



Frank Doran, 7th Dan, Shihan
Aikido West, Redwood City, CA
Division 2

In 1959 I was a member of the U.S. Marine Corps, stationed at the Marine Recruit Depot in San Diego, California. I was a member of the Hand-to-Hand Combat Instructor Staff, which was headed by MSgt B.J. Carlisle. Among the qualifications for this position was proficiency in one or more martial arts. My background at that time was in Judo, which I had been studying for 4 years. Other members of the 6-man staff also practiced in either judo or karate.

Not long after I'd been there, a new instructor was assigned to our group, Sgt Robert Tan. He had recently been stationed in Honolulu, Hawaii where he had been one of the original students of Koichi Tohei, Sensei, Aikido 10th Dan.

Whenever a new instructor arrived, MSgt Carlisle would always check them out personally. "Show me your stuff", said MSgt Carlisle, as he grabbed Sgt Tan by the shoulder. With a shout, he was suddenly down, as Sgt. Tan applied nikkyo. "What was that!?", yelled MSgt Carlisle. "Aikido", came the reply.

During periods when we were not engaged with instructing new recruits, we would get

together and cross-train in the various martial disciplines of each of the staff members. Sgt Tan soon started an aikido class and I became one of his students.

A short time later, Tokugi Hirata, 5th Dan, (another student of Koichi Tohei Sensei) arrived in San Diego and established a dojo in town. I joined his classes and was his student for 3 years.

Since that time I have continued my training under many of Japan's shihan (master teachers).

The Aikido West dojo originally started out as Aikido of Woodside and we trained in the facilities of a local high school. In 1978, Aikido West was incorporated as a non-profit organization at its present location in Redwood City. Our membership currently includes about 150 adults and 30 kids. We offer classes 7 days a week.

His current rank of 7th dan was awarded in January 2001 by Aikido Doshu Moriteru Ueshiba (grandson of the founder of aikido) at the Hombu Dojo, World Aikido Headquarters, Tokyo

My most Memorable Aikido Experience

Well, it would take about 6 weeks to relate all of the memorable experiences I've had in aikido. But, I'll tell you one of them.

In 1962, as a new shodan, I traveled to Tokyo, Japan to train at Hombu Dojo. I didn't speak or read Japanese. So when the cab driver dropped me off at the Wakamatsu-cho address, I was left facing a sign I couldn't read, but that seemed to direct the observer in two different directions. I decided to take the straight-ahead path and knocked on the door. When a woman answered, I showed her the letter of introduction from my teacher, Hirata Sensei, which was addressed to Koichi Tohei Sensei. She left, and a few moments later Tohei Sensei came to the door. He read the letter and gave me a very warm greeting. But, I had apparently knocked on the door of O'Sensei's residence!

Tohei Sensei led me through O' Sensei's home and into the adjacent building which housed the dojo. He showed me the dressing room and said that he was just about to start a private lesson in the dojo and that I would be welcome to join them. I put on my gi and hakama and walked out to the mat. The mat was empty - except for one other student. He introduced himself to me as Robert Nadeau.

From that initial meeting in 1962, Nadeau Sensei and I have worked together to share our common love of aikido with others. This year, 2002, we celebrate 40 years of friendship.