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Barrie Revell, Hanshi

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martial arts

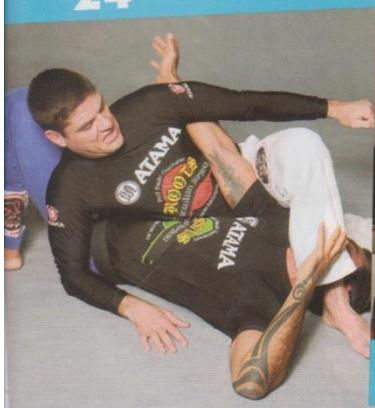
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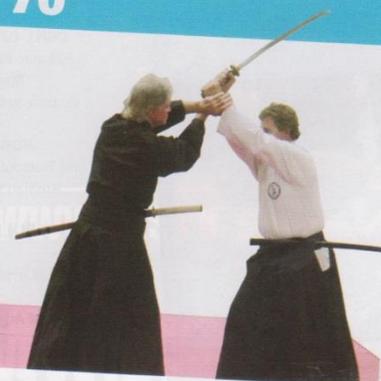


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OF DOVES AND SLASHING STEEL

An interview with Barrie Revell Hanshi

STORY BY GARY SIMPSON

Barrie Revell Hanshi, 8th Dan, is President of the Australian Martial Arts Association (AMAA) and arguably one of Australia's most experienced martial arts instructors. Gary Simpson caught up with Adelaide-based Revell when he visited Western Australia, to talk about his history in the martial arts and the teachings of his own late master, Grandmaster Bill Vaughan.

Hanshi Barrie Revell is different to most in the martial arts — he has twice refused to accept Black-belt rankings from his instructors. The first time was way back in the late '70s when Moss Hollis, a well-known Shotokan instructor, wanted to promote Revell to 4th Dan. At the time Barrie felt he was not ready to assume this relatively high rank and chose to remain a 3rd Dan.

Most recently, Revell, who was last graded in 2000 by Grandmaster Bill Vaughan (10th Dan, now deceased) to 8th Dan, has declined to assume 9th Dan status despite being handed the Grandmaster's own 9th Dan Black-belt. Although he wears proudly the Black-belt with its nine gold tags, he says he does so in honour of his teacher.

At nearly 60 years old and with more than 44 years of experience, Barrie told me that he still considers himself an 8th Dan — an unusual attitude when most

martial arts teachers seem to want to rise up the ranking ladder as quickly as possible.

At one point, Barrie became very emotional when relating the story of Grandmaster Bill Vaughan's passing. Barrie was a disciple of Vaughan's for over 30 years. When Vaughan suddenly fell gravely ill and knew that he was going to die, Barrie visited him twice in hospital to pay his respects to the man who he credits most with helping him become the martial artist and the person that he is today.

On the first occasion, Barrie took with him an assistant instructor, Andrew Quin. Barrie told me that Vaughan was in good spirits and looked okay despite the prognosis of the doctors. But a few days later Barrie said he looked very frail and, after his long battle with illness, they both knew that the worst was soon to come.

Bill Vaughan passed away on 16 July 2005. He was cremated in his karate gi, wearing his

embroidered maroon 10th Dan obi (belt). He also carried with him to eternity his beloved katana that he treasured so greatly in life.

After Vaughan's death at age 75, Vaughan's wife, Betty, handed Barrie a letter that Vaughan had written to him in his last days. In it, he expressed a desire for Barrie to wear his old belt and spoke of how proud he'd been of Barrie's commitment and discipline.

The respect and admiration that Barrie and Vaughan had for each other was mutual. Here is how Barrie described his late teacher:

"When Bill died, Australia lost one of its greatest martial arts pioneers and exponents. An era ended. Bill was an exceptionally skilful martial artist and a true gentleman. He was absolutely meticulous about his training methods and was a cut above everybody else.

"Bill's students were the very best at all the tournaments. I liked the way that they fought and the respect that they had for him,

themselves and their opponents. I realised very early that I could learn a lot from this man.

"Bill was a boxer, a judoka, a karateka and a military man. He saw action in the Malaysia-Indonesia confrontation of 1965-66 (which was also known as the 'Forgotten War').

"Sometimes he would tell me little snippets of what he did during the war. One story involved him being involved in a jeep roll-over. Some of the local villagers wanted to take advantage of that roll-over and, during the chaos, they attempted to attack the soldiers. Bill got up, dusted himself off and while still somewhat dazed and bruised, proceeded to use his hand-to-hand fighting skills to defend himself and his men. The chief of the local village got to hear about this man who was able to fight so strongly without weapons and made a point of meeting him."

At this point, I should mention that Bill Vaughan was approximately five feet two inches



Hanshi Barrie Revell

tall. Nevertheless, he made up for his lack of physical stature with an indomitable spirit and ability in combat to which few others could come close.

I, too, had an association with Grandmaster Vaughan over many years and knew that the things Barrie told me were no exaggeration. I wanted to explore Barrie's association with Bill Vaughan, but first I wanted to ask about his early martial arts training and development.

Barrie's very first instructor was Tommy Fallon, a boxing instructor. That was in 1959, in Hull, Yorkshire, England, when Barrie was only around 10 years old. The boxing club also included a judo club and taught an eclectic combination of techniques that included kicking, punching, elbowing and head-butting. Barrie seemed to think it was called something like 'scratch fighting'.

The Revell family emigrated to Adelaide, Australia, in 1963. By this time the young Revell was hooked

on the fighting arts and sought out another boxing club in Elizabeth East, run by Frank McCleave.

Wanting to learn more about the mysterious Asian martial arts, he enrolled in a club at the Salisbury Youth Centre under instructor Graham Tuffey, then 2nd Dan, in 1965. Barrie didn't know it at the time, but Tuffey was teaching for the legendary Moss Hollis, an ex-British paratrooper and one of Australia's pioneer karate teachers. At the time, karate was virtually unknown in Australia. Barrie also trained with the likes of John van Weenen, who later returned to the UK and became one of England's most respected karate instructors, and is now 8th Dan. Another early associate was Alan Vaishan, also a member of the Moss Hollis karate club.

During the early 1970s, Barrie met Joe Lamarca, who later went on with Karl Stojko and Bill Vaughan to form the Australian Martial Arts Association (AMAA). Since that time, the AMAA has

become one of the longest-serving associations for martial arts clubs in Australia. Though he didn't know it way back then, some 35 years later Barrie would become its second president, as Bill Vaughan's chosen successor (Bill held the position from inception until his death).

So committed had he become, Barrie shifted to Edwardstown to train with Moss Hollis in his new

Adelaide city dojo. There he met many visiting Japanese martial arts exponents – the result of Hollis's habit of visiting the docks whenever a Japanese ship was in and seeking out the Captain to ask whether any of his crew were experienced in the martial arts.

He offered free food and lodging in return for instruction. As word spread, visiting masters of all the main styles



Revell (L) and Vaughan, 1998

began to visit Hollis's dojo when they were in South Australia.

It was in 1969 that Barrie first met Bill Vaughan. He was "entranced" by the skill and knowledge displayed by Vaughan, who was then ranked 5th Dan in the Kyokushinkai karate style, having been trained and graded by the late founder, Sosai Mas Oyama.

According to Revell, Vaughan was promoted to 6th Dan after he fought all the other Black-belts and beat them all. It wasn't clear who presided over this decision, but nobody doubted Vaughan's incredible skill, stamina and ability.

"By the time I took the floor to perform a kama kata, there were dollops of blood everywhere... it was making the wooden floor slippery."

Barrie eventually received his 1st Dan Black-belt in 1970 and his 2nd Dan in 1972, all the while receiving instruction from both Hollis and Vaughan. In 1976, he earned his 3rd Dan and, as Hollis's senior Black-belts were venturing out on their own and opening up their own schools, by default Barrie became Hollis's main assistant instructor.

Eventually, Barrie also left to form his own school, called Australian Freestyle Karate. After being by himself for some time, he decided he simply needed more experience and knowledge to run the club, and took all his students over to Bill Vaughan at the Le-Hunt Community Centre.

Vaughan taught Barrie and his students Kyokushinkai karate, plus many weapons such as *sai*, *bo* and *bokken*. For several years, Barrie continued to visit Moss Hollis for impromptu instruction in Shotokan karate, looking to broaden his experience. Vaughan's club shifted to better premises in

Modbury and it was there in 1984 that Revell finally graded to 4th Dan, after refusing to accept the grade many years earlier.

Along his journey, Barrie has also trained with other master instructors, including Harry Vanderbilt in kempo and Doctor Edward Lim in arnis. Barrie trained with Bill Vaughan continuously and intensively for 12 years in karate, sword and other weapon techniques. He was hooked on weapons but, like his teacher, his favourite was, and still is, the *katana* (Japanese sword).

I can attest to Barrie's skill with the katana, having seen it

demonstrated over many years. I remembered a demonstration that Barrie, his senior student Geoff Worden and I did at Bill Vaughan's testimonial dinner in Adelaide in 2000. I demonstrated a *bo* kata, then Barrie and Geoff did a self-defence routine. After that, Barrie came back and did an amazing sword demonstration that drew gasps from the 120 or so guests, most of whom were very senior martial artists from all over Australia.

In his hands, the sword reminded me of the flashing blades of a helicopter – I didn't want to be anywhere near it as it whooshed around the stage area. What I didn't know was that Barrie was using a razor-sharp blade. In re-sheathing it, he nicked his thumb and blood was spilled.

By the time I took the floor to perform a *kama* kata, there were dollops of blood everywhere and I had to ask for it to be cleaned up as it was making the wooden floor slippery. But the amazing thing was that Barrie just kept

EMPTY-HAND VS SWORD DRAW



As the attacker draws his weapon Revell moves in...

...grasping his attacker's wrists...



...twists the sword down...

...and stepping in under the arms...



...to throw the attacker over his right shoulder.

Revell then snatches the katana and strikes.

performing. Nobody knew he had injured himself until the bucket and mop came out.

That was the night that Barrie was promoted to 8th Dan. Karl Stojko and Joe Lamarca (now retired) were also graded to 8th Dan and I was awarded 6th Dan.

During our interview, Barrie confessed to me that between the years of 1969 and 1973 he had a reputation for being a bit of a thug. This surprised me, especially since the day before we had both rescued a baby dove from certain death on a major road. I spotted the distressed dove sitting in a bus lane, so I turned my vehicle around and Barrie jumped out in the traffic to pick the bird up and place it carefully behind a tree. He then gathered a few fallen branches and placed them around the dove to shelter it from the cold wind that was blowing. So, there we were – me, Barrie and Andrew Quin – on our way to the dojo to train in deadly sword techniques, stopping to rescue a dove. The irony of it was rather amusing to us and we all had a good laugh about it.

Barrie told me that in those early days he was “hanging around with people who were on a road to nowhere.” He said that he didn’t want that direction. “Being called a thug or a ‘heavy’ wasn’t the person that I wanted to be.”

There were two major turning points in Barrie’s life. One was meeting Bill Vaughan. The other came when he met his future wife, Jenny. He was tired of street fighting, wearing his hair long and hanging around guys who were destined for jail. He wanted to use his fighting skills in a positive way. He needed a new lifestyle.

Barrie told me that it was Bill’s positive influence as a master teacher and mentor that has enabled him to become a better person. He realises now, after so many years, that without Bill’s positive influence and example how easy it would have been to go the other way into a life of violence, lack and regret. That

was why Bill’s parting letter to him meant so much and why he became so emotional when he was recalling its contents.

In 2000 Barrie and an associate patented the Masta Kata System at his present club in Edwardstown. Although his club is called Shin Gi Tai, an old Okinawan term for unity of spirit, mind and body, he plans to rename his club Samurai Karate, in honor of his great teacher and mentor, the late Bill Vaughan. That was Vaughan’s club’s name and Barrie wants it to be remembered.

I asked Barrie about the future of martial arts and he warned that: “If we are not vigilant it will become just another activity in your local sports gym.” He believes that many clubs are lowering their standards of training and grading requirements in return for money. But he also believes that the human spirit always rises. “There are still many great martial artists out there. There are also many great athletes. Just don’t confuse the two,” he said.

He is also hoping that more of the senior ranks will stay actively involved and not just parade around with high ranks and do nothing but tell others what to do. They need to be examples for others to follow, he says – like Bill Vaughan was.

In many ways, Barrie carries on Vaughan’s legacy today. Apart from inheriting Vaughan’s 9th Dan belt, Barrie also received all of his master’s training equipment, weapons and many books. He was unanimously elected the President of the AMAA, in accordance with Bill Vaughan’s wishes.

It’s my belief that Barrie Revell should now, after more than two years since Vaughan’s passing, finally assume his rightful 9th Dan ranking. It was Bill Vaughan’s dying wish that he would wear the belt and I believe that Barrie has earned it. His skill is obvious and a respectful time has passed. He has the age, the seniority, the

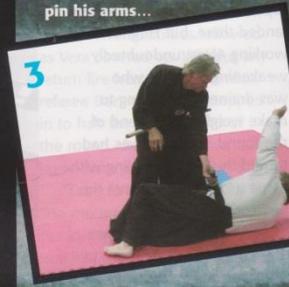
EMPTY-HAND VS SWORD DRAW #2



1
Revell rushes his attacker to pin his arms...



2
...then forces them down and around to the right (his left hand on the sword’s handle)...



3
...to throw the attacker 180 degrees.



4
Revell then secures the scabbard...



5
...and takes the opponent’s weapon away.



6
In old Japan, the finish would likely have been deadly.

maturity and the required years of experience behind him. It’s time for him to believe that the belt he was given, and so proudly wears, also carries the rank that it represents. Like his immediate predecessor, he’s a man of great martial arts talent, but I’ve found him to be a very humble person of great integrity, respect and gentleness. If the rescued dove could speak, it would tell us the same.

About the author: *Kyoshi Gary Simpson is chief instructor of Zanshin Kai Karate-Do in Perth, Western Australia. He is ranked 7th Dan with both the AMAA and the International San-Ten Karate Association (ISKA), and is a member of the International Society of Okinawan/Japanese Karate (ISOK). He is also the AMAA’s State representative for WA and runs Zenith Mentoring and Life Coaching International.*

BLITZ

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