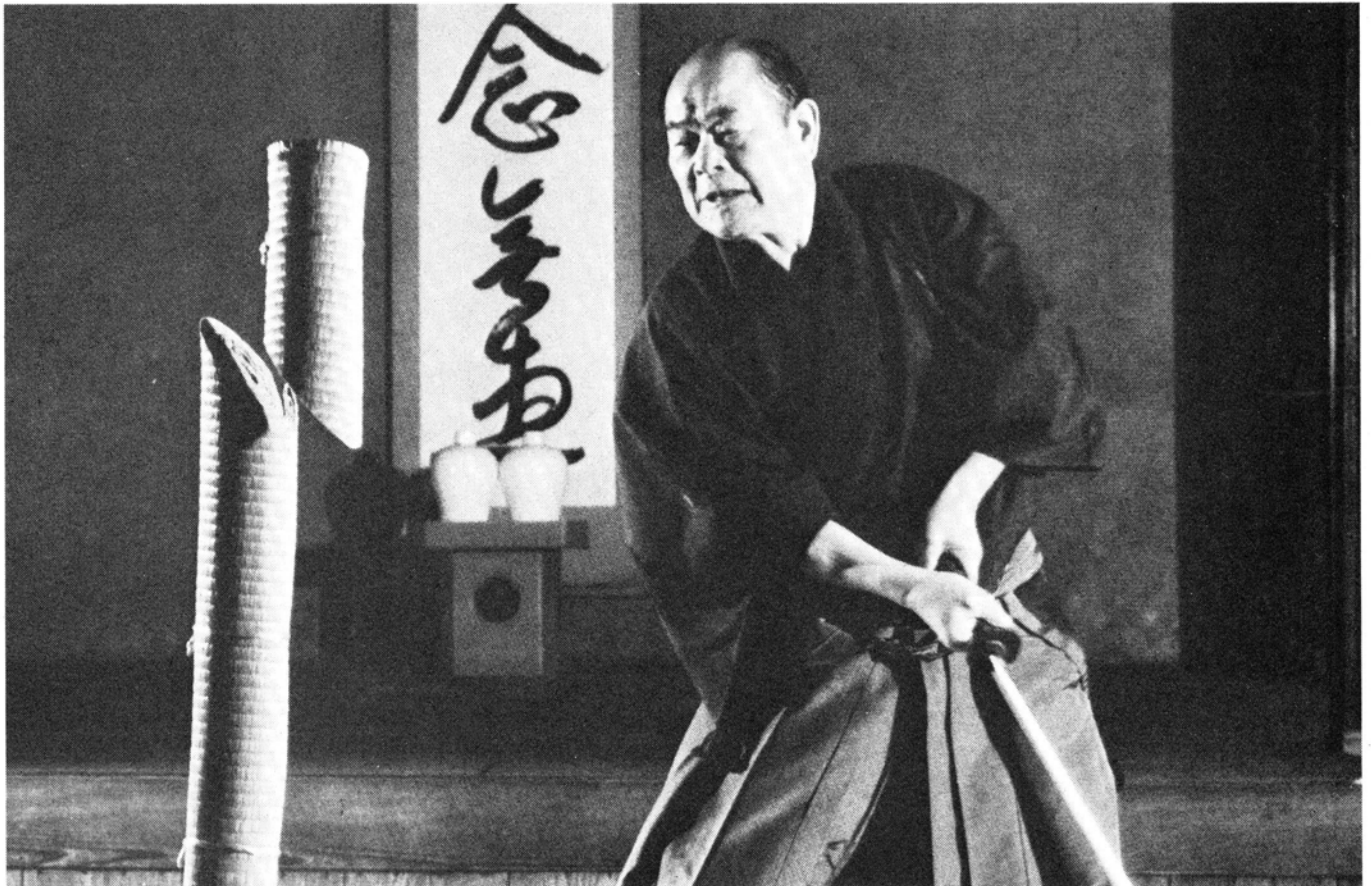


NAKAMURA TAISABURO

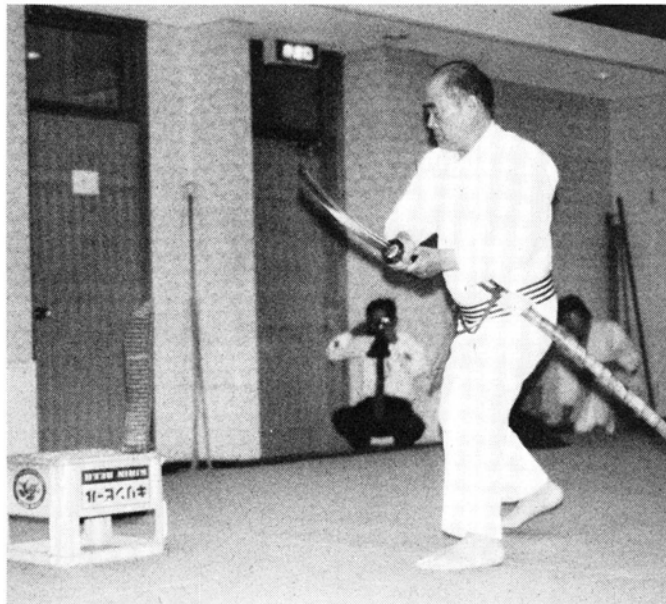
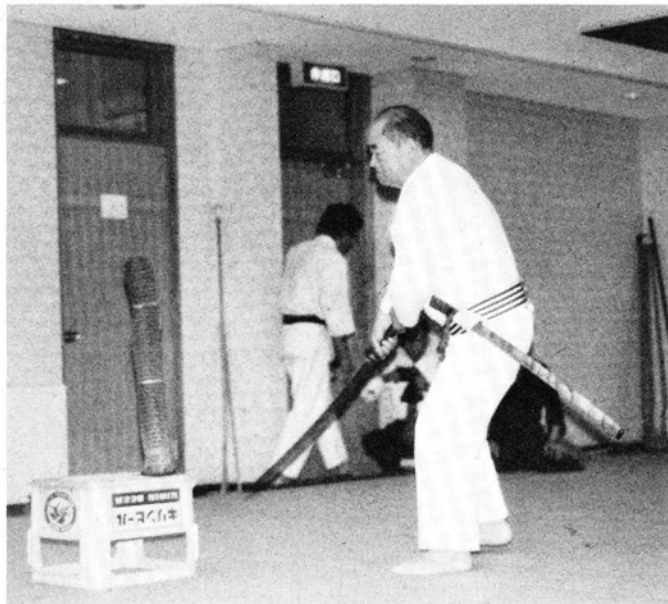
JAPAN'S MASTER OF PRACTICAL SWORDPLAY

By Dan and Doug Ivan

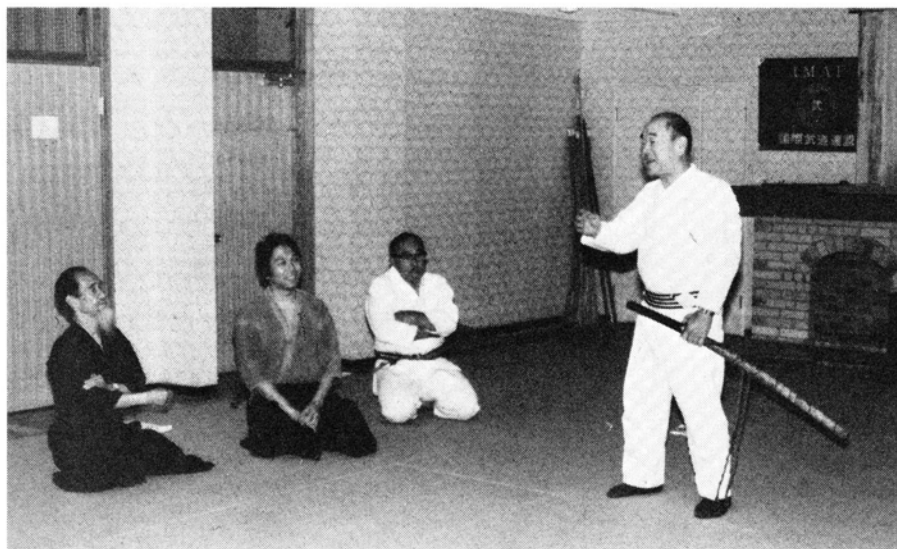
Combat taught Master Nakamura to turn his iaido from an art—into an art of killing. Out of his life-and-death experiences in Manchuria, Nakamura created his version of *batto-jutsu*, a deadly system of practical swordplay.



Master Nakamura Taisaburo exhibits flawless form and *zanshin* as he demonstrates both *batto-jutsu* and *tameshigiri* at the same time. Nakamura was selected to teach actual sword techniques to officers of the Japanese Imperial Army during their Chinese campaigns.



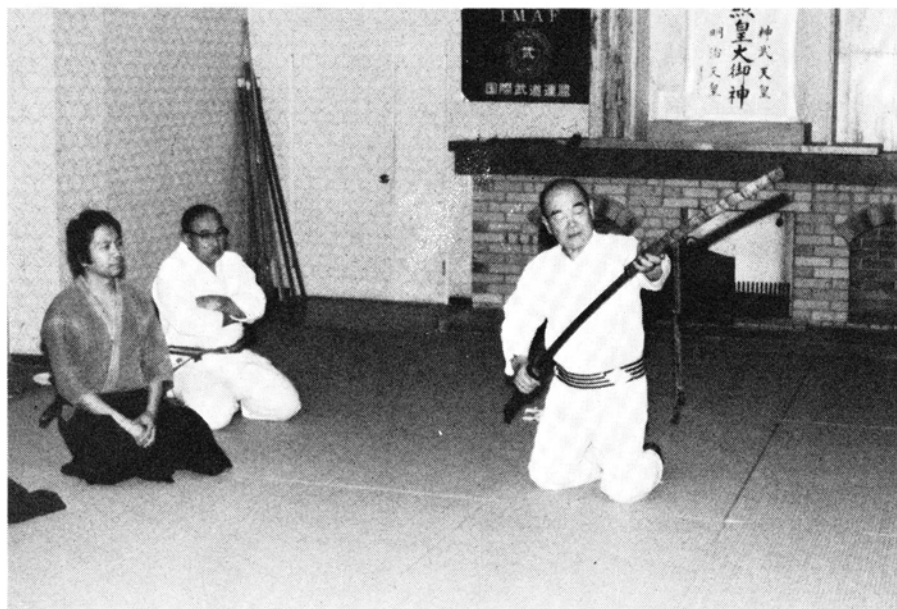
Nakamura is a severe critic of the trends in modern martial art. He dismisses most practitioners of iaido as “showmen” who know nothing of cutting with a live blade—a situation he addresses in his martial art by stressing *tameshigiri*, “test cutting” rolled wet straw and green bamboo.



Wielding his sword with two hands, the young Japanese army officer hacked and sliced fiercely at his enemy. But his opponent failed to fall in pieces before the flashing sword, as warriors had once fallen before the blades of his samurai ancestors. The young man was frustrated and confused by his lack of effectiveness.

His frustration was shared by many other officers during the Japanese military offensive of the 1930s. Although the men were issued fine swords with sharpened and well-balanced blades, their classes at the military academy were too brief to let them master the use of the sword. Though they learned proper grips, thrusts, parries, and jabs, they lacked a live target—so it was all untested theory.

Soon the eager young officers discovered that the sword did not possess any magical powers. Although a fine katana could sever



Master Nakamura displays one of his *katana* for Masters Sugino and Mochizuki (at left). Nakamura insists that martial arts must be stripped of showmanship and sport aspects.

Although a fine katana could sever an arm, slice off a head, or open a torso like a ripe melon, all depended on the skill of the user.

an arm, slice off a head, or open a torso like a ripe melon, all depended on the skill of the user. The hacking, chopping, and blunt blows of the modern officers did not have the effect of the cuts of a true samurai, who made the air whistle.

Teaching Men to Kill

During those war years, Nakamura Taisaburo was just a young man in the Imperial Service. He had spent his entire life practicing kendo, iaido, and kenjutsu. When the records of his martial arts background came

NAKAMURA TAISABURO . . .



Jukenjutsu, "bayonet art," is also part of Nakamura's ryu. *Jukenjutsu* was created in the Meiji era by the Toyama Gakko, a school that specialized in teaching the military.



Practitioners of *jukenjutsu* wear protective equipment in training that resembles the protective armor worn in *kendo*. A *do* form of the art—*jukendo*—does exist as well.



While many of Nakamura's students study *jukenjutsu*, practitioners outside of his ryu are mainly members of the Japanese Self-Defense Force. The art hones one's *kendo*.

to the attention of his military superiors, Nakamura was teaching *jukenjutsu*, the art of the rifle and bayonet, in a military academy. He was quickly reassigned, and made responsible for bringing officers' swordsmanship to a level that would not disgrace their ancestors.

From teaching his students how to kill—and from his own experiences in Manchuria—Nakamura developed and refined his *iaido* to make it more practical, and changed it from an art to an art of killing.

The Art of Killing

Two of Nakamura's new ideas came directly out of his combat experience. The sword blade was traditionally fastened to its handle with a small wooden pin. In battle, this pin sometimes broke. Nakamura replaced it with two metal pins.

Nakamura also discovered that a follow-through was necessary when hitting a target. The fighter must pull the sword towards himself as it touches the target, being careful not to cut his own extended leg!

When Nakamura introduced these and other innovations after the war, the Japanese martial arts community was unreceptive. They knew of Nakamura's military back-

Kendo is limited to sport, whereas *iaido* teaches killing techniques.

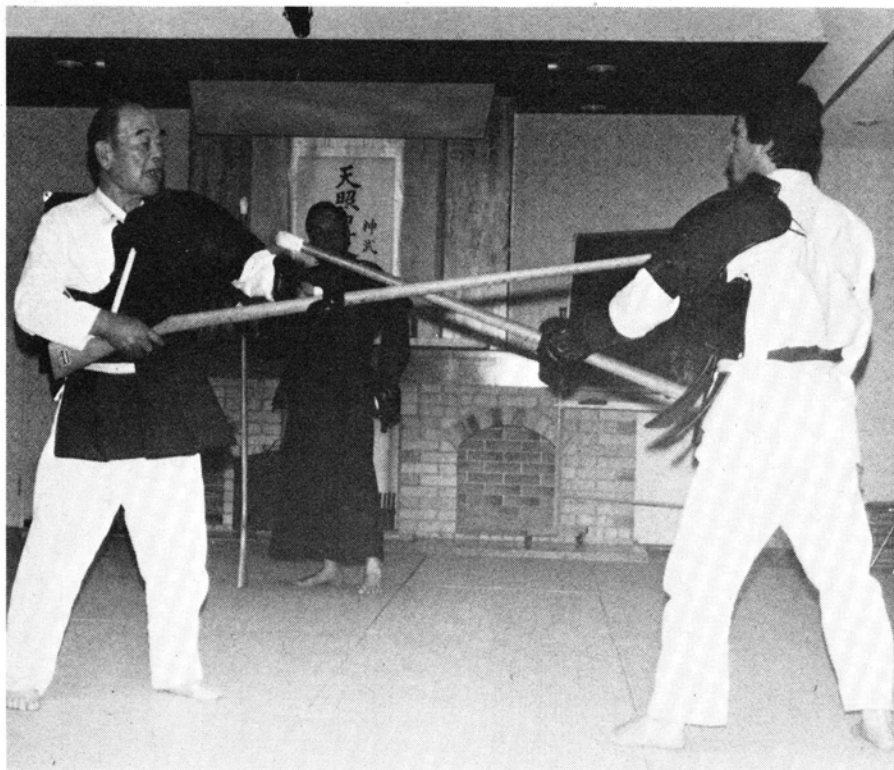
ground, and his combat experience made some of them cringe. *Iaido* practitioners had no intention of ever using their katana in a combat situation. They saw it only as an art form. Nakamura understood and respected this attitude in his associates.

But as *iaido* purists took up their swords one again, they began to appreciate Nakamura's findings. When they tested their skills by cutting rolled-up rice straw or green bamboo stalks, their blades often bent or flew out of their hands. There were even instances when a pin holding the handle to the blade would break and the blade would shoot off, piercing someone nearby.

The Practical Art of *Batto-Jutsu*

Those who turned to Nakamura for aid were enriched with techniques and exercises enhanced by practical experience. *Batto-jutsu*, as he calls his system, is composed of eight cutting techniques, known as *happogiri*. All *batto-jutsu* techniques are executed while standing, since Nakamura considers *iaido*'s practice of techniques from *seiza*, the formal Japanese sitting-kneeling posture, to be impractical.

Nakamura also emphasizes *tameshigiri* (test cutting). He believes that unless the practitioner can test his skill, his sword art is merely a formal exercise. His students de-



Note the large protective pad on the left shoulders of jukenjutsu practitioners: the art emphasizes straight thrusts, and the left shoulder is the most vulnerable target area.

velop their technique, focus, and power by cutting targets made of bamboo and rice straw.

To those martial artists who lack strength for cutting, he recommends more training with the *tanden-bo*. It has the basic shape of the katana, but is two to three times heavier to develop the wrists, forearms, and back muscles. It also strengthens the practitioner's grip, so the sword will not drop or fly out of one's hands while cutting.

Nakamura advises his students to leave a bit of space at the front of the grip for balance when holding the sword. Each student must experiment to discover the correct amount of space he should leave; start by cutting rolled-up straw mats until you feel your power.

Finding a blade that can withstand cutting is a vital part of batto-jutsu. This search may take some time, since modern swords often break or bend before cutting rigid bamboo. Look for a sword made prior to or during the war. Make sure the *shino*, the curved end of the handle, is rounded. A squared-off shino can injure the hand when the student is cutting. And don't forget that the pins holding the handle to the blade should be steel!

Many of Nakamura's students study kendo and jukenjutsu as well as batto-jutsu. But the master is quick to point out that kendo is limited to sport, whereas iaido teaches killing techniques.

Jukenjutsu started as training with the bayonet. Although today it is not nearly as popular as kendo or iaido, it does have its following. Most jukenjutsu students study the art to enhance their kendo training.

For batto-jutsu, Nakamura often uses a military-type uniform: white pants and tunic, with a four-inch sash around the middle.

Horizontal stripes on the sash indicate rank. Jukenjutsu practitioners wear kendo-type gear: the helmet, hakama, and gi top are the same. There is one major difference: the shoulder/forearm pad is placed on the left side of the body. In jukenjutsu, the "at ready" (*kamae*) stance places the left side forward, making it a prime target.

Nakamura, the Man

After 45 years of teaching with black belts in iaido, kendo, judo, jukenjutsu, and *kyudo* (archery), Nakamura is no longer the controversial figure he once was. As the founder of the Zen Nippon Batto-do Renmei, he has become the revered master of over 10,000 members all over Japan. He personally visits about 30 of his dojo to give classes.

Nakamura is also the director of the International Martial Arts Federation, Batto-Jutsu Division, with world headquarters in Japan. A group of his personally-trained black belts instruct the Japanese Self-Defense Forces in jukenjutsu.

As he nears eighty years of age, Nakamura is the perfect example of the benefits of martial arts training. A robust, energetic man, he barks out his commands to his classes in military fashion, reminiscent of a Marine drill sergeant. Quick on his feet and skillful with any type of weapon, he makes a fool out of anyone who dares pick up a shinai or bokken against him.

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