

September 2018 Newsletter
Goju-Ryu Karate-Do Kyokai

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Duane Sammons

By Motoo Yamakura

Duane Sammons, was a true leader of the karate world, and personal friend of mine. I have been associated with him some 30 years. Mr. Sammons held Shichi Dan and Kyoshi certification, in Goju-Ryu Karate.

He began karate training in October 1964 under Gogen and Gosei Yamaguchi (International Goju-Kai). In 1983 he accepted membership in the Goju-Ryu Karate-do Kyokai

Mr. Sammons was the Sensei and Chief Instructor of the Bellingham Academy of Self Defense located in Bellingham, Washington and was designated Northwest America Regional Director of the GKK. Mr. Sammons played a prominent role in expanding GKK growth in Northwest America. He has written *Beyond Technique, Reflections for the Martial Artist*, and written and produced the GKK Kobudo Kai Weapons Instruction Manual and video. He was the founder of the GKK's Kobudo Kai weapons division.

Mr. Sammons held dan rank in a wide range of martial disciplines, including: Goju-Ryu Karate (Yamakura, Sensei); Muso Jikiden Eishin Ryu Iaido (Oyanagi, Sensei); Kendo (Tanagami Sensei); Shinkendo (Obata, Sensei); Kobudo, GKK Kobudo Kai; Jujitsu, U.S. Judo Association.

Mr. Sammons was designated as a WKF (WUKO.) Level A Karate Tournament Official, and a Level 2 Examiner of the U.S. Judo Association.

Obituary of Duane Sammons -1936 - 2018



Duane Sammons, age 81, died peacefully in his sleep on July 30, 2018. Born in Omaha, Nebraska on December 30, 1936, he and his family moved to Seattle when he was a small child. He spent most of his life in Whatcom County as a professional musician, karate master, business owner, and civic leader.

He had a musical career spanning six decades. He started playing the drums in junior high, continued through high school, and, in 1959, began drumming professionally in Seattle with the Larry Duran Trio and later with the Gary Dahl Trio through the late 1960s. When he moved to Bellingham, he became a member of Ken Colvin's bands and The Skippers. In 1983, he joined the Bathtub Gin Party Band, which participated in jazz festivals across the Northwest and California, and toured in Japan. They even appeared in an episode of the TV show Northern

Exposure.

He started his karate career in Seattle with the YMCA and, by 1968, he had attained his black belt in Goju Ryu karate. He opened his own dojo when he moved to Bellingham and, in 1972, he bought the church building on the corner of High and Maple Streets, where he opened the Bellingham Academy of Self Defense. He was the head instructor there until 2010 when he retired. In 2002, he was awarded his 7th degree black belt. He also had black belts in Iaido, Kendo, and Jujitsu.

He graduated from the University of Washington in 1960 and was honorably discharged from the Washington National Guard in 1962. Then he began his lifelong career in the insurance business.

He started as a claims adjuster for CNA, then became a Safeco Insurance representative in the late 1960s. He joined Daw and Daw Insurance when he moved to Bellingham as an independent insurance agent and, in 1978, he opened his own business, Whatcom Insurance Center, buying Blaine Insurance the following year.

Community service was a big part of his life. He joined the Bellingham Junior Chamber of Commerce, was a Blossom Time Grand Parade Chairman, a D.A.R.E. Association chairman, and served as Blaine Chamber of Commerce President for many terms. In 1976, he was a participant in the Bicentennial Wagon Train sendoff. He became chairman of D.A.R.E. Association in 1977. In 1981, he served as the Bellingham Chamber of Commerce president. One of his favorite assignments was as Chairman of the Ski to Sea Race (1979-1993). The Westside Record-Journal named him "Man of the Year" in 1990.

He is survived by, Ann, his wife of 37 years and his sister, Carol. He has two daughters Taylor Lynnde Sammons and Stacey Peter from a previous marriage. He has a step-son Geoffrey. He has five grandchildren, Aubrey Kornelis, Kamron Sammons, Brad Philpott, Evan Philpott, and Donovan Peter. He has one grandson-in-law Jon Kornelis and great granddaughter Izabella Kornelis. A son, Mark and two sisters Marilyn and Janet, predeceased him.

Blasts from the Past:

Consistency Over Time – Mr. Duane Sammons Reaches Seventy

By Bill Giller

Transitions are never easy. Cemented beliefs, traditions, customs, routines, ceremonies and structures become a part of us. Change is as hard or as easy as we wish to make it. So, it was with some trepidation as I entered Mr. Sammon's dojo as a young freshman at Western Washington University in Bellingham, Washington.

I had spent two years training in taekwondo and was interested in a different style and instructor. As I introduced myself to Mr. Sammons, I explained I was interested in training with him, had observed his classes and students and this would be a better fit for me. He immediately welcomed me and then began the transition - a lifetime on one.

Mr. Sammons always sought correct techniques and principles and passed them on to us. His own training included trips to Seattle, San Francisco, Canada and Japan. He reflected and assimilated, and passed along these techniques and principles. Beside his proficiency in Goju Ryu, he sought training in kobudo, weapons, jujitsu, grappling and kendo.

Mr. Sammons had the "inch theory" which meant each day he wanted his knowledge to grow. Not only did he want his knowledge to grow, he willingly shared it with his students.

I observed Mr. Sammons fighting in tournaments, perform kata and set the example in the dojo. Training was tedious and long. Everyone worked. No one worked harder than him. Teaching meant demonstrating the techniques and their applications. He was patient with white belts as they bumped into upper belts, and upper belts as they asked questions about unfamiliar moves.

Shinsas were always an exciting time as dojos from Skagit Valley, Green Lake and the University of Washington brought students to Bellingham for promotional exercises. Students from a variety of dojos trained under the keen eyes of Mr. Reuter, Mr. Sammons, Mr. Stamper, Mr. Yamakura and Mrs. Gittens. All students were anxious to do their best at these exciting events.

Mr. Sammons is also a prominent member of the Bellingham Community. At many summer events, his band plays for the local crowds. Mr. Sammons models what he taught; never be satisfied with one's current level - there is always more to learn.

So, thank you, Mr. Sammons for all the individuals you assisted as they moved and continue to move along life's path. You have touched many!

Changes and Challenges

By Doug Lafferty

Great changes often bring up many emotions. I felt compelled to type this because of a rather large change happening with the Bellingham Academy of Self Defense. Due to the challenges of age, Sensei Sammons has retired from teaching karate and sold the building a couple years ago to another person. The current owner of the building has recently put the building up for sale. So, it comes with a heavy heart the era of "The Karate Church" has come to an end.

I started there when I was 14 years old, and the BASD had just joined the GKK, that was thirty years ago. Mr. Sammons had started the BASD around 1971, and it has lasted over forty years. Quite an accomplishment in itself, but then you think about the number of black belts produced from Sensei Sammons' instructions, let alone all those who have participated briefly in his instruction, that have passed through the doors of BASD, and it becomes blatantly evident; Sensei Sammons and his dedication to the art and our organization is simply incredible.

I felt it appropriate at this time to include a couple excerpts from the BASD website, to reflect upon a great era, as well as build excitement for what's to come next. As martial artists, if there is one thing we have all learned, it is to accept, confront and overcome challenges. In these last days of the BASD, no longer having Sensei Sammons' instruction or the karate church to go train at; comes with sadness. However, there is also a level of excitement to take on this new challenge.

With the help of two other students of Sensei Sammons: Sensei Bill Carter, roku dan with renshi certification and Mr. Tom McKeon, roku dan with renshi certification; along with other GKK doshi, we will continue to train and share our art.

Duane Sammons, the founder of the dojo, is a foremost expert on Japanese martial arts and weaponry. His study of the combat arts began with Greco-Roman wrestling and boxing at the University of Washington. After graduating, he transitioned to Japanese martial arts with the study of judo. In the fall of 1964 he began Goju Ryu Karate at the YMCA in Seattle. His original instructor was Mike Youngren, a student of Bill Reuter. Once Reuter Sensei was out of the Air Force, he opened Bill Reuter's Karate-Spa in Bellevue, and Mr. Sammons starting training with him making a 180 mile weekly commute for years.

In 1965 Mr. Sammons moved to Bellingham, and began teaching karate at the YMCA. After a few years of being moved into smaller and smaller rooms, he opened his own school next door, in a very comfortable space above the World

Famous Up & Up Tavern. In 1973, with classes growing, he purchased an old 1890's church from Bellingham 1st Lutheran Church, on the corner of Maple and High streets, near Western Washington University. Over the next several months, the doshi (students) worked to convert the building into what neighbors often call the "karate church". Soon the doors opened, and the Bellingham Academy of Self Defense was off and on its way to becoming a Bellingham institution. In the late 60's and 70's, karate tournaments were rampant in the Seattle area. Ishinryu schools with Mr. Steve Armstrong, Shito Ryu under Mr. Julis Thiry, Goju Ryu schools with Mr. Bill Reuter, and a variety of styles from Canada, would compete across the Northwest. Sammons Sensei attended many seminars and competed in tournaments up and down the west coast.

He seldom missed any key event. He was present and trained under Gogen ("The Cat") Yamaguchi when he came to Seattle in 1973. Coming away with valuable knowledge of Goju-Ryu Karate and cementing his relationships within the Goju-Kai. He would stay with the Goju-Kai for another ten years making multiple trips to the Honbu in both Japan and San Francisco.

Never satisfied with the status quo in the middle 1970's, Mr. Sammons undertook the study of kendo (bamboo sword with armor) and iaido (Japanese sword - katana). With diligent work and travel, he obtained his black belt in both arts. Mr. Sammons, along with two of his senior karate students, earned a kendo black belt from Tanagami Sensei. His original katana study came in Muso Jikiden Eishin Ryu Iaido from Hiroshi Oyanagi Sensei. In the 1980's he began practicing Shinkendo under the guidance of Toshishiro Obata Sensei.

The 1980's were a time of dynamic change and extensive growth. In 1983 Sammons Sensei accepted an offer from Mr. Richard Stamper to join the Goju-Ryu Karate-Do Kyokai as the Northwest Representative. The Kyokai provided additional variety of instruction as Stamper Sensei, Paul Okami, and Motoo Yamkura Shihan all paid multiple visits to Bellingham. Towards the end of the decade Joe Lewis was invited to teach sparring and Lew Korea taught kobudo emphasizing the sai. With ten to twenty yudansha training at every class, Sammons sensei decided to create an advanced class for black belt only instruction. This opened up a whole new area of curriculum and teaching opportunities for all as the yudansha where each required to teach their last promotional bunkai to the class. Mr. Sammons diversified into new areas with classes on hand gun defense, and a long intricate series on pressure points.

By the end of the decade Mr. Sammons along with help from some of his black belts created the GKK's Kobudo Kai (weapons division). Producing both a Weapons Instruction Manual and accompanying video for traditional Japanese/Okinawan weapons (bo, jo, kama, nunchaka, sai, tonfa, and yawara).

In the 1990's Mr. Sammons wrote *Beyond Technique: Reflections for the Martial Artist*. Early in the decade in response to the changes sweeping the martial arts world BASD added regular jujitsu instruction and certification. Mr. Sammons was designated as a WKF (WLJKO.) Level A Karate Tournament Official, and a Level 2 Examiner of the U.S. Judo Association.

As Sensei of BASD he has personally produced over 60 black belts. Most of those have gone past the shodan (1 st degree) level with several students who have been loyal for the last 30 years and reaching rokudan (6th degree) with renshi certification, and then shichi dan (7th degree) with kyoshi certification. These same levels have been reached by several former students who moved to other cities and started their own schools. When including the second generation of instruction the total number of black belts resulting from Sammons Sensei's teachings is over a hundred.

Duane Sammons is an entrepreneur starting three successful Whatcom County insurance companies. He has been involved with many community organizations including being the Ski-To-Sea race chairman for over ten years. He is a passionate musician and has been playing drums in bands since the 50's. One of his longest running bands was the Bathtub Gin Band that played Dixieland jazz up and down the West Coast at various festivals.

However it is his unwavering dedication to the martial arts that defines Sammons Sensei - shichi dan and kyoshi. Mr. Sammons found his calling in Goju-Ryu karate under the tutelage of one of the Northwest karate pioneers, Sensei Bill Reuter. He has been a student of many notable masters such Goju masters including Gogen, Gosei, and Goshi Yamaguchi (International Goju- Kai), Seigo Tada (Seigokan), and Motoo Yamakura (GKK). He has been sensei to thousands of Whatcom County residents. To those of us who have had the good fortune of training with him for decades he is the definitive martial artist.

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