

History of Isshinryu Karate

Master Shinkichi (Tatsuo) Shimabuku was born on September 19, 1908, and began his study of karate (Shuri-te) as a boy with his uncle, Irshu Matsumora. Master Shimabuku would eventually train under three great Okinawan masters: Chotoku Kyan, Chojun Miyagi and Choki Motobu, ultimately becoming an acknowledged expert in both the Goju-Ryu and Shorin-Ryu systems. Over time, he refined techniques and concepts from both systems to form Isshin Ryu (One Heart Way) on January 15th, 1954.

Chotoku Kyan was a student of Master Yasutune Itosu, who taught Shuri-te, and of, Master Matsumora, who taught Tomari-te. These two styles were combined to form Shorin-Ryu. He was famous for his powerful kicks, and for his outstanding teaching ability. Kyan was a stern perfectionist, and young Tatsuo Shimabuku achieved the honor of being his best student.

Chojun Miyagi was the number one student of the Naha-te grandmaster, Kanryo Higashionna. Miyagi was known as an exacting sensei whose grueling workouts greatly strengthened the body and built up endurance. Miyagi placed great emphasis on breathing and tension, low kicks, and the development of mind, body and spirit.

Choki Motobu was a less formal instructor, but an accomplished master in Shorin-Ryu, and an indomitable fighter. Coming from an ancient line of Okinawan nobles, he had an eccentric personality and an enormous physique. He is remembered as a brawler as well as a master, teaching both street and classic techniques.

Under these three sensei's, Tatsuo Shimabuku developed abilities that mutually complemented one another in making him a quintessential karate-ka. With additional training from Okinawan weapon experts, Tiara Shinken and Yabu Moden, Tatsuo Shimabuku became one of the most accomplished karate-ka of his day.

From the late 1920's to the 1940's, Master Shimabuku's prestige and authority in karate increased. Like most of the Okinawan population, Master Shimabuku was a poor farmer, who also worked in his village as a tax collector. With the advent of World War II, and the forced conscription of thousands of Okinawan men, Master Shimabuku and his family sought refuge on another island.

After the Japanese were defeated, the Americans occupied Okinawa and began a massive effort of reconstruction. Having returned to Okinawa, Master Shimabuku resumed farming, until American servicemen began to seek him out for instruction in karate. In the early 1950's, Master

Shimabuku decided to establish a formal dojo at his home in Chun Village, and later moving the dojo to Agena.

Master Shimabuku was both innovative and visionary in his approach to karate. He spent years synthesizing the techniques and concepts of Shorin-Ryu and Goju-Ryu into Isshin Ryu, including the innovative use of the vertical fist punch, low kicks, natural stances/movements, snap techniques and hard/soft applications. Master Shimabuku often stated that there was "no birthday" for Isshin Ryu, because it was a dynamic/work-in-progress.

Four former U.S. Marines are credited with bringing Isshin Ryu to the United States: Harold Mitchum, Harold Long, Don Nagle and Steve Armstrong. Master Tatsuo Shimabuku died May 30, 1975 in Okinawa.