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# Itten Dojo *Update*



— August 2005 —

## PLANNING NOTES

### **August 4 through 6**

Pan-American  
Shinto Muso-ryu Jo  
Gasshuku in Ohio

### **September 17**

“Saturday at Shutokukan,”  
mini-seminar for the  
Itten Dojo SMR jodokai,  
2:00 – 6:00 p.m.

### **October or November?**

Two-day, SMR seminar  
with Diane Skoss

### **January 21 and 22**

Aikido with Ellis Amdur

*From the dojocho...*

## Fight, or Quit

Back in the old karate dojo in the early 80's, we did a lot of heavy-contact sparring (several of the guys even went on to compete around the east coast in professional, full-contact kickboxing matches). In the dojo, we wore minimal protective gear and routinely sustained considerable damage, on the theory we “would rather take a beating here, than on the street.” (Hey, we were good fighters; nobody ever claimed we were particularly bright...)

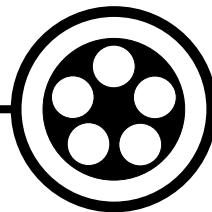
During one intense sparring session, A.J. Boyd was staggered by Dave Bretz's straight right to his head. A.J. went down to hands and knees, trying to regain his wits, as our instructor shouted, “Fight or quit, A.J.! Fight or quit!”

A.J. was game to continue the battle but, as he told me later, he just couldn't decide which of the three Dave Bretz's standing in front of him he should try to hit.

The above might be somewhat of an extreme example. At the same time, the incident illustrates a decision point all of us reach repeatedly in our lives, and many times in the microcosm of the dojo. The factors leading us to a decision point might be fear, fatigue, conflicting priorities, flagging will, injury, or illness. Regardless of the specifics, we're forced to make the choice to step forward, or step back.

I have always been amazed to see this paradigm play out in one particular aspect of dojo life: the shodan examination. If I look back over my time in karate and aikijutsu/aikido, and count the number of students who reached the point of being qualified and ready to undertake the shodan exam, I find that half the people stepped forward and took the exam. The other half stepped back, and never did. In most of the latter cases, the people quit training completely, rather than take the test.

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**Fight**, from page 1

I've even seen two people start the exam, be mentally and spiritually defeated in the course of the ordeal, and quit training on the spot, sometimes after having invested as much as ten years to reach that point.

Any time we step back, let alone quit altogether, I have to believe we emerge from the moment diminished in some critical way.

One karate black-belt candidate, with more than a decade of training and years of experience and sacrifice running a branch dojo, quit his shodan exam only minutes from successful completion. He didn't know how close he was, because our instructor had a practice in these tests of telling candidates they were about halfway through, after more than an hour of utterly grueling abuse, when in fact the exams were almost finished.

This particular individual subsequently requested a second chance. He was required to put in several more months of training. I visited his dojo a number of times to help him prepare. It wasn't going to be easy, but the second time around should have been easier than the first, by virtue of knowing what to expect and being able to train accordingly. But that wasn't how it turned out.

The second exam was held in a grim, unfinished, upper room of an old warehouse. The door to the room was heavy, and had both deadbolts and a sliding bar to secure it. At the appointed time, the black-belt candidate presented himself to the testing panel. Don Denoncourt, the senior member of the panel, asked the candidate, "Are you ready?"

The candidate shouted, "Yes, sir!" as though there were nothing in the world that could stop him.

Denoncourt looked the candidate square in the eye and very quietly said, "Good. Lock the door."

And that fellow's knees buckled. Literally. Within five minutes he quit the test, and karate, even though he was physically ready, even though nothing was (really) going to happen to him that he hadn't already survived. He was defeated by his own imagination.

None of us have an unblemished record in this regard, and we never know what circumstance will bring on the moment of decision.

I very nearly quit flight instruction early in my training, thereby surrendering a lifelong dream to be a pilot, during an episode of vertigo induced by steep turns. Vertigo kills pilots, and this episode would likely have killed me had I been alone in the plane at the time. Vertigo feels like one's head and limbs are being pulled from one's torso, all in different directions, with a horrible, terrifying sickness radiating from one's gut, and is completely disorienting and disabling. Every cell in my body was screaming, "Nothing is worth this!" The only thing that saved me from quitting was the recollection of the disappointment and, I'm ashamed to admit, disgust I'd felt just the week-end before watching one of those shodan candidates fold in the middle of his test and quit karate.

At my flight lesson the day following the vertigo I asked specifically to practice steep turns and had no problems. I soloed shortly thereafter.

But there were other times, in other arenas, I did step back (although the instances I can think of preceded my shodan exam or the incident in the airplane). Even if stepping back from a decision point has diminished us, God willing, we might have the chance later to make up the loss.

None of us have the luxury of knowing in advance which challenges might prove too much. The best we can do is train, facing in the dojo a multitude of small decision points and making the choice in each instance to step forward, hoping that the tempering of a will so forged might provide the wherewithal to make the decisions in life that *really* matter.

Ultimately, it all comes down to fight, or quit.

— Bob Wolfe



# When Donnie Comes Marching Home

Well, actually, he already has (thank heavens). After a year in Iraq, First Sergeant Donnie Dodson, US Army, is home at last and still in one piece, much to the delight of his no longer “desperate (house)wife,” Jo Carol.

Donnie, a yudansha in our aikidokai and the second person (not counting the Wolfes and Starners) to join the dojo, served with the 427th Transportation Company at a site south of Baghdad, and was in charge of maintaining a fleet of heavy trucks and other vehicles, as well as supervising a team of 12 soldiers supporting the combat effort. He promises to provide us a full report in a future issue of this *Update*.

Now that he’s home, Donnie plans some well-deserved relaxation. Within three to four months he should be retired from the Army reserves and intends to head back to college to finish up a degree. If all works out, he’ll follow in Jo Carol’s footsteps and become a teacher — and in the meantime, he’ll be back to training at the dojo. ☺



## Training Tip of the Month

When you finish reading this, stand up, start walking a few steps, and then look down and check the alignment of your feet. If you’re like most people, you’re stepping with your feet angled to the outside, by as much as 20° or 30°. And this isn’t good.

Anyone involved in physical activity placing great stress on the knees must be aware of the forces being loaded on those joints. Torque is a twisting force, and when it’s applied to knees it’s always dangerous — too much and something’s going to give. Even in small doses, torque on the knees can over time cause major problems.

Check your feet again. Notice that the angle at which you’re placing your feet does not match the direction your knees are pointing. As you step, that angle applies torque to your knees.

When you walk or run, or move around the dojo, it’s imperative that your feet move such that minimal torque on the knees is generated. The easiest way to do this is training yourself to step in such a way that the centerlines of your feet (roughly the line of the toe next to your big toe) are placed parallel to the line on which you are moving.

You’ll notice this is much more readily accomplished if you move your legs with hip rotation, in the manner of skating, rather than with the stiff-legged, falling-forward mode of locomotion untrained individuals exhibit when they walk.



# Special Opportunity: Firearms Training

Although, in our weaker moments, we might entertain fantasies of fending off numerous armed attackers with nothing but our aikido skills — and doing so while inflicting or receiving nary a bruise — the cold, hard fact is that in the modern context credible self-defense capability demands at least basic familiarity and facility with firearms.

Itten Dojo is exceptionally fortunate to include among its friends a highly trained firearms and tactics instructor (and jujutsu instructor, to boot), Paul Hawthorn. I first met Paul on the Mechanicsburg Navy base, where he is a security specialist. In addition to dan-grades in jujutsu, Paul's credentials include firearms instructor certifications from the United States Navy, Smith & Wesson, the National Rifle Association, and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania under Act 235 (PA Lethal Weapons Act) and Act 120 (Municipal Police).

This fall, Paul will be conducting a variety of NRA sponsored firearms safety, familiarization, and tactical courses that should prove of great interest and benefit to members of the dojo. All training will be conducted at Paul's personal classroom and range facility in Adams County, southwest of Carlisle, about a one-hour drive from the dojo (detailed driving directions will be provided registered students). Classes to be offered include:

## Firearms Safety in the Home (July 30, 2005)

The length of the class is approximately four to five hours, depending on the number of people registered, and this course is a suggested (but not mandatory) prerequisite to the other courses. Starting time will be 10:30 a.m. NOTE: There is no live fire in this course. Cost is \$25.

## Basic Pistol (August 12 – 13, 2005)

The length of the class is approximately 10 hours. Starting time for both the Saturday and Sunday sessions will be 10:30 a.m., while training should conclude between 3:30 and 4:30 p.m. on Saturday; maybe a little earlier on Sunday. Cost is \$45. (Participants should bring a bag lunch.)

## Personal Protection in the Home (October 15, 2005)

The length of the class is approximately eight to 10 hours, with a starting time of 10:30 a.m. and a finishing time between 7:00 and 9:00 p.m., depending on the number of participants. Mandatory prerequisite: Basic Pistol. Cost is \$45. (Participants should bring a bag lunch and snacks.)

## Personal Protection in the Home Instructor Certification (October 29 – 30, 2005)

This course includes the six-hour, basic NRA Instructor Class. NOTE: If the applicant has already completed the NRA Basic Instructor Class, the fee for this additional certification is only \$50. Starting time on Saturday will be 10:00 a.m., with an ending time of approximately 6:00 p.m. Starting and finishing times on Sunday could vary, depending on the number of participants and the amount of material covered during the Saturday session. Mandatory prerequisites: Basic Pistol and Personal Protection in the Home. Cost is \$200. (Participants should bring a bag lunch.)

Paul allows a 20% discount on registration fees for couples, defined as “married or formally engaged, with rings, etc.” — “really good friends” doesn't count...

Persons interested in enrolling in any of the above courses should contact Paul directly, via e-mail addressed to “pjh@pa.net” — and should be certain to mention membership in Itten Dojo.

Several members of the dojo, Alan Starner and myself included, completed a couple of years ago what is now the Basic Pistol course, so we can speak from experience in recommending these courses for their quality and content, as well as recommending Paul as an instructor.

If you have any interest in safe handling of firearms or in personal defense using handguns, the selection of courses being offered this fall represents an opportunity not to be missed. ☺



## News and Notes

Recently, members of the dojo enjoyed a backyard cookout hosted by John and Melanie Butz at their home in Boiling Springs. Although early indications were the weather would not cooperate, thanks to the remnants of the hurricane du jour, the skies cleared moments before starting time and we were able to party on the deck. The tents set up in the yard as backup weren't even needed.

The weekend before, Rihana O'Regan, just months old, paid her first visit to the dojo when proud parents Jasmin and Rene returned to practice after Jasmin's maternity leave. The search is underway for an appropriately sized keikogi.

### • Itten Aikidokai

We're off to a good start for the current cycle through the Honden waza, the core curriculum in our system of aikido. In addition to a lot of detail work on the gokyū waza, a highpoint of practices in July was the first time most members of the aikidokai had the chance to work on the *rokushakūbo* (six-foot staff) kata developed for us by Amdur sensei.



*The first kumibo kata — shidachi counters the tsuki with gyakuteuchi (notice shidachi's wrist is bent opposite what would be the case in the same technique done with a jo)*

As is the case with most sword and four-foot staff work in aikido, our aikiken and aikijo are rather “mannered” in nature, intended to convey or illuminate principles facilitating better taijutsu rather than being primarily adapted to combat. Our aikibo is just the opposite. Derived from koryū weapons forms, the bo kata are anything but mannered: adjectives like scary and lethal spring to mind. Oh, yeah, and the kata are an absolute blast.

The “spiritual” objective of the bo kata is development of aggressiveness and intent, terms not often associated with aikido, but characteristics having great survival value if one hopes a martial study actually enhances self-defense skills, especially if aggressiveness and intent can be maintained within a framework of the relaxation and calm typically attributed to proponents of aikido. As familiarity with the bo kata is gained, and the pace of practice increased, training partners find themselves operating on the edge, where moments or inches can mean the difference between an exciting workout and a serious injury.

In August our focus shifts to the yonkyū waza. While the difference between the first and second test sets is not nearly so great as the differences we've noted between practice with the jo and bo, there are still some distinctions deserving of attention.

For most members of the aikidokai, the gokyū test is the culmination of their initial exposure to martial arts, and consequently the standard for a passing grade is not overwhelmingly high. The bar is definitely raised for the yonkyū exam. While a restrained pace is allowed for the gokyū review, in the yonkyū demonstration test partners must be moving with substantially greater speed and efficiency, attacking and defending with considerably more spirit, flow, and effectiveness. There can be no pauses between left and right-hand applications of the techniques in the set or overt breaks between techniques (tests subsequent to gokyū, by the way, are cumulative, including all techniques previously tested, and a brisk pace even at the yonkyū level can become quite taxing for students paying insufficient attention to conditioning).

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## News and Notes, from page 5

There are some differences to note even between the techniques included in the gokyo and yonkyu sets. Attacks in the gokyo set are limited to kosadori and juntedori, on the theory beginning students have enough to worry about just figuring which foot to move when, and really don't need the added complication of having to evade or blend with a strike. Although the yonkyu set does include grabbing attacks in versions of irimiotoshi, nikyo, and shiho-nage, dealing with a straight punch is introduced with versions of iriminage and kotegaeshi (both of which employ a straight, up-the-centerline entry, rather than a tenkan or pivoting evasion of the strike).

*Tehodoqi* (releases) within the yonkyu set include responses to ryotedori, ryotemochi, eridori, and katadori, and the test concludes with a demonstration of proper *shikō sabaki* (seated movement).

When working on the yonkyu waza, students should pay particular attention to posture and its effects on technique, achieving and acting on solid kuzushi, and avoiding any impetus toward "floating" when entering (especially when dealing with a taller opponent).

### • Shinto Muso-ryu Jodokai

Our June visit to Shutokukan Dojo was an all-day trip to attend a mini-seminar in which Diane Skoss led us through an in-depth review of the kihon. Persons not familiar with the way Diane instructs might assume an entire day of fundamentals could make for a dull workout, but in fact the day was exceptionally productive and flew by. Each of the twelve kihon was demonstrated, scrutinized in terms of Relnick sensei's directions for proper practice, and then studied through hundreds of repetitions with a partner. We also did some specialized drills of Diane's design to highlight particular points and were able to devote part of the last hour of the seminar to kata.

We spent several weeks at our home dojo working on the tweaks we'd been presented in June, and then returned to Shutokukan in mid-July for final preparations in advance of the Pan-American Gasshuku in early August (look for a report on the gasshuku in the September *Update*). In consideration of the Gasshuku, our next road trip to Shutokukan Dojo will be September 17th. ☺



At John & Melanie Butz's cookout, from left: Nolan Jones, James D'Angelo, Alan Starner, and Roger Kelley



More party-goers: Lisa Granite, Shannon Kelley, Doug Greblunas, Doug's daughter, and Deb Starner.



# Itten Dojo Calendar of Events — August 2005

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	<b>1</b> <i>Tanelle Yentevich</i> Open Mat (6:00 – 6:30 pm)  SMR Jo (6:30 – 8:00 pm; Wolfe)	<b>2</b> Open Mat (5:30 – 6:30 pm)  Aikido (6:30 – 8:00 pm; Wolfe) Topic: Test Set Review	<b>3</b> Open Mat (5:30 – 6:30 pm)  Aikido (6:30 – 8:00 pm; Butz) Topic: Suwari Waza	<b>4</b> Open Mat (5:30 – 6:30 pm)  Aikido (6:30 – 8:00 pm; Butz) Topic: Kihon Randori	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b> Aikido (9:30 – 11:00 am; Butz)  SMR Jo (11:00 am – 12:30 pm)
<b>7</b>	<b>8</b> <i>John Butz</i> Open Mat (6:00 – 6:30 pm)  SMR Jo (6:30 – 8:00 pm; Wolfe)	<b>9</b> Open Mat (5:30 – 6:30 pm)  Aikido (6:30 – 8:00 pm; Wolfe) Topic: Aikibuki (aikido sword & staff)	<b>10</b> Open Mat (5:30 – 6:30 pm)  Aikido (6:30 – 8:00 pm; Butz) Topic: Aikibuki (aikido sword & staff)	<b>11</b> Open Mat (5:30 – 6:30 pm)  Aikido (6:30 – 8:00 pm; Wolfe) Topic: Aikibuki (aikido sword & staff)	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b> Aikido (9:30 – 11:00 am; Wolfe)  SMR Jo (11:00 am – 12:30 pm)
<b>14</b> <i>Makoto Fujii</i>	<b>15</b> Open Mat (6:00 – 6:30 pm)  SMR Jo (6:30 – 8:00 pm; Wolfe)	<b>16</b> Open Mat (5:30 – 6:30 pm)  Aikido (6:30 – 8:00 pm; Wolfe) Topic: Kosadori & Juntedori Irimiotoshi	<b>17</b> Open Mat (5:30 – 6:30 pm)  Aikido (6:30 – 8:00 pm; Butz) Topic: Kosadori & Juntedori Iriminage	<b>18</b> <i>Jevin Orcutt</i> Open Mat (5:30 – 6:30 pm)  Aikido (6:30 – 8:00 pm; Wolfe) Topic: Kosadori & Juntedori Nikyo	<b>19</b>	<b>20</b> Aikido (9:30 – 11:00 am; Wolfe)  SMR Jo (11:00 am – 12:30 pm)
<b>21</b>	<b>22</b> Open Mat (6:00 – 6:30 pm)  SMR Jo (6:30 – 8:00 pm; Wolfe)	<b>23</b> Open Mat (5:30 – 6:30 pm)  Aikido (6:30 – 8:00 pm; Wolfe) Topic: Tsuki Iriminage	<b>24</b> Open Mat (5:30 – 6:30 pm)  Aikido (6:30 – 8:00 pm; Butz) Topic: Shomenuchi / Yokomenuchi Iriminage	<b>25</b> Open Mat (5:30 – 6:30 pm)  Aikido (6:30 – 8:00 pm; Wolfe) Topic: Tsuki Kotegaeshi	<b>26</b>	<b>27</b> Aikido (9:30 – 11:00 am; Wolfe)  SMR Jo (11:00 am – 12:30 pm)
<b>28</b>	<b>29</b> Open Mat (6:00 – 6:30 pm)  SMR Jo (6:30 – 8:00 pm; Wolfe)	<b>30</b> Open Mat (5:30 – 6:30 pm)  Aikido (6:30 – 8:00 pm; Wolfe) Topic: Ryotemochi Shihonage (Ura)	<b>31</b> Open Mat (5:30 – 6:30 pm)  Aikido (6:30 – 8:00 pm; Butz) Topic: Test Set Review			

## Planning News and Notes:

- Our focus for aikido classes this month is the yonkyu test set. If you have a bok uito and/or bo, please be sure to bring your weapons to classes on the 9th, 10th, and 11th, for aikibuki (aikido weapons) week.
- August 4 – 6 — Pan-American Shinto Muso-ryu Jo Gasshuku at Kenyon College, in Ohio. Itten Dojo contingent departing the afternoon of August 3rd, and returning the afternoon of August 7th.
- September 17 — Tentative date for first edition of "Saturday at Shutokukan," a special, four-hour Shinto Muso-ryu mini-seminar for members of the Itten Dojo jodokai. Training will be held 2:00 to 6:00 pm.