

= Kenshiro Abbe =

Kenshiro Abbe (1915 - 1985) was a prominent Japanese master of judo , aikido , and kendo . He introduced aikido to the United Kingdom in 1955 , and founded the Kyushindo system . Abbe was a graduate of the Budo Senmon Gakko , having studied judo and kendo there . Following an illustrious early career in the martial arts , he served in the Imperial Japanese Army before and during World War II . He then trained in aikido under its founder , Morihei Ueshiba , for a decade . Abbe held dan ranks in several martial arts , most notably 8th dan in judo , 6th dan in aikido , and 6th dan in kendo . After introducing aikido to the UK , he established several Japanese martial arts councils there during the late 1950s . He returned to Japan in 1964 and remained there for most of the remainder of his life . There are contradictory accounts of Abbe 's final years , but it appears that he was in poor spirits and poor health towards the end .

= = Early life = =

Abbe was born on 15 December 1915 in a village in Tokushima Prefecture , on the island of Shikoku , Japan . He was the son of Toshizo Abbe , who was the local school 's headmaster and a kendo instructor , and his wife , Kote Abbe . The couple had four sons and five daughters , and Abbe was the youngest child in the family . On 4 September 1919 , when Abbe was not yet four years old , his father drowned in a flash flood while training in the mountains . A young schoolteacher , Manpei Hino , subsequently became a father figure for the young boy and introduced him to the martial arts , including sumo . Abbe went on to become a local school champion in sumo .

In 1929 , Abbe began learning judo from Kazohira Nakamoto , a former police officer . That same year , he was promoted to the rank of 1st dan in the art and , unusually , he reached 2nd dan the next year , and 3rd dan the year after that . Thus , at the age of 16 , he became the youngest judo student ever promoted to 3rd dan - an honour he received directly from Shohei Hamano , an instructor of the Dai Nippon Butoku Kai (abbreviated to ' Butoku Kai ' or ' Butokukai ') , which was the official governing body for Japanese martial arts . Abbe also became champion of the Tokushima High School Judo League that year . During his fifth year at the school , Abbe entered a regional tournament involving 30 towns , serving as captain for the team from the town of Kawashima . His speed and agility helped him to many victories , and he received the nickname ' Pegasus ' accordingly .

At his 1st dan judo examination , Abbe had caught the attention of Shotaro Tobata from the Butoku Kai , who had been refereeing at the event . Tobata had suggested to Nakamoto and Abbe that the young man should apply for entry to the renowned Budo Senmon Gakko (abbreviated to ' Busen , ' and sometimes referred to as ' Busen College ') , a specialist college for martial artists . With the additional help of a teacher named Nakano , Abbe now prepared for the entrance examination in Kyoto . Out of all the candidates , of which there were around 300 that year , 20 would be accepted into the judo programme and 20 into the kendo programme . Abbe performed well and was accepted into both programmes .

= = Budo Senmon Gakko training = =

In 1934 , Abbe moved to Kyoto with his mother and his sister Toyoka so that he could attend Busen , training in both the judo and kendo programmes . Abbe learned kendo under the direction of Busen 's head sword instructor , Kinnosuke Ogawa , a master who held the rank of 10th dan . He recalled that his instructor , at the age of 75 years , was so skilled that he could not be touched by any of the students or younger instructors . Every Saturday afternoon at Busen , following tradition , judo tournaments were held . Abbe fought five opponents in succession with each contest lasting five minutes , and he won all or almost all of these matches . In his first year at Busen , he was promoted to 4th dan in judo . In the autumn of his second year there , he was promoted to 5th dan , by which

time he was reported to have been fighting 20 opponents in succession .

In May 1935 , Abbe competed in the 5th dan division championship and defeated Masahiko Kimura . This match was one of only four professional career losses for Kimura , who was already well known as one of the best judo competitors in Japan , and would later gain further fame for defeating Hélio Gracie of Brazilian Jiu Jitsu . According to biographers Keith Morgan and Henry Ellis , Kimura was heard to remark after the match that fighting Abbe was " like fighting a shadow . " Abbe was listed at 5 ' 5 " (168 cm) in height and 156 lb . (71 kg) in weight at the time ; Kimura was only an inch taller , but much heavier at 187 lb . (85 kg) . Two years later , during which time Kimura trained hard , he sought Abbe out at the Kodokan and soundly defeated him in a 20 @-@ minute practice session .

While at Busen , Abbe also enrolled in Hajime Tanabe 's philosophy class at Kyoto University (then known as Kyoto Teikoku Daigaku , or ' Kyoto Imperial University ') . During this period , his sister Toyoko began studying Tend? @-@ ry? naginata under a female instructor named Mitamura Chiyo (in Japan , arts focusing on the handling of naginata have been practiced almost exclusively by women since the Edo period) , and she would continue practicing that art for the rest of her life .

Following graduation from Busen , Abbe became an instructor in judo at the college , as well as taking instructor positions with the Osaka police force and a high school in Kyoto . The Butoku Kai promoted him to 6th dan in judo in 1937 .

= = Military service = =

In June 1937 , Abbe enlisted in the Imperial Japanese Army , and was subsequently posted to a garrison in Manchuria . He served there for four years , during which time he was unable to continue training in judo but was able to practise kendo . While abroad , he began formulating his Kyushindo philosophy . His tour of duty ended in 1941 , and he returned to Kyoto , where he met and married his wife Keiko . Abbe did not remain a civilian for long , however , since Japan entered World War II near the end of that year .

Abbe was assigned to a training unit in Tokushima Prefecture , where he studied and mastered j?kend? (bayonet) . It was around this time that he first met Morihei Ueshiba , founder of aikido , who had also trained in j?kend? . Ueshiba was around 60 years old at this time , around twice Abbe 's age . Rogers , Ellis , and Eastman (2004) give the following account of their first meeting :

It was during a train journey in Japan that Abbe first met Ueshiba . Abbe didn 't know who he was and he reacted to Ueshiba looking at him , saying : " What are you staring at , old man ? " Ueshiba replied : " I know who you are , " to which Abbe modestly retorted : " Everyone knows me , I am Kenshiro Abbe , Champion of All Japan . " Ueshiba then introduced himself as the Founder of Aikido , and was told by Abbe that he didn 't look strong enough to be a martial arts master . Ueshiba then offered Abbe his little finger , and said : " But young man , you look very strong indeed . Please break my finger . " Abbe at first declined , but eventually accepted the challenge , presumably to shut the old man up . Abbe claimed that , as he took hold of the old man 's finger and tried to break it , he found himself on the floor of the carriage and totally immobilised . Whilst on the floor Abbe asked Ueshiba for permission to study under him .

Morgan and Ellis (2006) give a slightly different account :

While travelling on a train Abbe noticed an older man staring at him who then asked if he was a 5th Dan Judo . Abbe replied ? Why yes , how did you know that ? ? ? Because you have the build of a 5th Dan . So who are you ? ? Kenshiro replied : ? Everyone knows who I am , I am Kenshiro Abbe , Judo champion of all Japan ! ? Yes , I can see that , ? the old man replied . The old man continued to talk to Kenshiro much to his annoyance as he wanted to get some sleep . Eventually , the old man put a finger in Kenshiro ? s face , ? You are so powerful , break my finger ! ? Kenshiro was only too happy to oblige . He took the finger , expecting to snap it like a twig , and wham ! He found himself on the carriage floor under the full control of the old man . The old man allowed Kenshiro to get back into his seat . ? Who are you ? ? Kenshiro Abbe asked . ? I am Morihei Ueshiba , the founder of Aikido . ? Kenshiro Abbe was astounded at the technique of the old man and requested that he become his student .

Abbe studied aikido under Ueshiba for 10 years , eventually reaching the rank of 6th dan in that art . During this period , the Abbes had two daughters : Junko and Noriko .

In 1945 , the Butoku Kai promoted Abbe to 7th dan in judo and 6th dan in kendo . Following the end of World War II , however , the Butoku Kai and Busen were both closed down . Abbe took up the position of a judo teacher for the Kyoto Prefectural Police Department . He became Chief Instructor of judo for the Kyoto police , and also taught at Doshisha University in that city . After the Abbes had a third daughter , Yayoi , Abbe resigned from the Kyoto police . During this period , he felt that judo in Japan was declining , and ended his association with the Kodokan in the 1950s .

= = Europe = =

In 1955 , Abbe travelled to the United Kingdom . He went at the invitation of the London Judo Society (LJS) , and was the first master to teach aikido in the UK . That year , he demonstrated aikido at the LJS and at the Royal Albert Hall in London . Abbe came to experience two problems at the LJS : first , he felt that the students there were more concerned with competition than his theories , and second , he felt that the students did not treat him with the appropriate respect for someone of his rank and experience in the martial arts . According to the International Budo Council (IBC) , he founded the IBC in 1955 .

Abbe proceeded to teach aikido at his own dojo (training hall) , affectionately known as ' The Hut , ' which was located behind a pub in Hillingdon , London . Training was rigorous and , due to Abbe 's poor command of English , he would often make corrections by using a shinai (practice sword) to hit the body part that was out of place ; Ellis recalled that Abbe would say , " My English is poor but my shinai speaks fluently . " Abbe 's approach to self @-@ defence matched his no @-@ nonsense approach to training , and was demonstrated when three youths tried to rob him one evening . Geoff Thomson (1998) wrote :

He was walking down a quiet suburban street on his way home after his usual evening teaching session . He noticed three youths hovering several yards away on the opposite side of the street . When they approached him he was ready . " Give us your money , or you 'll get hurt " said the leader of the three . Abbe looked at each one in turn , then casually took his wallet out of his jacket pocket , throwing it on the floor between himself and the antagonists . He pointed to the wallet and said , " I am prepared to die for that wallet , what about you ? " The three would @-@ be attackers looked at the wallet on the floor , then at Abbe and then at each other and then moved away . Abbe picked up his wallet and calmly walked home .

Speaking about the incident , Ellis said , " Not a lot of love and harmony from Abbe sensei , simply an attitude and language these thugs understood . "

In 1958 , Abbe founded the British Judo Council (BJC) , and he went on to establish the British Aikido Council , British Karate Council , British Kendo Council , and British Kyudo Council . At this stage , he was travelling extensively through the UK and Europe , and also invited Japanese martial art masters to teach in the UK ; these included Mitsusuke Harada (Shotokan karate) and Tadashi Abe (aikido) . During this period , Abbe 's family remained in Japan . Robinson (2007) wrote , " [he] did invite his family to live with him in London however they refused , apparently not at all attracted by the life style that Kenshiro offered them in England . "

Abbe was involved in a car accident in 1960 which left him with severe neck injuries that had lasting effects on his health . While the precise date is unclear , Abbe had been promoted to 8th dan by late 1960 . Independent sources from the late 1960s include this rank with his name . In addition to his ranks in judo , aikido , and kendo , he held the rank of 5th dan in karate and dan ranks in ky?d? and j?kend? .

In 1964 , Abbe returned to Japan for the Summer Olympics in Tokyo . While in his homeland , he met with Ueshiba , updated him on the progress of aikido in the UK , and asked him to send another instructor to the UK to continue teaching the art . In 1966 , Ueshiba sent Kazuo (T. K.) Chiba to the UK to continue the work Abbe had begun . Henry O 'Tani (2009) has stated that during Abbe 's absence from the UK , a dismissed BJC senior executive and several senior instructors misappropriated his financial and organisational resources and set up their own BJC group . In 1969

, Abbe returned to the UK , but was distraught by the situation with this group that he had not authorised . When he asked former colleagues to help him rebuild the organisation , they refused ; he subsequently left the UK , never to return .

= = Later life = =

There are contradictory accounts of Abbe 's last years in Japan . Morgan and Ellis (2006) state that he lived with his family for the remainder of his life , while Cavalcanti (2004) and Bagot (2007) claim that there were problems and that he ended up living apart from his family . Sources appear to agree , however , that Abbe was in poor spirits and poor health towards the end of his life . He suffered a stroke on 17 November 1985 , and was hospitalised .

Abbe died on 1 December 1985 in Japan . According to at least two sources , he had chosen to donate his body for medical education at Saitama University , so it was not immediately laid to rest . Abbe 's funeral was held on 10 June 1986 at Zuiganji Temple , located south of Mount Bizan in Tokushima , and he was buried or commemorated at the family grave there . Robinson (2007) wrote , " Abbe was the master who introduced Kendo , Aikido , Karate , Kyodo , Jukendo , laido , Yarido and Naginatado to Europe yet he died almost totally alone and forgotten by most . "