



border control, and was glad to be able to come home to spend time with all of the people in the sword community. Special guests this year included a *Yumoto* trained *Kantai* specialist, Dr. Carroll Ford, Travis Boardman from Texas and Sang Kim from New York.

Several excellent seminars were available on Friday, and many took advantage of them. After the seminars, there was a short period of “All Hands” to get the rest of the prepared *Goza* into the building and finish the set up. That evening the instructors gave an *Enbu* of their home styles and showed us what our *Tameshigiri* could look like with a lot more practice.

The next morning we assembled for an opening ceremony that included both the Japanese and American anthem, performed beautifully by “Doc Goodwin’s” wife, *Hirumi*, opening remarks by *Soke Yamada* and a *Shinto* prayer from Ken Wintin. The morning was spent contesting the *Kata* competition and after lunch, we shifted into the *Tameshigiri* and *Kumitachi* events. Too soon it was time for the awards and the group photo. We are already anticipating next year’s event.

## Annual Testing

Testing for *Shin Shin Ryu* students was conducted this year at the Stone Avenue *Dojo* (*Ryu Shin Kan*) in March. *Soke Yamada* examined candidates from across the United States in the early afternoon of March 8<sup>th</sup>. Among the students elevated in rank this year from the *Yamakawa Dojo* were;



Marilea Major (*Sandan*)  
Daniel Milchack (*Shodan*)

## Kagami Biraki 2009

January, there was a friendly gathering at the *Yamakawa Dojo* for the annual start of the New Year. During the previous week we did our 1000 cuts practice (*Senbon Suburi*) and

performed some *Kata* and *Tameshigiri* for the guests at the Tucson Children’s Museum. The party at Dr. Gettings’ house and *Dojo* was a welcome finish to this flurry of activity. Much like the Western counterpart, *Kagami Biraki* is a time for a fresh start. This season also has a message of introspection. The *Kagami* of this season is a traditional shrine mirror. The purpose of the mirror, in this case, is so that when you look into a shrine, you see yourself. You are encouraged make improvements to your own character and to the conduct of your life.



## Kaichitsu

March 6<sup>th</sup> is the traditional date for *Kaichitsu* in Japan. This is a special division in the annual calendar that acts like a poetic almanac (The 24 Seasons). “Insects appear” is one translation. The weather is turning warmer and the players of spring are beginning to emerge. *Kaichitsu* is a special season word (*Kigo*) that has been used as a poetic convention for quite some time. This special list of season words and symbols creates a short-hand for setting the scene of artistic work. It is also close to the same time that the plum trees begin to bloom. It is interesting to note that the plum blossom viewing time (*Ume-mi, Kan-bai* 梅見、観梅) is near. This is more often a solitary experience, quite different from the raucous cherry blossom parties that fill the parks. Part of the reason for this is that the blooms of the plum are more sparse on the branches than the cherry. The spectacle of cherry blossoms is like fireworks compared to the graceful constellations of the plum. There also seems to be a melancholy aspect to the plum blossom that has been utilized repeatedly in textile, illustration and even sword fittings.

## Voices in your Head

If you have ever had the hair on the back of your neck stand up for no apparent reason you have probably benefited from the **Gift of Fear**. Our brains are actually collecting more information from the environment than we

Moon of Yamaki Mansion

Kobayashi, Kiyochika (1847 – 1915)

## Events Schedule

2009

May

Florida Tai Kai  
Palm Bay, FL  
(USFBD)

## Tucson Tai Kai

When the dust cleared in the Seville Ballroom in Tucson, there were two men tied for the overall honors and obligations of *Yusho*. Rob Rivers and Chuck Hunnicutt had dominated their events all day. It was decided that to resolve the tie, they would each perform an *Enbu* for a single judge, *Soke Yamada*. They were each given three *Tameshigiri* targets and a moment to prepare. Not surprisingly, both men turned in excellent *Enbu*, but Mr. Hunnicutt’s was superior. For all of his effort and dedication he was presented with a Howard Clark *Wakizashi* blade. Also doing quite well this year were two of his students, Nathan Grunow and Shawn Olson. In fact Shawn Olson was the winner of the *Nidan / Sandan* class for the day and is now the proud owner of an Elder *Katana*.

During this year’s Tai Kai, *Kaicho* McClafferty was in the United States to host *Soke Yamada*. He has been in Afghanistan for the last year sharing his expertise in

can process in our logic center. We have the ability to sense discord or danger when something just doesn't feel right. You may not be able to identify that "something" at the moment, but the instinct is real. The next vital step is to heed that warning.

We practice the skills of swordsmanship, in part, to condition our brains to remain calm in times of chaos. A swordsman draws a sharp blade in response to a threat and deals with the moment without unnecessary effort or disturbance. Modern sport-psychology calls this your **Optimal Arousal Level**. Long-term experiments have shown that there is a "tipping point" in your brain activity where you become over stimulated and the performance of a skill declines. Likewise, if you are too relaxed, it is also possible to "Shank one into the ruff" (underperform). The twilight between these two extremes has also been called "**The Flow State**". Runners have related that they felt like they were treading on air when this happens. They also report feelings of euphoria. Everything is working smoothly and they turn in a peak performance or best time.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the flow state is to recognize that it can be learned. This is a mental skill that requires practice. Focused awareness allows you to make the best use of the skills you already have. This ability will not make up for gaps in your skill set, but it will make it possible for you to function at your highest efficiency.

We practice our sword skills with an instrument that has the potential to do damage ourselves or our surroundings. We practice maintaining our focus so that there are no lapses in judgment and yet, our goal is to remain supple enough to respond to any situation.



For further reading please see; **The Gift of Fear**, by Gavin DeBecker. Other valuable

reference in this area is any one of the multitude of sport psychology books on the market. Some are sport specific, written by Olympic athletes or marathon winners, while others may be aimed at the business audience.



## Samurai Chado

The modern culture in Japan tends to regard "The Way of Tea" as a feminine art of accomplishment. Much like *Ikebana* flower arrangement or wearing pleasing *Kimono*, it is grouped by many with the decorative arts. It may come as some surprise to learn that tea was taken very seriously by many Samurai warriors. The proper methods of making and consuming Japanese tea were valued as skills that a cultivated warrior should not be without.

*Sensei* Keupp has been getting some instruction in this area during the annual visits by *Soke Yamada*. Just as the sword *Kata* has specific steps and timing, *Chado* is very particular about each step of the process. Also important is establishing the mood of the surroundings. In a formal ceremony, this is partly accomplished with a hanging scroll that complements the season.

Another aspect of this art is the proper storage of equipment and components as well as an appreciation of high quality ceramic tea bowls (*Chawan*). One of the favorites is now known by the name, *Oribe-yaki* (織部焼). This style has been produced in *Gifu* prefecture since the mid-*Heian* period (794 - 1185). *Oribe-yaki* is a subset of *Mino-yaki* (*Mino* ware). *Oribe Furuta* is the name of

one of the most influential tea masters in Japan. He succeeded the famous, *Sen no Rikyu* in the service of *Oda Nobunaga* and later, *Toyotomi Hideyoshi* in the 16th century. He is credited with introducing a feeling of modernism through his approach to ceramics and other arts and crafts. This is in contrast to the austere style that had been dominant previously. His use of unusual and organic shapes, and boldly colored glazes and designs was such a departure, that it was influential far beyond just the ceramic and tea ceremony circles.

*Sen no Rikyu* was also trained at an early age in Zen and Buddhist doctrine. During his lifetime, he developed four fundamental qualities in his ceremonies that seem to reflect that background; **harmony, respect, purity and tranquility**. It is also said that a practitioner should integrate these qualities into their daily life. One of his notable observations about tea ceremony is;

*Though many people drink tea, if you do not know the Way of Tea, tea will drink you up.*



## Yen Exchange

Recent economic changes have resulted in Japanese goods becoming 18% more expensive for Americans than last year. As recently as last summer and fall, one dollar could buy about 110 Yen. The current exchange rate is closer to 90 Yen per dollar. It may be more economical in the short term, to buy supplies and training clothes from companies that are based in the United States. There is usually a lag in price increases due to warehouse inventory that was purchased when the rates were better. On the bright side, American goods now seem "cheaper" to Japanese visitors and consumers. This may stimulate trade in that direction.

