

# The First Englishman to gain a Black Belt in Ninjutsu

Interview and Photos: Peter Robins

## COULD you give your name, age and background.

My name is Peter King, I am 27 years old and have been training in the Japanese martial arts since I was sixteen. I hold a black belt in karate and ju-jutsu.

I understand that you have recently been awarded a black belt in Togakure ryu Ninjutsu by Dr. Hatsumi, the 34th grandmaster.

Yes, in spring of 1985 I was given the honour of a *Shodan* and *Shidoshi-ho* by Hatsumi sensei.

## When and how did you become interested in ninjutsu?

It was actually through 'Fighting Arts'.....about ten years ago I saw an excellent article in this magazine about Dr. Hatsumi and his training. (Vol. 2 No. 6 Editor)

## Who did you first train with?

I first trained with Tetsuji Ishizuka 8th dan, at his home and dojo in Noda, Japan.

I have been to Japan twice to train in the traditional martial arts both visits were of two months duration. On the second trip I spent most of my time studying ninjutsu.

## Are there licenced Ninjutsu Instructors in Europe now?

Yes, there is Bo Munthe, 4th dan, Sven-Eric Bogner, 2nd dan, and Mats Gullberg, 2nd dan – all in Sweden. Also Brian McCarthy 2nd dan in Ireland, all are *shidoshi-ho*.

## Do you have your own dojo now?

Yes, I was given permission to open my own dojo, which is in South Croydon. (Editors note. contact address at the end of the interview).

## How different is ninjutsu to other martial arts?

The main difference, from a physical point of view, is that in ninjutsu, the power is generated by an unusual way of moving the body. It's a "soft" movement, propelling the body, usually from a low position.

## Who were your other instructors in Japan?

Most of my training was with Ishizuka sensei, but I also trained with Major F. Manaka, 8th dan and Dr. Ron Nivron, 6th dan, who was visiting with a training group from Israel. I was also fortunate to be able to train with Dr. Hatsumi.

## Were there many surprises in store for you or did you have a good idea of what to expect from Ninjutsu training?

I will answer that by saying that you are always being surprised by the subtlety and effectiveness of the techniques.



Peter King applies a lock and takedown technique from Jutai jutsu.

## What is the format of a class in Japan?

Usually we would meet at the dojo and while we were getting changed we would drink Japanese tea. The class would begin with *Junan Taisho* – warming up and stretching exercises, then onto *Taihenjutsu* – rolling breakfalls and body movement. Then the *Kihon* (basics) of *Dakentai jutsu* – striking, kicking and blocking; *Jutaijutsu* – grappling, choking and escapes. We would practice these techniques for some time until Ishizuka sensei would stop the class and show *Henka waza* – variations. Often after this, he would devote some time to teaching me *Hanbo* (3' stick) and knife techniques.

## Do you think that many people expect or want ninjutsu to be the magic recipe for martial prowess?

I think that a lot of people do think like this and allow their imagination to run wild with regard to ninjutsu. Perhaps they have been encouraged by watching fictional entertainment on television and in the cinema. That is not ninjutsu.

## How are these people treated by an instructor?

They are allowed to watch and train, then make a decision as to whether they wish to indulge in fantasies or to study the art of true ninjutsu. The two are quite separate.

## How do the students dress for training in Japan?

Mostly they would wear an ordinary black gi. The traditional garb is mainly kept for ceremony and demonstrations. They also do not wear the masks for the previous reasons.

## What is the relationship between unarmed and weapon training?

Unarmed and armed techniques are virtually identical as the same body movements are used in both.

**On your last trip, you were allowed into the instructors class. How was this experience?**

I felt very honoured to be asked into the special class by **Dr. Hatsumi** when he visited **Ishizuka sensei's** dojo. It was a unique opportunity to see first hand his brilliant mastery of technique.

**What was your impression of him?**

He was very kind and friendly towards me and took time to explain the various techniques during training. After this session he spoke to me at great length, through **Ishizuka sensei**, about ninjutsu, especially in relation to other martial arts. He is an exceptional man and extremely perceptive.

**How does he see the future of Togakure-ryu ninjutsu?**

As he carries the responsibility for the nine schools that make up the *Bujinkan*, he feels that he has the opportunity of showing the world what a true warrior tradition is. He believes that many martial arts have lost their way since their inceptions. On a purely personal basis, I feel that although he would like more people to experience the unique way of ninjutsu, the most important thing to him is his duty as the present grandmaster, to develop and continue the *Bujinkan* into the next generation.

**Peter, thank you for your time and the interview. I wish you success with your dojo.**



*Peter King demonstrates a Zenpo geri – the Ninja version of the front kick from Dakentai-jutsu.*

**Peter King can be contacted for further information on his school at – Bujinkan London – P.O. Box 207, South Croydon, Surrey, CR2 6JL.**

**Please include a s.a.e. with your correspondence.**