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MASTERING MIND AND BODY
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POD IUM DREAMS
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OF DOWS AND SLASHING STEEL
Harri Banrie Revell tells the story of his life in the martial arts and of his teacher, pioneering Aussie Grandmaster Bill Vaughan.
OF DOVES
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An interview with Barrie Revell Hanshi

Barrie Revell Hanshi, 8th Dan, is President of the Australian Martial Arts Association (AMAA) and arguably one of Australia's most experienced martial arts instructors. Gary Simpson caught up with Adelaide-based Revell when he visited Western Australia, to talk about his history in the martial arts and the teachings of his own late master, Grandmaster Bill Vaughan.

Hanshi Barrie Revell is different to most in the martial arts - he has twice refused to accept black-belt rankings from his instructors. The first time was way back in the late '70s when Moss Hall, a well-known Shotokan instructor, wanted to promote Revell to 4th Dan. At the time Barrie felt he was not ready to assume this relatively high rank and chose to remain a 3rd Dan.

Most recently, Revell, who was last graded in 2000 by Grandmaster Bill Vaughan (10th Dan; now deceased) to 8th Dan, has declined to assume 9th Dan status despite being named the Grandmaster's own 9th Dan Black Belt. Although he states proudly the black belt with its nine gold tags, he says he does so in honour of his teacher.

At nearly 60 years old and with more than 40 years of experience, Barrie told me that he still considers himself an 8th Dan - an unusual attitude when most martial arts teachers seem to want to rise up the ranking ladder as quickly as possible.

At one point, Barrie became very emotional when relating the story of Grandmaster Bill Vaughan's passing. Barrie was a disciple of Vaughan's for over 30 years. When Vaughan suddenly fell gravely ill and knew that he was going to die, Barrie visited him twice in hospital to pay his respects to the man who he credits most with helping him become the martial artist and the person that he is today.

On the first occasion, Barrie took with him an assistant instructor, Andrew Chin. Barrie told me that Vaughan was in good spirits and looked okay despite the prognosis of the doctors. But a few days later Barrie said he looked very frail and, after his long battle with illness, they both knew that the worst was soon to come.

Bill Vaughan passed away on 16 July 2005. He was cremated in his karate gi, wearing his embroidered maroon 10th Dan obi (belt). He also carried with him to rest in his beloved katas that he treasured so greatly in life.

After Vaughan's death, at age 75, Vaughan's wife, Betty, handed Barrie a letter that Vaughan had written to him in his last days. In it, he expressed a desire for Barrie to wear his old belt and spoke of how proud he'd been of Barrie's commitment and discipline. The respect and admiration that Barrie and Vaughan had for each other was mutual. Here is how Barrie described his late teacher:

"When Bill died, Australia lost one of its greatest martial arts pioneers and exponents. An era ended. Bill was an exceptionally skillful martial artist and a true gentleman. He was absolutely meticulous about his training methods and was a cut above everybody else."

"Bill's students were the very best at all the tournaments. I liked the way that they fought and the respect that they had for him, themselves and their opponents. I realized very early that I could learn a lot from this man."

"Bill was a boxer, a judoka, a karateka and a military man. He saw action in the Malaya – Indonesia confrontation of 1965-66 (which was also known as the 'Forgotten War')."

"Sometimes he would tell me little snippets of what he did during the war. One story involved being involved in a jeep roll-over. Some of the local villagers wanted to take advantage of that roll-over and, during the chaos, they attempted to attack the soldiers. Bill got up, dusted himself off and while still somewhat dazed and bruised, proceeded to use his hand-to-hand fighting skills to defend himself and his men. The chief of the local village got to hear about this man who was able to fight so strongly without weapons and made a point of meeting him."

At this point, I should mention that Bill Vaughan was approximately five feet two inches
tall. Nevertheless, he made up for his lack of physical stature with an indomitable spirit and ability in combat to which few others could come close.

It, too, had an association with Grandmaster Vaughan over many years and knew that the things Barrie told me were no exaggeration. I wanted to explore Barrie’s association with Bill Vaughan but first I wanted to ask about his early martial arts training and development.

Barrie’s very first instructor was Tommy Fallon, a boxing instructor. That was in 1959, in Hull, Yorkshire, England when Barrie was only around 10 years old. The boxing club also included a judo club and taught an eclectic combination of techniques that included kicking, punching, elbowing and head-butting. Barrie seemed to think it was called something like ‘scratch fighting’.

The Revell family emigrated to Adelaide, Australia, in 1963. By this time the young Revell was hooked on the fighting arts and sought out another boxing club in Elizabeth East, run by Frank McEwen.

Wanting to learn more about the mysterious Asian martial arts, he enrolled in a club at the Salisbury Youth Centre under instructor Graham Tuffy, then 2nd Dan, in 1965. Barrie didn’t know it at the time, but Tuffy was teaching for the legendary Mook Holin, an ex-British paratrooper and one of Australia’s pioneer karate teachers. At the time, karate was virtually unknown in Australia. Barrie also trained with the likes of John van Veenen, who later returned to the UK and became one of England’s most respected karate instructors, and is now 8th Dan. Another early associate was Alan Walsh, also a member of the Mook Holin karate club.

During the early 1970s, Barrie met Joe Lamasco, who later went on with Karl Stajka and Bill Vaughan to form the Australian Martial Arts Association (AMAA). Since that time, the AMAA has become one of the longest-serving associations for martial arts clubs in Australia. Though he didn’t know it way back then, some 35 years later Barrie would become its second president, as Bill Vaughan’s chosen successor (Bill held the position from inception until his death).

So committed had he become, Barrie shifted to Edwardstown to train with Moss Holin in his new Adelaide city dojo. There he met many visiting Japanese martial arts exponents—the result of Holin’s habit of visiting the docks whenever a Japanese ship was in and seeking out the Captain to ask whether any of his crew were experienced in the martial arts. He offered free food and lodging in return for instruction. As word spread, visiting masters of all the main styles...
began to visit Hollis’s dojo when he was in South Australia. It was in 1969 that Barrie first met Bill Vaughan. He was “entranced” by the skill and knowledge displayed by Vaughan, who was then ranked 5th Dan in the Kyokushinai karate style, having been trained and graded by the late founder, Sensei Mas Oyama.

According to Revell, Vaughan was promoted to 6th Dan after he taught all the other Black-belts and beat them all. It wasn’t clear who presided over this decision, but nobody doubted Vaughan’s incredible skill, stamina and ability.

“By the time I took the floor to perform a kata, there were dollops of blood everywhere... it was making the wooden floor slippery.”

Barrie eventually received his 1st Dan Black-belt in 1970 and his 2nd Dan in 1972, all the while receiving instruction from both Hollis and Vaughan. In 1976, he earned his 3rd Dan and, as Hollis’s senior Black-belt, were venturing out on their own and opening up their own school, thereby Barrie became Hollis’s main assistant instructor.

Eventually, Barrie also left to form his own school, called Australian Freestyle Karate. After being by himself for some time, he decided he simply needed more experience and knowledge to run the club, and took all his students over to Bill Vaughan at the Le-Hunt Community Centre. Vaughan taught Barrie and his students Kyokushinai karate, plus many weapons such as sais, do and bokken. For several years, Barrie continued to visit Mike Hollis for impromptu instruction in Shotokan karate, looking to broaden his experience. Vaughan’s club shifted to better premises in Modbury and it was there in 1984 that Revell finally graded to 4th Dan, after refusing to accept the grade many years earlier.

Along his journey, Barrie has also trained with other master instructors, including Harry Venderbit in kempo and Doctor Edward Lim in arnis. Barrie trained with Bill Vaughan continuously and intensively for 12 years in karate, sword and other weapon techniques. He was hooked on weaponry and like his teacher, his favourite was, and still is, the katana (Japanese sword). I am attest to Barrie’s skill with the katana, having seen it.
SOMA can provide training, tournaments, gradings (after a qualifying period and assessment) and a whole host of other benefits. For more information about how you or your martial arts organisation can join the Society of Martial Arts please contact admin@societyofmartialarts.com