

SENSEI PASCAL LECOURT 5th Dan.

Interview By André Brockbernd.

I met Sensei Pascal Lecourt (5th Dan) for the first time, in September 2003, in Mullheim, Germany. He is a member of the Shihankai of the Shotokan Ryu Kase Ha Academy. That is where he conducted, together with the other Shihankai-members, a Karate training for instructors. I was very impressed by his Karate expertise. Sensei Pascal's techniques, kime and knowledge of repositions are a good example of Karate as intended by Sensei Kase, who died in 2004. Sensei Pascal Lecourt is well on his way to become a phenomenon. Not just as a karateka, but also as a representative of the Shotokan Ryu, as spread by the late Sensei Taiji Kase.

Sensei Pascal Lecourt is 46 years old, lives in Rouen, France and is a great example for many karateka. Pascal Lecourt's Karate is hard and controlled. He is fast and has sublime movements, based on plyometric techniques. Pascal has proven, not only through his great skills, but also with his pleasant and friendly personality, that Karate is not just a gimmick, but in fact a life art. Together with some Karate friends, I have been regularly visiting training sessions conducted by this Karate master. In recent years he has been invited to give Karate training sessions all over Europe, as well as outside of Europe, for example in Israel and Australia. On October 22nd and 23rd, 2005, Pascal also gave a Karate seminar in my dojo.

This article is based on a number of earlier meetings I had with Sensei Pascal and I had the opportunity to interview him during the training session of January 14th and 15th in Luxemburg. The topic of this training session was the kata Kanku-Dai and its explanation, performed according to the concept of the Shotokan Ryu Kase Ha.

AB: When did you start practicing Karate and who was your first karate teacher?

PL: When I was 16 years old, in 1975, I started practicing Karate with Sensei Gerald Dumont.

AB: When did you first get acquainted with Sensei Taiji Kase?

PL: In those days, Sensei Kase was mostly active in France and there he gave approximately two training sessions each month. I attended every one of them. Usually I travelled there by scooter or, when it was very far, I used to hitchhike. I attended his training sessions from the moment I was white belt. In those days it was also very normal to wear your white



Pascal Lecourt states that, "Sensei Kase's training structured my life."

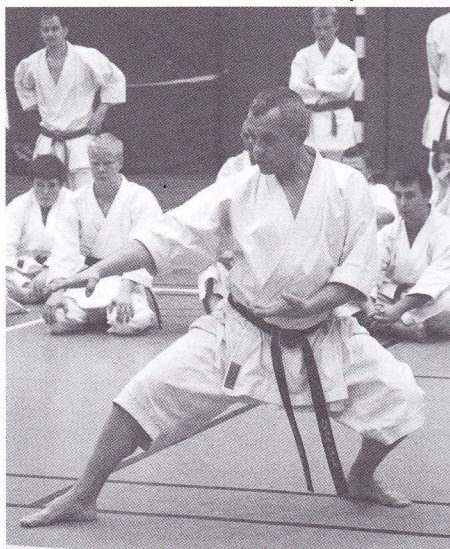
belt until your brown belt. I still work with this system in my school.

AB: What attracted you in Sensei Kase's Karate and what was he like as an instructor in those days?

PL: Kase's Karate was based on reality. These outlines were practical and very applicable in all kinds of situations. Sensei Kase was strict and training with him was hard work. At the time, my life was not very organized and Sensei Kase's Karate training structured my life.

AB: Is there a pleasant memory of Sensei Kase you would like to share with us?

PL: There is a memory, which



Sensei Lecourt teaching kata Kanku-dai.

changed my perception of life importantly. In 1985 Sensei Kase invited me to travel to Japan with him. I was privileged to stay at his house there. I was 26 years old at the time and trained Karate during many hours every day, convinced that this would help me improve and that it was good for my life. At a certain moment, Sensei Kase said that, if I continued training like that, my Karate life would soon come to an end. I was very surprised, because I trained hard and in an explosive manner and I was convinced that this was the only right way. In the following years I started to experience physical problems, such as a stiff neck and pain in the legs and knees. Sensei Kase advised me to start training in Sensei Shirai's style, but with Sensei Kase's training intensity. Sensei Shirai did not only train kime, but also flexibility. He allowed his body to rest and relax. Karate is good for your body and your life, but can also destroy it. Many JKA Karate instructors suffer knee and hip problems, due to training too rigidly. In fact, Kase said that you should listen to your body and that you have to use your energy in the right way. From then on I started working according to this concept of Sensei Kase's and I found out that this is the concept for life.

AB: Have you practiced any other Budo arts, besides karate?

PL: In France as well as in Japan I have practiced Kyudo (archery) for 10 years.

AB: During the training session I saw you demonstrated a movement from Kyudo. What has Kyudo meant for you, in combination with Karate?

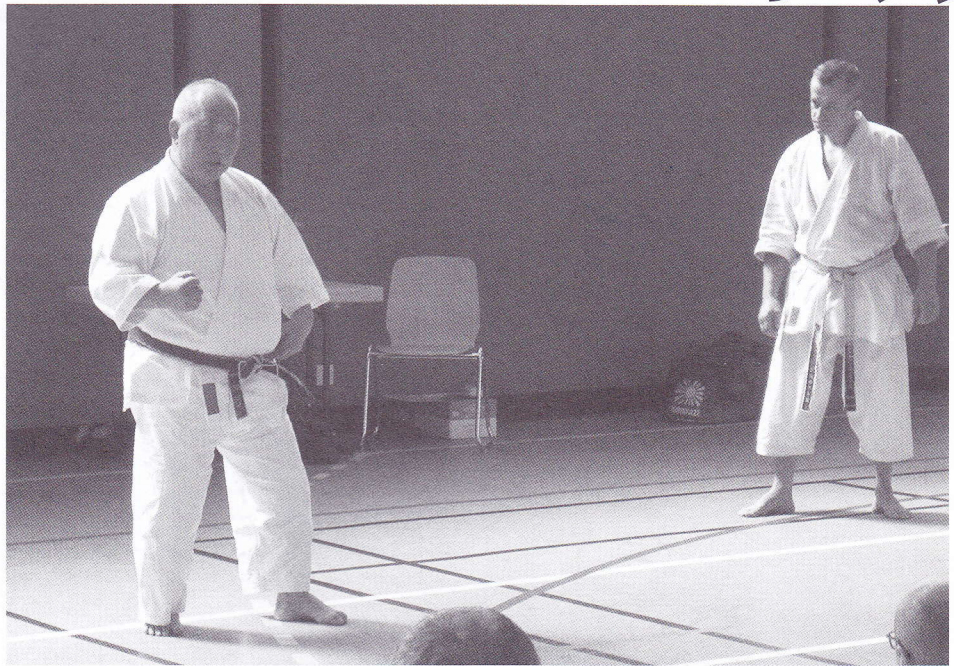
PL: Kyudo, literally: "The Way of the Bow," is considered by many as the purest of all martial arts. In a distant past, the Japanese bow was an instrument for hunting, war, ceremonies, games and also for demonstrating skills. The days that the bow was being used as a weapon are long gone. Kyudo emphasizes the physical, moral and spiritual development of its practitioner. One uses the bow as an instrument in the search for truth, goodness and beauty: hence the use of the expression "do", "the way". The control in Kyudo can be applied very well in Karate. Especially when contracting certain muscle groups, while other muscle groups must remain relaxed. In Shotokan as Kase has taught me, there are many movements of the arm which start from a position over the head and the shoulders. One is easily inclined to raise the shoulders or tighten them. This obstructs a fast and powerful execution of the desired technique, such as *shuto-uchi*. In Kyudo one must be able to tighten the bow without forcing the arms too much. One should be able to contract the muscle groups under the armpit, without contracting the arm muscles. By practicing Kyudo, it was somewhat easier for me to adopt Kase's typical karate techniques. Also the mental approach required in practicing Kyudo appeals to me and has parallels with Karate.

AB: Have you ever entered Karate contests?

PL: I have entered a few contests. In those days the competition in France was badly organized and that is why I did not feel in place.

AB: How do you feel about sportive karate, particularly the whole competition business, and do you think that sportive karate is inconsistent with the true spirit of karate-do?

PL: I have no objections to sportive karate as such. I think it can go together very well with karate as a way of life. It is just a shame that most of the competition people are only interested in winning and earning. It often lacks brotherhood, as we experience here during karate training sessions. There is no common goal, such as improving and developing karate. Most people quit when they reach the age that competitive, sportive karate is no longer possible. Fortunately, there are some individuals who start following the traditional way of karate after their competitive period. Sport is just a game and that makes it only a temporary part

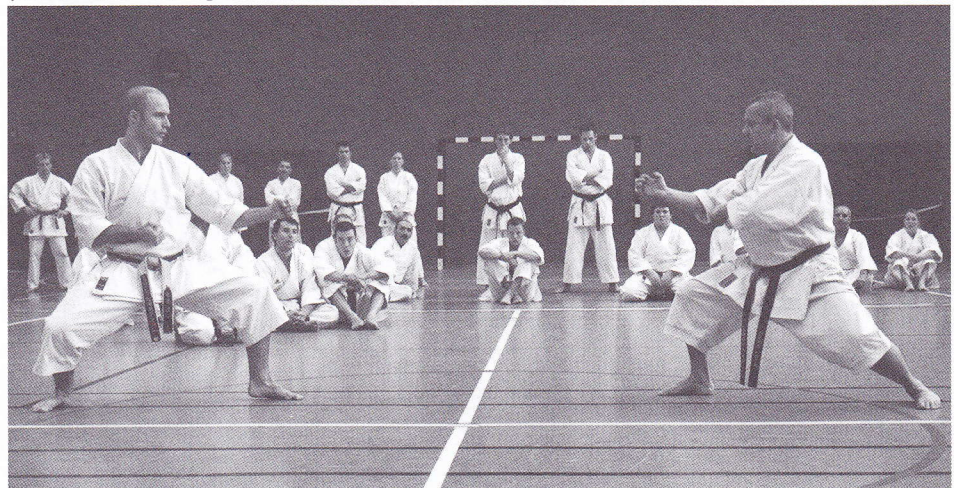


Pascal Lecourt (right) watches his mentor and sensei, the late, great master Taiji Kase 9th Dan, of Karate.

AB: You were there when Sensei Kase left the JKA and founded the WKSA. Can you tell us something about that?

PL: I do not know the real reason or cause for leaving the JKA. But I think that we should look for the origin in World War II. Sensei Kase started practicing karate during the war. In those days Gichin Funakoshi supervised his son Yoshitaka, Sensei Genshin Hironishi, Sensei Tadao Okuyama and Sensei Shigeru Egami teaching Shotokan karate. Sensei Yoshitaka developed karate further. Yoshitaka improved the inner power and he also developed the large movements. This enabled the cooperation between several muscles. Here lies the Shotokan origin, which was further improved by Sensei Kase. Large movements and deep stances; at first they seem absolutely impracticable, but after ten or twenty years of practice they prove their strength. Sensei Kase had

dedicated his life to this profound concept. During training we do not think about tomorrow, but about the distant future. After many years of hard and dedicated training, we can go everywhere in balance and stability. This way of training gives you the power and balance to be effective. O'sensei Gichin Funakoshi's younger assistants in those days were soldiers and most of them were deployed to China and the rest of Asia. They returned after the war. Unfortunately, these assistants had missed the latest developments, so they returned to the old karate as Gichin Funakoshi had taught them. Much later the JKA was founded, an organization based on Gichin Funakoshi's principles. Sensei Kase joined the JKA, because he wanted to become a professional karate teacher. After Sensei Masatoshi Nakayama, the leader of JKA, died in 1987, Sensei Kase founded the WKSA, in order to realize his path of life: spreading and further developing Yoshitaka Funakoshi's concept.



Pascal Lecourt says... "Large movements and deep stances at first seem absolutely impractical but after ten or twenty years of practice they prove their strength."

AB: Sensei, it has been over a year now since Sensei Kase died. How do you see the future of Shotokan Ryu Kase Ha, without its already legendary great master?

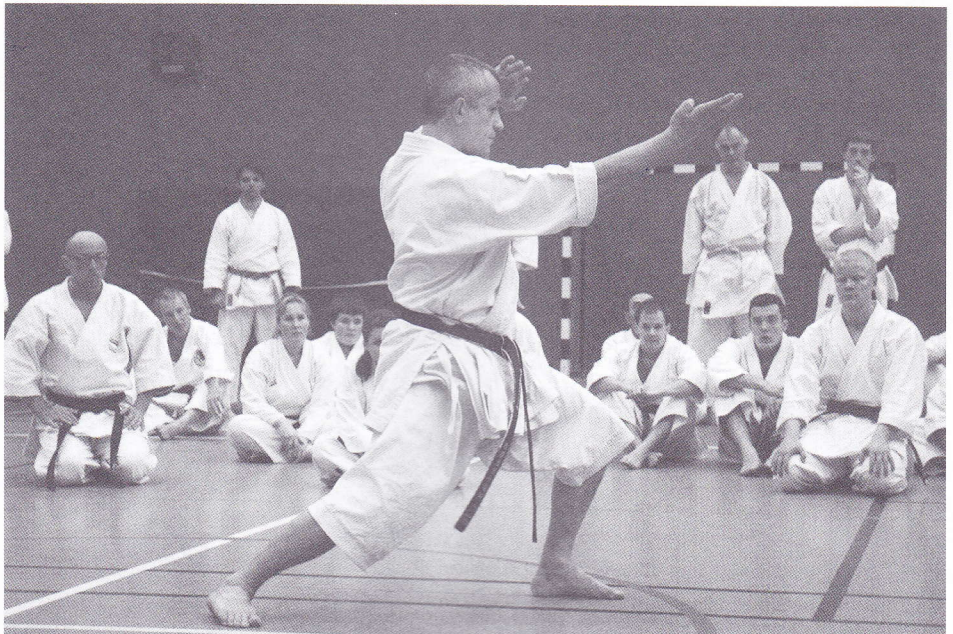
PL: I did sometimes ask my teacher Kase the same kind of questions. How should we continue after you are gone? Where shall we find our inspiration? What should we do with your ideas? And Sensei Kase always answered: "Get a picture of me and remember me!" First of all, all instructors of the Shotokan Ryu Kase Ha Academy should continue Sensei Kase's work and keep improving and spreading it. Secondly, if needed, we will return to the beginning, teaching starting karateka so that they again can become instructors. This should be a continuing process.

In September 2005 I have founded the Shotokan Ryu Kase Ha - France. We aim to organize training sessions each month, which affiliated karateka can attend for free. It is a growing organization. We already have 70 members and I hope that by the end of this year a total of 150 karateka will have joined.

AB: You are a professional Karate teacher and you teach in Sensei Kase's style. Sometimes one has to make concessions in order to be able to continue practicing the profession. Have you ever had to make concessions?

PL: I will never wear my karategi again, if I will not be able to teach Karate in Sensei Kase's style. I promised him, just before he died, that I shall dedicate the rest of my life to spreading his Shotokan Ryu.

AB: Where lies the difference between Sensei Kase's Karate style



Lecourt says "My opinion is that the Oyo-bunkai is a very good way to come close to reality."

and the Shotokan style, as spread by the JKA?

PL: In fact there are no big differences in appearance. The depth of Sensei Kase's Shotokan lies within the right timing, combined with the right repositions and the right use of force. All this is coordinated with the corresponding breathing.

As I have mentioned before; this way of practicing Karate is much healthier and leads you to maturity. Sensei Kase made some small alterations to some kata, which are based on realistic fighting situations. This bunkai form should be dynamic and the kumite element should be visible.

The forms are stricter with the JKA and there is less room for freer forms. I also feel that you should not shape yourself to the Karate, but that you should shape the Karate to yourself. You cannot reach maturity by merely training

a lot. You should also put your techniques to the test of reality. My opinion is that the Oyo-bunkai is a very good way to come close to reality.

Apart from training the classical forms of the Shotokan-kata, we also practiced special forms of those same kata. The existing kata are performed differently, such as Ura-kata, performing the kata in mirror image. Go kata, where all steps are made backwards instead of forwards. They are very well recognisable as Shotokan kata. The Ten-no-kata, the three Taikyoku kata, the Heian-oyo and the Tekki-oyo are also typical for Shotokan Ryu Kase Ha. These forms are not being trained with the JKA. From experience I know now that Sensei Kase's Karate, or better "Budo Karate", is healthier and that it is a good path to follow your entire life.

AB: Finally, I would like to thank you for this interview and perhaps you would like to add something?

PL: Keep on training as hard as Sensei Kase did. Always remember him, stay strong and maintain a balanced spirit. Make sure that you will always experience joy and pleasure as the most important things in Karate.

About the interviewer:

André Brockbernd (Dutchman, is the founder of Dokan Karate Foundation. He is a Shotokan stylist, who follows the line of Sensei Kase and is a member of the Shotokan Ryu Kase Ha Academy. He has been practicing Karate for more than 25 years and he is 5th Dan. Since the late 1980's he has helped organize many international Karate training sessions in the Netherlands. These training sessions were conducted by great masters such as Sensei Kase, Sensei Shirai, Sensei Dirk Heene, Sensei François van Binst and also Sensei Pascal Lecourt.



Interviewer, André Brockbernd (right) with sensei Pascal Lecourt.