

THE

Tenchi Goju Ryu Dojo

A PROFILE

天地剛柔流道場

Tenchi Goju Ryu Karate Dojo • Dalton, Georgia

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The Higaonna Dojo of the Tenchi Okinawan Goju Ryu Center, Varnell, Georgia. Morio Higaonna Sensei and his class meditate before training.

In the foreground, Mickey Brock, owner and chief instructor of the Tenchi Center, at the other end of the same line is Seigi, Higaonna Sensei's son.

In the minds of many people, the city of Atlanta, Georgia will forever be linked to Margaret Cleveland Mitchell's novel, *Gone with the Wind*. In my mind, it conjures up thoughts of General Sherman's "March to the Sea," of languid summer afternoons, the lyrics of the, "...banner that bears a single star," and sweet tea. Georgia is the very essence of the Southern life style. "Here in this pretty world where gallantry took its last bow," good manners, hard work, warm hospitality, and strong principles are still considered important

social assets! However, it is not a state that is necessarily associated with traditional Okinawan Goju Ryu Karate, although I suspect that this will now change.

Last June I was fortunate enough to receive an invitation to the Okinawa Prefectural Karate Do Rengokai training event near Atlanta. Apart from wanting to spend a few days with Morio Higaonna Sensei, who would be attending, I was anxious to visit the new Tenchi Goju Ryu dojo of Mickey Brock, a long time supporter, friend, and promoter of this publication. I

arrived a day early so I would have time to rest after the flight, and before driving up to Dalton for a private visit. The weather was perfect, the countryside lush in its coat of summer green, and the humidity, for Georgia at least, modest. To all intents and purposes, Georgia on that afternoon looked like England's South Downs as they slope gently downwards towards the English Channel.

I had heard that the Tenchi Dojo was very nice, but I was not prepared for what awaited me at the corner of Ruby Drive



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Morio Higaonna Sensei (right) with Mickey Brock in front of the dojo *kamidana* with photos of Kanryo Higaonna, Chojun Miyagi, and An'ichi Miyagi.

and the Cleveland Hwy., just a few minutes from Interstate 75. An imposing 11,000 square foot, purpose built martial arts center designed by an experienced karate instructor, and constructed entirely under his supervision. The first impression one gets is of its size, followed very rapidly by that of its presence. Like martial arts facilities in Japan, the quality is in the design

and materials used, not in cheap decoration or gaudy displays. It glows with an inner warmth that is spartan yet familiar and welcoming to anyone who has trained extensively in Japan. Elements of the design, in the Higaonna Dojo of the facility in particular, are reflections of, or perhaps muses upon, the *Okinawa Kenritsu Budokan* in Naha City, Okinawa, where Mickey Brock,

the owner, has trained with us on so many occasions at *CFA* seminars.

However, it is also very modern and well equipped for business, yet the 20th century management tools are artfully designed to blend with the center's overall design, and not be presented as electronic status symbols. They serve the dojo members; digital servants of the diverse yet homogenous micro-society of this unique karate dojo. This is a place for work and study, for effort and sweat, for frustration followed by enlightenment. A place where even the youngest members are encouraged to improve themselves in a separate "quiet" study room where they can master the principles of *bun bu ryo do* (文武両道) the sword and the pen in accord, by finishing their homework before they train.

A little later that day, Higaonna Sensei arrived. The place had been buzzing with anticipation since the morning, and as the time of his arrival drew closer, the tension rose to the point of being palpable. Nervous parents with young students dressed in sparkling white arrived; older dan grades often with a nervous, some would say furtive look, drifted in one by one. Even from the most senior dan grades one felt apprehension born of excitement mingled with dread. Then, suddenly, he was there! Short of stature, quietly spoken, soberly dressed, unobtrusive, and yet a very daunting, almost overwhelming presence. A Dalai Lama with calloused fists!

I have known Morio Sensei for a very long time, and so people often ask me what he is like. I have never found a satisfactory way of answering them other than to say, "watch!"

If you have ever been alone in a remote forest you will know that suddenly, and for no apparent reason, things can go silent. Every bird, furry animal, and insect will stop as if a switch has been turned off,

and vast forest will be blanketed in silence. Then, once again, just as suddenly, the million voices that contribute to nature's overture will begin again. THAT is the effect that Morio Sensei has when he enters a room, and so it was on this evening.

Higaonna Sensei walked into the dojo that bears his name, and the silence descended. He introduced himself as if he were just a new kid on the block, suggested that it would be rather nice if they all meditated together before training, then sat himself in formal *seiza* at the front of the class as if he did it every night of the week on that very spot. The silence now sunk to a level as profound as that of a winter's night in northern climes when heavy snow has just fallen. After a few minutes of meditation while the dojo held its collective breath, imperceptibly at first, the forest began to awaken, and the dynamo to spin. The members of the Tenchi Dojo would now experience, for three hours, Morio Higaonna's concerto of karate with him as the conductor, and them as his orchestra.

And what an evening it would be as the southern evening darkened, the temperature increased, and the humidity grew even more oppressive. Fireflies signaled their excitement to each other as *kiai* with real meaning began to erupt from the dojo into the night sky. They kicked, punched, blocked, did kata, punched again, combinations, *yakusoku kumite*, on and on. "*Mo ichi do, mo ichi do*," thundered Higaonna Sensei, "once more, once more!" and yet another roar would explode into the night sky as the dojo responded to the wizard of karate. It seemed to those present that Thor, the fearful God of the Vikings, was striking his mighty hammer upon its anvil just a few feet above the dojo roof. Energy pulsed, personal bests were eclipsed in seconds, sweat and adrenaline ran in equal measure, the dojo became a single living beast as



Higaonna Sensei takes a genuine interest in all students regardless of age or rank. He is a wonderful ambassador for Okinawan Karate which is why he was awarded the title of "Intangible Living Cultural Treasure of Karate," by The Prefecture of Okinawa in March 2013.

Thor beat his hammer over, over, and over and over the dojo roared its response.

And then the silence, and the velvet darkness of that summer night returned. In the tranquility of the universe, we submerged our conscious thoughts through meditation once more, into the void.

A Karate Do Kenkyukai
Approved Facility



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Tenchi Martial Arts Facility: General Specifications

Higaonna Dojo

A three thousand square foot traditional karate dojo inspired by the design of the *Rensei Dojo* of the Okinawa Prefectural Budokan in Naha City, Okinawa. This is equipped with multiple, *makiwara*, *sandbin gaami*, *kongo ken*, *chi'ishi*, and *tetsu geta*. A unique feature is the enclosed exterior viewing deck; a beautiful, practical, and very usable area that cannot fail to impress the visitor.

Miyagi Dojo

The second dojo, designated "Miyagi" has a 3000 sq. ft matted floor designed principally for younger students as well as kick boxing, Judo, and grappling. A very distinctive feature is the comfortable viewing lounge from which parents can watch the training through one-way glass. A rarely seen facility is also standard in this dojo; a thirty-six foot training bag "jungle."

Senior members of Higaonna Sensei's class pose for a commemorative photo after training. Although the Tenchi Center had been open for some time, we all felt after Higaonna Sensei's amazing class that this event was, "The Opening."

Angel Dojo

One thousand square feet that is reserved for private tuition. It offers an oasis of calm in a bustling facility that is conducive to the most focused practice and study. A place for closely supervised, intense training.

General Facilities

Four beautiful changing rooms with showers and private lockers. Three lobbies where parents and other visitors can relax, a pro-shop, a coffee shop, and student room for young members.



Impressive

The overall quality of this new facility is very impressive. It boasts large dojo with lots of headroom for weapons practice, the best training equipment, wood and tiled floor surfaces, changing facilities that would not be out of place in an expensive hotel, and parking just feet from the front reception desk. Of special note are the discrete viewing areas, the enclosed exterior deck of the Higaonna Dojo, and the functionality of the overall design, which is perfect. This facility shows what a combination of a deep knowledge the martial arts coupled with a great deal of planning and sincere effort can achieve.



The viewing area of the Miyagi Dojo, from which parents can watch their children through one-way glass as they practice, is a perfect example of the care that has gone into designing and building this superb martial arts facility. The unique layout allows visitors to enter and leave the area without disturbing the class in the slightest.

