History of International Uechi-Ryu Karate Federation (IUKF)

(Revised 9/11/06)

The origin of the Chinese martial arts which later became Uechi Ryu is an interesting subject. There are past and ongoing researches but none has yet been proven. Since records pertaining to the ancient martial arts in China and Okinawa are hazy at best, the lack of documentation results in much confusion. Various versions, or conjectures on the history of Uechi Ryu are available in books, magazines, articles, and various web sites.

The IUKF, at this point, does not wish to validate or sanction any of the versions. The following is an abbreviated version extracted from Master George Mattson's book entitled Uechiryu Karate Do, which was first published in 1974. The information was gathered by George Mattson from Master Ryuko Tomoyose, his immediate teacher; and from Master Kanei Uechi, son of Grand Master Kanbun Uechi in whose honor the style is named.

Legend has it that, in early 1897, a 20-year old Kanbun Uechi left Okinawa for the Fukien Province of China to study martial arts. He studied under a teacher by the name of Chou-Tzu-Ho (also known as Shushiwa). The style was based on a half hard and half soft concept (Pangai-noon).

After ten years of study and three years of teaching in China , Kanbun Uechi returned to Okinawa in 1910. Kanbun later got married and began farming near Naha and went to Japan in 1924.

While in Japan , Kanbun lived in Wakiyama prefecture near Osaka where he met another young Okinawan by the name of Ryuyu Tomoyose. Some time later, Ryuyu Tomoyose convinced Kanbun to start teaching the public to prevent the art from being lost. Kanbun agreed and taught karate in Wakiyama prefecture until 1947.

Kanbun's son, Kanei Uechi, began studying karate from his father in 1930. After ten years he opened his own school in Osaka and two years later in 1942 he returned to Okinawa . He got married and settled down as a farmer in Nago.

At the same time, Ryuko Tomoyose, son of Ryuyu, was living in Futenma, Okinawa . When he learned from his father that Kanei was in Okinawa , Ryuko found Kanei and convinced him to teach. Ryuko and a group of karate students built a dojo for Kanei in 1945 and brought him to Futenma. Kanei Uechi taught karate there ever since. After his father Kanbun died in 1948, the style was named Uechi Ryu in his honor.

The Futenma dojo was where a young American soldier by the name of George Mattson, studied Uechi Ryu from 1957 to 1958.

In 1958 when George Mattson was returning to America from Okinawa, Master Kanei Uechi

asked him to do his best to further Uechi Ryu karate in America . The responsibility of his promise prompted him to open a dojo in Boston , and published his first book, “The Way of Karate” in 1963.

George Mattson is known as the first American who brought Uechi Ryu from Okinawa to America . Since then, numerous Americans and Europeans have studied in Okinawa and have spread Uechi Ryu throughout the world.

George Mattson's first dojo in Boston was the famous and very successful Columbus Avenue dojo where the first, second and third generations of Uechi Ryu seniors were trained. The Uechi-Ryu Karate Association was also formed. Many of those earlier seniors have become famous in their own right as Uechi Ryu masters and instructors. Some had traveled to Okinawa to further their study and some had organized their associations.

Master Kanei Uechi died in 1991. His son, Kanmei Uechi, has since become the head of the Uechi Ryu Karate Association in Okinawa . Uechi Ryu has also branched into various organizations and associations worldwide.

In mid-1980's George Mattson organized Uechi-Ryu's North American Chapter (NAC). The goal of NAC was to unit Uechi-Ryu teachers who were more interested in the actual practice and success of Uechi-Ryu than political issues. Along with a fresh attitude towards rank and establishment of uniform standards, the organization also adopted a code of conduct and ethics regarding teaching and student relationship. NAC later evolved to be the International Uechi-Ryu Karate Federation (IUKF) and expanded to include members outside of North America . It is the hope of IUKF that irrespective of politics and competitiveness among the various organizations and associations, we, as practitioners of Uechi Ryu, can and will work together for the betterment of Uechi Ryu.