

## A short biography: Naruse Kanji (1888? - 1948)

成瀬 関次 (alt. "Narusei")

by Jason Wotherspoon - special thanks to [Professor Yasuo KAMATA](#) for giving me permission to use the photographs of his grandfather.



Kanji NARUSE while enlisted in the army

Among *shuriken* enthusiasts, Kanji NARUSE Sensei is most well known being the 3rd headmaster of Negishi Ryu *Shurikenjutsu*, although also the headmaster of a school of swordsmanship, Yamamoto Ryu and he was an author of several interesting books on the sword.

The Naruse family was the head family of Yamamoto Ryu, who passed on through the *Kuwana-han*, and he trained in this swordsmanship from an early age, eventually becoming the ancestral headmaster of the school. It is said he had a talent for the and was highly skilled in its use. As a student, he was also interested in socialist movements of Marx and others, as well as Christian humanism later in Japanese nationalism. It is thought that he also had some influence on famous children's author Kenji Miyazawa.

He was drafted into the army, serving during the Sino-Japanese war which began in 1894, where he both saw action, and was employed as a sword repairman. Based on his experiences, he wrote several books on the Japanese sword which are becoming quite popular in recent times. In particular, he carefully documented instances of swords being broken in battle, and became a lifelong vocal advocate on changing the design of Japanese swords based upon the repair work he was engaged in during his stint in the army.

During a particular 9 month period he repaired more than 2,000 swords, ranging in age from a variety of historical periods: 25% were Koto, 60% were Shinto or Shin Shinto, and 15% were Gendaito. Of these, only 30% had been damaged in battle meaning that most of them (70%) had been damaged in training or through mishandling.

The types of damage they suffered is very instructive. Scabbards required the least attention: about 10% of scabbards had been broken or split --- a problem primarily caused by the stress of incorrect unsheathing or re-sheathing the swords.

Blades, of course, were a problem, but not the most numerous problem. About 30% of the swords suffered bent or broken blades. For the most part, these were the swords that had actually been used in battle. Naruse was shocked at the high rate of blade failures. The main problem, however, was not the blades. It was the sword handles. A full 60% of the swords needed to be repaired because their handles had broken. Worse, Naruse reported that almost every sword he examined need to have the handle's *mekugi* (retaining pins) replaced. Even without severe use, the *mekugi* quickly wore out or became damaged.



Kanji Naruse is seated 3rd from the left.

On 15th April, 1927 at a meeting in Tokyo, he met Tonegawa M (1850 - 1939), second headmaster of Negishi Ryu *shurikenjutsu*. He was an accomplished martial artist, being expert in swordsmanship.



and horsemanship, and fought in the *Boshin* battle\* in Aizu in 186 age of eighteen. He was a student of the founder of Negishi Ryu, Shorei, and also Shirai Toru Yoshikane of Nakanishi-ha Itto Ryu and of Shirai Ryu *shurikenjutsu*.

At this meeting, the aged Tonegawa demonstrated throwing a sh chopstick into a *tatami*, which impressed Naruse deeply, and he became his student. Naruse studied with Tonegawa for 13 years passing in 1939.

Before the war, Naruse Sensei and his wife operated and taught at a school for underprivileged deaf and mute children, and they lived next door to the school. The school's gymnasium served as Naruse Sensei's *dojo*, and he taught *shuriken*.

In 1938, Naruse Sensei gave a demonstration of Negishi Ryu *shuriken* at the Meiji Shrine, on the day of the Meiji celebrations, (3rd of Nov 1938). During the demonstration, a young Eizo SHIRAKAMI, still in high school, visited Naruse Sensei and was very impressed with his art. Two days later, Shirakami visited Naruse and became his student, and he visited Naruse every 10 days for training.

In 1941, at the age of 19, Satoshi SAITO also began training under Naruse Sensei, who taught both the *shuriken* of Negishi Ryu and Shirai Ryu, as well as the Kuwana-han Den Yamamoto Ryu style of swordsmanship.



Demonstrating the posture "Koso no I"

Naruse Sensei wrote several books, listed below, which are apparently somewhat difficult to find. It is thought that due to his nationalistic tendencies during the war, many of his books were removed from libraries..

*Japanese Sabre Fighting* (further details not known)

*Tatakau nihonto* (1940, Japanese swords in battle),

*Jissen todan* (1941, Discussion of practical swords),

*Shuriken* (1943, ) Tokyo: Shin-Taishusha,

*Rinsen tojutsu* (1944, Battlefield swordsmanship).

The position of headmaster was passed onto an elder student of Naruse Sensei's, Isamu MAEDA, who in 1959, with permission of Naruse Sensei's daughter Eiko, transferred the title of headmaster to Saito Sensei, who remains the current master of Negishi Ryu *shurikenjutsu* and Yamamoto Ryu *lajjutsu*.

As it has with many classical arts, indeed the Naruse family's Yamamoto Ryu *lajjutsu* of the Kuwana -han line, Negishi Ryu *shurikenjutsu* has not passed on through blood family ties, rather, the headmastership has been passed on to students selected by the current headmaster. Saito Sensei says it seems to

Naruse Sensei lived his last years on a farm at Akitsu, in Musashino on the Seibu line. According to his student, Saito Sensei, Naruse Sensei had a fondness for *shochu*, a form of Japanese rice wine, which he heated and drank in winter while sitting under a *kotatsu* (a sort of low table with a heated blanket under it to keep ones feet warm). He developed a cirrhosis of the liver, no doubt due to the *shochu*, and sadly passed away in 1948.

be the fate of the art.

*\*NOTE. It is interesting to discover that a student of Shirai Toru Yoshikane (founder of Shirai Ryu) by the name of Kurokawa Naiden Goro Kanenori, had two sons who also fought in this battle.*



*Sources:*

*Personal communication with Professor Yasuo Kamata, grandson of Kanji Naruse*

*Interview with Satoshi Saito, in "Sword & Spirit: Classical Warrior Traditions of Japan Vol. 2", Diane Skoss, Koryu Books, 1999*

*"Shurikendo: My Way of Shuriken", Eizo Shirakami, Paul Crompton Books, 1987*

*Pierre Simon, a student of Satoshi Saito's, website,*

*<http://www.oshinkan.com/activites/negishiryu/historique.htm>, accessed December 22nd 2004*

*Post by Professor William Bodiford on [E-Budo.com](http://www.e-budo.com), 09-29-2000 and an article in the Japan Times by Hiroaki Sato <http://www.japantimes.com/cgi-bin/getarticle.pl5?eo20031229hs.htm>*

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