

9. Item # MANZ 7546 – 7547 (kendo face-mask, etc.)

Arthur Yamada [AY], MANZ 1162, interviewed by Richard Potashin [RP]

Disc 3 of 3 (DVD), 8:24 – 14:44

**RP:** How about activities like judo or kendo?

**AY:** Okay. I did take up kendo in camp. I think there was a very well-known instructor of kendo that originally lived, or came from, the San Gabriel area. My parents bought me a kendoji, which was the chest protector, and then the waist, and then the helmet. I did take lessons for kendo. Yeah, I enjoyed doing that activity. I guess I was quite small. But going through the ceremony of putting on the hachimaki on the head, and then putting on the helmet, long strings that you would wrap around the helmet to tie it down. And practicing with your shinai, the bamboo sword. Then you'd get to wear gloves.

When we left camp, I think that was one of the things that I remember moved to Denver with us. Although I never kept up the lessons after we left camp, but during some period in camp, I took lessons. Yeah, it was a lot of fun to beat each other up with sticks.

Then I remember there were some teachers with black belts that were a little tougher on the older kids. What the shinai was, it consists of four bamboo flat pieces the length of the sword, and then they're kind of held together by leather ties every so often, maybe every foot, so that when you hit, the sides wouldn't bend, but the two top and bottom piece would kind of flex. But the side, of course, would be rigid, so it wouldn't give too much. But then when you got hit, the wood would collapse, so it wouldn't be like being hit with a solid stick, like a broomstick. It would be four pieces of bamboo. What some of the black belt teachers would do would be they would add a couple of pieces inside. I think some of the older kids—I guess it was to be tough on them, or toughen them up. They would just really feel it.

**RP:** Even with the helmet on.

**AY:** Yeah, you would feel it. It's basically cloth, it's padded cloth on top, and in the front it's metal, so you couldn't get poked.

**RP:** What did it feel like to be hit by those?

**AY:** Yeah, you'd feel it. The gloves, not so bad because it was pretty good padding, the hands.

**RP:** Nominally, you would be aiming for the upper body?

**AY:** Yeah, from the waist up.

**RP:** So legs were completely—

**AY:** Yeah. And then you'd have to call out as you—wherever you hit, you have to call it out. If you call out the hands, it was kote I think for the hands. The sides of the body were odo, and then the head was omen, I think it was. Right here, you would have this one that you would go for the throat, that's tsuki. So those were the four. Then you'd practice your footwork, charging and then backing up, although it was very basic. I took it maybe about a year. I've watched some matches in J-Town, not recently, but when the black belts go at it, it's so fast that I couldn't tell what happened, and then the match is over. Somebody got hit, but I never saw it. So it's quite different that what I'm in. Ours is so slow. You'd be calling out where your going to hit, or as you hit it.'