

ENTERTAINMENT

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Author lays down law on historical Japanese weapons



Staff photo by Dan Relland

Don Cunningham, who joined the UW-Stout faculty this fall, displayed items from his collection of nonlethal weapons from Japan's Edo period. He will discuss his new book, "Taiho-Jutsu: Law and Order in the Age of the Samurai," today at Borders.

By Pamela Powers
Menomonie News Bureau

MENOMONIE — A Menomonie author who became interested in the implements of Japanese law enforcement during his tenure in Tokyo challenges Hollywood's view of sword-packing samurai.

In "Taiho-Jutsu: Law and Order in the Age of the Samurai," Don Cunningham, an assistant professor who teaches technical writing and composition at UW-Stout, describes the samurai as part of a complex Japanese law enforcement system in which people were innocent until they confessed in court and suspects were apprehended without the use of lethal force.

He will discuss the book during a signing set for 7 to 9 p.m. today at Borders.

"Taiho-Jutsu: Law and Order in the Age of the Samurai," (Tuttle Publishing; \$24.95) offers a detailed look at the weapons law enforcement officers used, including the

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— Don Cunningham,
author

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jutte, a narrow iron club similar to a police baton. Other weapons used for nonlethal force included a wooden staff, a sleeve entangler, a spear fork and arresting ropes.

Cunningham, 52, focused on police procedure during the Edo period of Japan, from 1603 through 1867.

He became interested in historic law enforcement tools in the 1980s while working in Tokyo for a Japanese telecommunications company. In his free time, he watched Japanese historical dramas on TV.

"They were the only thing I could watch on Japanese TV and

understand," Cunningham said. "I could follow the story without following all the dialogue."

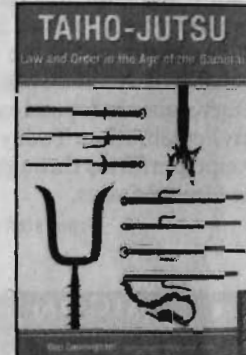
One of the TV characters that fascinated Cunningham was Zenijata Heji, a police assistant, who carried a blunt jutte and had the ability to throw coins like bullets.

"I thought the jutte was made up, like the coin throwing, until I saw one in a Japanese antique store," Cunningham said. He bought the item — the first of many Japanese law enforcement items he has collected over the years — in the Tokyo suburb of Yokohama where he lived.

He later learned that during the Edo period the jutte was used to apprehend criminals.

Another nonlethal tool used was a form of Mace made by boiling red peppers and sand to a fine powder. The powder then was placed in a case and could be blown at suspects.

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If You Go

What: "Taiho-Jutsu: Law and Order in the Age of the Samurai" book signing and talk with author Don Cunningham.

When: 7 to 9 p.m. today.

Where: Borders, 4030 Commonwealth Ave.

Cost: Free.

Author/ First book about ancient weapons was self-published

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"There were many prohibitions against lethal force," Cunningham said. "You didn't go around cutting people up with a sword if you were a samurai. Any suspects at the time were innocent until they confessed in court. Of course they could be tortured to confess."

The arrest of a suspect usually led to the arrest of others accused of crimes. Some of those arrested would become informants and spies.

"Many of the low-level criminals were given an opportunity to work as policemen," Cunningham said. "They had tattoo marks on their arms so they were seen as no longer employable. Their only option was to work with the police."

"Taiho-Jutsu" is Cunningham's second book about ancient Japanese weapons. In 2000 he self-published "Secret Weapons of Jujutsu," a book about the feudal Japanese defensive weapons. Tuttle Publishing obtained the paperback rights to that book in 2002.

Cunningham said the markets for both are limited but they seem to appeal to lawyers, sword collectors and martial artists. The author himself is a former international competitor in judo, a Japanese martial art.

Ken Pitchford of Chicago, who has studied martial arts for 25 years, praised Cunningham's new book and said he enjoyed learning more about what types of weapons were used by law enforcement.

"It's well-researched," Pitchford said. "It is in my library because it is valuable."

Cunningham said researching the Edo period is difficult because some of the history is not known.

For example, he said no one knows why different colored braids were tied on the handle of the jutte.

He spent nearly a month in Tokyo researching the book — meeting with curators and scholars at Meiji University's criminology museum, Fukogawa Edu Museum and the Japanese National Museum.

During that trip, he found one more item for his collection at a flea market: a tobikuchi, a firefighter's implement (which sometimes doubled as a self-defense weapon).

Today, Cunningham adds to his collection through online auction sites or antique stores. He also has expanded his collection to include some woodblock prints that depict martial arts from the Edo period.

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THE DUNN COUNTY NEWS

VARIETY

SUNDAY, JANUARY 8, 2006

Stout professor holds book signing at Border's

Don Cunningham, assistant professor in University of Wisconsin-Stout's English and philosophy department, will be at Border's Books, 4030 Commonwealth Ave., Eau Claire, at 7:30 p.m., Thursday, Jan. 12.

In addition to signing his latest book, titled "Taiho-Jutsu: Law and Order in the Age of the Samurai" (Tuttle Publishing, ISBN 0804835365), Cunningham will discuss civil organization and law enforcement during Japan's feudal era. Several antique arresting implements and historical documents from his personal collection will also be on display.