Hal Sharp:

My Life And Judo

Black Belt
November 1964

The instructor stared unbelievably, shocked all to pieces at Hal's lack of courtesy, and furiously barked "BOW!"

In an early morn Hal Sharp and his outfit reach the top of Mount Fujiyama in one of the many maneuvers performed by the Army. They reach the peak of the famous mountain just in time to view a spectacular display of clouds below them.

Harold Sharp is a versatile fourth degree Kodokan judoka, who in 1954 won the distinction of being the "Foreigner Judo Champion" of Japan. He is also the author of three well known books on judo — "Sport of Judo", "Techniques of Judo", and "Boy's Judo". It is strange how a man born in Cleveland and raised in Philadelphia, could some day, despite remotely different upbringing, become a dedicated judoka. But it happened.

It all began in August of 1945, while World War II was at its climatic stage. The atomic explosion on Hiroshima and Nagasaki inevitably forced the Japanese to surrender. Hal was in the process of completing his basic military training in Georgia when he heard the news that the war was over. Naturally, he rejoiced, yet, at the same time deep within himself, a feeling of incompleteness stirred and disturbed his thoughts. He was a highly trained infantry man, conditioned to kill his enemies was instilled deeply in him. He accepted the fact that he may land on foreign soil and was accordingly prepared.

Although he was molded into a competent killer, it was still a fact that the war was over; there's no one to kill; nothing to conquer now, except maybe himself. Somewhere, somehow, life seemed to have cheated him. He was thoroughly educated and trained to live in a hate filled hostile world, and now before graduation he was told to dissolve those thoughts overnight. An insurmountable task.

In September of 1945, at Fort Ord, California, he was ordered to some South Pacific Island where, he was told, his group were being sent there for mop-up action against some fanatic Japanese who refused to surrender. This at least, he thought, will put his training to practical use before returning to Philadelphia and civilization. But on board ship, their destination was changed to Yokohama, Japan. His hatred for the enemy through wartime brain washing made him envisioned a land of sneaky, mean, backstabbing little runts. All through that voyage those thoughts haunted his mind, as any man would fear an unknown and highly propagated, spurious fact.

Harold Sharp has almost gone native while stationed in Japan. The camera catches him relaxing and enjoying the scenery of Japan in the evening.

With great insistence Sharp was able to gather a group of Japanese children and men to pose for him. Those "kids" became very friendly and nicknamed him the "Kencho M.P.".

In early October of 1945 the dark foggy morning sky above Tokyo Bay gradually raised itself from the bay, and light sprinkling rain precipitated admonitarily, it was an inconceivable, misty welcome. The ironclad allied warships crowding the bay overlapped each other like a nightmarish traffic jam, and the few Japanese fleet, sunk half way into the water, remained lame and useless. It left an impression that of a war movie. In a short while the tug boats shoved and pulled the transport ship toward Yokohama in the quiet water that rippled like a calm before an expectant storm.

Hal finally saw the wrangling Japanese for the first time. The stevedores were little men wearing rubber sole canvas sneakers that appeared like small, first baseman's glove snuggly fitted on their feet, and the leggings coiled around their legs were like those worn by our World War I soldiers. They wore Japanese soldiers' uniforms with their heads encased in a rumpled flat top conical cap that had a small protruding visor. They were short, but contrary to his belief, they appeared harmlessly humble and moved with beaver like precision.

Eventually Hal and the rest were hustled aboard a train that were coated, so it seemed, with an odor of dried fish and preserved cabbages. Wherever the train stopped, strange little people crowded the train windows like customers crowding a lunch vendor's truck. "You get cigarretto' Joe?"

Later that night on board a truck, they were taken for a wild ride through villages that led to the Fourth Replacement Depot. The new replacements, while riding through, were unarmed in enemy country, and Hal nervously waited for an attack by unresolved fanatics. Eventually the dark foreign night enveloped his curiosity; bewildered and exhausted, Hal's first day in Japan ended like a fascinating dream.

Hal Meets The People

Within a few days he was assigned to the 52nd Combat Engineer Battalion. They had commandeered and occupied a former tool and die work shop between Yokohama and Tokyo. He spent his off-duty hours roving the streets of the villages, curiously observing all the alien spectable with uncrannied interest. A village consisted of wooden shacks that were built with the standard sliding panel doors which were so low, Hal felt it was an admonition for Americans to stay away. The narrow, unpaved streets aimlessly curved within a village and the absent side walks and the front doors which were part of the street, made it a hazard to walk in heavy traffic. The homes appeared like uniformedly erected cracker boxes. The wooden structures were old but somehow there appeared something strangely artistic about those shacks. Built haphazardly it seemed, but it left Hal to wonder, and, somehow he admired them for their uncanny ability to build economically, as well as, to utilize space to the fullest. Some of the villages were devastated and were in complete ruins; some, for unknown reasons, stood as though from the beginning of time. Each village carried that indigenous rice straw odor that seemed to pervade throughout Japan.

As weeks turned to months, Hal noticed some changes in him. At first, it was difficult to accept that fact that these people were quite human, more so than the people back home. Their habits were different of course, but their mannerism were timid and gentle, and somehow seemed sincere. It was funny to learn later that they were, conversely afraid of the horrible Americans.

Like all normal American G.I., Hal spent some time at the railroad stations where the only progress and the biggest business of the day, in fact any day, was black marketing. And like all normal American G.I., his dreams of late were dominated with the idea that he had inherited the American Tobacco Company. But when morning came, the cruel realistic world told him it would be easier to dream that someone were presenting him the island of Kapingamarangi. True, cigarettes ration were meager, and black marketing was frowned upon, but the excitement of bargaining seemed innate in all American G.I. Hal was an American G.I.

One night as Hal was clandestinely operating as a tobacco salesman, he was approached by Ryozo Ozawa, a prospective customer. "Cigarette Joe?" Hal nodded and Ryozo motioned Hal to follow. Ryozo lived in an above-average home with his mother, two younger brothers and a younger sister. His father was killed during the war, and his older brother lay wounded in a distant Army hospital.

After a close examination, he was invited in by Ryozo's mother. She bowed graciously and Hal felt uncomfortably embarrassed. Hal was offered tea and a difficult conversation about America and Japan ensued until late that night. The cigarette sale concluded, Hal later found out that Ryozo was a high school student and that the cigarettes would be used for bartering for foods with the farmers.

In the days that followed, Hal became friendly with the Ozawas. Every evening they would sit on the matted floor around the table and with difficulty converse aimlessly, using a Japanese-American dictionary constantly. Whenever he could, Hal would bring some food or goodies from the mess hall or P.X., but it seemed he was always repaid in double by a dinner or refreshments. This became a ticklish situation for it was more than they could afford.

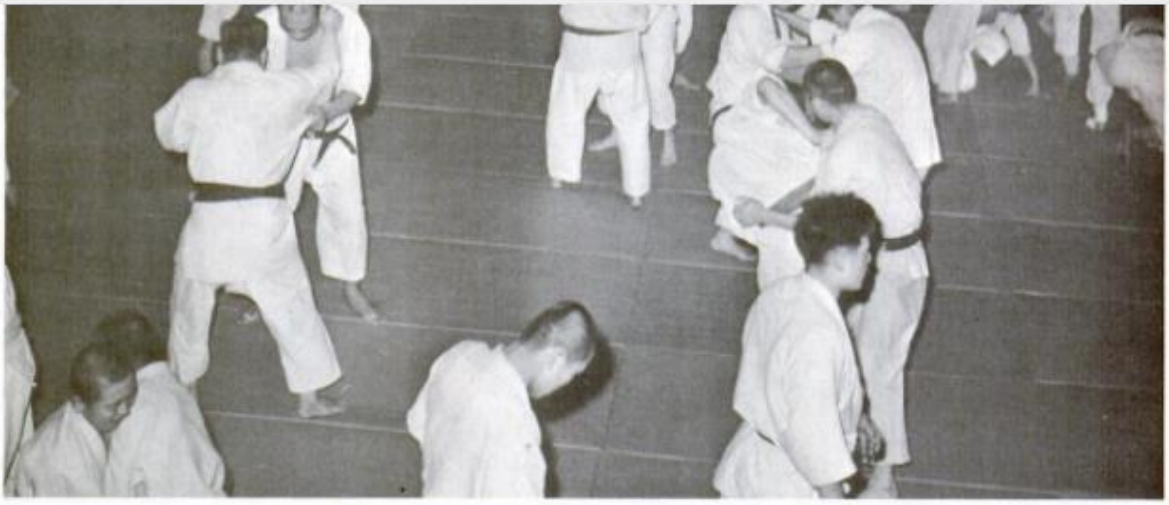
Introduced To Judo

Several months later Ryozo's eldest brother returned and bowed ceremoniously low to the ground, thanking Hal for helping his family. They became close friends. One day Hal asked the eldest brother if he knew something about ju-jitsu. The eldest brother was puzzled and looked at Hal with a blank confused stare. After several attempts with gestures and words the returned brother smiled knowingly, and standing up said; "You mean this?" Hal flew through the air and landed on his back unharmed, but startled. He looked around and suddenly everyone laughed with glee as he was introduced to judo.

Move To Chiba

In the spring of 1946, Hal's outfit was deactivated and he was transferred to the Chiba Military Government team in the city of Chiba directly across Tokyo Bay from where he was stationed. Black marketing was outlawed by now, and heavy penalties by the Japanese Military Government were levied on Japanese who were caught with American cigarettes and other G.I. items as they could be obtained from the black market only.

Hal's first assignment in his new outfit was a guard post in front of the Chiba Prefecture Capital Building known as the "Kencho." Decked in a M.P. helmet and a carbine, he was known as the "Kencho M.P." While on duty and with no officers looking, he would play games and sing songs with the children. He would hold a cleanliness contest; he would check ears, then teeth, and hands, and award the



Kodokan, the headquarters of judo, has visitors from all over the world. Hundreds of judokas train daily here. Above photos show only a small segment of the huge building.

Hal Sharp had a fortunate and unusual job to be assigned as one of the body-guards of Emperor Hirohito immediately after the Second World War. Here, he takes time out to take a photograph of the Emperor.

unspotted winners with chewing gum. This type of military behavior in public won him the name of "Pappy Sharp" from his outfit. His actions were secretly condoned by the officers, and Japanese parents would bring their children to visit the "Kencho M.P." It was not clear whether it was a punishment or a treat for the kids. Nevertheless, he played his part; he would stand motionlessly erect at his post on top the granite steps, and a child would cautiously approach him, then hesitantly say "Harro?" and wait expectantly with head tilted for an echo hello from Hal. Then they would run back agast with child hysteria to their parents clawing on to them and peepishly turning to look back with a mixture of nervous and pleasurable smile. Their elders would bow smilingly, appreciating pappy's kind gesture.

Later, Hal was assigned to the legal section of the military government team. On one occasion he was assigned to a group that had the distinct honor of escorting Emperor Hirohito on his first public tour. It was one of the most memorable experience. Hal's attitude has by now changed assuredly from hatred of the enemy to a protector of a former enemy's Emperor.

Return Home

As judo was outlawed by the American Government, Hal with a group of buddies were secretly making arrangement for judo lessons when he received his orders to return home.

And so Hal's first year in Japan ended, starting as boy with hatred and ignorance, and ending as a man with a warm place in his heart for those people in a strange land.

Like all servicemen he was anxious to return home never dreaming that he would miss Japan. As the years rolled by the thought of returning to Japan became more and more an obsession. From 1947 to 1950 Hal did odd

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. . . . . both men slammed into each other. Hal felt his chest caved in. Pain shot through his body as though he had "busted" his ribs.

Being awarded a Black Belt, especially from the Kodokan, is a great honor for most foreign judo-men. But this wasn't so for Hal Sharp. He was embarrassed. He felt he didn't deserve it yet. He did not slack his training as many judo-men and practitioners of the other martial arts would do once they received their Black Belt; Hal's attitude was that of a true "budo-man." He'd work twice as hard to satisfy himself that he deserved and had the right to wear the Black Belt.

Specialized In Osoto Gari

Hal noticed that the top judo competitors concentrated on only a few throws and techniques. Right then Hal decided to abandon all the techniques he'd studied in the past and concentrate in his favorite throw, *Osoto gari* (major outer reap). Hour after hour he practiced this one throw — over a hundred times a day. Meanwhile, he studied his opponents more closely. In his direct attacks he'd look for their weaknesses by watching their motions and by timing their breathing. He also developed the ability to feint effectively. After about ten months Hal was more than satisfied with his performance of *Osoto gari*. He could perform it effectively from both the right and left side. But he kept practicing it for another full year, when he finally thought it was perfected.

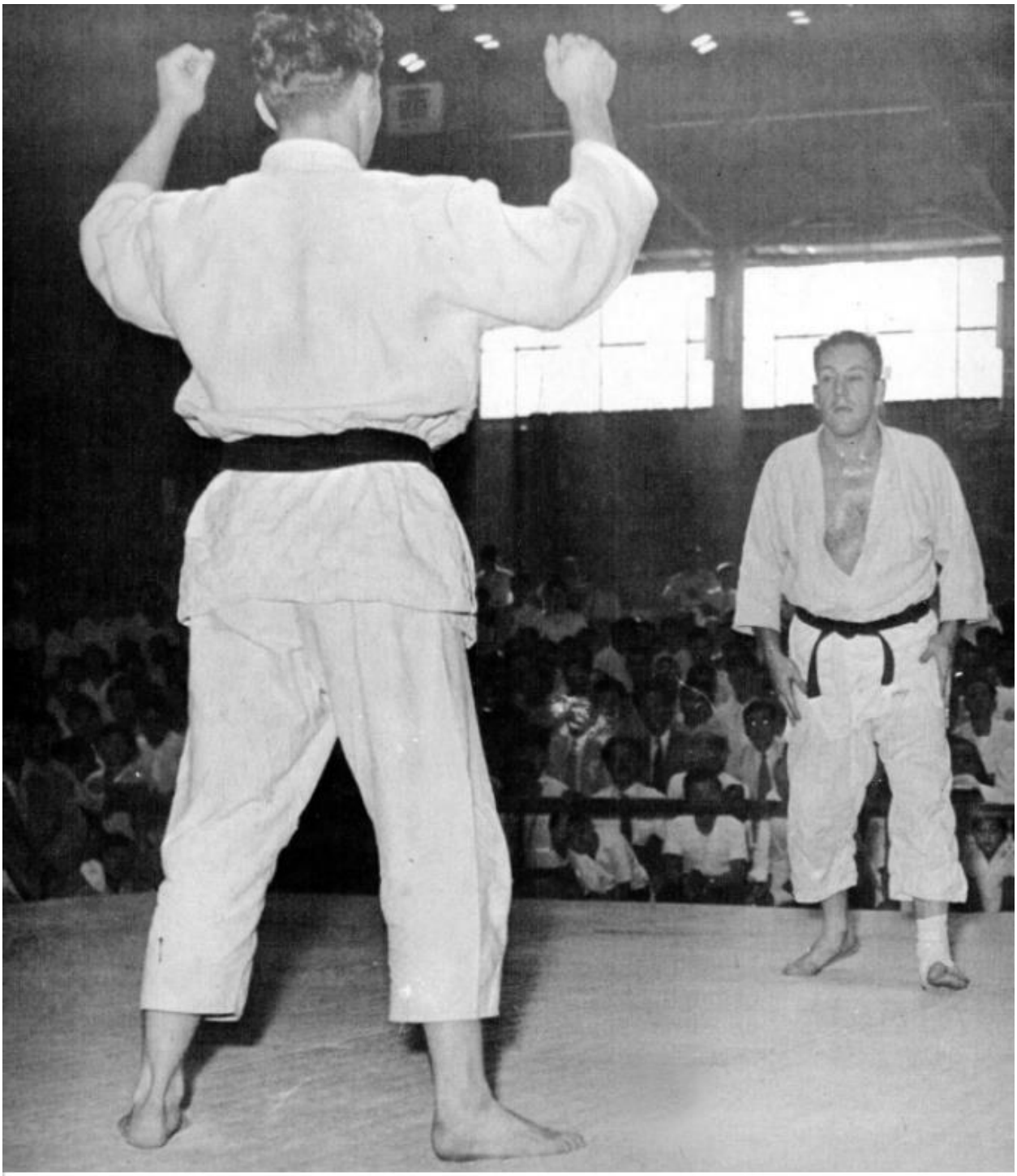
One great advantage to a foreigner of having a Black Belt was that he could train at the "Kishicho," Tokyo Metropolitan Police Academy, where the lowest-ranked native judo-men were 3rd-Dan Black Belters. "I think 1953 was the best and most productive year for me," comments Hal. "I met and studied under the top-old-masters of Japan like Otaki, Shirai, Tanaka, Asami, and Oda. But my skill in judo was greatly enhanced by the competition against the top young bloods of Japan. Whenever I spotted a good judo-man I would ask if he could practice with me. Then I'd train with vigor and determination just to impress him. After a hard session I would ask my partner if he could show me his best technique. Such a flattering remark always brought results: I became the recipient of many invaluable lessons."

Bawled Like A Baby

That year Hal met and befriended some foreign judo-men, such as Gregory, Palmer and Gleeson from England and Klein from France. But one friendship that he still cherishes in his memory is that of the late Master Oda, 9th-Dan Black Belt, the greatest *ne-waza* (mat-work) technician in judo. Master Oda was not only his great teacher, but an intimate friend, almost a father. When his friend passed away two years later Hal bawled like a baby for hours. After that, he stayed alone and in grief for days.

In latter part of 1953 Hal's training in the Kodokan was temporarily halted; he was transferred to Niigata for two weeks. Niigata on the China Sea side of Japan is no place for man to live during the winter.

When Hal got off the train with his luggage, he shivered



This is the second part of a two-part serial version of Hal Sharp's biography. The first part was based on Hal's life in Japan as a serviceman and his start in judo.

uncontrollably as the biting-cold Siberian wind seemed to blow right through his heavy garments. Several times he almost fell on the slippery snow-covered ground. But he managed somehow to reach his shelter in one piece.

Like most judo-men in a strange town, Hal promptly inquired the whereabouts of a police station. In Japan almost all the police stations have their own *dojos* (gyms). Hal soon found one. The policemen knew right away that the foreigner wanted to work out when they recognized Hal's *gi* (judo suit) tucked underneath his arm. Hal couldn't tell whether they were glad or disturbed to see him. But when they found out he was only a 1st-Dan Black Belter they could hardly suppress their delight. They placed the stranger in the center of the room, and the police Black Belters converged at one corner, arguing among themselves.

"From the little Japanese I knew," recalls Hal, "they all wanted to be the first to tackle me. I stood there with mixed-emotion. I didn't know whether to run, or fight for my life. My apprehension was soon resolved. A huge, rough-looking Black Belter came roaring to me. I threw him quite easily with my favorite throw (*Osoto gari*). The second man was more hesitant and cautious, but I had no trouble with him either. In a few minutes, somehow, I threw everyone. I was amazed to learn what poor judo technicians these country boys were. Embarrassingly they came up to me and congratulated me."

Hal's Roughest Fight

In all the years Hal's been in judo, he's proud to say that he has witnessed poor sportsmanship only a few times. One evening while visiting the Niigata Prison's *dojo*, a muscular and arrogant judo-man challenged him to a match on the following night. The instructor became embarrassed by his pupil's action, but Hal assured him he didn't mind the challenge. Before the evening was over the challenger exposed his muscular body and flexed his biceps a few times and bragged that he'd beat up the foreigner with his *Seoinage* (shoulder throw). Hal was furious but controlled himself by clenching his teeth together. Deep inside he kept telling himself, "I'll get that bastard, even if I get killed doing it."

The next evening the crowd was bigger than usual. Hal sensed that the braggart must have gone around spreading the news of the match. When Hal entered the dojo no one was playing on the mat. Everyone sat on the edge of the mat with his legs crossed. Meanwhile the show-off walked around, flexing his muscles. Cockier than ever, he boasted how he'd handle the foreigner. Once in awhile, he'd go into motion of a *Seionage* and pretended he was throwing someone. He was such a "ham" that he even foolishly rolled on the mat, panting and grimacing.

When Hal stepped on the mat the noise diminished to a murmur. Hal could barely hear the crowd whispering, "the *haku-jin* (whiteman) is big but not as muscular as our man." Hal faced his insolent competitor with one thought: "hit him fast and hard."

Hal Sharp (center, back row) was appointed captain of the Kawakami dojo.

Hal Sharp and James Long fight for the title of the 1954 All Japan Foreigners' Judo Championships. Hal finally won after three over-time matches.

Hal Sharp captained the U.S. Far East Judo team in the 1954 U.S. Goodwill Tour which included members from the U.S. A.A.U., Air Force, and the Far East teams.

As Hal faced his challenger for the customary bow he detected the overly confident expression on his opponent's face. As soon as the bow was completed, both men slammed into each other. Hal felt his chest caved in. Pain shot through his body as though he had "busted" his ribs. The muscular one tried to use his *Seionage* but Hal easily countered and both men sprawled onto the mat. Over and over they rolled as both men resorted to every trick they had learned. Seconds seemed like hours as both men scrambled for each other's throats. The pace began to sap Hal's strength. His right elbow was swollen and the pain spread through his shoulder. He wanted to cry and to quit. But when he saw his opponent bleeding from his jaw Hal recovered quickly and attacked with renewed vigor. Gradually the muscleman's strength faltered as Hal kept pressing his attacks. Finally he wanted to quit, but Hal wouldn't let him. Hal had promised himself that he wouldn't stop until the man begged for mercy.

He now reverted to throws. He would lift the weary challenger to his feet and then pound him to the ground. Again and again he threw him, until the vanquished, with tears flowing down his cheeks, begged Hal to stop. Hal mellowed as he saw his prey struggling to his feet, barely able to straighten his back.

Hal's First Book

"1953 could be designated as the year I became an author," says Hal. "I started to write the book *Sport of Judo* by chance. After months of futile searching in Japan for a reliable judo book, I finally went to see the leading publisher of Oriental books, Charles E. Tuttle Co. There I met the publisher himself, Charles Tuttle, who encouraged me to write a book on the subject. With the collaboration of Kiyoshi Kobayashi, a 6th-Dan Black Belter, we introduced the new book which is today's most popular book of its kind."

In early 1954 Hal was granted 2nd-Dan Black Belt in the "kagami biraki" (opening of the year) ceremony at the Kodokan. By now Hal envisioned himself as an invincible judo-man. He became conceited and intolerant. One evening he was asked to run the "slaughter line" against the foreign judo group. "Over-confidently I faced a big White Belter," Hal recollects. "He grabbed me in an awkward position and threw himself to the ground, severely dislocating my right shoulder. It was a bitter lesson because my shoulder never healed properly."

Foreign Judo Championship

A few days later Hal was persuaded to participate in a judo exhibition with the other foreign judo-men. Reluc-

tantly, he accepted after the official of the exhibition assured him that it would be strictly a *randori* (free exercise) and this shouldn't bother his shoulder.

But when Hal entered the hall with the other men, it was announced that this was to be the first All Japan Foreigners' Judo Championships. Fortunately for Hal, the two top foreign competitors, Palmer and Gleeson from England, did not enter. Hal mowed down the less experienced judo-men in the early going. But in the semi-final he barely beat Gruel, 3rd-Dan Black Belter from France, by half-a-point.

In the final Hal fought against U.S. Army Sgt. Lang. "Fighting with Lang was exasperating," says Hal. "We had been practicing together constantly and it was like fighting against my shadow. Match after match ended in a draw. Finally after the 3rd repeat match I was awarded the championship for being more effective."

A week later Hal was presented, in an impressive ceremony, an exquisite silver saucer, adorned with the imperial crest and chrysanthemum in gold. The award was donated by the Prince of Japan.

Captain of the U. S. Goodwill Tour Team

In early 1955 Hal was given 3rd-Dan Black Belt at the "kagami biraki" ceremony. From then on his competitions were mostly against men his size and skill. Hal also matured as a judo player. He now put more effort in correct breathing, timing, and endurance.

In the summer of 1955 he was elected captain of the Far East U. S. Goodwill Tour team which was comprised of the United States A.A.U., Air Force, and Far East teams. Outstanding U.S. men included Gene LeBell, John Osako, and George Harris, who is now on the U.S. Olympic Judo Team. The tour lasted seven days of *shiai* (contest). The U.S. players went against Japan's top judo teams, from major cities and universities. This tournament was the forerunner of today's World Judo Tournament.

Hal Sharp and Cook Hadly (both 4th-Dan Black Belts) operated their own dojo in North Hollywood, California, when they returned from Japan in 1956.

Hal Sharp referees one of the matches between the U.S. Air Force team and the Japanese Army Team. The U.S. team won easily.

That year Master Shinzo Takagaki and Hal spent nine days at a hot spring resort. Within that nine days, both men completed the book "Techniques of Judo," which included 600 photographs. They worked on the book night and day, taking time-out only to practice judo.

Hal recalls the lighter side of judo, too. At Shiroi Air Force Base, Cook Hadly and he trained a raw Air Force judo team for three months. Then they were matched against the Japanese Army judo team. Surprisingly, the Air Force pulverized the Japanese. After the contest the Air Force boys began to brag, so Hal yelled out, "now that you men are so good in judo, I'll arrange for you to meet the *gakkuei* (university) judo-men." The word "*gakkuei*" shuddered them with fright: these university boys were the best and roughest judo competitors in Japan.

Returned to U. S.

In 1956 Hal studied the other martial arts with the intention of writing a book. But his study was shortened when he was transferred back to the United States. "1956 was an unusual year because all the top foreign judo-men also returned to their home-lands."

When Hal saw the poor judo training methods in the U.S. he and Cook Hadly (4th-Dan Black Belt) opened a *dojo* (gym) in North Hollywood, California. In the meantime Hal was instructed by the Yudanshakai (local Black Belt association) not to compete because of his instructor's status. Hal and Hadly operated their *dojo* for five years, in which time they taught over 300 students, entered 50 exhibitions, gave lectures at various high schools, universities etc. Hal also was an official of the Judo Black Belt Federation of America.

Hal finally had to take a less active part in judo because it was leaving him so little time for his family life and business (he is an auditor with the Fed. Gov't.). But whenever time permits, Hal will don his *judogi* and will be visiting some *dojo*.