

DO NOT PREPARE TO FAIL

Interview of James R. Bartee, Jr., 4th Dan,

by Ikuko Kimura, Aiki News, # 158

"I will protect the President"

President John F. Kennedy was assassinated when I was about 7 years old. I was watching cartoons on TV when the broadcast was interrupted with a special report saying that the President had been shot. My mother and others around me cried. My mother later told me; apparently I said at the time, "When I grow up, I'm going to join the Secret Service so that the President does not get shot."

The job of the United States Secret Service (USSS) is protection from danger and upholding the Constitution. When we are with the president, our job is to protect him. Just like a modern warrior or Samurai, it is not necessarily our job to kill the enemy or attacker. And, as we are a select few, we must put our lives on the line. Putting our lives on the line means that there is a possibility that we ourselves could be shot. We do not relish becoming the target ourselves, but we trust our training and put our lives on the line to fulfill our duty. It's not that we dream or pray to die due to our work. We have to conquer our fear and give our all to our duty.

"Do not prepare to fail"

I was there when president Reagan was shot. He was wearing a bulletproof vest, but he was shot through the side of the vest. President Reagan did not realize he was shot at the time that he thought he broke a rib because a Special Agent (bodyguard) pushed him into the car too hard. Also, in that incident, the Secret Service needed to have decisiveness and conviction. If he had headed to the White House and not a hospital, he would not have survived. We do receive some medical training. The Special Agent who observed the wound suspected that there was bleeding from the lung and decided that if that were the case, then it was critical that the president be taken to the hospital and not the White House. Such a decision holds the balance of the entire country. It was a crucial yet calmly made decision.

For us, when something happens, that is when we have failed. It means that our preparations were not enough. If our preparations are good, then nothing happens. Therefore, we say, "**do not prepare to fail.**" Accidents can happen anywhere and anytime. For example, a president could have an allergy to bee stings. So we always make sure to know a protectee's medical history, what they can or cannot eat, and respond accordingly. We always say, regarding accidents, "Do not react, respond."

If we were to get to Japan three weeks before a presidential visit and spend that time walking around and drinking, it would be a disaster. The cost of what could be construed as a trivial mistake could be the president's life. We do not want to go down in history as a laughingstock. When Abraham Lincoln was assassinated, the bodyguard (a police officer) who was with him deducted that the president is watching a play, the theater is right there, so he went to a bar across the street to have a drink. If that bodyguard had been by the president's side, the president probably may not have been shot. That's a tragedy!

When President John F. Kennedy was assassinated, an acquaintance of mine was there. As we can see from film, as soon as the president was shot, the bodyguard immediately jumped from his own car on to the president's car. He never recovered after that. He eventually retired and continued to blame himself, saying, "If only I had done this or that..." In the end he succumbed psychologically and committed suicide.

The job of the United States Secret Service is to protect

We are with the president 24 hours a day. When he dies, we die. If he is skiing, we are skiing right beside him. That is why we need to be able to do anything. We have plenty of fun training. To always be with the president is similar to always being with one's master. If we are spoken to, then we answer, but otherwise we stay silent.

When he's in the middle of a crowd, we are very close to him, even with one's hand on his back. This is so that, if something were to happen, we can physically protect the president from danger immediately. The job of the Secret Service is to protect the president and transport him to a safe place. It is not to get in a gunfight. We would never draw our weapons to scare someone. When we draw our weapon, it is with the intent to possibility using it. We may not end up using it, but it is never just to scare people. Ushiro sensei has said, "The sword is there to not be drawn." I believe he means the same thing.

Budo cannot be learned without depth

Even in Japan and Korea, Budo is not as important to the younger generations. It is the same in America - young people are consumed with their cell phones and videogames. Nowadays, murders are commonplace - this is partly due to the influence of TV and movies. They contaminate our children. There are those who say that there is no influence, but there is no way that seeing a murder scene does not affect a person. Nowadays, parents do not try to protect their children from such things. In the past, the government controlled or regulated behavior on TV but not much anymore.

There are people in this country who claim to be pacifists, and are not only against violence but violence to resist. It is easy to say, but I think that they have never been in mortal danger themselves. People who have a philosophy of, "I won't fight" have a lazy philosophy. It is necessary to have the strength to survive. It is necessary to have the strength to fight the evil that is destructive to society. I believe that training in Budo is related to such strength and courage. If one only wants to put somebody down, then they should go to a gun store and buy a gun. A gun is much more suited to killing. Thus, in order to learn Budo, one needs to think of not only defense but something deeper. Without that, a person will not last long, I believe.