

# The Sijo Emperado Interview for Centuron Negro by John Bishop

Last Modified: 5th May, 2017, 10:28 AM

I have re-posted this because Professor Bishop's interview seems to be missing from:  
<http://www.kajukenboinfo.com/sjointerview.html>

## **AN INTERVIEW WITH ADRIANO D. EMPERADO**

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Unlike many of today's so-called masters, Adriano D. Emperado is a very humble man. He has no publicist, has never been one to seek out publicity, and rarely grants interviews. Black Belt was very fortunate to locate Professor Emperado at the Forbach Martial Arts Academy in San Clemente, Ca., where he was conducting the Saturday morning black belt workout. He was also spending a few days with his student Gary Forbach before going to Hawaii for the holidays. We thank Mr. Forbach for assisting us in obtaining this very rare and exclusive interview with Professor Emperado, the Sijo (founder) of the Kajukenbo system and our 1991 Instructor of the year.

CN: So what have you been doing the last year or so, besides being elected to the Black Belt Hall of Fame?

EMPERADO: I've been living in a cabin in Virginia, where I have been writing my autobiography. I have a deadline of April 1993 from the publisher so I've dedicated all my time to it.

CN: That sounds very interesting, you probably have some great stories about a lot of people in the martial arts.

EMPERADO: I sure do, but that will come out in the book.

CN: Can you tell us a little about the book?

EMPERADO: It's basically going to be my memoirs about my life and the people in the martial arts I've known over the decades. I'll talk about a lot of the martial arts events I've been witness to. And of course a lot of stories about the people of Kajukenbo.

CN: Can you tell us one of the Kajukenbo stories?

EMPERADO: Back in the 60s one of my high ranking black belts asked me to sign a piece of paper for him. Thinking nothing of his request, I signed it. He then said he wanted me to sign it again, but to write larger. When I asked him why, he then told me that he wanted a good example of my signature so he could use it to make sure no one was forging my name on certificates. A while later I was visiting a Kajukenbo school. While there I was looking at the instructor's certificates on the wall when he proudly showed me one with my signature on it. I

looked at it real close because I did not remember ever signing it. I later found out that my student had taken the paper I signed and had a signature stamp made. You see he had charged his students extra testing fees if they wanted my signature on their certificates.

CN: That's a very interesting story, were looking forward to reading the book. Can we talk a little about you and the Kajukenbo System?

EMPERADO: Of course.

CN: When and where were you born?

EMPERADO: I was born on June 15, 1926 in Honolulu, Hawaii.

CN: What was your first exposure to the martial arts?

EMPERADO: When I was 8 or 9 years old I was taught some boxing by my father and uncle who were both professional boxers. They fought at the old civic auditorium in Honolulu. At about 11 when I was living with my brother in Kauai I learned the basic 12 techniques or strikes of Escrima. And then at the age of 14 I trained in Judo under Sensei Taneo at the Palama Settlement Gym in Honolulu.

CN: And of course you trained under the legendary Professor William K.S. Chow of Hawaii. Can you tell us about this man and his classes?

EMPERADO: I started training with Professor Chow at the Catholic Youth Organization when I was 20 years old. Professor Chow had been a Kenpo Jujitsu student of James Mitose and also had a 5th degree black belt in judo. Like Mitose he emphasized makiwara training and ground work. The makiwara training was to develop that one punch kill that was the trademark of the Japanese styles. He also tried to be more innovative than Mitose and taught a lot of ground work because of his judo background.

CN: Who did Chow receive his judo training from?

EMPERADO: I'm not sure, but it may have been Professor Okazaki.

CN: Professor Chow was also said to have been taught kung fu by his father, can you tell us about this?

EMPERADO: I'm not sure how much kung fu training Professor Chow had in his early years. When I knew him he would tell me of visions he had of his father and grandfather. In these visions they would reveal kung fu techniques to him.

CN: Visions?

EMPERADO: Yes, one particular time in about 1952 or 53 he told me that his grandfather had appeared to him in a dream. He said his grandfather showed him some techniques and told him that they were "Kara-Ho".

CN: What does "Kara-Ho" mean?

EMPERADO: Actually nothing. Karaho is a derogatory term in Spanish, but Chow never had a meaning for the word. He said Kara-Ho was what his grandfather told him to call the art. Before that, at different times he had called his school "Go Shin Jitsu Kai" or "Lighting Karate" or "Thunderbolt Karate".

CN: How close were you to Chow?

EMPERADO: I was his first black belt, his Chief Instructor and a 5th Degree Black Belt under him. We were very close for many years.

CN: Some people say that Professor Chow's black belts abandoned him, others used him, and that he lived in poverty?

EMPERADO: It's true that Professor Chow lived in poverty most of his life. Hawaii is a expensive place to live, and he had no education. He could not read or write, so when he worked he was usually a stevedore or security guard. He also was not a good businessman so he didn't make a lot of money teaching the martial arts. Some people would visit him or invite him to do seminars for them. There was always large sums of money promised to him in exchange for a seminar and promotion. Most of the times the money was never paid or it was not the amount that was promised. Later in life he was forced to collect cans on the beach daily just to make ends meet. It bothered me to see the way he lived, but I tried to help him. When we were starting to get our schools established I went to the Professor and told him that we wanted to start an association with him as the head, and that we would all contribute dues to help him out financially. But you see Chow was a very proud and stubborn man. He refused our gesture of respect.

CN: Can you tell us about the founding of the Kajukenbo system?

EMPERADO: In about 1947 while I was still with Chow, I got together with 4 other black belts to train and develop a style of our own. I felt that the Kenpo Jujitsu system that I had learned lacked self defense techniques against multiple attackers or even multiple strikes. We had trained hard and fast to simply block and strike. We were developing the mentality of only facing one strike, and ending the fight with one focused punch. I started to ask myself, what if my attacker throws a number of strikes and kicks at me? What if my one well focused punch doesn't put him down? This is why we got together. We called ourselves the black belt society.

CN: Who were the other members of the black belt society?

EMPERADO: Peter Choo who was a welterweight boxing champion and a Tang Soo Do stylist. Frank Ordonez was a Sekeino Jujitsu stylist, Joe Holck was a 8th Dan in Kodokan Judo, Clarence Chang was a Sil-Lum Pai Kung Fu stylist, and of course there was me.

CN: So how did this development process take place?

EMPERADO: Because of the Korean War many of the military barracks and buildings around Honolulu were empty. We would use these abandoned buildings for our training so we could train everyday without distraction. We could train in one building for a while and then switch to another. You have to understand, in Hawaii there is much competition in the martial arts. Instructors would go to other dojo's and kwoon's to see what everybody else was doing. In fact

some people would train at more than one school or have their own students on the side even though they were still students themselves. When we were developing Kajukenbo I was still training under and teaching for Professor Chow. Anyway we tried to keep our meetings as secret as possible.

During these training sessions we would take advantage of each others areas of expertise. We worked on ground techniques, Korean style kicks, jujitsu locks and breaks, kenpo hand techniques, and circular kung fu techniques. We tried them on each other, looking for each others weaknesses. A karate or kung fu man was no good if a judo man were to take him down and choke him out. We combined our knowledge into self defense techniques that covered every situation we could think of, including multiple attackers, knife defenses, and club defenses. Two years later when we were finished we needed a name to describe our combination system. Joe Holck came up with the name Kajukenbo. KA for karate, JU for judo and jujitsu, KEN for kenpo, and BO for Chinese boxing(kung fu).

CN: Some people have credited you as being the main creator of Kajukenbo, is that true?

EMPERADO: All five of us created Kajukenbo and we wrote all our techniques down. Because of the Korean War the other four were called to service in 1949. It was left to me to continue the system. I'm the only one of the five who has ever taught Kajukenbo. In 1950 I founded the "Kajukenbo Self Defense Institute of Hawaii Inc.". The first school was at the Palama Settlement in Honolulu.

CN: Tell us about the Palama Settlement?

EMPERADO: The Palama Settlement was a City of Honolulu recreation facility. It had several buildings that housed dance halls, gymnasiums, cafeterias etc. It was set up to serve the needs of the poor people who lived in the surrounding areas. At the time of the founding of the Palama Settlement school you could join the settlement for 10 cents a year and use all the facilities. For Kajukenbo instruction we charged the members 2 dollars a month. For this fee they trained 5 nights a week for 3 to 4 hours.

CN: Did you have other schools also?

EMPERADO: Yes, after I started the Palama school I added schools at the Wahiwa Y.M.C.A. and the Kaimuki Y.M.C.A.. My brother Joe taught at the Palama Settlement school while I taught at the Y.M.C.A.s. Eventually there were 14 schools, the largest chain of karate schools in Hawaii.

CN: So you made a good living teaching the martial arts?

EMPERADO: No, I've never made a living teaching karate. You see we always charged very low fees for our instruction and we taught at Y.M.C.A.s and recreation centers. At the first schools we only charged \$2.00 a month. That didn't even pay for belts and certificates. I always worked full time until I had a heart attack in 1982.

CN: What type of work did you do?

EMPERADO: I worked various jobs for Pan American Airlines for 10 years, and then I went into law enforcement.

CN: You were a policeman?

EMPERADO: Yes, in 1962 I became a harbor policeman for the Hawaii Department of Transportation. Then in 1974 Al Dacascos called me and told me that he was doing well in Colorado and that it was a good opportunity for karate instructors. So I quit and moved to Colorado. When I got there I couldn't believe what was happening. There was fighting between a lot of the karate schools. Not just fighting, people were getting their cars blown up, their houses shot up, it was bad. Plus it was cold, not at all like Hawaii, I didn't like it at all. I only stayed there for about a year because I knew that I only had 2 years if I wanted to be re-instated with the State of Hawaii. I returned to Hawaii and in 1976 I was re-instated with the harbor patrol. I soon transferred to the Attorney General's Office where I served as a guard to the Governor. Then in 1977 I resigned to take a position as head of security for a large complex called the Kukui Plaza. I worked there until I had a heart attack in 1982.

CN: You have talked about your childhood training and kenpo training with William Chow. Have you trained in other systems?

EMPERADO: In my 30s I expanded my Escrima training with my step father Alfredo Peralta. He taught me a method using the single stick. We would take a 2X4, cut it arm length and taper down a handle at one end. We trained with this to build powerful wrists and forearms. After training with the 2X4 you could make a rattan stick go like lightning.

CN: Was Alfredo Peralta a well known escrima man?

EMPERADO: Oh yes. You see in the 40s and 50s they would have full contact escrima matches at the civic auditorium in Honolulu. Alfredo was beating everybody there until the gaming commission shut em down. Also, in Kauai, Alfredo fought Floro Villabrille. He won that match against Villabrille and left him with a scar above his eye.

CN: Kajukenbo has a lot of kung fu elements, did you also train in kung fu?

EMPERADO: Yes, in my 30s I also trained in various forms of kung fu under , Professor Wong, and Professor Lau. It was several years later that these Professors and the Hawaii Chinese Physical Culture Association awarded me the title of Professor, 10th degree. I was also awarded a certificate by Grandmaster Ho Gau of Hong Kong appointing me as an advisor and representative of the "Choy Li Fut" system. This certificate was signed by Grandmaster Ho Gau, Professor Cheuk Tse and the directors of the Hawaii Chinese Physical Culture Association.

CN: Isn't it true that you also received a instructors certificate from James Mitose?

EMPERADO: Yes, I went to Mitose for instructors training and later received a instructors certificate, but I place little value in it because I later found out that Mitose sold high ranks to some people while he was in Hawaii. Also I always considered Professor Chow to be my instructor.

CN: Mitose was a controversial figure who spent the last years of his life in prison. Can you tell us something about the Mitose you knew in Hawaii?

EMPERADO: When Mitose taught Kenpo Jujitsu he always emphasized his religious philosophy.

He dressed as a minister, carried rosary beads, and chanted like a Buddhist. He always stressed that you were never to use kenpo, even for self defense. His workout was that of traditional Japanese karate. We did makiwara training, some jujitsu takedowns and throws, and worked on developing the one punch kill. We also had one kata; the Naihanchi kata.

CN: What did Mitose call his art and who did he learn it from?

EMPERADO: Mitose called his art Kenpo Jujitsu. He told us that he had learned it from Choki Motobu. I never heard the term “Kosho Ryu Kenpo” until he went to prison and some other instructors visited him and got master certificates in Kosho Ryu. I also never heard from him the story about the Kosho family temple.

CN: So Mitose was a highly peaceful and spiritual man?

EMPERADO: Not really. You see in 1953 Professor Mitose paid a unannounced visit to my Palama Settlement school. He brought Dr. Arthur Keave and Masaichi Oshiro with him. He asked if they could demonstrate some techniques to my students. So I said ok, and Oshiro proceeded to demonstrate the Naihanchi kata. I then consented to demonstrate some of our Kajukenbo techniques. When all was done Mitose told me that I should call my system Kenpo Jujitsu since he considered it to be rooted in his system. I told him that I couldn't because there were 5 creators who contributed their arts to the system. He then became enraged and threatened to come back the next day with a samurai sword and kill me. Me and some of my students waited for his return, but he never showed. The next thing I heard he had gone to California. Years later I heard that he was in prison for having a student kill an old man.

CN: So the Kosho Ryu we see today in magazines is not the Kenpo Jujitsu you remember from Hawaii?

EMPERADO: Like I said I had never heard of Kosho Ryu Kenpo. Mitose called it Kenpo Jujitsu and some of the Japanese said that the traditional name should be Shorinji Kempo. The instructors who got the master certificates while visiting Mitose in prison were all from different systems, and I'm sure that he didn't teach them kenpo in prison. In fact Thomas Barro Mitose was a Kajukenbo black belt under my student, Joe Halbuna.

CN: Speaking of Thomas Mitose, are there other people that were originally Kajukenbo black belts?

EMPERADO: Many. The Shotokan stylist Ken Funakoshi was one of the black belts who came out of the Palama school, as was the actor Don Stroud. Funakoshi, who was a descendant of Gichin Funakoshi felt that he should follow his heritage and train in Shotokan. I gave him my blessing. Paul Yamaguchi, who had come to me from Professor Chow, was the grandson of Gogen (the cat) Yamaguchi. He later chose to train in his grandfathers style of Goju Ryu. Again he had my blessings. You see I have never stopped my students from expanding their knowledge. That's why Kajukenbo has four branches, original or kenpo, chuan fa, won hop kuen do, and tum pai. The only thing I don't like is when instructors don't give credit to their roots, Kajukenbo. I don't care for instructors calling their schools “John Doe's kenpo karate” or “Kajukenbo John Doe's method”. There is only one Kajukenbo.

CN: How well did you know Ed Parker?

EMPERADO: Before he started training with Professor Chow, Ed trained with me for about 2 weeks. While he was with me he took the first 8mm movies of the Palama settlement training. I knew him for many years. At times when I was in California he would have me as his guest of honor at the Long Beach Internationals. After Ed left Hawaii he became estranged from Professor Chow. It was Ed who brought kenpo to mainland America, made it popular, and made so many contributions to the art, so in the late 60s I promoted him to 8th degree black belt.

CN: We have all heard of the blood and guts training that went on in the old days. Were these stories true?

EMPERADO: When I taught a class I wanted to see blood on the floor before the workout was over, so there were a lot of injuries. You see, one has to experience pain before they can give it. You have to know what your technique can do. We lost a lot of students in those early days, but we also got a lot from other schools, including black belts. These students would look at what we were doing and realize that we had a no nonsense effective system.

CN: Who were some of these students?

EMPERADO: Woodrow McCandless was one of Mitose's black belts. Brother Abe Kamahoahoa, and Paul Yamaguchi were Chow's black belts. Marino Tiwanak was the flyweight boxing champion of Hawaii before he joined us. There were many.

CN: Who were some of the tournament stars of Kajukenbo?

EMPERADO: Al and Malia Dacascos won many tournament championships. Al Gene Caraulia won the 1st Karate World Championship in Chicago in 1963 when he was still a brown belt. Purple belt Victor Raposa knocked out world rated Everett "monster man" Eddy at the 1975 "World Series of Martial Arts". Carlos Bunda was the first lightweight champion at the Long Beach Internationals. Just to name a few.

CN: So Kajukenbo has really grown since the Palama Settlement days?

EMPERADO: Yes, there are Kajukenbo schools all over the world now.