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Way of the warrior

How controversial Hollywood star
Steven Seagal helped shape lower
north shore action man Bill Temm

UP CLOSE

✦ Caroline Tang

THE lower north shore's resident man of action Bill Temm would outlast the Energizer bunny if he was given the chance.

Age is just a number to the 57-year-old Temm, who has been the head instructor of Mosman Martial Arts Academy for almost five years.

The multi-talented Temm is a master of martial arts disciplines — from classical Japanese swordsmanship to karate and sumo wrestling — as well as boxing and even powerlifting, among other sports.

And, in addition to teaching the next generation of fighters, Temm is just as passionate about working in the film and television industries where his roles are as varied as his sporting expertise.

Temm has appeared in Hollywood films such as *The Wolverine* (2013) and *Hacksaw Ridge* (2016) and on television, including in the Australian miniseries *Blue Murder: Killer Cop* (2017).

The actor, stuntman and action scene choreographer demonstrated his talents for the *Mosman Daily*, from his swordsmanship (he returns his sword to its sheath without looking) to his tumbling: a running dive roll over a mountain of boxing bags.

Temm is grateful to his supportive boss, Olivia Vatile, for allowing him to “go and play around on film sets and stuff” and his colleagues for covering his classes while he is away filming for long periods.

The *Daily* interviewed Temm on a typically busy Friday (every day of his is jam-packed) where he taught three boxing classes between 6am and 8.30pm, supported the signing of the lease for the club's new, larger premises nearby, and was the corner man in a night-time bout for one of the academy's elite boxers.

“So now you get an idea of what my life is like — I need to be in excellent health; I've never had a sick day ... because I've got clients coming in every day and I can't have a bad day, ever,” he said.

Unsurprisingly, “doing nothing” in his free time is a foreign concept to Temm; he “doesn't have the time”. “I exercise, I train; I have to do

Action man Bill is no common sensei

It has been a life less ordinary for the head trainer at the Mosman Martial Arts Academy



Far left: Bill Temm with young sumo wrestlers in the Mosman Martial Arts Academy. Left: appearing in WWII drama *Hacksaw Ridge*. Below: *Hacksaw Ridge* director Mel Gibson.



Inset: controversial Hollywood star Steven Seagal trained Temm for three years.

“I have to do my own training because I can’t neglect it; my whole life is based on physical, spiritual, emotional and mental training — so, I don’t have a moment to waste

my own training,” he said.

The lower north shore local has lived in the area for more than half his life, but his upbringing was global.

Temm’s father was an Australian K Force volunteer soldier during the Korean War who later became a Far East political correspondent and eventually, a university student in Japan.

“If you can imagine an Australian guy, who spoke fluent Korean and taught himself to speak and understand fluent Japanese,” Temm said of his father.

“He went to Tokyo University ... at which time he was introduced to my mother.

“They fell in love and they

had me; I was born about 50 miles south of Tokyo in a place called Kamakura, a historic city.

“So, on my mother’s side, we’re a Samurai family.”

Temm, who is proud of his Australian and Japanese heritage, said his parents’ marriage was brave for the era: the war in Malaysia in World War II and then in Korea in the 1950s.

“So that was in 1961; you can imagine what courage it took to actually do that ... you can imagine how both families felt,” he said.

“But it all came good once I was born.”

Temm’s father soon became an Australian diplo-

mat and Temm followed him to wherever he was stationed, in the east or west. His childhood shaped the adult he would become.

“I started fighting sports when I was quite young ... from the time I was six,” he said. “From my father’s perspective, he wanted me to identify as an Australian and as a Japanese person.”

The death of Temm’s father in his mid-teens was part of his family’s decision to settle in Australia. He also followed in his father’s footsteps by studying in Tokyo.

But fatherhood and various professions generally kept Temm in Australia; his careers included mechanical engineer, academic, schoolteacher, and senior administrator for a peak educational body.

Temm became an empty-nester in his 40s, but there was no midlife crisis for him; instead he reflected on what really inspired him. “I was able to resume this long lost love affair I’ve had with martial arts and acting,” he said.

Temm had caught the acting bug as a schoolboy in Japan where he pursued classical Japanese acting and western theatre.

His early martial arts training in Japan also had a distinct theatrical flavour: the 12-year-old Temm was among the first cohort of pupils of a then young American aikido instructor who would later become a Hollywood action star.

“He was very tall, bushy-haired, quiet-voiced and I liked him straight away; somehow, I related to him because he was only about 10 years older than me, maybe nine years older,” he said.

“I couldn’t believe this guy was a *sensei* (teacher);

he was so young ... it turned out to be Steven Seagal.”

Temm was Seagal’s pupil for three years. “He was not famous at all; he was just an American guy,” he said.

“Steven had been graded to *nidan* at the time, second degree black belt in aikido, and at his age that was very, very unusual.

“He also encouraged me to study weapons ... he gave me my first *bokken*, a wooden training sword. He had unbelievable presence, incredible capability and amazing discipline.”

Temm’s significant come-back film role was in *The Wolverine* as a machine gunner. “I’m the first face and the first voice you hear in the whole movie,” he said.

Temm also worked on *Hacksaw Ridge*, where his roles included machine gunner and assistant military adviser. “For each set-up, I would go to a different location, so it looked like there were multiple machine gunners, but it’s always me on that gun,” he said.

An amusing moment on set saw Temm playing a background fighter when he was told to “try and look a bit more Asian”. Temm also received lighthearted direction from *Hacksaw* director Mel Gibson who booted him out of a prisoner of war scene for “looking like a Samoan halfback”.

But it’s not all Hollywood blockbusters; Temm is appearing in several current commercials and recently played a drowning man for a local television series.

“Work like that wouldn’t come my way unless I was capable of doing it; so, it’s really encouraging, I think, when *sensei* is doing crazy things like that, for the young’uns,” he said.