

The History Of Taekwon-Do

The following information is from General Choi's Taekwon-Do Encyclopedia:

As one of the closest associates of the author and having learned this art from him during our imprisonment under the Japanese occupation, I might deserve to write about the life of the author. First of all, it must be said about the author, that he had given so much devotion to this art, that the man, his life and his work are one. He has long developed and brought the little-known ancient genres up-to-date through long years of assiduous, zealous application and firm resolution. If Taekwon-Do today had gained international status, it is because of the tireless efforts of one man- the father of modern Taekwon-Do.

General Choi Hong Hi was born on November 9th, 1918 in the rugged and harsh area of Hwa Dae, Myong Chun District in what is now D.P.R of Korea. In his youth, he was frail and quite sickly, a constant source of worry for his parents.

Even at an early age, however, the future general showed a strong and independent spirit. At the age of twelve he was expelled from school for agitating against the Japanese authorities who were in control of Korea. This was the beginning of what would be a long association with the Kwang Ju Students' Independence Movement.

After his expulsion, young Choi's father sent him to study calligraphy under one of the most famous teachers in Korea, Mr. Han Il Dong. Han, in addition to his skills as a calligrapher, was also a master of Taek Kyon, the ancient Korean art of foot fighting. The teacher, concerned over the frail condition of his new student, began teaching him the rigorous exercises of Taek Kyon to help build up his body.

In 1937, Choi was sent to Japan to further his education. Shortly before leaving, however, the youth had the misfortune to engage in a rather heated argument with a massive professional wrestler who promised to literally tear the youth limb from limb at their next encounter. This threat seemed to give a new impetus to young Choi's training in the martial arts.

In Kyoto, Choi met a fellow Korean, Mr. Him, who was engaged in teaching the Japanese martial art, Karate. With two years of concentrated training, Choi attained the rank of first degree black belt. These techniques, together with Taek Kyon (foot techniques), were the forerunners of modern Taekwon-Do.

There followed a period of both mental and physical training, preparatory school, high school, and finally the University in Tokyo. During this time, training and experimentation in his new fighting techniques were intensified until, with attainment of his second degree black belt, he began teaching at a YMCA in Tokyo, Japan.

Choi recounts a particular experience from this period of time. There was no lamp-post in the city that he didn't strike or kick to see if the copper wires ahead were vibrating in protest.

"I would imagine that these were the techniques I would use to defend myself against the wrestler, Mr. Hu if he did attempt to carry out his promise to tear me limb from limb when I eventually returned to Korea."

With the outbreak of World War II, the author was forced to enlist in the Japanese army through no volition of his own. While at his post in Pyongyang, North Korea, the author was implicated as the planner of the Korean Independence Movement and interned at a Japanese prison during his eight month pretrial examination.

While in prison, to alleviate the boredom and keep physically fit, Choi began practicing this art in the solitude of his cell. In a short time, his cellmate and jailer became students of his. Eventually, the whole prison courtyard became one gigantic gymnasium.

The liberation in August 1945 spared Choi from an imposed seven year prison sentence. Following his release, the ex-prisoner journeyed to Seoul where he organized a student soldier's party. In January of the following year, Choi was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the new south Korean army, the "Launching Pad" for putting Taekwon-Do into a new orbit.

Soon after, he made company commander in Kwang-Ju where the young second lieutenant lighted the torch of this art by teaching his entire company and was then promoted to first lieutenant and transferred to Tae Jon in charge of the Second Infantry Regiment. While at his new post, Choi began spreading the art not only to Korean soldiers but also to the Americans stationed there. This was the first introduction to Americans of what would eventually become known as Taekwon-Do.

1947 was a year of fast promotion. Choi was promoted to captain and then major. In 1948, he was posted to Seoul as the head of logistics and became Taekwon-Do instructor for the American Military Police School there. In late 1948, Choi became a lieutenant colonel.

In 1949, Choi was promoted to full colonel and visited the United States for the first time, attending the Fort Riley Ground General School. While there, this art was introduced to the American public. And in 1951, brigadier general. During this time, he organized the Ground General School in Pusan as Assistant Commandant and Chief of the Academic Department. Choi was appointed as Chief of Staff of the First Corps in 1952 and was responsible for briefing General MacArthur during the latter's visits to Kang Nung. At the time of armistice, Choi was in command of the 5th Infantry Division.

The year 1953 was an eventful one for the General, in both his military career and in the progress of the new martial art. He became the author of the first authoritative book on military intelligence in Korea. He organized and activated the crack 29th Infantry Division at Cheju Island, which eventually became the spearhead of Taekwon-Do in the military and established the Oh Do Kwan (Gym of My Way) where he succeeded not only in training the cadre instructors for the entire military but also developing the Taek Kyon and Karate techniques into a modern system of Taekwon-Do, with the help of Mr. Nam Tae Hi, his right hand man in 1954.

In the latter part of that year, he commanded Chong Do Kwan (Gym of the Blue Wave), the largest civilian gym in Korea; Choi was also promoted to major general.

Technically, 1955 signaled the beginning of Taekwon-Do as a formally recognized art in Korea. During that year, a special board was formed which included leading master instructors, historians, and prominent leaders of society. A number of names for the new martial art were submitted. On the 11th of April, the board summoned by Gen. Choi, decided on the name of Taekwon-Do which had been submitted by him. This single unified name of Taekwon-Do replaced the different and confusing terms; Dang Soo, Gong Soo, Taek Kyon, Kwon Bup, etc.

In 1959, Taekwon-Do spread beyond its national boundaries. The father of Taekwon-Do and nineteen of his top black belt holders toured the Far East. The tour was a major success, astounding all spectators with the excellence of the Taekwon-Do techniques. Many of these black belt holders such as Nam Tae Hi, President of the Asia Taekwon-Do Federation; Colonel Ko Jae Chun, the 5th Chief of Taekwon-Do instructors in Vietnam; Colonel Baek Joon Gi, the 2nd Chief instructor in Vietnam; Brigadier Gen. Woo Jong Lim; Mr. Han Cha Kyo, the Head Instructor in Singapore and Mr. Cha Soo Young, presently an international instructor in Washington D.C. eventually went on to spread the art to the world.

In this year, Choi was elevated to two illustrious posts; President of his newly formed Korea Taekwon-Do Association and deputy commander of the 2nd Army in Tae Gu.

The Korean Ambassador to Vietnam, General Choi Duk Shin was instrumental in helping to promote Taekwon-Do in this nation locked in a death struggle with the communists. That same year General Choi Hong Hi published his first Korean text on Taekwon-Do which became the model for the 1965 edition.

In the year of 1960, the General attended the Modern Weapons Familiarization Course in Texas followed by a visit to Jhoon Rhee's Karate Club in San Antonio, where the author convinced the students to use the name Taekwon-Do instead of Karate. Thus Jhoon Rhee is known as the first Taekwon-Do instructor in America.

This marked the beginning of Taekwon-Do in the United States of America.

Choi returned to Korea as the Director of Intelligence of the Korean Army. Later that same year, he assumed command of the Combat Armed Command with direction of the infantry, artillery, armored, signal and aviation schools.

The Year 1961, incidentally, was the year of maturation for both Choi's military career and Taekwon-Do, with the command of the largest training centers in Korea and the newly assigned command of the 6th Army Corps.

Taekwon-Do spread like wildfire, not only to the Korean civilian and military population but to the U.S. soldiers of the 7th Infantry Division which was under his operational control. Through his students, Taekwon-Do was even introduced to the greatest military academy in the world. West Point. In the same year, he also made Taekwon-Do a compulsory subject for the entire armed and police forces in south Korea.

1962, Choi was appointed as Ambassador to Malaysia, where, as a dedicated missionary of Taekwon-Do, the art was spread. In 1963, the Taekwon-Do Association of Malaysia was formed and reached national acceptance when the art was demonstrated at the Merdeka Stadium at the request of the Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman.

The same year, two important milestones took place; the famous demonstration at the United Nations building in New York, and the introduction of Taekwon-Do to the Armed Forces of Vietnam under Major Nam Tae Hi. In February of the following year, a Taekwon-Do Association was formed in Singapore, and the groundwork was laid for forming associations in the outer reaches of Brunei.

The same year, Ambassador Choi made a trip to Vietnam with the sole purpose of teaching the advanced Taekwon-Do patterns that he perfected after years of research to the instructors group headed by Lt. Col. Park Joon Gi, in person. This was indeed a new era for Taekwon-Do in that he was able to draw a clear line between Taekwon-Do and Karate by completely eliminating the remaining vestige of Karate.

Late this year, he was re-elected to be the President of the Korea Taekwon-Do Association upon returning home, which gave him a chance to purify the Taekwon-Do society by cleaning up the political circles within its organization.

In 1965 Ambassador Choi, retired two star general, was appointed by the Government of the Republic of Korea to lead a goodwill mission to West Germany, Italy, Turkey, United-Arab Republic, Malaysia, and Singapore. This trip is significant in that the Ambassador, for the first time in Korean history, declared Taekwon-Do as the national martial art of Korea.

This was the basis not only for establishing Taekwon-Do Associations in these countries but also the formation of the International Taekwon-Do Federation as it is known today. In 1966, the dream of the sickly young student of calligraphy, who rose to Ambassador and the Association President of the most respected martial art in the world came true. On the 22nd of March, the International Taekwon-Do Federation was formed with associations in Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, West Germany, the United States, Turkey, Italy, Arab Republic of Egypt and Korea.

In 1967, the father of Taekwon-Do received the first Class Distinguished Service medal from the Government of Vietnam and he helped to form the Korea-Vietnam Taekwon-Do Foundation, presided by Gen. Tran van Dong. That same year the Hong Kong Taekwon-Do Association was formed. In August, Choi visited the All American Taekwon-Do tournament held in Chicago, Illinois, where he discussed expansion, unification, and the policy of the United States Taekwon-Do Association with leading instructors. This visit led to the formal establishment of the U.S. Taekwon-Do Association in Washington, D.C. on November 26th, 1967.

During his visit, Choi also met with Robert Walson, fourth degree black belt and one of the foremost American authorities on Taekwon-Do, to lay the ground work for a new edition of a book on Taekwon-Do.

In late 1967, the author invited Master Oyama to the I.T.F. Headquarters in Seoul to continue the discussion they had earlier at Hakone, Japan, whereby Master Oyama would eventually change his techniques to that of Taekwon-Do.

In that same year, the President of the I.T.F. selected five instructors from the Armed Forces for Taiwan, at the request of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-Shek. This request was channeled through General Chung Il Kwon, then the Prime Minister of South Korea.

In 1968, the author visited France, as the chief delegate of the Korean Government, to attend the Consul International Sports Military Symposium held in Paris. Taekwon-Do was a major topic on the agenda. Delegates from 32 countries witnessed demonstrations of Taekwon-Do by a team of experts. That same year, the United Kingdom Taekwon-Do Association was formed and the author visited Spain, the Netherlands, Canada, Belgium and India with the hope of spreading Taekwon-Do.

When Choi returned to Korea he was presented with the first Sports Research Award from south Korea for his dedicated work on behalf of the Korean martial art.

In 1969, Choi toured Southeast Asia to personally investigate the preparations of each country for the First Asian Taekwon-Do Tournament that was held in September in Hong Kong. Immediately after the tournament, the author undertook a worldwide tour of twenty-nine countries to visit instructors and gather photographs for the first edition of his previous book "Taekwon-Do". (copyright 1972)

August 1970, the author left for a tour of twenty countries throughout Southeast Asia, Canada, Europe and the Middle East. Choi, of course, held seminars for international instructors every place he went and helped spread and weld the International Taekwon-Do Federation into a cohesive force.

In March 1971, Choi attended the Second Asian Taekwon-Do Tournament, held at Stadium Negara in Malaysia, which was opened with the declaration of Tun Abdul Rhajak, the Prime Minister, and closed with the presence of their Majesties.

Also in this year, the author was asked by Gen. Kim Jong Hyun, head of the Army Martial Art department, to select qualified instructors for the Republic of Iran Armed Forces.

The world tour of 1972 was quite retrospective in that Choi had an opportunity to introduce Taekwon-Do to those heads of state of Bolivia, Dominica, Haiti and Guatemala respectively.

In this year, Choi moved the headquarters of International Taekwon-Do Federation, with the unanimous consent of member countries, to Toronto, Canada, envisaging to spread this art eventually to the countries of Eastern Europe, according to the milestone he set up years before.

During these travels, the author has been especially interested in promoting Taekwon-Do among the youth of the world. The President of the International Taekwon-Do Federation has been instrumental in introducing the art to numerous universities in Europe, America, the Middle East and the Far East.

During the months of November and December 1973, General Choi and a specially selected I.T.F. Demonstration Team, consisting of Kong Young Il, Park Jong Soo, Rhee Ki Ha, Pak Sun Jae and Choi Chang Keun, all 7th degree black belts, toured Europe, the Middle East, Africa and the Far East. A total of 13 countries were visited and new I.T.F. branches established in 5 of these countries. The tour was an overwhelming success with a total of more than 100,000 people watching the demonstrations in Egypt alone. At each stop, general Choi and the Demonstration Team were hosted by ranking representatives of the local governments.

1974 was indeed an exuberant and long remembered year for Choi, because the founder of Taekwon-Do was not only able to proudly present the superiority of techniques as well as the competition rules of this art, but also to bring his dream into reality by holding the first World Taekwon-Do Championships in Montreal.

In November and December of this year, he led the 4th International Taekwon-Do Demonstration Team consisting of 10 of the world's top instructors to Jamaica, Curacao, Costa Rica, Colombia, Venezuela and Surinam.

In 1975, Taekwon-Do alone had the privilege to demonstrate at the Sydney opera house for the first time since its opening. General Choi visited Greece and Sweden to conduct seminars later in this year. In the middle of 1976 he toured Iran, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Europe to inspect Taekwon-Do activities, giving seminars at the same time. In November of the same year, Choi went to Holland to declare the opening of the First European Taekwon-Do Championships held in Amsterdam.

September 1977, the founder of Taekwon-Do visited Malaysia, New Zealand and Australia following the Tokyo meeting in which he publicly denounced the South Korean President Park Jung Hee who had been using Taekwon-Do for his political ends. Later that year he visited Sweden and Denmark to aid in the formation of their National Associations of Taekwon-Do.

In May of 1978, General Choi toured Malaysia, Pakistan, Kenya and South Africa accompanied by Rhee Ki Ha. In this year he led the 5th International Taekwon-Do Demonstration Team consisting of Choi Chang Keun, Rhee Ki Ha, Park Jung Tae and Liong Wai Meng to Sweden, Poland, Hungary and Yugoslavia. In September of the same year the Second World Taekwon-Do Championships was held in Oklahoma City, U.S.A.

In June 1979, the All Europe Taekwon-Do Federation was formed in Oslo, Norway. After this historic event General Choi toured Sweden, Denmark, West Germany, France and Greenland accompanied by Khang Su Jong and Rhee Ki Ha. In November of that

year he led the 6th International Taekwon-Do demonstration team consisting of Kim Jong Chan, Choi Chang Keun, Rhee Ki Ha, Park Jung Tae, Lee Jong Moon, Chung Kwang Duk, Kim Suk Jun and Michael Cormack to Argentina.

The year 1980 was indeed an unforgettable one for the father of Taekwon-Do, both for himself and the future of his art. He and 15 of his students, including his son Choi Joong Hwa, made a monumental trip to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. This was the first time Taekwon-Do was introduced to the people of North Korea, Choi's birth place. In November of this same year, the first All Europe Taekwon-Do Championships was held in London with 18 countries participating.

In January of 1981, Gen. Choi made a visit to Queensland, Australia, accompanied by Choi Chang Keun, to declare, open the first Pacific Area Taekwon-Do Championships. At this time he helped to form the South Pacific Taekwon-Do Federation as well as the Australian Taekwon-Do Federation.

In June of the same year, the author led the 8th International Taekwon-Do Demonstration Team to Tokyo, Japan. In October, he conducted a seminar for the founding members of Taekwon-Do in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and in November he proudly presented the unified Taekwon-Do demonstration team consisting of North and South Korean instructors to the historic meeting called North and Overseas Korean Christian Leaders, held in Vienna, Austria. In August, President Choi visited Argentina to declare the opening of the Third World Taekwon-Do Championships held in Resitancia, Chaco.

In January 1982 the President of the International Taekwon-Do Federation formed the North America Taekwon-Do Federation in Toronto, Canada. In this year, the author was finally able to realize his long anticipated dream (since 1967) when a Taekwon-Do gym opened for the first time in Japan under the auspices of patriot Chon Jin Shik. It was indeed a very busy year for the President in that he visited Puerto Rico in July accompanied by Master Park Jung Tae, to conduct seminars.

During the months of October and November he toured Greenland, the United Kingdom, West Germany, Austria, Denmark, Poland, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and Finland, accompanied by Master Han Sam Soo, Park Jung Tae and Choi Joong Hwa to promote Taekwon-Do. He also attended the First Intercontinental Taekwon-Do Championships held in December in Naples, Italy.

In October of the same year Gen. Choi met with Mr. Csandi, the Chairman of programming committee of I.O.C. in Budapest, Hungary to discuss the recognition of I.T.F. by the I.O.C. In January 1983, General Choi made a visit to Colorado, U.S.A accompanied by Master Lee Suk Hi, the President of North America Taekwon-Do Federation, to grade Charles E. Sereff, the President of the U.S. Taekwon-Do Federation, for 7th degree.

In February 1983, the author toured Latin America including Argentina, Columbia, Panama and Honduras to conduct a full scale seminar. During his stay in Honduras he helped to activate the Central American Taekwon-Do Federation. During the months of March, April and May he toured Santa Barbara, California, Europe and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to conduct last minute preparation of the encyclopedia, the last product of his life-long research.

In October and November of the same year, he made a visit to Yugoslavia and Italy accompanied by Park Jung Tae and Choi Joong Hwa to prepare photographs to be used for the Encyclopedia. In April 1984, President Choi declared the opening of the Fourth World Taekwon-Do Championships held in Glasgow, Scotland. In the same month, he visited Mr. Juan Antonio Samaranch, President of the International Olympic Committee, in Lausanne accompanied by Master Rhee Ki Ha, Charles Sereff and Kim Yong Kyu to prove that only the International Taekwon-Do Federation is the world governing body of true Taekwon-Do.

In September the author invited key instructors such as Lee Suk Hi, Rhee Ki Ha, Park Jung Tae and Choi Joong Hwa to Pyongyang to finalize the publication of the Encyclopedia. In fact, this was the time when the relocation of the I.T.F. to Vienna, Austria was seriously discussed.

In October of the same year, the President made an official visit to Budapest, Hungary to declare the opening of the 3rd All Europe Taekwon-Do Championships. This indeed was of particular importance as it was the first large scale international event held in a socialist country as far as the Taekwon-Do tournament is concerned.

In the following month, General Choi visited New York City along with masters Lee Suk Hi and Park Jung Tae to declare open the 3rd annual General Choi's Cup in North America. In December the 5th I.T.F. Congress meeting was held in Vienna, where it was unanimously decided to relocate the I.T.F. here by March of the next year. Also at the meeting, President Choi Hong Hi was re-elected for another term. Mr. Jun Chin Shik, the President of Japan International Taekwon-Do Federation, masters Lee Suk Hi and Rhee Ki Ha were elected as Vice Presidents with master Park Jung Tae as Secretary-General.

Without doubt, 1985 was one of the most significant years for the founder of Taekwon-Do as he was able to document all of the techniques he had researched for years by publishing the Encyclopedia of Taekwon-Do. He was also able to establish a strong foundation for the spreading of his art to the entire world, especially the socialist as well as the Third World countries by moving the International Taekwon-Do Federation to Vienna, the capital city of Austria.

In April of this year, President Choi visited Puerto Rico accompanied by Tran Trien Quan, the President of the Canadian Taekwon-Do Federation, James Limand Kim Suk Jun to attend the 1st Latin American General Choi's Cup. In June, he visited East Berlin to attend the opening ceremony of the 24th I.O.C. Congress.

In November of the same year, Gen. Choi, accompanied by Secretary-General Master Park Jung Tae and Tran Trien Quan, visited Norway to honour the opening of the 1985 Scandinavian Taekwon-Do Championships.

In December, various festivals celebrating the 30th anniversary of Taekwon-Do was held in Quebec, Canada sponsored by the Taekwon-Do Federation of Canada were highlighted with the presence of the Father of Taekwon-Do, Gen. Choi Hong Hi.

In June 1986 the founder took DPRK Taekwon-Do demonstration team to the People's Republic of China. This visit eventually became the motivation for the Chinese people to adopt the Korean martial art, Taekwon-Do.

1987 was a significant year for General Choi because he showed once again the indomitable spirit as well as perseverance to the Taekwon-Do world by declaring the 5th World Championship in May in Athens, Greece, despite persistent interference of the South Korean dictatorial regime.

In December of the same year, president Choi began to formulate the Promotion and Popularization Foundation of ITF boosted by the pledge given by Mr. Chon Yon Shik, the elder brother of senior vice-president Mr. Chon Jin Shik, in the amount of 100,000,000 Japanese Yen.

The year 1988 was culminated by two important events. In May, the Hungarian government hosted the 6th World Championships in Budapest which was by far, the largest in scale, finest in technique and also for the first time, televised via satellite throughout Europe.

In August, the Father of Taekwon-Do was at last able to realize his ultimate dream of introducing and teaching his art without regard to religion, race, national or ideological boundaries, by leading the I.T.F. demonstration team to Moscow, U.S.S.R.

It is hoped that all instructors will follow his example by devoting part of their time towards introducing the art into the school systems in their respective areas.

Merely introducing the art, however, is not enough. The instructor must also concern himself with imbuing and maintaining a positive influence that will eventually serve as a guiding light to all students. Then and only then, can the instructor consider himself an apostle of Taekwon-Do.

Park, Sung Hwa

"Taekwon-Do" (The Korean Art of Self Defense) also known as The Condensed Encyclopedia.

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