

## ***WHEN AND WHERE DID TAEKWON-DO BEGIN?***

**By: General Choi, Hong Hi 1918 - 2002 Known as the father of American Taekwon Do**

A combination of circumstances made it possible for me to originate and develop Taekwon-Do. In addition to my prior knowledge of Taek Kyon, I had an opportunity to learn Karate in Japan during the unhappy thirty-six years when my native land was occupied by the Japanese. Soon after Korea was liberated in 1945, I was placed in a privileged position as a founding member of the newly formed South Korean Armed Forces.

The former provided me with a definite sense of creation, and the latter gave me the power to disseminate Taekwon-Do throughout the entire armed forces, despite furious opposition.

The emergence of Taekwon-Do as an international martial art in a relatively short period of time was due to a variety of factors. The evils of contemporary society (moral corruption, materialism, selfishness, etc.) had created a spiritual vacuum. Taekwon-Do was able to compensate for the prevailing sense of emptiness, distrust, decadence and lack of confidence.

In addition, these were violent times, when people felt the need for a means of protecting themselves, and the superiority of Taekwon-Do technique came to be widely recognized. My social stature, the advantage of being Taekwon-Do's founder and my God-given health also contributed to the rapid growth of Taekwon-Do all over the world.

My involvement with the martial arts did much to supplement the health that God gave me. I had been born frail and weak and was encouraged to learn Taek Kyon at the age of fifteen by my teacher of calligraphy. In 1938, a few days before I was due to leave Korea to study in Japan I was involved in an unexpected incident that would have made it difficult to return home without risk of reprisals.

I resolved to become a black belt holder in Karate while I was in Japan. The skills I required were, I felt, sufficient protection against those who might seek to do me harm. Not only was I able to return to Korea, but I subsequently initiated the national liberation movement known as the Pyongyang Student Soldier's Incident. Like so many patriots in the long course of human history, my actions aroused the wrath of those in positions of power. I was imprisoned for a time in a Japanese army jail. In January of 1946, I was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the fledgling Republic of Korea army and posted to the 4th infantry regiment in Kwangju, Cholla Namdo Province as a company commander.

I began to teach Karate to my soldiers as a means of physical and mental training. It was then that I realized that we needed to develop our own national martial art, superior in both spirit and technique to Japanese Karate. I strongly believed that teaching it throughout the country would enable me to fulfill the

pledge I had made to three of my comrades, who had shared my imprisonment by the Japanese.

"The reason that our people suffer in this way at the hands of the Japanese," I had said, "is that our ancestors failed to rule wisely. They exploited the people and, in the end, lost the country to foreign domination. If we ever regain our freedom and independence, let us not become the rulers of the people. Instead, let us dedicate ourselves to advising those who rule."

It was with this ambition in mind that I began to develop new techniques, systematically, from March of that same year. By the end of 1954 I had nearly completed the foundation of a new martial art for Korea, and on April 11, 1955, it was given the name "Taekwon-Do".

On the spiritual level, Taekwon-Do is derived from the traditional, ethical and moral principles of the orient and, of course, from my personal philosophy.

Even though I am only five feet tall, I pride myself on having lived in strict accordance with my moral convictions. I have tried to fight on the side of justice without fear of any kind. I believe that this was possible for me only because of the formidable power and indomitable spirit instilled by Taekwon-Do.

The physical techniques of Taekwon-Do are based on the principles of modern science, in particular, Newtonian physics which teaches us how to generate maximum power. Military tactics of attack and defence have also been incorporated.

I wish to make it clear that although Karate and Taek Kyon were used as references in the course of my study, the fundamental theories and principles of Taekwon-Do are totally different from those of any other martial art in the world.

In March of 1959, I led the military Taekwon-Do demonstration team on a tour abroad. We visited South Vietnam and Taiwan. It was the first such visit in the history of Korea. On this occasion, I renewed my resolution to leave my personal legacy to the world, in the form of Taekwon-Do, and I formulated the following basic ideals for the Taekwon-Do practitioners:

1. By developing an upright mind and a strong body, we will acquire the self-confidence to stand on the side of justice at all times;
2. We shall unite with all men in a common brotherhood, without regard to religion, race, national or ideological boundaries;
3. We shall dedicate ourselves to building a peaceful human society in which justice, morality, trust and humanism prevail

I also resolved to dedicate myself to the world-wide propagation of Taekwon-Do, in the sincere hope that it would provide the means by which the unification of the divided halves of my fatherland would become possible.

My study of Taekwon-Do proceeded in two parts, spiritual discipline and technical perfection. Because the human spirit belongs to the realm of metaphysics, what I mean by spiritual discipline is not easy to describe. One cannot touch, see or hear the spirit of man, It is wider and deeper than anything we can perceive. In this respect, I, myself, am only another student participating in a continuing and never-ending learning process.

I have come to define the spiritual dimensions of Taekwon-Do as fusing oneself with the ideals of Taekwon-Do and attaining and understanding the full meaning of each of the Taekwon-Do patterns. If we consider ourselves as one with Taekwon-Do, we will respect it as we respect our own bodies and Taekwon-Do will never be used in a dishonorable way.

The names of the patterns are derived from the most illustrious people to have been produced by nearly five thousand years of Korean history. A proper understanding of the patterns leads, inevitably to the realization that Taekwon-Do is a martial art to be used only for self-defence and only in the cause of justice.

The history of Korea contains not a single sample of its military forces being employed for the invasion of its neighbors or for any other purpose except national defense.