



Duk Sung Son

The Tradition Continues



Part I

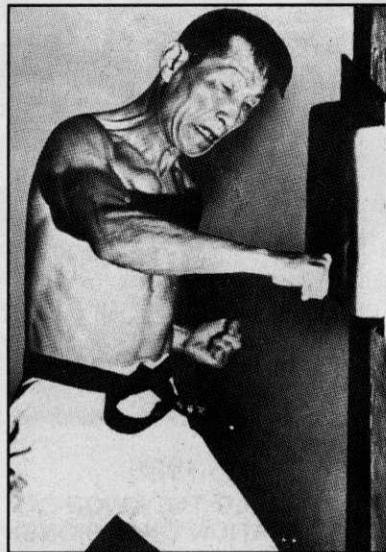
A rare glimpse of one of tae kwon do's founding fathers.

Junbeeee!" Thundering counting radiates out to the busy New York City street below. Sweat pours from rows and rows of Tae Kwon Doists moving up and down the dojang, en masse. The wooden floor vibrates with the power of the punches, kicks, and blocks. The atmosphere is electric: fast, focused, ever forward. Just as he has done for fifty years, Grandmaster Duk Sung Son shakes buildings and spirits with his bellowing voice, as another Tae Kwon Do workout begins.

One of the founding fathers of traditional Tae Kwon Do in Korea, Grandmaster Duk Sung Son is like a Korean Zen master. He is a man of few words but integrated action. He has continued teaching in his original ways since coming to the United States in 1963, following the path of his traditional

teacher, the renowned Won Kook Lee. Grandmaster Son is the 9th-degree black belt president of a large and long established independent Tae Kwon Do organization, the World Tae Kwon Do Association. He has written two

books with Robert Clark which set a high standard in Tae Kwon Do instructional texts. Best known is *Korean Karate, the Art of Tae Kwon Do*. His black belt text, *Black Belt, Korean Karate* is one of the few to address the issues of continued training at higher levels in Tae Kwon Do. He has kept a low public profile, preferring simply to do, rather than talk.



Grandmaster Son's famous photo demonstrates power and focus.

The Man

Grandmaster Son's commitment to Tae Kwon Do begins at 5 am every morning with a workout. For decades he has continued his routine of jogging and kicking trees, seven days a week.

By Alex and Annellen Simpkins, PhD's.

He teaches daily at his Manhattan dojang, or else he is traveling to his many schools throughout the country. He personally tests all black belts, first degree and up, which keeps the quality consistently high. Grandmaster Son's standards for himself are even more stringent than those he has for others. He is a man of strength, not just physically but also morally. He has remained consistent with his personal values, as seen by his daily actions. He is a devoted family man. Behind or alongside every great man

you will surely find a great woman, and Mrs. Son has proven herself to be a supportive wife, always there, attending (as a spectator) nearly as many workouts as her husband! His daughter, now married with children of her own, also teaches Tae Kwon Do.

Jhoon Rhee, another pioneer of Tae Kwon Do in the United States, had several comments to make about Grandmaster Son: "I have great respect for the man. He has a great deal of integrity and has always been devoted to his wife and daughter."

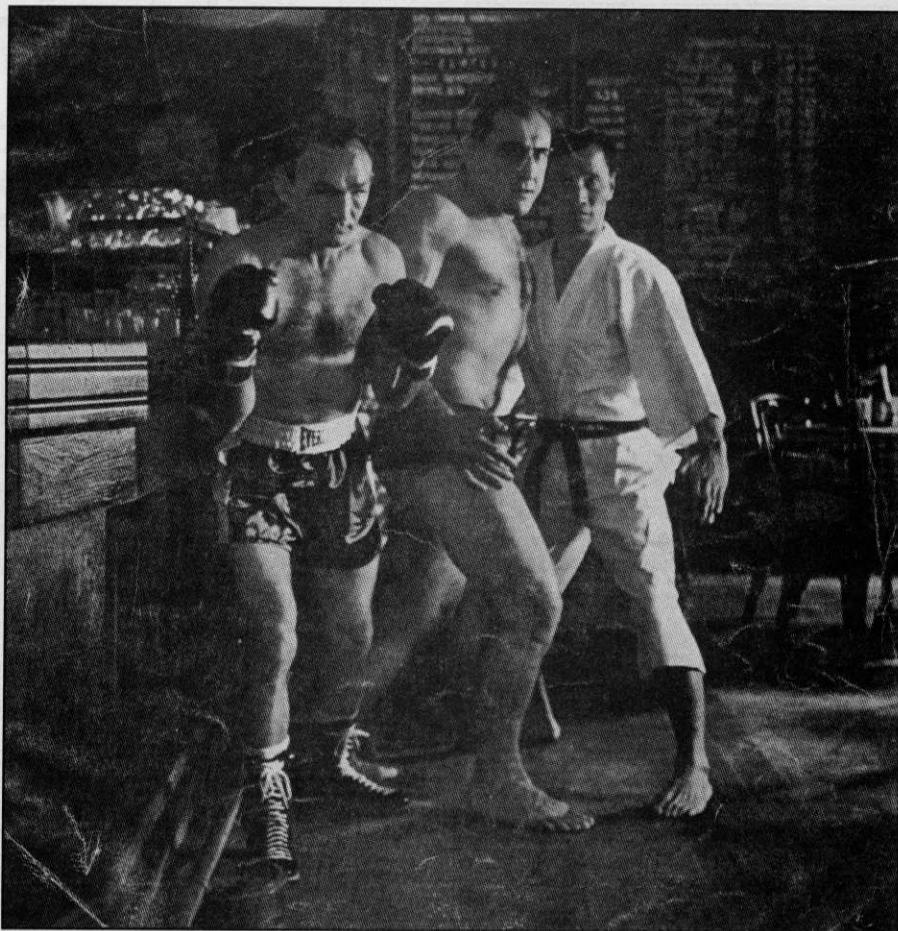
"Grandmaster Son cares about each of his many students. The structure of his workout ensures that every student receives an equal amount of attention. He is proud of the accomplishments of his students, both in and outside of the dojang, announcing that this person is a doctor, that one a successful businessman, as well as being a black belt."

Grandmaster Son believes that as "everybody the same," you should always put forth your own personal best. He has welcomed the efforts of



any sincere individuals without regard for apparent limiting boundaries. In witnessing a series of black belt tests, we were pleased to see people of all ages, from young children to a seventy-two year-old woman who was testing for her second degree black belt. All students performed with pride and determination, giving everything they could through their efforts.

Grandmaster Son applies his philosophy to women as well. Long before Women's Liberation, Grandmaster Son was including women as equals



Grandmaster Son, on the cover of Esquire Magazine was shown with the then famous boxer and wrestler, Basilio and Rocco, showing how to defend yourself in any barroom brawl.



in his dojangs. When asked if women have advantages in physical combat with men, he answers decisively, in his book *Black Belt Korean Karate*, "Yes." He states that even though women have some disadvantages in size and strength, they possess the capacity for great mental strength. Once women overcome their cultural stereotypes, they can be ferocious fighters, as evidenced in the world of nature. His commitment to women can be seen in the many high-ranking women black belts who continue to evolve in his style, and his respectful treatment of women martial artists in his dojangs.

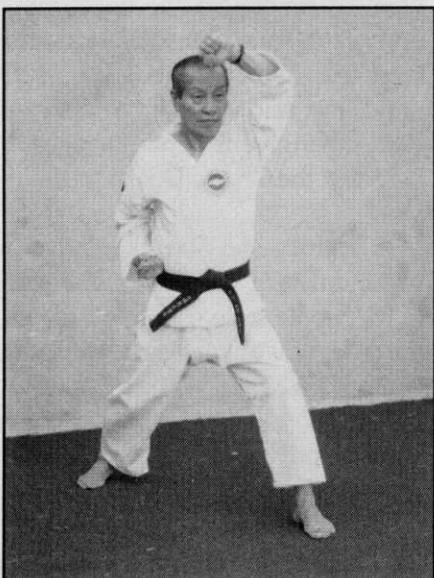
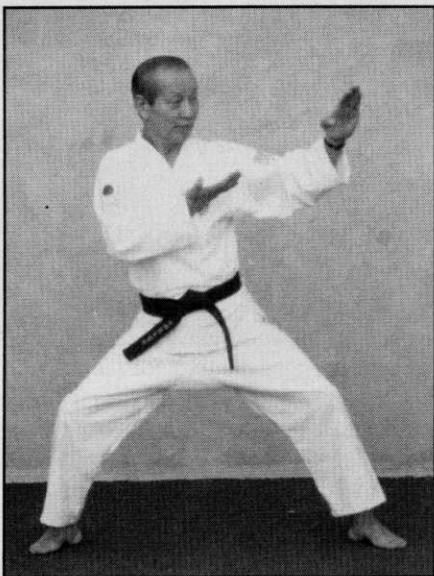
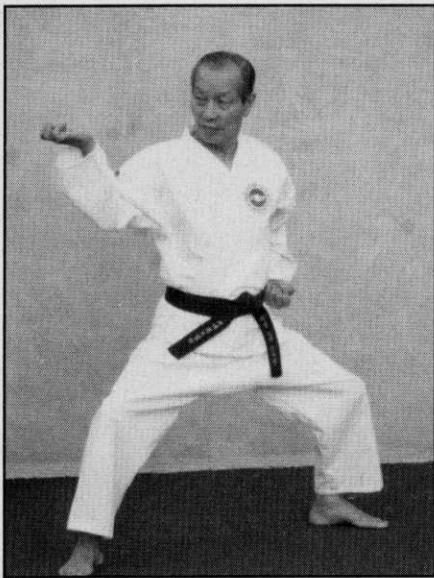
The History

Grandmaster Son was born in Korea and raised in Seoul. His career in the fighting arts began at the age of sixteen, when he took up boxing at the local gym. He proved to be a talented fighter, rising quickly toward becoming a national champion. However, he

found himself returning home each night in pain and discomfort with his face cut badly. Sometimes the injuries were so severe that he had trouble even eating the delicious, spicy Korean food. His parents took a firm hand and said, "No more boxing!" Rather than give up fighting altogether, he joined the Chung Do Kwan ("Blue Wave") school.

Grandmaster Son states: "It was like a different world. In the boxing gym, people stole shoes and towels, the place was always dirty. But in the Chung Do Kwanschooleveryone was polite. There was an atmosphere of good friendly people, all working out together. The style was no contact, so no one got hurt. I loved it, the people were very nice, and my parents were happy to have me stay with it."

Grandmaster Son still faithfully follows these traditions today. His dojangs always have a strong camaradery among the men and



Grandmaster Son displays perfect form in several typical Tae Kwon Do moves.

women students, all working together. The people are still very nice! It is expected and taken for granted.

Son attended Sensyu University, majoring in economics, but his interests remained with the martial arts. He committed himself to a career in the martial arts and rose quickly through the ranks. When his teacher moved to Japan, Grandmaster Son was named President of the Korean Chung Do Kwan Association in 1953.

A bit of Korean history may help the reader to put these events into context. After the Japanese Yi dynasty annexed Korea in 1910, all martial arts, along with Korean culture and literature, were prohibited. The ancient Tae Kwon Korean styles had survived behind closed doors as mainly kicking techniques. The combination of the older indigenous Korean arts, along with the influences from China and Okinawa which filtered in over the centuries, became known as Tang Soo Do.

Korea was at last freed from the Japanese occupation, and with this independence came a wish to resurrect the ancient Tae Kwon traditions. The first dojang to be opened was the Chung Do Kwan school by Won Kook Lee in 1945. Soon after, Moo Do Kwan and Yun Moo Kwan opened their doors. By 1945 there were five kwans, and after 1953 nine different kwans thrived.

Times were unsettled in Korea after the Japanese occupation. Amidst all the instability, demoralization, and turmoil, there were few means of bringing together a people who had been

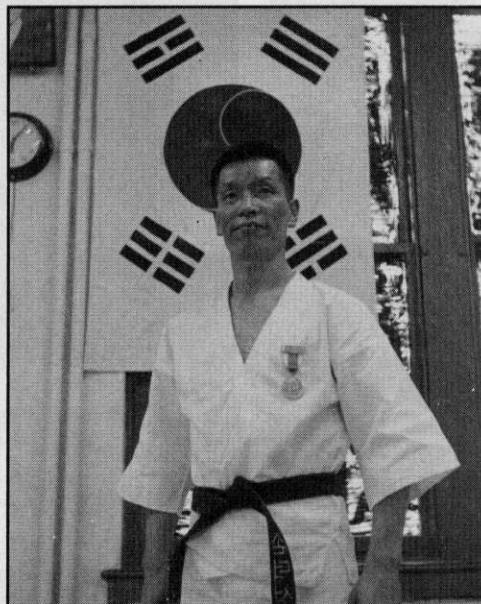
overrun by aggressors and disappointed by international policy. Their national pride and urge to strive and achieve were rekindled, in part, by the martial arts. Tae Kwon had been close to the hearts and souls of the Korean people for centuries. The ancient Hwa Rang Do had been fundamental with their code of ethics, integrity, strength of purpose, along with demonstrable Tae Kwon fighting skills, in unifying Korea and repelling take-over attempts of the past. It was a natural and logical step to raise the morale of the people with martial arts. The traditional martial arts masters were pioneers, and

had to have great determination, courage and strength of purpose to inspire their country.

The first conference of the National Board of Advisors for Chung Do Kwan met together over dinner on December 19, 1955. Grandmaster Duk Sung Son, then President of the Chung Do Kwan, was present and primary in these early formulations of Tae Kwon Do. He can

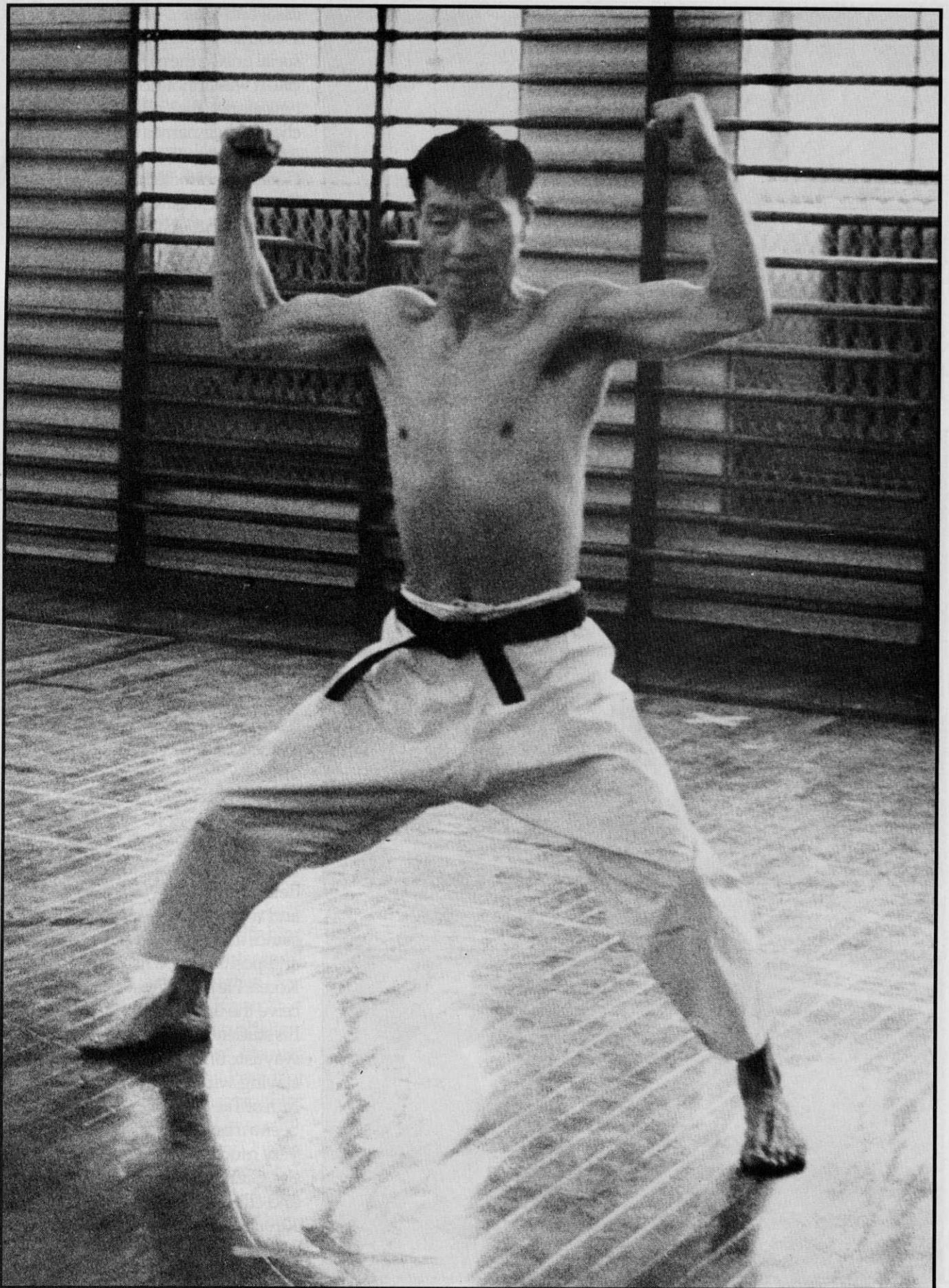
be seen seated, second from the left, along with General Choi Hong Hi (third from the left), General Hyung Keun Lee, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (seated fourth from left), Mr. Hyung Ku Cho, Vice Speaker of the National Assembly of Korea (seated fifth from left), the President of the Korean newspaper, and other important dignitaries. It was decided to give their martial art a Korean name. Son said they accepted the name Tae Kwon Do because it closely resembled the name for the ancient Korean arts, Tae Kwon, and it expressed the use of the hand and the foot.

President Syngman Rhee liked the

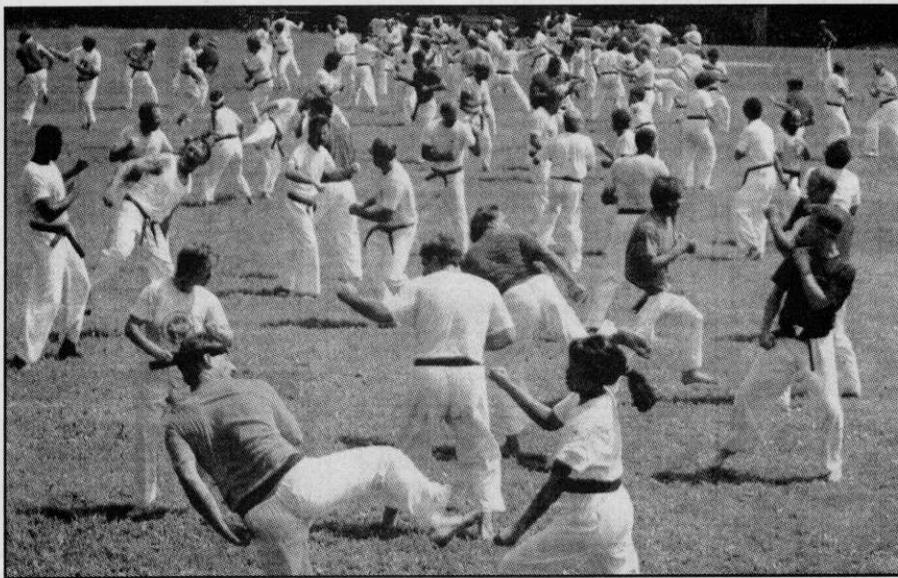


Grandmaster Son displays his Medal of Honor from former Korean President Pak Chung Hee, in 1975.

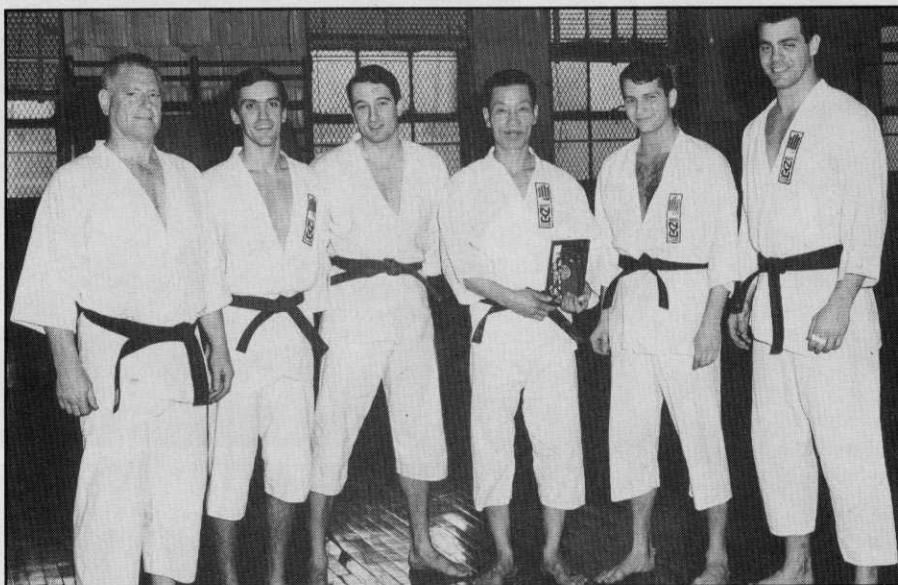
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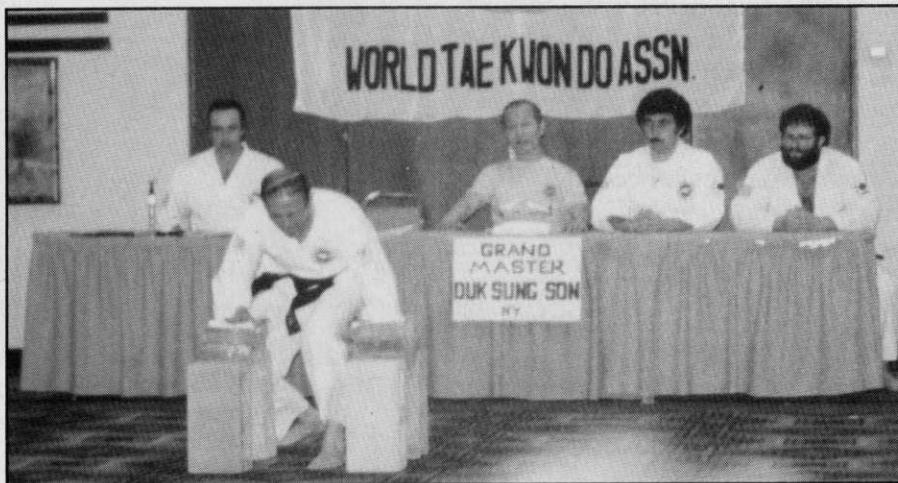
Grandmaster Duk Sung Son, in 1965.



A sea of black belts work out at a summer camp for black belts only. 110 people from as far away as Australia took part in this World Tae Kwon Do Association event.



Grandmaster Son is pictured with several of his top students, including the co-author of his two books, Robert J. Clark.



Master Kim, an 8th degree black belt, demonstrates a spectacular double palm break with three adobe bricks on each side.

idea, and after a short delay, due to incidents with serious potential to cause social unrest, the name was made official. It was announced in the national newspaper that all schools were to change their names to Tae Kwon Do.

Korea has since greatly benefited. General Choi took charge of Tae Kwon Do in Korea. Grandmaster Son disagreed with the changes and direction of Choi's Tae Kwon Do, and after taking a strong public stand, Son went his own way. He continued his original path, teaching for the military and other needed places, to help his country and Tae Kwon Do.

Over his career, Grandmaster Duk Sung Son has taught thousands of students. Among the many leading roles he played in spreading Tae Kwon Do, he was chief instructor at Hongik College in Seoul in 1954, chief instructor for the Korean Military Academy, 1955, and the U.S. 8th army division in 1956. Dr. Maung Gyi, chief instructor of the American Bando Association, studied with Grandmaster Son during his military service. He recalled remarks Son made to his students: "I'm the bridge, you're the stream!" referring to them as flowing onward to their own development and destiny.

Gyi had these things to say about Grandmaster Son: "Son Duk Sung was not interested in political gains. He tried to maintain a level of political detachment. He was a disciplinarian and a precisionist, instilling classical stance and method with exact punch and positioning when I knew him in Korea. He had a great capacity to perceive the unique individual talents in his students, and to instruct in such a way as to bring out those talents, while staying within the standard curriculum of Tae Kwon Do. Son has always been a man of honor, and I respect him very much."

Grandmaster Son was president and editor of a weekly magazine, *Tae Kwon Do*, in 1956 and received a trophy from the President of Korea in 1959, as well as being Chief instructor at the Civil Service Academy in Korea.

He was sent, in 1962, as the Korean representative to the Korean-Japan Karate Conference in Taipei. He was also Chief Instructor of the Civil Service Academy for the Korean government.

During the turbulent post-war years in Korea, as has happened throughout history, there were unfortunate political intrigues. As Grandmaster Son put it simply, some important figures might be said to have been "bad boys." Grandmaster Son remained true to his traditional values and his deep commitment to teach the original Chun Do Kwan Tae Kwon Do. He recognized the interest in Tae Kwon Do and chose the freedom of our country to evolve in the United States. In 1963 Grandmaster Son immigrated to teach Tae Kwon Do to Americans.

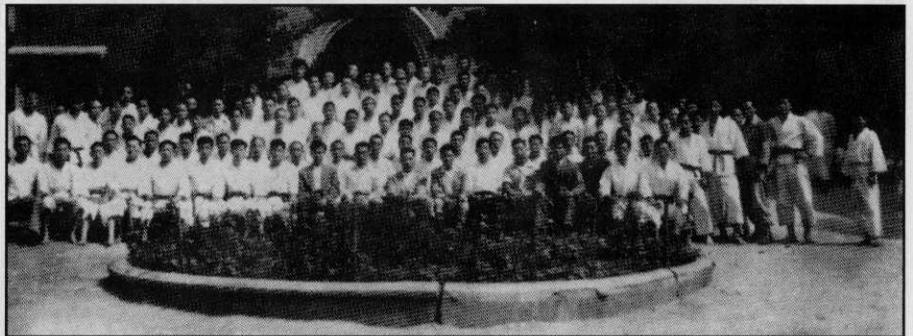
He has always made it clear that he is proud to be an American along with his Korean heritage. The beginning of black belt testing is always heralded by a vocalist singing the Korean National Anthem immediately followed by the American National Anthem, with all solemnly at attention, hand over hearts. Both the American Flag and the Korean Flag hang in his dojangs, and are worn on the shoulders of World Tae Kwon Do Association uniforms. Grandmaster Son has continued teaching his traditional forms and his traditional ways.

Master Kim, director of Tuscon, Arizona, World Tae Kwon Do Association, recalled his training with him: "Grandmaster Son's workouts are exactly the same as they were when I first learned from him back in Korea."

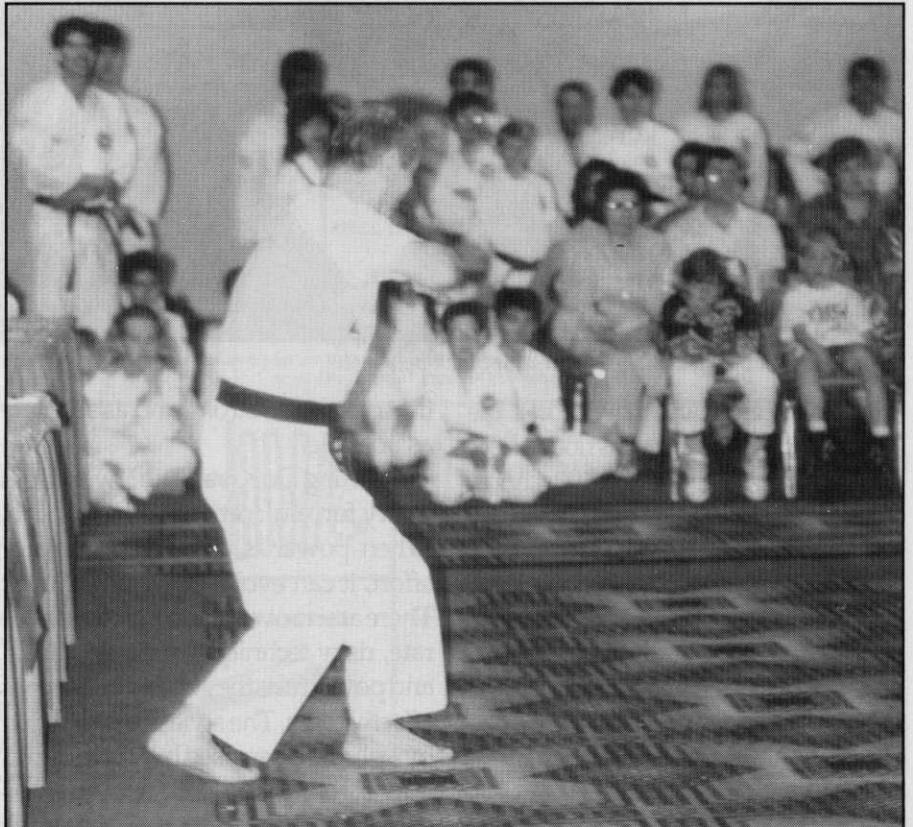
Son formed his own association, centered in New York City. He was given a medal of honor by President Park of Korea in 1965. He has taught at such schools as New York University, West Point, Princeton, Brown University, Providence College, Stony Brook State University, IBM of Poughkeepsie, and the list continues on. He has been given keys to many U. S. cities and presented with the rank of Admiral by the Navy.



The first conference of the National Board of Advisers for Chung Do Kwan, December 19, 1955. Tae Kwon Do, the official name of the Korean martial art, was created on this occasion. Seated from left to right, second, Grandmaster Son, third, General Choi Hon Hi, Fourth, General Hyung Keun Lee, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, fifth, Mr. Kyung Ky Cho, Vice Speaker of the National Assembly of Korea, the President of the Korean newspaper and other important Korean dignitaries.



After a promotion test in 1957 at the Headquarters of Chung Do Kwan in Seoul, Korea.



Grandmaster Son demonstrates the correct move.



Grandmaster Son leads the count at a black belt test.

Son's organization, the World Tae Kwon Do Association, has flourished, and currently includes over 400 schools from coast to coast. He has retained the linguistic character of Korean culture, but conducts all classes in English, except for "Junbi" and "command, cho," to mark the beginning and end of a set of movements. True to the values of his Chung Do Kwan Tae Kwon Do he expresses it in brief, short, direct, but powerful phrases: "Always best!" Always try hard, always put forth your own best effort, whatever

that may be, as strong and as accurate as possible.

Chung Do Kwan Tae Kwon Do is a very forceful form of Tae Kwon Do. When power is attempted in every effort, it can evolve to a higher level. There are no overt soft blocks or elaborate, risky techniques. Simple, direct, and powerful is the general criterion of effectiveness. The style is exemplified by a phrase often used by Son to depict how a Tae Kwon Doist should overcome any adversary in a self-defense situation, "One kick or punch, finish!"

Conclusion

Tae Kwon Do springs from diverse roots, having survived turbulent times and difficult beginnings. The kwans and their pioneering masters worked to pull the country together by revitalizing and unifying its martial arts resources, suppressed for so long, triumphant at last. The rush for enforced unity, change, and standardization.

He had a great capacity to perceive the unique individual talents in his students, and to instruct in such a way as to bring out those talents, while staying within the standard curriculum of Tae Kwon Do.

Though it had advantages during the period of post-war crisis, it led to some of the individual talents not being given the recognition they should have had. The pioneering masters, such as Grandmaster Duk Sung Son, are owed a great debt. Some of them continued in their original traditions, and perpetuate them in modern times, while others helped to forge the new directions. But all have contributed to make Tae Kwon Do the great world martial art which thrives today. ■

About the authors: Drs. Alex and Annellen Simpkins are practicing psychologists and martial arts instructors.