

A Tribute to Grandmaster Tran Trieu Quan

A Gifted Taekwon-Do Leader

By George Vitale & Stuart Anslow



On January 12, 2010 a devastating 7.0 earthquake hit the city centre of Haiti's capital Port-au-Prince. Rarely does a natural disaster hit a congested urban location so directly. Its impact to what is the western hemisphere's poorest nation left over 200,000 dead and upwards of a million people homeless. Its true toll has yet to be accurately measured. The Taekwon-Do world waited anxiously for word on one of its leaders, as Grandmaster Tran Trieu Quan was there ironically as an engineer to help advise and teach local officials about improving their building code standards.

Sadly on February 13, 2010 it was reported

that the remains of Grandmaster Tran had been

recovered from the rubble of the Hotel Montana and identified. His body was sent back to his adopted homeland of Canada on February 14, new years on the Lunar calendar and Valentine's day. This sad news broke many hearts around the world which prayed for a month for his safe return. I was one of the countless numbers of people around the world that have felt the deep loss of this man as a result of our friendship that goes back to the mid 1980s.

Our common association was the result of a shared love of the Korean Martial Art of Self Defense, called Taekwon-Do. Even though one may never have met Grandmaster Tran, it is evident how his life and now his loss has affected so many who may have only trained under him a single time, or just read of his teachings. This point is made clear by just reading some of the thoughts written on condolence pages worldwide over the internet.

While I am not a trained writer, Mr. Stuart Anslow and I felt we should tell the



*GM Tran with Masters Vitale, DeICid, Barkley & the Gallucio Twins.
Mid 1980s, Mississauga, Canada (Hometown of General Choi)*

readership of Totally TKD a little bit about a Taekwon-Do man that was taken from us all too soon. Grandmaster Tran was born in Hanoi Vietnam in 1952. Two years later when Vietnam was divided into two, his family, along with others started their escape from communist rule. In December of 1962, The Republic of (south) Korea started to dispatch Taekwon-Do instructors to South Vietnam to train Vietnamese soldiers in this Korean Martial Art of Self Defense that was developed in the ROK Army by Major-General Choi Hong Hi and soldiers under his command. The initial detail of instructors was led by Col. Nam Tae Hi, Gen. Choi's right hand man at the time. For his efforts, Col. Nam is considered the Father of Taekwon-Do in Vietnam.

Vietnam was one of the first countries outside of Korea to train in Taekwon-Do, becoming in 1966 a founding member nation of the International Taekwon-Do Federation. One of Vietnam's earliest students and most senior member of Taekwon-Do was a then 12 year old Tran Trieu Quan who started to train within 2 years of Taekwon-Do's launch in Vietnam. It took him about 5 years to earn his black belt. He led a high school class on Taekwon-Do when he was 17 years of age, starting his long career as a Taekwon-Do leader.

Since 1970 Mr. Tran was fortunate to have lived in Canada where he attended a university in Quebec to further his education.



Grandmaster Tran & General Choi



After graduating he obtained a job, started a family and eventually earned Canadian citizenship. Sadly such fortunate did not touch other members of the Tran family. His oldest brother was killed by bombs during the war. Then after the war ended his parents and 4 of his siblings, in an attempt to escape the control of the communists, vanished at sea when their boat was lost, never to be heard from again.

Living in Quebec, Grandmaster Tran opened one of the early Taekwon-Do schools in that area. During this time he developed a strong relationship with Gen. Choi who exiled himself to Canada in 1972. Dr. Janel Gauthier an ITF black belt member and friend, was quoted saying that Gen. Choi joked that Mr. Tran was like his adoptive son. Over the years Grandmaster Tran held such important posts in the ITF such as president of the Canadian National Governing Body as well as the Pan American Continental Body for the ITF. Additionally he served as the Chairman of their Tournament Committee.

In Montreal in 1990 and Quebec City in 2007 Grandmaster Tran hosted ITF World Championships. The City of Montreal gave

him an award for “Best Event of the Year” for his efforts in organizing the 7th World Championships in August of 1990. December of 2008 saw Mr. Tran attaining the highest rank in Taekwon-Do, IX Dan black belt and the title that is reserved for the holders of the terminal degree, Grandmaster.



Mission in Vietnam with General Choi, 1990

Perhaps maybe his greatest contribution was his focus on teaching the Do of Taekwon-Do. This was an aspect of Taekwon-Do that Gen. Choi readily admitted he simply did not focus enough attention on. Gen. Choi towards the end of his life, asked the next generation of his Taekwon-Do leaders and seniors to take up this cause. Grandmaster Tran should be saluted for his efforts in this area. Hopefully other senior leaders of Taekwon-Do will continue the work Grandmaster Tran did in this all important area.



Grandmaster Tran Teaching The ‘Do’

Grandmaster Tran was more than a Taekwon-Do man. While I am not qualified to speak to these areas with the attention and detail they required, we will simply list some of his other many accomplishments. The Museum of Civilization in Quebec City proclaimed Mr. Tran as one of the “Productive Citizens”. A

regional professional engineers association in Quebec named him “Personality of the Year” in 1997. For 2006-2007, the local Chamber of Commerce, the Ministry of Immigration of the Province of Quebec, and the City of Quebec proclaimed Grand Master Tran an “Immigrant of the World”.

One of Grandmaster Tran’s greatest personal challenges in life came in the 1990s when a commercial dispute where a supplier that he brokered a deal with never delivered the goods. This resulted in him being arrested in his native Vietnam. The undemocratic government there gave him a one day trial, convicted him and sent him to prison for life. Having to deal with the very harsh realities in a penal system not know for protecting human rights was very trying. Grandmaster Tran’s strong composition, aided by his life long study of original Taekwon-Do helped him to persevere, until outside pressure spurred by the collection of petitions totalling 125,000 signatures resulted in his release.

Mr. Tran was held for three years of suffering under conditions no human being

should ever face. His release was obtained a couple of months before Vietnam was to host a major international event that rotates among French speaking nations. The Taekwon-Do world hoped that his internal fortitude would once again serve him well, under such devastating conditions in Haiti. Tragically that was not the case in 2010.

The Tran Family was honored with the title "Family of the Year" for 1997. Grandmaster Tran is survived by his wife My Nguyen, his children, all black belts, Joliette (6th degree), Cecilia and Nicolas (4th degree). May they be comforted in knowing that he is now at peace and has made the



GM Tran throwing a student at a seminar, teaching an all to often neglected part of Taekwon-Do

world a better place today with all that he shared with so many people over the years that we were lucky to have him. May we be inspired by his work and strive to continue it, for it is the way we "build a more peaceful world".

The information gathered for this article was compiled from several sources. Among them were personal communications the writers have had with GM Tran, stories shared with us by others, articles appearing on line in the Globe and Mail, Agence France-Presse and the ITF website. Photographs courtesy of George Vitale, Phillip Hawkins & those previously supplied by Grandmaster Tran for his own articles.

In memory of Grandmaster Tran, we will continue to run the articles he authorised us to run and when exhausted, will contact the ITF in the hope that they will fulfil his wishes and offer further articles by this fantastic Grandmaster.

