

Nam, Tae Hi

The Silent Founder Of Tae Kwon Do

By Lyndsey Reynolds

The book 'A killing Art' introduced me to the real story of Nam Tae-Hi. Many TKD'ists around the globe will be fairly familiar with the majority of Grandmaster Nam's contributions to TKD - however it is the story of his time in the Korean war which really drew my attention to him and the fact that to this day- he is the living personification of the Tenets of TKD. GM Nam started his martial arts training in 1946- at the age of 17. Before meeting General Choi GM Nam trained in Shamokin Karate- and reached 1st Degree in this art.



In the 1940's, Nam's Training schedule was arduous to say the least. He would train weekdays from the early afternoon through to midnight sometimes while studying. The developing of his career however was interrupted by the breaking of Korean War. (June 27, 1950 to January 31, 1955) Nam was essentially stranded by his Division. Nam was a leader of a battalion which became completely surrounded by North Korean and Chinese communists. Despite the fact that Nam's regiment was hugely outnumbered, Nam's commander was furious. As a punishment for Nam's alleged 'failure'- his battalion was sent to A no-man's land outpost near Seoul on the top of Yongmun Mountain. This was 10km closer to the enemy and hugely dangerous for Nam's regiment. Nam had a genuine fear that they were all going to be wiped out!

Never the less Nam realised that all attempts must be made to maximise the chances of survival no matter how bleak the odds. He ordered the 31 soldiers in his regiment to dig trenches and forge outposts. After the second day of exile, Nam's Battalion heard the Chinese Army ripping through neighbouring friendly outposts, destroying the majority of them with stunning ease. Nam's unit retreated into

the trenches and waited, hiding in the darkness. Nam used the darkness and the shadows to his advantage, his unit was short on ammo and weapons and knew the enemy wouldn't fire in the darkness for fear of friendly fire. Nam fought the way he had trained, identifying enemies by fumbling for their heads. Chinese soldiers had crew cuts and South Korean soldiers had longer hair. So Nam fumbled and struck in bursts when he needed to all through the night. After the first night the enemy retreated to gun range, and returned to Nam's trenches at night. Nam maintained the same strategy, fumble check hair length, and attack with all his might, ignoring his own pain and the lethargy setting in. The enemy attacks ceased after the third night. The following morning allowed Nam to eat, he had missed food & sleep for three days and most of his battalion were dead. During this time, the Americans arrived to support the South Korean regiments and despite the fact they were still outnumbered, they managed to resist the Communists.

After sometime, Nam had a chance to eventually rest. He walked to where he fought the previous three nights. He hadn't seen it in daylight. What he came across was a pile of bodies- bodies with no Gun or Bayonet wounds. These bodies were the ones Nam had dispatched of empty handed with his previous training. At this stage the South Koreans counter-attacked, sensing that the communists had been weakened and managed to drive them away from Yongman mountain. This became a noted battle in Korea's history and word began to spread about Nam's exploits, the Korean Karate expert that had killed piles of communists with his bare hands.

Of course, the details of Nam's exploits flew into General Choi Hong Hi's ears, right at the time when the general needed an instructor to help develop instruct and define his new art, Tae Kwon-Do. General Choi- hungry to spread and popularise his martial art to the world sought Nam out in 1952.

In 1953- Nam was summoned by General Choi to teach what was then called Tang Soo Do in a completely new division called the 29th Infantry Division. This Division on Chenji Island was the birth place of Tae Kwon Do as we are familiar with it today. From here General Choi would devise the patterns, ask Nam to perform the movements and alter the movements if needed. Nam himself created the patterns Hwa-Rang, Choong-Moo and Ui-Ji., General Choi was in charge of 100,000 men on this island and ordered regimental commanders to send soldiers to train there 8 hours a day under 'Captain Nam'. On

Chenju Island, GM Nam personally trained many of today's pioneers, people such as Han Cha-Kyo, C.K Choi and Jhoon Rhee (Pioneer of TKD in USA). The 29th Infantry division then went on to train thousands of Korean Soldiers.

General Choi's wish was for Tae Kwon Do to become a worldwide martial art- however firstly he had to prove its effectiveness to the rest his own country first! He organised a military Demonstration in front of South Korean President Sing Man Rhee with Nam as the star of the show. The demonstration included patterns, self defence techniques, sparring, bayonet defence techniques and now the infamous breaking – where Nam as a Second degree black belt broke 13 roof tiles with a downward punch.



Grandmaster Nam, Tae Hi, with General Choi and Grandmaster Kang, Yon Ho

President Rhee was so impressed by this he stood after the demonstration and

asked for it to continue. Nam and Han Cha-Kyo had to improvise and fill the time with defences against multiple attackers, and a new pattern never before shown to the public (Hwa-Rang).

The demonstration was a huge success, which Nam had made happen for General Choi- and was a seminal moment- President Rhee wanted this 'new', revolutionary martial art to be taught to more of Korea's soldiers. Martial Arts was now added to the standard training schedule of a Korean Soldier. This demonstration also resulted in the creation of a new Military Gym headed by General Choi called the Oh Do Kwan (Gym of My/



Our Way) where Nam would instruct 300 soldiers at a time!- The Oh Do Kwan was also used to train South Korean Police officers. The first documented patterns to be unique to Oh Do Kwan are called Chang Hun and were designed by General Choi, Nam Tae Hi and Han Cha Kyo and originally practiced at the Oh Do Kwan.

In 1959, GM Nam became the first pioneers of TKD in Vietnam, after heading up a demonstration there he was the head instructor of the Vietnamese. In 1962 his instruction lead to him being known as 'The Father of TKD in Vietnam'. 1965 saw Nam going to Malaysia as a member of the Korean Diplomatic Corps. Here, he became chief Tae Kwon-Do instructor. He was elected as President of the Asia Tae Kwon - Do Federation . When the ITF was first inaugurated, Choi made him Vice President of the ITF. GM Nam eventually left the ITF after General Choi passed away as he felt



that any of the groups that called themselves ITF didn't really have the interests of its members in mind.

In 1973, GM Nam moved to Los Angeles to open a civilian school and taught TKD until he retired

As an instructor GM Nam travelled to more than 120 gymnasiums all over the world, he introduced new techniques, and theories and was essentially General Choi's right hand man. Whatever hopes and dreams General Choi Hong Hi had for Tae

Kwon Do, its development and the spreading of it around the world, GM Nam was instrumental in turning them into a reality. He is a living piece of history and a true 'student'- never asking for any credit for the vital work he did for Tae kwon Do, instead lives quietly in Los Angeles with his wife. In my mind, Tae kwon Do would not exist without him!