

Master Rhee



The following interview is with Master Rhee Ki Ha 8th Degree Vice President International Taekwon-Do Federation (I.T.F), Founder United Kingdom Taekwon-Do Association (U.K.T.A), Republic of Ireland Taekwon-Do Association (R.I.T.A) and All Europe Taekwon-Do Federation (A.E.T.F). Master Rhee is one of the original pioneering Masters of Taekwon-Do, renowned for his powerful techniques and all round Taekwon-Do abilities, he is also the father of Taekwon-Do in the U.K.

Ki Ha 8th Degree

TKMA: Could you start by telling us about your introduction to the Martial Arts?

R.K.H: My father was involved with Judo, he used to compete. He started to teach me Judo when I showed a serious interest I was 7-8 years old at the time. Practicing Judo gave me confidence. I was built for Judo, as a child at school my nickname was Tdun Tdun Bo meaning Double body.

TKMA: How did you progress to Taekwon-Do from Judo?

R.K.H: I saw one of my school teachers having to defend himself outside of school one evening, his movements were very different to Judo, more striking than grappling. I was so impressed with what I had seen that afterwards I asked what it was he was doing, he explained that he had studied at university in Japan and had learned Karate.

TKMA: Did you start to study Taekwon-Do at this time?

The Early Years.

TKMA KOREAN MARTIAL ARTS October 1996 Page 9

R.K.H: No, there was no Taekwon-Do around then. At this time, there were many names for Martial Arts like Tang soo, Taek Kyon, Kwon-bop etc. , however it was at this time I started to train my body, building up doing lots of toughening exercises. I also noticed that the people who studied striking arts, their bodies were very slim, unlike my own

Eventually I was required to do my military service. I was asked what I wished to do in the military. I said I would like to do Taekwon-Do, but they were not sure of me, because of my educational background the military felt I was cut out for something specialised, something like the Signals Corp. the British have, anyway they sent me away to think about it, but, I returned still wanting to do Taekwon-Do.

TKMA: Had you heard of General Choi at this time?

R.K.H: Of course I had heard about him, he had an incredible reputation in the military.

TKMA: Who were your 1st Instructors in the Military?

R.K.H: My 1st Instructors in the army were Captain Chang and Sargent Kim (Master Kim Bok Man) I was then in the 35th Infantry division. I eventually became

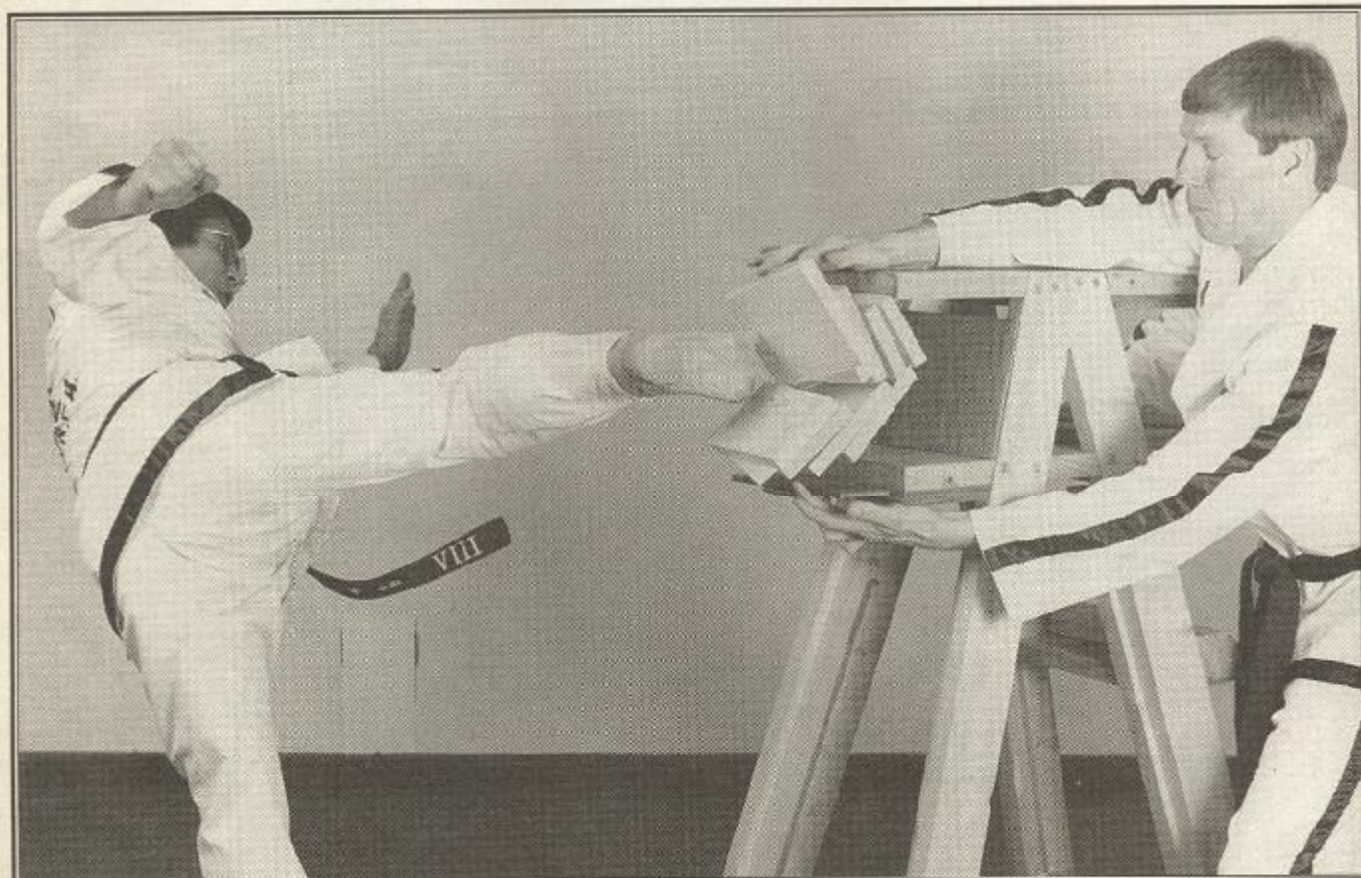
the instructor to the American forces at the 8th Army 1. Corp. Camp William, at this time I was a 2nd Degree. Later at the recommendation of Master Kim and Master Woo Jae Lim I went to Singapore as more Instructors were needed.

TKMA: In what year did you leave Korea?

R.K.H: In 1964 I went to Singapore, Masters C. K. Choi, Park Jong Soo, Han Cha Kyo, and others were leaving Korea to teach overseas, mainly Malaysia and Singapore, General Choi was the Korean Ambassador to Malaysia (1st ever Ambassador), I was the 1st person to leave Korea with Taekwon-Do Instructor printed on my passport. Making me the first ever official T.K.D Instructor to leave Korea

TKMA: Did you know General Choi and the other Masters before you left Korea?

R.K.H: Yes, as General Choi was commander of Taekwon-Do Training school which he had established in military in Korea. I met and trained with him along with many other Masters, including the one's mentioned before, also Masters Nam Tae Hi and Lee Byong Moo who eventually replaced me when I left Singapore in 1967. In fact I sent Master Lee Byong Moo his air ticket to come to Singapore from Korea.



Page 10 TKD & KOREAN MARTIAL ARTS October 1996



TKMA: When did you start to teach the R.A.F. in Singapore?

R.K.H: While I was teaching in Singapore some R.A.F. personnel started to train with me. This was about 1965 at R.A.F. Changi (military station) although there was a big gymnasium, we used to train outside due to the weather. Also about this time the air Vice Marshall was organising many displays for the Red Cross charity, I was invited to demonstrate TaeKwon-Do. A B.B.C crew arrived for a program on what British servicemen were doing in Singapore. They requested I do a demo for the camera's. I spent all day doing demos, the floor became very wet due to my sweating in fact I still have injury marks from that day, for all of that effort, I think less than 5 minutes were shown on B.B.C. T.V

TKMA: When and why did you leave Singapore?

R.K.H: R.A.F. personnel were rotated between Britain and Singapore. Many would write letters saying how much they missed the training as no Taekwon-Do in Britain, although there were a few who'd trained to black belt teaching. There was Mr Chang who I'd promoted to 2nd Degree in Kuala Lumpa before he left to study in Britain, he taught Taekwon-Do to supplement

his income. There was another Korean Lee Tae Hi who was studying at Oxford University, I believe he moved to the U.S. and became a Lawyer, Eventually some of my old students suggested I come to Britain. They sent me an invitation letter, so in 1967 I came to the U.K. but I didn't envisage settling down permanent, I was only going to stay for maybe 2 years and then perhaps go to U. S or Canada like lots of other Masters.

TKMA: Where did you settle?

R.K.H: I settled in Coventry. I travelled all over the U.K. teaching and demonstrating Taekwon-Do but it took its toll on my body as I slipped a disc in my back. In 1968 I was lying in Coventry General Hospital when I received a letter from General Choi asking me to go to Paris for Military demo (C.I. S.M.) as for financial reasons Korea could not send demo team so Instructors from Europe were asked to go like myself Kwon Jae Hwa (Germany) Sung Jae Park (Italy) and Lee Kwong Myung, Lee Yoo Sun and Lim Kwang Il, so I had no other choice, I discharged myself from hospital and went to the demo (and off the record I've lived on pain killers ever since).

TKMA: Who were your 1st students in this country?



Page 12 TKD & KOREAN MARTIAL ARTS October 1996

R.K.H: Many were old students from Chongi. I taught at many R.A.F. bases a few for example where St. Athen in Wales, St. Morgan - Cornwall, Kinlos - Scotland Mildenhall - East Anglia and Gaydon in Warwickshire, that should give some idea of the distance I used to travel on a regular basis and remember there were not the motor ways like now. I believe a lot of the R.A.F. camps have now shut down. However, the first person I promoted to Black Belt in this country was Flight Lieutenant Richard Harding he had started training in Singapore. The first person to start training with me in U.K. to reach black belt was Bob Howe and Murry Walker.

TKMA: Was Taekwon-Do spreading rapidly at this time?

R.K.H: Yes it was. Then in 1973 I heard that a building belonging to the Royal British Legion in Glasgow had become available as they were moving to new premises so I moved to Glasgow where I opened The Academy and started teaching, also at about that time I was selected along with Masters C.K.Choi, Park Jong Soo and Kong Young I11 by General Choi to go on a world tour to further promote Taekwon-Do.

TKMA: Do you think you were at your peak at this time? Would you say that yourself and the other Masters picked, were the best at this time?

R.K.H: Each member of the demo team was in fact was a One Man Demonstration team. We had all gone to our respective countries alone, to introduce Taekwon-Do. Being a team was quite good, as we all could perform all aspects of Taekwon-Do so if one got injured another could replace him. I went to all 23 countries in Europe, Middle East, Asia and Africa, the other Masters joined us at different times and places.

TKMA: Do you have any specific memories?

R.K.H: Yes, I remember many, most of them have left a scar some where on my body, but I especially remember the demonstration in Egypt. After we'd given a successful demonstration to the military, one of the ministers organising it, asked General Choi if we could give another demo in his home town where he was born so General Choi said yes. When we arrived he apologised because there was no big gymnasium to demonstrate in, so we used the local football ground. We started to perform in front of the Royal box but the people on the other side of the ground couldn't see so we ended up doing 4 demonstrations one in

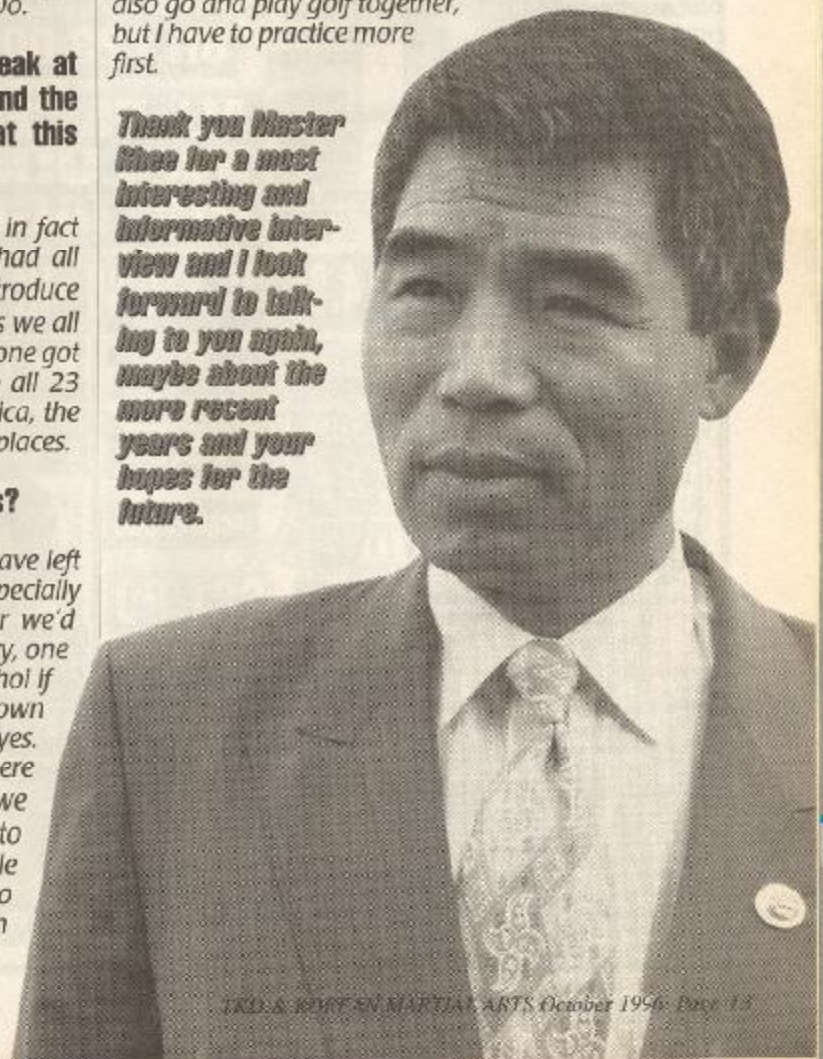
each corner of the stadium so that everyone could see. At the end of the demo everyone ran onto the pitch wanting to look at our hands and feet to see how we'd broken all the bricks and wood. The organisers panicked and called in the Military troops to protect us, (because of the situation in the middle east at that time there was a heavy military presence at the stadium) We had to jump onto a truck to get out as they were all grabbing at our hands and feet, I was a bit silly and stuck my hand out to wave some one grabbed it and nearly broke my arm. The military made sure we got out in one piece.

In 1975 we did the Masters demonstration in Kelvin Hall. Again with many World Masters this brings back some very fond memories.

TKMA: Do you still see many of the older Masters?

R.K.H: Yes, some of them. I hope next year (30 Years of Taekwon-Do in U.K.) some will come and help celebrate especially those on the 1974 demo team and the 1975 demo team from Kelvin Hall, as they are all pioneering Masters. Perhaps we could also go and play golf together, but I have to practice more first.

Thank you Master Hwa for a most interesting and informative interview and I look forward to talking to you again, maybe about the more recent years and your hopes for the future.



TKMA: ROYAL MARTIAL ARTS October 1996: Page 13