

A Stubborn Technique Thief from Muskegon

by W.K. Ammon

At first glance Ernie Lieb doesn't look too impressive. If you see him on the street you might not look twice. He's a bald-headed little guy with a moustache and a grin. But if you're around him for about 10 seconds something hits you, something about the way he walks or the gleam in his eyes. You can feel his energy clear across the room when he talks.

That energy intensifies when he puts on his karate uniform. Usually he wears

a plain black belt, but at tournaments you might catch him with a red and white one, maybe. He doesn't really like to attract attention. And he's not heavy on the formality.

Lieb likes to know his students by name. He greets beginners personally: "Hi, haven't seen you before. My name's Ernie." He's a friendly guy. But don't cross him.

Ernie Lieb is, by nature, a strong-willed, competitive person, "a stubborn,

thick-headed kraut," in his words. He's been a fighter all his life, sometimes just to survive. Nowadays he likes to limit his fighting to an occasional free-sparing match—"I'm gettin' older, you know."—but if you press him, on the street, in the correctional facility where he works, or at a tournament where he's chief referee, he just might explode.

"If you treat me with courtesy and respect, I'll be your best friend. I'll never degrade you. If you hurt me, after I've come to you in friendship, I'll destroy you as best I can. I have no bad feelings, no animosity. It's just that I'll show you that that is not the way. People respect that somehow."

People respect Ernie Lieb. They might not like him—he's got some strong opinions (about karate and other things), and he'll tell you exactly what he thinks—"I'm outspoken, that's my biggest problem."—but they respect him. He can back up what he says.

In 1963, Lieb became the first American to win the Korean Tao Soo Do Nationals. For eight years after that he never lost a tournament he entered. (He was disqualified three times for excessive contact.) He founded the American Karate Association in 1964, and today he's the AKA's chief instructor. He founded the American Karate System (originally American Chi Do Kwan) in 1965, and has been its president and chief instructor ever since. In 1973, he was named *Black Belt Man of the Year* and was installed in the *Black Belt Hall of Fame*. His achievements in karate could fill pages, but you don't hear much about him these days. He's been one of the prime movers in making American karate, both as an art and a sport, what it is today, but not too many people below fourth dan know anything about him. They should.

Last April, at the AKA National Convention in Chicago, Lieb was promoted to seventh dan. He tested for his rank—

