

physically tested—for three hours in front of a board of masters. That's unheard of; nobody tests for seventh dan, but it's not surprising if you know Ernie Lieb. The testing was a challenge to him, a chance to compete and win. Competition and winning, that's the story of his life.

But Lieb didn't start out as a winner. He came to the United States in 1952, an undersized, malnourished immigrant from Germany. At age 12, he weighed only 67 pounds. Lieb learned about life on the streets of Chicago the hard way. He still carries the scars from a knife fight he had at 13, (he didn't have a knife). Ernie became a tough kid, then a punk, running with street gangs in Chicago and later in Muskegon, Michigan.

"I got tired of being pushed around, you know. I was always willin' to fight, even though I'd get whipped. I didn't mind fightin'. I'd always come back; I never gave up. And if I couldn't beat you fair and square, I'd hit you with a two-by-four.

"That's how I was as a teenager. I was in a lot of trouble. I was kicked out of school consistently. There was no future for me, other than maybe prison."

In 1956, Lieb discovered the martial arts. He started with judo: "An excellent sport," but for him there wasn't enough aggressiveness in there. There wasn't enough violence.

"I wanted to fight big guys and beat them. In judo I couldn't do that 'cause the weight factor was so much different. You couldn't fight in the heavyweight class, you had to fight in your own class."

Lieb's first experience with karate

came that same year when a Marine instructor started classes in Okinawan shorin ryu in Muskegon. He tried it and liked it.

"I got into karate and I saw for the first time in my life something that would not only teach me to respect myself but respect others. I could get rid of all those anxieties and frustrations. I could get rid of my anger, which I had a lot of, in a safe way. For the first time I found something worthwhile.

"My grades improved, I got into less fights, I didn't get kicked out of school anymore. Instead of stealing hubcaps and breaking into cars, instead of running with a gang, I worked.

"In karate they had light and heavy-weight divisions, and I could fight both. I could win my lightweight division and take on the biggest guy they had. It was fantastic! Sometimes I lost, but in my weight division I never lost."

Lieb joined the Air Force after graduating from high school. He was sent to Korea and continued to study (chi do kwan) karate there under the late Chun Il Sup, better known as Mr. Kim.

Kim's students had won the tae soo do (now tae kwon do) national championships five times. Lieb was attracted by that success in competition, earning his black belt from Kim in 1963, the same year he won the Tae Soo Do Nationals. In 1964, he returned to the United States, a dedicated chi do kwan stylist.

"I really thought when I came home I'd be Korean style forever. I thought I'd never change, never switch—until I went in my first tournament. I was get-

tin' beat half to death till all of a sudden I did something unorthodox and scored a point."

That unorthodox move was the beginning of a change for Ernie Lieb and for karate in the United States. Lieb was dedicated to chi do kwan and to Kim, but he was also dedicated to winning. If he couldn't win with orthodox chi do kwan techniques, he'd find something he could win with. He began to search for and find that something, and called it "American karate."

"In Korea, my teacher, Mr. Kim, was one of the few who were open-minded. He told me to find my own way when I left Korea and went to the U.S.A., as long as I would continue my loyalty to him—which I did; and I always will. But when I came back home, I found that in the United States there was too much prejudice and difference, as far as philosophy and instructors' approaches to karate and their terminology, their techniques. No one wanted to work together.

"I came home and within two months I organized the AKA. I travelled all over the Midwest tryin' to find out why Americans couldn't get along with

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each other. And they couldn't! The problem was that the majority of them had so much hatred built up toward each other's styles—not as Americans go, but their senseis had taught them that—"American karate? No such thing."

"That's how I was when I came from Korea. You know, 'Korean is the best.' Then I ran into Tadashi Yamashita, and he blasted me. All of a sudden I found out that Okinawan isn't bad. It's the person who makes the style.

"In 1964, when I said 'American karate' the first thing I got was threatened, by other black belts—fellow Americans—who said there is no such thing as American karate. So I organized the American Karate Association. We had our first tournament and it drew 200-odd competitors—236, I think—

Ernie Lieb, (in white), is admittedly a strong-willed, competitive person by nature. Nowadays he limits his fighting to an occasional free-sparring match. "I'm gettin' older," he will tell you. Those who may press him, however, have found he just might explode.

