



When Lieb came to the U.S. in 1952, he was a malnourished immigrant from Germany. Now, he is an American citizen and proud of it, believing it the very best place to be.

which was large for a first tournament in the old days. People said, 'We're tired of being judged unfairly because of our style.' The AKA grew tremendously because everybody was tired of prejudice, unfair judging and discrimination, not because of race, but because of style and the patch you wore.

"Many Oriental instructors, because of commercialism, have had to advertise as being higher rank than what really is allowed. They themselves might have been very dedicated, but they advertised as being eighth dans, ninth dans and tenth dans, and their age wouldn't allow them to be that high a rank. Originally, there was no such thing as a ninth or tenth dan. That's fake rank. That's a rank that was given after a man died as a way to honor him—his memory, his ability, his accomplishments—and it was originally started when Professor Kano died. He developed judo in Japan. The man was a great man in his art. Tremendous.

"I can respect Orientals. If they're sincere and dedicated, I have the highest regard for them, but if they're frauds and phonies, I spit on them. I don't want to have anything to do with them. I don't even want them to come near me because of the simple reason that my teacher, Mr. Kim, was very honest and sincere, and they are degrading his memory, and also Yamashita, who is a dedicated instructor.

"That goes for native American in-

structors, too; those who put on this phony belt of eighth, ninth or tenth dan when they are not the head of an organization, which only an eighth dan can have. Ninth dan—they should be dead. They are holding the rank that should be given only to those who have passed away. Commercialism has done that more than anything else, I think."

Lieb isn't trying to slam commercial schools. He teaches at Muskegon Community College and his courses are part of the school's physical education program, but he's quick to point out that commercial schools can be worthwhile.

"I had a commercial school at one time, and I found that commercial schools, if they are honest and sincere and give the man his dollar's worth, can be well-run schools—they will survive. But many of them are fly-by-night schools. Commercial schools have some stigma attached, but there are many who are dedicated and can offer good commercial schools."

Dedication, honesty and sincerity are important to Lieb. The words come up over and over when you talk to him. Even the AKA, an organization he founded, lost his full support when it strayed from those values.

"Because of poor management for about four years it went down somewhat, but then John Sharkey got involved, and his father and some other people who are very dedicated got involved. And I lent my support again after being out of it for five years—just keeping away from it because I don't believe in bad management and not giving the person their money's worth. We have now, again, not started from scratch, but started where we were and built it stronger yet," he said.

In 1964, the AKA took a big step toward unifying American karatekas, but it was an organization, a group of competitors from various styles united by the fact that they were Americans. Lieb was still searching for his way, his style. In 1965, he met Tadashi Yamashita, a seventh dan, now eighth dan, of shorin ryu. Yamashita became chief instructor of the AKA and Lieb's instructor as well. Lieb founded his own style that same year:

"I organized the American Karate System because I found no one style having superiority in karate competition, no one style having the answer for Americans. The AKS is designed for Americans of all sizes, where the others are not."

Ernie Lieb is big on America and Americans. He became a citizen in 1959, and he won't hesitate to tell you

that this is the best country in the world. And he'll stand up for it, too.

"No matter how hard it is here, this is the best. When I was in military uniform in Korea, a man spit on the American flag. I broke his nose in three places. Lost two stripes for it, but I was willing to give 'em all. The man had degraded the flag, and I don't believe in that."

Lieb's belief in America was reflected in his style. His techniques were designed for Americans, and the organization reflected American traditions.

"There were 13 separate schools originally. I made sure there were 13 because of the 13 colonies. From there,

"When I was in the military uniform in Korea, a man spit on the American flag. I broke his nose in three places. Lost two stripes for it, but I was willing to give 'em all."

now, we've grown. Little by little we have built a foundation. Not just myself, others were involved in building the foundation. The nice part is that everybody has input into American karate. Not just me. And change will come about because changes are needed.

"Until 1972, it was called American chi do kwan. Then, we were promoting American karate, and I said, 'We gotta have something that says American,' so we had a meeting. Everybody got together and we threw it out saying, 'What are we gonna call ourselves?' We had to have something that represented America, not just the old Chi Do Kwan, because that wasn't what I was teaching. I was teaching American karate. My teacher knew it. Everybody knew it. We had to get a name that represented the U.S.A.

"Everybody threw in suggestions, and it was fantastic! We had all kinds of American names—some I couldn't even pronounce—but finally I said, 'Why don't we just call it American Karate System?'" That's something that everybody can identify with. It's simple, it's unique, it's exactly what we are. Everybody voted on it—at the time we had 13 people, all head instructors—and they all agreed that this was the most direct way. We said, 'Cool, let's call it that.' And we did."

Lieb compares the development of American karate to that of jeet kune do,