



SIMBA DOJANG

Washington D.C.'s Winningest Karate Studio

BY DR. A. JOSÉ JONES

When knowledgeable karateka discuss the merits and prowess of studios, they generally agree on one thing—the Simba Dojang is the best all-around karate studio in Washington, D.C. They won't say it's the *only* good studio, because there are many fine schools in the nation's capital.

Simba differs from the others, though, possibly because of the depth of expertise that runs throughout its ranks. Everyone is a technician—kids, women, lower belts, black belts. And

the martial artists who visit the studio stand in awe as they watch the rigid tae kwon do training schedule.

To test efficiency of the training, students participate in as many tournaments as their budgets permit. And in a short history, students and instructors from Simba have won over 1,000 trophies. This, then, makes them the winningest studio in Washington, D.C.

Contrary to popular belief, the real martial arts strength in



FOUNDERS OF SIMBA. Phil Cunningham (above left) and Furman Marshall (center). At right, black belts practice their side kicks under the watchful eyes of veteran fighter, Paul Atkins. Below, Marshall (left front) and Reginald Moten begin meditation after one of Simba's strenuous workouts. As always, spic and span uniforms and immaculately clean training facility are a must.

Photos Courtesy of Simba Dojang



the nation's capital seems to reside in the second and third-generation schools which are offspring of larger studios. Simba, an offspring of Lee's School of Karate, is one such school. Although most of the students have never met Soo Wong Lee, their "mentor," their fighting style reflects the influence of this fine technician.

The driving force behind any winning team or successful corporation is its leadership. Two black belts, Phillip Cunningham and Furman Marshall, provide the driving force which makes Simba a success. Both of the highly respected tournament champions have given unselfishly of themselves to train inner-city youngsters in both the martial arts and character building.

Phillip Cunningham first became interested in the martial arts in 1956 when he was stationed in Japan as a Navy signalman. He received a black belt from Ki Whang Kim and then

trained with Soo Wong Lee, to whom he gives credit for teaching him how to fight.

When Cunningham, later a Fulbright Scholar who studied in Afghanistan, went to Howard University, he met Dong Ja Yang, his present instructor.

Cunningham and Marshall have been stablemates since the beginning of their training. Marshall is a highly talented athlete who has won nearly 100 trophies in tournaments. A soft-spoken ex-Marine, his mild manner belies the athletic abilities he possesses. In addition to the martial arts, Marshall has trophies and medals in auto racing, cycling, football, track, tennis and skiing. And his dedication to the youth of the neighborhood is legendary.

The Simba Dojang didn't have its inception with a grand opening, advertisements in local papers or a lot of fanfare. It all began inauspiciously when the kids in the neighborhood

became interested in tae kwon do while watching Marshall train in the basement of his apartment. From a nucleus of a dozen boys and girls, the classes grew so large that they shifted from basement to basement, attempting to find suitable accommodations.

When **Cunningham** and Marshall joined forces, they moved to their present location at the Baptist Center in Southeast Washington.

Their territory is one of the roughest sections of the nation's capital, a conglomeration of low-rent apartments stacked close together, where the crime rate is extremely high. Murders, rapes, shootings and muggings are commonplace. Only the brave or foolhardy walk these streets at night. Simba students refuse to acquiesce to the perils of the urban jungle, though. "I teach in the ghetto where I prefer to stay because of the need for someone to help keep young boys and girls out of trouble," states Marshall.

Both instructors set good examples for their students to follow, for neither smokes nor drinks. Their biggest headache is keeping students off drugs. No vulgar language, discourtesy or disrespect for others is allowed in the dojang. Simba students are taught that they must respect others if they expect to receive respect.

Therefore, Simba is not just a place to train. It is a home away from home and both **Cunningham** and Marshall state with pride, "Simba is a family."

Simba Tae Kwon Do has trained over 5,000 students and 30 black belts at the main studio and branches. The instructors also organize trips for horseback riding, skiing, roller skating and cycling to keep students off the street and provide some cultural activity. No student is denied entry to Simba. And, because they don't have much money, tournament participation is handled in a unique way.

"Our students are very poor," laments **Cunningham**. "They don't usually have tournament fees; so we pool our funds and then decide who will represent us."

It is a family-type situation as far as spirit, cooperation and dedication are concerned. A good example of that spirit was demonstrated recently at the Oriental Defensive Arts Association.

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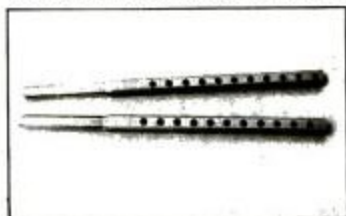


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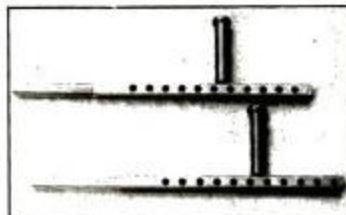


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keep his journey simple and efficient, he often experiments with ideas characteristic of the rapidly changing competition scene.

Special guest at that journey was former world middleweight champ Chuck Norris, Barrow's instructor. Norris said the matches, which featured semi-contact with safety gear, were some of the best he'd seen.

NOT TOO OLD TO ROLL WITH THE PUNCHES

After his mother was attacked by a purse snatcher,

Rick Alemany, owner of the Alemany Karate School in San Jose, California, worked out a program for teaching her self-defense. From there, he got the idea that other senior citizens would benefit from a regular program much like the one he set out for his mother.

Mixing karate, tai chi and wing chun kung fu, Alemany stresses positive thinking and preparedness. Fifteen students meet three times a week and, because the majority of the senior citizens are on a fixed income, the program is free.



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tion tournament held in Baltimore. Simba students took first and second place in lightweight black belt, first and second place in heavyweight black belt and grand champion. Rather than fight one another, they flipped a coin, pooled all winnings and divided the earnings equally.

Neither Cunningham nor Marshall has an interest in making money from their martial arts expertise. If they had, they could easily open a commercial studio. Their reputations would do the rest. Their primary interest is in doing something for the underprivileged youth of the inner city.

It's impossible to estimate the influence these two men have had on their community by providing the activities they do for thousands of youngsters. They have turned many potential delinquents into productive members of society. It is the fine qualities of these two true martial artists that has made Simba a success.



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