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Martial Artist

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The "Sleeping Tiger"



Tournament Results Inside



Martial Artist "Sleeping Tiger"

Master Gene Chicoine

BY the students of HO CHUN MARTIAL ARTS & Matt Mollica

Master Gene Chicoine is not your typical martial arts master. He is not small, oriental, soft-spoken, or humble. He is a massive and muscular American who is often brash and out-spoken in his criticism of what he believes is wrong with the kung fu world of today. He is sometimes harsh and has a fierce bearing.

With his grey hair and handsome "Blake Carrington" features he can be a master spokesman and inspiring speech maker, as smooth and under control as a presidential candidate. He can also make the building you're in shake when he demonstrates kung fu movements that rip through the air like a battle axe and arrive like thunder.

The man is almost six-and-one-half feet tall, moves with the grace and speed of an antelope, and can charge like a rhino, then stop and turn on a dime. This guy is scary, fearless, and inspiring all at the same time. Master Gene Chicoine is an enigma, and like all great men, he is misunderstood.

Ohio Martial Artist is specially pleased to feature this month a rare look at this charismatic and controversial man. Some of our most experts consider to be one of the greatest yet least known masters of the martial arts in the country.

Master Gene L. Chicoine was born in

1906 in a farm outside Akron Oh., the son of French Canadian parents. He enrolled in the army at the age of fifteen to become part of the occupation forces in Japan with the 11th Airborne division. As he began to familiarize himself with the new culture he was also taking the first step towards his initiation into the martial arts. It was November of 1946 in Yokohama, where the military government had banned the arts that he began his training.

He practiced in secret under a 4th degree black belt named Aiguri, himself a student of Master Oyama. The conditions under which the rigorous training took place for the next three-and-a-half years were barbaric by any standards. Seven days a week, 4 to 6 hours a day, sometimes under extreme weather conditions. This type of rugged and tortuous training was required of him to develop, above all else, the two specific body parts which would become his lethal tools in fighting situations—his right fist and fingertips.

He developed his hand on the makwara boards and his finger tips with buckets filled with sand and later gravel, into which he would thrust his hand over and over again for a total of 500 times a day.

Free sparring was intrinsic to the training method and it's practice was constant. The winner remained standing. Systems of points or timed rounds as we know them now were non-existent then.

No target was restricted, and although it was not written in the school rules, it was implicitly understood that the eyes and groin were to be treated with certain consideration, but not eliminated.

As a soldier of a conquering country his life was particularly difficult. The treatment he received from fellow Japanese students who like himself, were training in the underground was frequently unpleasant. He realized he must learn their language if he was to survive, and, determined to learn the martial arts at any cost or sacrifice, he crossed the language barrier and became proficient in Japanese.

During the three-and-one-half years of his training he was devoted entirely to his martial arts practice and his duty. He allowed himself no interruption, however small, for vacation, sickness or any other reason. At the end of 1949 when he was ordered to return to the U.S.A., tempered by harsh discipline and the spartan life, he prepared to leave Japan...as an expert in Go Jo Ryu.

In spite of their differences, teacher and student had grown very fond of each other. Master Chicoine remembers clearly the teacher's final instructions: One, continue training at any cost; Two, never forget or deviate from the original concept of the martial arts; Three, never show your skills to anyone who hasn't been trained in

the same manner.

Back in the U.S.A. he kept his pledge and trained alone (since karate schools were non-existent back then) and in complete secrecy. Even his family was kept completely unaware, evidence of a fierce private side of him which eventually earned him the nickname "Sleeping Tiger." Finally in 1956 he joined a school of Judo belonging to T.R. McClellan in Akron. A form of Karate, Shotokan, was also taught there. As he began assisting in the teaching of this last form he learned Judo as well. People who knew him in those days often speak of the great distances he would travel in order to find someone of a similar level in Karate that would spar him.

During the following years through 1959 he fought often and was unbeaten by anyone, including several of the best Japanese trainers sent to the U.S. to promote Karate. One of whom was the All Collegiate Champion of Japan. In contrast with today's strict rules and regulations, these events were full-contact without the benefit of safety equipment or a point scoring system.

In 1959 Master Chicoine met a Chinese teacher named Fernan Ong, who had left China after the take over by the communist regime. This man was of pivotal importance in the life and career of Master Chicoine as a friend and teacher,

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giving definition and direction as well as immeasurable depth to his training. Later, Master Chicoine was forced to make a decision (about a parting of the ways) when Master Ong's own practices and philosophies differed drastically from his own views, as they developed.

In their first years they trained together in Sifu Ong's basement until 1962 when they opened the first school of kung fu in the multi-state area. At the time few people knew anything about Karate and they had heard even less of the Chinese martial arts.

At this time Master Ong's teacher in Hong Kong ranked Master Chicoine as a black belt. Sixteen years had transpired since that November in 1946 when his training had begun in Japan.

Other events were taking place in Master Chicoine's life at this same time. Events outside the scope of the martial arts that would be the most public, controversial and painful occurrences in his life. Gene Chicoine became a household name, an infamous one.

Convinced that he could use his skills to uphold the law he became a deputy sheriff working in two departments. The period during which he was a Night Shift Commander for Portage County was perhaps one of the most fulfilling and happy times of his life.

Few that knew him during this time disagree with the fact that he was an extraordinary police officer, preferring always to work alone. He was sought after by police and sheriff academies to train their members in the martial arts. He was the first instructor of the newly formed

Ohio Peace Officers training program, teaching riot baton, night stick and riot control. He was the one who introduced the "tiger claw choke hold" for the control of dangerous prisoners. The commendations were numerous both for bravery, and for being wounded in the service of others.

At a time when drugs had permeated every layer of society, Master Chicoine was driven by his conviction that his training specifically suited him for this line of work. He became an undercover narcotics agent for the Summit County Sheriff's Department. Working in ways that few would be able to follow, and in record time, he made an impressive dent in the drug underworld of his time. His unorthodox methods were often misunderstood and disagreed with. He provoked emotional and often violent opposition that among other problems, caused him to be shot at twice and wounded once.

A special Grand Jury was formed to investigate his working methods and the story made the front page of the newspapers for the next seven months. He won every case for which he was investigated and in the end was totally vindicated. When one police officer was brought before the Grand Jury to testify about the character of Master Chicoine he responded without hesitation, "If he would have been born in the 1700's the West would have been settled 100 years earlier..." The trials had become public debates and his methods in dealing with criminals was questioned as he became a public figure marked by controversy.

In the end, deeply disappointed with the legal procedures and police work, he

abandoned the force and dedicated his time to his school. In fact, shortly thereafter, he had built the largest school of Chinese martial arts in the country. Despite the fact that he was against publicity and advertising to recruit students, they became famous in the area for the quality of material taught there, the expertise of the instructor, and the iron hand techniques which made the students practically invincible. At one point Sifu Ong himself brought his best personally trained students to compete, and, without exception they were all defeated!

Several styles have always been taught in the school among them are; Choi Li Fut, Tai Chi Ch'uan, Shaolin, Hung-Gar, Pukua and several weapons. Master Chicoine is known to have mastered throughout his career some 70 different fist forms. He is however, best known for his power and the fighting abilities he possesses and instills in his students. His hand training method is well known and feared as well as respected in martial arts circles.

True to his pledge never to deviate from the original purpose of the martial arts, he has refused to commercialize his school and maintains a high standard by screening all applicants himself, only after they have been personally recommended to him by a current student. Today this is still the only way a person can become a member of the system as a student of the "Ho Chun School of Martial Arts."

Towards the beginning of 1970 Master Chicoine noticed a dramatic change in the behavior of his old time friend and

teacher, Sifu Ong. A new set of priorities had become paramount. To control the minds and behavior of the students and to profit disproportionately from the sale of Chinese medicinal herbs, (priced at many times their value) Sifu Ong employed many methods similar to those observed in certain recent cults.

After confronting Sifu Ong and appealing to his old values in no avail, Master Chicoine pulled his school from the system thus forming his own separate identity. A period followed the rupture in which Master Chicoine trained with some of the best Chinese teachers in the western hemisphere, among them Master Pi of Vancouver British Columbia. Under Master Pi he was awarded the level of sixth degree black belt in 1978.

In 1979 Master Chicoine traveled to Taiwan R.O.C. where he eventually became a student and later a disciple of Grandmaster Ch'ang Tung-Sheng the "Flying Butterfly." Being asked to become his son was a most rare honor, even among the Chinese. It was an unusually high privilege never before bestowed upon a Caucasian.

A new era had begun in the martial arts career of the Master. He had finally met a true grandmaster, the one who is the undisputed champion of the purest and oldest Chinese fighting art, Shuai Chiao.

At the elaborate ceremony in which Master Chicoine formally became the grandmasters disciple the great Ch'ang told the audience that he had finally met the grandson he had so often dreamed about, the one he would love as his own son and that would help him to spread his art

throughout the world. In fact, in the immediate future Taiwan will become a member of the International Shuai Chiao Assoc. whose headquarters are located in Mogadore, Ohio. Negotiations are also underway with more than 66 schools now operating in Europe for the same purpose.

Most recently Master Chicoine led a team of Shuai Chiao fighters on a trip to Taiwan R.O.C. where he was instrumental in accomplishing the above achievements. He delivered many inspiring and motivating speeches urging authorities and masters of the martial arts to unify under the leadership of Grandmaster Ch'ang and the president of the International Shuai Chiao Association.

Master Chicoine himself is second only to the Grandmaster in authority (in the U.S.A.) and in rank, for he was recently honored by being promoted to the rank of 8th degree black belt under the undefeated tenth degree black belt, Ch'ang Tung-Sheng Grandmaster of Shuai Chiao as well as master of many fighting arts including Tai Chi Ch'uan, Hsing-I, Lohan, Shaolin, sword and more.

While he was in Taiwan Master Chicoine was honored by the mayors of the cities of Taipei and Tainan by receiving the key to both cities. He was interviewed by television and news crews, and was featured in many national publications.

Master Chicoine has received so many awards and so much recognition that a listing of them would go on seemingly forever. The master himself believes that seeking the limelight is wrong and that one should, "be content with the knowledge of

"It was so refreshing to see an Art than still had not lost sight or altered its original purpose and concept."

your own skill and your personal achievements."

Nicknamed by some of his Chinese associates the "Sleeping Tiger" because of the small town of Mogadore where his school is known as the "cave", and because of the low profile he keeps, Master Chicoine will abandon the cave only when requested or aroused. Then, like the "sleeping tiger", he will return to his cave when the work or the battle is done.

Master Chicoine has made this saying of Grandmaster Ch'ang his own, "To be dedicated, determined, deliberate, and if necessary deadly, in the use of the martial arts..."



(Picture to right) and no matter what the situation, sport or self-defense, put the stacker down hard with a finishing throw



At a greater distance the swinging forearm strikes the neck



In close in a self-defense situation the elbow would be used



Using a Hing-Jing kicking and blocking technique Master Chicone defends and counter attacks simultaneously



For sport...surround the neck