

The Best of the Best: The Best Moves From Great Pioneers in the Martial Arts

By Dr. Carl Totton



INTRODUCTION

Los Angeles in the 1960's was a hotbed of fervent martial arts activity. It became ground zero for a renaissance in martial arts and fighting strategies which continues to this day. Many prominent masters of kung fu, karate, judo, jujitsu, tae kwon do, hapikdo, escrima, silat, kenpo, aikido, kendo and more immigrated to Los Angeles and opened pioneering schools. At the center of this activity was a man generally credited for being the first to open kung fu's restrictive doors to non-Chinese, Grandmaster Ark Yuey Wong, recipient of Inside Kung Fu's Hall of Fame award.

Ark Wong was born in Canton China in 1900. His three primary instructors were local legends in the secretive kung fu world: Shaolin masters Lam Ark Fun and Ho Yeng, and the Chief Abbot of Canton, the monk surnamed Pang. Wong began his study at the age of 7 after his grandfather decreed that all heirs should learn martial arts if they wanted to retain their inheritance! Wong eventually moved to the US at the age of 21 and taught in California until his death in 1987. Wong played a Shaolin monk in the original *Kung Fu* pilot episode movie with the late David Carradine.

Some of the many who learned from or were influenced by Wong over the years included kenpo legend Ed Parker, kajukenbo pioneer John Leoning, limalama founder Tino Tuiolosega, the Samoan giant Haumea "Tiny" Lefiti, BKF founders Steve Muhammad (then Steve Sanders) and Ron Chapel, karate champion Jim Kelly of Enter The Dragon fame, martial arts actors James Lew and Albert Leong, white lotus kung fu founder Douglas Wong, and even Jeet Kune Do and Filipino martial arts great Danny Inosanto, among many others including his grandson and successor, Se-Ming Ma.

Indeed, Wong's kwoon or dojo on Ord Street in Old Chinatown became the testing ground for many fighting methods that would later help determine the direction of martial arts training throughout the US and much of the world for decades to come. This article takes a look at some of the best fighting moves and martial strategies that emerged from this incredibly rich environment. I had the opportunity to train with many of these legends and would like to share a few of the best fighting techniques I learned from some of the best fighters of all time. These movements are at the root of what I now call *The Core System*, the essential skills from some of the World's greatest martial artists.

ARK YUEY WONG

1900-1987 (Born: Canton, China)

Primary Art/Styles: Southern Shaolin Kung Fu, Five Family/Five Animals styles

Grandmaster Wong was a soft spoken man with a twinkle in his eye and a great sense of humor. Always affable, he was a workhorse who both taught kung fu and practiced Chinese medicine seven days a week even into an advanced age. His primary styles were the famous *Five Family Styles: Choy, Li, Fut, Mok, and Hung*. Within these he further specialized in the legendary *Five Animals: tiger, dragon, leopard, snake, and crane* forms. Although he had mastered an impressive array of thousands of techniques, a favorite was a devastating kick and finger striking combination which was extremely fast and very dangerous.

He had to use a similar combination once while going home. A man was waiting in the hall for him and stabbed down with a knife! Ark Wong evaded and then hit him in the neck and knocked him to the floor and kicked him. The man did not get up.

Once while taking a private lesson with Wong, he showed me just how effective his crane kick and snake finger combination was. This kick, also known as the “kick without a shadow” due to its great speed, was nearly invisible when Wong delivered it and he was capable of easily kicking his targets from the knee or groin up to the top of a tall man’s head! And all in the blink of an eye. The debilitating snake finger strike which followed was the nail in the coffin as Ark Wong had fingers as sharp and powerful as steel chisels due to his extensive iron palm and dim muk/poison hand training done over a lifetime.

ARK WONG TECHNIQUE



ED PARKER

1931-1990 (Born: Honolulu, Hawaii)

Primary Art/Styles: American Kenpo , Jujitsu, Judo

Edmund Kealoha Parker was born in Hawaii and grew up in Honolulu's notorious Palama settlement. Trouble was common and Parker often found himself having to defend his honor in order to avoid entanglements. This led to early training in judo and jujitsu and later lessons from the legendary master of kenpo, Professor William K.S. Chow. Chow had in turn learned from the Great Grandmaster of kenpo James Mitose, and both Chow and later Parker began experimenting with how to apply kenpo to American style street fighting.

After opening a school in Pasadena in 1956, Parker's thirst for knowledge led him to explore many traditional kung fu systems both in Los Angeles' and San Francisco's Chinatowns. At Ark Wong's school, both Ark Wong and Tiny Lefiti made an impression on Parker which contributed to his rapidly developing style. Well known for his incisive mind and lightening fast hands, Mr. Parker developed many innovative concepts which revolutionized self defense. The use of multiple impact striking combinations based on sound logic had a prominent place in his kenpo arsenal. A true pioneer, Mr. Parker went on to found the International Kenpo Karate Association, and the world's largest karate tournament, the International Karate Championships. Mr. Parker was a member of Inside Kung Fu's Hall of Fame and he taught many famous stars, including Elvis Presley.

Asked about some of his street fights, Mr. Parker described one unusual situation where after being surrounded and attacked by six men, they suddenly appeared to be moving in slow motion! The astonished Parker then quickly dispatched them, one at a time.

One evening while visiting Mr. Parker at his Pasadena home, he taught me a devastating series of combinations which took maximum advantage of both natural body motion and accelerated collision energy to maximize striking speed and power.

ED PARKER TECHNIQUE



TINO TUIOLOSEGA

1932- 2011 (Born: Utulei, Tutila, American Samoa)

Primary Art/Styles: Limalama, Kenpo Karate, Kung Fu, Boxing

Tuumamao “Tino” Tuiolosega was born on the island of American Samoa where he was introduced to the basics of fighting by various family elders. He later studied almost all of the Japanese martial arts including karate, judo, jujitsu, and aikido, and was well known as a terrific boxer while in the Marine Corps. Already a fearsome fighter, he polished his skills at Ed Parker’s kenpo karate studio and with Ark Wong’s kung fu.

Tino achieved lasting fame when he created Limalama (meaning the Hand of Wisdom) as a Polynesian-based hybrid of the many arts he had studied along with his own unique innovations. As such, it is an early mixed martial arts system. Ark Wong and Ed Parker jointly issued him a certificate recognizing him as the founding grandmaster of this new art, and Tino established the Limalama Association with five original black belts in 1965: Richard Nunez, John Makaalu Louis, Haumea “Tiny” Lefiti, Saul Esquivel, and Solomon Kaihewalu, all great fighters in their own right. Others would soon follow including Ted Tabura, Al Garza, Rigoberto Lopez, and Tino’s own sons, Rudy and Marlon.

Limalama is well known for its soft, fluid wrist maneuvers combined with blazingly fast hand combinations. Although the blocks sometimes appear “soft”, in practice Tino’s hands were quite heavy when done in a continuous flow with whipping combinations.

During a traditional Polynesian luau hosted by Mr. Tino in 1970, I had an opportunity to witness his almost unbelievable speed in person. After hours of demonstrations, food, and some serious drinking, a jazz band from Watts was playing. Following the set, the band’s drummer decided to “try out” Tino’s skills and threw a haymaker at Tino’s head without warning. Tino suddenly exploded into action in a blinding flurry leaving the drummer speechless and pale with terror, even though Tuiolosega never touched him! His movements left an indelible impression on me and I will share them here.

TINO TUIOLOSEGA TECHNIQUE



HAUMEA “TINY” LEFITI

1930-1973 (Born Honolulu, Hawaii)

Primary Arts/ Styles: Mok Ga Kung Fu (Splashing Hands), Limalama, Boxing



Haumea Lefiti, also known as Tiny, was a giant Samoan martial artist born in Hawaii in 1930. Weighing in at over 325 pounds and well over 6 feet tall, he was a mountain of a man, but with a big heart. His death in February, 1973 from a heart attack at the age of 43, left an even bigger void in the hearts of his students, friends, and family.

Tiny had a background in boxing and Polynesian street and knife fighting (his favorite weapon was the straight razor). As a drill instructor and Special Forces soldier in the Marines, Tiny studied karate in Japan, and later while stationed in Taiwan, he was exposed to the deadly kung fu style known as Mok Ga by a tough Nationalist Chinese general. This art, also called *Monk Fist Boxing* and *Splashing Hands*, was originally only taught to the specially trained monks and revolutionaries who guarded the Shaolin Temple gates.

Upon moving to the mainland US, Tiny trained with his fellow Samoan Tuiolosega in Limalama, and with Ark Wong, specializing in the art of Mok Ga with its deadly tools: the dim muk death touch and poison hand nerve strikes. In spite of his enormous size, Tiny was capable of striking with amazingly fast hand and leg combinations delivered with furious sounds like thunder and lightening! His fearsome slaps combined with rapid foot shuffles were overwhelming to witness and provided useful information to Ed Parker as he worked to refine kenpo's combat efficiency.

For some strange reason, during his early years of teaching, Tiny was constantly being challenged by other martial artists, boxers, and street fighters. They had to be crazy to even think about fighting someone of his size and strength, but still they came. These unfortunate individuals would come into the school, take a look at the apparently “soft” and fluid wrist maneuvers and Tiny's large size, and foolishly conclude he couldn't really fight. Tiny would have them sign an agreement stating that he was not responsible for their injury or death and would then hold up his huge fists and shout: *“This is the hospital (his left hand) and this is the morgue (his right hand). Which one do you want? Choose!!”*

Before the shocked opponent could answer, Tiny would proceed to punch, slap, kick and literally stomp them into the ground. Then he would have us drag the unconscious,

battered and bleeding body out into the alley behind the school, pour a little whiskey on their clothes, and call for the paramedics, telling them there was a drunk who had passed out in the back! Eventually the word got out to the community about Tiny and the challenges stopped. Tiny would tell potential challengers, “*I know your art, but you don’t know mine!*”

Tiny taught several who later started their own schools including myself (Carl Totton), Douglas Wong, Al Garza, Antwoine Alferos, and Jim McNeil. Today, more than 35 years after his death, there has been a resurgence of interest in Tiny and the arts he taught. Rather than teach hundreds of techniques and then try to use them for combat, Tiny emphasized a fundamental pattern of root motions called the Stem which could then be modified hundreds of ways against any conceivable type of attack. It is presented here.

JOHN LEONING

1927-1977 (Born Honolulu, Hawaii)

Primary Art/Styles: Kajukenbo Kenpo Karate, Kung Fu



John Leoning was another prominent martial artist who grew up in Hawaii’s Palama district. He began learning kenpo from William Chow and later Adriano Emperado when he opened the first kajukenbo school. Kajukenbo, with five men as co-founders, was perhaps the original mixed martial art with its roots comprising karate (ka), judo and jujitsu (ju), kenpo (ken), and Chinese and western boxing (bo). Chinese boxing was another name for kung fu. Kajukenbo became famous for its grueling workouts and hard hitting no-nonsense style.

John Leoning became the first person to open a kajukenbo school on the mainland US in 1957. Some of his well known students included Victor “Sonny” Gascon, Bill Ryusaki, and Carlos Bunda, winner of the lightweight black belt division at Ed Parker’s first two International Karate Championships. Leoning also taught many actors including Robert Conrad of The Wild Wild West and Hawaiian Eye TV shows. He himself played the role of Master Teh in the *Kung Fu* TV series.

When Leoning first arrived in the US he landed at San Francisco’s waterfront and quickly discovered how deadly and useful his kajukenbo was. Accosted by 11 men on the docks trying to rob him, he put 6 in the hospital while the other 5 ran for their lives! John Leoning never stopped learning and held black belt rank in Shito-ryu karate, and later received high ranks in kung fu from both Ark Wong and Share Lew. Leoning’s

North American Kung Fu-Karate Association became the accrediting body for all ranks issued by Ark Wong. Although short in stature, he was immensely fast and powerful and known for delivering extremely tough workouts. He became my first teacher in 1963 and this technique is one he taught me which I had to use in a real street fight!

Professor Carl Totton

Dr. Carl Totton is Director of the Taoist Institute in North Hollywood, CA, and the founder of *The Core System*. He has studied the martial arts since 1963, specializing in preserving the roots of the Chinese arts. Beside teaching martial arts and qigong, he practices as a clinical psychologist and shamanic energy healer. He has produced training DVD's and can be contacted at his website, www.taoistinstitute.com.



**This two part article was published in Inside Kung Fu Magazine
In the April and May issues, 2010**