

GRANDMASTER JAMES SAFFOLD

Founder of the American Kwan Tang Soo Do Federation



As a young man growing up in Detroit, Michigan in the 1950's and 1960's you had to be tough and ready to defend yourself. Having two older brothers to wrestle with, a reputation in school as being able to stand up for himself, as well as working as a farm hand during the summers led young James to grow up strong. His parents and brothers, by their examples, were all very positive influences in his development.

In 1965, James entered the US Army and went through basic training. Because he showed a natural aptitude while still in basic training himself, he was made an assistant instructor and asked to teach other trainees how to defend themselves in unarmed (hand to hand) combat.

In 1967, the US Army stationed Second Lieutenant Saffold in Vietnam. In June of 1968, while still in Vietnam he began training in the Korean Martial Arts. Since he was an Officer and training as a beginner, one of the senior (red belts) decided to take advantage of the opportunity and was overzealous in his attacks on the young white belt. Not one to complain, he endured this until his Instructor observed what was going on and arranged for a 5th Degree Korean Army Captain, Captain Oh, to work one on one with young James. What a great learning experience this turned out to be for the young Martial Artist. Training with Master Oh was very intense. It was during this period that Master Oh introduced him to the Senior Korean Martial Arts Instructor in Vietnam, Chief Master Instructor Jae Joon Kim. Occasionally young James' workouts were taught by Chief Master Jae Joon Kim.

In 1969 after leaving the U.S. Army, young James enrolled at the newly opened school in Detroit, Michigan. Fortunately for him, Grand Master, 8th Dan, Jae Joon Kim had immigrated to the United States and chose Detroit to open his school. A deep and personal friendship grew between the two that would last until Grand Master Jae Joon Kim's death in 2007.

While earning his black belt (1971) at Grand Master Kim's hand, he had the opportunity to meet and train with many of the senior Korean Masters that were immigrating to the United States. It was a great thrill to be able to train and learn from so many exceptional Masters, many of whom went on to become Grand Masters. It was during this time that he met Founder and Grand Master, Hwang Kee, who came to Detroit to conduct training and a Dan Promotional test with Grand Master Jae Joon Kim.

Over the years, as a black belt, James was asked by Grand Master Kim to run different schools in the Metropolitan Detroit area. During this time James became a Police Officer with the Detroit Police Department and spent time working the streets in uniform and as an undercover Officer, frequently putting his martial arts training to use.

In 1979, he began an intense training program to prepare for his Master's testing. The three people who trained every Saturday for more than a year were Master Stan Bojanowski (who was getting ready for his fifth Dan test), Mr. William Thompson and Mr. James Saffold. Grand Master Kim would frequently help with their training. They became known as the "Three Musketeers" and developed a deep friendship.

In 1981, the test came and was a combined Tang Soo Do and Tae Kwon Do test. Grand Master Kim was also the President of the Michigan Tae Kwon Do Association at the time. All of the "Three Musketeers" performed well and were promoted.

In 1980, then Master Saffold was trained by the U.S. Secret Service in Executive Protection. He used this training and his Martial Arts training to work as a Dignitary Security Team Leader during the Republican National Convention and later as a bodyguard for Mr. Lee Iacocca and other leaders of Chrysler Corporation.

Martial Arts continued for Master James Saffold; teaching and training four or five times per week. Promotion tests came and went, working ever higher. Finally, in March, 2002 Grand Master Jae Joon Kim tested him for his Eighth Dan, earning him the rank of Grand Master.

Grand Master Saffold founded the [American Kwan Tang Soo Do Federation](#) in 2004. He did not launch this organization as his instructor, Grand Master Jae Joon Kim, was still alive and was the leader of the World Moo Duk Kwan Tang Soo Do Federation and was both his friend and teacher.

In 2007 with the unexpected death of his friend and teacher, Grand Master Jae Joon Kim, Grand Master Saffold attended the funeral and was honored by Grand Masters' wife and family, many who are Grand Masters and Masters in their own right. Grand Master Saffold was allowed by the family the honor of being one of the pallbearers of his longtime friend.

Grand Master James Saffold's desire and the goal of the American Kwan Tang Soo Do Federation is to continue traditional Tang Soo Do as taught by Grand Master Hwang Kee and Grand Master Jae Joon Kim. American Kwan Tang Soo Do Federation, Inc. is a growing organization with Masters, Dan Members, and Members in several states.

Grand Master Saffold has special respect and fondness for Grand Master Jae Joon Kim, Grand Master Oh, Grand Master C.I. Kim, Grand Master Nam Kim, Grand Master Greg Boliard, and Grand Master Lee Harper, with whom it was his great pleasure to learn and practice many sparring techniques first hand over the years. Also, Grand Master Joseph Sanders cross trained him to second Dan in Hap Ki Do. There are many other Grand Masters, Masters, Instructors and students (including White Belts!) that contributed to Grand Master Saffold's knowledge and training.

As Grand Master Saffold sees it: "It is our duty as Masters of Tang Soo Do to pass on the Art of Tang Soo Do to the next generation of Martial Artists". "We need to train hard and practice to be able to pass on as pure a style as possible."

On Saturday, March 13, 2010, The League of Grand Masters confirmed and awarded the rank of 9th Degree Black Belt to Grandmaster James Saffold. In 2015 Grandmaster James A. Saffold was awarded his 10th Dan by the World Tang Soo Do Moo Duk Kwan General Federation – Korea. In 2017 he was appointed to the International Vice President of the WTSDGF-Moo Duk Kwan – Korea .