

The Soo Bahk Do Moo Duk

The 14th Annual
Ko Dan Ja shim Sa
candidates and
guest instructors.



If you have been training in the martial arts for any significant period of time, I am sure you have been told by other classmates or the black belt members about how difficult their last belt testing was. They speak of how strenuous their testing day was, and how they can not believe they survived the entire, stressful, testing process. In my 20 + years of martial arts experience, I have researched a myriad of different martial art disciplines and their corresponding testing protocols, not only for black belt, but other levels as well. Some of these one day exams were indeed difficult, and seemed to physically test the practitioner to a very high degree. Yet, somehow, I was sure that the test that was awaiting me was going to be ten fold more difficult than any other I had ever been associated with.

Kwan Ko Dan Ja Shim Sa

By Trent K. Suzuki

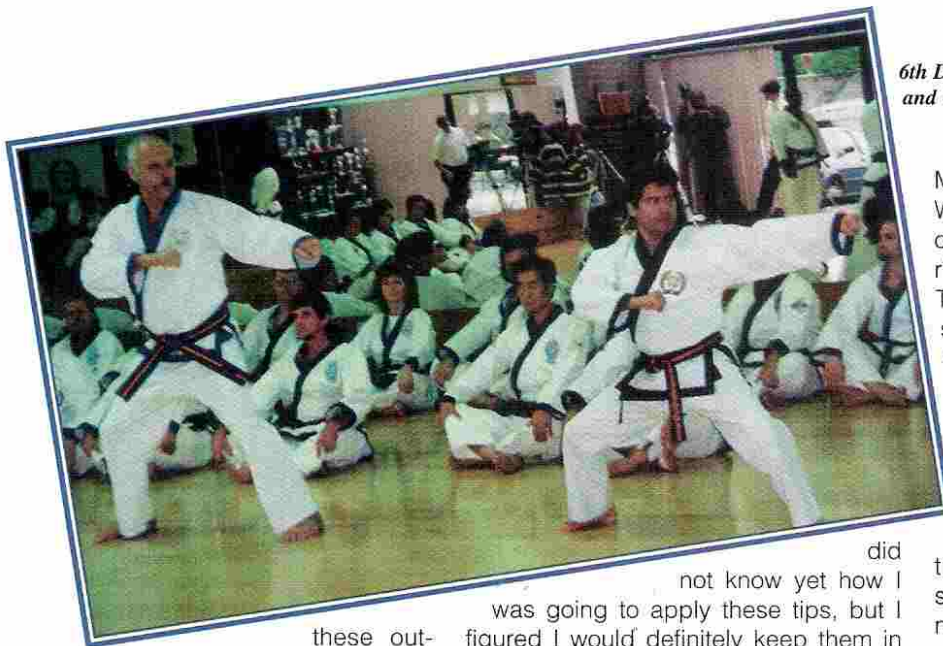


As the days passed by and I approached my own 4th Dan/Sa Bom (Master Instructor) test in Soo Bahk Do Moo Duk Kwan, I had mixed emotions. As a veteran of tournaments, testings, and other martial arts related experiences, I felt as though I had seen and heard it all. I thought I had experienced every emotion possible, or to use a cliché, the "thrills of victory, and the agonies of defeat." Little did I know what to expect as I ventured into the most important period of martial arts

training in my life, the 14th Annual Soo Bahk Do Moo Duk Kwan Ko Dan Ja Shim Sa.

The Ko Dan Ja Shim Sa, translated as "master model examination", is a very thorough, very difficult, 8 day exam, which challenges the participants' in every way, shape, and form. I had heard horror stories about the intensity and duration of the daily training sessions. Not only were they difficult to physically withstand, but the mental pressure was immense as well. Despite

these comments, I knew I was as prepared as I could be. I had passed (survived) the many prerequisites* that was required to be eligible, which included the recommendations of my instructor, Master Daymon Kenyon, Masters' Andy Ah Po and Vic Martinov-the Senior Ko Dan Ja of Region 9 (CA, NV, HI), and finally the Chairman of the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) of the U.S. Soo Bahk Do Moo Duk Kwan Federation, Master H.C. Hwang. I am extremely fortunate to have exposure to



6th Dan candidates Shipley and Guzman during exam.

these outstanding Master Instructors and I knew that if they allowed me to participate, I was fully capable of successfully passing the exam.

Before I continue, let me explain the history of the Ko Dan Ja Shim Sa (KDJSS). According to Master Hwang, the first attempt at the KDJSS occurred in 1982. There were only 5 practitioners who were allowed to test, Dr. Ron Cechner, Dr. Patrick Jorgenson, now deceased, Mr. Larry Jones, Mr. Dan Nolan, and Master Lloyd Francis. Master Hwang, with assistance from Master Russ Hanke of Wyandotte, MI., instructed this first KDJSS. The testing was filled with much hardship, but the candidates' response was so overwhelmingly positive that they went home and began to spread the word about how wonderful the experience was.

The 1983 KDJSS also had a similar, shortened 5 day process. Keep in mind that the Founder of Soo Bahk Do Moo Duk Kwan, Grandmaster Hwang Kee, had already gone on record stating that in order to get the optimum benefits of the KDJSS experience, the testing process should be a minimum of 1 month in duration! However, Grandmaster Hwang Kee understood that type of time commitment was not feasible, so in 1984, he created the current format of an 8 day testing process.

In the days before I left for U.S. Soo Bahk Do Moo Duk Kwan Headquarters in Springfield, New Jersey, the site of Ko Dan Ja testing, my Seniors gave me various tips on how to take most advantage of my upcoming experience. The most important tips were, "maintain your focus, and stay with the group." I really

did not know yet how I was going to apply these tips, but I figured I would definitely keep them in mind. After all, since my entire martial arts career had been based upon chain of command, I certainly was not going to ignore it now.

At last it was time to depart from sunny San Diego, California and travel to Soo Bahk Do Headquarters. Although excited, I was very nervous about what was to come. Following is a day by day synopsis of possibly the most comprehensive, challenging, yet enriching martial arts testing process in the world today.

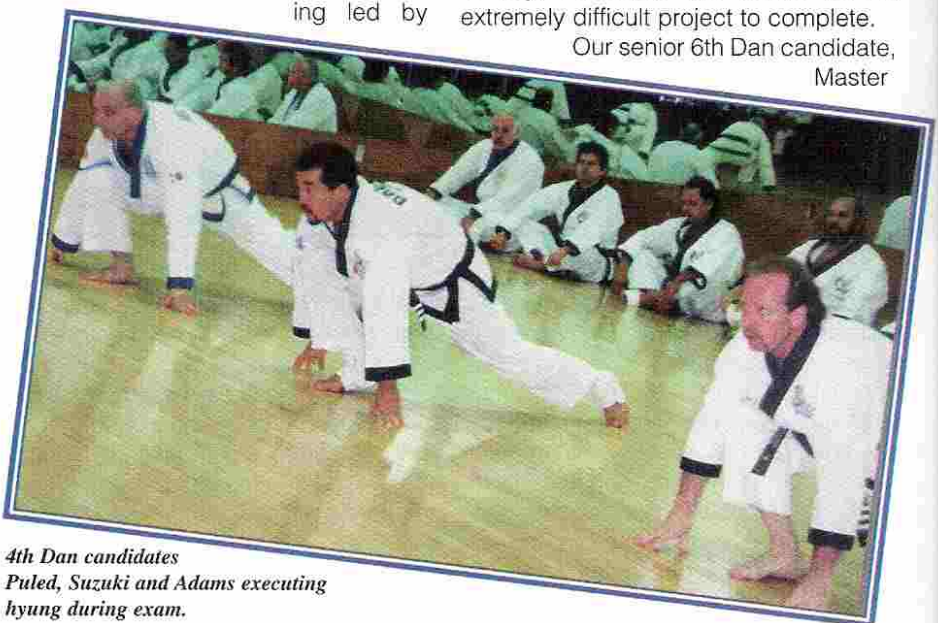
Saturday, November 16, 1996

After a cross country flight, my instructor and I arrived at Headquarters in New Jersey. Twenty practitioners from all over the world sat down to an orientation meeting led by

Masters Hwang, Hanke, Ah Po, and Wilton Bennett of Michigan. They went over basic rules, protocol, and the criterion by which we would be graded. Twelve of us were 4th Dan candidates, six were 5th Dan candidates, and two were 6th Dan candidates. Our ages ranged from the mid-twenties to the mid-fifties, so this process obviously was not relegated to extremely young practitioners. Our Seniors told us what the agenda would be for the week, along with what their expectations would be. These expectations seemed fair, yet demanding, but definitely attainable if the proper attitude and focus were maintained throughout.

The meeting finished and all the candidates went back to the hotel to share dinner, exchange room numbers, and prepare for the very difficult week to come. At this time we were made aware that there was an assigned written essay project that was due by the following Saturday, with a rough draft to be submitted by Wednesday AM. We then were told that only in our "free" time were we allowed to work on the project. The theme of our project was "How to Develop our National Championships to meet our Moo Duk Kwan Spirit and Philosophies." I thought to myself, "no problem, all we have to do is change the very fabric of how we run our Championships that have been running annually for nearly 20 years!" Needless to say, we knew this would be an extremely difficult project to complete.

Our senior 6th Dan candidate, Master



4th Dan candidates Puled, Suzuki and Adams executing hyung during exam.

Robert Shipley of Camas, Washington, was very friendly and gave us excellent advice which included, "never let your guard down, and stick together as a team!" We went to bed knowing tonight would be our last decent night of sleep for a week.

Sunday, November 17, 1997

We met for breakfast at 6:00 AM as our day began at 7:00 AM for "optional" morning breathing exercises (Moo Pahl Dan Kuhm). Understand that when our Seniors say "optional," it means you had better all be on the workout floor as a team at 6:45!! Master Hanke does the Moo Pahl Dan Kuhm every morning and let us know how much he would enjoy our company during our stay. After meditation, Master Hwang, along with the rest of the Seniors and visiting Ko Dan Ja, entered the workout area and we lined up for formal bow in and salutation. For the next 3 hours, Master Hwang, with his week-long assistants, Masters' Hanke and Ah Po, instructed us on basic hand and foot motions, breaking each motion down to the last detail. Even though it was very tiring physically, just being able to witness Master Hwang's flawless execution was motivation enough to keep on going! Master Hwang devoted the next 10 hours to detailed breakdowns of our forms (hyungs), with lunch and a short break mixed in.

At approximately 10:00 PM, we bowed out and stumbled off the floor, knowing we had to now grab dinner and begin working on our theme project. After training for 13 hours and working on the project for 3 hours, we got to bed around 2:30 AM.

Monday, November 18, 1997

When the wake-up call came at 5:30 AM, I sat up in bed and could not believe how sore I was and I had not even put my feet on the floor yet! Much to my dismay, taking a shower was far more challenging than I would have liked. We met for breakfast and car pooled to Headquarters for moo pahl dan kuhm. The foul smell of Ben-Gay and various other deep heating balms that were emanating from the candidates was unpleasant but tolerable. Today, Master Hwang, with assistance from TAC members Hanke and Ah Po, instructed 8 hours worth of review on hyungs and Federation One-Step Sparring (I1 Soo Sik Deh Ryun), once again with lunch and a short break

mixed in. Tonight we began our class teaching evaluations as Master Hwang and the Seniors observed us teach a class that had six of us 4th Dan candidates participating as well as the regularly scheduled students in the class. The rest of the 4th Dan candidates were to also observe and take notes as we would be critiquing our fellow candidates later that evening. The first two candidates to teach were Mr. Dave Williard of Lakewood, Ohio, and Mr. Alex Baran of Fishkill, New York. It is always tough to be the first to get out there and teach at a strange studio, with students you do not know, and all your Seniors standing around the floor purely for the sake of seeing how you react to the stress of the situation. However both of them did a fantastic job and taught terrific classes.

It was now time for Williard and Baran to be evaluated on their teaching. I had heard more horror stories about how the critiquing tended to be rather harsh and negative but was happy to see that it was just the opposite. Everyone was very encouraging, gave good advice, and it was a very positive experience. It was again 10:00 PM and we went back to the hotel to work on our project. Tired and really sore, I was happy to get to bed by 1:30 AM.

Tuesday, November 19, 1996

Showering today was even more of a fiasco than it was yesterday. Just washing my hair was a harrowing experience to say the least. After breakfast, we again participated in breathing exercises, then had a two hour review on hyungs and self-defense (Ho Sin Sool). Mr. Craig Wittmer of Ponca City, OK, taught the next class, did a great job, then had his class critiqued. After lunch, we had a two hour review on il soo sik deh ryun and ho sin sool. After a short break, three classes in a row were observed, then critiqued. The three candidates teaching were Mr. Monty Fulk of Columbus, OH., Mr. Jimmy Adams of Lewisville, GA., and Mr. Dan Kuhlman of Cincinnati, OH., and they all did quite well. We were dismissed relatively early tonight (9:00 PM), as we had to complete the rough draft of our project and submit it first thing in the morning.

After dinner, we twelve 4th Dan candidates met in the hotel lounge and began to put all our thoughts and notes together to try and make a clear presentation to

our Seniors. I did not think this would take very long, but whatever could go wrong did go wrong as we proceeded to debate about how we could improve our National Championships to more meet our philosophies of the Moo Duk Kwan. After 5 hours of in-depth discussion/debate, we came up with several creative ideas that could be prepared for possible future implementation by the TAC. After typing on the laptop for another hour, I was very happy to go to bed at 3:30 AM.

Wednesday, November 20, 1996

Breakfast, breathing exercises, and three hours of review took up our morning before we had lunch. The next session was devoted to each group of candidates preparing themselves for performing our required hyungs on Sundays' exam. Understand that since we were going to be performing in groups, we had to have our timing, breathing, and focus all coordinated as one. We were all very sore, very tired, and patience with each other was not our strength at this time. We were from all over the world, had never trained with each other before, yet were expected to perform our hyungs in choreographed fashion by Sunday. Needless to say, we were completely off key with each other. Our Seniors were having to give us advice on how to stay together and we were having many problems. We were repeatedly reprimanded for being in disharmony with each other and were told in no uncertain terms that this would be an unacceptable performance level. We were breaking down physically, our focus was weak, and we began to get belligerent with each other. The frustration level was killing us and we had to gather ourselves soon. Luckily for us, we had our Senior 5th and 6th Dan candidates there to help calm us down and keep our spirits up. Masters' Shipley, Guzman, Propst, Jang, and Brown were all instrumental in helping us keep it together.

After a short break, two more classes were taught, observed, and critiqued. Mr. Steve Puleo of Davie, FL, and Mr. Rick Jones of Gahanna, OH, were the candidates and each did an excellent job. We bowed out, had dinner, and after discussing how we were going to improve our performance levels, actually got to bed at a decent hour: midnight.

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TESTING

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Thursday, November 21, 1996

As I woke up this morning, I was totally drained, but something was keeping me going. My body felt strange tired, but alert. At this point, we had been training on the average of 10-12 hours per day, yet I physically and mentally felt pretty good. I really cannot describe it, maybe the adrenaline was kicking in but I felt like I was getting stronger. As per the norm, we ate, performed meditation, and had a hard, two hour review session on all previous materials. I needed to prepare myself differently today though, as it was my turn to have my class teaching evaluation. I had my notes, prepared and the class content all worked out so I could maximize the 50 minutes class time I had to the fullest. Since I enjoy free-sparring so much, I decided to make that the theme of my class. I would go through a quick 10 minute-warm-up/stretch, 10 minutes worth of basic hand and foot techniques, 5 minutes of basic sparring footwork drills, followed by 20 minutes of combination sparring drills, finishing with a 5 minute cool-down.

After my class, I felt pretty good about my performance. My critique went well, and besides a few corrections, my Seniors gave me an excellent review. I did not have much time to enjoy my results as it was back to work for another 2 hours of testing hyung requirements. We 4th Dan candidates were still off key a bit, but overall we were becoming more synchronized and harmonious. This was a particularly brutal session though as we did our required testing forms, Kong Sang Kun (Eagle), Po Wol (Embracing the Moon), and Ship Soo (Bear) hyungs 40-50 times each!

After a short break, our last two candidates taught their classes, and were subsequently critiqued. Ms. Judy Sudak of Peabody, MA. and Mr. Michael DiNoto of Cherry Hill, NJ. taught outstanding classes and did a great job! After a short business meeting, we were dismissed and actually had time to have a decent sit down meal and complete our final drafted project. I really felt a closeness to my fellow 4th Dan candidates. I remember speaking with my fellow 4th Dan candidate, Mr. Urs Sporri of Wald, Switzerland that we had

been through some extremely trying times together, yet we seemed to be finding each others' energy level and actually feeding off it!! Once again, I felt fortunate to be in bed by midnight.

Friday, November 22, 1996

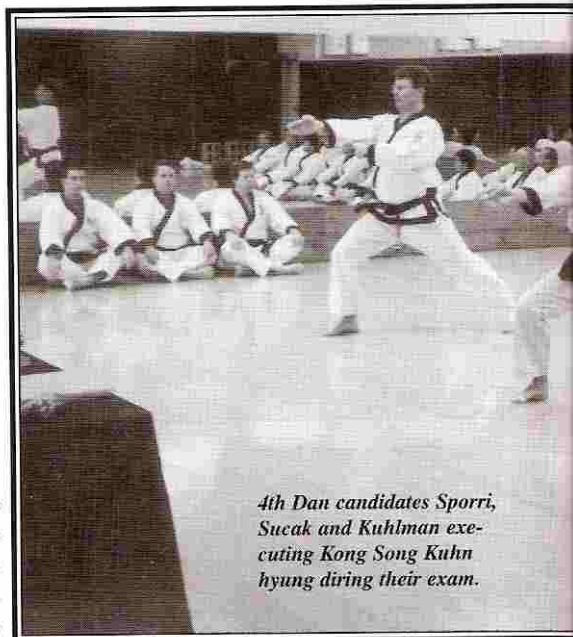
Luckily, we were not required to attend moo pahl dan kuhm this morning, so I appreciated the extra hour of sleep. After breakfast, we headed over to the dojang for more training. This morning's session was devoted to knife and stick defenses. For three hours, my partner Craig Wittmer and I literally beat each other silly, as we executed parries, disarms, and full takedowns to defend against the various weapons.

After a short lunch break, we went right back to weapons defense. Once again I found myself repeatedly tapping out for pain compliance and picking myself up off the ground after a takedown. At this point however, it was good to keep active and not let the soreness settle in too much. We finished the days' session with more testing requirements review, bowed out, and were dismissed for the infamous Friday night dinner. This dinner is a formal type affair that gives the candidates a chance to mingle with each other, as well as the Seniors in a lighter, more social type atmosphere. It was a highly memorable occasion as nearly everybody stood up, gave a heartfelt toast, and recognized how wonderful and unique our Soo Bahk Do brother/sister hood is. There was laughter, tears, and definitely many memories that I will cherish from this evening forever, but most importantly, I felt a bond between the candidates that will seal us together for eternity. After a wonderful evening, we returned to the hotel and actually got to bed by 11:00 PM.

Saturday, November 23, 1996

The wake-up call came, I jumped out of bed and felt great! I was feeling very good about the weeks' festivities and physically, I was completely used to the frenetic pace and was actually getting stronger and more mentally sharp. We had to check out of the hotel this morning because tonight, being the night before the actual testing, we were all staying together at the dojang. When we arrived at the dojang, it was back to business for a 4 hour review of all mate-

rials covered. After lunch, we returned for more practice on our testing requirements. All the candidates were looking sharp and our motions were in total unison, a stark contrast to how we looked a mere 6 days ago. Our Senior candidate, Master Shipley, who had been a rock for us all week, gave us a very motivating speech, telling us how proud he was of us and how much he had enjoyed spending this time with us. We were so grateful to have him as our Senior because he made it much easier for us all week long. I know he ran inter-



4th Dan candidates Sporri, Sueak and Kuhlman executing Kong Song Kuhn hyung during their exam.

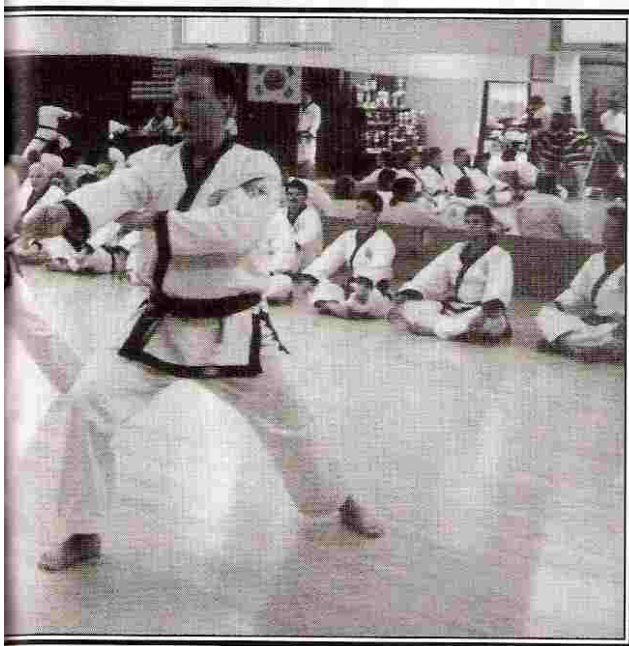
ference and took much of the heat from his Seniors for us. Master Shipley then dismissed us for dinner and told us to return in a few hours so we could clean up the dojang, set up tables, and generally prepare for our impending exam tomorrow morning. We got the dojang ready, set up our sleeping arrangements, and all twelve of us 4th Dan candidates jammed into one room and layed down to try and get some sleep at approximately midnight. (For purely humorous reasons I must mention that we were subjected to absolutely the worst, most brutally loud snoring I have ever been exposed to. We decided that Mr. Monty Fulk would pay for his horrendous snoring ways at a later date, as we got virtually no sleep due to his jackhammer-like breathing patterns!!)

Sunday, November 24, 1996

Well, here it is, testing day! Seven days of blood, sweat, and tears, all to be culminated in a single days' exam. One must understand that the actual

test was the entire previous week of training. All week long, everyone of us were under intense scrutiny at all times by our Seniors, seeing if we had what it takes to be a Ko Dan Ja member or receive additional ranking. We were all nervous as we expected to test in front of the Founder of Soo Bahk Do Moo Duk Kwan, Grandmaster Hwang Kee (Kwan Jang Nim). Unfortunately, the Kwan Jang Nim could not be with us on this day, but sent his warmest regards through his son, Master Hwang.

At long last our exam began. Very



straightforward, yet intimidating, the test lasted a full 2 hours. Our hyung groups looked great, and everyone of us rose to the occasion in a big way. We followed protocol to the letter and really worked hard as a unit, or like our Seniors desired of us in the beginning, as a family. The bonding that occurred between the candidates was a unique phenomenon in that, although only together for 8 days, with no previous training together or even speaking the same language, we were able to work together as a cohesive unit. Each candidate did extremely well and after the test was complete, we all hugged and took pictures, knowing we would never be the same martial artist again.

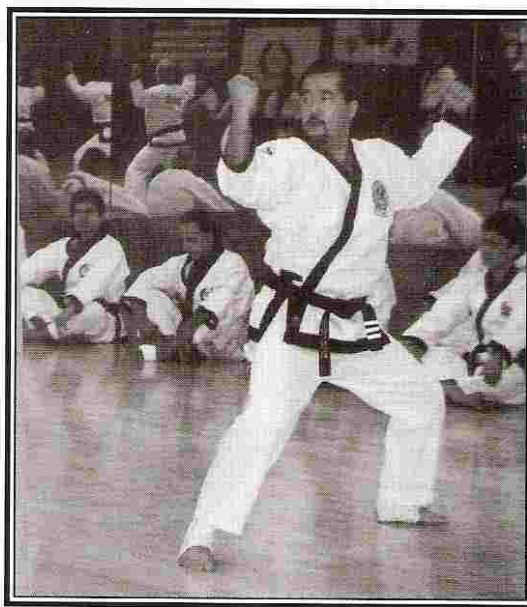
In retrospect, I understand this 8 day period to have been the most influential period of martial arts training in my life. Actually, I learned much about life in general during this time. A vast amount of discipline is required to survive this type of strenuous testing. You must be able to balance the highs and lows, the positives and negatives, the laughter

and the tears. I felt that I made strides in the area of balance as, although I was physically exhausted much of the time, I was able to stay mentally alert and keep a strong focus. The extreme, physically repetitive nature of the weeks' training, coupled with staying mentally alert, is what gives us the harmony, the balance, and the discipline to continue our development as martial artists. According to Master Hwang, the physical repetition is the best method of staying connected to the teachings of Grandmaster Hwang kee for the Moo Duk Kwan practitioner.

I can not fully express how deeply fulfilling I feel this whole experience was for me, both as a martial artist, and a person. I now understand much better how to get along with people under stressful circumstances. Most importantly, I learned that if you use your energies to care for oth-

ers, they in turn will care for you, quite possibly better than you could care for yourself! This type of mind-set may come in handy, say, at your job, in your marriage/relationship, or with your children. I will never forget my experiences at the 14th Annual Soo Bahk Do Moo Duk Kwan Ko Dan Ja Shim Sa. Thank you Master Hwang, for giving us the opportunity, and most of all, thank you Grandmaster Hwang Kee for giving us the Art and consequently, the brothers and sisters with whom to enjoy it! ■

Trent K Suzuki, M.S., C.S.C.S., CN., Dan #23501, is a 4th-Dan, Sa-Bom Certified, member in good standing of the U.S. Soo Bahk Do Moo Duk Kwan Federation. He resides in the San Diego, CA, area and trains regularly under the excellent guidance of Master Daymon Kenyon. In addition to teaching martial arts, Trent works as a strength & conditioning coach and trains professional athletes and other serious competitors to enhance speed, strength, and power. Trent can be reached at (619) 793-2072.



4th Dan candidate Trent Suzuki executing Ship Soo hyung during exam.

PREREQUISITES FOR KO DAO JA SHIM SA

Because of the large numbers of potential Ko Dan Ja Candidates, these individuals must meet very stringent guidelines to be considered.

- 1) time requirement- for 4th Dan-4 years since 3rd Dan
for 5th Dan-5 years since 4th Dan
for 6th Dan-6 years since 5th Dan, etc.**
- 2) Proof of consistent training under their instructor, who is Certified and a member in good standing of the Moo Duk Kwan.**
- 3) Being active at both the Regional and National level, such as tournaments, clinics, camps, and testings for the purpose of continuing education and service.**
- 4) Successful acceptance of a very thorough and detailed application process, which includes an essay on "Why I Should Be Considered a Ko Dan Ja Candidate."**
- 5) Being in good physical condition, which keeps the practitioner motivated to train regularly.**

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