MEMORIAL

GRANDMASTER MELBERT LEE SR. – KARATE FIVE ASSOCIATION
February 20, 1946 – December 2, 2017 - Knoxville, TN
“JOINS THE RANKS OF KARATE FIVE’S FALLEN WARRIORS”
The Karate Five Association and Karate Five Dojo staff, sensei’s, instructors and students will sadly miss our beloved Grandmaster Melbert Lee Sr. In honor of his memory, we are posting this memorial on the Karate Five website. This memorial only barely touches his 40 plus years contributions in his personal life, as an ordained minister (2005) and Grandmaster in the martial arts.

In honor of his memory, during Grandmaster Melbert Lee Sr.’s, December 9, 2017 funeral services, the President of Karate Five Association, Grandmaster Willie Garfield Wilson, presented to the family during the Reflections portion of the funeral program, a “Resolution In Loving Memory of “Grandmaster Melbert Lee, Sr.,” a Karate Five Association Logo Scarf and a poem written by Grandmaster Wilson, titled “Friend” in memory of just not his association in Karate Five but for his dear friend of over 40 years.

FRIEND

TO A FRIEND TO NO END,
HEARING THE WORDS, YOU WERE NO MORE, MY EMOTIONS SUDDENLY SOARED AS AN EAGLE’S WINGS;

AS MY EYES FILLED WITH TEARS AND MY VOICE AND HEART QUIVERED IN PAIN, I KNOW NOTHING WILL EVER BE THE SAME—YOUR FRIENDSHIP WAS DEEPER THAN MOST COULD UNDERSTAND;

WHEN I SEARCH MY FEELINGS, ONE THING COMES TO MIND, WHAT I AM GOING TO BE MISSING—OUR CONVERSATIONS ON LIFE AND HOW WE COULD STOP STRIFE;

TO NO LONGER HEAR YOUR VOICE CAUSES ME TO UNDERSTAND THE VOID YOU’VE LEFT;

ONE OF MY BEST FRIENDS IS GONE BUT THE MEMORIES LIVE ON FOR HE IS NOW WITH CHRIST AND LEFT US WITH ALL OF HIS PLEASANT MEMORIES;

HIS MARKS IN LIFE WILL ALWAYS BE OUR LANDMARK IF HE WAS HERE, I KNOW WHAT HE WOULD SAY, “LET CHRIST SHOW YOU THE WAY”

By Willie Garfield Wilson
December 9, 2017
Karate Five
Resolution In Loving Memory of "Grandmaster Melbert Lee, Sr."

We the members of Karate Five Association want the family to know that our hearts are with you as we gather to bid goodbye to one of the founders and Sensei's Melbert Lee, Sr.

WHEREAS, We remember Grandmaster Lee as a man who loved Christ, family, church and the Karate family. We remember Melbert as a Sensei which means teacher. He helped preside over developing programs that created leaders. His Christian leadership led people to Christ what he claims was his biggest accomplishment through Jesus Christ. His family, Christ and Karate family helped him hold to his principles.

WHEREAS, We remember Melbert as a very gifted martial artist and the first African American to receive his Black belt under the Harold Long lineage. He has received numerous awards, such as the Ishinryu Hall of Fame, World Karate Union Hall of Fame and the IiKA award. Since there are so many, the rest will be on the Karate Five website, karatefive.com.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that we, Karate Five embrace the family because all of us have a bond that will connect us the rest of our lives. We cannot replace Grandmaster Lee, but will attempt to demonstrate his love for his Karate members and family.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that Grandmaster Melbert Lee, Sr.'s name will be added to our memorial page. This resolution will be given to the family and a copy in the Karate Five files.

To the family of Melbert Lee, Sr., we know your loss is deep and your sorrow is great and the Karate Five wants you to know that we share in your sorrow.

When it is all over, we would like you to remember:

Lee and we were family,
We had a destiny,
We trained to protect me,
We are Karate Five Family,
We're here if you need us

Humbly submitted on this 9th day of December 2017

Willie G. Wilson
Karate Five Association
Willie G. Wilson, President
Melbert Lee Sr., was ordained as a minister in 2005 and attended Knoxville Interdenominational Bible Institute until his health began to decline. He and his family are long-time members of Sentertown Missionary Baptist Church since the mid-1970s.

He grew up being nurtured in his church, F.B.H. Church in Greenville, South Carolina by his grandparents, Elder Aaron and Ethel Lee. His family traveled extensively in the south and eastern regions of the United States until he moved to Knoxville, Tennessee in 1961.

Over the years Rev. Lee served in various ministries at his home church but he did not limit his ministry to the church; he shared his strong faith in Jesus Christ with his students at the Karate Five Dojo. His family says he loved and appreciated his pastor(s) and his church family and loved reading the Bible. His minister, Rev. Keith Elliot, spoke of his strong love for Christ and Mr. Lee’s love for his family, church and a personality which did not dally about expressing the truth.

There are many facets to Mr. Lee’s personality. His long-time friendship with Grandmaster Willie Garfield Wilson (and Linda Wilson) started when they were very young men in their twenties huddled on Willie’s front carport deciding how they were going to start their own martial arts organization. That friendship has endured over the decades until his transition on December 2.

Grandmaster Wilson states, “The night before his passing on Friday, December 1, Lee and I were discussing truck parts and replacing engine and transmission since he was already restoring his old Chevy like I did my own antique 1981 Silverado truck. I was teasing him as we usually did that he was not going to do it because I wanted him to do it and now he was telling me I (Lee) told you I was going to do it! As usual we did our bantering back and forth about who was and who wasn’t. Of course, he insisted he was going to restore his old truck. It was a tremendous shock for me to get news from his family the very next morning notifying me my best friend who was like a brother was no longer with us. Behind the scenes of Karate Five, we spent many hours on the telephone just being friends. My wife (Linda) and I will miss him deeply and my condolences go out to Sue and their family and the Karate Five organization.”

Many of Grandmaster Lee’s friends and peers in the martial arts community came to his December 9, 2017 services and extended their last respects to his passing, Mr. Lee’s family and friends. It was a moving ceremony which spoke highly of the man we all knew him to be.
During the Reflections portion of the *Home Going Celebration*, Grandmaster Wilson shared funny antidotes of his and Melbert experiences during their younger days. Everyone who knew him emphatically agreed he loved traveling and “not sharing the wheel” on road trips. Even Melbert Lee Sr.’s pastor, Rev. Elliot, had tall tales to tell of Mr. Lee on those long mountain curves during their traveling days which left him breathless at the end of the trip. Melbert Lee Sr., was well known for his “speedy” personality on the highways and bi-ways when he got behind the wheel whether it was a van, car or truck—he did not believe in wasting any time reaching his destination point.

Over the years, Melbert Lee Sr., made many friends and left a lasting impression on those he met. All who knew him said as his health began challenging him tremendously; he never complained but lived his life to the fullest until God called him home to rest. We shall miss his towering presence in our lives and his no-nonsense personality.
Melbert Lee Sr., lived his life to the fullest and touched many lives over the years.
GRANDMASTER MELBERT LEE SR.
KuDan (9th) Degree Black Belt
February 20, 1946 – December 1, 2017

Early Beginnings . . . Melbert Lee Sr.’s interest in Karate began when Jim Maples and he would sit at work and talk about martial arts. He began his training in 1972 under the late Grandmaster Harold Long and worked with other instructors such as Master Maurice Msarsa, Cas Cox, Glen Webb, the late Jim Maples and Master Allen Wheeler. Eighteen months of training later he earned his black belt. It was then Melbert was given the opportunity to follow his mentor’s vision (Grandmaster Harold Long) to teach martial arts to the Knoxville inner city youth.

Since his early beginnings as a martial arts teacher along with his partner and life-long best friend, Grandmaster Willie Garfield Wilson, they introduced martial arts classes at the Phyllis Wheatly Y.W.C.A. and later they moved their classes to the Eastside Y.M.C.A.

In 1980, Melbert Lee and Willie Garfield Wilson along with three others—Linda Wilson, Fredrick Brabson and William Faulkner became the core group of martial artists and the original founders of the Karate Five Association. This small group became the first-generation black belts under Harold Long’s lineage under Harold Long.

When Karate Five moved its martial arts program to the Eastside YMCA, the organization continued sponsoring classes and tournaments. During this period, Karate Five Association was under Mr. Lee’s leadership alongside Willie Garfield Wilson and they operated a community Karate Five Dojo at the Oakland Community Center at 3816 Oakland Drive, Knoxville, TN.

To further Karate Five’s commitment of Harold Long’s vision the organization which was not officially established until 1980. Karate Five’s inception began on the carport of Willie Garfield Wilson’s home as Lee and Wilson put their heads together and agreed the organization would
always be a not-for-profit organization. This major decision would allow Karate Five to facilitate a martial arts program designed for outreach to the inner city youth. Almost 40 years later, they have fulfilled the vision sponsoring inner city youth and young adults through the contributions and support of individuals, large and small businesses, and corporate sponsorship.

During Mr. Lee’s martial arts career spanning almost 45 years, Sensei Lee made some historical strides in the martial arts community of Isshinryu as well as many personal successes.

**Significant Milestones and Recognition:**

On April 18, 1974, Melbert Lee Sr., was the first African American to be nominated to the IILKA Board of Directors and re-nominated again in 2001.

He was later nominated two years in a row as Sensei of Sensei.

April 28, 1974 Knoxville News Sentinel article, “Lee Limps but He Sure Can BELT You,” Mr. Lee is interviewed about receiving his black belt and recognition as the first African American man to earn a black belt in Isshin-Ryu Karate in Knoxville, Tennessee.

Despite that Lee was suffering from a crippling pain in a hip joint discussed in the article below, a handicap which would have been devastating to many people; Lee continued to find success and recognition in martial arts. In addition to studying under Grandmaster Harold Long, he studied jujitsu with Moses Powell of New York City—a recognized 8th degree master and 70-year old Master Vee of the Philippines.

In this article, he stated, “I wish I had gotten into Karate 15 years; it has helped me both mentally and physically, certainly in building my confidence.” When Mr. Lee first began training in the martial arts, he was quoted, “I first though that white karate candidates would be shown favoritism because I felt that every pair of eyes were on me when I worked out. I later recalled it was only my imagination. People connected with Karate have been great to me.”

(Left) Professor Florendo M. Visitacion recognized as “Master of Masters” and founder of Vee-Jitsu Federation is fondly called “Master Vee” among his martial arts peers and students.
In 1977 Grandmaster Lee started studying under Master Moses Powell after Grandmaster Wilson received an invitation from Grandmaster William Mason of the Morristown Dojo study Moses Powell Sanuces Ryu system. Grandmaster Wilson in turn extended an invitation to Granmaster Melbert Lee Sr. the opportunity to also study under Moses Powell. Master Powell founded the Sanuces Ryu system in 1968; then the jujitsu system four years later. The Karate Five Association sponsored their 1st Annual Sanuces Ryu Tournament on August 18, 1979 on the Knoxville College Campus.

(Pictured Above) 1st Annual Sanuces Ryu Tournament Program – August 18, 1979 9:00 a.m. – Knoxville College Campus
Grandmaster Moses Powell

(L-R) Grandmaster Willie Garfield Wilson and Sensei Naomi Mason are shown in an August 18, 1979 article announcing Karate Five’s 1st Sanuces Ryu tournament in Knoxville, TN.

(L-R) Grandmaster Moses Powell and Grandmaster Harold Long were both in attendance at Karate Fives 1st Annual Sanuces Ryu Tournament
In a March 28, 1987, the Karate Five Association honored Mr. Lee at the Quality Inn Hotel – Downtown in a program titled, “A Night with Melbert Lee Sr.”

In the Congratulations section of this special program honoring Grandmaster Lee it read:

“Mr. Lee’s Success takes on significance because he has conquered crucial hurdles. He is disarmingly honest and whatever he says the students take to heart. They know Mr. Lee’s advice concerns the things that really matter in this world.”

(Front Row from L-R) pictured are Fredrick “Butch” Brabson, Melbert Lee Sr., Willie Garfield Wilson, and Clarence Allen in the program honoring Mr. Lee

(L-R) Back row are Melbert Lee Jr. and Anston Wilson, sons Willie Garfield Wilson and Melbert Lee Sr. (R-L) on front row
In 2000, Mr. Lee received the Lifetime Achievement award.

On May 4, 2002, Mr. Lee was certified to rank of Hachi-Dan.

On August 4, 2002, Melbert Lee Sr., was inducted into the Isshin-Ryu Hall of Fame (IHOF) (pictured left).

In 2003, soon after this coveted induction, Mr. Lee was inducted into the World Karate Union Hall of Fame.

In 2006, he received “Dragons Forever Tab” from Grandmaster Shaffer at the 2006 IHOF Tournament.

In 2009, he was promoted to Ku Dan (9th) Degree Black Belt.

Karate Five created a Kids’ Day which brought together children and youth from different communities in Knoxville’s inner city for a fun-filled day of creative activities. This program was particularly close to Mr. Lee’s heart. Several of his grandchildren participated in the martial arts program.

(L-R) Pictured above Melbert Lee Sr. and Willie Garfield Wilson

Awards, Certifications and Nominations:

In March 25, 1987 Knoxville News Sentinel article, “Karate,” Mr. Lee was quoted. Lee called the...
2002 Isshin-Ryu Hall of Fame
Induction Photo of Grandmaster Melbert Lee Sr.

2007 Danny Shaffer Dragon Jam

2009 Karate Five Morristown Dojo Christmas Party
Mr. Lee possessed a strong desire to learn more and amplify his skills in martial arts. He began expanding his cross training by studying under Grandmaster Jeffery Delaney (Hawaii) and Professor Lisa McManus in Modern Arnis in 2003.

(L-R) Willie Garfield Wilson, Melbert Lee Sr., and Jeff Delaney (Modern Arnis)

Mr. Lee is shown (far right) above with Professor Lisa McManus (Military Arnis)

Modern Arnis, Jujitsu and Isshinryu have become the core of Karate Five’s martial arts program sponsors training in these various arts through workshops, tournaments and camps.

2005 Military Arnis Camp
Grandmaster Lee is pictured above and to the right demonstrating a martial arts technique with Karate Five’s Dojo Sensei, Maurice Msarsa, during an Arnis Camp event.

Mr. Lee states in his bio that with over 30 years’ experience (now 45 at the time of his death), “I share my knowledge of martial arts by being open minded to those who have a desire to learn. Being a Sensei is a rewarding thing to me because you are able to observe your students grow physically, mentally and spiritually in Jesus Christ and find themselves doing things they thought were impossible. It builds up their character and puts discipline in the individual.”

Mr. Lee loved working with his students; encouraging their self-confidence with the same rewards he’d received from martial arts.
IN HIS FATHER’S FOOTSTEPS . . . Melbert Lee Jr., has followed his father’s love for the martial arts and bears the rank of Schichi Dan (7th) Degree Black Belt and his grandson, Melbert Lee III (known as Lil Mel) is also following the same path of father and grandfather’s footsteps.

Sensei Linda Wilson, Schichi Dan (7th) Degree Black Belt, states “Lil Mel” has excellent skills and his performance shows he is a student who is naturally gifted in the arts. Other family members in the Lee and extended family who have also shown a genuine commitment to the martial arts are:

These pictures were taken during the 2017 Isshin-Ryu Hall of Fame’s 38th Annual Awards Banquet and Tournament in Gatlinburg, TN. As always, Grandmaster Lee not only enjoyed the awards banquet but participated as one of the judges for the tournament activities on Saturday, July 22.

He always enjoyed the annual IHOF and WKU Hall of Fame events. Mr. Lee was always an eager traveler and his road companion, Grandmaster Wilson and he spent many years traveling the roads whether for pleasure or Karate Five tournaments business. They both loved being on the road whether it was in their early 80’s conversion vans, motorcycles, cars, in a boat on the lake or on a TVA Parks and Recreation island for the weekend with their families—camping and water skiing.
During the **2017 IHOF Awards Banquet and Tournament** events, Grandmaster Lee accepted the “**The Harold Mitchum Humanitarian Award**” presented to the Karate Five Dojo on Friday, July 22. On Saturday, July 23, he also assisted as a judge during the tournament competition activities. This year had one of Isshin-Ryu Hall of Fame’s largest turnouts in its annual 38 years event.
Until Sensei Lee’s health began preventing his regular presence at the Karate Five Dojo, his tall towering frame was missed by the Sensei’s, Instructors, staff and students.

The 38th IHOF Karate Tournament was a long day of demonstration and competition events for every age group.

(Left) Sensei Linda Wilson and Grandmaster Melbert Lee Sr.

Many of the Karate Five Sensei and instructors worked as judges as well as participated in the competition. Mr. Lee never wavered in his time and commitment to these events; he loved the martial arts which became a lifetime commitment.

(Left) Grandmaster Melbert Lee Sr., at the 2017 IHOF Annual Tournament events at the Gatlinburg Convention

(L-R) CJ Burnett, Grandmaster Willie Garfield Wilson, Sensei Linda Wilson and Grandmaster Melbert Lee Sr. (Center)
Another generation . . . June 20, 2017 was a very special occasion for Grandmaster Lee who made an appearance at the Karate Five Dojo to participate in Melbert Lee III’s (grandson) promotion to orange belt. It was a proud moment for Grandfather Lee Sr. and Lil Mel’s father, Melbert Lee Jr.

Pictured in center above are Melbert Lee III receiving his promotion certificate from father, Sensei Melbert Lee Jr., and Grandmaster Willie Garfield Wilson standing next to Sensei Linda Wilson; Grandmaster Lee Sr. is in the background.

Grandmaster Melbert Lee Sr. presents orange belt to Melbert Lee III.
Melbert Lee Jr. also carries on his father’s tradition as Grandmaster Lee proudly states in his own bio, “my son Melbert Lee Jr. (Yo Dan 4th Degree Black Belt at the time) won first place in the men’s heavy weight division and was crowned the IHOF 2002 Kumite Grand Champion.”

Granddaughters, Donitra and Myshauna Blair were promoted to (blue belts) in July 2004.

His son, Sensei Melbert Lee Jr., has been known to defy gravity during tournament demonstrations!
Melbert Lee Sr., was born in Greenville, SC but moved to Knoxville, TN in 1961. He is a graduate of Austin High School Class of 1966 and shortly after graduation married his lovely and devoted wife of 49 years, Susie Naomi (Ray) Lee. They have two sons (Marvin and Melbert Jr.), a daughter (Misty), nine grandchildren and six great grandchildren. Melbert Lee Sr.’s pride and joy was his family and most of all his relationship with Jesus Christ.

He spoke of how he embraced martial arts in 1979 when the Karate Five Dojo sponsored their 1st Annual Sanuces Ryu Tournament on the campus of Knoxville College in Knoxville, TN on August 18, 1979. The Knoxville News Sentinel Newspaper wrote an article announcing the event and he spoke openly and honestly about his introduction to the martial arts and his instructors’ influence during that period in his life.

“I wish I had gotten into Karate 15 years ago; it has helped me both mentally and physically, certainly in building my confidence,” he revealed in the article.

When he first began training in the martial arts, he was quoted, “I first thought that white karate candidates would be shown favoritism because I felt that every pair of eyes were on me when I worked out. I later recalled it was only my imagination. People connected with Karate have been great to me.”

Lee was featured in an April 27, 1974 article by the Knoxville News Sentinel, “Lee Limps but He Sure Can BELT You.”

In this article he further explained the impact martial arts made on his life after a football injury prevented pursuing what he once referred to in the article, “I once thought there was nothing like football,” he confessed.

As already mentioned earlier, Melbert Lee Sr., was an extra-ordinary person who never met a stranger and was known to many as a true encourager. Melbert enjoyed riding motorcycles especially riding his Goldwing which was exhilarating for him.

He was often involved in community events and enjoyed ministering with Praise, Honor and Glory for many years. He was the former Vice-President of Player Personnel for the Knoxville Crusaders minor league football team.
2002 World Karate Union Hall of Fame “Master of the Year” Award – Pictured above (L-R) Grandmasters Willie Garfield Wilson and Melbert Lee Sr.

April 2011 Arnis Camp

March 2013 UIKJA Hall of Honor Seminar
On July 21, 2017, Grandmaster Lee Sr., was present at the 38th Annual Awards Banquet to accept “The Harold Mitchum Humanitarian Award” on behalf of the Karate Five Dojo. This is an International Isshinryu Karate Association (IIKA) Board award. It is a great honor of recognition to receive this award.
(L-R) Melbert Lee Jr. and Melbert Lee Sr., “a legacy of martial arts carrying on the family tradition.”
A GENERATION AND LEGACY OF MARTIAL ARTS

Melbert Lee Sr., Ku Dan (9th) Degree Black Belt

Melbert Lee Jr., Schichi Dan (7th) Degree Black Belt

Melbert Lee Sr. presents Melbert Lee III his Orange Belt June 20, 2017

Jada Foster

Aniya Foster
Personal Reflections

(Above Right) Melbert Lee Sr., with Sue Lee (Left Below) Melbet Lee Sr.
pictured with sons Melbert Jr. and Marvin
Melbert Lee Sr. also known as Grandmaster Lee and Rev. Lee Sr., loved his family, Church, martial arts and living his life to the fullest until he was called home on December 2, 2017. He fought the good fight!
As we look back and remember all that we shared together, we ask where did the time go; it seems so short. The joy, laughter, worry, fear, perseverance and love is the recipe God made just for you. All these only God can give, a predestined life He gave you. You did everything God had for you while here, not saying you were perfect but your heart made pure. Will we miss you? Yes we will, weeping endures for a night, but joy comes in the morning. We don’t say goodbye, only see you soon. Even though our hearts are heavy and eyes filled with tears, we remember what you would always say, “Live a life knowing that your destination will be in Heaven, living eternally.” Until God completes His work in each of us, take your rest and we won’t say goodbye, but see you soon!

Remembering You Always,

The Lee Family
Karate Five Association and the Karate Five Dojo and Board will miss our dear friend and one of the five original founders of the Karate Five. His contribution has touched many lives especially the youth to which our programs and vision for Karate Five is dedicated.

To those of you who have visited his Memorial page to pay your respect and knew him through the martial arts, family, church, or the community, we appreciate your support and kind words for our fallen warrior, Grandmaster Melbert Lee Sr.

Thank You,

Grandmaster Willie Garfield Wilson
December 2017