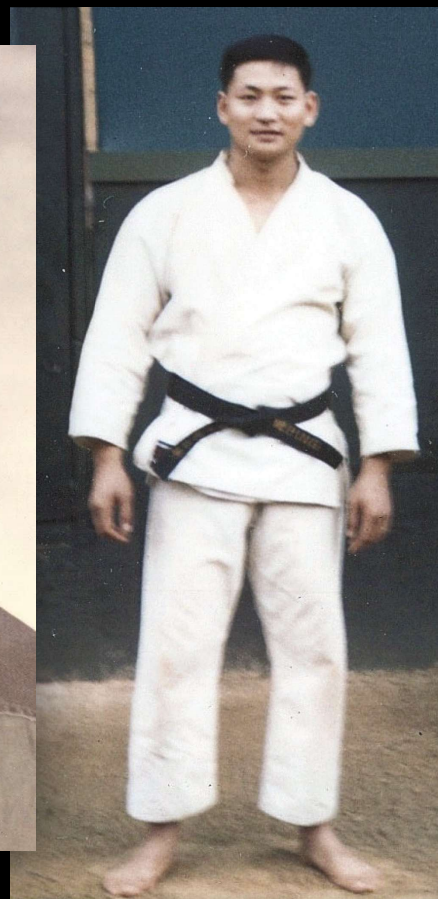
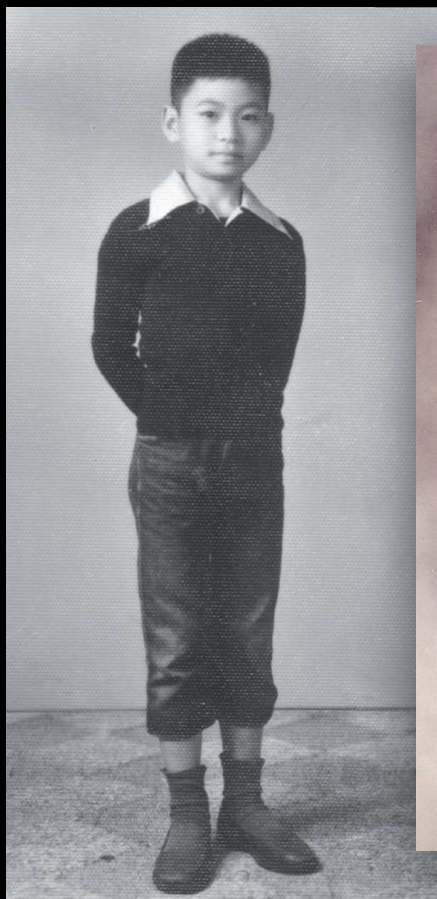


The Legend of a Long-Shot Marine



By Mike Hoeferlin

Question: How does a Chinese immigrant who came to America alone at 9 years of age not knowing a word of English become a highly successful professional sports agent and one of the best jujitsu practitioners in the world?

Answer: By first becoming a Marine!

Dr. Da-I (dah EEÉ) Ping always was a long shot. Throughout his life he repeatedly defied the odds. Today, as founder of Ping's Professional Sports Agency (PPSA) in Saline, Mich., he helps others defy the odds as they try to make it to the National Football League.

"Doc" Ping is more than a typical sports agent. He specializes in preparing athletes—top draft picks and undrafted free agents alike—for professional football. His methodology combines a rigorous

Da-I Ping is shown as a student in Taiwan in 1956 (left), prior to immigrating to the United States; as a recruit at MCRD San Diego in 1965 (center); and as a sergeant in MP Bn prior to conducting hand-to-hand combat in the Republic of Vietnam in 1968. (Photos courtesy of Da-I Ping)

mental and physical training regimen with a strong underpinning of emotional and psychological toughness, traits he developed in the Marine Corps, where he made staff sergeant during his four-year enlistment.

Ping motivates his clients by replicating his USMC experiences. The same drive and dedication required of Marines exists in his "total immersion concept" of training athletes. "My clients must be totally dedicated, or I won't work with them," he stated.

Robert Lyles, a passionate and punishing NFL linebacker for eight years with the Houston Oilers and Atlanta Falcons, is a PPSA client. "Doc's players definitely know he was a Marine," Lyles said. "He

always had the [Marine Corps] colors on, and he told us about his Marine experiences. ... He got you to believe in yourself, and he definitely used his Marine training to motivate us."

Another PPSA client, Lionel Washington, spent an incredible 15 years as an NFL defensive back with the St. Louis Cardinals, Los Angeles and Oakland Raiders and Denver Broncos. "Doc taught me a lot both mentally and physically. He's the best teacher in the world," said Washington. "We absolutely knew he was a Marine. ... He wouldn't let us forget it either. When you sign on with Doc, you know it's going to be difficult, but you also know you're going to get the best training, representation and effort that there is."

The Beginning

The legend of Doc Ping started in China when he and his family were trying to

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COURTESY OF DA-I PING

avoid capture by Communist forces who were searching for his father, a three-star general in the retreating Chinese Nationalist Army. They escaped to Thailand when Da-I was about 3. Times were tough. Food was scarce. Disease was widespread, and death was rampant among the Chinese refugees.

While there, Da-I and some other youngsters built a raft and naively floated it in a sewage-filled pond. The raft began sinking, and the others swam ashore. Da-I could not swim; he went under. According to witnesses, some minutes later a small and limp hand was visible just below the surface of the filthy pond.

Ping's lifeless body was dragged ashore, and various onlookers tried to revive him. His lungs and stomach were filled with foul water. There was no pulse, and resuscitation failed. He was dead. But, "something made me come back. ... I wasn't ready to die," he said. This was Ping's first brush with death.

Eventually, Ping's family made it to what is today Taiwan. Da-I led a relatively stable life as the son of a general officer.

When he was about 9, he had one of those pivotal experiences that often change one's life. His father took him to see an American movie about U.S. Marines battling the Japanese in World War II. The

movie, "Battle Cry," made an indelible impression. Although Da-I could not understand a word of the English dialogue, the actors' portrayals of resolute Marines fighting and triumphing impacted and altered him forever. Something had connected inside, and he intuitively believed that someday, somehow, he too would be a U.S. Marine.

Fearing a Communist invasion, Ping's parents arranged for their young son to immigrate to the United States. They reluctantly put their frightened little boy on a dilapidated freighter heading to the

his slight build, however, he was considered to be a long shot to make his varsity high-school teams. "I was skinny, but I didn't let that stop me," he said. "I was [mentally] tough; I had to be." He proved to be an outstanding athlete. More importantly, he became a citizen of the United States.

MCRD San Diego and Beyond

After graduating from high school in 1965, as the war in Vietnam was escalating, Da-I Ping enlisted and embarked on his remarkable Marine Corps journey of the heart and soul. When the short and slender recruit arrived at Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego, the DIs thought he was a long shot to make it through boot camp. He proved them wrong. He quickly made meritorious private first class and never looked back.

"Ping was the most outstanding recruit I could ever imagine," said Jack Gee, who was with him in Platoon 152 during boot camp. "He's one of a kind. He was probably the best Marine I have ever come across, [and] he was an inspiration to all of us." Gee added: "He was the battalion champion with pugil sticks ... the best I ever saw. He was and is incredibly focused and driven, [and] he helped quite a few of us make it through boot camp."

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States. "I remember crying nonstop for about the first two weeks of what was a horrible voyage," he reflected. "Finally, I accepted my fate and looked forward to becoming an American—and a Marine."

He ended up in foster homes in St. Louis, where he went to school, learned English and discovered he loved sports, particularly football and wrestling. Because of

Opposite page: Pvt Da-I Ping is in the third row, seventh from the left, in this 1965 photo of Platoon 152, MCRD San Diego.

Right: Sgt Ping teaches hand-to-hand combat to his fellow Marines in 3d MP Bn, 1968.

Meritorious promotions for the dedicated Marine came in rapid succession. Ping's abbreviated Marine Corps "career" was stellar and laden with dangers and accomplishments. Through it all, however, he could never shake the "long-shot" tag that had dogged him throughout his life.

In 1966, Sergeant Ping began studying jujitsu while stationed at the naval base in Yokosuka, Japan, where he was the Indoctrination noncommissioned officer (NCO) at the brig. One of his roommates in the Marine Barracks, Master Sergeant Joseph Vosine, USMC (Ret), remembered: "He was always working out, playing football, studying or working on his martial arts. He had lots of energy.

"Ping was always 'squared away,' and he and I were, and are, close friends. He's a class act."

Shortly thereafter, Ping began teaching hand-to-hand combat to other Marines and sailors. He was so adept at it that he subsequently was ordered to Camp Pendleton, Calif., to train Vietnam-bound Marines of 28th Regiment, Fifth Marine Division.

Vietnam

Next it was off to Vietnam where Sgt Ping was assigned to Company A, 3d Military Police Battalion, Force Logistics Command, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, located in a remote place inappropriately



COURTESY OF DA-I PING

called Happy Valley. "It was anything but happy," he recalled. "We ran and guarded the III MAF [Marine Amphibious Force] brig and III MAF Detention Facility, which usually housed about 150 prisoners, plus a classified number of POWs."

The MPs did more than just guard prisoners. They were under constant attack, and they fought back ferociously. The battalion sent out listening posts, ambushes and patrols almost every day and night. Ping said, "As is the case with all Marines, we were riflemen first and foremost." He added, "We were involved in some very fierce fighting and were 'hit' almost every night." Sgt Ping and the other MPs were on constant alert and in perpetual danger.

He often felt that he was a long shot to make it back alive.

From time to time, their perimeter was breached by enemy sappers who cut and/or blew up the rows of concertina wire surrounding the compound. The "Alpha" Co commander, Major Harold E. Dexter, USMC (Ret), then a captain, said: "We could sometimes see the bad guys out by the perimeter. ... Sometimes they came right through us. It was very dangerous, and we lost some good people." Dexter remembered that Ping and his other NCOs were "outstanding Marines," who helped save many lives.

The MPs fought from and essentially lived in trenches and fighting holes in



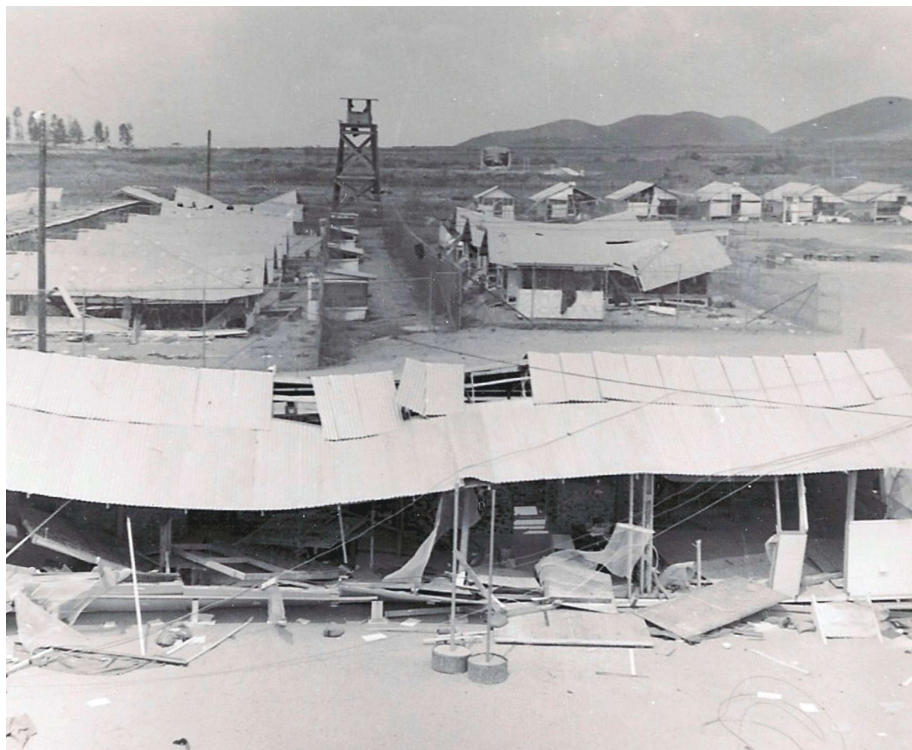
COURTESY OF DA-I PING



COURTESY OF DA-I PING

Capt H. E. Dexter (above), the Co A, 3d MP Bn commander, wearing a soft cover (left), is preceded by Sgt Ping as he inspects the MP unit in Vietnam in the 1968-69 time frame.

Below: The III MAF Detention Facility was hit by 122 mm Russian-made rockets.



COURTESY OF H.E. DEXTER

order to provide effective and coordinated protective fire. At times, they called in mortars, artillery and airstrikes (including “Puff the Magic Dragon” gunships) to prevent being overrun. Ping said the shrill sirens went off whenever the enemy came through the wire. “It got our attention, and it’s a sound that I will always remember.”

During a night attack, fragments from a Russian-made 122 mm rocket slammed into Sgt Ping’s clothes, flak jacket and boots, briefly knocking him unconscious. “I really don’t know what happened, but I was awakened by a Navy corpsman ripping my bloody big toenail off with pliers.” A somewhat debilitated Ping fought on. He could have been medevacked out, but he opted to stay with his unit.

On one night patrol after Sgt Ping volunteered to “walk the point,” he wondered again if his luck would run out.

Could he continue to defy the odds? Just then an enemy soldier appeared about 15 feet in front of him and fired his AK47 at point-blank range at about the same time Ping unleashed a round from his M79 grenade launcher. That time the long shot was a better shot. He had defied the odds again.

Another time, Sgt Ping accompanied a colonel to observe napalm strikes by F-4

Phantoms. Unfortunately, the bombing run was off target, and he and the colonel almost were cooked. “Another few meters and we’d have been ‘crispy critters,’ ” he admitted. “It got very hot very fast. ... I’ll never forget that smell.”

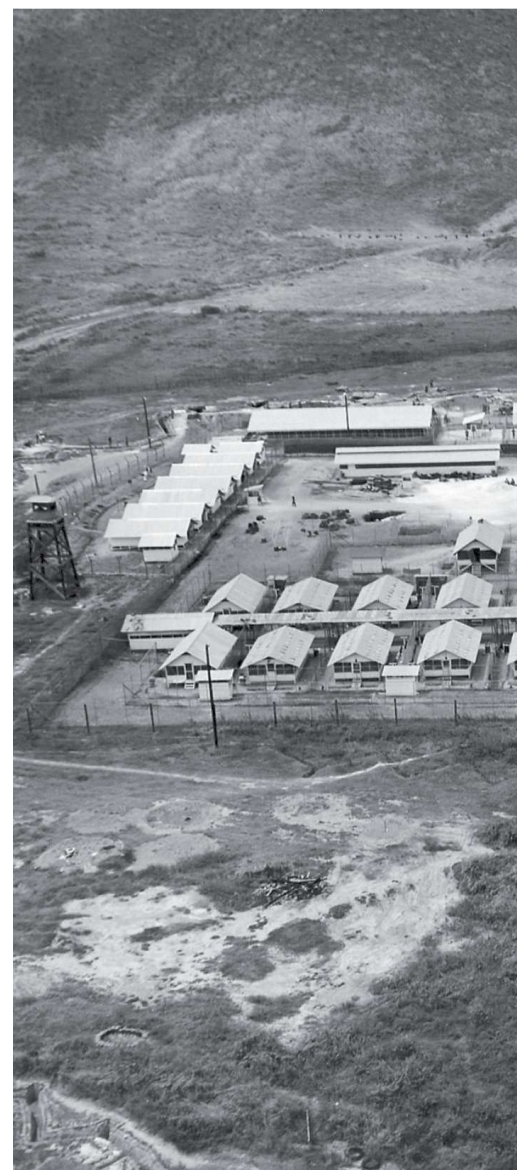
On still another occasion, Sgt Ping and his driver drove into a classic Viet Cong ambush. They miraculously escaped despite the fact that scores of enemy soldiers were blasting away at them as they traversed the kill zone. Ping’s luck held again, and he once more missed a possible appointment with death.

Finally, during the 1969 Tet Offensive, a sniper’s bullet tore through Sgt Ping’s helmet cover. The round passed only a few millimeters from his skull. Throughout his tour he had sustained various injuries for which he could have been medevacked. While others would disagree, Ping described his injuries as “minor” and not worthy of taking up space on an outbound helicopter. “Besides,” he said, “I always wanted to stay with my Marines.”

CONUS

After his Vietnam tour, Sgt Ping rotated back to Marine Corps Base Twentynine Palms, Calif., where he made staff sergeant. Shortly thereafter he was granted

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an “early out” to go to college on a football scholarship to Eastern Michigan University, where he also wrestled and taught martial arts and self-defense. In near-record time, he earned bachelor and master of science degrees in physical education. He then opened Ping’s Dojo (a school for martial-arts training). Through it all he never lost his zeal and passion for his USMC training, and he patterned his working philosophy on what he had learned in the Corps.

From 1973 to 1989, Ping traveled to Japan every summer to study under Dr. Soke Sugita, the Grand Master of Jishukan Ryu-Jujitsu. Ping competed internationally and gained his reputation as one of the best in the world. In 1983, as a result of Ping’s mastery of jujitsu, Dr. Sugita awarded him the rank of shihan, which includes a doctorate degree in Asian medicine. There are only four shihans in the world; Ping is the only one in North America.

Also in 1983, Ping started PPSA and was certified by the National Football



In this aerial view of the III MAF Detention Facility, the Vietnam Prisoner of War compound is in the lower right.

League Players Association as a contract adviser. He is, however, much more than that to clients who are immersed in the physical, mental, emotional and psychological aspects of realizing their absolute maximum potential. By adroitly combining Western pragmatism and Eastern philosophy, Ping brings out the best in each of his clients, all of whom refer to him simply as “Doc.”

Ping’s Professional Sports Agency’s impressive list of past and present clients includes many NFL stars plus “can’t miss” and some “long-shot” prospects who were not drafted by NFL teams. “I think back on my life, and I can relate to what is going on in their heads and hearts,” he said. “I was there. ... I faced adversity almost every day of my life, particularly as a Marine, and I survived.

“Some would say I was a long shot and defied the odds. That’s why I work as hard as I can to help other so-called long shots.”

Over the years, many of Ping’s clients have lived with him and his family as he prepared them for the rigors of professional football. He works them very hard. “They have to be just as dedicated as I am,” he said.

Doc awakens early each morning and engages in an extensive two- to three-hour workout six days a week. He requires his players also to be in peak physical condition. He teaches them various martial-arts techniques in order to improve their confidence and to better their abilities on the football field. Doc treats his clients in a firm and loving way that underscores his intensity, generosity and indomitable spirit—traits that he developed in the Marine Corps and still uses to help others today.

Dr. Da-I Ping, the eternal long shot and former Marine staff sergeant, has come a long way. The frightened little Asian child who arrived in America with no knowledge of English, the clothes on his back and few belongings has blossomed into an iconic figure who continues to help and inspire countless others. And, he said, “I owe it all to the Marine Corps.”

Editor’s note: Da-I Ping and Mike Hoeflerlin were high-school classmates and roommates in St. Louis, where Ping lived with the Hoeflerlin family. Ping persuaded Hoeflerlin, who commanded at the company and platoon levels in the 1stMarDiv and later flew helicopters in the 3dMAW, to become a Marine.



Sgt Da-I Ping is just back from patrol in this 1968 Vietnam photo.