

# Emil A. "Curley" Freedman



*Curley Freedman in his U.S. Navy uniform in the mid-1940's*

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**Emanuel Freedman** was born in Ekaterinoslav (Dnepropetrovsk), Ukraine, Russia on March 21, 1898 to Alexander and Elizabeth. His first name was later changed to Emil and he took the middle name of Alexander after the passing of his father. The nickname "Curley" was due to his lifelong curly and wavy hair. In September 1898, Curley Freedman emigrated with his parents from Russia to the United States settling in New York City. After the onset of World War I, he joined the U.S. Army and served for a time in the Hawaiian Islands.

After returning from his Army service to New York, he took up an interesting challenge. In 1921, a friend of his bet him \$300 that he couldn't walk from New Orleans to San Francisco. In addition, he had to do it between the New Year and March 21 of 1922. Curley took up the challenge and, travelling as "Daniel Foreman" or "Travelling Dan", he set out from New Orleans. After stopping in Houston, TX, the Houston Chronicle reported that he would follow the "Old Spanish Trail" and must average between 21 to 32 miles per day if he was to make his deadline. Indeed, he did make it to San Francisco by the deadline and collected the \$300. Unfortunately, on his way from San Francisco to Los Angeles, the money was stolen.

The next phase of his life began when he sailed to Honolulu to work as a tile setter at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel at Waikiki. While in Honolulu, Freedman began his Jujitsu study with Professor Henry S. Okazaki in 1936. With his athletic skill, he progressed to the rank of black belt by 1938. He was considered to be one of Professor Okazaki's senior instructors and was also adept at the restoration massage. While in Hawaii, he married Esther and began his own family. His children were Emil, "Curley" Jr., George, Burt, Maxine, King, Maurice, Rita and Bette. Curley Jr. studied Jujitsu and attained the black belt. George (or "Bud" as he was called) also studied Jujitsu and was the first "Haole" Sumo champion. As Bud remembers, "Curley Jr. was the brains and I was the muscle."

On December 7, 1941, forces from the Japanese Navy attacked Pearl Harbor. Curley Jr. and Bud were working as volunteer ambulance drivers at the time. Curley, Sr. was instrumental in securing the release of Professor Okazaki from detention at Sand Island. Curley, Sr., already a veteran of World War I, enlisted in the U.S. Navy in 1943 and served as a Seabee in the Pacific Theater until 1946.

After the war, Curley settled back in Honolulu. He was granted United States citizenship in 1953. He served as the president of the American Judo and Jujitsu Institute (one time name of the American Jujitsu Institute, AJI.) He divorced Esther and later married Florence Lorrie Walker. During the late 1950's, he unsuccessfully ran for a local political office.

Curly Freedman passed away on January 19, 1963 at the age of 64. He was buried with full military honors at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific at Punchbowl in Honolulu. He is interred in [Lot #1085, Section V, Outer Drive](#). He was posthumously awarded the rank of Kudan, 9th degree black belt in 1971 by the American Jujitsu Institute.

*Many thanks to George "Bud" Freedman for providing key information and photos of his father.*

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#### *Other pictures of Curley Freedman*



*Curley Freedman in his teens*



*Curley Freedman in the Army during World War I*



*Four posed photos depicting Curley Freedman's cross-country hike as "Traveling Dan".*



The first "haole" black belts from Professor Okazaki: (L-R) Charles Wagner, Robert Glover, Richard Rickerts, Professor Okazaki, Denzel Muggy, Emil "Curley" Freedman.



Back: Glover, Rickerts, Wagner, Freedman; Front: Professor Horimoto, Professor Okazaki



Freedman receiving his Mokuroku in 1938. The inscription reads: "For the war must never be."



Wagner and Freedman with wrestling promoter Al Karasick



The Freedman family after Curley's promotion



The Freedman family: George, Maxine, Curley, Esther and Emil, Jr.



Professor Okazaki and Curley Freedman



Seabee Curley Freedman in Guam in 1943



Seabee Curley Freedman in 1945





*Curley and Bud in San Francisco in 1947.*



*Curley working outside his home.*



*Curley in his office.*



*Curley Freedman (left) at the class of Michael Nizo (right)*



*Curley Freedman's 9<sup>th</sup> Dan belt*



*Curley Freedman in the late 1950's*



*Curley Freedman's grave at Punchbowl National Cemetery.*



*Bud Freedman with a photo of his father.*



*Bud Freedman and the author.*

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