



LEANING ON THE TAFFRAIL

MAAG DUTY IN TAIWAN

by Don Jones

I was assigned to the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) - Taiwan, 1967 to 1969. Being a Mine Warfare (MIW) advisor for the Republic of China Navy (ROCN), at Tsoying Naval Base, was a highlight of my navy career. Tsoying is located in the south, near Kaohsiung.

During my first weeks on the naval base, I spotted several USN exercise mine recovery floats by the side of the road. The floats were from a MINEX the year before. Their nylon recovery lines had been removed, but several had unfired explosive fittings installed. I took the floats back to headquarters and removed the explosives without incident. The ROCN did not have EOD personnel. They relied on UDT divers to supplement their meager MIW force.

Early on, I visited Makung, on the Penghu Islands, and was disappointed with the state of the many weapons stored there. I convinced the Navy brass they should conduct a Fleet Service Mine Test, similar to that used by the USN. During the operation some of their moored contact mines didn't work properly. The chemical horns and detonators checked out, but the electrical wiring was faulty. Corrosion on an electrical contact point made of brass kept the mines from firing. A few strokes with emery cloth and the old mines worked okay.

When a mainland Chinese ship conducted suspicious operations at night near the island of Kinmen, two coastal minesweepers were sent out to check for mines. When we arrived off Kinmen, the tension was high and the guns were manned as we conducted mechanical sweeping where the Chinese ship had operated. Nothing popped to the surface. Then an acoustic device was used with no results. The sonar operator didn't see any mines either, so we returned to Tsoying. We had been tricked into an expensive sweep operation.

Every year, P3's from Okinawa would drop exercise mines close to Tsoying. Due to strong currents and bad luck we were never able to recover all of the mines. One year, the sweepers

managed to cut-off most of the recovery floats and they popped to the surface. It was very embarrassing to all concerned.

By early 1969, U. S. foreign policy had changed and up to 50 advisors a month were leaving. When the Amphibious and Gunnery advisors departed, I assumed their duties, too. In rapid succession I participated in an amphibious landing south of Kaohsiung, a refueling at sea with a USN ship, and an anti-aircraft gunnery exercise.

In May, 1969, I was sent TDY to the Army base at Long Binh, South Vietnam. By then I was an MNC, and I relieved an Army E-8. My boss was an Air Force major, and his boss was an Army colonel. Our job was to help Taiwan acquire excess U. S. Army equipment at the Property Disposal Depot. When the new M115 jeeps arrived they turned in their old M38s, which were still in very good condition. Monthly, ROCN LST's delivered loads of bagged cement to the Newport Terminal, and soon as they were empty we back-loaded them with jeeps, trailers, and trucks of various sizes. In mid-July, 1969, the AF-major and I flew up to Danang for a few days, where we were given a mysterious wooden box to hand-carry back to Taiwan. We suspected the box contained captured AK-47's, but we didn't know for sure.

All things considered, the MAAG duty was a bittersweet learning experience. I went there unaware of the tension/hostility between the ex-mainland Chinese and the native-born Taiwanese. For example, one day we learned a Taiwanese civilian had been executed for stealing gasoline at a military base. It was frustrating and counterproductive to work in an environment like that, but, I was satisfied with my performance and I looked forward to my next assignment.

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