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The Journal of Humanitarian Demining

From the Deputy Director's Desk

And They Killed No Enemy: Taiwan's Landmines

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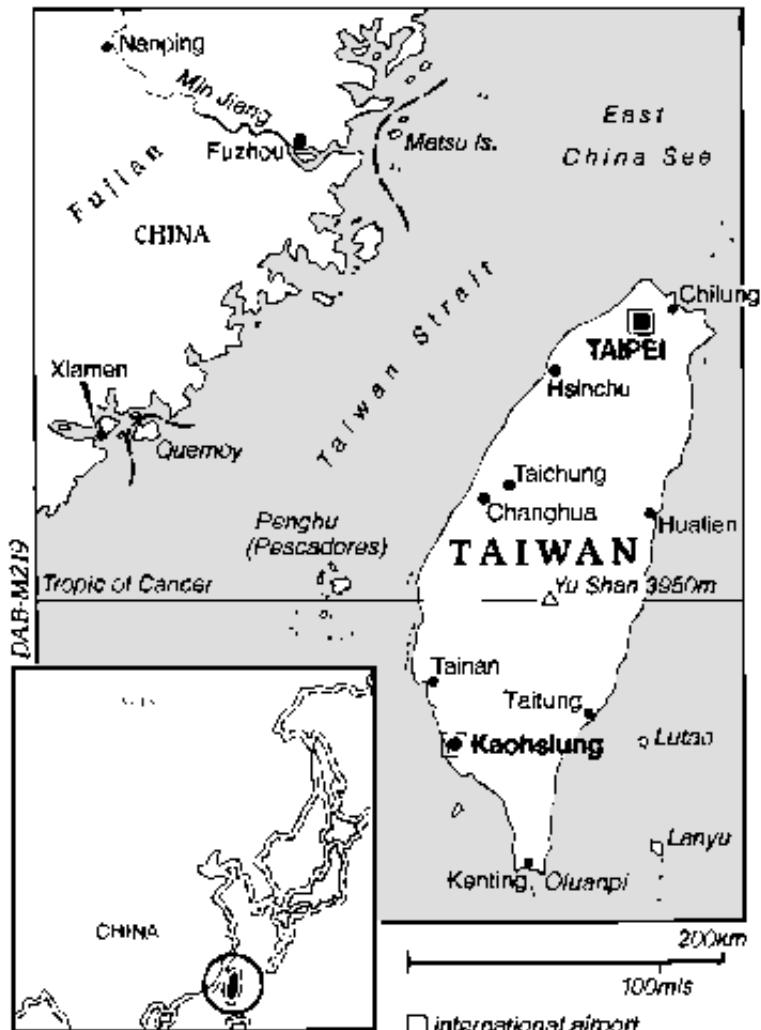
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Landmines are a remarkably wonderful little invention...from a military view. Since their systematic introduction to warfare doctrine in the spring of 1862 in the American Civil War, they have been used to deter, route, terrorize and harass opposing forces. Though their moral foundation has been in question since the beginning, little serious thought has been given to the effect of these perfect little soldiers on non-combatants--until recently. Our dark history provides numerous examples of the post-conflict madness inflicted by landmines and the other hubris of war on communities at peace. Rarely, however, do we find a case where landmines planted in defense killed no enemy but inflicted casualties only on the people they were meant to protect. Welcome to Kinmen Island.

By 1949, Mao Tse-Tung's Communist army had managed to corner General Chiang Kai-shek's nationalists on the mainland, and, having lost the war, Chiang Kai-shek fled across 227 kilometers of ocean to the island of Taiwan with 600,000 soldiers and numerous civilians, where he established the remainder of his regime. For the next four decades, the people of Taiwan lived under his Martial Law, while his Kuinmintong (KMT) regime of nationalists attempted to maintain the fantasy that they ruled all of China, and would some day "recover" the mainland. But the challenge for the moment was defending the island of Taiwan, and closer Kinmen Island (also known as "Quemoy"--see map) in



particular, against the growing threat of attack and certain extinction posed by the Communists. Kinmen was a relatively barren, rocky island sitting within artillery range of mainland China. As the front line of defense in October of 1949, General Fu Lien of the nationalists ordered the shores of Kinmen reinforced anticipating a move against the island from the mainland. He would not have long to wait.

Kinmen Island was not a pleasant place to be on the morning of October 25, 1949. Just after 2:00 in the morning, about 10,000 Communist Chinese of their 10th Corps made the short 10 kilometer trip from mainland China to the shores of Kinmen landing between Lunghou and Kuningtou in Houchiang Bay. It took over 200 fishing boats to move them. Because of this, they could carry only light weapons and field artillery and a limited supply of ammunition. They had to be mobile and quick. What they thought was their biggest asset turned out to be their biggest liability and downfall.

Though there were approximately 12,000 defenders on Kinmen, the invading Communists broke through the islands defenses in less than 40 minutes. At 2:00 in the afternoon, General Kao Kuei-Yuan regrouped the island forces and led the counterattack by Division 118 from Hunan Hill. With the help of about 22 old M-5A1 tanks acquired from the United States (nicknamed the "Bear of Kinmen"), the Communists were stopped, and eventually routed. Without any heavy weapons to counter the tanks, the Chinese were forced to retreat. Their escape was cut off by the destruction of their fishing boats that lay like decayed carcasses along Kinmen's northern beaches. The entire engagement, now known as the Ku-Ning-Tou Campaign, lasted only 56 hours. Over 6,000 invaders were captured, sent to Taiwan for "re-education" and eventually joined the Taiwanese Army.

For whatever reason, the Chinese Communists apparently never examined this tactical blunder and never again attempted to land foot on Taiwanese soil. The perceived threat, however, was sufficient to engage the defenders to fortify their island against possible follow-on aggression and key tactical positions were protected with anti-personnel landmines (APL). The islands of Kinmen and Matsu were declared military zones and proclaimed off-limits to the civilian population. Kinmen's military government was dissolved in 1989 and opened to civilian and commercial firms. Matsu still remains off-limits.

The rich history of Taiwan is fascinating and the sometimes bewildering status of this global economic powerhouse is confusing to even the most experienced of diplomats. But the resolve and determination of the Taiwanese people to be an integral part of the world community is clear and unambiguous. Their initiatives in dealing with the landmines on Taiwan, and participating in the global humanitarian demining efforts, are equally clear and growing. They recognize the impact of these weapons of war and their devastation on civilians. There are over 20 surviving landmine victims on Kinmen Island alone. In fact, the government of the Republic of China (Taiwan) has completed a draft compensation package for landmine victims that is budgeted by and administered by their Ministry of Defense.

Also before the Executive Yuan, Taiwan's primary parliamentary body, is the

request for NT\$304 million (about \$9.4 million USD) for clearance of the existing landmines on Kinmen, which is expected to take three years. This initiative has tremendous support within the government and is expected to pass easily. The minefields on Kinmen were "cleared" some time ago with all the APL, and possibly some unexploded ordnance (UXO), piled into six walled dumps around the island rather than destroyed. One dump has been cleared in early 1998 by the Specialist Ghurka Services (SGS). Other contracts to clear the remaining dumps are expected to be let as soon as funds are available. These mines have been in these dumps for over 30 years and no one knows how many there are or even what kind of mines are in there.

The government of Taiwan has begun complying with a UN resolution of 1996 which called for all members not to use, store, manufacture or transport antipersonnel mines. Even though they are not a UN member, the compliance by Taiwan, and the clear statements of support for the Ottawa Treaty of December 1997 by Premier Vincent Siew, as well as current clearance efforts and plans, are indications to many that this Asian tiger fully intends to be a responsible member of the world community and an active member in landmine control, clearance, and survivor assistance. They certainly have our support...and appreciation.

Learn More About Taiwan's History

Tung Nan Junior College of Technology
http://peacock.tnjc.edu.tw/ROC_info.html

Taiwan History Timeline
<http://www.tphg.gov.tw/formosa/e-histry.html>

Study Web: History of Taiwan Links
<http://www.studyweb.com/his/histaiw.htm>

Taiwanese Student Association,
University of Maryland
<http://www.inform.umd.edu:8080/StudentOrg/tsa/History.html>

Taiwan's 400 Years of History
<http://www.taiwandc.org/history.htm>

The History of Taiwan
Berkley Students for a Sovereign Taiwan
<http://www.taiwanese.com/~bst/history.html>

Taiwan is NOT part of China
<http://www.cris.com/~chielin/>

The Institute of Taiwan History
<http://www.sinica.edu.tw/as/brief/eng/ith.html>

REGIT Company

<http://www.regit.com/regitour/taiwan/about/history.htm>

New York Times, March 27, 1949

<http://www.taiwanc.org/hst-1947.htm>

The History of Taiwan

http://www.roc-taiwan.or.jp/info/yb96/f_html/ch04_3.html

Context I: The History of Taiwan

University of California at Berkley

<http://remarque.berkeley.edu:8001/~xcohen/Papers/CityOfSadness/behind1.html>

The February 28 Holocaust

The University of Texas at Arlington

<http://www.uta.edu/accounting/faculty/tsay/feb28hd.htm>
