

Dalat, Vietnam

In 1989 in Vietnam, I was working with the Republic of Taiwan (ROC) political warfare reps. The ROC reps were tasked with keeping the military thinking along the same lines as the government which was led by President Lee Teng-hui at the time. There was a small ROC detachment in Dalat near the Cambodian border that the ROC wanted me to visit.

Dalat at times had been occupied by the Vietcong. The ROC reps and I flew to Dalat for a two to three day visit. Landing at the Dalat airport was quite a thrill as the runway ended at the edge of a cliff. As one might conclude, there was no room for error and thankfully, all went well.

Shortly after our arrival we were taken to a small ROC house located in a residential area with no fortifications at all. The following morning as I came down for breakfast I wondered, what do the Chinese eat for breakfast? I must say, eating a fried egg with chopsticks is not easy! We also had pickles, nuts and rice.

The local ROC reps wanted to show us a Buddha temple outside of Dalat. We drove there in the ROC's jeep. It was about a twenty-to-thirty-minute drive and further out in the countryside then I thought we should go. The Monks met us and invited us into the temple to show us the beautiful statues inside. We went through the temple and left by a door in the rear which I thought a bit unusual. Then they wanted to show us the large statues down the trail along a ridgeback. We started down the trail and I noticed there was none of the usual jungle noises one would expect, none at all! So I told one of the ROC reps to tell the other two reps, in Mandarin, we were getting the hell out of there and not to say anything to the Monks. We turned and "hot footed" it to the jeep and drove off! I told the driver, "If anybody gets in our way or blocks the road, run them over!" Nothing happened but I had the feeling we were being "set-up".

Submitted by CAPT Ace Trask, USN RET