

## Living and Eating in the Western Pacific

By Captain Ace Trask, USN, (Ret)

In Vietnam I worked with the Koreans and when the Korean General had his birthday his wife would come to Vietnam with a batch of Kim-Chi she made. There was a dinner party to celebrate the occasion and I sat next to her. The first course was "bird nest soup." When I touched it with my spoon the head of the bird came to the surface. She saw the look on my face and said "you don't have to eat it!" to which I happily obliged. But when they served the "minced pigeon" it was quite good.

A few years later I found myself in Taiwan R.O.C. and we ate many strange dishes i.e. duck tongue soup, sea slugs (I drew the line on that one after the first year), sea weed, snails, buried eggs, Nuoc Mam (you don't want to know!) etc. etc.

Also, gestures are different in the Orient:

- a. If you want someone to come to you, you hold your hand in front of you and wave it up and down, similar to us waving good bye. [Think of Granny in the old Beverly Hillbillies show.]
- b. It's an insult to someone if you cross your legs with your toe pointing towards them. It's also an insult if you point with your elbow.
- c. Never give a knife as a gift. It's an indication you want to cut off your friendship with them.
- d. A gift of a clock means their time is running out.
- e. During my time there, we only gave gifts that were made in the U.S.A. because otherwise, it was an insult.
- f. In the event of a death, white is worn, not black. They also had paid mourners to walk behind the casket wearing white head dress.
- g. Chicken feet and legs are often eaten. I'm talking skinny feet and the skinny part of the lower leg, [not the plump juicy legs we're used to.]

I believe it's true when the oriental community says "**Americans eat with their eyes!**"