



THE MAESTRO WU FACTORY WITH ITS COPIOUS SUPPLY OF STEEL SHELLS. THE WORKER ON THE LEFT IS MELTING A SHELL SECTION IN THE FURNACE, THE STAMPING PRESS IS IN THE CENTRE, WHILE ANOTHER WORKER POLISHES A BLADE.

gling on the side. It then opened fire on the beached fishing boats, destroying most of them and preventing their return to the mainland for the second wave of another 10,000 troops. After fierce fighting lasting three days, the remaining 1300 People's Republic of China soldiers, running short of

food and ammunition, were driven back to the beach. There, after discovering their only means of escape had been reduced to splintered, blazing wreckage, they surrendered en masse. The whole PROC invading army, including a smaller second wave that arrived during the battle, was lost.

METAL AS ANYTHING

International gunboat diplomacy and the Korean war then put paid to Mao's desire to forcibly reunite the 'two Chinas' by military invasion.

In 1952 US President Harry S. Truman toyed with the idea of using atom bombs to destroy the People's Republic of China's military strength so that Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists could retake control of China. [A forerunner to today's madness over North Korea.]

To support this crazy idea, the garrison on Kinmen was increased to 58,000 troops. As a result China commenced an aerial bombardment of the island using conventional artillery. Kinmen returned fire and during this period many hundreds of people died on each side.

Birth of an industry

Kinmen has had its share of 'manna from heaven'. During WW2, steel was hard to get so an enterprising man, Wu Chao Hsi, started collecting casings from bombs dropped by the Allies on Kinmen. [Taiwan and its islands had been under Japanese rule since 1891.]

He earned the reputation of 'Maestro Wu' by carrying his forging furnace on

KITCHEN ARTILLERY

his shoulder as he travelled across the island making and selling his knives. Not many industries receive their raw materials in such abundance or under such trying conditions. In August 1958, as a result of worsening relations with China, the island was hit by over 400,000 artillery shells. Wu Tseng-dong collected the most intact of these shells and the Kinmen Steel Knife factory became famous at home

and abroad for its 'MaestroWu' knives and cleavers. The supply of steel increased dramatically in the 1958-1978 propaganda war when, as comical as it seems now, China and Taiwan fired leaflet-filled artillery shells at each other across the 10 km sea. For twenty years, China sent shells over on the odd-numbered days of the month. Kinmen answered fire on the in-between days.

The artillery shell to knife production process consists of cutting a piece from the shell, smelting, hammering, forging, grinding and polishing. One artillery shell can make about 60 steel knives.

Today's Maestro Wu, Wu Tseng-Dong, estimates that his supply will sustain the steel knife making industry on Kinmen for at least forty or fifty years — and that's a lot of knives.



THIS KNIFE TOOK ABOUT TWENTY-FIVE MINUTES, WHILE WE WATCHED, TO GO FROM BOMB SHELL TO KITCHEN APPLIANCE. TO OUR GREAT SURPRISE IT WAS THEN ENGRAVED AND PRESENTED TO US AS A GIFT.

How this story came about

Alison Alder and Paul Cockram travelled to Taiwan and then to Kinmen as part of Alison's art practice.

She leads off ...

Our trip to Kinmen Island was my third visit to Taiwan. I was first invited to participate in the Yilan International Invitational Printmaking exhibition, held in Yilan Province in the north-east of Taiwan in 2015. Professor Chung, a retired professor of printmaking at the National Taiwan University of Fine Arts, has a commitment to promoting local artists as well as bringing the best of international printmaking from the Asia Pacific region to regional provinces.

I have been honoured to be included in three exhibitions: In Yilan, where a new museum of contemporary art has been established, in Yunlin, the poorest province in Taiwan — where the regional government has a commitment to build local business through the arts and environment — and finally in Kinmen.

It is a two way exchange where local, national and international artists have the opportunity to spend time with each other, sharing experiences of their working lives but also their techniques.

... and from Paul

It was my first trip to that part of the world. In the time we were on Kinmen we did not see any other people like us — tall and ruddy from the heat. In a place riddled with tunnels it's not such a great thing to be tall.

And it's the coastal fortifications and the ants nest-like

tunnels linking them that visitors are most likely to be shown. We have nothing like it in our history. It's remarkable that after all Kinmen and other parts of Taiwan have endured, there is no animosity towards the people of mainland China.

The Taiwanese would just like to be acknowledged as a people with a country and be recognised by all other world governments. Even to this day, the Communist Party ruling China uses bullying tactics on anyone who have the temerity to recognise Taiwan as an independent state. Only twenty small countries defy China and recognise Taiwan (ROC), thereby losing their diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China.

Australia, of course, is not one of them.

THE LONG AND THE SHORT OF IT. FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: PROFESSOR LIN, PAUL, ALISON, PROFESSOR CHUNG AND OUR TRANSLATOR, GUIDE AND GOOD FRIEND TERRI TANG.



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