

16 HOURS ON TAIPING ISLAND

太平島 16 小時

The serenity of a remote tropical islet is shattered by the arrival of an invading enemy force. Over the course of the next sixteen hours, all hope for this remote patch of Taiwanese soil depends on the courage of three unlikely heroes: a guileless Marine frogman and two of the Coast Guard's least-disciplined soldiers.

Deep in the South China Sea, Taiping Island, the southernmost outpost of the Republic of China, is left defended by a skeleton crew of twenty Coast Guards as the nation takes its New Year's holiday, though their numbers are somewhat bolstered by the presence of fifteen Marines from the Amphibious Reconnaissance and Patrol Unit who are conducting drills there. At this moment of relative weakness, the island comes under attack by the Philippine Navy, and the outnumbered R.O.C. forces are rapidly overpowered, save for three soldiers who happen to be working off base at the time of the attack.

Now, all hope for the island lies with these three unlikely heroes: a mild-mannered marine frogman, Wang Kai-hsu, who would seem incapable of hurting a fly; and the Coast Guard's shadiest recruits, inveterate shirker Chen Jui-che and his partner-in-crime Hsieh Ping-yu. Possessed with a reinvigorated sense of duty, this ad-hoc band of brothers tempers itself into a force to be reckoned with. Availing themselves of Wang's extensive training, and Chen and Hsieh's intimate knowledge of the island's terrain, they hatch a plan to liberate their captive comrades and defend the sovereignty of their nation.

But there are still questions that remain unanswered. Why would the Philippines, which had previously exhibited no designs on the island, suddenly invade? Could the invasion be a gambit by another power competing to control the South China Seas? When the three soldiers witness the execution of their commanding officers and comrades,



Category: Military Thriller

Publisher: Links

Date: 9/2023

Pages: 416

Length: 156,042 characters

(approx. 101,400 words in English)

Full English Manuscript Available

Rights contact:

bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw

Rights sold: TV series (Yoosonn)

their questions take an entirely new turn: stay and fight against overwhelming odds? Or, find some way to flee and save themselves?

Unfolding with the gripping tension and explosive imagery of a blockbuster war film, this high-stakes military crisis is narrated in tightly-paced chapters with precise time markers, keeping readers in minute-by-minute suspense until the final resolution, while true-to-life dialogue and characterizations highlight the personal stakes of every decision made on the battlefield. A rare military novel from Taiwan, *16 Hours on Taiping Island*, is a thrilling addition to the genre, delivering intricate plotting, unexpected twists, and well-turned prose. As entertaining as it is thought-provoking, it is sure to leave readers pining for a film or television adaptation.

The Twelve Rays 十二芒

After retiring from active duty in 2015, this former serviceman began writing under the pen name The Twelve Rays, a reference to the twelve rays of sunlight depicted on flag of the Republic of China (Taiwan). One of the few authors in Taiwan writing military fiction, his works include *Loyalty Test*, *16 Hours on Taiping Island*, and *Black Ops: 16 Hours in Taipei*.

16 HOURS ON TAIPING ISLAND

By The Twelve Rays

Translated by Lee Anderson

1

--- 1530 hours ---

Taiping Island

Northern beach

"What the fuck did I do to deserve this?" fumed Chen Jui-che, clenching the bottle of Coke in his hand and stabbing a finger at the feeble, acne-ridden face of the fellow soldier standing next to him. "Well? You're fucking useless, why didn't you get the short straw?"

"Do you think it could be because you went to play golf last time you were supposed to sweep the temple?" Tsai Po-han tried his best to look baffled, but couldn't stop a satisfied smile from tugging at the corners of his mouth. "Perhaps Buddha is making you stay here to reflect on the error of your ways."

"Bullshit! Didn't you pretend to have heatstroke to get out of your last assignment? Why would Buddha only punish me?" Chen retorted. "Hold on a second, aren't you Christian? Shouldn't you be staying here to atone for your sins or something?"

Some of the ten other men sitting in the shade of the coconut trees began to snicker. Chen furiously unscrewed the Coke lid, but the hiss from the half-empty bottle sounded more deflated than refreshing. He'd been in a foul mood ever since the list of people being made to stay behind had been announced earlier that afternoon. Disheartened, he drank what was left of his Coke, but even that felt like it had gone flat.

He was on Taiping Island, Taiwan's southernmost territory. With the new year fast approaching, all one hundred and ninety soldiers of the Taiwanese National Coast Guard stationed there were about to take a C-130 back to the main island for two weeks' leave, save for the twenty "lucky" ones who had been chosen to stay behind over the holidays.

"I think you need to look at this rationally," Tsai said after a moment's reflection. Chen scowled at him as he waited for him to finish.

"As one of the longest-serving vets here, you were allowed to draw first – and you still got the short straw. Surely it was meant to be?"

"Meant to be, my ass!" Chen snapped, and he reached out and twisted the younger soldier's ear until he howled for mercy. His rage somewhat vented, Chen let the hapless Tsai go and wiped his face with the condensation that had accumulated on the Coke bottle, then roared in despair. This had to be a bad dream.

“Just look on the bright side, Jui-che...”

The voice belonged to Hsieh Ping-yu, a soldier the same rank as Chen. He was also being forced to stay behind, but he hadn't been given the option to draw straws to decide his fate – at least one communications specialist was indispensable to keeping the island base operational.

“All we've got to do is guard the fort, but they've got to do exercises.”

“They” referred to the group of fully-armed soldiers standing at ease further down the beach. The fifteen members of the Amphibious Reconnaissance and Patrol Unit, or ARP, had been ordered to Taiping for two weeks of grueling exercises over the new year, and had landed on the island at 1300 hours. Besides a ton of equipment and live ammunition, the new arrivals had also brought with them a gaggle of reporters and photographers from the Military News Agency.

“And how much do you think they're gonna get paid in overtime? Damn right they'd better do something,” Chen sneered.

“Their lieutenant's a good guy, you know,” piped up one of the younger soldiers.

“What makes you say that?” Hsieh asked.

“Our platoon leader told me to make a flask of tea for him, so I did, but when I took it to him, he didn't drink any of it... He offered it around to all his men instead.”

“It's always easier to admire senior officers when you're not in their unit—”

“Am I the only one who thinks that's disgusting? I don't wanna French kiss a bunch of dudes!” Chen interrupted, his mood not having improved in the slightest.

Near the new arrivals stood a female reporter from the Military News Agency, a professional smile plastered on her face as she enthused about the seemingly fascinating drills the men would be undertaking. The ARP soldiers were also in shot, parroting military catchphrases in voices so monotonous you had to worry about their IQs: “Work hard, train hard”, “Fight for honor and glory”, and other such inspirational slogans.

“Has it been too long since I've seen a woman, or is that reporter hot?” Chen said, squinting into the distance for a better look.

“Hell yeah she is!” agreed Hsieh. “Check out her tits!”

Excited chatter erupted as the other coast guards began discussing the merits of the reporter's appearance, until even Chen had forgotten he was going to be stuck on this rock over New Year's.

Suddenly, they saw a soldier carrying a T93 sniper rifle step forward and start setting it up on a foam mat which had been laid on the sand. An officer who must have been the lieutenant began gravely explaining to the reporter, who was wearing ear defenders, how to shoot a sniper rifle. When finished, he guided her down onto mat and helped her adopt the correct shooting position.

“Whoa! Is she gonna fire a T93? Man, that's sexy!” Hsieh crowed.

“Nah, it's just for the cameras. No civilian would be able to just come off the street and shoot a T93 like that.”

“Wahey, she's getting down!” Chen was about to wolf whistle but Hsieh stopped him just in time.

"Come on man, they're filming. You pull that kind of shit and they'll send us away."

"Shit, you're right! But breaking news: I wouldn't mind examining her technique up close," Chen said, adopting a typical newsreader's voice.

"What technique is that, Jui-che?"

"Why, her firing technique, of course. Ha!"

They watched as another, stockier soldier loaded a 7.62 mm cartridge and attached the sling to the rifle. He then crouched down beside the reporter in a standard combat squat position, and pointed toward the inflatable target out at sea. He was presumably giving her advice on technique and, under his instruction, she cautiously maneuvered herself into position and squeezed the stock tight against her body. There was a loud bang from the gun and a girlish scream from the reporter as she pulled the trigger. A lopsided grin crossed Chen's face. The inflatable target continued to float unscathed, but that wasn't the target the coast guards currently had their eyes fixed on.

The soldier next to the reporter picked up the rifle, switched the safety on, and stood back at ease.

"I'm telling you guys, that mat's mine after you've all gone," laughed Chen.

"It's all yours, man," chuckled one of his squad mates.

Chen continued to ogle the reporter as she stood back up. Then, to his dismay, the stocky soldier stepped forward again and assumed the correct prone position on the mat. From what Chen could see, he was covering roughly ninety-eight percent of the area where the reporter had been lying.

"Ah fuck," he groaned as Hsieh clapped him on the back and dissolved into raucous laughter.

The ARP soldier on the mat expertly loaded and cocked the sniper rifle, then there was a loud bang. The target popped almost instantaneously. The reporter applauded his efforts with a professional smile of admiration, before turning back to the camera and extolling the virtues of his rigorous military training. The rest of the unit came into frame and, like in every other TV appearance, punched the air and roared out, "For Taiwan!" to crown off the episode.

"Hell, are you guys goofing off again? The platoon leader's looking for you!" another coast guard shouted as he emerged from the trees behind them.

"We were just helping to move that mat into position," Chen said confidently as he pointed farther down the beach.

"Horse shit! It doesn't take ten of you to move one mat!"

"I dunno what to tell you, dude. It was heavy," Chen replied with a nonchalant shrug.

"As if my life couldn't get any worse... Fuck, I bet it's because I hit that bird with my golf club last week. And now I've got to cross the whole island with this thing..."

Chen grumbled to himself as he hoisted the foam mat onto his shoulder, with Hsieh taking the rear end. As the two most senior ranking soldiers involved, they were the ones taking the flack for the squad's laziness. With the airplane scheduled for take-off at 1800 hours, the men who were

going home for the holidays were already packing up and the C-130 crew were conducting their pre-flight checks.

"I've got my hands full at the moment," Hsieh sighed, "so forgive me if I don't get the violin out."

The sole runway on Taiping Island was 1,200 meters long and 30 meters wide, and sliced the long, narrow island into northern and southern halves. The pair had been ordered to take the mat from the northern beach to the warehouse in the southeast of the island used to store old equipment. Despite Chen's complaints, "crossing the entire island" wasn't actually that big of a deal but, in the spirit of experienced shirkers, they made sure to move at tortoise-like speed. Just as they were leisurely locking up the warehouse, their platoon leader for the next two weeks came roaring up behind them on a motorcycle.

"Hey, you idiots!"

"What?"

"The ARP guys are gonna need training equipment for tomorrow, and the duty officer said we might need to take it out to give it time to dry. I want you to move everything out from there and dump it by the assembly point on the eastern side of the runway." The platoon leader pointed to an area of tarmac some two hundred meters away, squinting at the sunlight reflecting from its surface.

"Why can't they do it themselves?" asked Hsieh.

"They're our guests. Not to mention that they need to rest up. Double not to mention that if I tell you to do something, you damn well better do it!"

"Fuck man, that's far!" Chen protested.

The platoon leader looked at the distance they had to cover and made no effort to deny it. Instead, he fired up the motorbike and said, "I'll be back soon to check on your progress. And remember to wipe the mats down; they were all covered in mold last time I looked. Make sure you're done by six. Oh, and lower the flag while you're at it."

And with that, he turned the bike around and sped off, leaving his two subordinates glowering in his wake.

"Fuck..." Even Chen, usually so eloquent when it came to complaining, couldn't think of anything better to say.

As they were desperately thinking of a way to accomplish their task with minimal effort, Hsieh suddenly spotted a hulking figure crouched on the reef rock near the shore, just over one hundred meters away. It was an ARP marine wearing a bulletproof vest, digital tiger stripe camouflage, and tactical boonie hat.

"Hey look, what's that asshole doing? Is he taking a shit?"

"Don't be stupid – wouldn't he have pulled his pants down?" Hsieh blew on his whistle, and the soldier turned round to look at them. Hsieh beckoned him over energetically.

"Oh look, if it isn't our heroic sniper from earlier," he snickered.

"Great... What the hell's that hobbit frogman doing here?" Chen had recognized him too, and still hadn't forgiven him for lying down on the mat after the female reporter. "I know, let's get him to move all the stuff for us."

"OK, but let me handle this. Your eyes are so close together, you always look shifty," Hsieh whispered back. Chen gave him a swift kick in the ass.

"Fuck you, everyone says I look like Takeshi Kaneshiro!"

By now the marine jogged over to them.

"Petty Officer Wang Kai-hsu of the ARP unit, sir! Is there anything I can do to help here?" His professional, by-the-book conduct was so alien to Chen and Hsieh that he might as well have been an extraterrestrial.

"Er..." Chen stumbled, for once at a loss for words.

"Thank you, petty officer," Hsieh jumped in, "but we're the ones who are here to help you."

"Roger that. Please tell me what it is I should be doing." Wang looked friendly enough, but his formal demeanor and manner of speaking made it hard to know how to talk to him. Hsieh summoned up his warmest, sincerest facial expression.

"Well, our platoon leader told us that someone from your unit had been sent here to get all the training equipment out of storage, and that we should come lend a hand. Because you guys have got exercises tomorrow, right?"

"Yes sir! I haven't received those orders yet, but thank you for the heads-up."

"No worries. Come with us, it's just over here," Hsieh said, turning around to hide the smug smile on his face.

For the next half an hour, they watched as Wang worked like a machine. Tirelessly he went back and forth from the warehouse, carrying out mats, dumbbells, sandbags, weighted ammo crates, and empty aqua bags. At first, Chen and Hsieh pretended to help out by carrying one or two of the lighter items, but they soon revealed their true colors once they saw how strong Wang was.

"What the hell? Is he done already?"

"He's like one of those Roombas!"

By now they were sitting in the shade watching Wang work in the distance, astonished by the fact he was actually arranging the equipment in order as he went.

"I hope he never leaves," said Chen.

"Me too. I bet he could do all of our jobs for us with just him on his own."

"He's not even questioning us. Is he fucking stupid? Ha, we might as well get him to wipe everything down, too!"

Wang set down the last of the aqua bags, and looked up to see Chen waving him over. He wiped his face with a cloth and walked over to the shaded area.

"Hey man," Chen started, "your boss...He's your lieutenant, right? He said all the equipment needs to be wiped clean before you guys can use it. Why don't you go get a bucket of water, and we can do it together?"

"That's very kind of you. Where can I get a bucket from?"

“Do you see that hangar? There’ll probably be one in there.” Chen paused, an odd look on his face, then lowered his voice and said, “But watch yourself with that guy standing out front. He’s the biggest pain in the ass in the entire squad.”

Hsieh smirked despite himself. There was indeed someone standing by the hangar at that moment – a rookie with zero experience who had just been transferred to the Coast Guard – and Chen was evidently plotting to prank both men at the same time.

“He’s obsessed with maintaining etiquette and order in and around the hangar,” Chen continued with all the solemnity he could muster.

“Then please advise me on how to proceed,” Wang responded with the same seriousness.

“Are you familiar with the official hangar entrance procedure?”

A few minutes later, Wang set his jaw and marched over to the coast guard standing by the door to the hangar.

“Excuse me...” The rookie was alarmed by the sight of the marine striding grimly toward him, just as any normal person would be. Chen and Hsieh, on the other hand, watched on gleefully as Wang stamped his left foot on the ground, raised his left arm forty-five degrees, and bellowed, “My left hand is unarmed, I repeat, unarmed.”

His movements were clean and precise as he retracted his arm and repeated the process on his right side. “My right hand is unarmed, I repeat, unarmed.”

By now, the rookie was looking positively terrified. His hand gripped the flashlight on his belt, and he seemed to be on the verge of crying out for help.

Suddenly, Wang dropped into a squat and began performing some kind of Cossack dance, hopping up and down alternating between his left and right leg.

“Left leg, right leg, left leg, right leg! Unarmed! Reporting for duty, sir!”

Wang’s boots knocked together as he rose and stood to attention, thus marking the end of Chen’s fictitious procedure.

An awkward silence descended. Even the C-130 crew farther down the runway had stopped what they were doing to watch the spectacle. The hapless rookie gulped and stammered, “Wh-what are you doing?”

“Petty Officer Wang Kai-hsu of the Amphibious Reconnaissance and Patrol Unit, Team Alpha, requesting permission to borrow a bucket, sir.”

Seeing the coast guard’s reaction, it dawned on Wang that this had all been a practical joke. He tried to hide his embarrassment as he explained what had happened, but he could hear the plane crew guffawing behind him.

“Shit dude, marines are fucking retarded!”

“That’s what happens when you get fucked in the ass too much!”

The rookie coast guard handed Wang a bucket, still eyeing him warily.

“Thank you,” he mumbled, yanking down the brim of his boonie hat.

A hundred meters away, Chen was laughing so hard he was at risk of an aneurysm.

"Man, I wish I'd filmed that! Oh my god, I can't breathe... What a fucking idiot!"

"Watch out, he's coming back. Stop laughing!" urged Hsieh, trying to stifle his own laughter.

"It's fine, I'll let him punch me if he wants. As if anyone could be that fucking stupid..." Chen wheezed, clutching his sides. But when Wang reached them, he couldn't help but burst out laughing again.

"The 'hangar opening procedure', huh?" Wang asked through narrowed eyes.

Chen, still laughing, pointed at Hsieh. "It was his idea."

"Bullshit!"

As Wang stalked off to wipe down the mats in the blazing sun, Chen and Hsieh decided to go and fill up the bucket for him, and take advantage of the break to cool themselves down.

"Are all marines that weird?" Chen asked as he doused his face with water.

"Nope, just this guy. The other ones I know are all solid. This is the first time I've met one as weird as him." Hsieh turned the faucet off and heaved the bucket up.

For the rest of the time, the two of them shamelessly did nothing to help besides filling and refilling the bucket. Seemingly unperturbed, Wang continued to wipe down the training mats.

"Do you think he hit his head too hard on a rock during that crazy endurance test they do... what's it called... the Road to Heaven?" Chen said.

"I reckon he'll be easy enough to get along with once you know him. I mean, he seems pretty likable," Hsieh replied.

"True."

Despite their sarcasm, the two of them were finding it difficult to conceal their admiration for Wang.

"I'll go get him something to drink," Hsieh said, standing up.

"Hey, frogman! Take a break!" Chen shouted over.

The three of them sat down in the shade, drinking from the cans Hsieh had brought back from the vending machine.

"Hey, what were you looking at before anyway?" Hsieh asked, suddenly remembering that they'd first seen Wang crouched by the shoreline.

"Oh, I've just never seen the sea look as beautiful as it is here. It's not this blue at our base in Zuoying. And you guys get to defend this paradise. You must be very proud."

"Oh yeah, it's the best," Chen scoffed.

Being all the same rank, it hadn't taken long for the three of them to drop the formalities and speak more openly with each other.

"Not gonna lie, I'm praying for a transfer back to Taiwan," Hsieh agreed. "Give it two weeks here and you'll see what I mean... Having nothing to do but stare out to sea every day is enough to drive anyone crazy."

Wang jumped to his feet so suddenly that Chen thought he was angry.

"What's wrong?" Hsieh asked, also startled.

“Our ten minutes of regulation break time are up,” Wang said with a smile, tapping his watch.

“Regulation shmegulation!” laughed Chen. In his four years of service, not once had he ever seen a soldier call an end to break time of his own volition. Spending time with this frogman was turning out to be a real eye-opener.