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To: "Michael D. Clark" <[Michael@mclark.com](mailto:Michael@mclark.com)>  
Sent: Thursday, January 23, 2003 7:05 AM  
Subject: Re: Information Request

I found some information regarding USS Tutuila ARG-4 after her transfer to the ROC Navy. Here is a brief translation:

ROCN AR 516 "Tian Tai" (meaning Heavenly Platform) was a PCF repair ship received from the US military on Feb. 23, 1972. However, the ship did not actually enter service at all before being decommissioned, so nearly no one knew about her existence. The reason why this ship joined the ranks of the ROC Navy was rather bizarre to begin with.

When the US military began withdrawing from Vietnam in 1972, this old ship became surplus material to be disposed of. As a solution to the problem, US Navy asked Taiwan to purchase the ship for US\$100,000. However, Taiwan military thought Liberty Ships were too obsolete. Besides, since Taiwan Navy had no river patrol craft, the ship would have been useless and thus there was no interest in procuring.

Later on, the ROC military attache to the US Wang Shi-Ling pleaded strongly in front of the ROCN C-in-C Adm. Song Chang-Chi, on the ground that since the USN had been very helpful in the past on military sales, one should return the favor this time; furthermore, even though the ship was obsolete, repair machinery onboard were still useful. With added income from dismantling the hull, her value would definitely exceed US\$100,000. ROCN General HQ finally agreed to procure the ship.

If just for the value of the repair machinery onboard and hull dismantling, she only needed to be disposed of right away. Why then the elaborate commissioning ceremony?

In Feb. 1972, US President Nixon just arrived at Beijing on his first visit to Mainland China. When the ship arrived at Tsoying Military Harbor on Feb. 23, Taiwan military decided to hold an elaborate commissioning ceremony held by the Chief of General Staff Lai Ming-Tang. Vast media coverage was made to create the impression that US-Taiwan military sales were still normal. After the commissioning ceremony, repair machinery onboard was removed for use by various shipyards, while the hull was sold and scrapped. Later on, it was found to be a very worthwhile deal. It was said that the value of the fuel onboard exceeded US\$100,000. After this "Tian Tai", which never actually served, was declared decommissioned in 1974, the crew went on to receive another repair ship also named "Tian Tai" in early 1975.

The original source in Chinese may be found at <http://www.yaox.com/cwm/>

I hope this helps. If there is anything else I can find out for you, please feel free to ask.

Mike Huang  
TMF Admin