

Diplomat Between Cultures

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Before I came to Taegu, several officers of the US Information Agency told me to look forward to meeting one of our retired colleagues, Arthur McTaggart, and soon after I arrived, I had the chance to do so. We soon fell into the animated conversation that follows when men of the same profession meet. Art McTaggart and I are separated by a generation in time, but I discovered that in feeling we are much alike. Especially when our conversation turned to Vietnam—where he had served ten years as a diplomat, where I had served a year in the Air Force—I knew we shared a deep interest in Asia and in the great task of communication between cultures. To say that we share an “interest,” though, mislabels our personalities; it is more honest to say that both of us have a great affection for the common task—communicating across cultures the United States and its foreign policy—we have both undertaken as our life work.

My friendship for Art McTaggart has been brief, and many other Taegu people can better tell the story of his work in this city. As a person who shares the same profession with Dr. McTaggart, and as a person who also felt the commitment of

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the Vietnam war, perhaps the better role for me is to tell something of Art McTaggart's career as a diplomat.

Americans can easily recognize Art McTaggart as a "Hoosier," a native of Indiana, the great state that lies in the agricultural plain of the midwest. Born in 1915, he grew up the small town of Logansport, set among the farms and fields. Graduating from Logansport High School in 1932, in the middle of the Great Depression, he began his working life as an apprentice machinist with the Logan Machine Company. Four years as an apprentice (wage : five and a half cents per hour) and four years as a machinist making hydraulic holding devices followed.

Thoreau was a pencil maker, Mark Twain a river-boat hand, Harry Truman a hatter, Benjamin Franklin a printer's devil, John Pershing a plowboy, Dwight Eisenhower a creamery hand, Art McTaggart a machinist before beginning great public lives. I asked Art what work in industry had taught him, and he surprised me with his reply. "You learn that machines are irrational ; though their operation should follow defined laws of metallurgy, electric energy, and mechanics, they often defy the operator with some irrational element. What you learn from that is to accept that man too has an irrational side that cannot be confined by a fixed political creed. Humans rarely follow the dictates of some

ordained rational philosophy—usually ordained from above. They have minds of their own.”

Art McTaggart left the Machine Company to enter Purdue University ; in two years at Purdue he completed three years of work in the field of industrial education. Winning a Telluride Scholarship, he went on to Cornell University. After the first year he earned his beachelor's degree in comparative literature ; in the second year he won his master's degree in the field of industrial education. The year was 1943 ; he entered the Army as a new ROTC second lieutenant the same year, commissioned in the Field Artillery. He spent the rest of the war teaching at the Artillery School at Fort Sill, Oklahoma.

The next chapter in Art McTaggart's military life will bring a smile to the face of any veteran. He was chosen to attend the Armyu's Chinese language course at the University of California at Berkeley. After attending the school in 1945, he was sent to Italy !

In Italy, Lieutenant McTaggart spent most of his time as a personnel officer, helping to send American combat veterans home. But he also found time to learn to speak Italian and to take courses at the Instituto Technicale in Livorno. What he found most curious about the Instituto was that it was a

technical college that had no machines ; the Italian industrial educators imagined that technicians could be schooled without any hands-on work.

The Army in Italy was rapidly demobilized and Lieutenant McTaggart was also sent home, arriving back in the United States in 1946. He then entered Stanford University to do some more work in industrial education and business administration. When it came time to prepare his doctoral thesis, he decided to return to Italy and write a formal study of the Italian concept of industrial education.

In Italy he ran out of money and was forced to look for a job to continue his work. The American Embassy in Rome had an opening for a local disbursing officer—not a job for an American staffer, but for an Italian employee. But regulations were flexible ; Art McTaggart listed all his administrative work in the Army on his application ; and he was hired. He worked as disbursing officer, playing a small role in providing Marshall Plan funds to assist Italy in its economic recovery, for two years. He was made a regular Foreign Service Staff officer while in Rome.

This personnel action made him an American diplomat, liable for service worldwide, and a new assignment to Warsaw, Poland, soon followed ; he was disbursing officer at

the Embassy while Poland was enduring a severe Stalinization at the hands of the Soviet Union. Fortunately he was soon to be reassigned to the American Embassy in Korea.

In 1953 the Embassy was still located in Pusan, but one of this first jobs was to help the Embassy move back to Seoul at the end of the year. Otherwise, he work largely concerned the disbursement of funds to the US Overseas Mission(US-OM), again to assist in the recovery of Korea after the war. But he also began to teach some evening courses at Seoul National University.

• 1953 was the year that the United States Information Agency was formed to conduct America's public diplomacy. The staff of the new agency was put together from newspapermen, educators, and Foreign Service officers from many backgrounds. In Korea, Art McTaggart was selected to join the new Agency at its inception, and he was sent to Taegu as Branch Public Affairs officer and Director of the American Information Center in 1956.

In the aftermath of the war, USIS had an important—perhaps impossible—role. There was work to provide Koreans information about the United States and the world at large; Korea had been thrust unexpectedly onto the world stage so soon after the end of the Japanese colonial period,

and Koreans needed to understand these larger events that had intruded into the lives of the Korean people in real ways. Also, to USIS fell much of the role to explain Western civilization, society, law, and thought to a society still firmly Confucian and Asian. All the work was preliminary to Korea's taking its rightful place as an equal member of the family of nations.

There were film showings, both in Taegu and in country towns. Art McTaggart can regale any younger USIS officer with tales of wading through rivers ahead of the jeep to make sure the river bottom was firm. And there was work with the USIS library, speakers, and art exhibits. While Koreans were valiantly struggling with daily life and with the cruel imperatives of reconstruction after the war, the USIS could, through its books and exhibits, give Taegu citizens some access to the life of art, culture, and education in the West.

And there was always the personal touch. During the years that Art McTaggart was Director, the Taegu American Information Center was located on the Chungang-tong in Buksung-ro. The office building had been an old Japanese restaurant. For his residence, Art McTaggart lived in a *hakobang*, a "cabin" or "barracks" attached to the back corner of the building. It had a small-sized kitchen on the first floor and a small bed/living room on the second floor. Almost every morning, three or four Korean guests came for breakfast, and

they enjoyed American and Italian dishes that Art McTaggart cooked himself. While they were dining, the kitchen was usually very noisy as each guest tried to practice English conversation. In four years, those guests included most of Taegu's government officials, military officers, educators, lawyers, journalists, medical doctors, and artists. Many have passed away or since retired after making important contributions to Korea's development. Others remain active even now as distinguished figures.

In 1960, Dr. McTaggart was transferred back to the Embassy in Seoul, working in the Cultural Affairs Office, and he worked for four more years in Korea as an "Area Officer," travelling from city to city on USIS programs.

In 1964, after eleven years in Korea, he was assigned to Washington to supervise the Korean language service of the Voice of America. But within a short time he undertook to begin study of Vietnamese, and he reached Saigon in 1966.

He was assigned first as a Public Affairs Advisor to the Information officer of a Vietnamese province--Binh Tuy. The work was again great--perhaps impossible. In a country in the grips of a great war, he worked on nation-building. The job was to help the Vietnamese government hold onto the loyalty and commitment of the Vietnamese people while their villages

were being terrorized by the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese. There was work with films, leaflets, and books. There was more work coordinating this "nation building" work with the concurrent US-Vietnamese military effort.

From 1969, he carried on the same work in Tan An, southwest of Saigon; again he was public affairs advisor to the Vietnamese provincial information officer. In 1970 and 1971 he was briefly in Washington, again working at the Voice of America, this time as a policy officer for the Vietnamese language service. In 1972 he returned to Vietnam as Branch Public Affairs Officer and Director of the American Cultural Center in Hue. Again it was work with a USIS library, speakers, and exhibits; he continued his work with students; again he taught, at the University of Hue. He was withdrawn from Vietnam just a month before the fall, in March 1975.

He can sum up ten years with the Vietnamese in their struggle by saying, "What happened in Vietnam was that Communist terrorism—directed at anyone educated and anyone who displayed any loyalty toward the South Vietnamese government—made all the virtues too dangerous."

1975 was Art McTaggart's sixtieth birthday; friends at the Korean Embassy in Washington arranged his "hwangap" and in accordance with regulations, he had to retire from the

Foreign Service at that age. He returned to Korea and began his years of teaching at Youngnam University in 1976.

Others can tell more of Arthur McTaggart's contributions to the University, to Taegu, and to Korea in this most recent phase of his active life. His affiliation with the US Information Service continues; every Wednesday evening he is at the American Cultural Center moderating the "Wednesday Forum." Using video recorders and news tapes, he reviews English and current events with the Forum—a group of students and professionals. He remains a man stimulated by the excitement of meeting people at the boundary between cultures. As he himself did years before, he helps young men and women see the broader worlds that lie beyond their own culture.

Director

Taegu American Cultural Center