

Tiny Badge

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One evening on my first week in Korea I dropped in on a very personable friend in his BOQ. Meeting me at the door he said "Dennis. I'd love to chat with you but as I've a hot chick with me so I'm a little tied up just now."

The next time we met there was time to talk, and he told me what happened.

He met the lady in Seoul and smuggled her on base in the trunk of his car. They had stayed in his room a week when her parents showed up in a limousine. A marriage was arranged for them taking place a week later bringing his carefree bachelorhood to a sudden end. "It happened so fast that my head was spinning. It was a complete surprise." The married couple had no further need for smuggling.

Another friend thinking to save a hotel fee, decided to emulate my married friend. However the woman in the trunk of his car panicked as the car approached the main gate and began beating on the trunk. A quick U-turn before the gate solved the problem. He said "No, no-no-no-no! The risk was far too great for the gain, she must have been claustrophobic." No more smuggling for him.

Still another wanted to use his rust bucket car in Korea. He refused to pay what was needed for its entry and it was impounded at the port of Pusan. He had met his master and lost but somehow the impound storage fee was paid by Maryland.

I wanted a motorcycle in Korea, used ones were few and overpriced. New ones were not good and overpriced. The duty on a used motorcycle was 100% of its new price. A \$50 used bike would have an import duty of \$1000. I went to Japan, bought a ten-year-old noodle delivery Yamaha for \$50, took it apart, and mailed it to myself in Korea as what it was, "used motorcycle parts." I assembled it in Korea, kept it off base riding it there where licenses were not required. I asked a friend about the ominous stamp on one of the packages "this package has be x-rayed." He explained that an airman was in trouble for black-marketing new motorcycle parts through the Crafts Shop. Later, I mailed it home to the USA again as used motorcycle parts. Although it is 54 years old, I still ride it. It was immediately recognized by bike salesmen who literally ran out of their shop to see it up close.

I bought more motorcycles, rode them where I bought them but never sent them anywhere but Oregon. The Oregon motor vehicle department even translated one of my Japanese bills of sale.

I oppose smuggling and said so sincerely in public near the chief ration control enforcement officer at Osan who took off his miniature badge on the spot and gave it to me saying "I appreciate what you said, realize that this is not official. I've been asked to ease up on my enforcement and don't need this anymore."

I still have his little tie tac badge that had caused great difficulty for the black market at Osan.