KIENYANG

Kienyang (now Jianyang) [lat. 27-20, long. 118-07], Fukien (now Fujian) Province

Kienyang , Fukien Province, is located on the Chien (now Jian) River, a tributary of the Min. It is 120 northwest of the port of Foochow (now Fuzhou) and 150 miles northeast of Changting (still Changting). The town was home to the district magistrate and refugees from Japanese-occupied China. For SACO it was a major communications and supply center and a principal transit point for personnel on the way to the eastern parts of China.

> [Kienyang] is at the junction of the Chien and Hsi rivers, and four roads, one to Nanping, one to Shaowu and Kanchow, one north to Pucheng and another to Chungan, about 60 miles north of Nanping. (Stratton, 1950, p 183)

> A courier jeep made a regular run between Kienyang and Changting every two weeks. Some caught it. Others were forced to board Chinese trucks whose erratic progress over roads, which made a Rocky Mountain goat trail seem like a highway by comparison, can be appreciated fully only by those who suffered this experience. A journey aboard those often windowless, topheavy vehicles furnished the thrill of a lifetime. To neither understand nor be able to speak Chinese made it a test of patience, good humor and ingenuity for each new arrival.
>
> At Kienyang personnel were further transported to their ultimate destinations by means secured locally. To reach the more remote outposts the men had to travel by jeep, sampan, sedan chair and certainly by foot. (Stratton, 1950, p 180)

Supplies could be flown from Kunming to Changting but had to be trucked on to Kienyang. Nowadays the roadway distance between Kienyang and Changting is 260 miles; the modern travel time is four hours.

A SACO supply depot was operational in Kienyang by April 1944; it was one of three in China. The other two were in Chungking (now Chongqing) and Kweiyang (now Guiyang), 180 miles south of Chungking. By July 1945 the facilities included several go-downs, general stores, and disbursing offices.

In Mid 1944, RM1c Kenneth Brown set up a direction finder (DF) at Kienyang. The heart of the DF was a Hallicrafter SX-28 receiver. Normally, between the hours of 2000 and 0200 the DF operator monitored frequencies designated by Happy Valley and by 0400 transmitted the coded results back to Mainradio.

Radio Kienyang, call sign QT89, was located five miles out of town in an abandoned temple. The station was operated by three Americans and two Chinese radiomen; their living conditions were primitive.

By the end of 1944 a navy weather station was active in Kienyang. The town became a SACO aerological headquarters where weather data was collected from eastern China.

On January 1, 1945 headquarters for the eastern China command of SACO was established at Kienyang. Lieutenant Si (pronounced *Sigh*) Morris organized Comnavueast (Commander Naval Units Eastern China) and was the first commander. The name was changed to Comnavchec (Commander, Naval Group China Eastern Command) on March 9, 1945 and command transferred to CAPT I. F. Beyerly, who was the Chief of Staff for COMO Miles and the Chief Naval Aerological Officer for SACO. The headquarters occupied an American mission.

In January 1945 a coast watcher school for Americans was established at Kienyang. The course work included ship recognition, map and chart reading, aerology, radio, and coding. The classes lasted until the first week of March and produced 14 trained lookouts who were deployed as single observers along the coast from Haimen (still Haimen), 180 miles south of Shanghai, and southward. A second class graduated 25 more.

On the 20th of January, the radio shack was moved closer to town, a five-minute walk from headquarters. The antenna was strung between the top of a fortified hill and the old British mission. The traffic in March 1945 was 100,000 groups a month; by June it had increased to 142,000.

The eastern headquarters exercised operational control over Naval Units One, Six, Seven, and Eight; the coast watcher, intelligence, and weather nets #1, #2, #3, #4, and #5; and the SACO liaison with the 14th U. S. Air Force at Changting.

Kienyang was the wartime home of Shanghai's National University; Students versus Navy was a frequent, popular basketball event.

Cited reference:

Stratton, R. O., 1950, SACO – The Rice Paddy Navy: C.S. Palmer Pub. Co, Pleasantville, N.Y., 420 p.

Charles H. Miles, Ph.D.
July 10, 2023