

Transcription from Vietnam Diary, July 1970

by Lt Richard Crowe, USN advisor on Republic Vietnam ship PCE-09, sent to SRF, Guam for overhaul

... Today I talked at length with the man who manages part of Public Works, SRF, Guam: in part administering driver's license tests. He tested some Vietnamese officers and me to drive PW vehicles. The PW fellow is Mr. La Joi, about 60 years old, a real curmudgeon. Today, however, as Captain Thoi and Lt Trac (RVN Navy) were transcribing the license test into Vietnamese, La Joi talked to me about his service on the gunboat, USS SACRAMENTO (PG-19).

La Joi enlisted in 1927 and right away went to China to the SACRAMENTO. This was a coal-fired ship with 4" guns. He said the story/movie *Sand Pebbles* was pretty accurate in all respects.

About this time the ship's company was getting tired of being fired on by Chinese (and being told not to fire back), as Chiang Kai-shek was trying to consolidate power, so the CO decided one day to fire back. He picked a pagoda, a prominent feature, to fire on. He figured the structure was empty and firing on it would quiet the Chinese firing on his boat. Well, it happened that the pagoda was full of people (about 300...some religious event). Quite a few (nearly all 300) Chinese were killed but it did stop the sniping. A Board of Inquiry resulted in the CO getting a letter of reprimand.

The ship was "coaled" and washed down (smoke and coal dust on white paint) by Chinese coolie labor at 10 cents per day per coolie.

Navy sailors had a hard life on the gunboats, especially in the hot engine (and similar) rooms. Sailors could stay down only so long before fainting or coming topside for cooler air. Dirty enginemen were always flaked out on the boson's nice clean, teak deck. Discipline sometimes required flogging with a rope, long-since outlawed in the Navy.

Pay scale (pay per month):

E-1: \$21
E-2: \$36
E-3: \$48
E-4: \$60
E-5: \$72
E-6: \$84
E-7: \$96

Shipping over in China below E-5 got you a \$50-\$100 bonus. If you made 2nd class on your first cruise in China, you could get a \$200 bonus. Sailors could not get married without the CO's permission. If they did get married, they could get a bad conduct discharge.

The ship left China in 1928 for San Francisco. It was supposed to have had enough coal to make the trip but it ran out near the Farallon Islands, 20 miles or so short of San Francisco, and had to deploy its sails. It did save just enough coal to save face and enter SF Bay under steam power. It coaled up at a pier in Tiburon. Apparently, the CO had pocketed some of the Navy's coal funds.

The boat was originally going to coal-fuel conversion at Mare Island but was instead ordered to the Caribbean...the "Banana Fleet". When they heard of this, about 90 of the crew (out of 171 officers and men) went AWOL (absent without leave). When the ship put into San Diego, enroute to the Panama Canal, more went AWOL and the ship had to get more crew. After the ship left California, most of the AWOL sailors reappeared. They all got a general court martial and busted in grade. The court martial testimonies showed that the CO was partly to blame and he was cashiered out of the Navy. La Joi was one of the AWOL sailors and was busted.

Photo # NH 101685 USS Sacramento off Tsingtao, China

