Named after the port from which Columbus sailed for the New World, USS PALOS was laid down based upon suggestions made by Admiral Dewey of Manila Bay fame. With four rudders and a very shallow draft, she was custom made for the river upon which she would spend her entire service life, the Yangtze. Just a little over a month from her commissioning date, PALOS became the first US flagged ship to reach Chungking, an inland port 1300 miles upriver (the approximate distance between Minneapolis and New Orleans). On occasion, she would steam another 200 miles west of Chungking to the town of Suifu, and then proceed for an additional 90 miles up the Min River to evacuate non-Chinese nationals from marauding bandits.

From her commissioning to 1917, PALOS cruised the upper river. With the entrance of the United States into World War One, she found herself interned in Shanghai for a period of four months. After this short internment was over, she continued to do such things as supplying armed guards to merchant ships and generally fighting the rampant piracy that was found up and down the Yangtze. With the arrival of the six new gunboats (USS GUAM, LUZON, MINDINAO, OAHU, PANAY, and TUTUILA) in 1929, USS PALOS was put into reserve status. Even so, she was called to travel to Changsha in 1930 to protect German nationals from the local warlord, a job she did so well that her crew got a formal thank you from the Weimar Republic.

The late summer of 1931 was disastrous for the Yangtze River Valley, which suffered from the most devastating series of floods that had ever been recorded. Literally millions of people were forced out of their homes by the inundation, and PALOS was put back on active service to help deal with the crisis. She remained in full commission for the rest of her time in service.

PALOS was engaged in two major engagements and 32 minor ones in the course of her Yangtze service. One of her most memorable ones occurred in 1933, when she saved the entire town of Changsha from bandits. After evacuating all foreign nationals from the city, her armed crew then successfully chased all of the bandits into the hills outside of the town, returning order to this river city.

On 12 November 1934, PALOS became station ship at Chungking. She continued in this capacity until she was decommissioned on 21 May 1937.

USS PALOS also has the distinction of being the only China gunboat featured in a Popular Science advertisement. In the October 1927, issue of this magazine, a letter from Robert Mellor was published as a part of an ad sponsored by Edgeworth Tobacco, in which he praised this product and stated that all of his shipmates continually looked forward to receiving new supplies from the States because they would know that their Edgeworth would be included!

<table>
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<td>3(B-BTT)</td>
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<td>29/12/32</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1936</td>
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</table>
| 3(B) + SLKbs

Cancels have been recorded in black and magenta.
The locations recorded in the killer bars from USS PALOS are:

Anking  Changsha  Chungking  Hankow
Ichang  Kiukiang  Nanking  Shanghai

Three official corner cards have been documented from this ship:

NAVY DEPARTMENT  Navy Department
U.S.S. PALOS  U.S.S. Palos
Yangtze Patrol Force  Asiatic Station
Via Seattle, Wash:  Via: Seattle, Wash.
OFFICIAL BUSINESS (Rubber Stamp)  (Printed) EKU 9/9/1933
EKU 22/2/1929

Sample cuts of the 3 corner cards

Cacheted covers are not as prevalent as one would hope from this ship, but the following artists have been noted:

John Coulthard
Theodore Harrington
Harry Ioor
Harry Klotzbach
C Wright Richell

The hunt for covers from this gunboat, the first specifically built for the Yangtze, is a pursuit well worth the effort!

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www.navsource.org/archives/12/09016.htm
At the turn of the last century, China was a fragmented country. Warlords vied for control over various parts, including the important waterway of the Yangtze River. As American commerce grew from Shanghai to Chungking, it soon became apparent that a permanent military presence was necessary to protect US interests. The construction of the gunboats MONOCACY and PALOS was a first step in providing this protection.

USS MONOCACY gunboat 20, was laid down on 28 April 1913 at the Mare Island Naval Yard in Vallejo, California. After the ship was built, she was dismantled and transported to Shanghai, where she was reassembled by the Shanghai Dock and Engineering Company. Launched on 27 April 1914, MONOCACY was commissioned on 24 June 1914 with Lt. Andrew E. Carter as her first commanding officer. Assigned to the Second Division (Yangtze Patrol) of the Asiatic Fleet, she was designated PG 20 on 17 July 1920. On 15 June 1928, she received her final classification as PR 2. For the first fifteen years of her service, ‘MONOTONY’, as she was known by those who served aboard her, patrolled the upper reaches of the Yangtze, calling Chungking her homeport.

On 17 January 1918, she was protecting a Japanese steamer from Chinese bandits when she suffered the only death from hostile forces recorded during World War I on the Yangtze. Harold Leroy O’Brien, Chief Yeoman, was killed near Chenglin because of this skirmish. The Chinese government agreed to pay $25,000 to the U.S. as a result of O’Brien’s death. This money was then turned over to O’Brien’s widow.

USS MONOCACY was placed on reserve status on 24 June 1929 and stationed in Shanghai. Because of massive flooding on the Yangtze, she was restored to active duty on 19 September 1931 to help provide humanitarian aid. She remained thus until the Navy Department decided to decommission her. This was done 31 January 1939, and she was towed out to sea and sunk on 10 February 1939.

MONOCACY’s post office opened on 10 June 1916 and was closed on 31 January 1939. There has been one recorded example of a cover mailed from this ship before the post office was opened, determined by the corner card dated 15 June 1915. Nine different types of cancels were used by this ship, the most common being Type 5hks. I have been able to record 255 separate dates, (using the various cancels) from this ship.

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</tr>
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<td>F2</td>
<td>1927</td>
<td></td>
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<td>F3</td>
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<td>11/1/1934</td>
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<tr>
<td>Received</td>
<td>1935</td>
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Cancels have been recorded in black, blue and magenta. Various cities can be found in the ship’s killer bars. I have been able to record the following:

Changsha  Hankow  Ichang
Nanking  Nanking Capital City  Shanghai
Yangtze Patrol/China  Yangtze Patrol/Hankow China  Yangtze Patrol/Ichang China
Three Official Corner Cards have been noted:
United States Asiatic Fleet
Yangtze Patrol
U.S.S. MONOCACY
Via Seattle, Washington
Official Business
(Printed)
EKU 19/6/1928

United States Asiatic Fleet
Yangtze Patrol
U.S.S. MONOCACY
Via Seattle, Washington
Official Business
(Rubber Stamp)
EKU 13/6/1931

Many artists produced cachets found on USS MONOCACY covers. Those recorded and identified are from the following people:
John Coulthard
P.J. Ickingerill
Henry Krause
William Linto
C. Wright Richell
Nelson White

Although her crew may have called her the MONOTONY, collecting covers from this ship can be a fascinating pursuit!

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As USS MONOCACY and PALOS aged, the Navy asked for and received funding for six new gunboats made specifically for Chinese waters. With the warfare between the forces of Nationalist China and the communists, as well as an untold number of warlords, American life and property were continually being put into jeopardy, and these six ships were the rapid responders of their time.

The first of these ships was USS Guam (PG 43), named after the American territory. The Kiangnan Dockyard built her in Shanghai.

Her keel was laid on 17 October 1926, and she was launched 28 May 1927, with LCDR Robert Awtrey as her first skipper. Her shakedown cruise took her from Shanghai to Chungking, and she carried Rear Admiral Yates Stirling, Jr., the commander of the Yangtze Patrol, on board. Her first tasking was to escort the Standard Oil ships MEI LU and MEI FOO, and on this inaugural assignment she took fire while defending her charges. USS GUAM’s superior weaponry soon chased the bandits back into the hills. Shortly after this engagement, she was re-designated PR 3 on 5 October 1928.

With a shortage of ships in Hong Kong, GUAM found herself assigned to the South China Patrol on 14 October 1928. She remained on this station until replaced by USS MINDINAO in the middle of June 1929.

On 4 July 1930, USS GUAM was sent to Yokohama to protect American citizens from the communist insurgents that were wreaking havoc in the area. The gunboat made five runs past the city, allowing the sailors on either side of the ship to practice their marksmanship. Both three-inch guns and all of her Lewis guns were brought to bear on the Red Chinese. Unfortunately, this action cost the life of one of GUAM’s sailors, who was shot by a communist rifleman.

By 1937, the Japanese were running roughshod over the areas adjacent to the Yangtze. GUAM was ordered in September of 1937 to evacuate the American embassy at Nanking before the Japanese could get to that city. Three months later, the ship was back in Nanking to evacuate American civilians, traveling on to Wuhu and Hankow to do the same thing.

By 1938, USS GUAM was the station ship at Hankow.
Smith was ashore on 8 December when a detachment of Japanese demanded the surrender of his ship. As the Japanese force was far superior to that left behind on USS WAKE, Lt. Smith surrendered WAKE. She was the only US naval vessel surrendered intact to Japanese forces.

Author Quentin Reynolds would later write a book about Smith’s experiences, entitled *Officially Dead: The Story of Commander C D Smith, USN; The Prisoner the Japs Couldn’t Hold* (available today at Amazon.com). WAKE was stricken from Naval lists on 25 March 1942.

The Japanese renamed ex-USS WAKE IJNS TATARA. Lt. Yasumura Taiichi was her first Japanese commander. She survived the war, and was turned back to the Americans in 1945. The US then gave her to the Nationalist Chinese in 1946, who named her TAI YUAN. Three years later, she was captured by Chinese Communists, and her fate from this time on is unknown.

USS WAKE received one battle star for her service in World War II.

USS GUAM’s post office opened on 16 February 1928, and continued until 29 November 1941, operating under the ship’s new name, USS WAKE. While GUAM, she had seven cancel types, and five while WAKE.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Type Used</th>
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<td>1928</td>
<td>22/7/41</td>
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<tr>
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<td>22/7/41</td>
<td>18/10/39</td>
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<tr>
<td>LAST DAY in Killer</td>
<td>22/7/41</td>
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<td>Blank Killer</td>
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As WAKE

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9x</td>
<td>1941</td>
<td>23/7/41</td>
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</table>
I have seen a cover with a USS WAKE corner card used as prisoner of war mail and dated 21/4/42.

I have been able to record 304 separate dates (including all cancel types) from USS GUAM/WAKE.

Cancels have been recorded in black, and in the case of the 9v, magenta.

Locations and slogans recorded in the killer bars are:

- Changsha
- Chenglinki
- Chungking
- First Day
- Foochow
- Hankow
- Hong Kong
- Ichang
- Kiukiang
- Last Day
- Nanking
- Shanghai
- Wanh-sien
- Washington’s Birthday
- Wuhu
- Yangtze Patrol
- Yochow
- 364 Miles Above Hankow China
- 364 Mi Above Hankow China

I have been able to record three official corner cards from USS GUAM:

- U.S.S. Guam
- Yangtze Patrol
- United States Asiatic Fleet
- Official Business

- Navy Department
- U.S.S. Guam
- Asiatic Station
- Via Seattle, Washington
- Official Business

- Navy Department
- U.S.S. Guam
- Asiatic Station
- Via Seattle, Washington
- Official Business

(U.S.S. Guam is larger than Type 2)

GUAM (as well as her sister ships LUZON, OAHU, MINDINAO, PANAY and TUTUILA) attracted the attention of a number of cachet designers.

Those recorded - and this list is by no means complete - include the following:

- D C Bartley
- Yak Sun Chin
- Major Clarke

- John Coulthard
- Walter Crosby
- L R Diesing

- Ted Harrington
- Hobby Shop
- Frederick Horton

- P J Ickeringill
- Henry Ioor
- Lewis Klotzbach

- Jack McLennan
- M Fay Muridge
- Glen Osborn

- Karl Parshall
- C Wright Richell

USS GUAM was a small ship that carried only a few dozen sailors at any one time. However, small as she was, she performed a lasting service to a wide variety of people, from American businessmen to European missionaries, not to mention the Chinese. Collecting covers from her can recapture some of the glories of that now forgotten era.
The China station was a sought after duty assignment by those who served in the US Navy, and those sailing the Yangtze enjoyed the benefits as much as those who stayed in Shanghai, Hong Kong, or Tientsin. However, unlike the ships detailed to other exotic ports, those on the Yangtze often found themselves the targets of warlords, Communists, Nationalists, and later, the Japanese. USS TUTUILA experienced this throughout her days on the river. 

Commissioned on 2 March 1928 with Lieutenant Commander Frederick Baltzly as the first of twelve COs, she began her shakedown cruise in Shanghai, where she had been built by the Kiangnan Dock Works. 

Arriving in Ichang in July of 1928, she met up with USS GUAM (PR 3) to begin her job of providing convoy service and armed guards to American flagged vessels as they negotiated the upper Yangtze on their way to such ports as Wansien and Chungking. 

By 1929, TUTUILA had already had her baptism of fire. After bullets from one of the local warlords hit his ship, Lieutenant Commander S. E. Truesdell decided to make a show of force. He went ashore to force the Chinese commander to stop the firing. The warlord stated that his soldiers were just a bunch of farm boys that meant no harm. At this, Truesdell pointed to TUTUILA, whose 3” gun was pointed directly in the direction of the warlord, and stated that he had a bunch of farm boys on his ship, too. The Chinese took the hint, and the sniping immediately stopped. 

Because of her shallow draft, TUTUILA spent almost all of her time on the upper river, giving much needed aid and protection to not only Americans, but to all who asked of her. 

A parallel can be drawn between the United State’s Anaconda Plan of the Civil War and the Japanese plan to take the Yangtze. Realizing that the Mississippi River was a lifeline for the Confederacy, Washington made its capture a priority. Japan was very aware of the importance of the Yangtze to the well being of China, and concentrated a vast number of forces to its capture. The farthest the Japanese got was Ichang, taking it (for the second time) in September 1941. This put Japanese forces 460 miles (300 air miles) from Chungking, and effectively made the Yangtze a Japanese river. USS TUTUILA found herself in the midst of all this chaos. 

On 3 August 1938, the gunboats TUTUILA and LUZON transported the American ambassador to China, Nelson Johnson, to the new Nationalist capital of Chungking after the Japanese had captured both Nanking and Hankow. As a result of the Sino-Japanese war, TUTUILA found herself in Chungking and its environs for the rest of her time in the US Navy, becoming the station ship there, mooring in the Lungmenhao Lagoon. 

On 30 July 1941, USS TUTUILA became the first US naval vessel to be fired on by an Axis power since the beginning of World War II. She was attacked by a flight of Japanese planes, which resulted in a hole blown into her side just above the waterline. Six months later, on 18 January 1942, USS TUTUILA was decommissioned. On 16 February, her last commanding officer, Lieutenant Commander William Bowers, turned the ship over to the Nationalist Chinese as a part of the Chinese/American lend lease program. She was renamed MEI YUAN, which roughly translates as “American Origin.” Her American crew was then flown out of Chungking to safety. 

As MEI YUAN, she safely survived the war. She was officially transferred to the Nationalist Chinese on 17 February 1948. Seeing service against the Chinese Communists, she was scuttled sometime in 1949 to prevent her from falling into Communist hands.
USS TUTUILA’s post office opened on 2 March 1928 and through the course of its existence had seven types of cancels. I have been able to record 293 different dates on covers canceled from this ship.

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<td>9x</td>
<td>1937-1939</td>
<td>14/9/1937</td>
<td>4/2/1939</td>
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F(1) This type has an arrow at the end of the second killer bar
F(2) This type has no arrow
1936  4/12/1936 (only known date)

Because of a shortage of postage, there are two different provisional markings. These consist of a rectangular box, both stating, “Sailor’s Mail  Auth. Post. Regs. Par. 515.” The majority of these markings have the facsimile signature of Lieutenant Kemp Tolley. The rarer one has the facsimile signature of R. W. Germany.

Provisional  1938-1939  7/9/1938  21/12/1939

Cancels have been recorded in black, blue, and magenta.

There was a vast amount of cities and wording in the Tutuila’s killer bars. Those recorded so far are:

- Changsha
- Chickenks
- Chinese New Year/Ichang China
- Chungking
- Hankow
- I Chang (sic)
- Itu
- Kwangshikong (sic)
- Nanking Navy Day
- Navy Day/Hankow China
- Ochang
- Paichow
- Shanghai
- Singti
- Wahnsien
- Yangchi
- Yochow
- Yangtze Patrol
- Wuhu
- Wushan
- Wuhu
- Wushan

There are three official corner cards from this ship:

U.S.S. Tutuila
Yangtze Patrol
Via Seattle, Wash.
Official Business
(Printed)
EKU 4/11/1929

U.S.S. Tutuila
Asiatic Fleet
Via Seattle, Wash.
Official Business
(Rubber Stamp)
EKU 20/4/1933

U.S.S. Tutuila
Asiatic Fleet
Via Seattle, Wash.
Official Business
(Printed)
EKU 1/11/1934
USS TUTUILA was sought after by many cachet designers. Those identified so far include:

- D. C. Bartley
- Walter G. Crosby
- Don Graf
- Marshal Hall
- Frederick Horton
- Lewis Klotzbach
- Jack McLennan
- Lloyd Nace
- Wright Richell
- Fred Wayman
- John Coulthard
- Walter Czubay
- John Haag
- Hobby Shop
- P. J. Ickeringill
- William Linto
- M. Fay Muridge
- Glen Osborn
- Howard Stevens

TUTUILA was stranded on the upper river after the summer of 1938, the only one of the US gunboats to suffer this fate. This is one of many things about her that make collecting her postal history an exciting pursuit!

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A special thanks to for sharing his knowledge and covers for this project.
Probably the best known of the Yangtze Patrol gunboats, USS PANAY received this distinction by being sunk by the Japanese on 12 November 1937.

Built at the Kiangnan Dockyard and Engineering Works in Shanghai, PANAY was launched on 10 November 1927. Chinese shipworkers at this firm predicted a bad future for her, as she experienced a fire on board during construction and during her launch, she got stuck in the ways. Not an auspicious start!

Shortly thereafter, she joined her sister ships on the Yangtze escorting American flagged vessels, providing security as needed up and down the river, and loaning out sailors to act as armed guards on commercial ships. Originally designated the PG 45, her status was changed on 10 September 1928 to PR 5 while under the command of LCDR James Lewis.

It was not unusual for any of the gunboats to receive hostile fire from the various warlord factions that fought for control of sections of the Yangtze. In 1931, responding to a reporter’s question about being fired upon, LCDR R. A. Dyer, PANAY’s skipper, said, “Fortunately, the Chinese appear to be rather poor marksmen and the ship has, so far, not sustained any casualties in these engagements.” This remained the case for the next six years as PANAY plied the river from Shanghai to Chungking.

In the latter part of 1937, the bad future foreseen by PANAY’s Chinese shipbuilders became a reality. In November of that year, PANAY was assigned as station ship in Nanking, the capital of the Republic of China. The Japanese were already hammering away at the city during this time, and the American embassy’s staff was ordered to relocate to Chungking before Nanking fell. Only a skeleton staff, under the leadership of vice-consul George Atcheson, was left behind to handle the final closing of the embassy. On 11 December 1937, the order came to complete the evacuation of State Department personnel, and PANAY took on board not only the remnant from the embassy, but several newsmen, including two Italians, Sandro Sandri and Luigi Barzini.

Informing the Japanese Senior Naval Commander in Shanghai of his intent, LCDR James Hughes was well aware of the danger surrounding him. Stray shells, both Chinese and Japanese, often fell among the ships crowding the Nanking docks. Anxious to get underway, Hughes decided to wait and follow the British gunboats HMS SCARAB and HMS CRICKET in case either one were to be hit and need his assistance. After these two ships were well underway, PANAY left Nanking behind late in the afternoon of 11 December.

She didn’t make it far, tying up for the evening twelve miles upstream of Nanking. Here, she was joined by three Standard Oil river tankers, MEI PING, MEI AN, and MEI HSEI. Continuing upriver the next day, this small flotilla was halfway between Nanking and Wuhu when they were spotted by a flight of 24 Japanese airplanes, which consisted of three medium bombers, twelve dive bombers, and nine fighters. Based in Changle, squadron leaders Shigeharu Aoki, Ichiro Komaki, and Ryohei Ushioda had been briefed by Japanese army liaison Takeshi Murata, Masatake Okumiya, and Luigi Barzini.

The Japanese reached their targets shortly after 1:00 pm on 12 December. The first to go in was Murata’s flight of three medium bombers. Ensinger Biwerse had just stepped out on deck when he heard machine gun fire followed by an explosion that tore most of his clothes off. A 120-pound bomb from one of Murata’s planes hit the Panay in the bow section, destroying the forward 3” gun and the pilothouse, and damaging the radio shack. It was this explosion that injured LCDR Hughes, breaking his leg and causing multiple shrapnel wounds.

This same explosion would inspire Vaun Al Arnold of Kansas City, to write an ode to one of PANAY’s sailors, “The Pantless Gunner of the Panay.”
Ernest Mahlmann had put on his shirt and tie, and was in the process of stepping into his pants when the first explosion occurred. Knowing that he had to go up a ladder, he decided against taking the time needed to finish buttoning up his trousers, and hurried to one of the machine guns where he began to engage the Japanese. One of the iconic images of this raid is of Mahlmann firing at the attacking planes with a shirt and life vest on, but little else.

After two hours, the attack was over and the Panay was sinking. At 3:05 Ensign Biwerse, still missing most of his clothes, became the last man off PANAY, Charles L. Ensminger, Storekeeper 1st Class, Lt. Edgar G. Hulsebus, and Italian journalist Sandro Sandri were all killed as a result of the raid.

Although seen as a deliberate and willful violation of US neutrality, the average Japanese was shocked at these military actions. In a letter to a crewmember dated 11 January 1938, a Japanese student wrote,

My dear brave friend, how do you find yourself? You must feel lonely in hospital far from your country. When we heard your ship was destroyed by a bomb from Japanese aeroplanes and many brave men were wounded, how we (were) surprised! But the airmen did that without knowing your ship. Please forgive them. I hope you recover your health very soon. When you regain your health, don’t fall (sic) to visit our country. We shall be very glad to see you. Good luck to you!

Your friend,
Toshiko Hiramatsu

The Japanese government offered to salvage PANAY, but was refused, as was an offer to build a replacement vessel. The Japanese did pay reparations of $2,214,007.36, and Japanese children who donated their school lunch money contributed additional monies. Foreigners who appeared to be American were often stopped and given apologies for the sinking of PANAY by ordinary Japanese citizens.

PANAY became the first US naval ship to be lost due to an attack by enemy aircraft.

The post office of USS PANAY opened for business on 25 January 1929. During her service, she used four different cancels.

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>LKU</th>
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<td>10/5/33</td>
<td>16/11/37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>10/9/33</td>
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<td>9/5/29</td>
<td>7/2/30*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T9x</td>
<td>Unknown**</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The last recorded example, although the Postmark catalog says this was used through 1932.

** The author has never seen nor recorded an example of this marking.

The Catalog of United States Naval Postmarks lists a fifth marking, a Type 5bs (OOX) used during 1931. However, upon investigating the 1931 cancels that I have, I have discovered that the lower half of the cancel is consistently light, either due to lack of inking or lack of pressure used. Under magnification, a slight imprint of the bottom bar can often be seen. Therefore, I have rejected this cancel as a valid variety.

To date I have been able to record 174 separate dates of all cancel types from USS PANAY.

Cancels can be found in both black and magenta.

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To date I have been able to record 174 separate dates of all cancel types from USS PANAY.

Cancels can be found in both black and magenta.
NAVY DEPARTMENT
U.S.S. PANAY
Via Seattle, Washington
OFFICIAL BUSINESS
(Rubber stamp)

U. S. S. PANAY
YANGTZE PATROL
VIA SEATTLE, WASH.
OFFICIAL BUSINESS
(Printed)

Cachets have been seen from the following designers:
Cliff Blackburne  John Coulthard  Walter Crosby
Louis R. Deising  John J. Haag  John N. Lawrence
C. Wright Richell

There are two good websites in which you can see videos of USS PANAY. For the original *Universal* Newsreel shot by Norman Alley:


An interview with the last American survivor of the PANAY bombing can be found at this site:

www.usspanay.org

American history really comes alive when one is holding a cover from USS PANAY!

USS PANAY circa 1930s
http://www.navsource.org/archives/12/12120504.jpg

**Bibliography**


Rawlins, R. D. (ed.), *Naval Cover Cachet Makers Catalog*, Universal Ship Cancellation Society, 1988


www.hazegray.org/danfs/patrol/pr5.htm

www.navsource.org/archives/12/1205.htm
After launching on 26 November 1927, USS OAHU’s shakedown cruise took her from the docks of Shanghai to the inland port of Chungking, about as far up the Yangtze as any U.S. gunboat would venture. This long and, at times, dangerous journey foreshadowed a career that ended with a voyage the designers of OAHU never dreamed she would be forced to make.

The first nine years on the river would include tasks that would become routine to all of the Yangtze sailors... escorting American flagged vessels, ferrying legation employees, and engaging in occasional firefights with both warlords and Communist insurgents. In January of 1932, the crew of OAHU found themselves as facilitators in the release of Captain Charles Barker, an American who was skippering a motor barge when it was captured by Chinese bandits. Barker was then taken hostage, and held ransom for 10 million yuan. In a note that Barker sent to USS OAHU, he despaired for his release, stating that he was really worth only 5 million yuan. The higher ransom was paid, and Barker was released on 31 May 1932.

Incidents like this livened up the river’s routine, but as the final third of the 1930s rolled around, things began to turn more ominous. The Japanese had been having major clashes with the Chinese since 1932, but total warfare broke out on 7 July 1937. Due to a variety of reasons, this conflict did not catch the attention of the American public. European events, from Germany’s increasing militarism to the Spanish Civil War, overshadowed what was going on in China. One can only imagine the thoughts of the men plying the Chinese river, witnessing the horrors of the Japanese conquest while themselves occasionally ducking bullets fired by both the Japanese and Chinese. Other than the volunteer Abraham Lincoln Brigade in Spain, which was not endorsed by the American government, there were no U.S. citizens coming under hostile fire in Europe.

This was not the case on the Yangtze!

America’s focus changed, at least for a while on 12 December 1937.

It was on this date that the Japanese attacked and sank USS PANAY.

USS OAHU was the first U.S. vessel to arrive after the sinking, and spent some time finding and caring for PANAY’s crew. However, the outrage sparked by this event soon was replaced by another European crisis, as Hitler marched his troops into Austria on 12 March 1938, three months to the day of USS PANAY’s sinking. China was quickly forgotten, as war in Europe seemed to be on the verge of breaking out.

Japan kept up her pressure, not only on China, but on everyone she considered a potential threat. This included the Americans. While the US Navy could still sail on the Yangtze, the Japanese limited how far the gunboats could go. It became standard procedure to expect a Japanese naval escort to shadow all movements of any of the American gunboats. According to the Japanese, this was to ensure that another PANAY-like attack would not happen. Nevertheless, to the Americans, it was a way to hinder free movement by US ships. This harassment by the Japanese extended to the mails coming from and going to the various gunboats. In a 22 February 1938 letter to well-known naval collector Dr. S. E. Hutnick, H. L. Nahgonbe, the mail clerk of OAHU, stated.

“The Chinese post office in Shanghai has been taken over by the Japanese - but there is no fear for Uncle Sam's mail - for the British gunboats take our mail direct to the Mail Exchange.”

This raises the question, why did the Japanese not allow the Americans to carry their own mail?

While serving in OAHU in 1941, Frank Hoeffer, ship's cook, kept a diary. The bellicosity of the Japanese towards the Americans is apparent in his writings. Pursuing his hobby of photography, Hoeffer took some photos of a Japanese warship while OAHU was anchored in Hankow (although Hoeffer says that the Japanese ship was ITAKA, I could find no ship of this name in my 1941 edition of Jane’s Fighting Ships). It could be that this ship was JIN ISUZU, especially since this ship carried an admiral, who would shortly make Hoeffer's life miserable). The Japanese kept a close eye on all the activities that could be seen on OAHU, and it was soon reported to the Japanese admiral that an American sailor was taking unauthorized photos of his ship. The infuriated officer was soon piped aboard OAHU, and “shouting and waving his arms,” demanded that whoever had taken the photos of his ship be severely punished. After it was determined that Hoeffer was the photographer, his camera was confiscated and the film exposed. The Japanese officer urged OAHU’s CO, Lt. Commander D. E. Smith, to physically punish Hoeffer. Instead, Hoeffer was denied any liberty and was told that his camera would be locked away as long as OAHU was in Hankow. Although the Japanese officer was not satisfied with the mildness of the punishment (he had wanted Hoeffer publicly beaten), he was somewhat mollified by the destroyed film. Sailors on OAHU did notice...
the continual observance by a crewman with a pair of binoculars stationed on board the Japanese ship trained on OAHU’s gangway to make sure that Hoeffer stayed put!

Toward the end of November 1941, it was obvious to those stationed with the Asiatic Fleet, especially to those on the Yangtze Patrol, that it was only a matter of time before Japan would be in a state of war with the United States. Orders were received for USS OAHU to make the transit from Hankow to Shanghai. It was thought that if this voyage was not made, then the gunboat would have to be detained in the middle of China if and when war were to break out. It soon became apparent to the Japanese that OAHU was getting ready to leave Hankow, and this did not sit well with them. The same Japanese admiral who became so upset with Hoeffer’s photography sent a message to Lt. Commander Smith to stay put, and that if he tried to leave his mooring he would be sunk. Knowing that if he were to pick up a local pilot, the Japanese would know exactly what he was planning, Smith chose to sail without a pilot, and the Japanese threat proved hollow. USS OAHU steamed downriver, picking up missionaries, Standard Oil personnel, and others as she proceeded to Shanghai.

Once they got to the mouth of the Yangtze, Smith received an order that he never imagined he would get. He, along with USS LUZON, were to set sail on 28 November 1941 for Manila Bay. Keep in mind that neither of these ships were equipped with a keel, and blue water navigation was not something ever envisioned by the ship’s architects. Two days into their voyage they were surrounded by a Japanese destroyer squadron who, while aiming many of their guns at the two small gunboats, queried them as to which port they had sailed from. Battle stations were called, and most on board the American ships felt that a firefight with the Japanese was inevitable. The luck of the gunboaters held, and they were soon on their way through the Formosa Straits, and right into the teeth of a typhoon.

Yangtze Patrol Commander Rear Admiral William Glassford, aboard USS LUZON, stated, “For nearly 48 hours there was experienced the hardest beatings of our lives at sea. There was no sleep, no hot food, and one could scarcely even sit down without being tossed about...” OAHU experienced a 47-degree roll at the height of the storm. The typhoon was finally cleared on 5 December 1941, but not before USS PIGEON (AM 47) and USS QUAIL (AM 15) were dispatched to escort them the final distance in case one or both of the gunboats broke up in the Pacific. A few hours after escaping the storm, the small flotilla docked in Manila Bay.

Upon arriving, Rear Admiral Glassford hauled down the ComYangPat flag, declaring that the Yangtze Patrol was now formally dissolved.

USS OAHU spent the first few days of World War II preventing the Japanese from outflanking the troops on the Bataan Peninsula by thwarting Japanese attempts at shore landings behind American lines. This activity ended on 27 December due to a lack of fuel. She would still be used in various capacities anchored off Corregidor, but upon the capture of Bataan on 9 April 1942, OAHU’s sailors became artillerymen on the island of Corregidor until that island also fell. OAHU then became a stationary target, and was sunk less than a month later, on 5 May.

One of the last of the China gunboats fought to the end, hundreds of miles from where she was built to serve.

The post office aboard USS OAHU opened on 8 June 1929, and used five different cancels (the Type 3s BC had two different dials) until it was officially closed on 7 December 1941. I have recorded 278 different dates and from all locations for this ship.

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<th>LKU</th>
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<td>25/11/1941</td>
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<td>17/10/1931</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9x</td>
<td>1939</td>
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<td>(information needed)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Catalog of Naval Postmarks lists a 3s(AC-BTT) used from 1932 to 1936. However, I have never seen an example of this type, and question its existence. If you have an example of this, please contact me.

The first 3s(BC-BTT) cancel got quite a workout. As seen in the progressive photos accompanying this article, a right hand bulge became more and more noticeable until it was replaced by the 3r cancel in early 1937. Apparently, one of the mail clerks got fed up with it a few months into 1933, and substituted a different dial until 1935, when the bulge returned.

Cancels can be found in black, blue, and purple.

![Progression of the bulge on the dial.](image)
Many locations and various wordings can be found within USS OAHU’s killer bars.

Changsha
Chenglinki
Chenglinki/Hun., China
Chungking
Chungking/Szechuan
Chungking/Sze. China
En Route/Hankow
En Route/Shanghai
Hankow
Hankow/Hupeh China
Hankow/Hupeh, China
Hankow/Hup., China
Hohsien
Honan/Ichang China
Ichang
Ichang/Hupeh China
In Memorium USS Panay/Chinkiang China
Kiukiang
Kiukiang/K China
Kowan
Kweifu
Memory/USS Panay
Mupanshih/Hun., China
Nanking/Bombed
Nanking/Kiangsi China
Nanking/Ku., China

I have been able to record only one official corner card from OAHU:

NAVY DEPARTMENT
U.S.S. OAHU
Via Seattle, Washington
OFFICIAL BUSINESS

This is a rubber stamp, and can be found in both black and purple.

Several cachet makers provided services for OAHU. Those recorded are:

C.S. Anderson     D. C. Bartley     Yuk Sun Chin
John Coulthard    Walter Crosby     W. H. Davis
Linn Haag         Marshall Hall     Edward Hacker
Ted Harrington    Frederick Horton   Harry Klotzbach
Henry Kraus       Leslie Merrell     M. Fay Muridge
“S”               Howard L. Stevens

Holding a cover from USS OAHU, one cannot help but imagine the trials and hardships that she went through!

For a map of the wreck site of USS OAHU, go to: http://wikimapia.org/#lat=14.3759991&lon=120.5923641&z=17&l=0&m=b

Bibliography
navalwarfare.blogspot.com/2010/10/uss-oahu-pr-6.html
wtv-zone.com/califPamela/memorial-page-3.html

A special thank you goes out to Henry Sweets and John Noble.
It was not a good start. On her maiden voyage, USS LUZON ran aground below Shanghai on the breakwater off Woosung, leaving her bow high and dry. Her future would become even more adventurous.

USS LUZON was based on a design submitted to the Secretary of the Navy on 10 September 1924. The plans called for the building of two gunboats, later to be named LUZON and MINDINAO (PR 8), by the Kiangnan Dockyard and Engineering Works in Shanghai. These vessels were to be the longest and heaviest of any of the U. S. Navy's Chinese gunboats, forty eight feet longer and about two hundred tons heavier than their sister ships, OAHU and PANAY. The navy accepted the designs on 16 December 1924, and the building began.

USS LUZON was commissioned as PG 47 on 1 January 1928 and soon thereafter re-designated as PR 7 on 15 June 1928. During most of her tenure on the Yangtze, she was homeported in Hankow. Traveling up and down the river, she spent her time protecting American interests from Chinese warlords, the emerging Communist movement, and even the Kuomintang. At one point early in her career, LUZON's mess hosted Chiang Kai Chek in an effort to improve relations with this facet of Chinese politics.

As the Japanese began their 1937 invasion of China, USS LUZON found herself being responsible for the well-being of the American legation, which was based in Shanghai. Realizing the danger of trying to keep the legation in Shanghai, the diplomats were ordered to abandon Shanghai and move to Chunking. It was LUZON that carried them there.

This all came to an end in December of 1941. Realizing that it was just a matter of time before the Japanese turned her armed forces against the U.S., USS LUZON, MINDINAO (PR 8), and OAHU (PR 6) were ordered to leave their Chinese ports and make their way to Manila. As USS MINDINAO was leaving Hong Kong, Rear Admiral William A. Glassford (Commander, Yangtze Patrol) boarded LUZON to make that harrowing trip. Since neither LUZON nor OAHU had keels, there was some doubt as to whether or not they could make the trip safely. Thus, the minesweeper USS FINCH (AM 9) and the submarine rescue vessel USS PIGEON (ASR 6) were sent out to escort the two gunboats in case either or both foundered.

Before the arrival of FINCH and PIGEON, LUZON and OAHU found themselves in seas they were never built to negotiate. While in the Straits of Formosa, they became involved in a typhoon the likes of which no Yangtze sailor had ever seen. Rear Admiral Glassford would later boast of the seaworthiness of the two small gunboats, but wonder how any of the Sailors (including himself) had managed to survive.

After the small flotilla of four ships entered Manila, LUZON found herself on continuous patrol in an effort to stop Japanese infiltration of the Bataan Peninsula from the sea. Due to a chronic lack of fuel, the Navy decided to divide up what was left between LUZON and MINDINAO, which had arrived in Manila on 10 December. It was soon learned that the Japanese were planning a major push against Bataan's defenses, to begin on 6 April 1942. USS LUZON and MINDINAO were tasked to stop this landing.

At two o’clock on that morning, the gunboats discovered eleven small Japanese landing craft heading for the Bataan shore. While lacking heavy guns, the two ships took on the landing force with their two three inch guns, as well as whatever machine guns could be brought to bear. They managed to sink four of the landing craft, turning the other seven back before being forced to withdraw after coming under fire from long-range Japanese shore batteries.

The fighting on Bataan ceased on 9 April 1942, and all allied forces withdrew to the islands of Corregidor and Caballo. The fuel, which had been carefully hoarded, had run out, and the entire gunboat crews were pressed into service as artillerymen. LUZON's sailors were assigned to the two fourteen inch guns, which made up Battery Gillespie on Fort Hughes, which was on Caballo Island.

As the sun rose over Corregidor on 6 May 1942, the defenders knew that their cause was lost. LUZON was ordered scuttled to keep her out of Japanese hands. This was done, and USS LUZON was stricken from the US Navy on 8 May 1942. LUZON sailed under eight US skippers, the first being LCDR George McMilin, and the last being LCDR George Magruder Brooke, who received the Navy Cross for his actions while commanding her. His citation for this medal reads, in part—

**USS LUZON (PR 7)**

- **Displacement**: 500 tons
- **Length**: 210’ 9’’
- **Beam**: 31’
- **Draft**: 6’ mean
- **Speed**: 16 knots
- **Compliment**: 80
- **Armament**: Two 3”/23 gun mounts
- **Armament**: Ten .30 caliber Lewis machine guns

In December of 1938, LUZON's orders were changed. She was to travel to Shanghai and relieve USS AUGUSTA (CA 31) as station ship of that city. Although she made brief excursions up the river, Shanghai was where she would spend the majority of her remaining years in China.

**Yangtze Patrol**

**USS LUZON (PR 7)**

*Randy Pence (8929)*

541 Hale Circle SW

Albuquerque, NM 87105-0309
catclan@earthlink.net
USS LUZON

“Commander Brooke directed the anti-aircraft batteries of his ship and conducted operations of strategic important (sic) involving hazardous missions such as to bring great credit to his command and the United States Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life for his country.”

You might think that this would be the end of this China gunboat, but you would be wrong. The Japanese found that LUZON could be raised and salvaged, and this is what was done. After undergoing repairs at the captured dock facilities in Cavite, she was renamed IJNS KARATSU.

Assigned to the Third Southern Expeditionary Fleet, she served out the remainder of her life as a submarine chaser, complete with sonar. All repairs and updates were finished on 14 October 1942, and she was reassigned to the Cebu Guard Unit. While in this capacity, she was tasked with working with the Imperial Japanese Army in a counter-guerrilla capacity. It was during this time that KARATSU was credited, along with two Nakajima B5Ns from the IJN 954th Air Group, with the sinking of USS CISCO (SS 290) on 28 September 1943, thus becoming the only gunboat ever to sail under an American flag to destroy a US submarine.

KARATSU’s time, however, was coming to an end. On 3 March 1944, she was detected by USS NARWHAL (SS 167). The sub launched a spread of torpedoes, and one took off KARATSU’s bow. Although the damage was severe, the ship did not sink, and was soon towed back to Manila, where she once again began to receive repairs. Due to the extensive amount of damage done, the ship was still in drydock when the Americans attacked the island of LUZON on 9 January 1945. Because of the intensity of the attack and the inevitable fall of Manila, the IJN decided to scuttle KARATSU as a block ship in the mouth of Manila Bay, doing so on 5 February 1945. KARATSU was stricken from IJN records on 10 April 1945.

Postal History

Opening on 12 January 1929 and closing on 7 December 1941, USS LUZON used ten different cancels, with one fake included in the Catalog of United States Naval Postmarks. In addition, there was a Yangtze Patrol Branch cancel out of New York (why not out of San Francisco or Seattle?) that can be found on covers from LUZON. I have documented 315 separate dates found on covers from this ship.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Used</th>
<th>EKU</th>
<th>LKU</th>
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<td>24/4/1933</td>
<td>23/8/1935</td>
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<td>3r(AC-TTB)</td>
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<td>16/3/1937</td>
<td>24/11/1941</td>
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<td>5s</td>
<td>1929-1931</td>
<td>6/2/1929</td>
<td>26/5/1931</td>
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<td>5bs(0X0)</td>
<td>1931-1932</td>
<td>11/6/1931</td>
<td>4/7/1932</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9v</td>
<td>1934</td>
<td>Information needed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other than the 9v cancels, which are normally purple, cancels are only found in black.

The locations and wordings of the killer bars are fewer than that found in some of the other ships. Those recorded consist of:

- Chansha
- Chinkiang
- Hankow
- Hwangshikong
- Ichang
- Ipin
- Kiukiang
- Lincoln's Birthday
- Mud Fort Barrier
- Nanking
- Shanghai
- Shanghai Greetings
- China 8th Birthday
- Washington's Birthday
- Wuhu
- Wusuh
- Wusen
- Wusiahsien
- Yangtze Patrol Branch

There have been eight recorded official corner cards for USS LUZON:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EKU</th>
<th>LKU</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>23/5/1929</td>
<td>2/10/1929</td>
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<tr>
<td>Printed Corner Card</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
USS LUZON attracted a fair amount of philatelic attention. Those who drew cachets found on covers from this ship include:

- “Adam”
- John Coulthard
- W. M. Grandy
- Lewis E. Khotzbach
- MhCachets

D. C. Bartley
- Walter G. Crosby
- Ed Hacker
- Frank Kuss
- M. Fay Muridge

Yak Suk Chin
- Jerome Golnick
- Harry Ioor
- J. N. Lawrence
- K. E. Parshall

Byrd Powell
- C. Wright Richell
- “S”
- Leo A. Schupp
- Loring Stannard
- Donald Yontz

Holding a cover from this ship in your hands brings you a little closer to a mostly forgotten chapter in our glorious history.

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militarytimes.com/citations-medals-awards/recipients.php?recipientid=19853
navalwarfare.blogspot.com/2011/04/ussLUZON-pg-47-pr-7.html
When one thinks of the Yangtze Patrol, one usually thinks of the gunboats that spent years patrolling the river. However, the Patrol contained ships that might have been attached for only a matter of weeks, and sometimes only days. In a piece of personal correspondence from Admiral Kemp Tolley dated 20 June 1995, he wrote:

Destroyers, minesweepers, an occasional cruiser when on Yangtze duty were under the direct opcontrol of ComYangPat.

Sailors on board ships that served on the Yangtze between the dates of 3 September 1926 to 21 October 1927 and 1 March 1930 to 31 December 1932 qualified for the Navy’s Yangtze Service Medal. The ships that met these requirements numbered 72, and the challenge of finding postal history from all of these vessels during these time frames is daunting. As if this wasn’t hard enough, there are many other ships that cruised the Yangtze outside of these dates. A diligent search of killer bars, even from commonly found pre-war ships, may uncover a previously undiscovered Yangtze Patrol postmark!

In this installment of the Yangtze Patrol postal history series, I would like to focus on just two ships, one that served on the river for only a short period, while the second was the flagship of the Patrol for eight years.

When Congress authorized the construction and commissioning of six shallow draft gunboats specifically built for the Yangtze River, it was assumed that they would all stay on that river. This was not to be the case. The exception was USS MINDINAO. Named after the second largest of the Philippine Islands, this ship was built at the Kiangnan Dockyard and Engineering Works in Shanghai, and launched on 28 September 1927 as PG 48. Her classification changed to PR 8 upon her commissioning on 10 July 1928. She began her shakedown cruise on this date, traveling up the Yangtze all the way to Chungking. She continued to cruise the Yangtze until 28 December 1928, when she began an overhaul process in Shanghai. This work lasted until 21 March 1929, at which time she resumed her duties on the Yangtze Patrol. This continued until 2 May 1929, when she received new orders and traveled to Hong Kong, taking up duties as the South China Patrol’s flagship. She remained in that capacity until December 1941, when she sailed for Manila to help with the defense of the Philippines. She was scuttled in order to keep her out of Japanese hands on 2 May 1942. There were two commanding officers during the time MINDINAO was on the Yangtze Patrol, Lieutenant Commander Alan Withers Ashbrook (10 July 1928-8 March 1929) and Commander George Christian Logan (8 March 1929 - 20 February 1931).

I have yet to find any postmarks from USS MINDINAO from her Yangtze days, but the *Catalog of United States Naval Postmarks* lists a Type 5s for 1929. I do have two examples of MINDINAO corner cards on number ten envelopes with a USN Purchasing Office, Shanghai China T3 cancel. Both of these are dated January 1929, a time when MINDINAO was being overhauled in Shanghai. I am assuming that the onboard post office was not functioning at this time, and shore facilities served MINDINAO’s postal needs.

Since USS MINDINAO served on the Yangtze for seven months, there must be postal evidence of the ports she visited. The search is on!

The second ship was originally built as a pleasure yacht, and was acquired by the US Navy during World War I. John Willys, the founder of the Willys-Overland car company (which would eventually produce the famous Jeep), commissioned the Bath Iron Works to build the yacht ISABEL in 1917. Displacing 718 tons, it was one of the speediest private vessels of the time, with a maximum speed of 29 knots.

Serving as a convoy escort during the First World War, she was classified as SP 521, and spent most of this time looking for the U-Boats that menaced the cargo ships she was protecting. After the war, she spent time on the Mississippi, going as far north as St. Louis in an effort to attract new recruits to the U. S. Navy. After this service, she sailed for the port of Philadelphia, where she became the tender for the famous NC-4 seaplane flotilla.

The Navy decided to decommission her in 1920, but reversed this decision in 1921. After considering her as a permanent seaplane tender, the final decision was made to turn her into a China gunboat. USS QUIROS was showing her age by this time, and ISABEL was chosen to replace her. Arriving at Shanghai in 1921, she became the flagship of the Yangtze Patrol, and served in that capacity until 1928. During this time, she would sail between Shanghai and Hankow during the high water summer months, and stay in Shanghai during the winter when the river’s level dropped. ISABEL was not immune to trouble while in this service. In October of 1926, she found herself in crossfire between rival...
Chinese warlord factions. Later, on 24 March 1927, she found herself in what became known as the Nanking Incident. Chinese warlord Zhang Zongchang had been defeated in his attempt to hold Nanking, and with the approach of the Chiang Kai-shek’s National Revolutionary Army, was attempting to retreat to safety. However, many of his troops were left behind, and they began to riot, looting the foreign settlement of that city. A multi-national force of naval vessels, including ISABEL, used their firepower to protect foreign interests. The National Revolutionary Army restored order on 26 March 1927, and the naval ships of the various countries were ordered to stand down. Those serving on the American vessels in Nanking at this time were awarded the Yangtze Service Medal.

In 1928, USS ISABEL left the Yangtze Patrol to become a workhorse of the Asiatic Fleet, traveling between China and the Philippines. At times, she did travel up the Yangtze again, but this was not done on a regular basis. As the war clouds gathered over Asia, ISABEL was ordered to Manila, becoming Admiral Thomas Hart’s Asiatic Fleet flagship there on 9 July 1941. Escaping the Japanese invasion of the Philippine Islands, ISABEL made her way to Australia, and was based in Freemantle for the duration of World War II. Surviving her second world war, she was sold for scrap in 1946.

USS ISABEL is the only Yangtze Patrol vessel that sailed both the Mississippi and Yangtze rivers while on active duty.

The two MINDINAO covers both have the same rubber-stamped corner card in black ink. It reads:

U. S. S. MINDINAO
YANGTZE PATROL
U. S. ASIATIC STATION
POSTMASTER, SEATTLE, WASHINGTON.

While serving on the Yangtze Patrol, USS ISABEL had seven different cancels, according to the Catalog of United States Naval Postmarks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Used</th>
<th>EKU</th>
<th>LKU</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T3ars</td>
<td>1927-28</td>
<td>(?)</td>
<td>6/4/28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T3rs (C)</td>
<td>1923-27</td>
<td>5/3/23</td>
<td>12/6/27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T3s</td>
<td>1927-28</td>
<td>25/11/27</td>
<td>21/9/28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T3 (AC-BBT)</td>
<td>1938-39</td>
<td>30/5/38</td>
<td>17/4/39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6p 1928 *
9v 1926 *
9v 1927 *

* The author has not seen examples of these postal markings.

I have been able to record 22 covers of all dates from USS ISABEL while she was on Yangtze service. Postmarks have been found in black, blue, and purple.

Locations and slogans in the killer bars include:

Hankow  Nanking  Shanghai
Wuhu    Yangtze Patrol

Two different corner cards have been recorded on number ten envelopes from this ship, they can be found in black and purple.

USS ISABEL  Commander Yangtze Patrol
YANGTZE PATROL  USS ISABEL, Flagship
U.S. ASIATIC FLEET  Asiatic Station, via
VIA SEATTLE, WASH  Seattle, Washington,
OFFICIAL BUSINESS  OFFICIAL BUSINESS

I have been able to record only two cachet makers that serviced covers from this ship, the two being D. C. Bartley and P. J. Ickeringill.

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navalwarfare.blogspot.com/2011/06/uss-minidnasio-pg-48-pr-8.html
The first US flagged naval vessel to venture up the Yangtze from Shanghai was USS SUSQUEHANNA which sailed to the port of Wuhu in 1854. This began a continuous American naval presence on the Yangtze that would last until 1941. According to Rear Admiral Kemp Tolley in his book *Yangtze Patrol*, “So, although the Navy would not know what to call it for many years, the Yangtze Patrol was born in June 1854.” As stated in my last installment of this series, all US Navy ships that went upstream from Shanghai were considered to be attached to the Yangtze Patrol, no matter how short the duration of their cruise. Pre-1920 covers from these ships, though rare, can be found. I have illustrated postmarks from three of these ships, USS ALBANY (on a 1913 postcard from Hankow), USS CHARLESTON (with a 1909 return address of Nanking), and USS WILMINGTON (with a 1916 Hankow return address). I have also included a postcard depicting USS CINCINNATI while she was fighting in Nanking, postmarked 19 March 1914 and mailed from Japan.

In order to recognize those who had served on the river at two important periods of time, the Navy awarded the Yangtze Service Medal to all officers and enlisted men on vessels that were on the river during the specified dates. The first period ran from 3 September 1926 to 21 October 1927. It was during this time that major upheavals were rocking China.

Despite Sun Yat Sen’s attempt to unify China, the power of warlords continued to hold sway. One of the most powerful was Zhang Zongchang, who ruled throughout the Yangtze valley, including the major port city of Shanghai. Known for his ruthlessness, he employed over 4000 White Russians, using them as a vanguard for his army (and thus chewing through them in a rapid manner). He was known as the Three Don’t Knows, since he claimed he didn’t know how many men he had in his army, didn’t know how much money he had, nor did he know how many concubines were in his seraglio. In fact, his numerous wives (which included women from Korea, Japan, Russia, France, and the United States) were known by numbers, since he could never remember nor pronounce their names.

Zongchang’s power would be severely threatened by the rise of the Koumintang and its military leader, Chiang Kai-Shek. On 9 July 1926, Chiang’s National Revolutionary Army was ordered to begin its Northern Expedition, which included routing Zongchang’s troops from the lower Yangtze valley. American, British, Japanese, and other non-Chinese powers went on high alert. Fighting between the Koumintang’s army and that of Warlord Zongchang soon began, and on 22 March 1927, Chiang’s forces entered Shanghai. Two days later, National Army forces entered Nanking.

Zongchang was forced to retreat from the port of Nanking, escaping that city by 7:00 AM on 24 March. At this point, things began to get out of hand. Nationalist Army forces began looting foreign consulates, homes, and businesses. An international force of warships then began to fire on these soldiers. At the end of the day, three British, one American, one man from France, one Italian, and one Japanese were dead. Naval forces stayed on high alert throughout the summer and into the fall as the Nationalist forces continued to fight those of the warlords, to ensure that Western and Japanese properties were respected.

US Naval ships that were granted the Yangtze Service Medal for participation during this time period are listed as follows:

- USS GENERAL ALAVA (AG 5)
- USS ASHEVILLE (PG 21)
- USS BLACK HAWK (AD 9)
- USS BULMER (DD 222)
- USS CINCINNATI (CL 6)
- USS EDSALL (DE 129)
- USS ELCANO (PG 38)
- USS JOHN D. FORD (AG 119)
- USS HART (DM 8)
Finding covers from all of these ships while on the Yangtze is a difficult task, as some were only on station for a matter of a few weeks.

I have included illustrations of the few ships that I have been able to track down while dealing with the Nanking troubles.

The second time frame for the awarding of the medal is from 1 March 1930 to 31 December 1932, and this service dealt with humanitarian efforts given through the United States people, using naval ships to counter a widespread natural disaster.

The Yangtze River has flooded over 1,000 times in recorded history, but the drought of 1928-30 augmented what was to be one of the rainiest years on record in 1931. The Yangtze inundated the lower valley, causing an estimated 145,000 deaths. 28.5 million other people were affected in some way by the flood and its aftermath, including tens of thousands dying of flood related diseases. Humanitarian aid was provided by the US at various river ports, and was transported on US Navy ships. The ships that were awarded the Yangtze Service Medal for their participation in this relief effort were:

USS ASHEVILLE (PG 21)
USS AVOCET (AM 19)
USS BARKER (DD 213)
USS BEAVER (AS 5)
USS BITTERN (AM 36)
USS BLACK HAWK (AD 9)
USS BORIE (DD 215)
USS BULMER (DD 222)
USS CANOPUS (AS 9)
USS EDSALL (DD 219)
USS JOHN D. EDWARDS (DD 216)
USS FINCH (AM 9)
USS JOHN D. FORD (DD 228)
USS GUAM (PR 3)
USS HERON (AM 10)
USS HOUSTON (CL 30)/(CA 30)
USS ISABEL (PY 10)
USS JASON (AV 2)
USS PAUL JONES (DD 230)
USS LUZON (PR 7)
USS MCCORMICK (DD 223)
USS MONOCACY (PR 2)
USS OAHU (PR 6)
USS PALOS (PR 1)
USS PANAY (PR 5)
USS PARROTT (DD 218)
USS PEARY (DD 226)
USS PECOS (AO 6)
USS PIGEON (ASR 6)
USS PILLSBURY (DD 227)
USS POPE (DD 225)
USS RIZAL (DM 14)
USS ROCHESTER (CA 2)
Again, finding covers from some of these ships are exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to find. Although some will carry locations in their killer bars, others will not. One must rely on the dates that these ships were on the Yangtze (found at http://www.history.navy.mil/medals/yangtze.htm) to find out if they were attached to the Yangtze Patrol at any given date.

In addition to these ships, other US Naval vessels occasionally made trips upriver. Without access to voluminous amounts of ship’s logs, the easiest way to determine which ships made these voyages is to check the locations found in the killer bars. So far, I have discovered five ships that made trips up the Yangtze:

Obviously, this list of ships on the river falls far short of being complete. New discoveries await those who diligently go through naval cover stocks, adding further to the knowledge of the ships, both US and those of other countries that plied the mighty Yangtze.
As I conclude this series on the naval philately of non-Chinese navies on the Yangtze River, I would like to thank all who have contacted me with both additional information and kind encouragement, especially fellow USCS members Henry Sweets and John Noble. A hobby begun to escape the pressures of college and grad school has turned into a lifetime of enjoyment and learning. In writing these articles, I hope that I have shared an appreciation of the collecting of covers from the ships of this little-remembered outpost manned by sailors serving under a variety of flags.

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