

# Benjamin Marks, the USS PAUL JONES (DD-230), & their China Adventure

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In 1923, Torpedoman's Mate 3 Benjamin Marks was a sailor aboard the USS PAUL JONES (DD-230), which crossed the Pacific two years after her commissioning in 1921. (See the ship's history on page 15.) There, she became part of the Asiatic Fleet's destroyer flotilla, which at various times included the ALDEN (DD-211), BARKER (DD-213), BORIE (DD-215), BULMER (DD-222), EDSALL (DD-219), JOHN D. EDWARDS (DD-216), JOHN D. FORD (DD-228), PARROTT (DD-218), PEARY (DD-226), PILLSBURY (DD-227), POPE (DD-225), STEWART (DD-224), and WHIPPLE (DD-217). Several of the four-pipers had been in the Far East for a year or two. The PAUL JONES joined their rotating schedule of winters at the Cavite Navy Yard in the Philippines and summers in China operating out of the Asiatic Fleet's forward destroyer bases at Chefoo and Tsingtao patrolling China's northeastern coast and shipping lanes and up the Yangtze River.

By the early 1920s, the more than 1,700 miles of China's Yangtze River had become an extremely dangerous waterway for Americans and other foreigners. Large numbers of them lived in China as missionaries and in other capacities or were engaged in shipping and trade under the open-door policy.



Having no troops to deploy, members of the ship's company of the various destroyers and gunboats in Chinese waters were employed on the ground. Here crewmen of the USS PAUL JONES (DD-230) set up a gun emplacement during the anti-foreign rioting of the early 1920s. The single Lewis machine gun and a few old rifles, probably model 1896 Krag-Jorgensen carbines, were usually enough to keep trouble at bay. Photo courtesy of Frederick Marks.



The USS PAUL JONES (DD-230) was a member of the large CLEMSON class of 156 destroyers, which began construction in 1919. Ordered for World War I, the ships were not delivered until the following year. As a result of the great size of the class and of the financial constraints on the navy during the Great Depression, another class of destroyers was not constructed until 1934. Photo courtesy of Frederick Marks.

That policy, in which the Chinese had little or no say, was the result of international treaties that turned most of the country's coastal towns and cities into free-trade ports. Much of the 1920s' widespread unrest and violence against foreign lives and property was triggered by student demonstrations after World War I when secret Allied treaties gave parts of China to Japan and Germany.

Aside from angering the Chinese, the treaties and Japan's seizure of Manchuria in 1931 essentially put an end to the open-door policy, set the stage for the rise to power of communist Mao Tse-tung in 1949 and a year later, the flight of Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist Chinese to Formosa/Taiwan, and was a first step in Japan's conquest of Asia and the Far East.

But that was not the situation when the American destroyers joined the century-old Yangtze Patrol. Upon their arrival in the early 1920s, they found at least three major forces, with constantly shifting loyalties, engaged in a civil war in southern China. At the local level were the armies of competing warlords, battling each other and the armies of the Kuomintang Party's pro-communist Sun Yat-sen and an ambitious party member and nationalist, Chiang Kai-shek. As it turned out, the two leaders were as much at war with each other to gain control of the party and southern China as with the warlords. Their armed conflict ranged along the course of the Yangtze River, which was also plagued by river pirates who preyed largely on foreign ships, as did the other warring forces. With increasing frequency American ships and other

vessels on the river and military installations and civilian properties ashore were the target of brutal attacks or were caught in the middle of fights that didn't involve them directly.

At the time, the U.S. Navy had a handful of overworked gunboats assigned to the famed Yangtze Patrol. The U.S. force included the SACRAMENTO (PG-19), PALOS (PG-16), and MONOCACY (PG-20), whose efforts were stretched thin patrolling the river protecting British, American, and other foreign concessions. In that capacity, they supplied armed guards to merchant ships, convoyed U.S. and other foreign ships, helped evacuate American citizens when necessary, and protected American citizens at Chungking when that city was under siege by a warlord's army. Upon their arrival, the American destroyers took on many of the same duties.

Aboard the PAUL JONES, Torpedoman Benjamin Marks was very proud of being a "right hand rate". When not manning his battle station as part of the gunnery division during engagements with the Chinese river pirates, he was assigned to the landing parties that went ashore at Chefoo,

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Amoy, and Hangkow. Their mission was to help keep the peace, a duty that, typically, was the work of the army and marines, but in China in the 1920s, it was also tin can sailors from their ships' gunnery and deck divisions that did it, and did it well.

One such instance was at Hangkow in 1925, during unrest in the aftermath of Sun Yat-sen's death and Chiang Kai-shek's military actions to consolidate his power in southern China. There, Marks and eight other members of a machine gun squad carried ashore empty bags to be filled with sand for barricades and a Lewis machine gun to defend various American-held properties. Notoriously heavy, the Lewis was pan fed, and its pan magazine had to be loaded by hand with a special tool, which also had to be carried when they went to their posts. On duty, the sailors stood 12-hour watches, each armed with a .45 and a Springfield single-shot, bolt-action weapon.

The volatile situation continued as American passenger and cargo steamships did a brisk business, which continued on the Yangtze until 1935. Several U.S. destroyers continued regu-



Shown here is the author's father, TM3 Benjamin Marks, wearing a shore patrol armband in China in 1927. Marks was a sailor in Chinese waters from 1919 to 1926, serving on the USS PAUL JONES (DD-230). He was very proud of being a "right hand rate" and was a member of both the landing party and machine-gun squad during the troubles with China and their civil war. There were also engagements against Chinese river pirates that involved the Yangtze Patrol ships. Photo courtesy of Frederick Marks.

lar Yangtze patrols into the 1930s. The official history of the PAUL JONES gives no details of her service in China, but those of a few other Yangtze Patrol destroyers do tell us what their service was like.

One of those was the WHIPPLE, who left the U.S. in May 1921 with her division mates for the Far East. Upon her arrival at her new home port in Cavite, near Manila, she began four years with the Asiatic Fleet, "showing the flag" and standing ready to protect American lives and property in strifetorn China during summer operations out of Tsingtao in northern China.

Battles between local warlords around Shanghai in late 1924 and early 1925 resulted in the WHIPPLE being called upon to serve as a transport. On 15 January 1925, the Marine detachment from the gunboat SACRAMENTO (PG-19) went ashore to protect American property, and a week later, an expeditionary force of marines, led by Capt. James P. Schwerin, USMC, embarked in the WHIPPLE and her sisters BORIE and BARKER. The three destroyers landed the marines on 22 January, relieving the 28-man detachment from the gunboat.

After four years in the U.S., she returned to the Far East for another decade, watching the rising ascendancy of Japan over China and the Far East. She resumed the usual routine common to ships of her type with winter exercises in the Philippines and summer maneuvers out of Tsingtao and cruises to Chinese coastal ports in the interim.

The PARROTT was one of the ships that relieved the WHIPPLE's division in May 1925. She joined the Asiatic Fleet at Chefoo, China, in mid-June. Because of unsettled conditions in China, the PARROTT, with other destroyers, sailed to Shanghai and put ashore a landing force. She remained in the area until 31 July and was back on 10 September for duty with the Yangtze Patrol. After operations out of Manila, she reported to the South China Patrol at Swatow in March 1926. By mid-June, the revolution between Communist and Nationalist forces in China resulted in intense naval activity that brought the entire Asiatic Fleet into Chinese waters. The PARROTT carried out a rigorous schedule, aiding and protecting the interests of Americans and other neutrals. Her duty in China ended in October 1927.

The EDSALL was another of the destroyers that arrived in 1925. She stayed on through Japan's invasion of Manchuria in 1931, which was the



A shore party in Hankow, consisting of a chief petty officer and nine enlisted, man their station. Such groups were often the only protection for American interests in China during the 1920s. Without good roads, Chinese waterways provided access to the interior of the country, and U.S. destroyers and gunboats plied the rivers as far inland as they could, which gave rise to the phrase, "gunboat diplomacy." Photo courtesy of Frederick Marks.

lead-up to a Sino-Japanese war. A year later, some 70,000 Japanese troops temporarily occupied Shanghai. Throughout this period, Chang Kai-shek's Nationalist government in Nanking had been sending forces to battle Mao Tse-tung's Communist guerilla army in the western provinces. Japan's increased attempts to take over China, however, led the Nationalists and Communists to join in fighting an undeclared war on Japan in 1937. By the end of that year, Shanghai and Nanking belonged to the Japanese who proceeded to set up a naval blockade of China and bomb Chinese cities. A year later, Japan controlled all of China's major ports and railroads and declared its dominance in the region with its "New Order for East Asia." Shut out of most spheres of influence, the U.S. and Britain finally openly declared their opposition to Japan's invasion of China, its establishment of a puppet government there, and further expansion in the Far East. In August 1940, the last British troops left China.

In July 1941, Japanese bombers attacked and damaged the U.S. gunboat TUTUILA at Chungking, then apologized and offered to concede to some of the Americans' demands regarding China if the U.S. would end its freeze on her assets and the Allied control of lands that supplied Japan with oil. The U.S. refused and warned Japan against further territorial incursions. By November 1941, the U.S. and Japan had reached a stalemate. The U.S. was still demanding, to no avail, that Japan withdraw its forces from China and,

with the same degree of success, the Japanese were insisting that the U.S. stop restricting trade with Japan and stop interfering with its activities in the Pacific. Negotiations ended on 29 November 1941.

On 7 December 1941, the PAUL JONES, flagship of DesDiv 58, DesRon 29, the BARKER, BULMER, PARROTT, and STEWART were at Tarakan, Borneo, and the ALDEN, EDSALL, JOHN D. EDWARDS, and WHIPPLE were at Balikpapan, Borneo. The JOHN D. FORD, PEARY, PILLSBURY, and POPE were at the Cavite Navy Yard in Manila Bay. (See the article "The Saga of Desron 29, December 1941–March 1942," in the April-May-June 2004 issue of *The Tin Can Sailor*.)

*Editor's note: The foregoing article is the outgrowth of a letter and photographs sent to us by Fred Marks, Benjamin's son. Information came from Wikipedia; the Yangtze Patrol Memorial website; and "Yangtze River Patrol and Other U.S. Navy Asiatic Fleet Activities in China, 1920-1942," as described in the Annual Reports of the Navy Department for the Fiscal Year 1920, on the Naval Historical Center website, [www.history.navy.mil/library/online/yangtze.htm](http://www.history.navy.mil/library/online/yangtze.htm).*

### Tin Can Talk

**LOOKOUT:** A man stationed as a visual watch. May be air lookout, horizon lookout, surface lookout, fog lookout, etc.