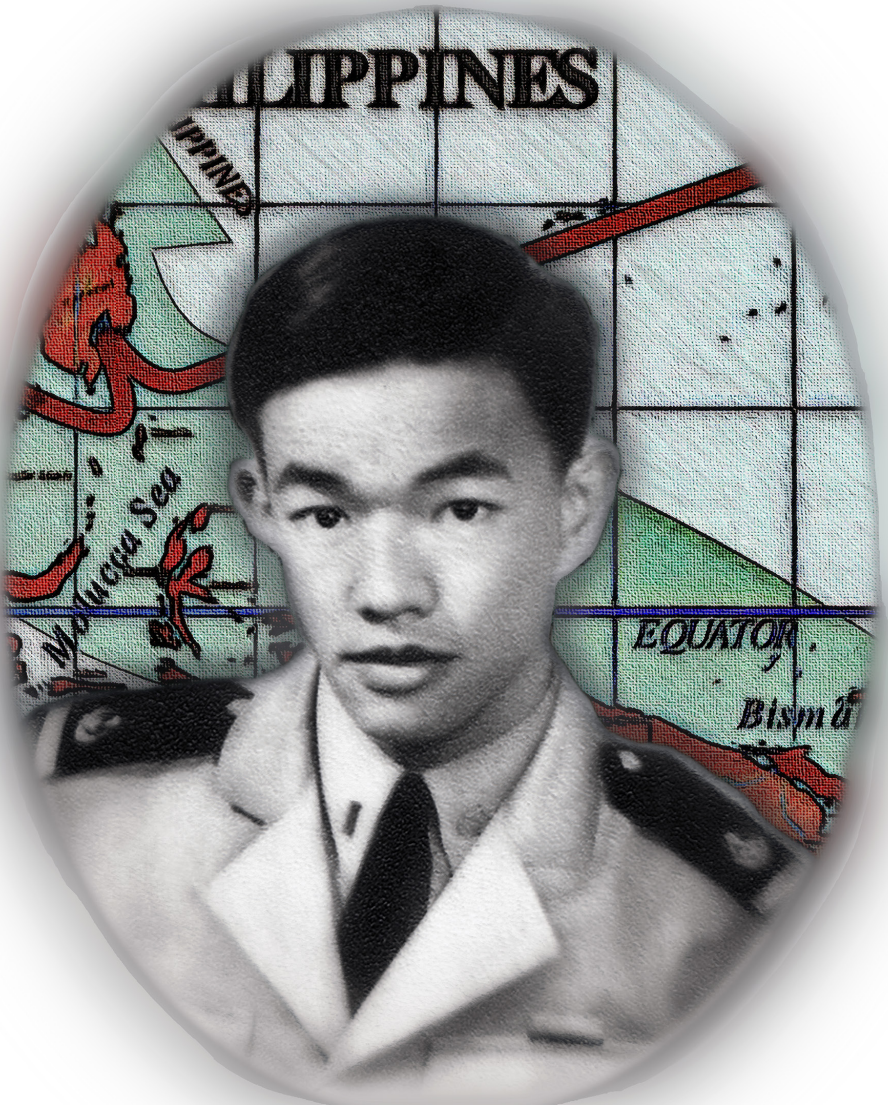


With Courage and Good Cheer The Life of Peter Chue



AMERICAN MERCHANT MARINE MUSEUM
“Highlights in Leadership and Diversity” Series

- #1. *KP Women: Breaking the Gender Barrier* (2018)
- #2. *With Courage and Good Cheer: The Life of Peter Chue* (2021)

Cover: *Peter as a newly-commissioned Ensign in the U.S. Maritime Service, circa 1944. His single ribbon is the “Combat Bar,” meaning his ship had experienced enemy attack, in this case by Japanese aircraft.*



**SUPERINTENDENT
UNITED STATES MERCHANT MARINE ACADEMY
KINGS POINT, NEW YORK 11024-1699**

April 19, 2021

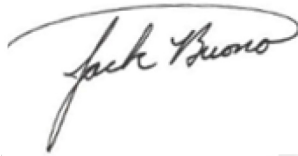
Diversity has been a cherished value at the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy since its creation. This is the only federal service academy that never practiced segregation. Furthermore, Kings Point was the first federal academy to recruit women. A truly national school, USMMA attracts young men and women from all fifty states as well as Guam, American Samoa, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Our student body is increasingly diverse and welcoming to all qualified young people. We are not a perfect institution, but we are making a concerted effort to build on our tradition of diversity as we foster the core Regimental values of respect, honor, and service and work towards USMMA's mission "to educate and graduate leaders of exemplary character who are inspired to serve the national security, marine transportation, and economic needs of the United States as licensed Merchant Marine Officers and commissioned officers in the Armed Forces."

While the name of the first Asian American to attend USMMA is not known for certain, the first yearbook produced in 1944 indicates Asian Americans were a presence from the start. This exhibit focuses on Peter Chue, who, along with others like Theodore M. Tang, Edward A. Tinloy, John H. Young and Frank Yip, was a Chinese American from California, mostly the San Francisco Bay area. Peter Chue stands out among these mariners because he tragically lost his life in a kamikaze

attack on his ship a few months after graduating. Furthermore, his family has maintained a strong memory of Peter in the seventy-five years since he died in the nation's service.

Kings Point's Asian American community, ably represented by the Asian American/Pacific Islander Culture Club, has been the moving force in presenting this new light on the Kings Point experience. In conjunction with the American Merchant Marine Museum and Peter Chue's family, this exhibit honors the past and invites the Kings Point family to ponder the sacrifices and contributions of all its Midshipmen and graduates.

ACTA NON VERBA,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jack Buono". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish over the top of the name.

Jack Buono
Vice Admiral, USMS
Superintendent

CHINESE HERITAGE, AMERICAN ROOTS

Many Americans are not aware of the racism Asian Americans faced in the United States in the early twentieth century. Chinese began emigrating in the mid-nineteenth century during the Gold Rush era, but were deemed “perpetual foreigners,” incapable of assimilation and set apart for decades. As early as 1882 a series of Chinese Exclusion Acts banned most Chinese from immigrating to the United States and severely restricted their ability to become American citizens. Notably, the Chinese were the only immigrant group specifically named as largely ineligible for citizenship.

The alarm felt over Chinese immigrants was completely out of proportion to their numbers. In the mainland United States there were roughly 77,000 Chinese Americans; about 30,000 in California, with the single largest concentration living in San Francisco, some 18,000. Most lived in urban Chinatowns, which offered a degree of safety and a sense of community but very few lucrative jobs.

According to historian K. Scott Wong, World War II broke out just as the first sizable generation of native-born Chinese Americans entered adulthood. They felt strongly that they were Americans, but expressed frustration that racism held them back from their economic potential. A Chinese American newspaper editorial argued “we are Americans in name and in fact: that we belong to this country and not to China; but that we are treated nevertheless as foreigners still.” Even Chinese American college graduates found it difficult to find appropriate employment. Among this latter group was a bright young man named Peter Chue.

EARLY LIFE

The Chue family’s roots lay in southern China. Peter Chue’s father, Bak Yuen Chue, and mother, Min Yin Shea, had been political activists and reformers who worked to overthrow the Qing Dynasty during the Boxer Rebellion in 1900. They



Image 01: *Four year old Peter with his mother Min Yin and sisters on the steps of the Sunshine Mission, Oakland. His sailor suit was common for little boys in the 1920s, but in this case foreshadows his career in the Merchant Marine.*

were part of the leadership supporting Sun Yat-Sen, the individual most responsible for the overthrow of the Qing Dynasty and who established the Chinese republic on October 10, 1911. However, Peter's parents left China in 1913 as the revolutionary movement splintered into competing factions; they married in Japan before embarking on a steamer bound

for San Francisco. His father remained politically active and was sometimes accompanied by Min Yin in his travels. He returned to Shanghai for a year to be the personal secretary to Sun Yat-sen, and was a founding member of the Chinese National Welfare Society, which aimed to educate the world about reforms Sun Yat-sen brought to China.

Peter was born on August 15, 1920, in St. Luke's Hospital in San Francisco. The family moved to Oakland's Chinatown two years later where his mother taught Chinese to children at the True Sunshine Episcopal Mission. Tragically, Peter's father died of complications after a surgery in 1929, leaving his mother as sole supporter of her children: Peter, her only son, and his three sisters, Ruth, Alice, and Helen. Somehow they survived on her small earnings as a teacher while living in an apartment over the mission. Though the family was poor, Min Yin was a respected leader within the church and in Oakland's Chinese community. Like many Chinese immigrants, Min Yin encouraged her American-born children to fully embrace their U.S. citizenship and identities.



Image 02: Teenager Peter with his mother Min Yin and sisters Helen, Alice, and Ruth, 1937. The framed photo in the background is Peter's father, Bak Yuen Chue.



Image 03: Peter, a UC Berkeley undergrad, with a classmate at Cal's iconic Sather Gate, after taking a German mid-term exam, 1938.

Peter attended local public schools and breezed through his three-year high school program in two and a half years. He won several awards for his scholastic standing, another for his stamp collection, played the clarinet in the school orchestra, and rose to Staff Sergeant in the Oakland High School



Image 04: Peter and his family at a Bay Area airport, in front of a United Airlines "Mainliner" DC-3.

ROTC unit. At nearby University of California, Berkeley, he majored in Plant Pathology. Academics came easily for Peter; he did well enough to get financial aid from government student programs and graduated in 1941. He was active and a leader in several clubs, particularly the Chinese Students' Club and Pi Alpha Phi, the Chinese student fraternity. Notably, he helped organize events to support Chinese refugees who had fled Japanese aggression.

Like many Chinese American college graduates at that time, Peter had difficulty finding a position commensurate with his education. The beginning of World War II, however, offered new opportunities to both men and women in the burgeoning shipyards around San Francisco Bay. The work was patriotic, and it brought Chinese from Chinatowns in San Francisco and Oakland into daily contact with other Americans. For many, it was the first time they experienced near-equality with their fellow citizens. Following graduation from Berkeley, Peter worked in the Bethlehem Steel Shipyard in San Francisco as a shipfitter.

CHOOSING THE MERCHANT MARINE

After the Japanese struck Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, Peter wanted to do more for the war effort. Many of his friends, family, and classmates enlisted in the military. The spouses of Peter's sisters supported the war effort in a variety of distinguished roles. Helen's husband, Morrison Chun, served in the Army as a liaison officer in the Burma/China Theatre, and Alice's husband, Dr. Robert Lew, served in the Dental Corps in the Philippines. Ruth's husband, Dr. Leroy Young, after finishing medical school, used his linguistic skills to decode intercepted Japanese messages. Peter decided to apply to the Merchant Marine as a first step to reach his goal of becoming a naval officer despite a problematic relationship between the U.S. Navy and Asians in general. Naval officers tended to see Asians in terms of steward's staff who served their meals. Clearly Peter was too educated to be a waiter; he could serve the nation better as an officer. There was a precedent: the Naval Academy's first Chinese American graduated in 1934, Gordon P. Chung-hoon, and rose to command a destroyer late in the war.

Peter likely recognized several advantages to joining the Merchant Marine Cadet Corps. His training would start in San Francisco, near the family's home in Berkeley. His ships would probably be sailing from San Francisco Bay, making visits home easier. The program trained young men for a career that could be pursued after the war. It also offered officer status, both as a licensed officer in the Merchant Marine and as a potential officer in the U.S. Navy Reserve. Ships would sail from San Francisco Bay, allowing visits home to his family. The program trained young men for a career that could be pursued after the war. It also offered officer status, both as a licensed officer in the Merchant Marine and as an officer in the U.S. Navy Reserve. According to Ted Tang, one of the first Asian American midshipmen to attend Kings Point, San Francisco's Chinese American community made a concerted effort to send young men to this new academy.



Image 05: *Peter looking sharp in his khaki uniform beside a wooden lifeboat at the San Mateo campus of USMMA, in the autumn of 1942. This may be his first official photo while a Cadet-Midshipman. His lack of a Naval Reserve Insignia indicate his status as a "Preliminary Cadet," today termed a "Plebe Candidate."*

In the summer of 1942, the Merchant Marine training program moved from Treasure Island to a new campus on Coyote Point in San Mateo, just south of San Francisco. A short time later, on September 24, 1942, the War Shipping Administration (WSA) accepted Peter's application to be a cadet in the U.S. Merchant Marine Cadet Corps. Within a week, the Navy gave him a physical, which he passed. There was nothing unusual, just a tonsillectomy in his childhood and two missing teeth.

At Peter's request, the WSA changed his designation from training as a deck officer who navigated the ship to an engineering officer who worked in the engine room. His reasons were straightforward and upheld USMMA's

motto *acta non verba*: "Warmer, more work, more to learn, less monotony." On November 13, 1942 Peter reported for preliminary training at San Mateo and became a member of the U.S. Merchant Marine Cadet Corps. As a Cadet-Midshipman, he received \$65.00 per month, and a deferment from the military draft. The San Mateo campus provided preliminary merchant marine training and

Naval Science courses lasting ten weeks. The first weeks were devoted to intense indoctrination and orientation, followed by eight weeks of coursework. Monday through Friday the Cadet-Midshipmen had eight hours of classes per day, reduced to four on Saturdays, with Sundays off.

Some records survive from Peter's training. He brought no sea-going experience with him, but his ROTC days meant he was used to military drill and accepted the military-style hierarchy and regimen easily. Though he wasn't much of a swimmer, he liked playing basketball, did well in the machine shop, and excelled in his Naval Science coursework. Rigors of intense training are commonly stressful, but as one of the first Chinese American Cadet-Midshipmen, conditions may have been even more challenging for Peter. Reviews from his training officers suggest his adaptations to these circumstances may have affected his naturally outgoing personality. He had demonstrated strong leadership skills during his UC Berkeley undergraduate days. In contrast, after eight weeks of U.S. Maritime Service (USMS) training, the faculty judged Peter to be a good student but a poor leader, which they attributed to his ethnicity, describing his personality as "Chinese." His supervisors attempted to promote Peter, first as a Section Leader and later as a Company Commander. However, he was reluctant to give orders and refused to report those who didn't follow them. Nonetheless, his training officer reported that he would be satisfied to have Peter under his command.

AN EXTENDED SEA-YEAR

From February 1943 to mid-July 1944 Peter went to sea as a cadet to get the required sea-time to sit for his U.S. Coast Guard license as a Third Assistant Engineer.

His first ship was the SS *Egbert Benson*, a Liberty ship operated by Luckenbach Steamship Company and named after a prominent jurist from New York. Liberty ships, many built in the Bay area, were the workhorses of the American merchant fleet. He felt "woozy" during his first night out as he adjusted to the ship's motion, then spent a little over two months onboard the *Benson*. The ship departed San Francisco on February 4, 1943, and sailed independently to Wellington, New Zealand, then to Brisbane, Australia, arriving March 4, and returning to San Francisco on April 4. Since the Japanese did

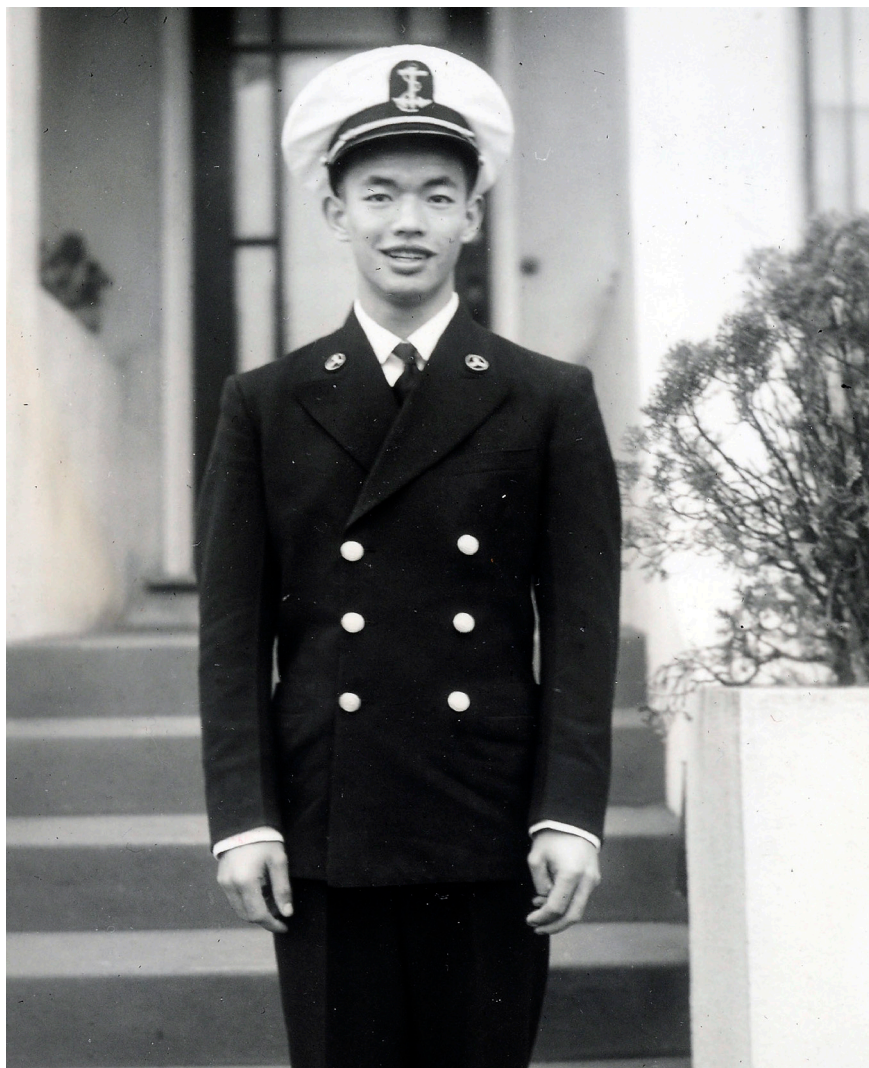


Image 06: Peter in his "Service Dress Blues," likely on his first visit home in late 1942. Note the propeller devices on his lapels, denoting his choice to be in the engineering program. The lack of his U.S. Naval Reserve (USNR) eagle pin on his left side indicate he is very early in the USMMA program.

not use their submarines much to hunt merchant ships in the Pacific, the ship did not sail in a convoy but proceeded independently.

Peter spent a four-hour watch in the engine room on a typical day, one hour working on refrigeration units, an hour split between electrical supply and deck machinery, and daily lifeboat drills. The government expected him to work in his free time on his "Sea Project" for at least ten hours per week on ship's time. The Sea Project is a hallmark of the USMMA experience. It consisted of several rigorous written assignments based on a cadet's experience while at sea. On returning from sea, the cadet-midshipman turned in the completed projects and faced a grueling oral examination. For a future engineering officer like Peter, the project focused on operating and maintaining the ship's machinery.

Peter exceeded the required ten hours for his Sea Project, adding another twelve hours from his personal time, spending an average of twenty-two hours per week studying. Peter's officers rated him primarily as "very good" with two exceptions: his room and personal appearance received "good" scores.

Peter was a good correspondent, who sent many letters home, signed "Pete." Before departing on his first voyage, he gave the family his "code" for telling them where he was located in the world. For example, if he was in the South Pacific or Australia, he would address his letters to his sister Alice; if he was in the South Atlantic or South America, he wrote to Helen. He wrote letters home almost twice a month, and true to the code system, addressed all his letters to Alice. He reported frequent chats with other crew members and even the ship's Armed Guard contingent in his letters home. He enjoyed playing pinochle or cribbage with shipmates, although he preferred bridge.

In April 1943, the WSA transferred Peter to the SS *Manulani*, a veteran freighter of Matson Line's pineapple trade between Hawaii and the continental United States. This ship also stayed clear of combat zones. *Manulani* was an older ship, built in Oakland in 1921, with an unusual configuration for the early twentieth century in that the engine room and stack



Image 07: Peter's U.S. Naval Reserve pin, worn on the left breast of his uniform. This pin indicated the wearer's status as a Midshipman, Merchant Marine Reserve in the United States Naval Reserve. A variation of this pin is still worn by USMMA midshipmen.

were in the stern. It was also the only vessel Peter worked on that had turbine engines. *Manulani* wasn't a beautiful ship, but it had a mellifluous name that meant "bird of paradise" in Hawaiian. After a little over two months on this ship, going back and forth between San Francisco and Hawaii, the WSA ordered him to Kings Point, to complete his training. On July 26, Peter officially left the *Manulani* and reported to the WSA office in San Francisco.

However, Peter never reported to Kings Point and chose an alternative route to graduation. After completing their preliminary training and sea year requirements, WSA regulations gave cadet-midshipmen two options. They could go to Kings Point for thirty more weeks of training and sit for their license there. Instead, Peter chose the second option, to go back to sea for another ten months, study independently, and graduate after passing the Coast Guard license test.

On August 2, he signed onboard another Liberty, the *SS John Ross*, named after a chief of the Cherokee Nation. Kaiser Permanente built this ship at its No. 2 shipyard in Richmond, California, and Seas Shipping Company operated it out of its San Francisco office. This was the ship's first voyage, sailing from San Francisco to Australia and then to New Guinea. Located just a little south of the Equator, New Guinea was known for

impassable jungles, steep mountains, and tropical diseases. The island had few roads, so the American military relied on Liberty ships to supply the hastily constructed bases that supported the fighting forces.

Peter sailed on vessels that brought supplies to the South West Pacific Theatre, which was under the command of General Douglas MacArthur. Through 1943 and 1944, most of the fighting continued on New Guinea, with Liberty ships providing the crucial supplies at newly-established bases along the island's northern coast. These harbors had only the most primitive facilities at first. Until the Army built piers to handle the immense quantity of supplies required to sustain Allied forces, the supply situation was often chaotic. Peter now began to experience combat close-up. On October 15, 1943, SS *John Ross*, riding low at anchor in Oro Bay, New Guinea, with a load of bombs and mustard gas, assisted in shooting down an airplane. *Ross's* 20mm guns riddled the Japanese aircraft as it passed over the ship's stack.

Peter spent a whopping eleven months and eight days aboard the *John Ross*, far exceeding his required sea-days. He would be able to sit for his license as a Third Assistant Engineer as soon as he returned. He'd spent almost 300 hours of training or experience working on diesel engines that powered his ships' electrical systems. Ten days after returning to San Francisco, Peter passed his license on his first try. He duly received a commission as an Ensign in the USMS, and as required by regulations, also applied for a commission in the U.S. Navy Reserve. Something went wrong at this point; the Navy refused him a commission because he had failed his physical. In 1942 Peter had passed this physical, so something had changed. Still, Peter received his USMMA diploma on July 20, 1944.

It did not take long for Peter to find a ship, the SS *Lewis L. Dyche*, another Liberty ship, less than one-year-old. Based in San Francisco, the Interocean Steamship Corporation operated the *Dyche* on behalf of the federal government. Peter left

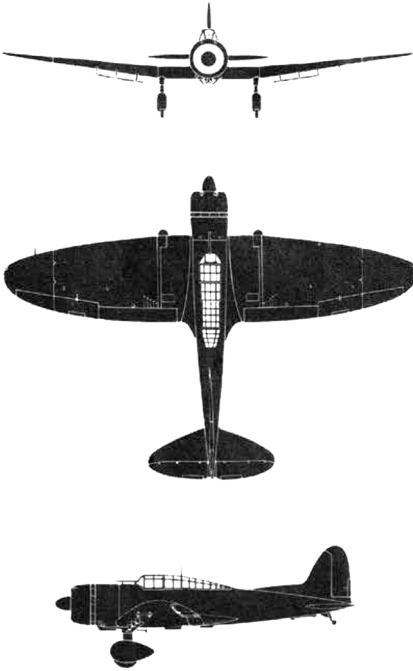


Image 08: Japanese “Val” dive-bomber, the type of aircraft that destroyed the SS Lewis L. Dyche. By 1945 they were badly outdated, and often relegated to kamikaze missions.

San Francisco on the *Dyche* on September 4, 1944. The *Dyche* made port in New Guinea again, and Peter noticed that living conditions had improved dramatically for the units based there since his last voyage.

LOSS AND MEMORY

In the autumn of 1944, Allied forces commenced a campaign to re-take the Philippines from the Japanese. On January 2, 1945, three Liberty merchant ships, the SS *William I. Chamberlain*, *Lewis L. Dyche*, and *Allen Johnson*, departed Leyte in the southern Philippines,

bound for Mindoro, a large island not far from Manila. All three merchant ships were unharmed in a bombing attack on

January 2 which set a tanker on fire. The convoy anchored in Mangarin Bay, near the southern tip of Mindoro, on January 3. For several days, Japanese aircraft attacked the convoy, including the fearsome kami-

kazes, which intentionally flew their aircraft into American ships. American aircraft and anti-aircraft fire fended off most attacks, but almost inevitably some got through.

Peter’s death was brutal. On January 4, the *Dyche*, loaded with ammunition and explosives, lay at anchor. Three Japanese “Val” divebombers approached the American ships. Anti-aircraft fire chased one airplane away, and an Army P-47 fighter chased off another, but the third dived at the *Dyche* in a suicide attack, hitting it amidships. The resulting explosion

destroyed the *Dyche* instantly, and there were no survivors. The official report put the casualties at eighty-two dead, including the Merchant Marine crew and Navy Armed Guard detachment. After the aircraft hit, the ship disintegrated in a tremendous explosion that damaged nearby vessels.

On February 5, 1945, Peter's mother received a telegram from the Navy informing her that her son was missing and presumed lost. He was 25 years old. His mother clung to the hope that Peter might be found alive. She waited until February 23, 1947, to hold a memorial service for Peter at the newly erected True Sunshine Mission, the church community in which he grew up. The service celebrated Peter's many accomplishments in his short life. Most who attended were of Chinese heritage, and they joined the family in commemorating his life as an American.

A dear family friend, Dorothy Scott, wrote a poem for the memorial service:

To Peter

Your life, too brief here among us,
Shines on within our hearts;
It lifts our thoughts from sorrow –
New hope and faith imparts.
Your brave devotion to duty
Will be a guiding light
To others who are seeking
The way to Peace with Right.
Your valiant spirit is with us,
Dispelling doubt and fear;
It bids us face the future
With Courage and Good Cheer!

The memory of Peter remains strong within the extended Chue family. In 1950 Peter's mother donated to the Mariner's Chapel Fund, and years later, the family had fond memories of visiting there. In 2001 his sisters, Helen and Alice, applied



Image 09: *Peter's brother-in-law, Morrison Chun (center) wearing his original U.S. Army uniform from the 1940s, preparing to lay a wreath commemorating the Merchant Marine at the World War II Memorial in Washington D.C., 2013.*

for veteran status for Peter, which the Coast Guard issued in May 2002. He is remembered at war memorials for merchant mariners in Washington D.C., and in San Pedro, California. In 2019, the Chinese American WWII Veterans Recognition Project–Congressional Gold Medal Review Committee voted unanimously to award Peter the Chinese American Veterans of World War II Congressional Gold Medal.

A GENERATION'S LEGACY

During the war, American society began to accept Chinese Americans more fully. On December 17, 1943, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Acts. This directive very gradually opened up immigration from China (only 105 Chinese a year) but, more importantly, allowed Chinese immigrants living in the U.S. to become naturalized citizens. Peter's mother, Min Yin Chue, became a citizen in 1954.

During World War II, Chinese Americans increasingly moved out of urban Chinatowns and joined the American mainstream. Many received higher education with post-war veteran's benefits, and most brought a more comprehensive range of skills to offer employers. In 1948, President Harry S. Truman ended racial segregation in the military with Executive Order 9981. Nonetheless, other forms of institutional discrimination, including governmental real estate redlining, changed slowly. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 removed impediments to immigration by non-whites. Subsequently, immigrants from many Asian countries, many of Chinese descent, have added to the ethnic diversity of the United States, contributing to the intellectual, economic, and cultural growth of our society.

This is also true of the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, which many Asian Americans have attended, graduating to serve in the armed forces or the maritime industries. Since World War II, Asian Americans have been a consistent and growing presence at USMMA, men and women now, whose roots lie throughout all of Asia. They continue the tradition of service and can look back with pride on the perseverance of Peter Chue. We honor his legacy, along with all those who served in World War II. The memory of Peter's dedication and sacrifice inspires not just Asian American, but all Midshipmen at USMMA.

AMERICAN MERCHANT MARINE MUSEUM

The American Merchant Marine Museum at the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy collects, preserves, interprets, and displays heritage assets such as historic artifacts, records, documents, and art relevant to the post-1900 American maritime industry. The Museum educates midshipmen and the public regarding the Merchant Marine's contributions to our nation's heritage in times of peace and war.

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Business Hours: 10:00am-3:00pm, Tuesday-Friday
Closed during Academy vacations



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