

Lost "Silent Crew Member" of the USS Yosemite

The family of Coyt Hackett is looking for a painting he created in 1960-1961 and sent to the USS Yosemite. Dad was a National Park Service Ranger. The family transferred to Yosemite from St. Louis in the summer of 1959, and Dad was assigned as the Museum Curator. As we remember it, shortly after we arrived, the Park received a letter from the Chief Petty Officers requesting assistance in obtaining a painting for their mess. The project was turned over to Dad, and he proceeded to investigate the possibilities. What was requested was fairly large. Dad approached several local artists and found that what was offered was much smaller and prices seemed to be ridiculously high considering who wanted the painting. It made him angry.

In his ire, he decided to paint something for the ship himself as Dad had received formal art training in his high school years and had painted several landscapes. He chose a very famous Yosemite view called Valley View which looks up the Valley with Bridal Veil Falls on the right, Half Dome in the back center and El Capitan on the left. The painting "grew" on the wall for over a year. We remember it hanging on the dining room wall of our house in Yosemite Valley as Dad worked on it nearly every night. Our recollection is he repainted almost every part. He was a perfectionist and wanted it to be just right.

We believe the painting was approximately 3.5 feet by 5 feet; and we think it was painted on Masonite board as dad thought that would hold up better in a marine environment. There was a story done in a little local newspaper at the time it was crated and shipped to the USS Yosemite. We know there is a story about its delivery to the ship or nearly non-delivery; however, that story may have gone with Dad as none of us know the details.

A few months later, in 1962, a package arrived for Dad containing thank you gifts. The Chief Petty Officers arranged for a set of walnut and brass bookends, one with a plaque of appreciation dated 1962 and a framed picture of the USS Yosemite. We also have a USS Yosemite baseball cap but are unsure if that came in the same package or if he acquired that at a later date. Needless to say, he was very pleased. These were prized possessions for the rest of his life and are still favorite family mementos.

We know the painting was still on the ship in 1985 or 1986. One of Coyt's daughters married a merchant seaman, Peter Mitchell, who was at that time the Captain of the S.S. Santa Juana chartered to the Navy as the supply ship for Diego Garcia. She was accompanying Peter on a trip; and as they were leaving DG, they crossed paths with the Yosemite as it was going into DG. Peter contacted the Commanding Officer and learned that the painting was indeed still on the ship and either in the Officers' Mess or in the CO's quarters. Dad was alive at the time and thrilled to hear the painting was still in service.

The family would be grateful for any information about the picture, if it still exists, and if so, it's location. Please contact Coyt's daughter, Marci Mitchell, via email or phone. marcimitchell@comcast.net or (843)884-5885.