

# SACO NEWS



The Sino-American Cooperative Organization Historical Education Society, Inc.  
Preserving the Memory of The Rice Paddy Navy  
Perpetual Skipper VAdm. Milton E. "Mary" Miles

February 2020

WHAT THE HELL?

Issue No. 50

## Important Business

### SACO Dues 2020

Please use the green form enclosed in this newsletter to return your dues to SACO Treasurer Dairus Reynnet. This is the only dues mailing you will receive, and we count on your support to make sure SACO remains vibrant. Dues are \$35 per year for Associate members. SACO veterans are not required to pay dues. Thank you!

### Reunion Registration

Please find the white 66th Reunion registration form enclosed in this newsletter. Complete one form per person and mail with your check to:

Dixie Burlingame  
116 N. C Street  
Livingston, MT 59047

### Send Email to Lynn

If you wish to keep receiving the latest SACO news, you need to send an email to SACO President Lynn Grabenstein, wondermere@hotmail.com. This will ensure that we have an up-to-date email list, which is essential to SACO's future. Please take a moment to do this today, even if you have already provided it to the Treasurer and Membership Chair.

## SACO 66th Reunion June 3-7, Bozeman, MT

### East Meets West with hosts Ken Brown and Dixie Burlingame

Ken Brown and Dixie Burlingame invite SACO and our Taiwanese friends to Big Sky Country for three days of friendship and natural wonders.

Home base will be the BW GranTree Inn in Bozeman, Montana.

The highlight of the event will be a tour of Yellowstone National Park, a two-hour ride from Bozeman. This world-renowned wilderness and recreation area features dramatic canyons, lush forests, rushing rivers, abundant wildlife, and of course, geysers like Old Faithful. We'll see it all in a single day!

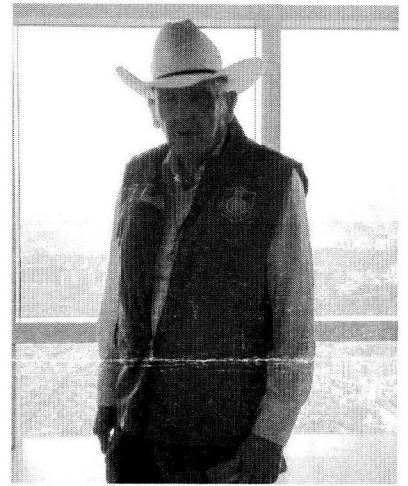
Those planning to go to Yellowstone need to arrive on Wednesday, because we'll have an early start Thursday morning at 7:30 a.m. It will be a long day, returning around 8:30 p.m., so we're leaving Friday unscheduled.

On Friday, you can soak up the Western vibe of Montana at your own pace. Relax at the hotel pool and the hospitality room, wander charming downtown Bozeman and shop for authentic Western gear, or take in unique museums like the Museum of the Rockies and the American Computer and Robotics Museum.

Saturday, we'll have SACO business meetings in the morning, the banquet in the evening, and plenty of time for visiting and relaxing in the afternoon.

For complete details, see the registration form enclosed in this newsletter. Each attendee must complete a separate form, so please make copies as needed. Send the form(s) with your check to Dixie Burlingame at the address on the form.

Many, many thanks to Ken and Dixie for hosting East Meets West in Bozeman for SACO's 66th Reunion!



Ken Brown in Taiwan in 2019



# SACO Officers 2020

## President and Trustee

Chairperson: Lynn Terpstra  
Grabenstein

Vice President: James Hunnicutt

Membership Chairman: Jack Coyle

Treasurer: Dairus Reynnet

Assistant Treasurer: Pete Barbieri

Secretary: Judy Barbieri

Assistant Secretary: Penny Coats

Historian: Jack Coyle

Editor SACO News: Linda Kush

Legal Counsel: Jim Hasson

## Trustees:

- Ken Brown
- Robert Coats
- Carolyn Inman Arnold
- Sue Meier
- Jonathan Maurice

# SACO Membership

For information about SACO membership, please contact Jack Coyle, membership chairman:

jackwcoyle@bellsouth.net  
770-788-2454

# SACO Website

www.saconavy.net

# THANK YOU

Many thanks to these people for contributing to this issue of *SACO News*:

- Jack Coyle
- Mia Del Prete
- Joy Grabenstein
- Lynn Grabenstein
- John V. Pizarick Jr.
- Dairus Reynnet

# SACO Annual Dues

Payment is due January 1 each year.

Annual dues: \$35.00

Please remit to:

Dairus Reynnet  
c/o SACO  
8608 E. Vermontville Hwy  
Dimondale, MI 48821

A green membership form is enclosed for your convenience. Please return it to Dairus with your dues today!

# SACO News

is published by and for family and friends of SACO Veterans, Sino-American Cooperative Organization (aka U.S. Naval Group China as well as the Rice Paddy Navy). The late Richard Rutan is Our Perpetual Editor-in-Chief. The publication is funded by annual dues of members.

**Please see page 3 about the future of SACO News.**

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# SACO News Transition

by Linda Kush

I regret to report that this is my last issue as editor of SACO News.

At the reunion in 2013, I volunteered to take on the publication of the newsletter. Richard Rutan, the stellar editor for decades, was unable to continue, and the SACO officers and trustees appreciated my assistance. Richard died in 2014. While I knew that my effort could not equal his, I had professional experience in the publishing and printing industries and was grateful for the opportunity to use my skills to help the remaining veterans and associate members maintain their connections.

I have greatly enjoyed researching and writing the articles as well as publishing stories written by others. It was great fun hearing from veterans and their families about what SACO meant to them over the years.

My favorite stories were the unexpected, like a group of high school students making SACO keychains for the veterans, and SACO veteran Frank Ruggieri reconnecting decades after the war with an American missionary he had met in China.

But as fun and rewarding as it has been these past six years, I am not able to continue due to work and family commitments.

The SACO officers and trustees are considering the best way to continue SACO News going forward and will be in touch with the members in the coming months.

**IMPORTANT: Please send your email address to SACO President Lynn Grabenstein, [wondermere@hotmail.com](mailto:wondermere@hotmail.com), in order to stay in touch with SACO.** This request is a focused effort to compile a complete and accurate email list.

We plan to use email more than we have in the past, so be sure to do so even if Membership Chairman Jack Coyle and Treasurer Dairus Reynnet already have your email address.

Many members have contributed stories, photos, and suggestions to SACO News these past six years, and without them, there would have been no newsletter! I wish to thank these kind and energetic people:

Christine Altenes  
Carolyn Inman Arnold  
Judy Barbieri  
Ellen Booth  
Charles Bruggerman  
Robert Coats  
Cathy Ruggieri Colque  
Jack Coyle  
Mia Del Prete  
Joy Grabenstein  
Lynn Grabenstein  
Robert Hill Jr.  
Frank Kilmer  
Douglas Lawson Jr.  
Jerry Levendowski  
Sue Meier  
Charles Miles  
Jodi Petersen  
John V. Pisarick Jr.  
Dairus Reynnet  
Jeanne Ruggieri  
Laura Sellers  
Jack Shearer  
William Sheffer  
Mary Lou Visosky

Wishing all the best to SACO. Have a great reunion in June!

**Please send in your dues  
and register for the reunion  
today!**

# SACO Friendship Trip to Taiwan

The Republic of China Military Intelligence Bureau hosted a group of SACOs in Taiwan Sept. 4-12, 2019.

The visit was the third in recent years. It strengthened the friendships between SACO associates and MIB officials in the Republic of China, a connection that grows more precious as the World War II generation in both countries passes away. Sixteen Americans, including SACO veteran Ken Brown, made the trip. These included representatives of SACO's third generation: Angela Matthews, Mia Del Prete, and Pete Barbieri, the children of Judy and Pete; and Josh, Joel, and Joy Grabenstein, children of Lynn and Ed.

The week in Taiwan was jam-packed with sight-seeing, banquets, socializing, and even candy making.

"The 2019 SACO trip to Taiwan was an incredible experience. The Grand Hotel was stunning, the island of Kinmen was fascinating, and the food was delicious! Between the hospitality and generosity of the MIB, the relationships formed between SACO members, and the deepened understanding of the service of our Grandfathers, I know this was an experience I will always remember," wrote Joy Grabenstein.

Photos are by Joy Grabenstein and Mia Del Prete.







# Luck and Prayers: SACO Veteran Remembers

by John V. Pisarick  
Gunners Mate First Class

[Editor's note: John Pisarick wrote this remembrance of his SACO service at the urging of his children shortly before his death on Feb. 22, 2019. Thanks to his son John Pisarick Jr. for sending it to SACO News.]

War had broken out. I went to enlist with the Trenton gang into the Marines. I was rejected – color blind.

While working in the steel plant I was called and drafted for service at Newark, NJ draft board. They told me that I was going into the Marines. I asked the officer in charge if I can go Navy, as all my friends were in the Marines, and I had failed, which hurt me very much.

Navy boot camp was at Newport, Rhode Island, and then I was sent to gunnery school at Little Creek, VA. After schooling I was sent to the Liberty ship *Colin P. Kelly*, named after the World War II hero pilot who dove his plane into a Japanese warship.

On my first trip across the Atlantic Ocean from the USA, the ship carried a cargo of tanks, trucks, and US troops. On the return trip, we brought back German and Italian prisoners. The second crossing to Europe was the same, with stops in Oran and Casablanca in Northern Africa.

The third trip was to Naples, Italy, loaded with troops and 500-lb. bombs. Luck was with me, because the same convoy later was destroyed in Bari, Italy. All convoys were torpedoed. Returning home, I was granted a 30-day leave and then reported back to Little Creek, VA, assigned to a Small Craft LSM, which were landing barges. At Little Creek, I noticed a sign asking for Hazardous Duty Volunteers, and I signed up. I was shipped to Washington DC, and got paid to just live at the Hotel Ritz while waiting for others to report. All we did was report every morning to the Navy building to muster, and the rest of the day was liberty.

The group was called together after a week to report to the Pentagon building, where we were photographed, fingerprinted, and examined for tattoos and other features.

Leaving Washington, DC, we boarded a troop transport ship, the *General Anderson*, with Marines and troops aboard. Leaving Virginia out to sea, we sailed past Cuba, Haiti, through the Caribbean Sea, and through the Panama Canal. We crossed the International Date Line and on to New Zealand, the Tasman Sea, Victoria, Australia, through the East Australian Current and across the Equator. We then sailed across the Indian Ocean and landed in Bombay, India.

Off ship, I boarded a train to Calcutta, India. There I boarded a plane to fly over the Himalayan Mountains into Kunming, China. Leaving Kunming, my group marched 11 days on foot to SACO Camp 7 that was set for us. We all came down with dysentery from water we drank from canals. At Camp 7, we lived in a Chinese temple. We taught Chinese soldiers gunnery and the arts of war. For my next assignment, I volunteered for duty behind Japanese lines.

Leaving Camp 7, I marched to my assignment crossing Japanese lines into Mayshein, China, which was an American Catholic mission run by the Maryknoll Fathers. Bishop Ford and Father Donovan had lived in the mission for years. We had intelligence training at the mission and lived with the Maryknoll household for a number of weeks until training was over.

Thirteen of the Navy men who trained were going out behind Japanese lines to be stationed at different points. Our first couple of days out, Chinese bandits held us up. We bluffed them, telling them more Americans were on the way. We came across a camp full of sleeping Japanese troops, crawling past them on hands and knees while their dogs barked. Pairings were sent out to duty stations, one Navy radioman with a Chinese interpreter. After two days out, my buddy Rudy Rossomano was captured. As we delivered men to their stations, we met US Army paratroopers who were there for a planned invasion of China that would have been necessary to uproot the Japanese if the bombs had not worked.

When I had enough points to go home, I was flown by plane to Kunming. I returned to Bombay and boarded the troop ship *General Hodges*. This ship would take me through the Indian Ocean, Arabian  
*continued p. 9*

# SACO Presentation in New Orleans

SACO was honored to be part of the Veterans Day celebration at the National World War II Museum in New Orleans on Nov. 11, 2019.

Charles Miles and SACO veteran Ken Brown spoke in a panel discussion moderated by Keith Huxen, the museum's director of history and research, titled "Pacific Cooperation: An Afternoon with the Sino-American Cooperative Organization (SACO)."

A video of the conversation is available online: <https://livestream.com/nww2m/events/8882901>

In attendance were six delegates from Taiwan, Ken Brown, Dixie Burlingame, Sue and Jeff Meier, Caroline and Dairus Reynnet, Nancy and Billy McDonald, Charles Miles, Dan Halperin, Jonathan Maurice, and Lynn Grabenstein.

Earlier in the day, Lynn gave a welcome speech to the celebration attendees.

## Lynn Grabenstein's Speech

Good Morning. I am more than proud to be the President and Chair of the Sino-American Cooperative Organization, simply known today as SACO.

SACO was a top-secret military operation in the Pacific Theater during WWII. Its code name was "Project Friendship," aptly named because it was forged by the mutual agreement of President Franklin Roosevelt and Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek. It was an amazing military achievement made possible only because friendship was truly its basis. Friendship was the secret to its power and the code name that protected its members.

SACO was headed by two men after Pearl Harbor: one was the American (then a Commander), Rear Admiral Milton Miles, who was fondly referred to as "Mary" by his men; the other was the Director, General Dai Li, head of the Chinese Secret Service. SACO was the only operation in WWII with a policy of total immersion. The 2500 or so Army, Marine, and mostly Navy sailors served in scores of Chinese units all over China. Because they often operated behind enemy lines, the American SACO soldiers were assigned an unseen Chinese protector to make sure nothing happened to them. They lived, trained, and fought together, depending on each other for survival. There were meteorologists, frogmen, underwater demolition teams, radio intelligence, and search and rescue personnel working with the Chinese. The Americans

became adept at disguise and guided by the SACO Chinese, could slip safely back and forth through enemy lines at will. During the months and years, not one was detected. Eventually, 97,000 intelligence guerillas and 20,000 saboteurs and pirates were trained. Approximately 71,000 Japanese military personnel died during their mission, while there were only 3 Americans captured and 5 killed. They became known as the "SACO Tigers" and the outfit was nicknamed "The Rice Paddy Navy." Their motto? "What the Hell!!!" My dad was one of those guys. He was underage when he enlisted and signed up for hazardous duty like the rest of them.

After the war, the Chinese anti-communist Nationalists relocated to Formosa, now Taiwan. "Project Friendship" was finally declassified and the activities and contributions of SACO remained little known here in the United States. But these men and their deeds continue to be remembered, studied, and honored in Taiwan. Their Military Intelligence Bureau has joined us during our annual reunions for over 60 years. Our relationship stands as a shining example of all that is good and right in a chaotic world and truly embodies, perpetually, the original spirit of "Project Friendship." The stated mission of those original veterans and their families—sons and daughters, nieces and nephews, and now grandchildren, is to pass on to posterity our knowledge of SACO and to educate the public in what SACO did to help win a victory in WWII. Our bylaws also stress that the members of the SACO Corporation "by our own actions and by our heritage know that liberty has not, is not, or ever will be free—and will, by our actions, encourage and demonstrate pride in our country and its armed forces for the preservation of liberty in the United States and the world."

I invite you to be present for the panel here this afternoon at two o'clock. I believe you will not be disappointed. It will feature both Ken Brown, one of the few remaining original SACO veterans, and Charles Miles, the son of Admiral Mary Miles—a wealth of information on the subject of SACO. Ken was an integral part of radio intelligence in China and always has some good stories and a great perspective on life.

Thank you for this opportunity. It means so much for those who served so well.



# China and India through Mike Cannon's Lens

Michael P. Cannon, Aerographer's Mate 2/c, took these photos while serving in SACO, August through November 1945, in Calcutta, Kunming, and Shanghai. Photography became a lifelong passion, and he earned a degree in photography from Spokane Falls Community College after his retirement. Mike died November 1, 2017.



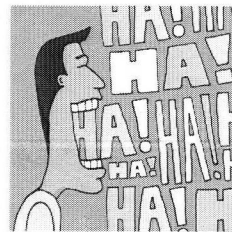


*Luck and Prayers, continued from p. 6*

Sea, Gulf of Aden, Red Sea, Suez Canal, back into the Mediterranean Sea, into the Atlantic Ocean, into New York Harbor, and from New York to the Philadelphia Navy Yard.

Upon arrival, I received a 30-day leave. When it was over, I reported to New York for discharge on December 24, 1945. 600 planes were lost in the Himalayas. I had been given a one-shot pistol (for me) but of course never had to use it. The voyage from Virginia, USA to India was 37 days at sea, and from India back to the USA, 32 days at sea. Convoy sailings to Africa, Italy, and Sicily were 20 to 25 days. Ships were always zigzagging in the ocean to avoid being struck by torpedoes. I had traveled all the way around the world by sea and came out unharmed.

Lucky!



## Just for Laughs

A young man wants to join the Navy. "Can you swim?" the recruiter asks him.

"Why, don't you have boats?"

Having passed the enlistment physical, John was asked by the doctor, "Why do you want to join the Navy, son?"

"My father said it'd be a good idea, sir."

"Oh? And what does your father do?"

"He's in the Army, sir."

**Q:** Why do Swedish battleships have barcodes on them?

**A:** So that when they come into port, they can Scandinavian.

**Q:** What do you call a dog that's in the Navy?

**A:** A sub-woofer

A boat carrying blue paint collided with a boat carrying red paint, and the crew were marooned.

DAY IS DONE ... GONE THE SUN...  
FROM THE LAKES, FROM THE HILLS,  
FROM THE SKIES.  
ALL IS WELL ... SAFELY REST.  
GOD IS NIGH.

# Taps

Membership Chairman Jack Coyle regrets to report the following deaths recorded since SACO News Issue 49, January 2019, as of Dec. 1, 2019. Locations of service are in chronological order.

Roy S. Anderson, January 12, 1994  
Chungking, Camp 3

William T. Athey, September 1, 2000  
Kunming, 14th Air Force, Chungking, Kunming,  
Chungking

Arthur P. Black, April 24, 1963  
Tung An, Camp 1, Pact Doc, Calcutta

Charles E. Black, November 22, 2017  
Jorhat, Camp 8, Kunming, 14th Air Force,  
Chungking, Shanghai

Michael P. Cannon Jr., November 1, 2017  
Calcutta, Kunming, Shanghai

Edward T. Doyle, November 24, 2018  
Calcutta, Kanchow, Yangtze Unit, Camp 1, Hankow,  
Shanghai

John R. Grayson, December 14, 2011  
Calcutta, Kunming, 14th Air Force, FRUCHI

Douglas B. Lawson, August 16, 1978  
Camp 8, Yu Ou, Camp 8, Shanghai

Steven Michalicek, 2003  
Chungking, Camp 3, Sian

John V. Pisarick, February 22, 2019  
Calcutta, Camp 7, Kienyang, Meishen, Kunming

Paul R. Vollmar, 1976  
Chungking, Kanchow, Kienyang, East China, Camp 8,  
Changting, Shanghai

Wiley C. Williamson, April 14, 2015  
Calcutta, Kunming, Foochow

## A SACO Prayer

By Bill Bartee

Hello, God, it's us again,  
The boisterous ones called SACO men.  
We're here today to laugh and play;  
To remember You aren't far away.

We're older now with a bit more sense  
Than years ago, when without recompense,  
We all stepped forward; yelled out our "Here"  
In response to the call for volunteers.

You made us part of MILES' Navy;  
Home port China — Big Boss, TAI LI.  
You protected us, then brought us home;  
Turned us loose and let us roam.

But, at that time, You waved your wand,  
And among us all was forged a bond  
That half a century has not changed,  
Even though our lives were rearranged.

So, at this time, we feel we must  
Say, "Thank You, God, for picking us."  
And thank You, too, for standing fast  
To receive our Mates whose time has passed.

And if there ever comes a time  
The world goes nuts and You're in a bind,  
Just remember that here below,  
SACO Tigers volunteer to go.

And so this Psalm we will now end;  
But prior to our big Amen,  
To You, OH! God, we salute and bow;  
To You, from SACO, A BIG "TING HAO!"

*Bill Bartee (1924–2014) composed this poem in November 1996. He served in SACO from Oct. 1944 to Nov. 1945 as Radioman 1/c in Kunming, FRUCHI, 14th Air Force, Chungking, and Shanghai. He held many leadership positions in SACO Veterans and rarely missed a reunion.*

## Michael Paul Cannon Jr.

Mike Cannon was born in Washington D.C. on September 14, 1923. He passed on into eternity on November 1, 2017. He served in the Navy during World War II in SACO, which was the precursor to the Navy SEALs. After the war he traveled west to attend and graduate from Gonzaga University. He worked many years as a pharmaceutical representative for the company that became 3M. After he retired he attended Spokane Falls Community College and graduated from their photography program. Photography was a lifelong passion, and he was very accomplished. Mike was married to Betty Homer and they raised a large family: Patty Allen (Steve), Michael (Pete) Cannon (Gayle), Kate Kondo (Mark), Terry Perry (Brent), Jim Cannon, Peggy Hamilton (Ray) and Mary Jo Gowan (Dave). He had numerous grandchildren and great-grandchildren. He was one of the all-time greats and truly the luckiest Irishman alive!

Please see p. 8 of this newsletter for Mike's photos of India and China.

## John V. Pisarick

John V. Pisarick Sr., 95, passed away on Feb. 22, 2019. He was a lifelong area resident of Hamilton, NJ.

John was a parishioner of St. Raphael-Holy Angels Parish, and was an usher for over 50 years. He was retired from John A. Roebling and Sons and Mercer County Community College. He was a member of the Whitehorse Volunteer Fire Department. John loved being with his family. He enjoyed the beach and the ocean. In his younger years, he enjoyed basketball, bowling, softball, and boxing. He was a member of SACO.

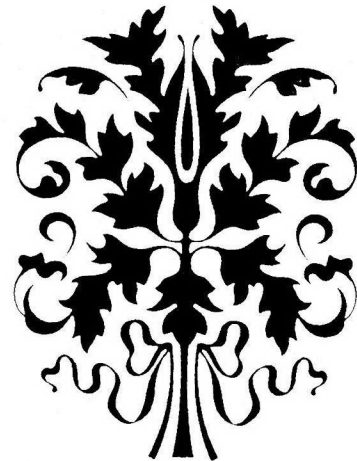
He was also a member of the Armed Guard and the Hump Pilot Assoc. He is a recipient of the Distinguished Service Medal and the SACO Service Medal awarded by the Republic of China.

Son of the late John and Mary (Gelak) Pisarick, husband of the late Mildred (Sikowski) Pisarick, brother of the late Mary Cook. Surviving are his children and spouses, Deborah and Dr. Thomas Paglione, Daire and Craig Goettler Esq., and John V. and Kelly Pisarick, Jr., 4 grandchildren, 3 great-grandchildren, and his beloved dog, Zippy.

Please see John's remembrance, Luck and Prayers, on p. 6 in this newsletter.

## Wiley C. Williamson

Wiley Cornett "Reds" Williamson, 93, formerly of Edgewood, MD, passed away Tuesday, April 14, 2015, at his home in Pinnellas Park, FL, in the company of family and friends. He was born in Fries, VA, on Nov. 30, 1921 to the late Luther R. and Dela Maye (Robinson) Williamson. He was predeceased by his wife Charlotte (McCarthy) Williamson and his first wife Margaret (Orndorff) Williamson. He is survived by his daughter Karen Van Horn, sons Guy Williamson, David Williamson, and R Leo Williamson, and many grandchildren and great-grandchildren. He proudly served in the U.S. Navy with the Scouts and Raiders in China/Burma during WWII. After the war he worked at Edgewood Arsenal in the motor pool. He coached boys' baseball and enjoyed square dancing, golf, and weeding his gardens. Wiley was an active member of VFW Post 5337 in Abingdon until he moved to Florida after his retirement.



# SACO NEWS

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\*\*\*\*\*SNGLP T1 P1

Edward & Lynn Grabenstein  
3846 Thomas Rd  
Oxford MI 48371-1549

Address correction requested

## SACO History

SACO (pronounced “Socko”), the Sino-American Cooperative Organization, officially started in May 1942 in a rice paddy near Pucheng, 130 miles from the China coast; the formal SACO agreement was approved by both the Chinese and United States governments April 15, 1943. The Directors of SACO were General Tai Li, head of the Chinese Secret Service, and Commander (later, Rear Admiral) Milton Edward “Mary” Miles. This was a land-locked U.S. Naval unit of almost 2,700 Americans who fought the Japanese in China during WWII. The men became known as “SACO Tigers” and the outfit, “The Rice Paddy Navy.”

The center of operations, named Happy Valley, was built eight miles west of Chungking. Fourteen additional camps were established. All of these units trained Chinese troops and gathered intelligence. At war’s end SACO included 97,000 organized Chinese guerrillas and 20,000 saboteurs and pirates.

SACO set up weather stations throughout China as far north as the Gobi Desert and by the end of 1943 began producing weather reports for the Pacific Fleet. Coast-watchers reported on enemy shipping and furnished targets for U.S. submarines as well as the 14th Air Force and Naval aviators.

**Stay in touch!**  
Send an email to  
Lynn Grabenstein.  
See p. 3