

EMBLEM AND PATCHES OF SACO

Cited references:

- Miles, M. E., 1967, *A Different Kind of War*: Doubleday & Co, Garden City, NY. 629 p.
Miles, M. E., undated, *SACO Photograph Albums*: unpublished, in four volumes.
Stratton, R. O., 1950, *SACO – The Rice Paddy Navy*: C.S. Palmer Pub. Co, Pleasantville, N.Y., 420 p.

The What-the-Hell pennant, Miles's personal flag, was adopted by the men. No SACO patch was ever officially issued. (Stratton, 1950, p 409)



The story of the origin of this pennant – “*What-the-Hell*” pennant – is a companion article to this current one.

There have been many stories told of the origin and meaning of Mary Miles' What-the-Hell-Pennant. All members of SACO have seen it at one time or another, inasmuch as it was flown at every SACO unit when Mary was present.

It is a white pennant. It looks like a cone turned sideways. Three question marks, three exclamation points, and three stars are emblazoned across it in red. Its length and breadth varies with the enthusiasm of its maker or the height of the pole or flag hoist from which it is to be flown.

The What-the-Hell Pennant was, as well as Mary Miles' personal flag, the official insignia of the American side of SACO. It appeared on radio blanks and seals. It was used in marking cases of material consigned to U.S. Naval Group China. It adorned the shoulders of flight and field jackets of SACO personnel. Some had cigarette cases and other trophies made upon which were soldered enamel replicas.

To many it was only an emblem of SACO; to others a symbol of the great task confronting them and their shipmates. A few scoffed at what they thought was an attempt of a Navy captain (prior to Mary's promotion to Commodore) to aggrandize himself and fly a personal flag, when such rights were reserved exclusively for officers of flag rank. Some saw in it an expression of the "What the Hell?" attitude of men deep behind Jap lines, a resignation to inevitable loneliness, deprivation and possible capture; others thought it a joke. The What-the-Hell pennant meant something different to each of us. (Stratton, 1950, p 30-31)



[There was] a SACO emblem, or logo, designed and drawn by COMO Miles. The 12-point star stands for China. The Chinese characters are *Mei and Zhong* (*U.S. and China*).



(Stratton, 1950, p 409)



[About the beginning of June, 1944] The Navy part of SACO was promoted—promoted to be a "Group of the U. S. Fleet," operating directly under the Commander-in-Chief. And I was appointed the first Commander of Naval Group China. It is usual military procedure to use the introductory letters of the various words to shorten long titles such as this. We tried out different combinations, finally deciding on ComNavGrpChina, but my wife had ideas of her own. Her next letters were addressed to ComNavGrouCh.

(Miles, 1967, p 208)



My favorite memory is of a serious U. S. Coast Guard horseman at salute as he passed carrying a guidon with our emblem—the "What-the-Hell?" pennant over a U. S. Navy anchor and inside China's star. As the mounted troops dashed up in a spectacular charge, General Hurley let out a tremendous "Yea Navy!" . . .

(Miles, 1967, p 468)

"Guidon bearer salutes Ambassador Hurley, June 9, 1945." (Miles, undated, v 2-67)



"[M]y plane arrived June 1945. I never flew in it."

(Miles, undated, v 2, p 72c)

By 1944 enough dope was coming in about Japanese ships to keep more than one man busy. Alert young officers, as they prepared the daily digests of ship positions, types of cargo, schedules, and routes, decided that summaries of these might prove useful for the war planners who would not have time to read the digests themselves and to determine from them whatever patterns were developing. So they began preparing a sheet that was something like a stock market buyer's guide. In it they listed weekly and monthly developments in their very specialized field.



“NavU 14 shoulder patch”
(Miles, undated, v 3, p 93)

We called it “Shipping News,” and we sent out mimeographed copies under a snappy cover that bore the Naval Radio Unit's new insignia which combined Chennault's Flying Tiger with a twelve-pointed Chinese star and the Navy's fouled anchor. The design was the same as the one used by SACO Headquarters except that this one used a Flying Tiger instead of SACO's “What-the-Hell?” pennant. We were never actually given permission to wear a shoulder patch, but the SeaBees had one and Captain Jeff Metzler finally wrote that official permission seemed hard to get, so why didn't we just go ahead and wear this one of ours?

(Miles, 1967, p 316-17)



Both the oxygen we provided and the weight we saved were appreciated by the pilots and airfield operators, but the “Assam Navy” that did the work took a lot of kidding. All the Army people with whom they came in contact had shoulder patches that clearly identified them but our boys had none and, in their khaki uniforms, they were rarely known for what they were. So, when they insisted that they needed some designation of their own, I authorized the use of a shoulder patch. They designed it themselves and finally came up with a sturdy peg-leg pirate who was using a spyglass. And I was flattered to see that beneath this figure in block letters, they had placed the single word MILES.

They were delighted with their new shoulder patch. Even the flight personnel loved it. So did I and somehow the boys of the “Assam Navy” became even more productive.

(Miles, 1967, p 274)



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