

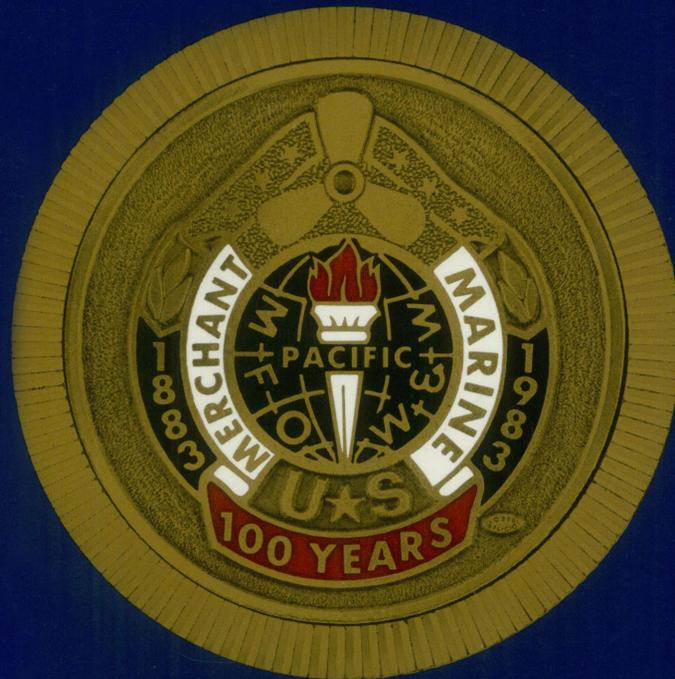
Pacific Coast Marine Firemen, Oilers, Watertenders & Wipers  
Assn.

# FROM HELL HOLE TO HIGH TECH

*Historical Highlights*

**PACIFIC COAST MARINE FIREMEN, OILERS,  
WATERTENDERS AND WIPERS ASSOCIATION**

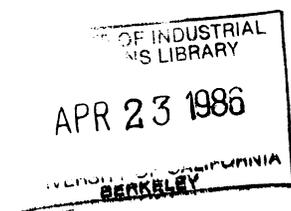
affiliated with the  
**Seafarers' International Union  
AFL-CIO**



**CENTENNIAL  
1883-1983**



*This booklet is dedicated to  
the members of the Marine Firemen's Union  
who kept this Union alive from 1883 to 1983,  
and particularly to those members  
who died in shipwrecks through the years  
and the hundreds of members  
who were killed in World War II.*



# Contents

Foreword . . . . .	3
MFOW Officials . . . . .	4
Founding of The Union . . . . .	5
The Early Days 1850-1915. . . . .	6
Living Aboard Ship . . . . .	8
Early Union Efforts . . . . .	11
1900-1922 . . . . .	17
Marine Firemen's Union . . . . .	21
The Fighting Years . . . . .	23
Seamen and the Law . . . . .	28
The War Years . . . . .	39
The Post War Years . . . . .	43
The Agonizing Years 1974-83 . . . . .	54

# Foreword

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**T**he 100-year history of the Marine Fireman is a magnificent story, rich with colorful figures and exciting events. During all of the 100 years of large and small triumphs and defeats, the Marine Firemen's Union has remained fiercely independent and true to the early traditions of rank and file control. It has never been an empire builder, although it was approached by other mechanical and construction trades on the waterfront which sought affiliation. In the galaxy of unions in this nation, it could be classified as a small union. However, paraphrasing Daniel Webster's description of Dartmouth College, "It is a small Union, but there are many who love it."

The Marine Firemen's Union plans in the future to assemble all available records and write a book with the sometimes sad, sometimes happy and sometimes comic details of strikes, contract fights, internal quarrels, jurisdictional quarrels and the origins of many of the provisions in the Union Constitution and our collective bargaining agreements with shipowners. Time did not permit such an ambitious undertaking to do the job right in time for the Centennial. This booklet only scratches the surface.

There are many difficulties in reconstructing the history of the Union. Prior to 1935, Paddy Flynn, the head of the Marine Firemen's Union from early days, was also active in the International Seamen's Union and important correspondence concerning the Union was kept in the offices of the International Seamen's Union. When the International Seamen's Union dissolved, its records were scattered to the four winds. Some of the records are in Illinois, some are in Michigan, some are in a blockhouse of the Sailors' Union of the Pacific, some are in the Bancroft Library of the University of California, and many important broadsides, pamphlets, union agreements, membership records and minutes are lost forever.

Unfortunately, in the early thirties, many of the boxes of early records were tossed into the garbage by "Peg Leg" John, the janitor at the time.

In preparing this booklet, the Union borrowed heavily from Professor Paul Taylor's book, *The Sailors' Union of the Pacific*, which contains many references to the Marine Firemen's Union. Other sources include the *Coast Seamen's Journal*, a brief

history written by V.J. Malone in 1945 for the benefit of newcomers to the Union, newspapers and existing Union records, and a great unpublished history of the Sailors' Union of the Pacific by Peter B. Gill.

The Union is also indebted to Charles Regal who graciously donated his time to make this booklet readable. Thanks are also expressed to the staff at Headquarters. Many worked long and hard to dig up facts and details.

When Matson published its history book for its Centennial in 1982, they had worked for several years and spent a large sum of money for research and drafts. It was a beautiful job. We had only a few weeks to prepare this booklet and, if there are any errors, they are inadvertent and chargeable to the limited time to put the booklet together.

We start our history with the early days and end with some crystal-balling into the future. But the symphony of this history has some repetitive melodies—ups in periods of economic prosperity and downs in periods of depressions and recessions. The ups for the seamen, particularly in times of war, were matched by prosperity in the Merchant Marine; with some exceptions, the downs were matched by lean times for shipowners and shoreside wage earners. Ends of wars found ports glutted with surplus ships and surplus seamen. As it has been in the past, it may well be in the future.

## PACIFIC COAST MARINE FIREMEN, OILERS, WATERTENDERS & WIPERS ASSN.

MFOW Officials - 1983:  
Henry Disley, *President*  
B.C. Shoup, *Vice President*  
Joel E. McCrum, *Treasurer*

Walter von Pressentin,  
*Seattle Port Agent*

Bernard J. Carpenter,  
*Wilmington Port Agent*

Marvin Honig,  
*Honolulu Port Agent*

## MFOW Officials 1983-84 Term



H. "Whitey" Disley  
*President*



B.C. "Whitey" Shoup  
*Vice President*



Joel E. McCrum  
*Treasurer*



Bobby Iwata  
*San Francisco  
Bus. Agent #1*



Walt von Presentin  
*Seattle Port Agent*



Robert G. Kimball  
*Seattle  
Business Agent*



Bernard J. "Bernie" Carpenter,  
*Wilmington  
Port Agent*



Sol Ayooob  
*Wilmington  
Business Agent*



Marvin "Lucky" Honig  
*Honolulu Port Agent*

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# Founding of The Union

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**T**he history of the Marine Firemen's Union is wrapped up and intertwined with the history of ships and seamen in other vessel departments with which we share a common heritage of the sea. The seaman of today can hardly imagine the life of those who lived in the early days of the Union. Their lives were brutal, painful and short. Marine hospitals in the early days reported that the average life span of a seaman after embarking on a life at sea was only thirty years. Even today, the mortality assumptions used in the Pacific District Pension Plan expect its members will die several years earlier than the life span of average shoreside workers.

Although there is some indication that a Marine Firemen's Union existed for a short time as early as 1850, the membership books from early years proudly proclaim that the Union was founded in October 1883 and reorganized in 1907 (by an amalgamation with an Independent Firemen's Union). There were many later organizations of firemen unions in the Great Lakes, New York City and the Gulf. Some of these unions later amalgamated with deck seamen unions and, even later, with the Seafarers' International Union. There are records of a Spanish Seamen's Union in New York City by the turn of the century, but the Pacific Coast Marine Firemen, Oilers, Watertenders and Wipers Association has a clear trail to its 1883 beginnings.

# The Early Days 1850-1915

**T**he life of early seamen was described by a U.S. surgeon in 1974:

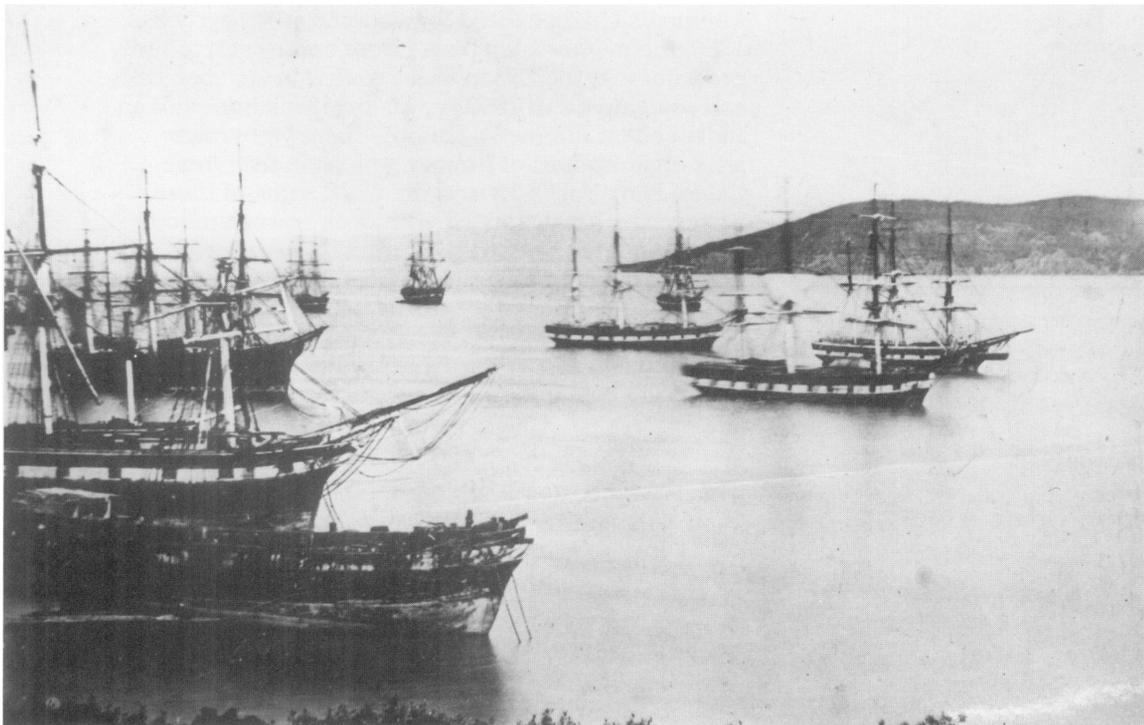
"No prison . . . so wretched, but life within its walls is preferable to the life of the sailor on a majority of merchant vessels. No jail diet so meager, no penal servitude so exacting, no exertion of authority so unrestrained and brutal, no utter want of care for health and life of convict or felon as are the rule but not the exception, for the man before the mast would be tolerated, if comprehended by the community."

In 1847, two years before the California Gold Strike, the first steamship appeared on the Pacific Coast, brought down from Alaska. In 1848, the Pacific Mail Steamship Company began its career under the Congressional Act of 1845 with a mail subsidy of \$199,000 for monthly coastal service by three steamers calling at San Diego, Monterey and San Francisco. Pacific Mail later provided monthly service to China and Japan assisted by a \$500,000 annual government subsidy.

Upon news of the gold strike at Sutter's Mill in 1849, hundreds of vessels sailed into San Francisco and the crews promptly scurried off to seek their

fortunes in the mines, not even waiting to unload cargo. By 1850, 500 abandoned ships were lying in San Francisco bay. Seamen willing to sail on return voyages received glorious wages—as much as \$200 or \$300 a month. This was a basic wage never again reached until after World War II. When deserting seamen failed to find nuggets on the ground in the mountains, many returned penniless in 1850, even willing to work without pay for passage to East Coast ports. Wages sank to \$25 a month.

During this period, sailing ships dominated the trade, but by the 1870s, there were a number of steamers running along the coast. Puget Sound had 42 steamers and there were some steamers operating on the Sacramento River and river steamers on the Columbia River. By 1880, steamers were employing about 1,400 men, a large portion of whom were native Americans. Roughly 50 percent were under 30, 25 percent between 30 and 40 and the remainder over 40. By 1881, there were 174 steamers, primarily from foreign ports, and British ships carried the bulk of foreign trade to the West Coast. Matson commenced its operations in 1882, but did not have any steam vessels until 1901.



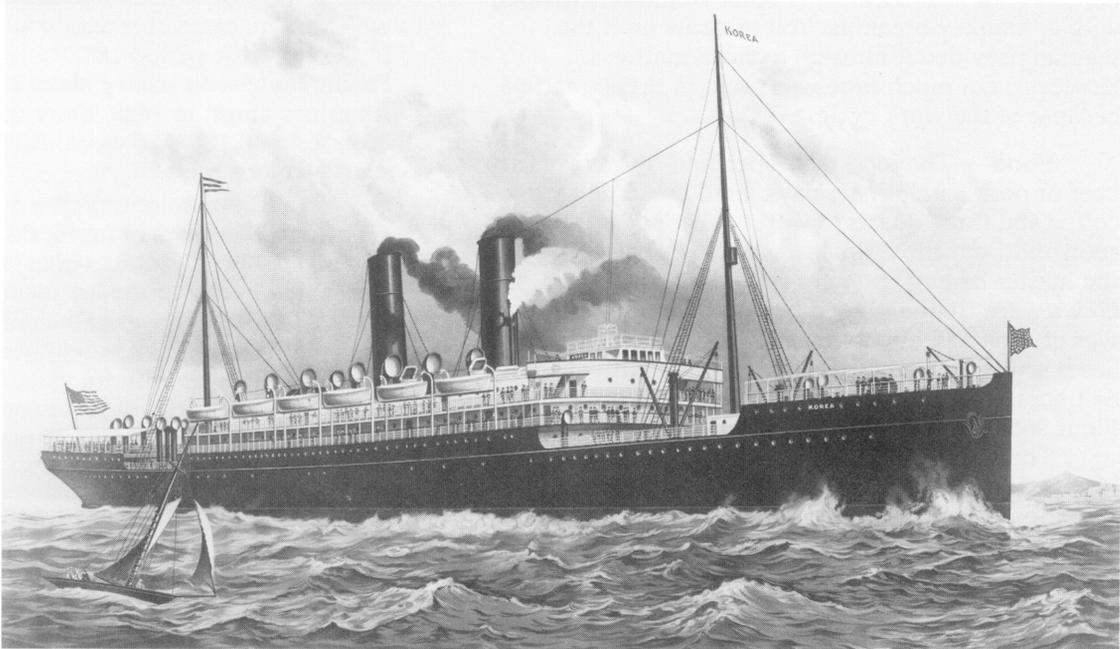
*Ships awaiting crews in San Francisco Bay during Gold Rush period—1853.*

(National Maritime Museum photo)



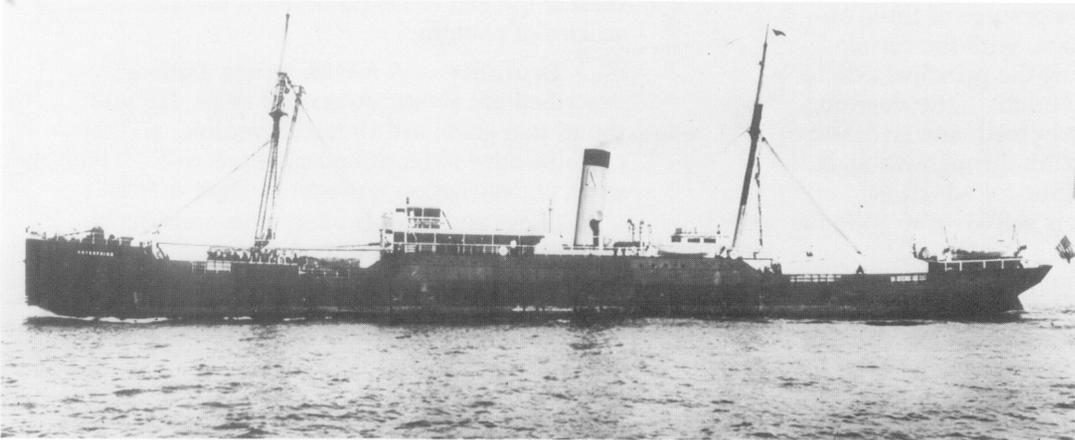
*S/S JAPAN (built 1867) at Pacific Mail Steamship Co. coaling dock, San Francisco, 1870*

(National Maritime Museum photo)



*Pacific Mail Steamship Co.'s KOREA, built 1902.*

(American President Lines Archives)



*Oil burning steamer in Pacific—SS ENTERPRISE of Matson Navigation Company.*

(Matson Navigation Company photo)

# Living Aboard Ship

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**F**orecastle — In older ships, the forecastle (fo'c's'le) was located in lower decks. With a small opening of perhaps 36 inches square, the ventilation was puny. Bunks were placed two and three high in a small, filthy, vermin-filled fo'c's'le in which the law specified 72 cubic feet per man, 6' x 6' x 2'. It was usually built around the foremast and the fo'c's'le invariably leaked. Temperatures rose in hot weather to 110 to 120 degrees; in bad weather, the door or other small opening was closed. There was a homemade slush lamp sputtering and smoking. No inspection or disinfectant ever touched the forecastle and seamen with communicable diseases were housed with healthy men. A bunk would be provided with a "donkey breakfast" bit of straw or, if the seaman provided it himself, a cheap mattress. However, not much time was spent in these quarters because of the work cycle.

**Food** — The food scale specified by law was salt beef or pork on alternate days, hard bread daily, tea, coffee and three quarts of water daily, and split pea soup and flour three times a week. The catch was that the master had an option of providing substitutes, and crews were frequently fed below the minimum. Food was of such bad quality that it was usually spoiled. Sea biscuits molded or became infested with vermin. Salt horse became so bad it was actually poisonous. Flour soon molded.

The *Coast Seamen's Journal* later described the biscuit, the principal part of a seaman's diet, as: "usually more or less full of weevils, and, very much worse than this, long, thick maggots which are sickening to behold, crawling about in the 'bread barge'. To sit down to a pot of coffee or stewed tea with one or two of these vermin-filled biscuits to pull to pieces and eat, and this at the commencement of a passage of three or four months' duration, with the certain prospect of this being the principal article of diet during that period. . . the steaming lumps of meat, untrimmed, and with some of the unskimmed filth through which it has been lifted clinging to, which he dumps into a 'kid', is sufficient to stifle the toughest appetite.

"The pork—hunks of fat, with a small amount of tasteless lean, tough as old rope yarns—in cold weather, when the mass of fat has hardened, is palatable and even appreciable with good biscuit, but in hot weather— . . . it is usually dumped

overboard. . . there is the 'tinned meat', which is served up once a week under the title of 'fresh mess', tough, tasteless stuff that is unappetising in any form in which it may be cooked with 'decimated spuds', except sea pie, and this is only possible when the flour is exempt from weevils and has not been overrun by rats."

**S**urveys showed that food on American ships at that time was far below the standards of European vessels. Although the cure for scurvy was well known, cases of scurvy continued to be reported. In the two-year period 1872 to 1874, 119 vessels in Pacific trade with scurvy aboard were reported on American ships; in 1888, there were 6 cases; in 1893, 35 cases; and 1894, 36 cases. America led the world in scurvy among seamen.

In addition to scurvy, the Surgeon General reported 6,558 cases of problems with digestive organs in 1894. Dysentery was reported on ships, traceable directly to spoiled meat being fed crews.

There were no special facilities where the men could eat. The seamen would perch around the steaming mess kit with tin plates and cups and spoons and their table cutlery would consist of personal rusty sheath knives and fingers for forks.

**Other Amenities** — It was not until 1884, one year after the founding of the Union, that vessels in offshore trade were required to carry slop chests from which seamen could purchase clothing and tobacco. Prior to 1884, when a man went to sea, he carried his equipment with him. His possessions were limited to a bit of simple mess gear which he kept on a small shelf at the end of his bunk and a few non-descript articles of clothing.

**Brutality** — A British writer, Lubbock, described life aboard American ships. He said. . . "the things that go on are almost incredible, and the captains have to be skilled surgeons to cope with the work of destruction wrought by their mates."

"Legs and arms broken were considered nothing, ribs stamped in by heavy sea-boots had to mend as best they could, faces smashed like rotten apples by iron belaying pins had to get well or fear worse treatment, eyes closed up by a brawny mate's fist had to see. There have been many instances of men triced up in the rigging, stripped, and then literally skinned alive with deck scrapers."

"Thus, the reputation of American ships has got so bad that none but a real tough citizen will ship in them."

The law of the time permitted ship officers to impose "justifiable punishment." The courts held "the simple and somewhat rude character of seamen" justified punishment as necessary "to quicken the caviller and the lazy." The courts held it would be too severe a rule to hold a master in damages if he "somewhat exceeded the limits of moderate and reasonable chastisement."

**T**here are countless tales of brutality. A few examples of brutality on "Hell Ships" were set forth in the famous "Red Record" published in 1895 by the Sailors' Union of the Pacific. They picked a number of cases which had been given some publicity, but these cases were the tip of the iceberg. Numerous cases were unreported. Routine beatings were a way of life. There was little point in complaining about them because the U.S. Federal attorneys at the time would give them a "deep six". A few examples published in the "Red Record" illustrate the "justifiable punishment."

**1888, S/S HECLA** — Captain attacked seaman, struck him with a heavy instrument, breaking his jaw and knocking out several teeth; nearly killed another man; with the aid of the first mate, beat several of the crew. Put some of the crew in the hold for 48 hours, tied up in such a manner they could neither stand, sit

or lie down; tied one seaman to a stanchion for four days without food. Upon completion of voyage, refused to pay wages due the crew.

**1890, S/S EDWARD O'BRIEN** — First mate knocked down second mate and jumped on his face; struck one seaman on the head with a belaying pin; struck another man on the neck with a capstan bar, then kicked him until he was unconscious; struck boatswain in the face because he failed to hear an order.

**1890, S/S LOUISIANA** — Sick seaman refused to go aloft because of illness; second mate struck him on the head with a belaying pin and several blows with his fist; the captain struck him in the face, the first mate then beat him with a block of wood. Another seaman was put in irons and fed on bread and water for one hundred days.

**1891, S/S EUREKA** — First mate assaulted a seaman by hitting him with belaying pins and brass knuckles. To escape further punishment, the seaman jumped overboard and was drowned.

**1893, S/S OAKES** — Captain charged on 28 indictments for cruelty. Six men gave direct evidence and showed wounds inflicted; the captain made no defense. The jury returned a verdict that "a ship master has the right to beat a seaman who is unruly".

**1893, S/S TAM O'SHANTER** — Second mate assaulted several seamen; one bore nine wounds, including a piece bitten out of his hand, a mouthful of flesh bitten out of his left arm, and his left nostril torn away as far as the bridge of his nose.

*Fireroom of Mass. State  
Maritime Academy  
training vessel  
NANTUCKET in early  
1930s.*



(National Maritime Museum photo)

## Life on Watch

It is possible that the Marine Firemen escaped much of this punishment because they worked under the chief engineer and were required to daily suffer the hell in the fire hole. Injuring a fireman could interfere with the vessel's schedule and life in the fire hole was its own form of brutal existence. To be a good fireman or coal passer required a strong constitution and, above all, endurance.

Prior to the Shipping Act of 1915, and even later if the ship was shorthanded, the length of shifts in the fireroom would be at the whim of the Master. The Master could work the men as hard and for as many hours as he desired. Frequently, the men would drop in their tracks from sheer exhaustion. One can picture life in the fireroom because we still have members who remember the days of coal passing and shoveling into hot furnaces. Marine firemen may have escaped a great deal of brutality because injuring a fireman could slow the vessel, but life in the fireroom was its own form of hell.

The fireroom temperature would soar to unbearable highs. Air came into the fireroom by a small ventilation shaft which had to be constantly adjusted to catch prevailing winds. At the beginning of a watch, the fireman's duties would be to clean at least one furnace fire by putting the hot embers and ashes on the floor plates. The coal passer quickly hosed the burning embers and hot steam filled the room. The firemen danced around to avoid the burning embers, working in a room with the temperature of a Turkish bath. The men labored for incredible hours, constantly shoveling tons of coal into the roaring furnaces and banking furnaces in a frenzy for use of the succeeding shift.

**T**he coal passer moved coal by wheelbarrel from the coal bins to the floor plates indirectly in front of the fire boxes. The firemen shoveled the coal into the furnaces and tons of coal were moved in one day by the men. When the furnace doors were open, the firemen would be exposed to blinding light and searing heat and many pounds were lost through perspiration.

In addition to shoveling coal, the firemen periodically lifted the burning coals with a slice bar to increase the draft circulation and rake the coals in the furnaces.

The coal passer removed the ashes to be dropped over the side and had to respond to the constant shouts for more coal, and also find a moment to dash up on deck to adjust the ventilation shaft to get a few more breaths of air into the fireroom between his coal delivery tasks.

The speed of the vessel depended upon the furnaces and the master had to constantly engage in mental arithmetic. Coal was expensive. If he ordered more coal for the furnaces to increase his speed, he increased the cost of the vessel's operations. If he lowered the speed, he might not be able to make his schedule. Always interested in more profit, the master would occasionally buy cheap coal which did not burn as well, but this could be overcome by the expertise of the fireman. However, the firemen had to work harder to maintain the steam pressure by using the slice bar to provide greater heat from burning embers.

The duty of an outgoing watch was to have a few furnaces banked for the use of the oncoming watch. Many a quarrel would occur if this was not accomplished and one can imagine the curses and hot tempers if one shift had not completed its tasks and tried to leave it for the relief watch. In a corner of the fireroom, the captain would grudgingly place some cakes of salt. Tortured by the heat, the firemen would gobble some salt and drink from the water hose. During the course of a voyage, men of the black gang would double over with cramps or pass out from heat exhaustion, to be revived by a pail of water and a kick to resume their duties.

Landsmen unfamiliar with life at sea, marveled that men could be found to work in the firerooms. However, the firemen, a wiry, tough lot, took a perverse pride in their skill to keep the furnaces blazing and their ability to survive under such conditions. Since much of the Pacific trade required long voyages in tropical seas, the combination of tropical heat, engine room heat and steam tested the endurance limits of any but the toughest. Those surviving such voyages would boast of their sturdiness. Men who could go through shift after shift, day after day, week after week and month after month in the fire hole were indeed the toughest of the tough.

## Wages

The battles to improve wages and conditions was a never ending struggle. Except for the bonanza year of 1849, and the early part of 1850, wages from 1850 to 1931 hovered between \$25 and \$90 a month, depending upon supply and demand, the power of the unions at the moment, and the availability of alien crews.

Pensions, welfare plans and good paid vacation were unknown. However, because of the danger of communicable diseases to port citizens, the members did have the United States Public Health Service ashore—a benefit they retained until President Reagan took it away in 1981.

# Life Ashore

**S**eamen a hundred years ago were treated by the public as derelicts. After being at sea for long periods of time, if they were not intercepted by the crimps they would invariably head for the nearest gin mill to meet with shipmates and hoist a few drinks. As a result, they were branded by the community as bums.

They were subject to frequent arrest for minor offenses, including vagrancy. They would be slipped a Mickey Finn in the bars, rolled for whatever they had and dumped in the gutters. If they complained of ill treatment, a judge on the bench would warn the jury about the testimony of seamen, reminding the jurors that "seamen were addicted to spinning yarns."

San Francisco newspapers were filled with articles and editorials depicting seamen as an evil lot and justified the rough waterfront bars and houses of prostitution as necessary evils to cater to the "depraved" seamen. Shipowners testified in Congress and described seamen as "a bunch of hoodlums," scorned by the good citizens of the ports. However, the seaman who got as far as the bar with any wages would have to be as quick witted and fleet of foot as a professional football quarterback. When a seaman was lucky enough to get ashore to forget his troubles, his stay would be short and expensive. In 1887, the California Labor Commissioner took the trouble to investigate the lot of the shoreside seaman. His report stated:

"[The seaman] was never out of the hands of sharpers who coax, wheedle, debauch and pander to his worst vices until his last dollar is gone."

Taking the seaman's last hard-earned dollar quickly and efficiently was developed to a fine art.

## Crimps

Upon completion of a voyage, captains of vessels would frequently increase the pace of brutality to entice seamen to desert the ship. If the seaman deserted, he forfeited his wages and the captain could whistle complacently with a fuller pocket.

If "Jack" did not have "channel fever" and was able to sidestep brutality, he would have to run the gamut of the crimp runners. A "crimp" was a boarding house owner who had contracts and agreements with shipping masters for the exclusive right to ship seamen aboard particular vessels. Frequently the boarding house owner also was a shipping master. When a vessel entered port, even before it dropped anchor, a crimp runner would go

aboard with a few bottles of rum and greet the seaman as a long, lost friend. He would dazzle the seaman with promises of high wages for a shore job and glorious living conditions. If he was successful, he could entice the sailor to desert. Then the crimp would split the spoils with the master.

If the seaman succumbed to the alluring promises while still aboard the vessel, it would be a double victory for the crimp. If the seaman waited until he got his money from the master—a difficult job because the master could delay several days after the vessel reached port before making payment—he would be met at the dock by a crimp runner and quickly transported to a boarding house where he would be supplied with liquor and tasty shoreside food. The seaman would come to the next morning without his clothes to be presented a huge bill for liquor, food, and the night's "lodging." Under the law, the crimp was entitled to impound his clothes as security for the boarding house bill. The poor fellow without money and access to friends or help from others was in no position to deal with his plight. The crimp then would ply the seaman with more drinks and take him to a clothing supplier, outfit him with new clothes, again at a hiked-up price. The seaman, usually drunk by this time, would be delivered to a ship. The captain paid the crimp for the bills of the boarding house and the clothing supplier as an advance against the seaman's wages for the outgoing voyage.



**T**he California Labor Commissioner, in 1887, after careful and independent investigation, made findings that the crimp and the clothing store were frequently in league with the captains of the vessels who would pocket a bit of the spoils.

Often the seaman's stay in port was only one day and the charges of the crimp as an advance on wages would be the equivalent of a two-month voyage. It boiled down to the crimp taking all the wages earned by the seaman on the incoming voyage and also much of the wages on the outgoing voyage. Since the crimps were the exclusive hiring halls for vessels, it was almost impossible to beat the system.

If a seaman tried to save his money and pick his own lodgings, he would be unable to get another job on a ship until he would go to a crimp "hiring hall" and stay until his money was all gone and he had run up a sufficient bill for the crimp to get a healthy advance part of his future wages. The crimp system enriched the English vocabulary by the words "blood money" and "shanghaied."

"Blood money" referred to the amount the masters of vessels would pay the crimp for the delivery of seamen to vessels. When seamen were scarce, captains would pay between \$15 and \$25 for a man delivered on board the ship.

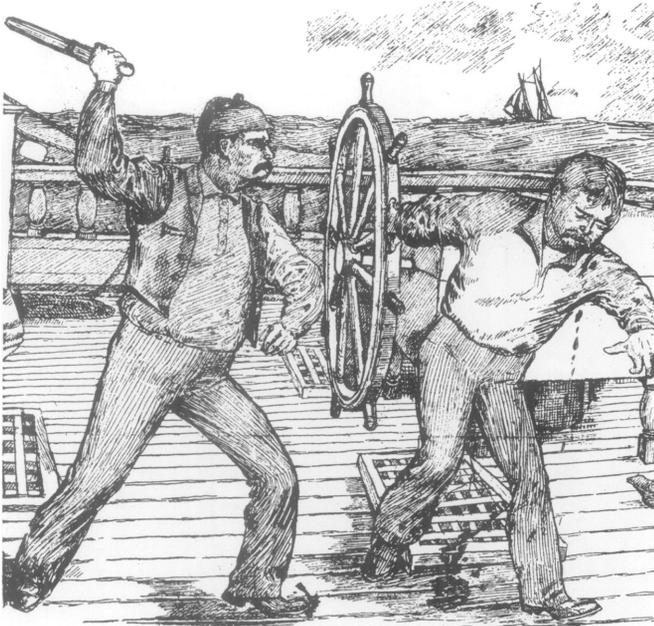
**B**ecause of the conditions aboard ships, men who were able to get a job ashore would be reluctant to ship out. This led to "shanghaiing." Reminiscing old timers reported in the Coast Seamen's Journal of a particular bar that had developed an efficient system of shanghaiing. A newcomer entered the bar, would be greeted with friendliness and offered a drink on the house. He would be steered to a certain location at the bar, given a drink loaded with drugs and, when he had drunk the concoction, a lever would be pulled and a trap

door would drop him onto a mattress in the basement. When he awoke, he would be in the forecabin at sea. Many of these unfortunate shanghaied souls had no prior vessel experience and this meant more work for the experienced sailors and firemen, and the land-lubbers required a certain amount of gentle brutality by mates to be kept in line.

In 1884, the practice of shanghaiing and blood money was so extensive it led to complaints by United States consuls in foreign countries where the unfortunate shanghaied crews would be discharged. One of the U.S consuls complained to the Commissioner of Navigation that the ships arriving from San Francisco:

"Were manned by the most worthless set of men . . . These men were paid from \$20 to as high as \$40 per month, and, in addition to this, a bonus of "blood money" is called for by the boarding master to the extent of \$15 and high as \$25 for each man. It is little short of a miracle that vessels so manned would safely reach their destination. The large majority of these men are green landsmen and, as a matter of course, being but little use aboard the ship, they do not receive the best of treatment, and on reaching port desert and become charges on some of the consulates. Three months advance pay is demanded in San Francisco, and this, as does everything else, goes to the boarding master. The men are but on board without clothing, and according to many of them, in a state of intoxication, and without their own consent. Upon arrival here they are in debt to the ships, and, aided by the crimps, and not opposed by the officers, they desert."

**T**he history of maritime unions for 75 years was a never ending struggle against the power and activities of crimps. They were still being fought in the 1930's, and in 1983 the Wall Street Journal reported that several crimp houses are flourishing in Louisiana and Texas, using the same tricks of supplying workers to offshore oil rigs, trucking and construction for backbreaking jobs at minimum wages and the men must pay the crimp houses for drinks they have not consumed and exorbitant charges for cheap dormitory rooms. The Marine Firemen's Union was prompted to introduce a resolution to the Maritime Trades Department and the AFL-CIO to use all of the power of each to again stamp out these vermin.



## The Shipowners

In 1879, some San Francisco shipowners passed a resolution against paying blood money but the crimps were too powerful. When the shipowners sought to defy crimp "exclusive hiring halls," the crimps simply refused to allow a seaman to board a vessel until blood money was paid.

A San Francisco newspaper reported battles with the crimps in the following words:

"The commerce of the port is at their mercy. A crew cannot be shipped without their consent, and ships are frequently compelled to lay in the stream for days and weeks without crews on account of the captain's having in some manner incurred the displeasure of these pests."

The Shipping Commissioner's Act of 1872 included an effort to stop shanghaiing by requiring that only sober men could sign articles and then only before a commissioner. At first the crimps fought the law by delaying ships and refusing to furnish crews but then found that the law could be avoided by simply sending sober seamen to sign the articles using the name of a shanghaiing sailor who would find when he awoke on a ship that his name had been registered on ship articles.

## The Dingley Act

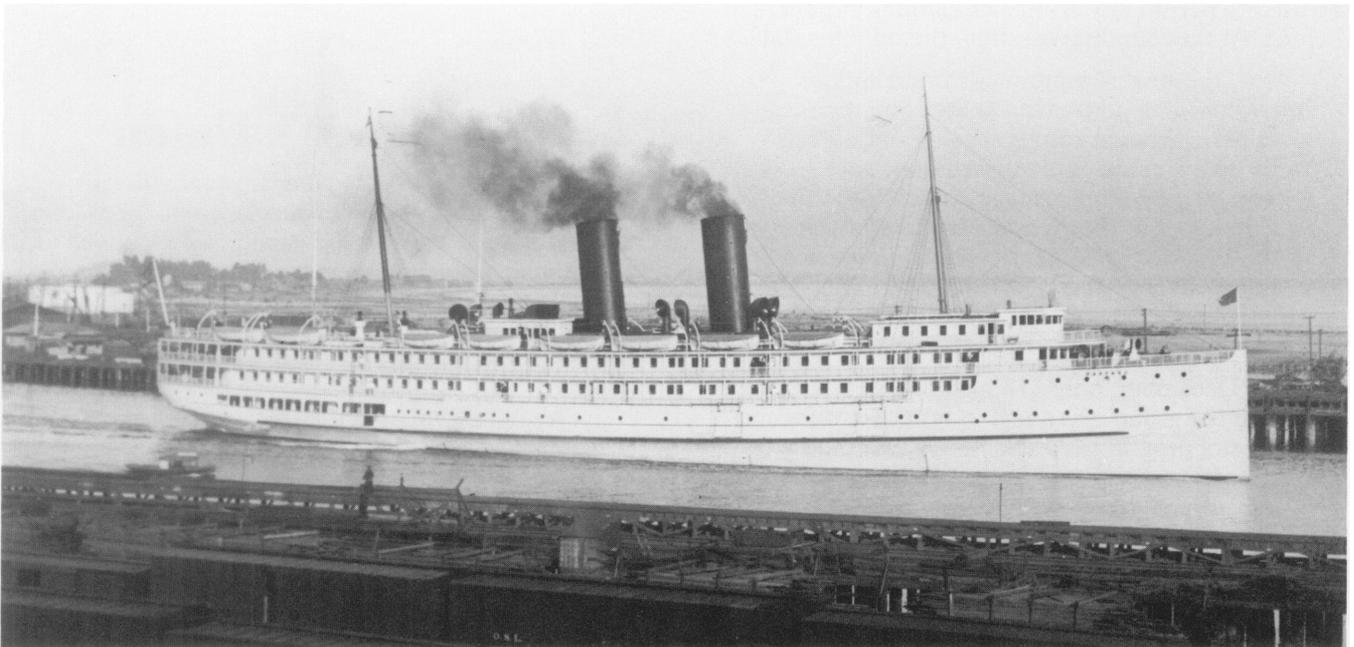
The next effort to curb crimps was the Dingley Act of 1884 which prohibited paying advance wages to anyone other than the seaman's wife, mother or other relatives. This law was easily circumvented by the crimps and shipping masters by paying the seamen less monthly wages and paying a side cash bonus to the crimp who brought him aboard.

Shipowners finally gave up the battle with crimps because the crimps effectively delayed their vessels if they were not paid off. Amended in 1886, the law allowed advances on seamen pay not to exceed \$10 for each month of a prospective voyage payable to an "original creditor" for any just debt for board or clothing."

In 1891, the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce investigated blood money and found \$120,000 at \$40 a head had been paid in one year and the Chamber of Commerce report blamed the system on the shipowners.

Crimps did not confine their efforts to American ships. Seamen on foreign ships entering the port would frequently desert in the hopes of obtaining employment in coastal trade where the wages were higher. From the standpoint of foreign shipowners, desertion of their seamen was a mixed blessing because they could pocket deserters' wages. The unpaid wages and expenses of maintaining deserting seaman in port more than paid for blood money for replacements. Sometimes as many as one-third of foreign crews entering a United States port would desert in a year. Shipowners would rub their hands with glee over such desertions because it increased the number of men to man vessels and the increased competition for available jobs kept the wages low.

This brief summary of the life of seamen in the early days explains the conditions that led to unionization. In truth and fact, the seamen were alone, scorned by the public, without family or friends, brutalized by ship officers, victimized by crimps, and denied justice by the courts. The only way their brutal life could be changed was by joining together to fight each tentacle of the ship and shore exploitation they suffered.



*Photo of steamer "Harvard," she and a sister vessel "Yale" served the Pacific coastal passenger trade decades ago.*

# Early Union Efforts

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**W**hen the Marine Firemen's Union was launched one hundred years ago, the founding members were firemen on coal-burning steamers. As today, they were a definite minority among the men who went to sea for a living.

Although the Marine Firemen's Union dates its ancestry to a formal founding in 1883, we also know from pamphlets and broadsides at the time that there were organizations of Marine Firemen on the coast from the early 1850s. Taylor reports steamship firemen, as well as calkers, ship joiners, shipwrights, riggers and stevedores were organized in the period following the Civil War, but little is known of their organizational activities. We assume, as in many early unions, they were relatively informal organizations that would strike wage agreements on coastal steamers by the simple device of not signing on except upon agreed-upon rates.

We know that they would cooperate with deck seamen. In fact, firemen and sailors were active in forming the "Seamen's Protective Association" in 1880.

This organization was formed in response to a decision by the Pacific Mail Steamship Company to discharge a number of Caucasian employees and put Chinese in their place. The seamen protested, but the company refused to change its position. The sailors and firemen got together to establish some rules and refused to permit any crimps or clothing suppliers to belong. At the founding meeting, the minutes state:

"... there were continuous interruptions by boarding house land sharks and their whiskey-bought runners; going so far as to throw valuable eggs—that did not have time to get to the best age and odor—at the agitators, but they made a bad failure, as the superior intelligence and calmness of the speakers entirely discomfited their enemies." (Taylor, *The Sailors' Union of the Pacific* )

By December, only 113 men had joined. Although the group was small in numbers, they did start several programs. Frank Roney was indefatigable in his efforts to assist seamen and to bring ships' officers guilty of brutality to justice. In the *Coast Seamen's Journal* in later years, Roney reminisced over these early efforts to assist deserters on foreign vessels and he maintained a constant verbal barrage against the United States attorney for his failure to prosecute the brutality of mates and masters. The Union had a committee on prosecutions and published the

statistics that, of one hundred cases of cruelty they had discovered, no convictions had been secured with the exception of a fine of \$25 in a case of one mate. Roney also drafted a bill to be forwarded to Congress requiring that two-thirds of the seamen on every United States ship would have to be citizens of the United States, but nothing came of this effort.

A great deal is owed to Patrick Roney because he laid the groundwork for later legislative efforts, even making a bold attempt to request Congress to grant a 12-hour day at sea and double pay for overtime. He encouraged the Seamen's Protective Association to send delegates to the Assembly of Trade to forge a bond with other organized unions.

At this time, over a dozen unions of various shoreside trades existed in San Francisco. The Seamen's Protective Association never had a very large membership. By 1881, it only had 99 members who had paid up in full. Although a total of 341 had joined, meetings dwindled despite many organizing efforts.

The Association did successfully protest the issuance of meal checks by shipowners for subsistence in ports and was able to obtain agreement for cash substitutes. Another accomplishment was a committee investigation of crimp houses to report on the quality of food, cleanliness and conditions. The Association's last meeting was in 1882.

## Coast Seamen's Union

Up to 1885, the deck department was still unorganized. The Coast Seamen's Union, predecessor of the Sailors' Union of the Pacific, was founded as a result of an announcement by shipowners to reduce coastal wages to \$25 for open or outside ports and \$20 for other areas. Seamen were enraged by this announcement and gathered in groups to discuss the matter.

An organizer from the International Workmen's Association was, by chance, walking by a milling group of disgruntled seamen and inquired the cause of their excitement. When they told him, he advised them to form a union, and join hands with other labor organizations in San Francisco and helped them to organize. The International Workmen's Association was active in Europe, the United States and other countries. It was founded by Karl Marx, father of the Communist movement throughout the world and his

followers. Marx had earlier worked in New York and had urged the IWA to send organizers to the United States.

**T**he founding meeting of the Coast Seamen's Union is a dramatic story which can best be told by the Sailors' Union of the Pacific. Briefly, the IWA organizer gathered some speakers from the organizing headquarters of the IWA, accompanied by leaders of shoreside unions. The founding meeting was held on a dark night on a Folsom Street wharf and hundreds attended, happy with the darkness because their faces could not easily be identified by crimps. With an Advisory Committee consisting of IWA representatives, the union elected officers and conducted a short strike which was successful, and the shipowners conceded to the wages of \$30 a month demanded by the union.

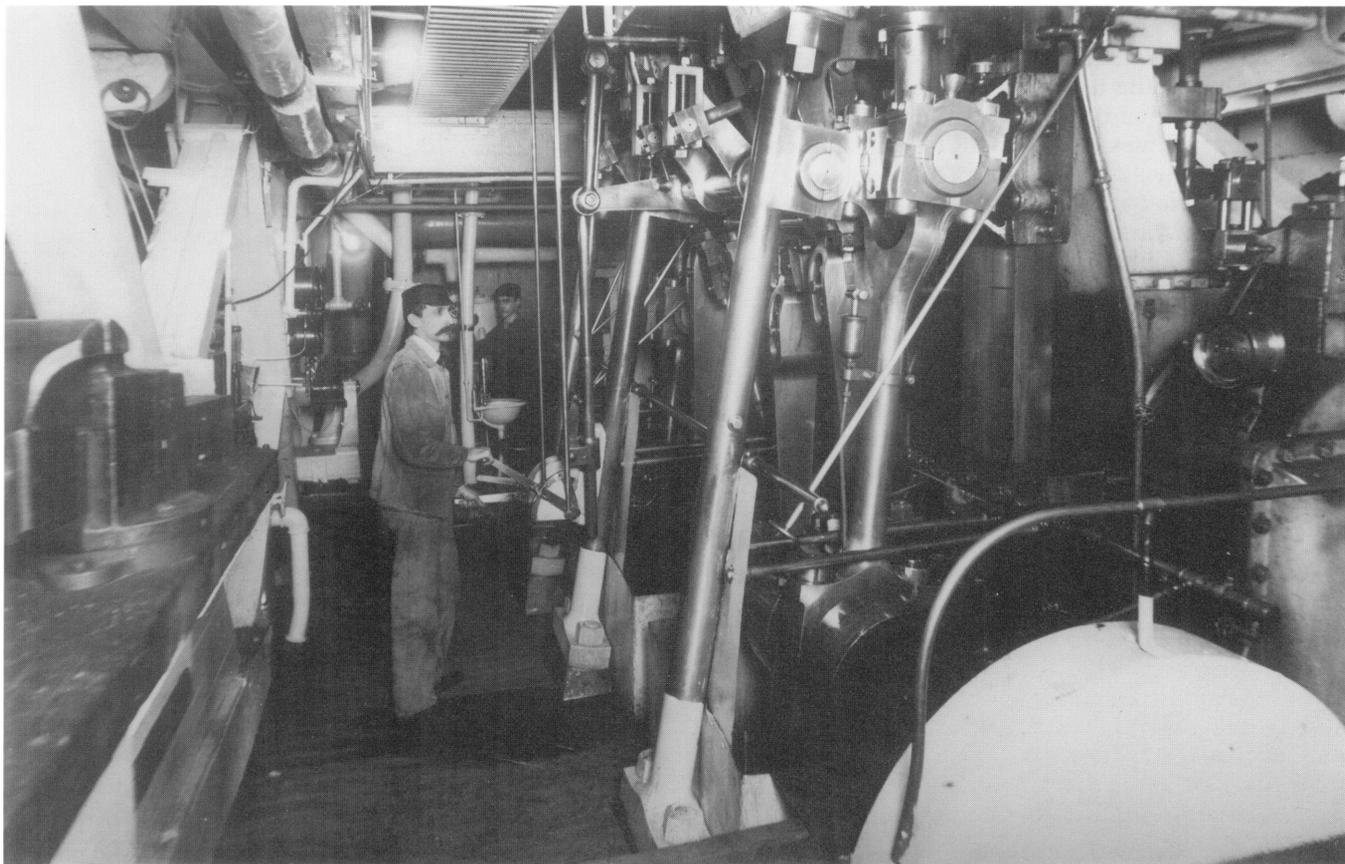
After the strike, there were constant clashes with crimps, ship captains and police which continued for a year and a half. By 1885, the Coast Seamen's Union had a membership of 2,200—approximately two-thirds of the coasting sailors. By 1886, the union had obtained \$35 a month on vessels to Puget Sound, \$48 a month for outside ports and \$30 a month to Mexico, Honolulu and South Sea islands. At that time, seamen were so scarce that shanghaiing was still frequent in coastal ports.

## The 1886 Strike

In June 1886, the Marine Firemen's Union struck the Oceanic Steamship Company over a dispute on the number of firemen required on ocean voyages. A ship had returned from Australia with a short-handed black gang. The firemen took the dispute to the Federated Trades, and a general strike against the Oceanic Steamship Company was ordered.

The coast seamen obeyed the strike order, and those who quit forfeited their wages in accord with the provisions of maritime law. The shipowners decided to fight and formed a Shipowners' Association of the Pacific Coast. The Association established an exclusive shipping office and adopted a shipping book system known as "grade books." Masters refused to sign men unless they had a grade book and shipped through the office of the Association. In order to get a grade book and to ship, a union member would have to turn in his union card to the shipping office and repudiate the union in writing.

**T**his was a serious blow to the union, but they did help some of the men to ship by issuing duplicate union cards so the men could turn in one card and keep the other. The shipowners gathered up non-union men from wherever they could be found, including deep sea seamen, deserters and landlubbers.



*Puget Sound passenger vessel SS FLYER, built 1891. Engineer at main engine controls.*

(National Maritime Museum photo)

By June 1886, shipowners were paying \$40 blood money to crimps. This problem led the union to call a strike against shipowners in August of that year. Three thousand men were involved, and the strike continued until September. The union finally terminated the strike because the members were "starved into submission."

Hard times fell upon all seagoing unions. Wages sank as low as \$15 a month and the union lost one-third of its members. The union finances of the Coastal Union were so limited that it had to cancel the office telephone. A year later, the Coast Seamen's Union membership had dropped to 1,400 active members; and we assume the membership of the Pacific Coast Firemen's Union had proportionate losses. However, the shortage of men willing to ship forced the shipowners to increase wages to \$40 a month for the coast trade generally and \$45 to Humboldt Bay.

**I**n 1887, the union had one strike in San Pedro. A number of seamen had been working ashore as longshoremen and the Shipowners' Association discharged them in a move to force them to go to sea to meet a shortage of seamen. The rest of the seamen working ashore and the longshoremen struck. About sixty sailors walked off the ships forfeiting their wages. However, a few days later, the longshoremen voted to return to work, leaving the seamen alone, and they lost the battle.

After 1886 and until 1890, the shipping unions did not call any coastal strikes but did conduct a series of quickie walkouts known as "working the oracle." Men would use their grade books to get on the vessel and would deny their union membership. Then, just as the vessel was about to pull up anchor, they would all walk off the ship. This would cause the vessel some delay until a new crew was secured. At the same time, the seamen would go to the crimp houses, run up bills and then refuse to pay on the ground that the law of 1874 had repealed all of the provisions of the law of 1872 in coastwise trade, a legal development later discussed.

The fortunes of the seamen unions grew very slowly but surely. By 1890, the membership of the Coast Seamen's Union had been built up to over 3,000 members and the treasury had been built up to

\$36,000. Branches were maintained in Eureka, San Pedro, San Diego and Seattle and the grade book system was abolished. However, vessels were still manned with both union and non-union men.

The remaining years until 1900 were hard years. Wages dropped to as low as \$15 a month in 1887. Membership was almost halved, but by April of 1886 there were good shoreside jobs and the shortage of good men ultimately forced coastal wages up to \$40 and \$45 a month.

Thereafter, until 1915 wages and conditions seasawed with economic times, but the coastal and seagoing unions slowly regained members. Ocean trade steamers were organized, and an independent union of sailors on ocean steamers amalgamated with the Coast Seamen's Union in 1891 to form the Sailors' Union of the Pacific. The Marine Firemen's Union continued as the Pacific Coast Marine Firemen's Union. Both the Pacific Coast Marine Firemen's Union and the Coast Seamen's Union joined in the founding of the International Seamen's Union of America in 1895, together with various organized seamen unions in the Great Lakes, the Atlantic and the Gulf.

By 1901, the Pacific Coast Marine Firemen's Union had 1,080 members. In 1907, the Pacific Coast Marine Firemen's Union amalgamated with an independent union of firemen to form the Marine Firemen, Oilers and Watertenders of the Pacific.



*Union Seal at 1907 reorganization.*

# 1900 - 1922

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**I**n May 1901, the Pacific Coast Steamship Company reached an agreement with the Sailors' Union of the Pacific and the Pacific Coast Marine Firemen's Union for full union recognition, and many ship operators were primarily using union crews.

The gains of seamen were paralleled by gains of shoreside unions. The American Federation of Labor grew from 1897 to 1901 to almost eight million members. By 1900, ninety unions were organized in San Francisco and the California State Federation of Labor held its first convention. There were successful shoreside strikes in 1900 and 1901 involving almost all shoreside unions.

## The 1901 Strike

Although historians may quarrel, the 1901 strike may well be the most significant strike of labor in the history of California. It was a showdown battle between employers and organized labor. The goal of employers was to establish the "open shop" in the city of San Francisco and on the coast. In April 1901, fifty employers subscribed \$1,000 each to the drive, and this amount was later increased to yield \$250,000.

In May 1901, some cooks and waiters struck for a six-day week, ten-hour day and won their demands in a number of restaurants. As a countermove,



*Waterfront workers during  
1901 San Francisco strike.*

(National Maritime Museum photo)

wholesalers refused to supply restaurants displaying a union card, and this action was echoed by employers in other trades. By the middle of May, two thousand workers were on strike in San Francisco. In July 1901, the Draymen's Association ordered Teamsters to either quit the union or quit their jobs. On July 20, 6,400 members struck. Maritime unions had formed a City Front Federation and a resolution was passed for sailors, marine firemen, longshoremen, shipyarders, ship clerks, pile drivers and others to join the action.

On July 30, 20,000 men were on strike and all shipping companies were struck except the Pacific Coast Steamship Company, on which the firemen remained at work under an agreement entered into with the company prior to the strike. In August, the

Pacific Coast Marine Firemen struck the Pacific Coast Steamship Company notwithstanding the existence of a contract and the company threatened to sue the Union. Two days later, the Marine Cooks and Stewards walked out, and the strikers threatened to extend the strike along the coast if no settlement was reached. The strike was vicious; police were less than gentle in dealing with strikers. One hundred seventy-five vessels were tied up in San Francisco.

On one steamer, the S/S ELDER, scab firemen were employed but became seasick and lay down in the fireroom, forcing the vessel to the nearest port.

By August 23, 12,000 members of the City Front Federation were out and 800 scabs were working on the waterfront. Two hundred vessels were tied up.



*Policeman escorts  
"scab" wagon driver  
during 1901  
San Francisco  
waterfront strike.*

(National Maritime Museum photo)



*Maritime union members parade on Kearny St. during 1901 San Francisco waterfront strike.*

(National Maritime Museum photo)

Students at the University of California were scabbing on longshoremen in San Francisco and Oakland. The president of the University defended their actions. A letter protested:

"Is it one of the marks of a liberal education that those who receive it gratuitously should do what even uneducated men consider vile and infamous?" (Gill, "History of the Sailors' Union of the Pacific")

On Labor Day 1901, over 20,000 unionists marched in a four-mile parade, and the City Front Federation with 9,500 members led the parade. The employers pleaded with the governor to send in troops, but he refused to do so.

A prominent figure in the history of labor struggles, Father Yorke, attended numerous gatherings of striking workers and pleaded with them to stand firm. Yorke castigated the employers with colorful terms, describing the Employers' Association in biting words:

"Their society is a little bit of a clique, made up mostly of people who have had the brains extracted from their skulls and dried tea leaves substituted. . . They go down to their little clubs and they get a little flushed with wine, and they are boasting of it—boasting and saying, 'Down with these union men!'"

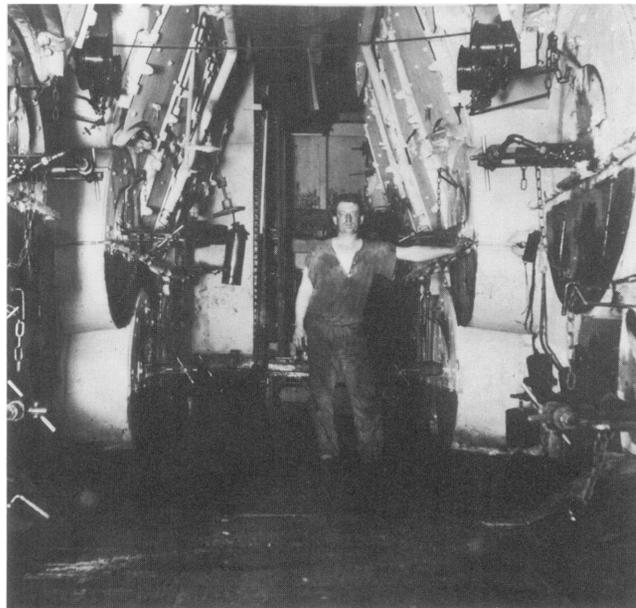
**T**he police ordered the arrest of every man known or suspected of being a union man on the waterfront after dark and, in two days, arrested one hundred forty men and charged them with drunkenness.

The strike lasted until October. Governor Gage was brought in to arbitrate the dispute and worked up a settlement agreement. Although the terms were not revealed, he consulted with the Teamsters and the City Front Federation and stated he was authorized by unions and employers to declare all strikes and lockouts ended. Although the employers temporarily won the right to avoid "recognizing" a union, workers were not blacklisted for union membership. In the eyes of the public and the unions, they had won a major victory. This was the birth of San Francisco's reputation as a "Union town."

From 1901 forward, there were skirmishes and short-term agreements with shipowners. Paralleling the pattern of today, in 1903 and 1904 negotiations were conducted jointly by the Sailors' Union, the Pacific Coast Marine Firemen's Union and the Cooks and Stewards Association. In 1903, sailors' wages were set at \$45 a month in inside ports and \$50 a month for outside ports. Firemen's wages were set at \$50, and wages in the stewards department ranged from \$70 to \$30, depending on the job classification.

There were other victories. In hindsight, they may be considered small but, in the conditions of the day, were important. In 1904, the *Coast Seamen's*

*Journal* reported that coffee would be given on all vessels and the "shipowners will furnish mess gear and cooks will keep the same clean." They also obtained an agreement with the Steam Schooner Managers' Association to eliminate crimps as a shipping source, and by 1905, had obtained an agreement that men would be shipped through the union halls on steam schooners.



*Fireroom of SS MANOA (circa 1900-1910).*  
(National Maritime Museum photo)

## The 1906 Strike

In 1905, employers reorganized to combat longshoremen and to uphold an open shop. This led to the strike of 1906 on steam schooners. The steam schooner agreement had expired in January, and the unions requested a wage increase and mess halls for crewmen as well as time for the crews to keep their quarters clean. This request was rejected, and in April the sailors, firemen and cooks voted to strike on May 1.

However, April 18, 1906 was the date of the San Francisco earthquake. In a remarkable act of restraint in view of the plentiful jobs ashore, maritime unions voted to maintain their present wages and hours but not to take advantage of the crisis.

On May 14, the seamen unions again requested a wage increase and this was rejected. In June, the Employer Association locked out longshoremen, sailors, firemen and cooks from Pacific Coast, Oregon and Coos Bay Steamship Lines. On June 7, the Oceanic Steamship Company terminated its agreement with the unions. The shipowners then went on a nationwide search for scabs, and the strike dragged on until November 1906.

The unions were victorious, and the unions' demanded scale of wages was accepted. Thereafter, there were a number of small skirmishes, short-term contracts and seesawing court decisions, but primarily the battles were in Congress and state legislatures.

# Marine Firemen's Union

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*V.J. Malone  
Led Marine  
Firemen's  
Union  
1938-57*

**V**incent J. Malone was President of the Marine Firemen's Union from 1938 to 1957. A colorful and eloquent speaker, Malone was known for his salty editorials in *The Marine Fireman*, the Union's newspaper, and also wrote his personal version of the history of the Union up to 1945, emphasizing events that occurred after he took over the helm.

Giving only passing attention to early days, Malone commenced his narration with the strike of 1921. He later told many members that he had written a complete history of the Marine Firemen's Union with three copies, as well as a commentary on the important labor, maritime and employer representatives. We know he contacted a possible publisher, but we do not know anyone who ever read his manuscript or where a copy can be found.

Vince Malone wrote in the language of a seaman, and the words he used echo the emotions and attitudes of seamen at the time. To capture the history of these years from the viewpoint of a participant, we are reproducing a shortened version of Malone's "history" of the Marine Firemen's Union using his own words and epithets. He is speaking of times when few citizens would patronize a store, restaurant or barbershop if a picket line was in front. These were days when a union could do no wrong. Indeed, during the 1934 strike, it could be truthfully said that unions ran the city for many years. Malone captures the flavor of the times.

## More Ups and Downs - 1921 to 1940

*by V.J. Malone*

During the year 1920, the seagoing maritime unions of unlicensed personnel were affiliated with the International Seamen's Union and working under satisfactory agreements for the time. Wages were at the highest they had ever reached, firemen receiving ninety dollars per month, oilers ninety-five, watertenders ninety-five, wipers seventy-five, deck engineers one hundred dollars, and the overtime rate was sixty cents per hour.

The working rules were very scant. For instance, the wipers were required to work two hours on Sundays and holidays at sea.

However, these wages were regarded as exorbitant by the steamship operators. At the time, Admiral Benson was in charge of the Shipping Board, and the companies lined up Admiral Benson and his Shipping Board for a tremendous effort to bust the unions wide open and smash down wages.

The first overt move was made in January 1921, when Admiral Benson addressed a letter to all the maritime unions requesting that they agree to the following proposals - First, a wage reduction of fifteen percent; Second, the abolition of all overtime; Third, the substitution of two watches on deck instead of three; Fourth, abolition of the right of union delegates to go on board ships; Fifth, men to be hired through the Sea Service Bureau, regardless of union affiliation.

Of course no union worthy of the name could agree to such proposals. Negotiations dragged on for four months, and finally the Shipping Board gave notice that the new reduced schedules would go into effect at midnight of April 30, 1921. The unions notified their crews not to sign on at the lower wages, and the strike, or lockout was on.

The strike was broken. Men whose sense of unionism wasn't too strong; men who did not realize that good strong unions were necessary to keep wages up; men who did not know what the score was; took the ships to sea at the reduced wages.

On the Atlantic Coast the strike was broken in short order. Ships moved freely, and the strike was finally called off in thirty days.

On the Pacific Coast the union members were of tougher mettle. Not a ship moved until strike breakers were imported from the East Coast and Gulf. There

were some tough beefs, and clashes between pickets and scabs. Finally the overpowering combination of Government and shipowners proved too much. The strike was called off on the Pacific Coast at the end of July 1921.

**T**he unions were broken on all coasts. The seamen, including the firemen, were cowed and dispirited. For thirteen long years the steamship companies were in the saddle, and in their triumph they used the whips and the spurs.

But the shipowners were not satisfied with the tremendous victory they had gained, and the first great pay slashes. They wanted the wages reduced again and again. Some immediately instituted the policy of substituting cheap Oriental labor for American seamen.

On January 5, 1922, the wage committee of the American Steamship Owners Association proposed to its members and to the Shipping Board that a new and even lower wage scale go into effect.

The new proposals were to cut the wages of firemen from seventy-five dollars per month to fifty dollars; wipers from sixty-five to forty; oilers from eighty to fifty-five; and deck engineers from eighty-five to seventy.

In other departments, stewards were to be cut from fifty-five dollars per month to thirty; able seamen from seventy-two to forty-seven; ordinary seamen from fifty-two to thirty-five; plus a thirty dollar per month slash for mates and engineers.

At this proposal, even the Shipping Board demurred, but the shipowners, with no union to oppose them, went ahead anyway.

In high spirits, some steamship companies went even further, and by nineteen twenty-four, the second policy was in full swing, the movement to replace American crews in the unlicensed deck, engine, and stewards departments by Orientals at subsistence wages.

**I**n January 1924, the following were typical examples of how three West Coast Companies had taken advantage of the crushing defeat of the maritime unions.

The **President Cleveland** and **President Taft**, of the Pacific Mail Line (Dollar) left San Francisco with Oriental crews in the unlicensed deck, engine, and stewards departments. The **President Cleveland** had 134 Chinese and 56 Filipinos.

Two Swayne and Hoyt freighters, the **Las Vegas** and **West Jappa**, told a similar story; the **Las Vegas** with twenty-two Filipinos, the **West Jappa** with nineteen.

Three freighters operated by Struthers and Barry showed similar figures, the **West Ivan** having nineteen Filipinos; the **Stockton** twenty-four, and the **West Cajoot** sixteen.

Rackets developed in connection with the Oriental crews hired aboard ships running to the Orient. The Seattle-Post Intelligencer of February 22, 1923 reported:

**"Chinese Bid High Stakes for Ship Job  
"Money offered for positions on Orient-Seattle vessels revealed in Fight Against Dope.**

*"High stakes offered for minor positions on American steamships plying between the Orient and Seattle are revealed in correspondence between Chinese yesterday by investigators uncovering the dope traffic here.*

*"A letter to the purser of one Trans-Pacific liner, believed to have been written in Hong Kong, and dated November 9, 1922, reads — 'I went up your office this afternoon for applying of job of interpreter.*

*" 'I beg to says that I will hand over one thousand dollars if you can fix up for me.*

*" 'I will come to see you immediately, when your ship return from Manila and I hope you will combine with the chief steward, and also I will do him good when the job succeeds. Yours truly, LO WING PO.'*

*"Another letter, written to the Master of one of the big passenger liners, was received by him at Manila, and was written on stationery of his ship. It bears the signature of H. Kong, and reads — 'Hoping that you are open to any proposition within reason and not entailing too much risk that will benefit your financially, I take the liberty of advancing my business aspirations.*

*" 'Representing the largest Chinese business club of Hong Kong, I would bid for the position of Number One Man in the Stewards Department. The sum to be paid you on your arrival in Hong Kong in case you accept this bid will be five hundred dollars gold. An arrangement will be made with the Chief Steward separately.*

*" 'In case you care to entertain this proposition, an answer as to whatever agreement you could arrive at would be very much appreciated not later than Sunday afternoon.*

*" 'We wish to know in order to have the money ready in case you desire.*

*" 'Besides the initial payment there will be more money at the end of the voyage.*

*" 'Perhaps this may not be feasible to make a change this trip, and I hope you will consider this enough to keep me in mind for the next trip as Number One Man.*

*" 'These trips can be very profitable to you if you are farsighted.'*

*"Reports in the possession of federal investigators show that the smuggling of opium, morphine, and cocaine is not confined exclusively to the Admiral Oriental Line. To*

*the contrary, it is generally admitted that narcotic drugs in varying quantities reach Seattle and other Puget Sound ports on practically all vessels which load cargoes in the Orient."*

So the deterioration of the American Merchant Marine set in. The cankerous, malignant cancer grew and grew. Wages cut, overtime eliminated, manning scales slashed, working hours lengthened; American crews replaced by Orientals; graft and dope running on the ships to the Orient; the feeding scale slashed with crooked port stewards grafting on the stores. One company steward boasted his efficiency was responsible for feeding men at the rate of thirty-five cents per man per day; living conditions slipped. The situation on board ship went from bad to worse.

Some lines on the West Coast were all right. Through the worst of the slashing and the cutting, the operators of the steam schooners kept right on feeding their men well, the Coos Bay Lumber Company had quarters on their ships that were the admiration of the Coast; Sudden and Christenson fed well, so did the Los Angeles Steamship Company. Some of the fishery companies, such as the Pacific American Fisheries and Alaska Packers Association, hired union crews and had decent conditions. Here and there other companies adopted the policy of feeding and sleeping men like human beings, but one and all, slashed wages.

But there was a new day dawning for the American seaman, and it commenced when Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected President of the United States.

# The Fighting Years

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**O**n March 4, 1933, Franklin Delano Roosevelt was inaugurated as President of the United States. Things were in a mess all over the country, and almost his first act was to declare a bank moratorium, closing every bank in the country, until a means could be worked out to check bank failures and halt the Depression.

On the ships and ashore hope flared when, in June 1933, the National Industry Recovery Act was passed by Congress. It called for the creation of codes of fair practice for each industry under governmental supervision and included the famous section seven (a) setting forth the right of the workers to organize.

In the shipping industry, the shipowners set forth proposed code conditions that were humdingers. The same old low wages and miserable conditions were to be perpetuated, according to them. The seamen grew restless. A change was long overdue, and they knew it.

Up to this time the membership rolls of the Firemen's Union had reflected the same sad state of organized labor throughout the Nation. By 1933 the

Union was bankrupt, and at its very lowest ebb.

There were only three hundred stout hearts with paid up membership books in the Union, a fact mainly attributable to the fact that a few steam schooner engineers insisted on hiring union men, and the Matson passenger vessels, the **Sonoma**, **Sierra**, and **Ventura**, running to Australia, carried 100% Firemen's Union crews because of the insistence of the Australian Waterside Workers Union. A few crews out of Seattle and San Francisco, running to Alaska. That was all.

To get out of the financial mess, a new charter was applied for, and in September 1933 the Union changed its name from the Marine Firemen, Oilers and Watertenders Union of the Pacific to the Pacific Coast Marine Firemen, Oilers, Watertenders and Wipers Association.

In 1934 the firemen were getting forty and forty-five dollars per month, with some ships paying even less; other vessels used Oriental crews at lower wages again; and bitter feeling among the firemen and all seamen grew.



*L to R, members George Kodis and Thomas Judson at the site of Mission and Steuart Sts. in San Francisco, where union men Howard Sperry and Nick Bordoise, gave their lives on "Bloody Thursday," July 5, 1934. Since then, this date has become an annual commemorative event attended by ILWU and maritime unions. (Note plaque at bottom left.)*

## The 1934 Strike

Coincident with the growing feeling of hostility and bitterness, long repressed, among all seamen, was an identical growth of thwarted hostility among the longshoremen. They, too, had been pushed around through the tough years. They, too, had stood out in the rain and sleet in the shapeup, and they had a bellyful.

Finally, the storm broke, in one of the most famous and at the same time one of the bitterest strikes in American labor history, the 1934 West Coast maritime strike.

The longshoremen went out on strike on May 9, 1934, and the Seamen were not officially called out until May 16, but, as ship after ship came in, the crews hit the beach and joined the longshoremen's picket lines.

Remember this, ship after ship came in, dozens of them without a union member in the entire crew, but, as they arrived, the crews walked off en masse and up to the Union Halls to sign up and take out books or pledge cards.

It was like spontaneous combustion. Everybody with any principle was fed up and disgusted, and oilers and firemen getting forty and forty-five dollars per month and less, figured they couldn't possibly lose anything. Everybody, that is, except a few miserable deluded scabs, who were induced to keep on working for the splendid rates of wages that amounted to about one dollar and a half per day, plus scanty room and board.

The shipowners hired amateur longshoremen to scab on the experienced longshoremen, recruiting them mainly from farming communities and from the campuses of certain colleges where deluded students were induced to assume the inglorious mantle of scabs.

The hiring of strike breakers touched off some of the bitterest riots the West Coast has ever seen. Strike breaking agencies imported thousands of dollars worth of tear gas, and that tear gas was used in clouds on the Embarcadero. More than a dozen union men lost their lives, but finally, on July 31, 1934, after the strike had been in effect for eighty-four days, a tentative settlement was reached through the auspices of a Board appointed by the Government—the National Longshoremen's Board. This Board was to arbitrate the longshoremen's case, and to supervise balloting among the seamen to determine the organization they desired to represent them in collective bargaining and arbitration.

In this election, the Marine Firemen's Union won the right to represent unlicensed engineerroom personnel; the Sailors' Union of the Pacific, the unlicensed deck department; and the Marine Cooks and Stewards Association, the Stewards Department.

It took the Board a long time to hand down its decision. The strike was over on July 31, 1934; yet it was April 10, 1935, before the award was finally announced. This long delay is one of the main reasons why West Coast seamen hated to arbitrate anything.

The Award wasn't wonderful in the eyes of the Union, but the shipowners screamed they faced immediate ruin, yet the payscale merely called for the lucky firemen to get sixty-two dollars and fifty cents per month; the lucky wipers fifty dollars per month; and the lucky oilers and watertenders seventy-two fifty per month. The overtime rate was sixty cents per hour, and very little of it.

Such were the first gains. An eighty-four day strike fought with intense bitterness to establish a wage scale of just sixty-two dollars and fifty cents per month!

The months after the announcement of the award were equally bitter months, for the firemen and the rest of the seamen learned by sad experience that you cannot teach an old dog new tricks.

Port captains, port engineers, ship captains, and chief engineers who long had run ships now had to deal with resurgent, militant union men, who knew what they wanted and were ready to fight to get it. They now wanted, above all things, decent conditions on the ships.



*Typical scene on San Francisco Embarcadero as maritime strikers mass near pier entrance in 1934 waterfront strike.*



*Strikers are tear-gassed by police near San Francisco Embarcadero on July 5, 1934. Two strikers were killed that day, which became "Bloody Thursday."*



*Police subdue striker during 1934 waterfront strike altercation near San Francisco Embarcadero.*

## **The Fight for Conditions**

Award or no award, ship after ship was tied up because recalcitrant port captains refused to do anything about vessels that were loaded with bed-bugs; again and again ships remained immovable at the dock because some grafting port steward had failed to realize a new day had dawned and that decent first grade stores, meat, vegetables and milk had to be provided; fresh milk, chicken, and ice cream appeared on the messtables of freighters; ships were equipped with fans and decent lockers; the thin straw and excelsior mattresses — the Donkey

Breakfasts went overboard; through the portholes went the miserable cracked enamel mugs and plates that were the standard equipment on vessels prior to 1934, and in their place appeared regular crockeryware; coffee dregs disappeared and the crews got regular first grade coffee; abolished was the stewards practice of mixing the evaporated milk with water; quarters were rebuilt and cleaned out; clean white linen was provided regularly instead of blue sheets intermittently.

And as they came in, the scabs who evermore were to carry in their souls the knowledge they had betrayed their brothers, for a miserable forty dollars a month, were turned out in the streets and back to the farms, accompanied by the hoots, the jeers, the derision, the contempt of the longshoremen, the firemen and the sailors, and here and there, plenty of good solid kicks and blows. The shipowners even, were ashamed of them and wanted them no more.

The successful conclusion of the 1934 strike caused a striking upswing in the affairs of the Marine Firemen's Union. From a membership of three hundred loyal souls in 1933, it had expanded to more than four thousand members and pledge cards by the end of 1934.

## The 1936 Strike

The years following the 1934 strike saw an unsuccessful tanker strike in 1935, and, after two years of restive resentment, members of the Firemen's Union again hit the bricks to improve their working conditions. This time, together with the rest of the West Coast unions banded together in the Maritime Federation of the Pacific, the picket lines were out for ninety-eight days.

Even though this strike lasted longer than the 1934 strike, it was a lullaby in comparison. The shipowners had learned a terrible lesson and this time did not try to hire strikebreakers. They merely sat tight, and tried to have time, and starvation, and a whipped up public opinion work for them. These tactics failed too, and we emerged from the strike in February 1937, with the wages raised ten dollars and the overtime ten cents, many improvements in the working conditions, and hiring through the Union Hall.

The going was tough. The two strikes had lasted a total of one hundred and eighty-two days, and even after that the wages of the firemen on offshore ships were only seventy-two dollars and fifty cents per month.

Naturally, that wasn't satisfactory, either, and the work of improving the agreements, the wages, and the working conditions went on with renewed vigor.

**P**rior to 1938, there was not one American flag freighter that carried an electric icebox or Frigidaire for use of the unlicensed crew. The efforts of the crew of the McCormick Line **West Cactus** were responsible for the first such equipment being placed aboard ship for the benefit of the crew. It was not long thereafter, because of negotiations between the Firemen's Union and the McCormick Steamship Company, that all McCormick ships in the offshore and intercoastal trades were equipped with them. With that victory, negotiations with the American-Hawaiian Steamship Company were successful, and that company equipped its forty ships with eighty

brand new electric refrigerators, one each for the crew's mess and the officer's mess. Later on, the Firemen's Union inserted in its agreements that all such vessels should have electric refrigerators for the crew's messroom, setting the standard for the Merchant Marine.

**E**quitable working rules covering every rating of the unlicensed engine room personnel were negotiated, and, in 1939, embodied in the main agreement with the shipowners. In the agreement negotiated in 1939, more than forty separate improvements were noted.

The wages were steadily increased. On the steam schooners it took two strikes to do it, one of a short nine day duration, one of sixty days.

On offshore vessels, on April 30, 1940, wages were raised by another ten dollars. Firemen now were up to eighty-two dollars and fifty cents.

Then, on February 10, 1941, another wage raise was negotiated, this time amounting to seven dollars and fifty cents. Firemen raised to ninety dollars per month; oilers one hundred; wipers seventy-seven fifty.

By October 1, 1941, negotiated wages were raised: firemen, one hundred dollars per month; oilers, one hundred and ten; and wipers, eighty-seven fifty.

## Union Hiring Hall

The Union Hiring Hall was one of the Union's basic demands, and the long days and dreary nights on the picket lines in November, December, and January were well worth it in the minds of all the members. For they had bitterness and indignation graven deeply in their hearts because of the years of indignities heaped on seamen by unscrupulous company superintendents and shipping masters.

Prior to the 1936 strike, firemen hunted for jobs on the docks and the ships and stood around in the rain and snow when a ship came in, waiting for an opportunity to ship. When a chance finally did come, some shipping master crooked his finger with a "Hey, You!" Men stood around and saw the guys with pull and drag get the jobs. Guys from college making a trip for fun and getting on a ship because they knew the port captain or the chief engineer or a big stockholder in the company. Plenty of shoe leather was worn out prowling from ship to ship and dock to dock.

**T**he cards were stacked. Favoritism was rife! The guy that was the lackey got first preference. Seamen got shoved around in an atmosphere of uplifted noses and superiority complexes, for they were "the crew." Fo'c's'le hands. Trash! Tripe! Scum of the universe, and devoid of all humane consideration!

Small wonder the oldtimers battled so fiercely and so determinedly for the Union Hiring Hall, and,

when they had gained their objective, set out to make shipping through the Hall as fair, honest, and as decent as possible.

A committee of experienced firemen was elected from the meeting by the members, with the idea of working out a set of shipping rules that would be fair and just to all members. A simple system, with simple rules.

Several fundamentals were established. One was that, if a vacancy occurred aboard a ship, and a book member was on board but in a lower capacity, but had the necessary qualifications and experience to handle the job, he had the right to step up.

The second fundamental was that, when the final vacancy or vacancies after the necessary

promotions had been made, all job replacements on ships under our agreement should be called from the hall.

The third fundamental was that all jobs had to be announced and men shipped at regular intervals. Every job had to be called out, and there was to be no such thing as back door shipping, side door shipping, or favoritism. Every man in the union was to expect just one thing, a fair and honest deal in his chances for the job.

The rotary system was adopted. Not a compulsory rotary system in which men at the head of the list were forced to ship on any job that came along, but a satisfactory selective rotary system in which men at the top of the list had the opportunity to accept or reject the particular job offered.

## Seamen and the Law

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**T**he ups and downs of union organization were paralleled by legislative and court battles. Laws in the states of California, Oregon and Washington against desertion or harboring deserters were in effect, and the seamen waged a continuing battle.

In 1872, the Shipping Commissioner's Act became law establishing Shipping Commissioners to superintend all shipping agreements, and defining in great detail the signing on and discharge of seamen, with penalties for desertion. Of course, this law was easily evaded by crimps.

In 1874, the law was amended at the request of shipowners to exempt seamen in coastal and Great Lakes traffic because of the paperwork involved. This led to confusion but a majority of federal courts held that the amendment of 1874 eliminated the laws against desertion in coastal trade. This gave coastal unions the weapon to walk off ships in ports in coastal traffic. If men walked off a ship and the matter went to a federal court, the federal court would uphold the seamen's right to desert. On the other hand, state courts were still enforcing their state laws against desertion.

In 1890, the shipowners were successful in persuading Congress to adopt an additional law that seamen in coastal trade who were signed on before a Shipping Commissioner were subject to the desertion penalties under the act of 1872. Using this law, shipowners insisted that seamen in coastal trade sign on before a Shipping Commissioner.

Seamen counterattacked. In 1894 a San Francisco congressman, James Maguire, introduced a

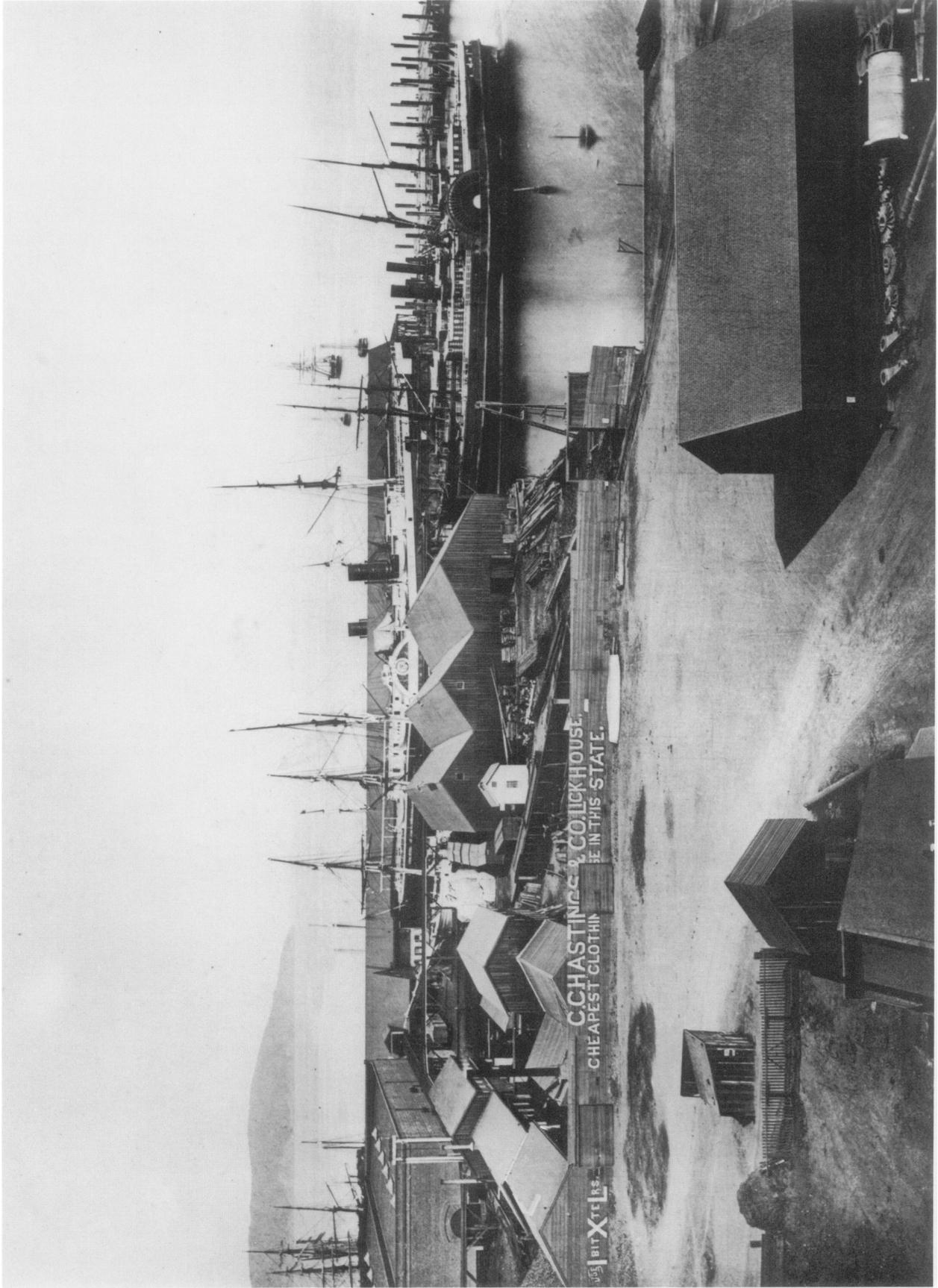
number of bills on behalf of seamen. One of the bills dealt with the problem of desertion and advances to crimps. This bill was finally adopted in 1895. In effect, it repealed the act of 1890, and abolished imprisonment for desertion in coastal trade and also exempted seamen's clothing from impounding by crimps.

This broke the power of the crimps in coastal trade.

The seamen pressed on, and in 1897 a further law was passed which made some improvement in crew spaces; but the bill died.

**T**he U.S. Supreme Court watered down the Maguire Act by holding that seamen could not desert in a coastal port if the vessel was scheduled to continue on to a foreign port. The court also held that U.S. Constitutional provisions against involuntary servitude were not intended to apply to seamen who had executed a contract for the duration of the voyage.

The seamen then introduced a further bill jointly sponsored by Senator White of California and Congressman Maguire which contained a number of proposed changes in pre-existing laws. The final compromise bill abolished imprisonment for desertion on American vessels in any port in the U.S. and reduced the penalty from three months to one month's imprisonment for desertion in a foreign port at the discretion of the court. It did permit one month's wages as an allotment to crimps in foreign



*Port of San Francisco Pacific Mail dock in 1871. Pacific Mail was a predecessor of American President Lines.*

(American President Lines Archives)



Honor roll, headed by President Woodrow Wilson, of Congressmen and unionists chiefly responsible for Seamen's Act of 1915. (Marine Firemen's Union Archives)

trade and made a few other changes, including the right of seamen on vessels to receive half the wages due them at any port when discharging or loading cargo unless the seamen had waived the right by contract.

Seamen continued battles in Congress and in state legislatures. In 1897, they were successful in persuading the state of California to repeal the fugitive sailor law; but the law against harboring a deserting seaman was not repealed until 1911. The fugitive sailor laws were repealed in the state of Washington in 1909, but the toughest battle was in Oregon where crimps were legalized and licensed by the state.

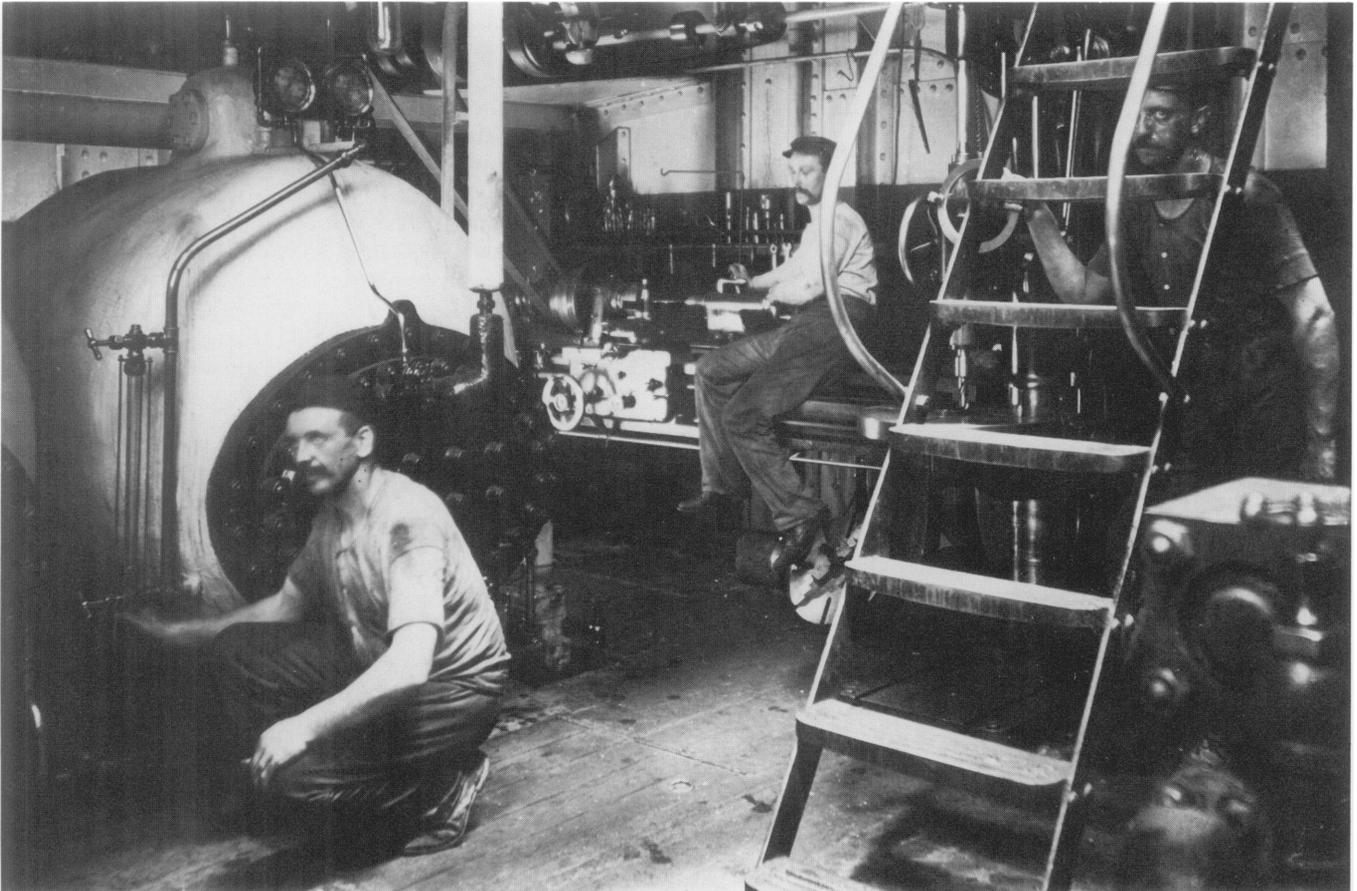
**D**uring all of these years, the shipowners continued efforts to reinstate legislation in Congress to provide criminal penalties for desertion but were unsuccessful. The only positive Congressional enactment helping seamen was tacked on to a bill granting subsidy payments to specified Merchant Marine activities. This subsidy bill included provisions requiring ships to carry a certain percentage of seamen who had enlisted in the naval reserve. The tacked-on provision increased the penalty against crimps who held seamen's clothing by making it a criminal offense punishable by up to six months' imprisonment and a \$500 fine.

During all of this period, seamen fought bitterly against bills providing subsidy for U.S. vessels and were particularly wrathful at Congressional grants of subsidies to ships carrying foreign crews.

**T**he most significant development was the ultimate passage of the Seamen's Act in 1915. The seamen enlisted the aid of "Fighting Bob" La Follette. So vigorous were his efforts that the bill was also known as the La Follette Act. A book could be written on the intrigues, moves and countermoves that led to the passage of this Act. International interests were involved and, in the course of final passage, Senator La Follette reported on the array of opponents and the awesome power that had lined up against seamen.

*"The great shipping combinations, alarmed by the unexpected passage of this bill through the Senate are rushing their trained lobby agents to Washington to block it in the House of Representatives. Back of them are the biggest aggregations of capital on earth. Their influence cannot be overestimated.*

*"Percy C. Neil is here. He represents the International Mercantile Marine Company, and the Morgan Syndicate controlling the American Line, the White Star Line, the Red*



*Engine Room, S.S. Californian, (circa 1900-1910)*

*Star Line, the Leland Line, and the Atlantic Transport Line. E.P. Schwerin, vice president and manager of the Pacific Mail Steamship Co., controlled by the Harriman Railroad System, is also here. And Harvey D. Goulder is on the ground. He is counsel for the Lake Carriers' Association, the dominant factor of which is the Pittsburg Steamship Company, the maritime end of the United States Steel Corporation. Others are coming. The onset on the House will be a thing, the like of which has not been witnessed in years."*

During these legislative battles and in the final passage, Paddy Flynn, head of the Marine Firemen's Union, was chairman of the legislative committee of the International Seamen's Union and stood shoulder to shoulder with Andy Furuseh, the Abraham Lincoln of seamen. Flynn testified to the life of marine firemen on board ship. He had earlier introduced a resolution to other unions affiliated with the International Seamen's Union, calling for a three shift watch in the fireroom four hours on and eight hours off—in effect, the eight-hour day.



*Andrew Furuseh  
"Abraham Lincoln  
of Seamen"*



*Patrick Flynn  
a Founding  
Father of  
Marine  
Firemen's  
Union*

One of the final provisions of the Seamen's Act was the adoption of Flynn's proposal of the three-watch system in the fireroom at sea, although the law retained the two-watch system for sailors.

The Seamen's Act of 1915 struck a death blow at crimps by prohibiting an allotment to "original creditors" not only in coastal trade but on American vessels in foreign trade or *foreign vessels in American ports*. The law endeavored to raise the standards and wages on foreign vessels to overcome any wage differential by requiring foreign vessels to bring their articles for inspection prior to clearance and prohibiting any violation of the law against advances to original creditors. It also gave the foreign seamen the right to quit in American ports, *notwithstanding contrary treaties*. This was in response to Furuseh's position that if foreign seamen could quit in American ports the effect would be to raise wages for foreign seamen, because wages are primarily based upon the wages of the port from which a seaman shipped.

There were many other important provisions including substantial improvements in crew quarters and requirements to hold the rating of able seaman which struck at the ability of shipowners to use landlubbers. At least 75 percent of the crew was required to be able to understand the orders of officers. This was a blow against employment of foreign seamen on U.S. vessels—particularly the practice of hiring crews from Far Eastern ports.

The time was propitious for the passage of the Seamen's Act. Public attention had been focused upon the need for greater safety at sea because of the sinking of the Titanic in 1912 and other ship disasters. A large number of the Act's provisions were adopted to increase safety at sea—although not all of the provisions sought by seamen on this subject were incorporated.

The seamen were also assisted by the clouds of war in Europe. Farsighted legislators anticipated the need for a greatly expanded Merchant Marine. Capitalizing on this concern, seamen argued that U.S. workers would not be enticed into service in the Merchant Marine unless conditions were substantially improved.

The Seamen's Act of 1915 was indeed a gigantic victory for American seamen. As Andrew Furuseh stated, "We are finally free men," referring to the abolition of penalties or imprisonment for desertion.



*"Hong Kong" Mary in her later years, a good friend of the West Coast seamen.*

**T**he history of the Marine Firemen's Union in the 1930's would not be complete without a summary of two criminal prosecutions that captured the attention of the Press, Unions and their sympathizers in 1935 and 1936.

The two cases are commonly known as "The Modesto Boys" and "The King, Ramsay and Conner Case."

## The Modesto Boys

In the aftermath of the 1934 strike, the seamen's unions decided to tackle the oil transportation portion of the maritime fleet and a strike against the Standard Oil tankers commenced. A joint strike committee was formed and Standard Oil retaliated by assisting an independent tanker union. As the strike dragged on, the California Federation of Labor issued a circular that "War has been declared on organized labor by Standard Oil Company," and called upon all organized labor to boycott all Standard Oil products and strenuous efforts were made to spread the boycott throughout the State.

Late in the evening of April 20, 1935, eleven men were taken at gunpoint from two automobiles outside the town of Patterson, California. The eleven were taking part in the tanker strike then going on in all West Coast ports.

**T**he men with the guns were private detectives employed as guards by the Standard Oil Company. A short time later, the Sheriff of Stanislaus County and his Undersheriff arrived, and a search of the cars was ordered. The search was made by a Standard Oil guard and a private detective working under the direction of Standard Oil agents. The guards claimed to have found in one of the cars, six sticks of dynamite, some lengths of fuse and detonating caps, and two blackjacks. The Union men were placed

under arrest and taken to the County jail. Two of the men taken from the cars, it was later determined, were members of the joint tankers strike committee — one of whom was also secretly serving as a private detective in the employment of Standard Oil Company, and another was making regular reports to the San Francisco Police Department during the course of the strike. The men were indicted on the theory that two of the men had stolen dynamite from a quarry and 10 days later had met in San Francisco, and planned to go to Patterson, California, to clean out a bunch of tanker strike breakers then living in the Del Puerto Hotel. According to the prosecution, dynamite was split between the two automobiles with the intent of blowing up the Del Puerto Hotel and also blowing up several Standard Oil stations on their way back to San Francisco. The defendants claimed the trip was only for the purpose of making observations, getting information on the strike breakers and reporting back to the joint tanker strike committee. They denied they had carried any dynamite, fuses and blackjacks, and denied anything had been said by any of them to use dynamite to blow up the hotel or any gas stations. They contended that if any dynamite was found, it had been planted by the Standard Oil guards and private detectives. The case was brought to trial in July, 1935 and, in addition to the regular district attorney, a special prosecutor employed by either Standard Oil Company or other major oil companies was really in active charge of the prosecution.

**T**he first count was for conspiracy to dynamite the Del Puerto Hotel and oil and gas stations. The second count was for conspiracy to assault with deadly weapons certain persons of the Standard Oil Company. The third count charged that the defendants did recklessly and maliciously have in their possession on a public highway a certain amount



**The Eight  
Modesto  
Frame-up  
Victims**

*Rear Row,  
Standing, Left to Right  
John Rodgers,  
John Burrows,  
Henry Silva,  
Victor Johnson,  
Robert Fitzgerald,  
John Sousa.  
Seated  
Patsy Ciambrelli,  
Reuel Stanfield.*

of dynamite. The fourth count charged that the defendants did unlawfully, knowingly, and maliciously have in their possession a quantity of dynamite, and the fifth count charged the defendants with unlawfully, maliciously and feloniously having in their possession two blackjacks.

The District Attorney dismissed the fourth count of the indictment before the trial commenced in Modesto, the county seat. The jury, in spite of the general atmosphere in Stanislaus County against the defendants, brought in a verdict of not guilty on the first, second and fifth counts of the indictment. The only count that was sustained was the charge of reckless and malicious possession on a public highway of a certain amount of dynamite. The defendants were sentenced from six months to five years in prison. The jury obviously did not accept any of the testimony of the "stool pigeons" who were privately serving as spies for the Standard Oil Company, nor did they believe that the defendants had any intent to blow up the Hotel or any gas stations, but apparently did believe the testimony that dynamite and fuses were in the vehicles. The men were sentenced to prison for terms up to five years and the verdict was upheld on appeal.

**E**motions ran high in the labor movement after the verdict was announced, and a Joint Marine Modesto Committee was formed to appeal the decision, particularly on the ground that the conviction violated a section of the Penal Code which had been repealed earlier by the State Legislature. Four of the men so charged were members of the Marine Firemen's Union and this earlier publicity obviously lingered in the minds of many when, a year later, the famous King, Ramsay, Conner-case erupted.

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## The King, Ramsay, Conner Case

**O**ne of the most famous labor cases in the West was the King, Ramsay, Conner case. King was the head of the Marine Firemen's Union. Ramsay was an organizer and Conner was the engine room delegate aboard the SS Point Lobos, berthed at Alameda.

On March 22, 1936, George Alberts, Chief Engineer on the SS Point Lobos, was found stabbed to death in his cabin.

On August 27, 1936, George Wallace, an MFOW member, was arrested in Brownsville, Texas. On the same day, Earl King and Ernest Ramsay were arrested in San Francisco, and Frank Conner was arrested a few days later in Seattle.

The prosecution did not contend that either King or Ramsay had been on the Point Lobos at the time of

the murder. The prosecution's case rested almost entirely on the testimony of Wallace. Wallace testified on the day before the murder Earl King had asked him to "go on a job" and King gave Ramsay some money for expenses. Wallace also contended Ramsay, a fireman named Sakovitz, and an unidentified seaman went across the bay to "beat up" Alberts. They were unable to meet him, but on the following day Wallace, Sakovitz and the unidentified seaman again went across the bay, and Conner, the ship delegate, was called ashore. Conner, Wallace, Sakovitz and the seaman had a conference and then all went aboard the ship. A few moments later Sakovitz stood at the engineer's door, Conner raised his arm "as a signal," and Sakovitz entered the engineer's cabin and committed the murder. Sakovitz and the unidentified seaman were never apprehended. There are conflicting opinions whether Sakovitz ever existed. Many years later Ramsay received a report that Sakovitz left the country through Mexico, went to Africa and joined the Foreign Legion. Later, during World War II the Foreign Legion was dissolved, and Sakovitz joined American forces. On enlisting, his fingerprints were taken and his identity discovered. While he was being returned under arrest to the United States, he jumped overboard and drowned or disappeared.

In any event, the thrust of Wallace's statement had two prongs. First, he implied that whatever happened to Alberts started with Earl King's request "to go on a job." Second, Wallace's position was that he wasn't even in the room when Alberts was killed.

**T**he case attracted state-wide interest. Evidence was obtained that an ex-convict who had been convicted of a series of burglaries and lived under various names, such as Scott, Kent, or Margolis, had earlier attended a meeting with a captain of the San Francisco Police Department, Harper Knowles of the American Legion, and two men representing an employer association. This meeting conversation, on April 11, 1936, was taped. The discussion apparently centered on Scott's ability to obtain information about the murder and concurrent efforts to establish that Harry Bridges was a Communist and largely consisted of haggling over money. Scott wanted \$350 to "cooperate." Apparently Scott had sent a letter to Colonel Sanborn, an individual who published an ultra right anti-labor newspaper named "The American Citizen," and later directed resistance by employers in the famous Salinas lettuce strike of 1937. During the course of the meeting, Sanborn referred to a letter that had been sent by Scott indicating that he had information of value and inquired whether the information would be available. Scott responded in this conversation which took place four months before King was arrested, in the following words: "That's the reason I got in touch with you. Well, now, we have the question of Bridges and the frame-up on King. That is far more complex than appears on the surface."



*MFOW officials during court proceedings: (l to r) Ernest Ramsay, San Francisco business agent; Frank J. Conner, vessel delegate; Earl King, then MFOW President.*

(Bancroft Library, Univ. of Calif. Berkeley)

**A**s the case began to evolve in the press, many historic figures became involved. J. Robert Oppenheimer, then at the University of California, resigned from the American Civil Liberties Union because it decided not to participate in the case. The prosecuting attorney was Earl Warren, and the publicity derived in the case led him to election victory as Attorney General of the State of California, and on the march to Governor and thereafter, Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court. Mysterious events unfolded. Several members of the Marine Firemen's Union tried to get in touch with Wallace after his arrest, but Wallace did not want to talk to them. Wallace rejected any assistance to provide a legal defense and had chosen to be represented by Public Defender Willard Shea. Two men persisted in their efforts to talk to him and finally got to see him, but only after Shea had gotten permission from District Attorney Warren, although

Shea in his status as defense attorney had independent power to authorize their visit.

**O**ther characters appeared on the scene. Willard William Pritchard, a young seaman, testified on the morning of the murder that Wallace had approached him in San Francisco and told him "there is an engineer on the Point Lobos I have been looking for for a long time. I'm going to work him over, but I need some help."

The prosecution introduced a confession signed by Frank Conner, which he later repudiated when the defense proved that he had been handcuffed to a chair and put through a third degree. For almost 60 hours he was kept without sleep, and the questioning continued until the interrogators got "a confession." He was then rushed to a hospital and the physicians found he was in bad shape, with a high temperature and "severe nervous tremor." On arriving at the

hospital, Conner's first act was to repudiate the "confession," and he spent a week in the hospital recovering from the ordeal. One of the prosecution's witnesses was Albert Murphy, the number two man in the officialdom of the Marine Firemen. It was Murphy who had contacted Warren and implicated King.

**M**urphy testified that on the day before the murder he had given \$30 to Ramsay on King's instructions "for an expedition across the bay" and that he had recorded the transaction in the Union ledger under "patrolmen's expenses." The defense brought the very ledger into court, and every entry was in Murphy's handwriting. There was no entry indicating any payment to Ramsay. In further cross-examination Murphy reluctantly admitted that he and one Guidera, an ex-convict and a member of the crew of the SS Point Lobos who had quit his job two days before the murder, had worked with the District Attorney by taking a hotel room and allowing the District Attorney to install a dictaphone. They invited King to the room and they enticed him to say something that might sound incriminating, but King didn't have anything incriminating to say. Murphy also admitted that he also was "arrested" along with King and placed in the same cell as Ramsay, which had been wired for sound, and had tried to get Ramsay to say something, but Ramsay also had nothing incriminating to divulge.

A number of witnesses testified to refute Wallace's testimony. For example, Wallace testified that Conner had gone ashore just before the murder to confer with him, Sakovitz and the unidentified sailor, and had given the actual signal that started the murder knife into the Chief Engineer's body. However, the witnesses for the prosecution, the Second and Third Mates of the Point Lobos, testified that on the day of the killing, and all during the period Wallace stated Conner was supposed to have come ashore, they sat on the gangplank and saw no one enter or leave the ship. Another prosecution witness was Roscoe Slade who discovered the body of the slain engineer. After the murder Slade shipped on the SS Katrina Luckenbach, and the third mate and the radio operator testified that he told them during the voyage and before the trial that a "representative of high financial interests — San Francisco shipowners" — offered to "take care of him." If he "colored" his testimony, he would receive a "10 year engineering contract in South America." Slade also corroborated the defense contention of Wallace's testimony to the effect that Conner stood in the passageway and raised his arm "as a signal" that the coast was clear — the sign that it was time for Sakovitz to enter the engineer's cabin—did not occur. Slade testified that he saw the Chief Engineer not more than three or four minutes before he was killed, and that on going below, he found Conner working on the steering engine. This would have made it impossible for Conner to have been where Wallace

said he was because Slade would have had to squeeze past him to get to the engine room. Both Slade and Captain Odeen positively testified that a few moments before the crime was committed, they saw Conner go to the forward deck and did not return until after the killing. From the position he was placed by Slade and Odeen, Conner could not possibly have given a signal for the murder.

**R**amsay was implicated solely by the testimony of Wallace. Suspicion was also cast on Ramsay because he had visited the ship the day before the murder and had talked to Chief Engineer Alberts. This was his job as a patrolman for the Firemen's Union and it was his duty to settle overtime disputes. However, Ramsay brought into court the very sheet of paper on which overtime pay items were tabulated. Even prosecuting witness, Showell, witnessed the entire discussion between Alberts and Ramsay and stated the discussion was friendly and, also, the disputes were settled in an agreeable fashion. Ramsay denied he received any money from King, denied he had paid money out to anyone and the "evidence" by which Earl Warren sought to tie him to the killing was scanty.

At the trial 11 of the 12 jurors were disturbed by the facts brought out in cross-examination, that Murphy and Wallace had lied, that many of the prosecution witnesses were in the pay of shipowners through the trial, and that certain evidence having a strong bearing on the case had been concealed by Earl Warren.

In 1935 a law had been passed by the State Legislature permitting a judge to comment upon the evidence. The judge presiding at the trial was a very close friend of Earl Warren. He had been appointed to the bench on Warren's recommendation but, at the time of the trial, he refused to disqualify himself. To add to the problem facing the defense, the jury panel was picked from lists supplied by three banks, specific business houses and the various industrial plants. The jury finally consisted of six elderly business men, all retired, and six middle-aged women.

**A**lthough the jury was not predisposed to labor, the judge made full use of his right to comment on the evidence. According to the San Francisco Examiner, he stated in effect that the prosecution had established that the responsibility for Alberts' murder rested on Earl King, Ramsay, Conner and Frank J. Wallace. There were other irregularities. One of the jurors was interrogated with respect to her acquaintance with the trial participants, including the District Attorney's assistant in presenting the case. She stated, under oath, that she hardly knew Warren's assistant, Mr. Wehr. However, within four months after King, Ramsay and Conner were convicted, she began making a series of loans to Wehr, and over a period of two years had loaned him \$15,376, all without any security.

On January 5, 1937 King, Ramsay and Conner were found guilty of murder in the second degree. They were sentenced to San Quentin. If the case were tried today, the third degree "confession" of Conner would have been thrown out, the judge would not have been permitted to comment upon the evidence, and King and Ramsay could have obtained separate trials instead of being required to stand trial with Wallace in order to paint them with the same brush. The defendants would have been entitled to a preemptory challenge after Judge Odeen refused to disqualify himself from the trial.

In view of many who were closely involved in investigating the case, there was a belief that the cases against King and Ramsay were brought to get rid of officials of the Marine Firemen's Union because of the balance of power held by the Marine Firemen in the then conflicts between the seagoing unions. The cooks were strong advocates of the Maritime Federation which later led the cooks into the CIO. The Sailors' Union of the Pacific was opposed to the Maritime Federation. The Marine Firemen held the balance of power and King was close to Harry Bridges.

**T**here were later many overtures to King and Ramsay during Bridges' deportation trial with suggestions that, if they could supply evidence that Bridges was a Communist, a parole would be granted. This led to one of the most dramatic hearings in the history of labor. It occurred at San Quentin Prison and James Landis, later Dean of Harvard Law School, was presiding to determine whether Bridges should be deported to Australia as a Communist. King was brought into the hearing room and asked the critical question, whether he had any knowledge that Bridges was a Communist. People in the audience held their breath and Landis focused King with a penetrating stare.

King broke down with the statement, *"Well, it's no fun being here. I would like to be out on the bricks again. Doyle (an important investigator for the prosecution of the Bridges deportation proceedings), gave me that chance but, you see, I couldn't do what I wanted. I'm about 45 years of age. I have been to a lot of places and done pretty near everything I have wanted to do. I had a good time. I have good friends. I have a record of 24 years in the labor movement. Nobody is going to spoil it. Nobody is going to make me perjure myself. I haven't much left, just my self respect and nobody is going to take that away from me."* At this point there were tears in King's eyes, and newspaper reporters and Dean Landis were all touched by the emotion and the sincerity of King's response.

**W**ho did kill the Chief Engineer? A number of those who followed all the ways and byways of the King, Conner, Ramsay proceedings point the finger at Wallace, with some believing that Sakovitz was the key person. None believe that either King or Ramsay should have been charged or involved in the criminal procedures. As a passing note, the case continued to have ripples in the lives of the participants and those caught up in the mainstream of events surrounding the trial. Max Radin, a world renowned legal scholar and professor at the University of California analyzed the proceedings and wrote a letter to the court presenting his views. Later, when Earl Warren became Attorney General of the State of California this letter played prominently in his successful efforts to block Radin's nomination to the Supreme Court of the State. Governor Olson discussed this development and asked Radin to name the man he would desire to have appointed in his place. Radin named Roger Traynor who served on the Supreme Court for many years and became one of the most respected jurists in the nation. Years later, the resignation of physicist Robert Oppenheimer from the ACLU because of the organization's decision not to become involved in the King, Ramsay, Conner case was part of the government's loyalty investigation and subsequent decision to bar him from access to secret information on the ongoing production of the hydrogen atomic bomb. King and Ramsay, and later Conner, were pardoned by Governor Olson, but in a curious twist of events, proceedings were then brought to deport Ramsay to Canada. The deportation proceedings could only be blocked by personal intercession of then-Governor Earl Warren, the man who had prosecuted the case. Responding to overtures by then SUP President Harry Lundeberg, one of the last acts of Earl Warren was to pardon Ramsay the day before he left the Governor's office to take up his duties as Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court.

## **What happened to King, Ramsay and Conner**

When King left prison he took a small job with the ILWU, then went to sea, studied and became an engineer. He moved to New York, was later elected President of its large branch of the Marine Engineers' Beneficial Association, and played an important role in the formulation of policies and decisions of MEBA until his death. Ramsay returned to the Marine Firemen's Union and served as a port agent for the Union, primarily in New York, until his retirement. Conner suffered greatly in prison and became mentally unstable. Soon after he left prison, he was confined to a mental institution.

# The War Years

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**L**ong before Pearl Harbor, the Marine Firemen anticipated the coming showdown and World War II. Union leaders and members knew that merchant mariners would be subject to war action at sea, without the benefits accorded by the government to the military. Much time was spent laying the groundwork for war bonuses.

The first clash arose from a decision of bulk carriers to load high test gasoline and lubricating oil for Italian Somaliland. This was a staging area for Mussolini's war against Ethiopia. The MFOW had no sympathy for the Fascists and refused to sign on unless a bonus of \$250 was paid plus life insurance plus return wages and transportation to the U.S. in the event the ship was lost. Bulk carriers balked at the request, moved the ship to an outer harbor in Los Angeles and recruited a scab crew.

A war was raging in China between Japan and the forces of Chiang Kai-Shek. Japan had captured Peiping, Tientsin, Nanking, Shanghai and the port of Amoy. The war in Spain between Loyalists and the Franco forces was in full swing in 1938. Bulk carriers had contracted to help the Loyalists, and West Coast union crews sailed under a war bonus agreement which was unprecedented in its provisions for the time and place.

In an experience with enemy attacks, the S/S WISCONSIN was in Barcelona when the port was bombed, and many ships were sailing to Tsingtao and Dairen on the China coast. On each of these voyages, West Coast unions were receiving war bonuses.

In Europe, the S/S MCCORMICK was in port in Bergen when the Nazis invaded Norway. In anticipation of events, the ship was operating under a special bonus negotiated by West Coast unions. They had seen with their own eyes the bombing of Bergen and the bombing of Barcelona and recognized the dangers that would be facing seamen in the years ahead.

In 1939, President Roosevelt signed the Neutrality Act, barring American vessels from European waters and from carrying war supplies to belligerent powers. West Coast unions obtained ship bonuses as early as 1939 for ships going to Australia and running to the Orient. The bonus provisions had an escalator clause providing for their immediate negotiation if the United States entered the war.

## Pearl Harbor

The first vessel to go was the LAHAINA, hit five days after Pearl Harbor near Honolulu. Ten days after Pearl Harbor, another Matson ship, the MANINI, was

hit. Japan captured the PRESIDENT HARRISON near the China coast, and the ADMIRAL Y.S. WILLIAMS owned by the Pacific Lighterage Company in Hong Kong. In December 1941, the Hog Islander CAPILLO, an American Mail Line ship, was captured by the Japanese, and the crew was interned when the Japanese captured the Philippines.

**O**n New Year's Day 1942, the Japanese captured Matson's MALAMA, and on the following day, bombed and sank APL's S/S RUTH ALEXANDER in the Macassar Straits. In January 1942, the S/S FLORENCE LUCKENBACH was torpedoed in the Indian Ocean. By February, German submarines were scattered throughout the Caribbean, and the S/S WEST IVIS sank with a full crew of oldtimers of the MFOW. Later in February, Matson's MAUNA LOA was bombed at Port Darwin and completely gutted.

Further Caribbean losses continued. Matson's S/S LIHUE was lost in the Caribbean but fought back and sank the submarine that attacked her. One of the shells from the ship, silver plated and inscribed with the names of the gun crew and engine room crew, was given as a trophy to the Union.

May and June 1942 were the worst months for MFOW ships. The S/S JOHN ADAMS was lost in the South Pacific, the OHIOAN was lost near New York and the S/S OGONTZ in the Caribbean. Also lost in the Caribbean in June were the S/S WEST NOTUS, the S/S ILLINOIS of States Line, American Hawaiian's AMERICAN and ARKANSAN, American Mail Line's GEORGE CLYMERS, Matson's KAHUKU, Shepard Line's SEA THRUSH, McCormick's WEST IRA, and Weyerhaeuser's POTLATCH. APL's motor ship CHANT, enroute to relieve Malta was lost and the COAST TRADER was sunk by a Japanese submarine very close to the Oregon coast.

**I**n July 1942, eleven MFOW-crewed ships were lost, six of which were in the "suicide convoys" to Murmansk. All told, in July 1942 eleven out of forty-three ships manned by MFOW crews were lost, including the EDWARD LUCKENBACH in the Gulf of Mexico, the ARCATA in Alaskan waters, the COAST FARMER and the WILLIAM DAWES in the South Pacific. The HONOLULAN was lost near the Straits of Gibraltar.

In August 1942, the S/S STAR OF OREGON operated by the Pacific Atlantic Steamship Company and States Line's CALIFORNIA were torpedoed in the Caribbean and MATSON lost the KAIMOKU in the Northwest Atlantic. In September 1942, the MARY LUCKENBACH, loaded with thousands of tons to

TNT, was bombed enroute to Murmansk. In the same convoy, the OREGONIAN was lost. A few days later, the States Line freighter KENTUCKY went down.

The list went on and on. All told, 138 ships manned by MFOW crews were lost or badly damaged during World War II. To merely list the ships that were torpedoed or bombed or whose fate is unknown does not portray the day-to-day acts of heroism of men who stayed in the engine room to the last minute or went down with the ship. Space does not permit listing MFOW members who substituted for members of gun crews who were killed during action. No statistics can portray the heartbreaking experiences of Union officials responding to letters from mothers, wives and children of members who were missing or dead.

**M**embers of the Marine Firemen's Union sailed to almost all of the invasion sites in World War II—North Africa, Sicily, Anzio, Singapore, Hong Kong, Indonesia, New Guinea, Guadalcanal, the Phillippines (standing by during the historic battle at Leyte Gulf and later sailing to Lingayen Gulf), Palau, Okinawa, China, India (staging ports), the Normandy beachhead, and, finally sailing to Japan, after its surrender, with needed supplies.

In addition to the men who went down with their ships, there were others who died in prisoner of war camps, men who died by enemy action on vessels that survived attacks, and men who died in lifeboats or by barbaric atrocities. One of the most brutal acts of World War II was an aftermath of the torpedoing of the SS Jean Nicolet. The ship was manned by a full west coast crew with a crew of 41 men, but all told the ship had 100 men aboard. The ship was attacked by a Japanese submarine on June 2, 1944. Lifeboats and life rafts were launched and then the submarine surfaced. The Japanese manned four machine guns, aimed at the lifeboats and ordered the men aboard the submarine. Each of the 95 men who ended up on deck of the submarine had his hands tied behind his back. The Japanese took a few of the men, shot one in the back, bayoneted another one in the stomach, and threw them overboard. Several men were then lined up and run through a gauntlet of Japanese who beat them with heavy steel stanchions and had their skulls crushed in, and as each man was killed his body was thrown overboard. At this point, a Catalina bomber, responding to an SOS, was sighted and the Japanese submarine commander quickly ordered the crew inside and dove, leaving the victims to struggle in the sea. One of the members had a sheath knife and swam around and managed to cut the rope of seven other men and they, in turn, managed to help some of the other bound men. About 17 men drowned. Sharks were around in great numbers and got some of the men. Some men swam all night; others were able to make their way to a raft that was afloat until a patrol plane came close and dropped a number of life jackets. Finally, the survivors were picked up by a Singalese patrol boat, and out of the 100 men originally on the ship, only 23

were saved. Three of the men saved were members of the Marine Firemen's Union: P.L. Mitchen, C.R. Rosenbaum and L.B. Ruth.

## World War II MFOW Manned Ships Sunk or Damaged

### Alaska Packers Association

Joseph Smith Jan. 11, 1944 broke up, lost at sea

### Alaska Steamship Co.

John Straub Apr. 19, 1944 broke in two, blew up  
Mount McKinley Mar. 11, 1942 stranded, total loss  
Dellwood stranded, total loss  
Canada Victory Apr. 27, 1945 sunk by Japanese suicide plane

### American President Lines

President Coolidge Oct. 26, 1942 sunk by mine  
President Harrison Dec. 8, 1941 captured, crew interned  
President Taylor Feb. 13, 1942 stranded, total loss  
Alice F. Palmer July 10, 1943 torpedoed  
Chant June 15, 1942 bombed & sunk  
H.G. Blasdel (not in book)  
Ruth Alexander Dec. 31, 1941 bombed, sunk  
James H. Breasted (not in book)  
James Robertson July 7, 1943 torpedoed  
Oliver Walcott ship torpedoed; repaired  
Peter H. Burnett (not in book)  
Phoebe A. Hearst Apr. 30, 1943 torpedoed  
Timothy Pickering July 14, 1943 bombed, destroyed  
Walter Camp Jan. 25, 1944 torpedoed  
William S. Rosecrans Jan. 3, 1944 torpedoed  
President Grant Feb. 26, 1944 grounded, total loss  
Jean Nicolet July 2, 1944 torpedoed

### American-Hawaiian Steamship Co.

Alaskan Nov. 28, 1942 torpedoed  
American June 11, 1942 torpedoed  
Arkansan June 15, 1942 torpedoed  
Coloradan Oct. 9, 1942 torpedoed  
Honolulan July 22, 1942 torpedoed  
Illinoisian July 28, 1944 deliberately sunk to form breakwater, Normandy Beachhead  
Kentuckian Aug. 12, 1944 deliberately sunk to form breakwater, Normandy Beachhead  
Montanan June 3, 1943 torpedoed  
Ohioan May 8, 1942 torpedoed  
Oklahoman Apr. 8, 1942 torpedoed  
Oregonian Sept. 13, 1942 torpedoed  
Pennsylvanian Aug. 4, 1944 deliberately sunk to form breakwater, Normandy Beachhead  
Puerto Rican Mar. 9, 1943 torpedoed  
Texan Mar. 11, 1942 torpedoed & shelled  
Washingtonian Apr. 7, 1942 sunk by submarine  
Cape San Juan Nov. 11, 1943 torpedoed  
Albert Gallatin Jan. 2, 1944 torpedoed  
Harrison Gray Otis Aug. 4, 1943 mined while at anchor  
Logan Victory Apr. 6, 1945 struck by Japanese suicide plane

William D. Burnham Nov. 23, 1944 torpedoed  
William M. Marcy Aug. 7, 1944 torpedoed

### **American Mail Line**

Capillo Dec. 8, 1941 bombed (later sunk by U.S. Army)  
Coldbrook June 2, 1942 ran aground, total loss  
Collingsworth Jan. 9, 1943 torpedoed  
John S. Copley Dec. 16, 1943 torpedoed; damaged  
Crown City Sept. 2, 1942 ran aground  
Francis W. Pettygrove Aug. 13, 1943 torpedoed  
George Clymers June 7, 1942 torpedoed  
Meriweather Lewis Mar. 2, 1943 torpedoed  
Samuel Parker July 22, 1943 several direct hits, repaired  
John A. Johnson Oct. 30, 1944 torpedoed

### **Coastwise (PFE) Line**

Coast Trader June 7, 1942 torpedoed  
Coast Farmer July 20, 1942 torpedoed  
Augustus Thomas Oct. 24, 1944 bombed  
Rufus King July 7, 1942 stranded, broke in two  
Samuel Heintzleman July 1, 1943 disappeared  
Peter Sylvester Feb. 6, 1945 torpedoed

### **W.R. Chamberlin & Company**

Cyrus H. McCormick Apr. 18, 1945 torpedoed  
Peter Skene Ogden Feb. 22, 1944 torpedoed

### **General Steamship Company**

Hobart Baker Dec. 29, 1944 bombed while at anchor

### **W.R. Grace & Company**

Harvey W. Scott Mar. 3, 1943 torpedoed  
Thomas A. Edison Jan. 2, 1943 stranded & wrecked (ship broke)

### **Hammond Steamship Company**

Arcata July 14, 1942 shelled & sunk by sub.  
Edward Bates Feb. 1, 1944 torpedoed

### **Intercoastal Packing Corp. (Nick Bez)**

Ogontz May 19, 1942 torpedoed

### **Interocean Steamship Corporation**

Lewis F. Dyche Jan. 4, 1945 struck by a Japanese suicide plane

### **Luckenbach Gulf Steamship Corporation**

Edward Luckenbach July 2, 1942 struck a mine  
Forence Luckenbach Jan. 29, 1942 torpedoed  
Matthew Luckenbach Mar. 19, 1943 torpedoed  
Lena Luckenbach Aug. 4, 1944 "blew up at Port Chicago"  
Stephen Hopkins Sept. 27, 1942 shelled & sank  
John R. Parks Mar. 21, 1945 torpedoed

### **Matson Navigation Company**

Honomu July 5, 1942 torpedoed  
Kahuku June 15, 1942 torpedoed & shelled  
Kaimoku Aug. 8, 1942 torpedoed  
Lahaina Dec. 11, 1942 shelled by submarine  
Lihue Feb. 23, 1942 torpedoed  
Malama Jan. 1, 1942 bombed  
Manini Dec. 17, 1941 torpedoed  
Mauna Loa Feb. 19, 1942 bombed  
Mokihana Feb. 18, 1942 torpedoed, but repaired  
Olopana July 7, 1942 torpedoed

Elihu B. Washburne July 3, 1943 torpedoed  
Henry Knox July 19, 1943 torpedoed  
James Smith Mar. 9, 1943 torpedoed, later repaired  
Marcus Whitman Nov. 8, 1942 torpedoed

### **McCormick Steamship Company**

Absaroka Dec. 24, 1941 torpedoed, but repaired  
West Ira June 20, 1942 torpedoed  
West Ivis Jan. 26, 1942 torpedoed  
West Notus June 1, 1942 shelled by submarine  
West Portal Feb. 5, 1943 torpedoed  
Elihu Yale Feb. 15, 1944 struck by aerial glider bomb  
Fitz John Porter Mar. 1, 1943 torpedoed  
James W. Marshall June 8, 1944 deliberately sunk to form breakwater, Normandy Beachhead  
Lydia M. Child Apr. 27, 1943 torpedoed  
Russell H. Chittenden  
Starr King Feb. 10, 1943 torpedoed  
Robert J. Walker Dec. 24, 1944 torpedoed  
James W. Nesmith Apr. 7, 1945 torpedoed, but repaired

### **Moore McCormack Steamship Co.**

Goerge Thatcher Nov. 1, 1942 torpedoed  
Mark Hanna Mar. 9, 1943 torpedoed, but repaired  
Henry Miller Jan. 3, 1945 torpedoed

### **Northland Transportation Co.**

John Burke Dec. 28, 1944 struck by a Japanese suicide plane

### **Oliver J. Olson & Co.**

Jean Nicolet July 2, 1944 torpedoed & shelled  
Samuel Huntington Jan. 29, 1944 bombed & destroyed  
Sebastian Cermeno June 27, 1943 torpedoed

### **Pacific Atlantic Steamship Co. (States Line)**

California Aug. 13, 1942 torpedoed  
Illinois June 1, 1942 torpedoed  
Kentucky Sept. 18, 1942 torpedoed  
Michigan Apr. 30, 1943 torpedoed  
Oregon Feb. 28, 1942 shelled by submarine  
Peter Kerr July 5, 1942 bombed  
Washington July 5, 1942 bombed  
Star of Oregon Aug. 30, 1942 torpedoed  
Elias Howe Sept. 24, 1943 torpedoed  
John Sevier Apr. 6, 1943 torpedoed  
Nathaniel Hawthorne Nov. 7, 1942 torpedoed

### **Pacific Lighterage Company**

Admiral Y.S. Williams Dec. 25, 1941 scuttled by crew to avoid capture

### **Sudden & Christenson**

Ann Hutchinson Oct. 26, 1942 torpedoed & shelled  
Hobbs Victory Apr. 6, 1945 struck by a Japanese suicide plane

James Withycombe  
John Adams May 5, 1942 torpedoed

### **Shepard Steamship Company**

Sea Thrush June 28, 1942 torpedoed

### **Union Sulphur Company**

John Randolph July 5, 1942 mined & broke in two

## Weyerhaeuser Steamship Co.

Heffron	July 5, 1942	mined
Potlatch	June 27, 1942	torpedoed
Winona	Oct. 16, 1942	torpedoed
Edgar Allen Poe	Nov. 8, 1942	torpedoed
Juan De Fuca	(not in book)	
John H. Couch	Oct. 11, 1943	torpedoed
Samuel Gompers	Jan. 30, 1943	torpedoed

Solomon Juneau	(not in book)	
William Dawes	July 22, 1942	torpedoed
William S. Ladd	Dec. 10, 1944	struck by a Japanese suicide plane

## Pope & Talbot, Inc.

West Nilus	July 7, 1944	deliberately sunk to form breakwater, Normandy Beachhead
West Portal	Feb. 5, 1943	torpedoed

## Wages and Benefits – The War Years

During the war years, wages and benefits were subject to wartime wage controls. Base wages were not very high, but overtime and war bonuses picked up some of the slack.

In 1944, the Maritime War Emergency Board, despite the protests of all the maritime unions, drastically reduced war bonuses from 100% to 66⅔%.

The owners and the unions participated in wage hearings before the MWEB as well as continuation of their demand for higher war bonuses.

As the war dragged on, unions again sought improvements in wages and a number of conditions. In 1944, the monthly wage of Firemen was \$107.50, with an overtime rate of \$1 per hour. For offshore operations, the rate was \$110 per month with an overtime rate of \$1.10. The union proposals of 1944 had included a request for vacations of 15 days per year, and inclusion of a National Maritime Day as a recognized holiday.

In early 1945, the War Labor Board Shipping Panel denied any wage increase but did grant some

increases in conditions, giving a vacation clause and increasing lodging allowance from \$2 per night to \$2.50, and meal money from \$2.50 to \$2.70, and subsistence of \$3 per day while traveling. The unions were straight-jacketed by the tight government control over wages and benefits, and in July 1945, again petitioned for further consideration. This time they were successful and West Coast unlicensed unions were granted a \$45 per month increase in base rates of pay, giving the wipers a \$132.50 basic monthly wage, firemen \$145, oilers and watertenders \$155, deck engineers \$187.50, chief electricians on certain vessels \$252, and other adjustments. This was coupled with an elimination of all war bonuses, with the exception of certain specified areas.

There was still a differential between the steam schooner scale and offshore agreements. The steam schooner scale was higher for some classifications. Firemen received \$152, combination men \$157.50 per month. Reefer and electrician scales varied by the size and type of the ships.



Officials and delegates at first MFWO Convention in San Francisco, 1945. Oldtimers will recognize many of the faces in the photograph.

# The Post War Years

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**B**efore World War II ended, the maritime unions had anticipated a substantial decline in jobs for merchant seamen. The necessity of reconstructing ravaged Europe and Japan, added to the ongoing war in China, served as a substantial cushion until 1950. The war in Korea erupted in June of 1950. This war, coupled with a wave of economic prosperity and a sense of optimism in the nation, cushioned but did not halt the ongoing decline of the Merchant Marine. Japan, ravaged by the war, was not a competitive threat for many years. Fleets financed by Asian capital were non-existent.

As at the end of World War I, the United States government was choked with surplus vessels from Liberty ships to newer versions. These ships, anchored at ports throughout the nation, in the Philippines and elsewhere, were available for sale and they were sold. Many were bought by established U.S. shipowners with established fleets but others were sold to foreign countries. The earlier fights of the seamen against ships manned with foreign crews took a new twist. U.S. corporations were buying ships and transferring them to foreign registry. Tanker ships sold abroad became the nucleus of the Onassis fleet and the tide of nationalism by previous colonial countries led to their desire for ships flying their own flags.

Above all, the paramount union issue of the post war years can be summarized in a single word—jobs. At the height of World War II, the Marine Firemen's Union had 31,000 members and permit men; at the end of World War II, the total had dropped to 15,000.

The steady decline in contract vessels was paralleled on the East Coast and in the Gulf. Fights for jobs raged throughout the maritime industry.

Inevitably these issues created inter-union battles and even led to intra-union battles among the unions representing the deck, engine and steward departments on Pacific Coast vessels.

Freed of the restraints of war controls, the unions in the immediate post-war period were feeling their oats and accumulated disputes had piled up awaiting resolution.

During the earlier post-war years, each seagoing union negotiated its own agreements for short duration with different opening dates. Ships could and would be shut down over disputes by one or another union and shutdowns were not confined to acts of unlicensed unions. The Marine Engineers' Beneficial Association, the Masters, Mates and Pilots, and the Radio Officers were also potential striking unions.

**A**lthough labor issues were products of the times, amicable solutions were hindered by the earlier post-war hard-line position of employer organizations. The Employers Council of San Francisco, Shipowner and Waterfront Associations were also awaiting the war's end to resume battles on issues they had lost by decisions of wartime wage boards. During the war, leading employer spokesmen preached a hardline position against seagoing, longshore and other unions. Frank Foisie for the Waterfront Employers and Gregory Harrison of the law firm of Brobeck, Phleger and Harrison were leading hard-liners.

Commencing in the 1940's the Union had adopted a number of long-term strategies. Recognizing personal hardships during strikes, the members voted for higher dues, with a portion allocated to buildup of a union strike fund. With the enormous membership in World War II, the amount in the strike fund mounted. Over the years the strike fund was carefully and conservatively invested and amounts withdrawn only during strike periods. In 1983, the strike fund, as a result of this early policy, has been stabilized at \$1,500,000, an amount to be withdrawn for members in the event of a strike.

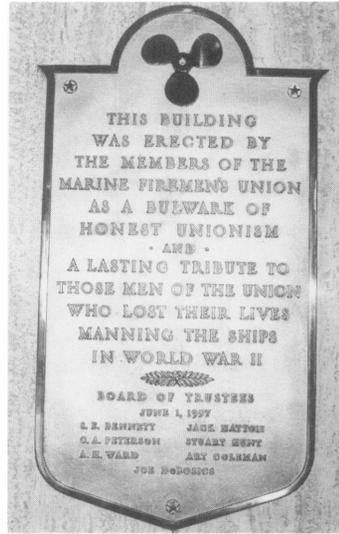
During the war years the Union also set aside amounts to construct suitable office and meeting facilities in various ports. The unions first bought a building at 150 Broadway, San Francisco in 1949 and rented out space at other ports but plans were drawn for a post war Headquarters building to serve as a memorial for members who died at sea. Members were excited with the plans for a new Headquarters Building and a resolution for a small building assessment was handily passed. Commencing in 1944, as the funds accumulated, buildings were purchased or remodeled in San Francisco, Baltimore, New York, Portland, Seattle and San Pedro.



*Marine Firemen's first union-owned San Francisco headquarters building, completed in 1949 and torn down in 1957 to make way for Embarcadero Freeway off-ramp.*



Marine Firemen's Union San Francisco headquarters building, completed in 1957, features engine-room scene and propeller art work above main entrance at 240 Second Street.



Plaque in foyer of Marine Firemen's Union headquarters building honors brothers who died in World War II action.



Listening to speaker at dedication of new MFOW headquarters in San Francisco, June 7, 1957. l to r: Sam Bennett, Vice President; V.J. Malone, President; Monsignor Matt Connolly, Apostleship of the Sea; and J. Paul St. Sure, President, Pacific Maritime Association.

The present Headquarters Memorial Building absorbed years of planning and was not finally completed and opened until 1957. Dedication ceremonies were attended by representatives of government, maritime employers, unions, prominent legislators and, of course, a large number of members. The Headquarters building at 240 Second Street was built with an eye to a possible addition of a future floor. Constructed of granite, marble, terrazzo, and teak, the total cost was approximately \$1,000,000 over the several years of construction. In 1982, the Union was approached by real estate brokers with offers of millions of dollars if the Union would agree to sell.

**I**n addition, the Union has over the years built up and has maintained a sizeable Union fund for general operation of the Union and reserves of this fund have also been prudently managed and conservatively invested. As a result of these early policies, the reserve fund in 1983 is over one million dollars.

Other policies adopted in the 1930's have been maintained to the present date. Details of expenditures must be reported at each meeting and annually an audit committee verifies any securities of the Union by personal inspection and visits to each bank in which the Union has funds to verify account balances. Officers are held to modest salaries and many of the higher rated working members earn more than the officers. From its beginning, the Marine Firemen have been a union controlled by the membership and the officers have been servants of the membership and not their masters.

**I**n 1944, the Union commenced a monthly newspaper to report news from ships, activities in every port, and proceedings at Headquarters. The newspaper, *The Marine Fireman*, has continued monthly to the present time.

The majority of these programs were initiated in the late 1930's and during the war years.

In the 1950's the Union adopted a constitution calling for conventions prior to submittal of proposals to employers and all members are invited to attend and formulate policies to guide the officers in negotiations. The membership must approve all positions in negotiations and all agreements between the union and employers.

Some of these policies have later become a matter of law for all unions but these principles were followed in the Marine Firemen's Union long before any law required. Although the Union was in good shape to face post war years, there were formidable and unanticipated problems to come.

## 1946

In May 1946, a convention of maritime unions was held in San Francisco. At this time, both the longshore unions and the seagoing unions were in deadlocked negotiations; and a proposal was advanced at a Marine Firemen's Convention for one national organization of maritime workers unions with joint strike action by longshore and seagoing unions. As a step toward this ambitious end, a Committee for Maritime Unity [CMU] to serve as a strike coordinating committee was proposed to include the longshoremen, cooks, the National Maritime Union, MEBA and others.

The Marine Firemen delegation to the Convention split on whether to formally affiliate with the CMU and the proposed policy of joint strike action. The majority of the MFOW delegates approved the affiliation and a minority did not.

## The 1946 Strike

Working with the CMU, the Marine Firemen, the Marine Cooks and Stewards and the Longshoremen's Union struck in the spring of 1946. Before the strike date, the Secretary of Labor asked the unions to attend a conference in Washington to work out the dispute. Coordinated picketing plans were adopted by a joint strike committee. An agreement was reached in Washington granting Marine Firemen \$17.50 per month increase retroactive to April 1, 1946, a reduction in the work week of 44 hours to 40 hours in ports, and a number of collateral issues were referred for further negotiations and arbitration if negotiations were unsuccessful.

However, the decision had to be approved by the Wage Stabilization Board and it disapproved certain additional wages for able-bodied seamen and certain watch standers.

The engineers and mates then struck the vessels, and this shutdown continued until November 1946. Little was gained over the last offer of the employers.

## 1947 - CMU Affiliation Issue

The issue of continuing affiliation with the CMU raged within the Union. Letters, pro and con, poured in and were published in *The Marine Fireman*. The Sailors' Union of the Pacific had formed the Seafarers' International Union, comprising East and West Coast seamen, and was chartered by the AFL. Harry Lundeborg, president of the Sailors' Union of the Pacific, was also president of the Seafarers' International Union. The SUP declined to participate in the Committee for Maritime Unity. Many Marine Firemen members were fearful that affiliation with the CMU would mean a loss of autonomy, and the Constitution of the Marine Firemen's Union prohibited any affiliation resulting in loss of autonomy.

Since all other unions in the Committee for Maritime Unity were affiliated with or favored the CIO, many members believed affiliation with the Committee for Maritime Unity would inevitably mean affiliation with the CIO. As the AFL was the dominant union and the Marine Firemen's Union had close relationships with teamster unions and the Sailors' Union of the Pacific, a large group, including the then Vice President Sam Bennett favored continued independence in order to cooperate with both AFL and CIO affiliates.

The matter finally was submitted to a ballot of the entire membership and in 1947 the proposal to affiliate with the Committee for Maritime Unity was defeated by a vote of 3,674 to 732.

Although the overwhelming vote against affiliation was a great surprise, the result was not. Future events showed that it was not a vote against cooperation with other maritime unions, because it was quickly followed by a meeting in March 1947 of nine seagoing unions to work on establishing a united

policy on common problems. The meeting was attended by representatives of the Seafarers' International Union, the Sailors' Union of the Pacific, the Marine Firemen's Union, the Masters, Mates and Pilots, the Radio Officers' Union, the National Maritime Union, the Marine Cooks and Stewards Association and the Marine Engineers Beneficial Association.

The basic purpose of the meeting was to deal with legislative matters and common action in dealing with government agencies, including the Bureau of Marine Inspection and Investigation, the United States Marine Hospitals, and the Coast Guard.

One of the most important decisions was to establish a united front to combat the wholesale transfer of Maritime Commission ships to Panamanian and Honduran registry to be operated by U.S. owners. Ships were being purchased from the Maritime Commission and assigned to foreign registry. This was augmenting the growing "foreign flag" problem.

## Taft-Hartley Act – Non-Communist Affidavits

The passage of the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947 was a severe shock to the labor movement, and port agents and officers of the Marine Firemen's Union quickly assembled on July 15 and 16, 1947 to discuss problems created by the law.

In anger, the assembly voted to boycott the NLRB to the greatest extent possible, but to comply with the provisions of the Taft-Hartley Act, including the obligation for officers to execute an affidavit of non-membership in the Communist Party. The officials also resolved to coordinate political action with other unions to defeat all congressmen and senators who voted for the Taft-Hartley Bill. Their recommendations were adopted by the membership. For months thereafter, a debate on ships and on shore and within the Marine Firemen's Union raged over officials signing non-Communist affidavits.

There was later a motion passed by the San Pedro branch for adoption of a policy by the Union to order officers to refuse to sign the affidavits. Under the procedures of the Union, this motion was forwarded to all branches, but was defeated by a sizeable vote.

**U**nder the leadership of Malone, the unions maintained a middle road on Communist Red-baiting during earlier years (the late '40s) and "pooh-poohed" the shipowners in their belief that Communists would take over the docks and disrupt shipping in the event of any conflict with Communist countries. Malone answered shipowners by narrating his attendance at ILWU meetings and observing that they commenced with the pledge of allegiance to the flag of the United States and he assured shipowners that the ILWU membership were loyal Americans.

**T**o understand the emotion generated by the requirement of non-Communist affidavits, it is necessary to backtrack a bit in the history of the Union.

As in many unions, there were people in early days who held IWW cards. In fact, in 1910 one of the East Coast seagoing groups voted to affiliate with the IWW. During the Depression Years, many Union members wandered politically and the drama of the 1934 strike helped the left wing drift because newspapers, the American Legion and others were branding them as revolutionaries.

Records show that there were a number of Communists in maritime unions in the 1930's and continuing through the 1940's. The MFOW San Francisco Headquarters meetings in the early 1930's were dominated by a left-wing faction which included a number of active Communists.

Countering the left-wing faction was a middle-of-the-road group of members, V.J. Malone was first elected to Headquarters on a slate composed of middle-of-the-roaders and the slate victory ousted many left-wing officials.

The same issue and philosophical struggles in 1947 were ongoing in many of the unions throughout the United States.

## **Jurisdictional Battles With the Sailors' Union of the Pacific**

During 1947 the Sailors' Union secretly negotiated a contract for it to man all unlicensed departments aboard certain vessels of the American Pacific Steamship Company. The other unlicensed unions got wind of the agreement and picketed the ships. This resulted in a settlement agreement between the SUP, the MFOW and the MC&S under the auspices of the Maritime Commission.

The agreement provided that if the American Pacific Steamship Company would be permitted to load and sail without interference, the Sailors' Union of the Pacific would agree that any dry cargo or passenger ships operated by all other newly organized companies, including offshore, coastal and coastwise ships of Wilson Towing Company, would be manned by the Sailors' Union of the Pacific in the unlicensed deck department, the MFOW in the unlicensed engine department and the MC&S in the stewards department.

## **The Rolando Struggle**

In 1948 the Irwin Lyons Lumber Company signed a contract with the SUP for it to provide all unlicensed seamen on the M.V. Rolando, and a Sailors' Union of the Pacific crew took over at Coos Bay, Oregon, manning all three departments. Hearing the news, when the ship arrived at San Francisco it was greeted by a Marine Firemen's Union picket line. The Sailors' Union of the Pacific went through the line. The Rolando sailed back to

Coos Bay and the Marine Firemen's Union met it with 40 pickets, and the longshoremen observed the line as well as sawmill workers employed in the Lyon's mill and the loggers in Lyon's logging camp. The Rolando was then loaded by the SUP ship crew and sailed to San Pedro. When the ship arrived in the Los Angeles harbor, it was met by a massive picket line and it was a pitched battle that broke out after a man in the Sailors' Union of the Pacific contingent fired a revolver. Picketers were armed with two-by-fours and stout clubs. A large number of the Sailors' Union of the Pacific members received emergency treatment at local hospitals. Marine Engineers walked off the ship and were replaced by other personnel recruited by the Sailors' Union of the Pacific.

But, in October, the ship was still tied up in Oregon. The leadership of the Sailors' Union of the Pacific was bitterly attacked in the Marine Firemen's Union and the Rolando fight attracted the attention of other unions. The Sailors' Union of the Pacific then filed for an election in Alaskan ships to gain bargaining rights for the stewards department.

In the view of Malone, SUP was moving in on the Marine Firemen's jurisdiction and jurisdiction of the cooks and stewards because of a scarcity of jobs. The SUP had many firemen and stewards waiting for weeks for jobs and finally going to the Firemen, Cooks and Stewards to ship under their contracts. This action, Malone mused, forced Lundeborg into a decision to find jobs for them at the expense of the Marine Firemen and the Marine Cooks and Stewards.

## **The 1948 Strike**

In 1948, a West Coast strike took place. The Marine Firemen, Marine Cooks and Stewards and ILWU again hit the bricks. Although not affiliated with the Committee for Maritime Unity, the same unions were involved in the strike. Feelings ran high. The Marine Firemen reached agreement on economic issues but stumbled on hiring and contract language. Shipowners had little incentive to resolve differences with offshore unions until they resolved their differences with the ILWU but offered to meet and resolve the hiring issue if the Marine Firemen would work under a negotiated contract, even if the Longshoremen and the Cooks had not settled.

The Marine Firemen, through spokesman Malone, flatly responded that it would not pledge to go through any picket line manned by longshoremen. In his words, *"If that is the pledge you require it is one you cannot get from any labor man of honor or principle."* Malone went further to state *"... our members can see one thing: if the Longshoremen's Union is smashed, and we were to assist you in smashing them by crashing their picket lines... then it would be a matter of time before our union and others would be broken, also."*

The strike dragged on for months but was finally resolved at the end of the year. The Marine Firemen obtained a \$16 a month raise along with improvements in a number of working conditions and a protective clause on crew size. The parties reached a compromise agreement on hiring hall language and the other subjects and the agreement was ratified by the membership.



*Inpatients celebrating the holidays at U.S. Public Health Hospital, San Francisco in late 1950s. (U.S. Navy photo)*

## 1949-1950 – First Health and Welfare Plan – Korean War

Some breakthrough benefits gained by seagoing unions were pioneered by the ILWU. In 1949, the ILWU cracked the Pacific Maritime Association's standing opposition to any Health and Welfare Plan. Health and Welfare Plans were then obtained by offshore unions, and contributions to a Health and Welfare Plan for the Marine Firemen commenced in January, 1950. Jobs were so scarce at the beginning of the year that the Union adopted a one year rule, requiring members to leave vessels at the conclusion of a one year period, (later reduced to 6 months period, then changed to the current 7 month rule). With the outbreak of war in Korea in June, 1950 shipping again zoomed. By August, 40 ships were brought out of laid-up fleets, another 24 were manned and a number of ships that were headed for the bonnyard were kept in operation. This resulted in a net gain of almost 700 jobs for Marine Firemen.

## 1950 Negotiations

Negotiations for a new contract commenced and increases of 6.38% were granted, effective September 30, bringing the wages of Firemen to \$236; unlicensed watch juniors to \$283, and

unlicensed juniors for day work to \$314.50, with varying rates for electricians ranging from \$366.50 to \$465.50 depending upon the type of vessel. In addition, the Union negotiated a \$2.50 daily war bonus and general war bonus type protections for insurance, loss of personal effects and repatriation.

A wave of anti-Communist sentiment swept over the maritime unions. The MFOW conducted a referendum ballot in 1950 to expel "Communists and Communist stooges" from the Union. The same action was taken by the NMU. The MFOW referendum carried a vote of 2,269 to 438.

## 1951 Negotiations

In 1951 negotiations, a further wage increase of eight percent was reached in basic wage rates and a similar increase was made in overtime rates. Accompanying the wage adjustments were a number of improvements in fringe benefits and working conditions. The 1951 contract provided reopening provisions for periodic review of the rates in December 30, 1951, June 15, 1952, December 30, 1952 and June 15, 1953. The Sailors' Union of the Pacific and the MFOW had, for a long time, maintained parity between the basic ratings of firemen and able seamen. The SUP opened its agreement on September 30, 1951 and received concessions over and above that obtained by the MFOW. Under the reopening clause and the "most favored nation" provision in the MFOW contract, the Union and the Association met to adjust rates for the Marine Firemen but could not agree and the matter was submitted to arbitration in 1952. The arbitrator decided in favor of the Marine Firemen and increased overtime rates and penalty rates, as well as specified special rates.

The Sailors' Union of the Pacific conducted a short strike in the summer of 1952 and obtained a further five percent increase in wages and overtime and were granted overtime rates for work on Saturdays at sea. There were further arbitration flurries but all negotiated agreements had to be submitted for Wage Stabilization Board approval.

## First Pension Plan

In 1952 the MFOW proposed adding a pension plan as part of the Welfare Plan. On October 1, 1953 employers agreed to the establishment of a Pension Plan to provide \$100 per month for members attaining age 65 and retiring after October 1, 1953 and lesser pensions for those retiring after age 60 or over, but before age 65, as well as a disability pension of \$50 per month plus \$10 for each dependent child, less any outside income.

From 1948 through 1952, the Sailors' Union of the Pacific continued to seek contracts covering the jurisdiction of the Marine Firemen's Union as well as the jurisdiction of the Marine Cooks and Stewards.

Acrimonious letters WERE exchanged by the unions and each union used its newspaper to air salty editorials against one another. Malone would scold Lundeberg, President of the Sailors' Union, with salty epithets in *The Marine Fireman*, and the SUP responded in its paper with words equally colorful. On occasions, members of the respective unions would continue the argument. As an example, in 1952, two SUP lads had more than a few drinks and decided to "organize" the Firemen and Oilers on the Steam Schooner MARGARET SCHAEFER docked in Reedsport, Ore. Their boasts were overheard by four local police who followed them.

According to Malone, "*members of the Black Gang were peacefully sleeping, dreaming of that happy day when retroactive checks would be forthcoming and handed to them by houris suitably undraped. . . and were rudely awakened by two drunken thugs demanding that they join the SUP right now, that the SUP was taking over, and they could exercise their democratic right to join the SUP or be gouged with a peavey hook.*" The SUP attackers knocked two of the Black Gang around before the trailing police burst in and carted them to the local gaol. The "goons" attack was not supported by the deck crew which took no part in the beef and wanted no part of it.

Malone mused over the rift. The actions of the SUP had drawn the MCS and the MFOW into common battle against the SUP. At one point in the struggle, a delegation of the Marine Cooks and Stewards came to the MFOW officers requesting affiliation with the MFOW. In Malone's view, the Marine Cooks and Stewards had a bad reputation with ship-owners for quickie work stoppages and it would only be a matter of time before the Sailors' Union of the Pacific would successfully establish a rival union of Stewards. In Malone's view, if the SUP were to represent the Cooks and Stewards Department, it would only be a matter of time before the SUP would try to gobble up the Marine Firemen's Union as well. He shared his thoughts with his membership and his conclusion that it was in the best interest of the Marine Firemen's Union to maintain three separate departmental bargaining units as important to the ships, the MFOW and for proper representation of the interests.

## Marine Firemen Affiliate with SIU

Scuffles and jurisdictional disputes continued until the Union saw the necessity of affiliating with either the AFL or the CIO. In January, 1953 the Marine Firemen officers and agents recommended to the membership that one committee be sent to an SIU Conference in San Diego to explore the terms of affiliation and a second committee be directed to contact the CIO and NMU to find out their terms for affiliation. The committees were established and reported the results of their explorations.

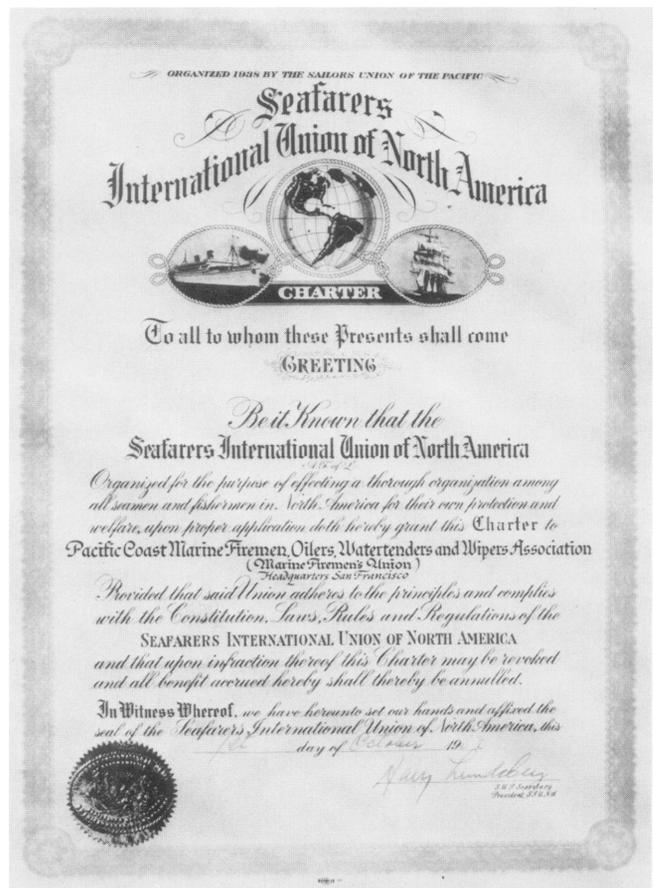
In brief, they informed the membership that direct charter by the CIO could not be granted because the NMU had exclusive jurisdiction over

unlicensed personnel, deep sea and inland charters. The NMU was only willing to discuss affiliation under conditions that would lead to ultimate integration of the Marine Firemen's Union into the NMU. The Seafarers' International Union offered full autonomy with the right of the Marine Firemen to elect its own officers, to handle its own finances, to negotiate its own agreements, retain its own property and assets, and to govern its own internal affairs. In answer to the knotty problem of jurisdiction, the SIU proposed to freeze the present jurisdiction and the SUP and MFOW to cooperate in organizing new companies on the Pacific Coast or any companies being reorganized.

Based on these reports, a mailed ballot Resolution was submitted to the members to affiliate with the American Federation of Labor through the Seafarers' International Union.

**T**he Resolution sponsored high pitched debates among members on every ship and in every Port. Letters supporting or opposing affiliation poured into the Union and were printed in *The Marine Fireman*.

In October, 1953 returned ballots were counted and affiliation with the Seafarers' International Union was approved by a vote of 1826 to 987 valid ballots.



Official charter for Marine Firemen's Union affiliation with Seafarers' International Union of North America.

## 1953 – Vacation Plan – Further Benefits

In 1953, sailors and firemen joined to establish a vacation trust. Prior to that date, vacation was paid by employers and there were many cases of delays and loss of partial months of vacation credit. Under the new system, contributions went to a Sailors' Union of the Pacific vacation fund for deck personnel and a MFOW vacation fund for engine room personnel to be administered by a Board of Trustees. A new agreement provided for three days of vacation for 90 days of employment; seven days of vacation for 180 days of employment; 10 days of vacation for 270 days of employment, and 14 days of vacation for 360 days of employment, to be effective January 1, 1954. In the 1953 negotiations, further wage increases were granted, particularly for electricians and reefers. The agreement specifically provided that "whenever practicable", the Marine Firemen would have their own mess room, equipped with a clock, fans and electric refrigerator.

In January 1954, an important conference of maritime unions was held in Washington. Attending the conference were both AFL and CIO unions. The

CIO was represented by the National Maritime Union, Marine Engineers Beneficial Association and the American Radio Association. The AFL was represented by representatives of the Seafarers' International Union and each of its affiliates, the Sailors' Union of the Pacific, the Marine Firemen's Union, the Inlandboatmen's Union of the Pacific, and various unions that competed with their CIO counterparts, including an AFL Marine Cooks and Stewards Union, then in its organizing stage. V.J. Malone was elected chairman of the Conference and it addressed a variety of issues, many of which are still issues of today. The Conference recommended: construction differential subsidies to ships in established trade routes; development and improvement of docks and facilities for more efficient handling of cargo and passengers; opposing the transfer of any U.S. flag vessel to a foreign flag unless the transfer would be in the interest of the U.S. Merchant Marine; placing all American-owned foreign flag ships under the U.S. flag; requiring military cargoes to be transported in American flag ships, as well as all economic aid cargoes and cargoes financed by American loans, legislation eliminating MSTs competition with private ships, and discontinuance of employment of foreign seamen on U.S. flag ships.



*APL P2 passenger vessels, PRESIDENT WILSON inbound and PRESIDENT CLEVELAND outbound, pass each other in San Francisco Bay.*

## Organizing the Cooks and Stewards

With the both sailors and the firemen affiliated with the SIU, attention focused on the Stewards Department. There had been an earlier election among the Stewards with only the ILWU and an independent AFL union on the ballot. The majority of voters chose neither union. The independent Marine Cooks and Stewards Union was ineligible to participate because of the refusal of its officers to sign a non-Communist affidavit.

## Establishing the SIU-Pacific District

In October 1954, the SUP, the Marine Firemen's Union, and a number of Marine Cooks and Stewards organized by the efforts of the SUP, joined to form a three-union combine under the banner of "SIU Pacific District" and petitioned the NLRB for a single bargaining unit election for all unlicensed seamen on ships represented by the Pacific Maritime Association.

In April, 1955 the one unit vote was held with the Pacific District SIU, comprising the Sailors' Union of the Pacific, the MFOW and the AFL Marine Cooks and Stewards Union, competing with the ILWU and the National Union of Marine Cooks and Stewards on the ballot. The final vote, Pacific District 3931; ILWU 1064; neither 327. There were 133 void ballots and 76 challenged ballots. The Pacific District was established as a bargaining agent for all three departments, but retained the three union departmental structure.

## Gunplay in the Union Offices

There was still a vocal minority in the MFOW which had opposed affiliation with the SIU. This led to a bizarre incident. Charles ("Swede") Berglund, a business agent for the Union, was a delegate to the San Francisco Labor Council and also a member of the Union's negotiating committee. He had become very hostile to the Union leadership because an agreement was made by the Sailors' Union of the Pacific to man a ship with a reduced crew and its agreement covered all three departments. The SUP decision to make this agreement had previously been discussed with the Marine Firemen officers and they approved it as an experiment to try to break into the ore shipping trade. As part of the understanding, although the SUP held a contract for all three departments, all of the black gang jobs would be filled by the MFOW. The company was adamant that it would only sign a one-union contract for unlicensed departments and was considering a deal with the NMU or the SIU, both of which would sign contracts for all three departments. Nevertheless, the contract caused suspicion among the members and a resolution was introduced to withdraw affiliation with the SIU. This resolution was voted down by 551 to 89. The problem preyed on Swede Berglund's mind and he became quite erratic. As a member of the negotiating committee, he made a number of far-out

proposals and bitterly opposed negotiation of a single Pacific District contract to be negotiated by the three unions. He became so disruptive, the 10 members of the Firemen's negotiating committee signed a resolution asking for Berglund's ouster from the committee and this motion was unanimously approved at a membership meeting. Shortly before the membership meeting was held, he pummelled Vice President Bennett sending Bennett to a hospital. Swede then went around boasting that he would "put a head" on all of the union leaders and had a fist fight with Malone. Malone, although he was 50 years of age, still packed a mean right cross and had workable knowledge of Judo. Swede wound up on the deck. On Wednesday, he fought with another member of the negotiating committee, Slim Von Hess, and lost the decision in that fight, after which he went out muttering about getting a gun.

**J**ack Hatton told him, "Quit the campaign of hate, Swede, and don't bring any guns around here." Other Headquarters officers rebuked Hatton and said, "Don't put any ideas in the man's mind!" Swede stopped at the door on his way out, pointed to Jack and hollered out, "Remember, you were the one who was talking about guns!" That same day, Berglund went to a second-hand store on Third Street and bought a gun. The next day, the membership ousted him from the negotiating committee. On Friday morning, Berglund showed up



*Jack Hatton, who died in Sept. 1983, was a well-known and dedicated MFOW official for 35 years before he retired in 1977.*

at the Union office. He was walking towards the President's office with a loaded pistol in his hand, when Jack Hatton and Stuart Hunt came down the passage from the Treasurer's office. He whirled around and shot at them. The gun went off close to Hatton's face, leaving powder burns and a bullet hole in Hatton's hat. The second bullet went through the side of Hatton's chest, a third ripped Hunt's shirt and bruised his body. Hatton and Hunt dashed into Malone's office and closed the door. Berglund then ran down to Treasurer Cliff Peterson's office. Peterson looked up to find a gun pointed right at his stomach and Berglund with a crazy look on his face. "No, Swede!!" he cried. Swede slowly checked his gun, swung it around the room, and went out. Peterson got up and locked the door. Swede rushed along the passage and came upon Johnny Walker. Berglund swung the gun on him and Johnny jumped for the only weapon he could find — the Union seal, Berglund fired three times at him at point blank range, missed twice, but the third shot ripped through Johnny's chest, cut through his lungs and he collapsed on the deck.

**M**iss Washburn, the bookkeeper, was standing by the mimeograph machine and Berglund pointed the gun at her. "Stay where you are!" he ordered. "Please may I go to the ladies' room?" she pleaded. "Okay! Okay!" he said, waving her aside. He then went into the patrolmen's room and reloaded his gun. At this moment Malone came out of this office and, as he stepped out of his door, Berglund stepped out of the patrolmen's room. Berglund saw Malone, raised his pistol to shoot but Malone jumped for the safety of the angle of the passageway. He made it as the bullet splattered a shower of mortar. Malone dashed into the Union's welfare office, ordered one of the women to call the police and an ambulance, then went to the dispatcher's office to give the same instructions. Malone went back to the entrance of the hiring hall to watch for Berglund to come down the stairs.

Just at that time, a police patrol car happened to be cruising only one block from the hiring hall and was pulling up, and two patrolmen were getting out. They came in and were met by Malone who reported the situation. The police went up the stairs with pistols ready, Malone unarmed showing them the way. They entered the outer office and Malone hollered for Berglund to come out but there was no answer, so they checked the rooms and in the patrolmen's room, they found Berglund dead by his own hand.

Malone pondered the gunplay and wrote that none of the office staff held bitterness towards Swede because they realized he was far from his normal self, and they remembered him for the long years he was their friend.

## The Quiet Years 1957-1961

In 1956, V.J. Malone, who had been head of the MFOW for the previous 20 years, decided not to run for reelection and was succeeded by Sam Bennett in 1957.

In 1957, Morris Weisberger, previously the Port Agent for the SUP in New York, was elected Secretary Treasurer for the Sailors' Union of the Pacific, succeeding Harry Lundeberg who had died in office.

The simultaneous election of Morris Weisberger as the new head of the Sailors' Union of the Pacific and Sam Bennett as the new head of the Marine Firemen inaugurated a long period of close cooperation between the two unions on all matters of common interest.



*Sam Bennett  
MFOW President, 1957-60*

In the years between 1957 and 1961, the three Pacific District unions bargained in harmony with the Pacific Maritime Association. Wages and benefits continued an upward march. In 1957, firemen received \$370 a month; a watchman received \$370 a month, day firemen \$400 a month; unlicensed juniors \$458.50 and electricians received wages between \$470 and \$544.50. The wages of chief electrician ranged between \$550 and \$704.50, depending upon the vessel type. Reefer engineers received wages ranging from \$454 to \$583. Overtime rates were increased to \$2.98 per hour for all rates except wipers and wipers who received \$2.25 per hour. Penalty rates were adjusted and pension benefits were increased by approximately 25%.

A new Constitution was proposed and adopted in 1959, but the passage of the Landrum-Griffin Act required a number of changes and, finally, a revised amended Constitution was approved by the membership.

## The Severance Pay Controversy

Prior to 1959, a mailed referendum ballot recommended a number of propositions for membership approval. Among them was a proposal to give retiring officials severance pay benefits "similar" to payments provided officials of the SUP and some other maritime unions. The ballot proposition called attention to the long service of V.J. Malone as warranting such a program.

The measure was approved but the ballot did not disclose the magnitude of the "similar benefits" or the precise severance benefits.

Over the years, the MFOW had adhered to a policy that officials should not receive higher wages or benefits than that granted members working aboard ships. Many members were convinced that the

officials had deceived the membership by the vaguely worded resolution and also were concerned that financing the benefits might require mortgaging real estate property of the Union.

Tempers flared and resolutions were adopted to require the incumbent officials to turn back union money that had been paid on their behalf to a bank trustee to finance severance pay rights of incumbent officials. The incumbents, dismayed by this turn of events, agreed to do so.

Many members believed that the severance pay proposal was a part of an undisclosed plan to later merge the Union with the Sailors' Union of the Pacific. In the heat of this controversy, Sam Bennett decided not to run for reelection and William Jordan, unopposed, was elected president of the Union, taking office in 1961.

## 1961 - 1968

William Jordan was an unusual man. Raised in South Carolina, he had only a grammar school education but was equipped with a keen, incisive, analytical mind and the gifts of a superb negotiator speaker.

In earlier years, Jordan had served as Portland Port Agent but quit in a dispute over Union policies and returned to South Carolina. In South Carolina he completed in one year a four-year program to become a journeyman electrician and quickly took over the helm of the Electricians' Union. In that capacity, he led a strike of electricians that rocked the South. Restless with the centralized control



*William W. Jordan  
MFOW President, 1961-68*

by the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, he returned to the West Coast, sailed on vessels and again ran for an elected post in the Union.

## The 1962 Strike

In 1961, the MFOW held a Convention of members and officers and Jordan reported on a range of issues. The Convention decided to submit proposed changes of many collective bargaining provisions, but the most important issues were crew size ["manning"] and reduced time in port by fast turn-around ships. Agreement was reached on many contract improvements and language clarifications but 1961 negotiations deadlocked over a Union proposal for overtime in port for work after 5:00 p.m. and before 8:00 a.m. and the size of the money package. The Union struck on March 16, 1962.

On April 11, 1962, the Labor Department intervened and called for Federal Mediation Service meetings. These were held but were unproductive and the Labor Department considered the strike as a "national emergency." Under the provisions of the Taft-Hartley Act, a national emergency strike can be enjoined by the government for a period of eighty days, and on April 11, 1962 such an injunction was issued.

The injunction required the "status quo" — the conditions existing before the strike — to be maintained during the course of the injunction. This led to an immediate court fight that made its way to the United States Supreme Court. The Union contended that, under the status quo — the conditions prevailing before the strike — members could leave a ship in a U.S. port even before cargo had been removed. The employers disagreed, but the Court of Appeals agreed with the Union on this issue, but disagreed with a second Union position that members could not be required to sign on a voyage that would terminate after the 80-day injunction expired.



*Officials and delegates to the 1961 MFOW Convention in San Francisco.*

Both the Union and the shipowners appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court. The Supreme Court allowed the Court of Appeals' decision to stand, but cargo shippers, worried their cargo might not be unloaded, were reluctant to ship any cargo on vessels until the dispute was resolved.

Finally, on July 5, 1962, the twenty-eighth anniversary of Bloody Thursday, July 5, 1934, an agreement was reached between the Pacific Maritime Association and the SIU Pacific District. Under the terms of the agreement, the Union won its major issue — the right to overtime after five and before eight for all work in port — and also received an increase in the monthly pension benefits to \$150 a month at age 62 as well as increases in wages, vacations and welfare benefits.



*L to r: W.W. "Bill" Jordan, former MFOW President; Alex Jarrett, longtime Honolulu Port Agent and Vice President at the time of his death in Sept. 1968; and Jack Hatton, former San Francisco Business Agent, Port Agent and Vice President.*

## 1965-1966 New Technology and Automation

The 1962 contract covered a three-year period expiring on June 16, 1965. The shipowners opened negotiations in 1964 with a demand to reduce the size of crews on newly automated and retrofit ships. This was shortly followed by an announcement by the Maritime Subsidy Board that it would disallow construction subsidies for the expense of providing quarters for a crew in excess of 37 men on each of the five new vessels being built by APL. APL's plans were to provide crew quarters for a total of 45 men, the number required under agreements previously negotiated between PMA and West Coast unions.

The unions attacked the Maritime Board decision as an improper interference with collective bargaining and appealed the decision, obtaining a reversal by the Undersecretary of Commerce.

Negotiations dragged on as the parties grappled with the impact of new technology and automation. The automation issue was finally resolved by providing defined manning scales for each

department on defined types of ships with a further provision that any manning scale could be changed by mutual agreement but, if reduced, the employer would be asked to pay stipulated amounts for a period of five years to cushion the impact of job loss. This was coupled with an expanded paid training program to qualify members for higher ratings, a wage increase of \$15.50 a month to be effective June 1, 1966, improved vacation benefits and additional increases for day workers. Under the agreement, firemen's wages effective June 1, 1966 reached \$419.50 a month with possible supplemental wage benefits of \$537.00 a month. This was a substantial increase.

At the end of 1968, William Jordan announced his health problems precluded running for an additional term.

## 1969-1974

Harry Jorgensen, a longtime Port Agent and official of the Union, was elected President and took office in 1969. Although the Vietnam War continued, labor relations in the years from 1969 through 1974 were relatively quiet, with only one work stoppage by the MFOW involving a disagreement with Matson over proposed contract language.

Contract improvements were steadily made in both wages and fringes, but the decline in jobs and ships continued. On some automated ships, concessions were made by reducing crew size in exchange for quid-pro-quo payments to benefit funds.

Jorgensen retired in 1974 due to ill health and Henry Disley, then Vice President, assumed his duties as acting President. Disley was confirmed in the office by secret ballot at Headquarters and branches in May 1974, won an election for the next term and thereafter, in successive elections, he has not been opposed.



*Harry Jorgensen, at right, MFOW President 1969-74, and Congressman Phil Burton at SIU Convention in early 1970s.*

# The Agonizing Years 1974-83

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**B**y 1975, the Union membership had dropped to approximately 1,400 members — a 25 percent drop since 1972 and held contracts with eight companies — American President Lines, Matson, Pacific Far East Lines, States Steamship Company, and Prudential Lines, as well as a few single-vessel agreements. During the height of the Vietnam conflict in 1966 to 1967, the active membership was 3,400, illustrative of the saying that the Merchant Marine feasts in war and starves in peace.

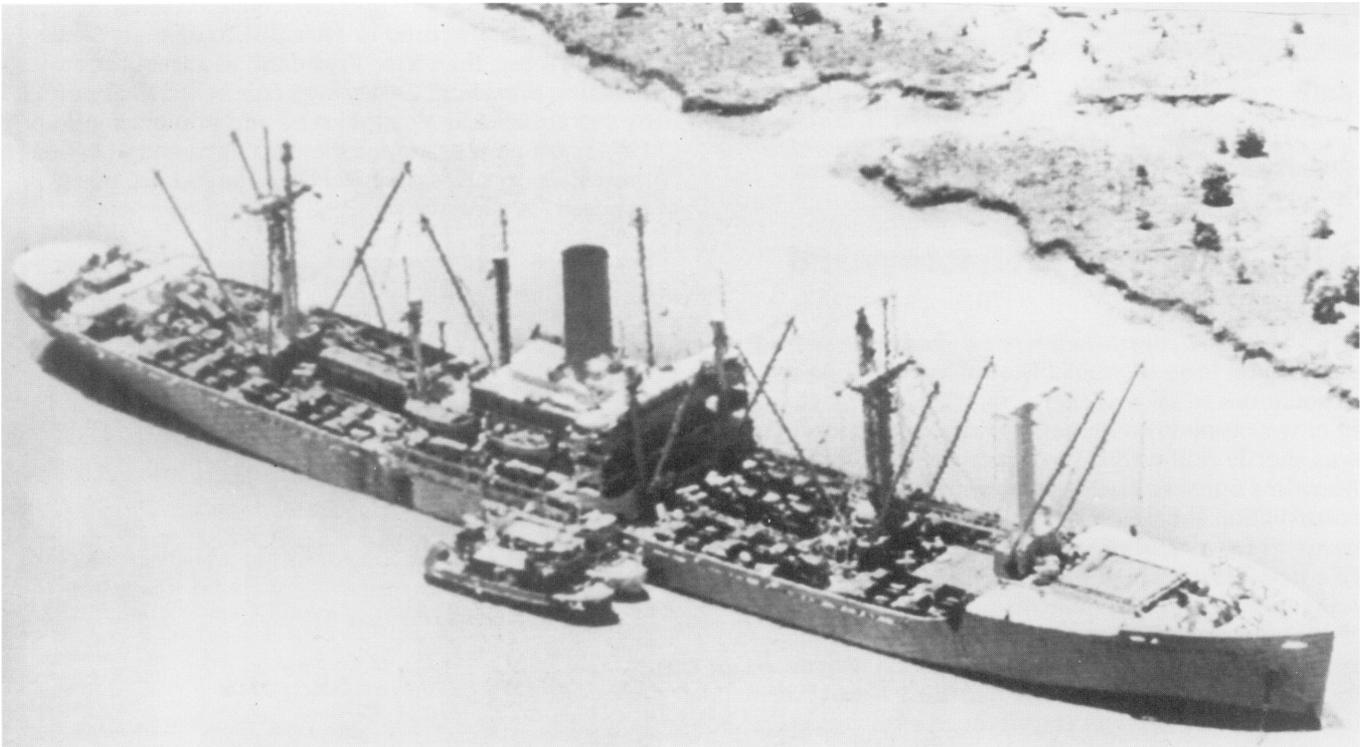
## 1975 Negotiations

Negotiations with the Pacific Maritime Association were ongoing in 1975 and many issues faced the Union. Principal MFOW demands were a cost of living provision and improved funding of the basic pension plan. With the steady decline of ships and additional costs to provide additional benefits required by the newly-enacted pension reform law,

the MFOW was concerned that, in future years, the pension plan might terminate with inadequate funds to provide benefits for older members unless a sound pension funding schedule was negotiated.

During the course of these negotiations, the Pacific Far East Lines secretly arranged for sale of a large number of its ships to Farrell lines together with a sale of its subsidized trade route to Australia. Farrell's fleet was under contract with the NMU, and transfer of the ships would result in substantial job loss and contributions to fringe benefit plans including various separate pension plans for Pacific District unions. Control of PFEL rested in the family of San Francisco Mayor Joseph Alioto. The Sailors' Union and the MFOW refused to sign on PFEL vessels then in port until an agreement could be reached with PFEL.

The major demands asked PFEL to pay a share of unfunded accrued liability of the SIU-Pacific District PMA pension fund and proposals to cushion the impact



*The only MFOW manned ship lost in the Vietnam War. Of the seven American crewmen killed, five were Marine Firemen. The American freighter BATON ROUGE VICTORY lies aground on the Saigon River bank, 20 miles southeast of Saigon. This photo was taken 3 hours after the ship, loaded with war supplies, was blasted by a Communist mine. The mine ripped a hole in the port side, flooding the engine room where the MFOW members were on duty.*

(Associated Press Wirephoto)

of job loss. The picketing was enjoined; but, prior to the injunction, there was a most unusual move.

The Marine Cooks and Stewards enlisting the NMU's assistance, quietly manned the THOMAS E. CUFFE, and the vessel sailed on a scheduled voyage. PFEL and the NLRB marched to a federal court and obtained an injunction against any Union demand for representation rights aboard any vessels transferred to Farrell Lines but the Court did not block picketing for other purposes.

Following the injunction, there were many moves and countermoves. PFEL had been employing a number of shoregang members of the MFOW and the SUP. Alioto approached the ILWU to take over the Pacific District shoregang jobs. The ILWU split on the issue but, led by the local ILWU president and the majority of the members, the Union refused to do so.

In negotiations with PMA, the unions demanded a five-year 100 percent quid-pro-quo for all jobs lost on the sale of any trade route with the selling company given credit for any additional jobs created by the company that did not presently exist in the PMA fleet. They also demanded payment of a share of accrued pension liability attributable to service on any sold trade route, pension plan payments and quid-pro-quo payments on the sale of any ship during its economic life.

**N**egotiations continued but were not resolved until 1976. In 1976, an agreement was reached providing for a 12½ percent increase in base wages, supplemental wages and hourly overtime rates in the first year of the contract, and 5 percent increases in the second and third years with retroactivity. The Sailors and the Marine Firemen were the only participants in these later negotiations. The Union also obtained a modified cost of living clause, provisions for quid-pro-quo for jobs lost when trade routes were sold, together with specific payments to the pension fund in the event of sale of a ship prior to expiration of its economic life.

The provisions for cost of living provisions and cushioning the impact of jobs lost upon the ship of ships were a "first" for the Pacific District Unions. While PMA negotiations were still ongoing, an agreement was separately reached for specific sums to be paid by PFEL to the pension plan and also quid-pro-quo payments to cushion job dislocation resulting from its sale of ships to Farrell Lines.

## **1977-1978 – Loss of Ships**

### **Loss of Pacific Far East Lines**

In November 1977, the Union received word that Pacific Far East Line had not submitted its contributions to Fringe Benefit Funds, but PFEL assured them that payment would be made by the end of the month. A Port Committee meeting on the matter, attended by representatives of Pacific District unions, PMA and Pacific Far East Lines was held in

January, 1970. A PFEL spokesman apologized for the delinquencies and explained cash flow problems were the cause and that it would be able to make payments to the Fund as cash became available from large accounts receivable.

A few days later PFEL notified the Unions that it was filing voluntary bankruptcy proceedings under Chapter XI of the Bankruptcy Act and planned to sell several ships to pay its obligations to benefit plans, and filed voluntary bankruptcy on February 1, 1978. In the same year, the last U.S. passenger ship, the SS MARIPOSA, completed its last voyage, and Pacific Far East Lines put both the MARIPOSA and the MONTEREY up for sale. PFEL staggered along until June, 1978 and was finally ordered into receivership.

### **Loss of Prudential Lines**

The death of PFEL was a solid blow to the Pacific District, but it was not the only blow. Earlier, in December 1977, Prudential Lines announced that it was entering into negotiations to sell all of its ships to Delta Lines. Delta Steamship Lines had a contract with the SIU covering all unlicensed seamen in its fleet. Meetings were held with Prudential Lines over provisions for quid pro quo and pension fund payments in the event the sale occurred. While negotiations with Prudential were underway, the Union was jolted by a more serious blow.

### **Loss of States Line**

In December 1978, States Line suddenly decided to shut down its operations and filed a Chapter XI proceeding in bankruptcy. There had been rumors that States Line had some financial problems, but it had not discussed the gravity of its condition with any of the unions.

In June 1978, there was a short protest strike when the time came for Prudential to transfer its ships to Farrell Lines. The SIU crew respected the lines, but the Federal District Court enjoined any picketing to keep the jobs on the transferred ships, leaving the unions free to continue negotiations for quid pro quo severance type payments and contributions towards pension unfunded liability. These negotiations continued, and in 1979 Prudential agreed to pay a total of \$930,000 to the SIU Pacific District PMA Pension Plan, and \$162,000 for quid pro quo claims by unlicensed unions.

The loss of PFEL, States Line and Prudential left the Pacific District with only two major fleets — American President Lines and Matson.

### **SIU Merger Discussions**

The loss of ships disturbed all West Coast seamen, and in both the SUP and the AFL there were serious discussions and decisions to explore the feasibility of a merger with another District of the SIU. Resolutions for such a merger were introduced at the Portland and New York branches of the SUP and the membership voted to instruct SUP officials to

meet with the SIU on the subject and invited the MFOW to participate. SIU President Paul Hall was invited to address a conference of officials and members of the SUP and the MFOW.

The SIU had earlier offered a merger but this had been rejected by both Unions. On March 21, 1979, a Conference was held in San Francisco chaired by SIU President Paul Hall. The pros and cons of a merger were thoroughly discussed. At the end of the meeting sentiment of SUP and MFOW members favored submitting a merger proposal to the membership of both Unions.

During the same period, the SIU and the NMU were also exploring a possible merger of the two national unions. For this, or possibly other reasons, the SIU held up further discussions of merger with West Coast Unions, and no further discussions were initiated until after Paul Hall's death in June, 1980. Frank Drozak ascended to the presidency of the Seafarers' International Union and suggested that merger discussions be resumed. The SUP, influenced by the secession of West Coast Inlandboatmen from the SIU, took the position that it no longer wanted to merge with the SIU.

## **1982-1983**

During the years 1982 and 1983, the Marine Firemen's Union, seeing the future of its membership closely tied to the success of American President Lines and Matson, joined the shipowners in many efforts to obtain government charters and contracts for its remaining companies.

Both of its remaining companies, also, face severe competition. The companies struggle for cargo while the Union struggles for jobs. American President Lines, struggling for survival as a profitable enterprise, was jolted by a takeover bid by Diamond Shamrock and emerged from the takeover bid surrendering its energy holdings and resources in exchange for cash and stock. The fleet of American President Lines as well as its support facilities and certain real estate were retained and a separate company with these holdings was established.

## **A Look at the Future**

In 1984 the SIU Pacific District contract with the Pacific Maritime Association will be open for renegotiation. Officials and members now ponder the future of the Union. During the last 10 years the Union battened down its hatches, sold many of its buildings and managed to maintain the Union in a strong financial condition. Its ratio of jobs to members is probably one of the most stable of any maritime union in the United States as increasing numbers of retiring members have cushioned the steady decline of ships and job shipping opportunities for active members. Its Supplemental Pension benefits have dramatically increased on a carefully funded base and a Money Purchase Pension Plan has been added in the hope that the pension benefits from the SIU-Pacific District-PMA Pension Plan added to benefits from a negotiated Supplemental Pension Plan and benefits from a newly negotiated money Purchase Pension Plan, coupled with Social Security benefits, will protect its members in retirement.

The last ten years have brought stormy seas, but the history of this Union shows that it has weathered worse in the past.

Henry Disley, President of the Marine Firemen's Union, summed up the future of the Union in a speech aboard the HMS Queen Mary in Long Beach on June 17 of this Centennial Year as he accepted the Southern California Maritime Industry "Man of the Year" Award:

"The members of this Union have demonstrated over the years that they have the drive and loyalty necessary to keep any organization alive and healthy."

Accepting the tribute, Disley responded:

***"The honor is a tribute to the Marine Firemen's Union and the entire membership. Our Union exemplifies the struggles of the American labor movement. There have been many changes in the MFOW since the 'black gang' shoveled coal in blazing heat to keep up the steam, but the old union spirit of pride and independence goes on."***



*Henry "Whitey" Disley, MFOW president, addresses 300 guests at dinner aboard Queen Mary in Long Beach, Calif., after receiving 1983 "Man of the Year" Award from So. California Maritime Trades Department Port Council. At right is John R. Henning, California AFL-CIO Exec. Sec'y-Treasurer.*

*Below are some of the men who reversed the confrontation labor policies of shipowners associations in the immediate post war years—turning to a policy of working out problems at the bargaining table in an atmosphere of problem solving with due regard for the legitimate interests of both workers and management.*



**RANDOLPH SEVIER**  
President, Matson Navigation Company 1950-1962

Sevier began his career on Matson's Hawaiian docks and rose steadily from the ranks. He led Matson through a difficult period of transition. In his words, he would happily have been a strong unionist if there had been a union to join at the time he started work at Matson.



**GEORGE L. KILLION**  
President, American President Lines, 1947-1966

Killion, who began as a newspaper reporter in Southern California, was a colorful figure in the Maritime Industry for two decades. Active in politics throughout his career, he was California State Director of Finance in the early '40s and later was treasurer of the Democratic National Committee. He died in January, 1983 at 81.



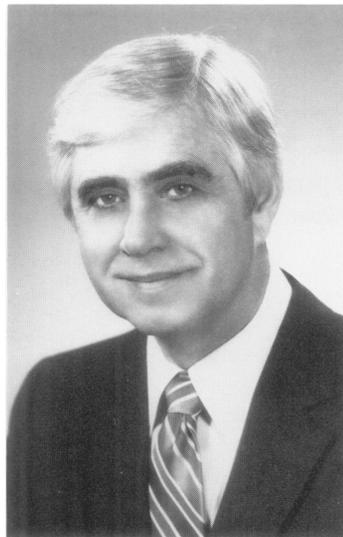
**ROCCO C. SICILIANO**

Siciliano served as Assistant Secretary of Labor under President Eisenhower and later as Presidential Assistant for Personnel Policies. He served as President of the Pacific Maritime Association from April 1965 until July 1969, later became Undersecretary of Commerce and then returned to private industry.

**WILLIAM E. CODAY**  
President, Pacific Maritime Association

William Coday took the helm of PMA in September 1981. He was born in the Depression and in poverty, living in various foster homes. He took odd jobs to complete his college education and graduated from law school, later specializing in labor law. Coday came to PMA after several years as labor counsel for Ralston-Purina.

He was attracted to the "psycho-drama" of labor relations. "It deals with a great deal of conflict with a great deal at stake—people's bread and butter and society's commerce."



**J. PAUL ST. SURE**  
President, Pacific Maritime Association  
March 4, 1952 -  
March 9, 1965  
Chairman of the Board  
March 10, 1965 -  
September 1, 1966

St. Sure left an indelible imprint in the collective bargaining annals of the nation's maritime industry—a vital force in creating an atmosphere of mutual understanding between employers and unions, a man of honor, a man of integrity, a man totally devoid of acrimony, an inherently kind and compassionate person.



*An artist's conception of Matson's liner "Monterey" rescuing troops and crew from the stricken "Santa Elena" in the Mediterranean. The rescue operation was extremely difficult because of darkness and World War II blackout conditions.*



*APL's newest containership PRESIDENT MONROE, shown at Oakland Terminal, is latest of three diesel-propelled vessels to enter West Coast-Far East Service.*

*Photo taken in M.F.O.W. headquarters building during 1981 Convention, and during that portion of the proceedings involving discussions and speeches by various segments of maritime industry representatives and members.*





*Part of the Marine Firemen's contingent in the 1982 San Francisco labor day parade.*

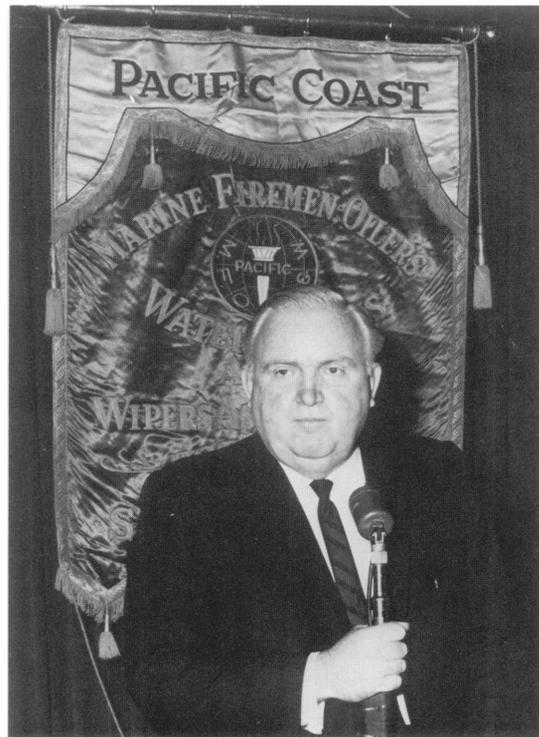


*Photo of M.F.O.W. and S.U.P. pickets at pier 96 San Francisco Pacific Far East Lines terminal during the 1975 beef. The two men at right front are, H. "Whitey" Disley, M.F.O.W. President and Morris Weisberger, then president of S.U.P. The man at left front (with hat) is Richard Ernst, then Counsel for Pacific Maritime Association.*



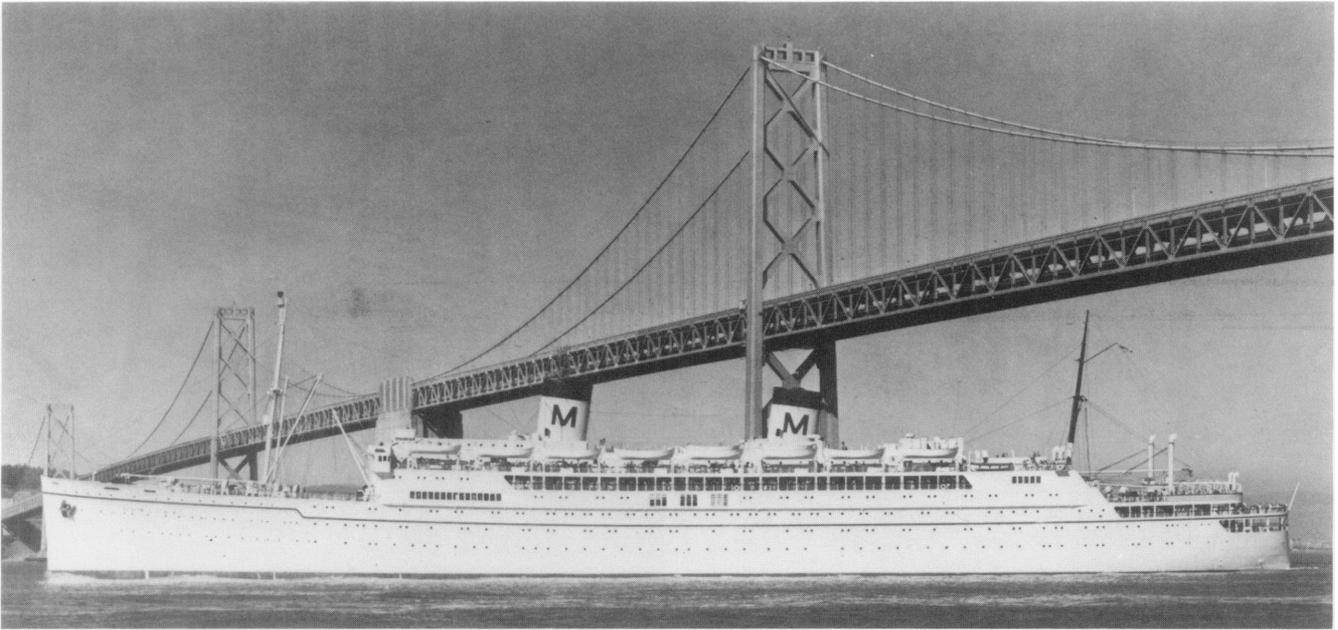
*Left M.F.O.W. pensioner Wm. "Bill" O'Hara and San Francisco headquarters building manager Wm. "Bill" Geyer. Photo taken during labor support of Polish solidarity in 1982.*

*The late Paul Hall, former president of "Seafarers International Union" addressing the membership in MFOW headquarters building during 1963 Convention.*



*Below, left to right: the widow of the late Harry Lundeberg; Jack Ryan, Vice President, S.U.P.; Frank Drozak, President, Seafarers International Union; Paul Dempster, President, S.U.P.; H. "Whitey" Disley, President, Marine Firemens Union and John Henning, Executive Secretary of California State AFL-CIO. Photo taken during unveiling ceremonies of the refurbished busts of former S.U.P. presidents, Andrew Furuseth and Harry Lundeberg at the Harrison Street entrance of S.U.P headquarters building in San Francisco, on March 5, 1981.*





*Famed West Coast-Hawaii luxury liner LURLINE, queen of Matson's four "white ships," is shown under Golden Gate Bridge enroute from San Francisco to Honolulu. It was third LURLINE and served from 1932 until 1963, including four years as WW II troopship.*



*Today's LURLINE, fifth Matson vessel to bear the famous name, is a combination roll-on, roll-off trailership and container carrier. Vessel was converted from a "ro-ro" and "stretched out" with 126½-foot midbody in 1981 to add lift-on, lift-off capability and triple cargo capacity.*

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Oilers, Watertenders and Wipers Association  
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*Printed by Graphic Arts of Marin, Inc., Sausalito*

