

Human Stories of the U.S. Coast Guard



Chiao-Shun Soong (a.k.a. Charles Jones Soong) is probably the most famous individual of Chinese ancestry to serve in the U.S. Coast Guard. However, his fame in the United States is little known compared to his celebrity in China and Taiwan.

In January 1879, at the age of sixteen, Soong chose to enlist in the U.S. Revenue Cutter Service. Soong found no interest in working at his uncle's importing business and chose to ship aboard the cutter GALLATIN, then moored in Boston. The commanding officer of the GALLATIN, Captain Eric Gabrielson, hailed from Norway and served in the Union Army during the Civil War.

Gabrielson was a rather reserved religious man who had spent most of his life on the sea. Soong developed a very strong bond with Gabrielson and followed the captain on to the cutter SCHUYLER COLFAX when he transferred to the command of that vessel, homeported in Wilmington, North Carolina.

Seeing the great promise and character traits Soong exhibited, Captain Gabrielson arranged Soong's discharge from the service in 1881 after nearly three year's of service. The young man began studies at Trinity College, now known as Duke University in Durham, North Carolina. From there, Soong continued his studies at Vanderbilt University, where he earned a degree in theology.

After completing his degree at Vanderbilt, Soong traveled to China as a missionary. He settled permanently in Shanghai quickly built a large fortune and became a financial leader in China. He also married and raised six children and he sent all of them overseas to pursue a college education.

All of his children figured prominently in the political and economic development of twentieth-century China. His daughter Ching-ling Soong married Dr. Sun Yat-Sen, founder and first leader of the Chinese Republic. Daughter Mei-Ling Soong married Nationalist Chinese leader Generalissimo Chaing Kai-Shek, who ruled over China from 1928 until 1948, when a communist takeover forced him to the island of Taiwan, where he ruled until 1975. Ai-Ling Soong married Dr. H.H. Kung, a one-time finance minister of China and a descendant of Confucius. His son T.V. Soong founded the Bank of China and became a world financial leader. His son T.L. Soong became a director of the World Bank and his youngest son, T.A. Soon, became a director of the influential China Development Corporation.

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