Overview of the Collection

Collection Title: Captain Alv Kulstad and George Kulstad Collection

Dates: 1916-2012

Identification: OCH/AGK

Creator: Kulstad, Peter Alv, 1895-1980

Physical Description: 7.41 linear feet

Language of Materials:
English
Norwegian

Repository: Old China Hands Archives

Abstract: The Captain Alv Kulstad and George Kulstad Collection contains correspondence, 3D objects, monographs, serials, ephemera, and research materials related to the maritime career of Peter Alv Kulstad and the lives of his wife Helen (Nellie Thomas) Kulstad and children George Kulstad and Olav E. Kulstad in Shanghai in the first half of the 20th century. The bulk of the materials date from 1920-1949.

Biographical Information:
Captain Alv Kulstad was born Peter Alv Kulstad in Trondheim, Norway in 1895. He attended Trondheim Navigation School, served in the Royal Norwegian Navy during World War I, and then made his living working on a number of ships. He met Helen (Nellie) Thomas while in Shanghai and the two were married in 1928.

Helen was an American born in 1899 in Chemulpo (Inchon), Korea to a Japanese mother and American father. Alv and Helen had three sons together, Olav (Ollie) born in 1930, Peter born in 1932, and George born in 1935. Peter died of dysentery in early childhood.

While living in Shanghai Alv Kulstad served in the Shanghai Volunteer Corps from February 1927 until 1935, when he began working as First Mate on the ship Li Liang. In 1938 he was transferred to the dredger Chien She. He was initially assigned the job of acting Captain of the Chien She in 1940, but soon became Captain. During his tenure as Captain, he and the rest of the ship’s crew were interned on the Chien She by the Japanese from 1942 to 1944. After World War II, Alv Kulstad worked on the SS George R. Holmes, the SS Trans Ocean as a Captain, the SS Grays Harbor, and the SS Casa Grande.

While living in Shanghai, George and his older brother Ollie attended Catholic school Saint Francis Xavier College. Ollie later went to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology for an academic year, starting in 1948. When the Communists took over Shanghai in 1949, Helen and George left China on the SS General Gordon, eventually settling in Stockton, California, where Ollie and Alv later joined them.

Genre/Form of Material:
Ephemera
Paper records
Photographic material
Publications

Processing Information:
Mallory Furnier, 2017

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This collection is open for research use.

Preferred Citation:
For information about citing items in this collection consult the appropriate style manual, or see the Citing Archival Materials guide.

Arrangement of Materials:
Series I: Alv Kulstad Maritime Career Papers, 1935-1953
Series II: George Kulstad Research Papers, 1922-2012
Guide to the Captain Alv Kulstad and George Kulstad Collection, 1916-2012

Series III: Personal Papers, 1916-1964

Scope and Contents

The Captain Alv Kulstad and George Kulstad Collection contains correspondence, monographs, serials, ephemera, research notes, and objects related to the maritime career of Peter Alv Kulstad and the lives of his wife Helen (Nellie Thomas) Kulstad and children George and Ollie. Collection materials provide insight to maritime life through correspondence and ephemera related to Alv Kulstad’s maritime career as well as American culture in Shanghai through the personal papers of Helen Kulstad. The bulk of the materials date from 1920-1949, with a significant amount of material from circa 1920-1929. The Collection is divided into three series, Alv Kulstad Maritime Career Papers (1935-1953), George Kulstad Research Papers (1922-2012), and Personal Papers (1916-1964).

Series I, Alv Kulstad Maritime Career Papers, documents the seafaring career of Alv Kulstad through correspondence, employment applications, and Kulstad’s professional clothing. These materials are arranged chronologically.

Series II, George Kulstad Research Papers, documents George Kulstad’s research regarding his family history, including his father’s work on the dredger Chien She and time with the Shanghai Volunteer Corps. There are also copies of documents and research notes related to Kulstad’s historical research into the context of his early life in Shanghai pre-1949. This includes a significant number of copies of archival documents regarding the Shanghai Municipal Police. Research papers are arranged alphabetically by subject.

Series III, Personal Papers, relate directly to Alv Kulstad, Helen (Nellie Thomas) Kulstad, or the Kulstad family and primarily reflect their residence in China, with a small number of materials related to their post-China lives. Personal papers are arranged based on provenance, and then alphabetically.

Series I: Alv Kulstad Maritime Career Papers, 1935-1953

Box 1, Folder 1  Kulstad, Alv Correspondence, 1935
Box 1, Folder 2  Kulstad, Alv Correspondence, 1938
Box 1, Folder 3  Kulstad, Alv Correspondence, 1940
Box 1, Folder 4  Kulstad, Alv Correspondence, 1941
Box 1, Folder 5  Kulstad, Alv Correspondence, 1942
Box 1, Folder 6  Kulstad, Alv Correspondence, 1943
Box 1, Folder 7  Kulstad, Alv Correspondence, 1944
Box 1, Folder 8  Kulstad, Alv Correspondence, 1945
Box 1, Folder 9  Kulstad, Alv Correspondence, 1946
Box 1, Folder 10  Kulstad, Alv Correspondence, 1947
Box 1, Folder 11  Kulstad, Alv Correspondence, 1948
Box 1, Folder 12  Kulstad, Alv Correspondence, 1949
Box 1, Folder 13  Kulstad, Alv Correspondence, 1950
Box 1, Folder 14  Kulstad, Alv Correspondence, 1951
Box 1, Folder 15  Kulstad, Alv Correspondence and Employment Applications, 1952
Box 1, Folder 16  Kulstad, Alv Correspondence, 1953
Box 3, Item 1  Captain Hat
Box 3, Item 2  Trans Ocean Corporation Headband
Box 3, Item 3  Whangpoo Conservancy Board Headband
Box 3, Item 4  Winter Captain Jacket

Series II: George Kulstad Research Papers, 1922-2012

Box 1, Folder 17  Chien She Research and Whangpoo Conservancy Board Envelope, undated
Box 1, Folder 18  Japanese Officers Execution Research, 2010-2012
Box 1, Folder 19  Shanghai Articles and Research, 1928, 1953, 2002
Box 1, Folder 20  Shanghai Municipal Police Reports, 1929-1940
Box 1, Folder 21  Shanghai Municipal Police Reports, 1922-1943
Box 1, Folder 22  Shanghai Municipal Police Reports, 1929-1943
Box 1, Folder 23  "The Council’s Regulations and The Standing Orders of the Shanghai Volunteer Corps" Photocopies, undated
Box 2, Folder 1  Shanghai Volunteer Corps Research, 1934-1989
Box 2, Folder 2  Shanghai Volunteer Corps Research, 1922-2002

Series III: Personal Papers, 1916-1964
Box 2, Folder 3  Chinese Paper Currency, 1946-1949
Box 2, Folder 4  Golden Anchors Souvenir Photographs, 1946 September 19
Box 2, Folder 5  Kulstad, Alv Personal Papers, 1916-1951
Box 2, Folder 6  Kulstad, Helen (Nellie Thomas) Correspondence Culture Courses, 1922-1925
Box 2, Folder 7  Kulstad, Helen (Nellie Thomas) Personal Papers, 1920-1964
Box 2, Folder 8  Personal Family Files, 1924-1949
Box 4, Item 1  Alv Kulstad Dress Handkerchief, ca. 1920-1939
Box 4, Item 2  Boy Scout, Lloyd Triestino, Missionary Youth, Firestone Tire, Jacinto Rubber Co. Daylight Sport Shoes, and Rigugio Biella Dolomiti Pins
Box 4, Item 3  British Army Uniform Metal Insignia
Box 4, Item 4  Gold and Black Silk Rolls
Box 4, Item 5  Hakushindo Playing Cards Box
Box 4, Item 6  Indian, Turkish, Japanese, and Chinese Lapel Pins and Buttons
Box 4, Item 7  Japanese Muslin Civilian Bags and Hachimaki
Box 4, Item 8  Norwegian and British Lapel Pins
Box 4, Item 9  Ship Officer Uniform Buttons
Box 4, Item 10  Sigemitu-Sakai Japanese Kitchen Knife and Box, ca. 1920-1939
Box 4, Item 11  Tin Box
Box 5, Item 1  Helen Kulstad Suitcase