

How (proper) blast cleaning averted a Naval conflict

by Michel Cardon

Michel Cardon puts a humorous spin on an incident that gained his company a work project with the French Navy.

What do John Paul Jones, the founder of the U.S. Navy, and Georges Clemenceau, a French politician (1841 - 1929), have in common?

Both of these famous names in history have been given to ships. The Clemenceau was a French aircraft carrier and the USS John Paul Jones was a U.S. Naval Destroyer.

Moreover, in the 1960s, they were docked together at Toulon, the French Navy base in Provence in the south of France.

The French Navy needed to upgrade the Clemenceau's flight deck coating. The coating was a mixture of resin and alox that formed an anti-skid surface for landing aircraft. However, it was damaged and relatively fragile. The Navy was concerned that the alox particles might enter the catapult rails. A new type of rubber-based coating was selected, but the 8,800 square meters (about 95,000 square feet) of original coating had to be removed first.

Test were conducted and the removal process needed to be efficient, quick and, as much as possible, dust-free.

I was the manager of the vacu-blast department for my family's company, SATEM, at that time and was on the Clemenceau with my company demonstrators in hopes of securing a Naval contract. We were demonstrating our closed-circuit blast equipment—we had a high-efficiency gun that was powered by a "crawler unit".

My competitors had a pneumatic multi-hammer. Unfortunately for them, Toulon harbor receives a north wind named the "Mistral" (i.e. the Master). The particles of coating and alox loosened by the hammer were fiercely blasted on the John Paul Jones' downside. The U.S. Navy did not appreciate this free-of-charge blasting process and I saw several of their crew coming out and yelling. The multi-hammer test was stopped immediately.

We got the order and the job was done without international dispute. ●



Michel Cardon is retired from the vacu-blast industry and resides in Paris, France. During his career, he was the manager of the vacu-blast department of his family business, Satem. He formed Matrasur which was later purchased and became Wheelabrator. Some of his career highlights include being a guest of the U.S. Capitol in 1982 and a meeting with Jacques Chirac.

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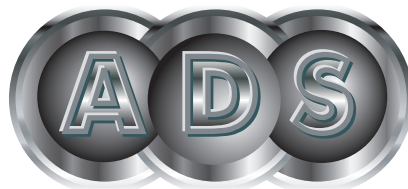
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