

## **Small Ships Section, Southwest Pacific Area of World War II**

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After the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, they rapidly seized as many islands in the Pacific as they could. They landed on the north side of the island of New Guinea in 1942 and began to sweep down the island taking control of Hollandia, Madang, Finschhafen, Lae and Buna. The thick jungle slowed their progress over the Owen-Stanley Mountain Range to Port Moresby. The entire Australian Army was fighting with the British in North Africa and the only thing that stood between their home and Japanese invasion was the American Army and Navy. When General Douglas MacArthur established his headquarters in Australia, the Aussies knew he was not falling back any further and their country would be safe. On 30 March 1942, the Navy would command the Central Pacific while McArthur would retake New Guinea and the islands north of Australia. The Australian government endorsed the decision on 14 April 1942. However the inter-service rivalry meant the US Navy could spare no Marines and landing craft for McArthur. He had to find another source.

When the idea for a small ships unit originated, the US Army was still holding onto the peninsula of Bataan in the Philippines with the promise of help, but the US Army and Navy had few resources to deliver much needed supplies. The Army Transportation Service had no ships available to supply troops in the South Pacific and the US Army would not have an amphibious capability until the 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Special Brigade arrived at Oro Bay, New Guinea in October 1943.

### **Mission X**

John Sheridan Fahnestock and Adam Bruce Fahnestock, from a privileged New York family and friends with President Roosevelt, originated the idea of organizing a unit of small sailing ships of adventurous civilians and Soldiers with sailing experience to deliver supplies to Bataan, called "Mission X." Both had participated in two famous South Seas explorations expeditions aboard the 130-foot 3-masted Grand Banks fishing schooner *Director II* in 1934 and 1940. Their experience convinced them that small craft would be necessary for any war in the Pacific. Their dislike for the discipline and stuffiness of the US Navy inspired them to join the Army's navy. In December 1941, they began work with "Mission X" this organizations initial plan was to find a way to relieve the Philippines use small watercraft purchased in the Pacific that would in theory go unnoticed by the Japanese. Continued advances made by Japanese forces ended any hope of relieving the Philippines and the defense of Australia became the primary goal in the Pacific.<sup>1</sup>

In January 1942, they recruited former members of their old *Director II* crew, Phillip W. "Phil" Farley and Bob Wilson from Yale, Dawson C. "Gubby" Glover who had been kicked out of Yale as well as other schools, and 2LT Ladislav "Laddie" Reday, an MIT graduate who was attending Coastal Artillery School at Fort Monroe, Virginia. Sheridan

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<sup>1</sup>Ladislav Reday, *The Raggle Taggle Fleet*, Riverwood NSW: Ligare Pty Ltd, n.d..

Fahnestock was commissioned as a captain, Bruce as a first lieutenant and the rest as second lieutenants.<sup>2</sup>

The Mission X cadre flew to Melbourne, Australia in bombers in March 1942 to create a Small Ship Section of the McArthur's Southwest Pacific Area to provide transport to the beleaguered defenders of Bataan, but on 9 April 1942 shortly after Mission X arrival the US Army on Bataan surrendered. Mission X would become the Small Ships Supply Command, later Small Ships Division, under the Transportation Service of the US Army Forces in Australia (USAFIA).<sup>3</sup> The Small Ships' mission was to deliver ammunition, medical supplies, and perishable food to outlying bases that could not be reached by deep draft ships and assist in tactical operations when required.<sup>4</sup>

COL Thomas G. Plant, former steamship operator of the American Hawaiian Steamship Line, headed up the Water Branch of the Transportation Service in Australia which the Small Ships officially fell under on 29 May 1942. COL Thomas B. Wilson arrived from the Alaska Steamship Corporation to become the Chief of Transportation Division (later Transportation Service) and Deputy Chief Quartermaster for the USAFIA, later US Army Service of Supply (USASOS), in Southwest Pacific Area (SWPA). He supervised the acquisition of the growing fleet and brought MAJ Jack McKinstry with him. COL Harry Cullens was recalled to active duty to process the acquisition paperwork. He was joined by MAJ Reford P. "Mike" Shea. Neither knew anything about ships, but knew the Army administration system. MAJ Gordon Evans joined the unit as the personnel officer. They formed the nucleus of the Water Branch of the Transportation Service in SWPA.<sup>5</sup> The Small Ships initially established its headquarters in the Melbourne it with the rest of the headquarters but moved into the Grace Building on the corner of York and King Streets in Sydney, Australia in September 1942.<sup>6</sup>

After the move to Sydney, MAJ George P. Bradford joined them and was given command of the Small Ships. He had been the president of the Everett Steamship Corporation and had its head offices in Shanghai, China and the main port and corporate headquarters in Manila, Philippine Islands. The hard-working commander disdained military brass but wanted to get the war over and recover his fleet in the Philippines. MAJ Shea became the executive officer and CPT Sher Fahnestock became the Operations Officer. Heath Steele and Frank Sheridan, both brother-in-laws of the

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<sup>2</sup> Captain E. A. Flint, MBE, ED, "The Formation and Operation of the US Army Small Ships in World War II," an address to members of the Small Ships on 25 January 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Bykofsky and Harold Larson, *The US Army in World War II; The Technical Services: The Transportation Corps: Operations Overseas*, Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1957. The official history referred to the unit as the Small Ships Division but some correspondence would refer to it as the Small Ships Section.

<sup>4</sup> Bykofsky and Larson, *Transportation Corps: Operations Overseas*.

<sup>5</sup> Reday, *Raggle Taggle Fleet*; and Bill Lunney and Frank Finch, *Forgotten Fleet*, Medowie: Forfleet Publishing, 1995.

<sup>6</sup> Reday remembered in *Raggle Taggle Fleet* the headquarters moved to Sydney around the end of April or early May 1942, but the official history *Transportation Corps: Operations Overseas* by Bykofsky and Larson claimed the move of the Transportation Office took place in September 1942.

Fahnestocks but not former members of the *Director II*, enlisted as sergeants. Karl Kortum and Chet Juday later joined the Small Ships in Australia.<sup>7</sup>

To assemble the fleet of Small Ships, the USASOS purchased what was available locally, requisitioned from the United States, and began construction in Australia and New Zealand. The original officers of the Small Ships split up upon arrival to find adequate vessels with Phil Farley going to New Zealand, Bob Wilson to Adalaide, and Bruce Fahnestock to Sydney. Laddie Reday and Sher Fahnestock went to Hobart, Tasmania followed by Gub Glover when they made arrangements with the Australian Army and Navy.<sup>8</sup>

Using the reverse Lend Lease Program they purchased or commandeered with promise to pay all sailing craft they needed, but they needed a skillful eye to ensure they acquired serviceable watercraft. The first civilian hired was John B. "Jack" Savage of the JJ Savage and Son Boat Builders of Victoria. He would thoroughly inspect the boats and determine the appropriate value. War shortages meant that ships were procured from wherever they could be gotten in Australia creating a fleet like none seen before. The vessels ranged in any size, shape and age, some powered by motor or sail including several built in the previous century.

Fishing trawlers made suitable landing craft for the islands because they had shallow draft, a stern anchor and best of all a winch for hauling in nets. The crew could attach the anchor chain to the winch and use it to pull the vessel off the beach. The first fishing trawler acquired was the 62-foot long *King John* skippered by Bill Priest. The next was the *Ulladulla*, skippered by Jim Allsop, and the third was the *Kelton*. The fourth trawler was the *Willyama II* skippered by Ralph Andrews.<sup>9</sup> The fleet of fishing trawlers and skippers would eventually include:

*Minston Brae*, George Ling  
*Two Freddie's*, Ralph Andrews  
*Black Fin*, Tommy Neilson  
*St John*, Scotty Smith  
*Timoshenko*, Neil Sandry  
*Chas. Cam*, Bill French  
*S. Christofolo*, Steve Shirley  
*Mimmamurra*, Tom King  
*Barraconda*, Charlie Hart  
*Potts*, Frank Greer  
*Nanikai*, Ken Sherer  
*Zoie*, Jack Gardner  
*Brianbard*, Ron Prince  
*Mary Ellen*, Bert Evans  
*Bundaberg*, Bert Hallam

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<sup>7</sup> Reday, *Raggle Taggle Fleet*.

<sup>8</sup> Reday, *Raggle Taggle Fleet*.

<sup>9</sup> Flint, "US Army Small Ships."

*Majorie Jean*, Ted Bishop  
*Bonwin*, Lt Ames  
*Tassie III*, Wal. Mayhew  
*Tassie VI*, Alec Flett  
*Willyama Two*, Simcock Jack  
*Hilda Norling*, Harold Horder  
*Ulladula*, Jim Alsop  
*Kurimarau*, Bert Evans  
*Wombat*, H. D. Hallam  
*Erina II*, Firth

The Small Ships then purchased ketches ideal for hauling supplies over shallow reefs and onto beaches. The first ketch purchased was the 31-ton *Melanesia*, 54x15.2x7.3 feet, then the 105-ton *Harold*, 96x23x7.1 feet, and then the *Leprena*, 92x22.8x6.6 feet, skippered by Alan Reynolds with well-known Australian engineer, Ray Parer. The 3-masted schooner *Argosy Lemal*, 119x24.5x12 feet, was outfitted with radios to serve as a communications ship anticipating the Japanese would not pay attention to small sailing vessels. The next ketch purchased was the *Margaret Thwaities* followed by several others.<sup>10</sup>

The Small Ships also commandeered a few Dutch freighters and converted a WWI destroyer, *Maysaya*. It also purchased large vessels like the 340-ton motor ship *Kooraka*, 130x24.4x7.5 feet; 554-ton 134-foot *Moa Moa*; and 285-ton *Kurimaru*, 1215.7x25x7.2 feet, which saw early action on Milne Bay and took Brigadier Victor C. Secombe ashore at Oro Bay and Porlock Harbour. 1100-ton *MV Lorinna* was leased on 30 September 1942, to become the flagship of the Small Ships' fleet. She was skippered by Captain Elmer Malanott, a WWI U-boat skipper. All vessels were outfitted with machineguns and the US flag.<sup>11</sup>

The *SS Mactan*, a Compagnia maritime ship that escaped the Philippines was also commandeered into the Small Ships service and its master, Cisneros, was recruited into the Army as a captain. The *Mactan's* mate, Lieutenant Ames, became skipper of the trawler, *Kelton*, with an all Filipino crew. The *Mactan* engineer, Melchior "Mel" Bernal, was also recruited as a second lieutenant in the US Army and made engineer aboard the *Kelton*.<sup>12</sup> This fleet was assembled at No. 10 [Pier] Walsh Bay in Sydney.

Because Australia had to build up an army to fight in the Pacific, the Australian Government did not allow the US Army to recruit any man eligible for military service; so consequently, the Small Ships could only recruit old men and young boys, or men physically unfit for military service. These civilian crews initially signed up for six-month contracts and issued two sets of khakis, shoes and cap. Most wore civilian clothes aboard ships and bought the billed caps with the Army Transportation Service insignia for going ashore and impressing the girls. These Australian sailors were paid American

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<sup>10</sup> Flint, "US Army Small Ships;" and Reday, *Raggle Taggle Fleet*.

<sup>11</sup> Flint, "US Army Small Ships."

<sup>12</sup> Reday, *Raggle Taggle Fleet*.

wages, which were considerably higher than normal Australian wages. Upon completion of their six-month contracts, they sailed home to Australia where they could sign up for another six months.

The odd assortment of boats with their crews made their way to New Guinea, specifically to Milne Bay on the tip of New Guinea to be the primary means of supplying the American and Australian Troops battling the Japanese Army for control on New Guinea and the protection of the Northern Coast of Australia.

### New Guinea

Small Ships sailed up the coast of Australia then out through the Great Barrier Reef toward New Guinea. Milne Bay, on the western tip of the island became the Advance Base for the US Army and initial operational port for the Small Ships. The New Guinea coast had not been charted since the previous century, which meant that these sailors had to face unknown reefs and shallows when bringing supplies and equipment to the Allied forces, to include artillery and light tanks. Local natives, known as “Fuzzy Wuzzies,” were hired to unload the boats by hand once they came ashore. In an attempt to avoid enemy air attacks from Rabaul night runs were common but extremely dangerous and required the teaching of celestial navigation to all boat commanders. But the small ships were the best option for delivering supplies, the terrain of New Guinea played havoc with and serious movements made by both the Allies and Japanese, what roads existed were trails, and the few airstrips were hampered by continued rains. On 24 August 1942, the Japanese Navy landed with 1,900 in an attack against Milne Bay but the Australian defenders beat back the attacks and the Jap Navy withdrew what remained of their infantry on 5 September.<sup>13</sup> While at Milne Bay, the Small Ships Section added a captured Japanese landing barge to its fleet.

With Milne Bay secure, McArthur wanted to take the Japanese stronghold on Buna on the north coast of New Guinea. The 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division, a National Guard unit from Michigan and Wisconsin, had been activated into federal service back in October 1940 and participated in the Louisiana maneuvers prior to the declaration of war. The Division landed in Australia on 14 May 1942 to train in jungle warfare at Camp Cable near Brisbane. The 126<sup>th</sup> and 128<sup>th</sup> Infantry sailed to Port Moresby, New Guinea 15-28 September 1942 and with the Japanese reinforcing Guadalcanal, McArthur decided to take Japanese-held Buna. The 128<sup>th</sup> Infantry blocked the Japanese advance down the Kokoda Trail and a battalion crossed over the Owen Strandley Mountains to reach Jaure on 25 October. The 128<sup>th</sup> Infantry was then flown to Wanigela on 14 October. Two fishing trawlers, *King John* and *Timoshenko*, sailed to Wanigela and picked up 102 Soldiers of the 128<sup>th</sup> Infantry.<sup>14</sup>

On 18 October 1942, *King John* and *Timoshenko*, dropped the Infantry men off at Pongani just 30 miles west of Buna. This was the first amphibious assault conducted by

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<sup>13</sup> Lunney and Finch, *Forgotten Fleet*.

<sup>14</sup> Shelby L. Stanton, *Order of Battle; US Army, World War II*, Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1984; and Lunney and Finch, *Forgotten Fleet*.

the Small Ships Section. Early that morning, an American B-25 bombed and strafed the vessels killing Bruce Fahnstock and *New York Times* reporter, Bryon Damton, who were aboard *King John*. Bruce and the other wounded were the first casualties of the Small Ships. Six more Small Ships joined the first two in support of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division with small landings, resupply and hauling out casualties to the hospital ship, *Manunda*. LTC Laurence A. McKenny, G4 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division, relocated his supply base three miles east to Mendaropu and advanced along the coast toward Buna while McArthur waited the results of the fighting in the Solomon Straits.<sup>15</sup>

The Australians occupied Kokoda on 2 November, the 128<sup>th</sup> Infantry reached Oro Bay while the 126<sup>th</sup> Infantry assembled at Natunga on 14 November.<sup>16</sup> With Admiral Halsey's destruction of the Japanese convoy in the Solomons by 15 November, McArthur could continue his offensive to take Buna. He ordered the I Corps Commander, MG Robert L. Eichelberger, to take it "or not come back."

The *Kelton* and *Maysaya* joined the Small Ships fleet at Milne Bay for Port Moresby on 26 October. BG Hanford MacNider selected the *Kelton* as his flag ship, picked up the Warren Force at Embogo and sailed to Hariko Village at Sudest Point just two miles west of Buna on 16 November to link up with Urbana Force. *King John* and *Two Freddie's* were also unloading supplies there under the observation of Japanese outposts at Cape Endaiadere a mile away. MacNider established his forward command post ashore with the Australians blocking the eastern and southern approach to Buna. The Small Ships then sailed back to 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division headquarters at Embogo to pick up more supplies. There they met up with the trawler *Bonwin*, schooners *Mimmamurra* and *Alacrity*, and the Japanese landing barge then the *Kelton* led those vessels loaded with troops, radios, rations and ammunition back to Hariko. The *Mimmamurra* carried the 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division Commander, MG Edwin F. Harding. By 1700, Japanese dive bombers strafed the vessels at Hariko sinking the *Bonwin*, *Alacrity* and *Mimmamurra* setting them on fire. The Japanese Zeros continued down the coast hitting the *Two Freddie's* at Embogo, damaging the vessel but only wounding five of the 110 troops on board, and then strafed the *Willyama II* ten miles further south at Mendaropu. The skipper, Jack Simcock, ran the badly damaged *Willyama II* into the beach for possible salvage. Ralph Andrews was able to sail *Two Freddie's* back to Milne Bay for repairs. The Small Ships finished unloading ammunition and supplies the next day, *Felton* sailed back to Embogo to pick up more supplies for Hariko and then sailed to Oro Bay while the Bloody Battle of Buna began on 19 November.<sup>17</sup>

Another small ship grounded on a reef, and the *Helen Dawn* was bombed by Jap planes while stuck on a sandbar on 25 November, and four more were bombed while at anchor in Oro Bay (one was the *Kurimarau* trying to bring up two more 25-pounder artillery pieces) leaving only the *Kelton*. The *Kelton* had managed to bring two 25-pounder artillery pieces on 22 November. On 28 November, MG Harding reported, "That finishes the Red Arrow freighters." With the loss of so many Small Ships, the advance to Buna

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<sup>15</sup> Lunney and Finch, *Forgotten Fleet*; and Reday, *Raggle Taggle Fleet*.

<sup>16</sup> Stanton, *WWII Order of Battle*.

<sup>17</sup> Lunney and Finch, *Forgotten Fleet*.

was brought to a standstill due to the want of supplies. Over frustration with the slow progress of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division the next day, McArthur ordered LTG Eichelberger to take command of the fighting at Buna and to relieve Harding. Eichelberger replaced Harding with BG Albert W. Waldron. The majority of the Soldiers were sick with malaria, dengue fever and dysentery. The 127<sup>th</sup> Infantry had moved up to Dobodura by 4 December and Waldrop ordered all forces to attack on 5 December. In desperate fighting that day, he was wounded and evacuated and replaced by BG Clovis Byers. Other Small Ships arrived. The *Hilda Norling* arrived at Oro Bay on 5 December and heading to Porlock when she was bombed and strafed by 15 Japanese planes killing two of the crew. The skipper, Norm Oddy, ran the ship aground in hopes of salvager her later. The *Timoshenko* and *Pat* brought up two more 25-pounders on the night of 8 December. The few surviving Small Ships continued to bring up much needed troops and supplies from Oro Bay and bringing out the wounded. On the night of 11 December, the Dutch ship, *MV Karsik*, delivered four American light tanks, which the Small Ships towed to front on barges.<sup>18</sup>

Back in late October, the Combined Operations Service Command (COSC) received eight small plywood landing craft called Higgins Boats and 35 Australians from the 2/7<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Sixth Division as well as Americans volunteered to crew them under the command of MAJ C. K. Moffatt. On 11 December, the landing craft sailed from Fall River to Harvey Bay, adjacent to Oro Bay, on 13 December where CPT Sher Fahnstock assumed command of the small fleet. Leaving MAJ Moffatt ashore, Fahnstock sailed the landing craft to Hariko with much needed ammunition. They loaded up 88 fully equipped Australian soldiers on each landing craft to establish a beachhead two miles south of Buna. After losing the Corvette escort, the Higgins Boats returned to Oro Bay to hide during daylight hours, but were strafed about three miles north of their destination incurring several casualties. The wooden boats were patched and the next night, the Corvettes rejoined them and the landing craft delivered the rest of the Australian soldiers. The 127<sup>th</sup> Infantry seized Buna Village on 14 December. The landing craft continued to run up the coast during Operation Hammer and Sledge Hammer until 20 December. By the end of December, they only had two remaining Higgins Boats due to enemy fire, running on reefs and damaged or cannibalized for spare parts.<sup>19</sup>

The *Eva* was destroyed by US Navy motor torpedo boats at Cape Sudest on 23 December. On Christmas Day, skipper Alan Reynolds and his crew of the *Eva* was sent to Porlock to recover the *Hilda Norling*. They repaired her as best they could and set sail on 8 January 1943. LT Laddie Reday asked Ralph Andrews, the skipper of the destroyed *Two Freddies*, if he could sail the *Hilda Norling* to Townsville for repairs, which he did. She returned to duty in October.<sup>20</sup>

The 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division fought in the Sanananda vicinity 16-23 January until they linked up with the Australians and on 22 January 1943, the Australians and Americans finally took Buna with casualties exceeded those taken by the Marines fighting on

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<sup>18</sup> Lunney and Finch, *Forgotten Fleet*.

<sup>19</sup> Reday, *Raggle Taggle Fleet*.

<sup>20</sup> Lunney and Finch, *Forgotten Fleet*.

Guadalcanal. Totally exhausted from jungle warfare, the 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division left New Guinea from 21 January until 21 February and returned to Camp Cable, Australia.<sup>21</sup>

The 41<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division a National Guard unit activated from the Northwest states, Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Montana began arriving in Australia on 9 April 1942 to conduct their training. The 163<sup>rd</sup> Infantry landed in New Guinea on 27 December 1942 and was sent to Dobodura on 2 January 1943 to clear the road to Sanananda on 8 January and accomplished this task by 22 January which ended the Papua Campaign. The 186<sup>th</sup> Infantry was flown to New Guinea on February 1943 to replace the 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division and reached Milne Bay by 27 February.<sup>22</sup>

The fishing trawler *Zoie* arrived at Milne Bay on 4 February. On 28 March, Japanese planes bombed Oro Bay destroying the Dutch Inies freighter, *Bantam*, and sinking the *Masaya*, a converted WWI four-stack destroyer. *Zoie* beached the sinking *Bantam* and was sent out to rescue the crew from the sinking *Masaya*.<sup>23</sup>

As the war moved further up the coast to Salamaua and Lae, Liberty ships could bring supplies into Milne Bay, Oro Bay and at last Buna. The Small Ships then shifted to landing supplied reconnaissance patrols and coast watchers behind enemy lines. The 163<sup>rd</sup> Infantry fought to the Kumisi River during February and then using the Small Ships patrolled the Kumusi and Mambare Rivers until supplying the patrols with provisions the Regiment returned to Australia on 16 July.

After the 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Special Brigade (ESB) arrived with LCVPs and LCMs in May 1943 and conducted its first amphibious landing delivering the 162<sup>nd</sup> Infantry behind Japanese lines at Nassau Bay on the early morning of 30 June 1943.<sup>24</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> ESB provided 29 landing craft for the mission but requested 2LT Reday to guide them up the coast and across the breakers to shore because of his knowledge of the coastal waters. 21 LCVPs were left swamped on the beach due to the inexperience of the operators, including the one carrying Reday leaving him stranded until a resupply ship arrived the next night.<sup>25</sup> The small sailing vessels still did not attract as much attention from the enemy as Army or naval grey ships and after a few years the crews knew the coastal waters of New Guinea better. The Small Ships began turning over the assault landing missions to them and continued to conduct resupply missions and casualty evacuations.

On 17 July, the 162<sup>nd</sup> Infantry pushed toward Salamaua in conjunction with the Australians. MAJ Archie Roosevelt, a decorated WWI veteran and son of Teddy Roosevelt, used the *Zoie* to tow a barge with 25-pounders. They would come within sight of the Japanese and Roosevelt's men would run the guns down the ramp then engage the enemy.<sup>26</sup> The 162<sup>nd</sup> Infantry fought in the Sanananda-Killerton-Gona area against

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<sup>21</sup> Stanton, *WWII Order of Battle*.

<sup>22</sup> Stanton, *WWII Order of Battle*.

<sup>23</sup> Lunney and Finch, *Forgotten Fleet*.

<sup>24</sup> *History of the Second Engineer Special Brigade, United States Army, World War II*, Harrisburg, PA: The Telegraph Press, 1946

<sup>25</sup> Reday, "Raggle Taggle Fleet;" and *Second Engineer Special Brigade*.

<sup>26</sup> Flint, "US Army Small Ships."

Japanese entrenched on steep mountain ridge overlooking Tambu Bay. MAJ Roosevelt concentrated the fire of a battery of 40 mm Bofor anti-aircraft artillery on one spot on the ridge, blew away the vegetation and then fired on the next spot until the battery had cut a two hundred yard wide brown strip of earth across the ridge, leaving the Japanese defenders stunned or buried. The infantry stormed “Roosevelt Ridge” and dug the Japanese out on 14 August. After the Battle of Scout Ridge on 9 September, it left New Guinea on 3 October.<sup>27</sup>

As the Sixth US Army advanced up the coast, and took control of Lae then Finschhafen in September 1943, the Small Ships delivered supplies to those ports. The Small Ships then participated in the US landing at Cape Gloucester, New Britain in December 1943, ten days prior to the well-publicized Marine landing.<sup>28</sup>

Losses among crew and ships occurred but as the war continued on the ramshackle fleet gave way to new build construction that provided these men with a more proper fleet. By 1943, the boats constructed by Australian boat builders became available. They included the 40-foot and 60-foot tugs, 112-foot Fairmiles. Other ocean lighters and freight supply ships built in the States also arrived but the Small Ships were still needed to get in to the remote shallow beaches. By 1944, the Small Ships was turned over to the Army Transportation Service and the crews signed up for one-year contracts, plus they had the option of joining the crews of larger ATS ships.

The amphibious landing at Hollandia on 22 April 1944 completed the conquest of New Guinea and provided the next staging base for the subsequent invasion of the Philippine Islands. This was the last assault landing conducted by the beach landing section of the Small Ships. At first McArthur did not want to use any Australians in retaking the Philippines and replaced Auzie crews with Americans, but he came to realize he could not do it without the Auzies and let them back on their ships. Later in December 1944, the Australian Government similarly ordered the Small Ships crewed by Auzies south of the Equator but had to rescind the order.<sup>29</sup>

On 10 October 1944, the first Small Ships convoy of 13 tugs hauling 40 barges left Hollandia under the command of LTC Leon J. Lancaster for Taclaoban on Leyte.<sup>30</sup> The Americans invaded Leyte on 20 October and the next convoy of 14 tugs with barges left that day arriving at Taclaoban on 3 November, unloaded and then evacuated the sick and wounded on 24 November.<sup>31</sup> They continued to support the Sixth Army in the landings at Leyte, Lingayen, Cebu and Dagupan, Philippine Islands. Others supported guerrilla units operating in remote islands of the Philippines.

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<sup>27</sup> Shelby, *WWII Order of Battle*; and Lunney and Finch, *Forgotten Fleet*.

<sup>28</sup> Flint, “US Army Small Ships;” and John H. Brown interview by Richard Killblane at Sydney, Australia on 14 May 2010.

<sup>29</sup> Flint, “US Army Small Ships;” and Lunney and Finch, *Forgotten Fleet*.

<sup>30</sup> Lunney and Finch, *Forgotten Fleet*; and Bykofsky and Larson, *Transportation Corps: Operations Overseas*.

<sup>31</sup> Lunney and Finch, *Forgotten Fleet*.

As the war continued some of these vessels and their crews would follow the Army's advance to the Philippines, they continued to provide supply operations with tugs and barges, and operate small ships used for medical evacuation, While the Small Boat Service personnel would continue to operate their boats in the Philippines and areas of the Southwest Pacific that had been successfully retaken, the growing American military might meant that larger war built vessels manned by American crews were taking their places in the coming invasions. Many small boat personnel would sign onto these vessels and continue to serve until the end of the War.

The Small Ships Section had played a vital role in driving the Japanese out of New Guinea and providing the only assault landing craft capability until the arrival of the 2<sup>nd</sup> ESB. The Small Ships accomplished with wooden sailing ships and crews unfit for military service what the 2<sup>nd</sup> ESB and US Army harborcraft units with modern landing craft and steel-hulled vessels would perform later in the war.