

## The “Cactus Navy” at Guadalcanal

*It was only a small action that met little resistance, but it can be argued that the raid on Tasimboko saved the First Marine Division on Guadalcanal and set up the turning point in World War II.*

—Capt. Frank J. Guidone, USMC (Ret.), commander of Company Able, 1st Raider Battalion, on Guadalcanal<sup>1</sup>

In the early evening of 7 September 1942, the rifle companies of the U.S. Marine Corps’ 1st Raider Battalion embarked in the destroyer-transport *Manley* (APD-1) and *McKean* (APD-5) and the patrol craft *YP-239* and *YP-346* at Kukum on the north coast of Guadalcanal, en route to a site twenty miles to the east to launch a raid on Japanese forces occupying Tasimboko village. The YPs were former San Diego tuna boats sent to the Solomons by the U.S. Navy for duty as supply ships. Normally engaged in hauling food, fuel, supplies, and occasionally personnel from Tulagi to Guadalcanal across the span of water separating the two islands, they had been drafted as a last resort, after APDs *Little* (APD-4) and *Gregory* (APD-3) had been sunk by the Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN) destroyers *Yudachi*, *Hatsuyuki*, and *Murakumo* two days earlier in the waters between Guadalcanal and Savo Island.<sup>2</sup>

The *Manley* and *McKean* were the only two remaining units of Transportation Division 12, initially comprised of the five destroyer-transport *Manley* (APD-1), *Colhoun* (APD-2), *Gregory* (APD-3), *Little* (APD-4) and *McKean* (APD-5), which had been sent to the Solomons, following the Battle of Savo Island, to deliver badly-needed supplies and support to the Marines on Guadalcanal. The APDs were

converted World War I era flush-deck destroyers whose current mission was to deliver a company-sized combat unit to a location off a hostile landing beach. They would then stand off and provide gunfire support as needed while Higgins boats delivered the Marines to shore. As the *Little* discharged stores on the Guadalcanal beach on 30 August, she witnessed the destruction of *Colhoun* during a Japanese air raid as the APD patrolled offshore. Successive plane attacks sent the destroyer-transport to the bottom with fifty-one crewmen killed and eighteen wounded. The *Little* herself, as well as the *Gregory*, would be lost to enemy destroyer gunfire on 4 September while returning to their anchorage at Tulagi Island after transporting a Marine Raider Battalion to Savo Island. The Japanese, after direct hits from gun salvos left the APDs ablaze and sinking, steamed between the stricken ships firing shells and strafing survivors in the water. The *Gregory* sank about 0140, and *Little* some two hours later. Admiral Chester Nimitz, commander-in-chief Pacific Fleet, paid tribute to the destroyer-transport: "With little means, the ships performed duties vital to the success of the campaign."<sup>3</sup>

## THE TOKYO EXPRESS

The three destroyers which attacked and sunk the two American APDs on 4 September were part of the so-called "Tokyo Express," fast ships that by night transported food, reinforcement personnel, supplies and equipment to Japanese forces operating in and around New Guinea and the Solomons. The enemy had initiated use of the Express to counter the air superiority established by the Allies in the South Pacific in late August 1942 after Henderson Field became operational on Guadalcanal. Recognizing that its slow transports were vulnerable to attack by day, the IJN devised an alternative plan whereby warships of the Tokyo Express would make all deliveries in darkness and return to their originating bases prior to dawn in order to prevent daylight interception by Allied aircraft. A majority of the participating ships were part of the Eighth Fleet operating from Rabaul, New Britain, and Bougainville, Solomon Islands. (Rabaul, 565 nautical miles west-northwest of Guadalcanal, was the largest center of Japanese military activity in the South Pacific.) Some units from the Combined Fleet, home-based further north at Truk Atoll in the Caroline Islands, were often attached temporarily. Express operations, which began soon after the Battle of Savo Island on 9 August 1942, continued until 25

November 1943. On that date, five American destroyers, under the command of Capt. Arleigh Burke, USN, interdicted and almost completely destroyed three IJN destroyer-transports escorted by two destroyers in the Battle of Cape St. George. The sea battle, fought in waters between Cape St. George, New Ireland, and Buka Island (now part of the North Solomons Province in Papua, New Guinea), marked the end of Japanese resistance in the Solomon Islands.<sup>4</sup>

Map 1-1



Groups of Japanese warships termed the "Tokyo Express" made nightly runs from their bases at Rabaul, New Britain, and Bougainville in New Guinea, down the slot between the northern and southern Solomon Islands to deliver food, reinforcement personnel, supplies and equipment to Japanese ground forces operating in and around New Guinea and the Solomons.

Source: [http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/historical/pacific\\_islands\\_1943\\_1945/solomon\\_islands.jpg](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/historical/pacific_islands_1943_1945/solomon_islands.jpg)

## IMPENDING TASIMBOKO RAID

Following the destruction of three units of Transportation Division 12 within only five days, and with only two destroyer-transports left to provide troop lift, Marine Col. Merritt A. "Red Mike" Edson drafted YPs 239 and 346 to participate in the raid on Tasimboko after he observed them working the Tulagi Harbor. When the ships formed at Kukum on 7 September 1942, the stark differences between the APDs and YPs were very apparent. While the destroyer-transports sported a coat of jungle-green paint and camouflage nets to help them blend in against tropical backdrops, the former fishing vessels were a dull

navy gray.<sup>5</sup> Another contrast was the ride the ships offered; Marines aboard the 815-foot destroyer-transports were much happier during the ensuing wet, cold transit in rough seas than those in the two diminutive vessels. A member of Able Company later remarked that the most miserable night of his life was the one he spent between 7 and 8 September while embarked in the *YP-346*. He described the conditions thus:

The stack of that YP poured sparks [emitted by the laboring diesel engine] into the air all night. We were extremely crowded . . . so we huddled in a sitting position and attempted to brace ourselves to catnap. . . . It was cold! The rolling vessel made some seasick and as they heaved we were all awash in cold sea water and vomit.<sup>6</sup>

The Guadalcanal Campaign, of which the impending raid would be only a small part, was spurred by the Japanese occupation of Tulagi, a small island nestled in a bay at Florida Island opposite Guadalcanal, on 3 May 1942. In response to the enemy having established a toehold in the strategically-located island chain, U.S. naval forces began to build a base on nearby Espiritu Santo Island three weeks later. Japan wanted an air field in the Solomons from which its land-based bombers could provide air cover for the advance of Imperial land forces to Port Moresby, the capital city of Papua and the site of an Allied base (the territories of Papua and New Guinea were combined after World War II into a single territory that today is known as Papua New Guinea). The thousands of troops based there were the Allies' last line of defense before Australia. Having found Tulagi fit only for a seaplane base, on 5 July Japanese forces landed on Guadalcanal, twenty miles across the New Georgia Sound (which Allied servicemen referred to as "The Slot") from Tulagi, and began the rapid construction of Lunga Point Airfield from which the empire's planes could menace the shipping lanes to Australia.<sup>7</sup>

In an effort to prevent that eventuality and gain control of the Solomons, 11,000 members of the 1st Marine Division landed at Guadalcanal on 7 August, and captured the airstrip at Lunga Point, as well as the Japanese encampment at Kukum on the west side of Lunga Point the following day. That same afternoon, after fierce fighting, Marines discharged at Tulagi took the Japanese-held Island, as well as the smaller islands of Gavutu and Tanambogo. The captured airstrip on Guadalcanal was renamed Henderson Field, and its occupation and use by Allied forces temporarily halted Japanese expansion in the

South Pacific. The significance of American control of the island—from which the Allies could expand their presence in the South Pacific while thwarting the Japanese thrust—was not lost on the enemy. Guadalcanal became a pivotal piece of island real estate, one that both sides wanted to control and to which they were willing to commit large numbers of forces. By day, aircraft from Henderson Field controlled the skies, allowing U.S. Navy transports and small vessels to operate in the area with some degree of safety. At night, however, control of these waters shifted as IJN warships, then safe from air attack, raced down the slot between the northern and southern Solomons with supplies and troops to resupply Japanese land forces—and to assault Allied ships caught outside the protected harbor of the fortified island of Tulagai.<sup>8</sup>

## **FISHING VESSELS TO THE FORE**

How did the tuna boats from San Diego come to be plying the dangerous Solomon Islands waters during the summer of 1942? A few weeks after the attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, Comdr. W. J. Morcott, USN (Ret.), the U.S. Navy's port director, met with San Diego tuna fishermen to inform them that the Navy needed them and their boats to support the war effort. About 600 fishermen signed up that day—men with good Portuguese names like Madruga, Gonsalves, Rosa, Theodore, Mascarenhas, Soares, Perry, and Freitas, mixed with Italian names like Ascuito, Scandinavian ones like Rasmussen, and others like Green. Many of the fifty-two clippers that went to war were acquired by the military under a "Bare Boat Charter." Such charters required a vessel to be returned to its owner in a condition as least as good as when acquired, less ordinary wear and tear based on use of the vessel for naval purposes. Other vessels were purchased from their owners, private individuals as well as subsidiaries of tuna canners and shipyards. A majority of the clippers were ordered to the South Pacific for employment as small supply vessels, or to the Panama Canal Zone for assignment to anti-submarine patrol duties. The term "tuna clipper" originally applied to tuna baitboats greater than 100 gross tons and, since all large YPs were tuna baitboats, the term was appropriate to describe the YPs acquired from the San Diego tuna fishing community. A majority of the tuna clippers were operated by captains of Portuguese descent, followed by those of Japanese, Italian, and Dalmatian origins. A number of smaller vessels from the major

California fishing ports, including San Diego tuna baitboats/sardine seiners, San Pedro seiners/tuna baitboats, and sardine seiners from Monterey and San Francisco, were also taken into service to serve as naval district patrol craft.<sup>9</sup>

The tuna clippers were especially prized for their refrigeration capabilities and economical diesel engines. Sporting new coats of dull slate-gray paint over their former brilliant white hulls, and fitted (typically) with a 20mm cannon forward, as well as .50-caliber (sometimes .30-cal.) machine guns and depth charges, the boats were quickly pressed into service as the “errand boys of the Pacific.”<sup>10</sup>

The fishermen who volunteered for duty quickly donned navy uniforms; there was no requirement for the experienced mariners to attend boot camp. The skippers and chief engineers of the boats received commissions as chief warrant officers, and crewmen were given petty officer ratings, compensatory with their age and knowledge. The experience of Vincent Battaglia is fairly representative. After joining the Navy on 1 May 1942 as a machinist’s mate second, he reported aboard the *YP-346* (the ex-tuna clipper *Prospect*) on 6 May, and left San Diego aboard her that same day. The skipper, Joaquin Theodore, had remarked to a lieutenant commander, while arranging his own entry into the Navy, that he did not even know how to salute, to which the officer replied: “Mr. Theodore, we don’t care how you salute; we want you because of your seamanship.” His ship was armed with two .50-caliber machine guns, one atop the pilothouse and the other in the stern near where depth charges were stored on a rack. The men aboard believed that the barrel-shaped explosives would provide little protection against submarines, and the depth charges made them uneasy, as a collision with another ship while in convoy—always a possibility at night—could blow their boat to pieces.<sup>11</sup>

After standing out of San Diego harbor, the *YP-346* joined a group of thirteen other YPs departing San Diego for the Hawaiian Sea Frontier in company with the patrol yacht *Almandite* (PY-24). All of the vessels were raised-deck tuna clippers destined for use as refrigerated supply ships in the Hawaiian Islands or in the South or Southwest Pacific. Kenneth G. Adams, the commanding officer of the *YP-347* (formerly the *Star of the Sea*), described the transit to Hawaii, during which the ships ran at night with navigation lights extinguished to help avoid the possibility of detection by enemy forces:

Photo 1-2



Former skippers and chief engineers of San Diego tuna clippers newly commissioned as naval officers, most as boatswain or machinist warrant officers. Pictured, upper row, left to right, are Boatswains Victor Rosa and Frank Gonsalves, Ens. Antonio Mascarenhas, Boatswain John Tosso, Machinists Robert Hargreaves, James Burk, Mike Ascuitto, V. I. Simian, W. A. Robbins, and L. E. Wiley, all USNR. Lower row, left to right, with officers of the 11th Naval District port director's office, Machinist John Turner, Boatswain Edward Madruga, Machinist Manuel Enrique, USNR, Comdr. W. J. Morcott, USN Ret., Lt. J. F. Piotrowski, USN Ret., Lt. Comdr, J. E. Kemmer, USN Ret., Boatswains Ed Varley and E. Quallin, USNR.

Courtesy of the San Diego Portuguese Historical Center

When clear of Point Loma [San Diego], all fifteen boats fell into their previously assigned station, and the Yippie [YP] fleet was Pearl Harbor bound. Keeping station was a nightmare. My tub was either too fast or too slow. So it was a case of crawling up on the ship ahead or falling back too far. Fortunately ours was the last ship in the column; else we surely would have been rammed. . . .

Then there was the nighttime, during the dark of the moon, and complete blackout, without even a feeble stern light to help the following ship. Daytime was bad enough, but darkness was simply hell. Only by the grace of God did we avoid collision with the ship ahead.

Pearl Harbor was an astonishing, appalling sight that the folks back home were never told about. There were wrecked ships all over the bay and at the docks. The water was thick with oil. The [battle-

ship] *Arizona* lay on her side. One ship at the dock had a hole clear through her. We were issued gas masks and ordered to carry them at all times. The civilian population did likewise, right down to every child.<sup>12</sup>

Upon arrival, the 185-foot patrol yacht reported for duty to the Hawaiian Sea Frontier, and thereafter operated in and out of Pearl Harbor for the duration of the war. Her duties included patrolling the harbor entrance and escorting other ships on runs from Oahu to other Hawaiian islands, as well as to Johnston and Palmyra Atolls located quite a distance southwest of Pearl Harbor. She also served as a weather station in the Hawaiian area. The fourteen YPs entered U.S. Navy Yard, Pearl Harbor in the early afternoon of 17 May. Six of the former tuna clippers (identified by asterisks in the following summary of ship characteristics) would not return home from the war. The abbreviation Bos'n denotes the rank of Warrant Officer Boatswain.

<b>Ship Designation/ Former Name</b>	<b>Year Built</b>	<b>Length Feet</b>	<b>Commanding Officer(s)</b>
<i>YP-237/Anna M.</i>	1941	101.2	BM1 John R. Bruce/Lt. (jg) M. S. Morgan
<i>YP-239/Challenger*</i>	1940	113.7	Howard H. Branyon/Ens. G. E. Shannon
<i>YP-240/Conte Bianco</i>	1934	111.7	At war's end, Lt. (jg) M. S. Carroll
<i>YP-277/Triunfo*</i>	1937	116.0	Pete Dias
<i>YP-284/Endeavor*</i>	1940	131.3	Christian Rasmussen
<i>YP-289/Paramount*</i>	1937	110.1	Bos'n Edward X. Madruga
<i>YP-290/Picaroto</i>	1937	127.9	Bos'n Victor Rosa/Lt. A. B. Goldman
<i>YP-292/Azoreana</i>	1937	130.4	Bos'n Ed Varley/Ens. W. H. Tidman
<i>YP-345/Yankee*</i>	1939	105.9	G. J. Brocato
<i>YP-346/Prospect*</i>	1938	108.7	Bos'n Joaquin S. Theodore
<i>YP-347/Star of the Sea</i>	1930	107.0	Bos'n Kenneth G. Adams
<i>YP-348/Cabrillo</i>	1935	126.0	Virgil Pash/Bos'n V. DiPaixio
<i>YP-349/Queen Mary</i>	1938	134.0	George Reeves
<i>YP-350/Victoria</i>	1937	129.0	Manuel Freitas <sup>13</sup>

The former San Diego tuna clippers did not remain idle for long. A few other YPs were present in the Hawaiian Islands, but being relatively small, they had been assigned to the local defense force. These craft included five former Japanese-owned fishing boats—*YP-173* (ex-*Kasuga Maru*), *YP-174* (ex-*Nachi Maru*), *YP-186* (ex-*Tenjin Maru*), *YP-225* (ex-*Kiyo Maru*), and *YP-226* (ex-*Tenjin Maru II*)—as well as the ex-*Seamonger* (*YP-123*) and the ex-*Islander* (*YP-327*), built in 1924 in Malmo, Sweden, and in 1931 by the Sampson Fishing Boat Co. of Honolulu, Hawaii, respectively. The larger, more seaworthy

ex-tuna boats were dispatched with provisions and supplies to areas farther out in the island chain. Four YPs—284, 290, 345, and 350—cleared the harbor at 0700 on 20 May 1942 en route to Lisianski and Midway, west-northwest of Honolulu. A second group—the 237, 239, 277, and 348—set off for French Frigate Shoals, 260 miles to the south-east of Midway, to deliver provisions, spare parts, and fuel to a Motor Torpedo (PT) Boat squadron detained there en route to Midway. The YPs and PT boats were part of a larger Pacific Fleet effort to prepare Midway for an anticipated Japanese attack. Cryptanalysts had broken Japan's top secret naval code on 15 May 1942 and were able to piece together that Adm. Isoroku Yamamoto, the architect of the attack on Pearl Harbor, planned to occupy Midway Island and the Aleutians. Nimitz immediately ordered the reinforcement of Midway.<sup>14</sup>

### **YPS ORDERED TO THE SOUTH AND SOUTHWEST PACIFIC**

Amid such efforts, on 17 June Nimitz assigned five of the former tuna clippers to Vice Adm. Robert L. Ghormley, the newly appointed commander, South Pacific Area and South Pacific Force. Three of the YPs—240, 289, and 292—were then at, or en route to, Samoa, and *YP-239* and *YP-346* were en route to Efate, two links in a recently-developed vital supply line to Australia. Shipping bound from Bora Bora in French Polynesia to Australia had to pass through or close to the Cook Islands, then the Samoa, Tonga and Fiji groups, and finally, approximately a thousand miles from the Australian coast, the New Hebrides group and New Caledonia. These island bases were generally poor, offering little more than a small airfield and a protected anchorage for ships while they took on fuel or supplies from service vessels. Efate, a part of the joint British-French colony of New Hebrides, however, hosted a large military base. Initially established as an outpost to support New Caledonia, 300 miles to the southwest, and the Fiji Islands, 600 miles to the east, it subsequently served as a minor air and naval base for offensive operations. With the U.S. Army already in New Caledonia and the Japanese moving into Guadalcanal, 700 miles to the north, top military brass had deemed it critical to open airfields in the New Hebrides to facilitate bombing enemy forces on Guadalcanal and to prevent completion of a Japanese airfield on Lunga Point. In July YPs 284 and 290 were hurriedly deployed to the Southwest Pacific.<sup>15</sup>

The earlier group (YPs 239, 240, 289, 292, and 346) had left Hawaii with orders to the Efate/Samoan Defensive Area; with YPs 284 and 290 ordered to Auckland, New Zealand. The latter two vessels arrived at Tongatabu, Tonga Islands, following stops en route at Palmyra, and Suva, Fiji. From there, necessities of war sent the *YP-290* to Auckland, New Zealand, and the *YP-284*, following her arrival at Espiritu Santo, to Guadalcanal along with YPs 239 and 346.

<b>Ship(s)</b>	<b>Assigned Location</b>
<i>YP-290</i>	Auckland, New Zealand
<i>YP-239, YP-284, and YP-346</i>	Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands
<i>YP-240, YP-289, and YP-292</i>	Samoan Islands <sup>16</sup>

The voyage of YPs 239 and 346 to Efate was representative of those of the other ships. After returning from French Frigate Shoals, the two YPs had stood out of Pearl Harbor in the late afternoon of 9 June and set a course south for Palmyra, an atoll halfway between Hawaii and Samoa and the site of a naval air station. The crews of the former tuna clippers typically numbered about seventeen men, usually nine ex-fishermen and eight “regular Navymen,” who included an experienced gunner’s mate to maintain the ship’s armament. Leaving Palmyra on 15 June, the vessels continued sailing south, bound for Tutuila, Samoa. Upon arrival there eight days later, the ships’ captains, Chief Warrant Officers Branyon and Theodore, reported for duty under Vice Admiral Ghormley. It is unclear whether the two vessels then continued to operate together or separately. The *YP-346*’s next stop was Fiji, where its crew found, much to their delight, that liquor was only six cents a shot. Following this respite, the 346 set a course west-northwest for Espiritu Santo, New Hebrides, the site of a supply and support base as well as a naval harbor and an airfield.<sup>17</sup>

### **LOSS OF THE DESTROYER *TUCKER***

As the *YP-346* neared Espiritu Santo in the early evening of 3 August, a Navy destroyer challenged her via flashing light message. Following receipt of the correct response, the DD, also bound for Espiritu Santo, signaled “Good luck to you guys.” The YP entered Second Channel an hour past midnight and thereafter sighted a wrecked ship ahead

that was breaking in two and folding up like a jackknife—the same one with which she had exchanged signals the previous night. After having bid them farewell, the *Tucker* (DD-374) unknowingly entered a defensive minefield laid the previous day by the minelayers *Gamble* (DM-15), *Breese* (DM-18) and *Tracy* (DM-19), and struck a mine at 2145. The destroyer was unaware of the danger, as she had received no radio warning regarding the existence of the new field. The explosion broke the *Tucker's* back, killing three crewmen, with an additional three missing and presumed lost. In an effort to keep the DD from breaking in two, her captain ordered topside weight jettisoned, and sailors heaved depth charges, torpedoes, 20mm shells, and other portable gear overboard. Upon arrival at the scene, Theodore took the 346 into the field in an attempt to save the beleaguered warship:

And so when I got there, the captain asked me if I could give him a tow, cause they're in deep water, to go into shallow water. . . . So I went alongside him, [and] he give me a line.<sup>18</sup>

The YP was able to get the foundering *Tucker* clear of the minefield, fortunately without detonating any more mines, but despite her best efforts she was unable to beach the destroyer. The DD later grounded in the surf off the northwest coast of Malo Island, set there by strong wind and seas. In the interim, those aboard were either taken off or abandoned ship. On her arrival on scene around noon, the minelayer *Breese* found that most of the survivors had already been put ashore. The YP-346 had taken about half the crew off and the tanker *Nira Luckenbach* another dozen, while others had abandoned ship in the destroyer's whaleboat and life rafts. The minelayer took aboard the remaining thirty-eight men and three officers and, in the late afternoon, offered the services of three of its own officers to guide the YP-346 and *Nira Luckenbach* through the field. The YP stood into port, while the merchantman chose to turn around, proceed out the channel, and make passage south of Malo Island. The beached destroyer later broke apart and sank after shifting offshore.<sup>19</sup>

After reaching Espiritu Santo, the YP-346 offloaded frozen food for the base and, over the next few days, did whatever else was asked of her including retrieving a downed flyer from the sea and towing a barge. On 28 August Rear Adm. John S. McCain, commander Aircraft South Pacific Forces, directed that the YPs 346, 239, and 284 take aboard aviation gasoline, and Rear Adm. Richmond K. Turner,

Photo 1-3



YP-346 with the *Tucker* (DD-374) under tow at Espiritu Santo, New Hebrides, on 3 August 1942. The destroyer had struck a mine while turning from Bruat Channel into Segond Channel, breaking her keel.

US Navy photo # NH 77030 from the collections of the Naval History and Heritage Command, <http://www.navy.mil/ourhome/navsource.org/archives/14/31346.htm>.

commander Task Force 62 (Amphibious Force, South Pacific Force), ordered the destroyer *Helm* (DD-388) and three YPs to form Task Unit 62.2.3 and proceed to Guadalcanal. Upon arrival the former tuna clippers were to report for duty to Major Gen. Alexander Vandegrift, commanding general 1st Marine Division. The *Helm* got under way in the early evening of 29 August, but due to darkness, could not locate the three ships she was to escort. The DD stood westward through Bougainville Strait, then northwestward to pass south of San Cristobal Island before proceeding for Lengo Channel leading to Guadalcanal. She eventually made contact and the group arrived at its destination in the mid-afternoon of 31 August.<sup>20</sup>

## YP DUTY AT GUADALCANAL/TULAGI

The offloading of cargo from the YPs began the next morning. Around noon, as a Japanese air raid arrived overhead and bombs began falling on the beach and in the anchorage, the little ships hauled in their anchors and put out to sea as fast as possible. Baptized by enemy attack, the YPs would subsequently serve as tugs, dispatch boats, rescue craft,

troop and supply ferries, and transports for minor amphibious operations in dangerous waters. Because "Cactus" was the military code word for Guadalcanal, the YPs, and other ships that shuttled food, supplies, and ammunition between Tulagi and Lunga Point, Guadalcanal, were referred to as the "Cactus Navy."<sup>21</sup> Vincent Battaglia, a former *YP-346* crew member, summarized that duty and the fighting between American and Japanese forces on Guadalcanal and Tulagi:

Our anchorage was Tulagi. It was maybe a two-hour run [20 nautical miles] from Guadalcanal to Tulagi . . . There were three YPs, the *Endeavor*, the *Challenger*, and the *Prospect*. Our duty was between Tulagi and Guadalcanal, back and forth, carrying troops from here to here, load with food, or whatever it was.

[There was] a lot of fighting at Tulagi. In two or three days it was all over with. It shifted and about a month later it was down in Guadalcanal. The Japanese started reinforcing. . . . At night a Jap ship would come down the channel. The next day an American ship would come up. The big battles were fought two months after we got there.<sup>22</sup>

## MARINE RAID ON TASIMBOKO VILLAGE

In early September, native scouts and aerial reconnaissance discovered that Japanese troops had come ashore on Guadalcanal at Tasimboko, eighteen miles east of Lunga Point. The scouts correctly estimated that the enemy force (which would prove to be a reinforced brigade) was several thousand in number. The Marines believed enemy strength to be about 500 men, and that the 1st Raider and 1st Parachute Battalions under Colonel Edson would be sufficient to deal with them. In any event, there was little time to respond to the threat. After occupying a village near the shore and setting up a supply base, the brigade, led by Major General Kawaguchi, had begun advancing inland towards the Marine defense perimeter around Henderson Field.<sup>23</sup>

At 1800 on 7 September, the rifle companies of the 1st Marine Raiders embarked from Kukum, Guadalcanal, in *McKean*, *Manley*, *YP-239*, and *YP-346* for a night transit east to Taivu Point. Approaching the landing point just prior to dawn, a group of ships they hoped were not units of the Japanese fleet appeared on the horizon. Happily, the group proved to be the transport *Fuller* (*AP-14*) and cargo ship *Bellatrix* (*AK-20*), escorted by warships and engaged in unrelated

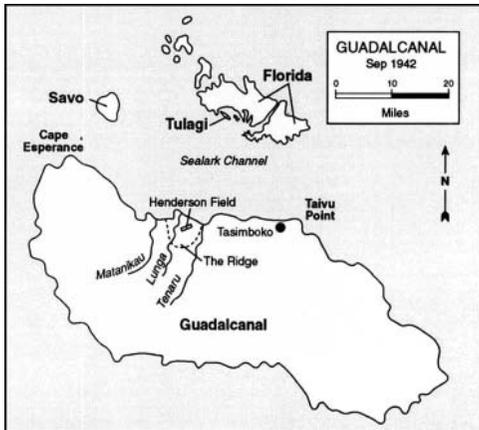
business. A Japanese rear guard of 300 men, left behind to guard the brigade's supplies, also sighted the ships and mistakenly thought they were part of a larger landing force. Alarmed, the soldiers withdrew into the jungle, abandoning individual weapons, supplies and 37mm antitank guns at water's edge, and leaving the landing site only lightly defended.<sup>24</sup>

Prior to the landing of Marines by Higgins boats, the destroyer-transport and planes of Marine Aircraft Group 23 shelled and strafed enemy strong points inland. However, as the Marines came ashore and moved into the underbrush, they took fire from .25-caliber rifles and machineguns, followed by 75mm artillery. Baker Company silenced the enemy fire and attacked Tasimboko from the west along the beach, as Able Company moved into the jungle and came in from the south. Enemy resistance was light; the raiders suffered only two killed and six wounded while advancing toward the village. (Meanwhile, *McKean* and *Manley* had shuttled back to Kukum and returned with the balance of the raiders, the weapons company of the 1st Raider Battalion and the 1st Parachute Battalion.) On their arrival at Tasimboko Village, the Marines found it stockpiled with cases of food and sacks of rice, medical supplies, and more than 50,000 rounds of ammunition. Having gone without eating for over twelve hours and hungry after the cold, wet transit, the raiders ate some of the food, including delectable canned crabmeat, drank whatever was available, including Saki, and then destroyed the large quantities of supplies, ammunition and equipment. Before re-embarking in the destroyer-transport and YPs in the early evening, Marines stripped the breach blocks off large artillery pieces and threw them into the sea, and used Higgins boats to drag the smaller guns offshore into deep water.<sup>25</sup>

By that time, word of the raid had reached the Japanese Navy's high command, and an angry Tokyo Express, led by the light cruiser IJN *Sendai*, was proceeding down the slot between the northern and southern Solomon Islands to exact vengeance. Meanwhile, the APDs and YPs had returned to Lunga Point to disembark the Marines where, in the rain and amidst rough seas, leathernecks began boarding boats for the short trip to shore. As the *Manley* unloaded, she received orders to clear out at highest speed as a raid by enemy surface units was expected momentarily. With 200 Marines still embarked, she hoisted aboard all boats and, accompanied by the *McKean*, headed out Lengo Channel at 2110 hours. The YPs were told to make haste for Tulagi,

about twenty miles away, which offered an enclosed harbor defended by shore guns. However, sanctuary for the ex-tuna boats, which were only able to make 10 knots, was a long two hours away and the *YP-346* did not make it.<sup>26</sup>

Map 1-2



Told while disembarking Marines at Lunga Point to clear out at highest speed, since a raid by Japanese enemy surface units was expected momentarily, the former tuna clippers *YP-239* and *YP-346* made haste for Tulagi about twenty miles away. The latter was just short of the sanctuary of the harbor when she came under fire from an enemy light cruiser.

Source: [http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online\\_books/npswapa/extContent/usmc/pcn-190-003130-00/sec6.htm](http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/npswapa/extContent/usmc/pcn-190-003130-00/sec6.htm)

Vincent Battaglia described being warned of the impending raid, and the ensuing attack by the *Sendai*, which caught the *YP-346* alone in the channel ten minutes from safety, as her sister ship—*YP-239*, only 300 yards ahead—was beating into the harbor:

Hey, you guys, you better get out of here. There is a cruiser and two destroyers in the channel. . . . Now we are going to Tulagi, "Hail Marys" [praying] all the way. When we get there it is about midnight. The Japanese cruiser shoots up a star [shell, an illumination round], shoots its flares up and lights up the whole bay. In the spotlight they find us and start shooting at us. . . . That ship was so close you could hear the blowers [that push air into the propulsion boilers] on the ship.

They hit us twice. They hit the pilothouse. One guy was blown off the pilothouse; he is dead. [The commanding officer] Theodore

looks like he got wounded; one Marine got wounded here; one guy got his arm shot off. To make a long story short, I went over the side because of the ammonia. Theodore said, "Get off of this thing." Ammonia gas [used for freezing fish] is very deadly. Theo manages to get the boat in the right direction to go towards the beach. We are in the water while the boat beaches itself. That is how they got Theodore off and they got these other guys off, but we were in the water.<sup>27</sup>

The Japanese cruiser, having overhauled the *YP-346*, opened fire on the wooden vessel with its 5-inch main battery and anti-aircraft guns shooting fragmentation rounds. The first salvo hit the magazine and fire swept the deck of the little ship. The blast from a gun round destroyed the pilot house, fatally wounded Electrician's Mate First Lehman and blew him over the side. (His body was found two days later.) A hit aft punctured a section of piping associated with the fish freezing system, releasing deadly ammonia gas into the boat. Shrapnel from an anti-aircraft round struck Joaquin Theodore between the shoulder blades, causing the commanding officer to collapse on deck. (He was fortunate that the entry wounds were to the left of his spinal cord and that most of the metal shards exited his body on the right side of his chest). When able to look up, Theodore noted the helmsman, Roy C. Parnell, a gunner's mate second, was staggering near the wheel with a dazed look on his face as a result of one of his hands having been shot away, and sent him below for treatment. Years later, the former ship's captain described the brutal attack and his order to beach the *YP-346*:

I took one and beside that I told everybody to take shelter, who don't belong on deck, so they did. All of them. The only guys on top of the deck was me. I was on the bridge and the other guy at the wheel. . . . He got a piece of shrapnel in his arm, he cut his arm, broke his arm. I hollered over there to somebody for help. I had two Marines that were on my ship, they were gunners and they came out and I told them, "Beach the ship."<sup>28</sup>

With no chance against the cruiser, having only .50-caliber machine guns for self-defense, and his ship aflame such that a distant Marine could see the channel illuminated by it, Theodore chose his best and only option to save the crew from almost certain death:

But what are you going to do? You have a little ship there, you can't defend yourself. What are you going to do? The first thing I thought

of was beach the ship. Get it away from the line of fire and I think it saved a lot of the guys. We lost one guy there. He was my electrician on the ship. . . . He got hit with a piece of shrapnel, I guess.<sup>29</sup>

"Beach the ship" may have been the last order the incapacitated captain uttered. Following a direct hit in the engine room, Chief Machinist's Mate Charles Vaughn went on deck to make a damage report and on arriving topside, found the bridge shot away, a Marine at the helm, and was told that Theodore was dead. Marine Private 1st Class John Murphy, who had been asleep in his bunk until awakened by the cook for general quarters, had run topside with Private 1st Class Gerard Nevle to man their gun. Unable to get near it due to shells exploding in the magazine below the gun, the Marines quickly took up new, more pressing duties. Nevle entered the demolished bridge, set the *YP-346* on a heading toward land, and ministered first aid to the helmsman. After the ship veered off course, he re-manned the helm and, despite there being only three broken spokes still fixed to the hub of the wheel, grounded the vessel off the beach in shallow water. Nevle then got the wounded gunner's mate over the side, helped him to swim ashore, and leaving his charge safely on the beach, returned aboard to assist other crewmen.<sup>30</sup>

While these efforts were underway, Chief Vaughn returned to the engine room and aided by Murphy, secured the ammonia system in an effort to protect ship's company from being incapacitated or killed by the deadly, colorless gas. Vaughn then told Murphy to "take off." Emerging on deck the Marine was knocked flat by an exploding fragmentation round and shrapnel gouged away a chunk of his arm. Despite his wound, he picked up a lifejacket and slipped over the side, entering the water about fifty yards from shore. After making the beach, Murphy assisted in transporting Parnell to a field hospital for medical attention. For their courageous actions under fire, which almost certainly saved the lives of the gravely injured captain and other members of ship's company, Vaughn, Murphy, and Nevle received the Navy Cross. The medal, the second highest American decoration for valor, is awarded for extraordinary heroism not justifying the Medal of Honor. (Copies of their award citations are provided in Appendix D.)<sup>31</sup>

The sailors and two Marines, some wounded, found no shelter from the elements ashore except for a small cave, unable to accommodate more than a single person, near the beach. After placing the grievously wounded commanding officer inside the cave, the men

huddled on the beach in the rain until rescued, after first witnessing the final destruction of their little ship, the former tuna boat *Prospect*, the following night.<sup>32</sup>

Following the first engagement, the Japanese erroneously believed that the *YP-346* had been destroyed. An officer aboard the *Sendai*, Lieutenant Kaboshima, reported at midnight on 8 September:

No enemy at Lunga, we advanced to Tulagi. Sighted two destroyers in harbor [probably the two YPs], shot them. One sunk.

The cruiser then left the area, believing that she had dispatched her prey, and the tiny ship thus escaped obliteration. Her luck would not continue. The *Sendai* returned the following night around midnight, sighted the *YP-346* aground at a point on Tulagi Island, and began shelling it. One of the rounds struck a bait box used to store ammunition in the after part of the ship and the resulting explosion and fire finished off the vessel.<sup>33</sup>

Battaglia described the event:

The Japanese cruiser comes in again that night at midnight, and the same thing [happened]. They run a light across the beach and they see the ship on the beach. . . . It was already beached and I didn't think we could salvage it. Ernie and I were about 100 yards away from the ship and they started blowing it out of the water. The Japanese sank the same ship twice. Do you want to know where the Japanese navy was September 9, 1942? They were at Tulagi sinking a fishing boat.<sup>34</sup>

Theodore's description of having "taken one" during the action was understated. Initially evacuated to Pearl Harbor for medical treatment, he was later sent stateside to Oak Knoll Naval Hospital in Oakland, California, where surgeons removed his dead right lung, which contained shrapnel. Following recovery, the Navy assigned him to tending anti-submarine nets at the entrance to San Diego harbor for the duration of the war. Afterwards Theodore worked the fuel dock in San Diego—unable, due to the injuries he had sustained, to return to fishing.<sup>35</sup>

## LOSS OF THE TUG *SEMINOLE* AND PATROL CRAFT *YP-284*

*They only had small guns on them, you know. The Japanese destroyers picked them off like wooden ducks.*

—Larry Canepa, skipper of a San Diego tuna clipper during World War II, describing, in an interview in 1988, the disparity between YPs and enemy warships operating in the South Pacific.

Six-and-a-half weeks after the loss of the *YP-346*, three Japanese destroyers sent the *YP-284*, along with the fleet tug *Seminole* (AT-65), to the bottom on the morning of 25 October 1942 during the second battle for Henderson Field. *Akatsuki*, *Ikazuchi*, and *Shiratsuyo* opened the action against the destroyer-minesweeper *Trever* (DMS-16) from a range of five miles. The *Trever* and her sister ship *Zane* (DMS-14) were both former World War I destroyers with only modest armament. Two hours earlier, they had received a warning that three Japanese destroyers were headed their way. However, there was work to be done providing support for Motor Torpedo Boat Squadron 3. One of the squadron's divisions was already present at Tulagi and a second—comprised of *PT-37*, *PT-39*, *PT-45*, and *PT-61*—had arrived earlier that day.<sup>36</sup>

The *Trever* was ferrying torpedoes, ammunition, and gasoline across the channel to Guadalcanal with two motor torpedo boats in tow astern, and the *Zane*, in company behind her, was similarly burdened when the Japanese destroyers appeared and took them both under fire. The three DDs were eastbound, passing a stretch of water at the southern end of the slot between Guadalcanal, Savo Island, and Florida Island termed "Ironbottom Sound" by Allied sailors due to the large numbers of ships and planes already sent to the ocean floor there during the relatively young Guadalcanal Campaign.<sup>37</sup>

Bracketed by gun salvos, the minesweepers cut their tows adrift in an effort to evade the Japanese ships. Lt. Comdr. Dwight A. Agnew, commanding officer of the *Trever* and the senior officer of the two ships, ordered his three-inch guns to commence firing and turned the two ships hard left into the shoal-ridden Nggela Channel in a futile attempt to escape the enemy's five-inch guns. The *Zane* was hit by a salvo at 1035, killing three crewmen, wounding nine, and disabling one gun mount. As four fighter aircraft from Henderson Field

appeared overhead, the 1st Assault Unit destroyers, under Comdr. Yusuke Yamada, changed course to fight off the attack. The minesweepers—making more than 29 knots in an endeavor to flee almost certain destruction—proceeded into Indispensable Strait.<sup>38</sup>

The salvation of the *Trevor* and *Zane* brought about the ruin of the *YP-284* and *Seminole*, which had arrived at Lunga Point, Guadalcanal, from Tulagi with cargoes of howitzers, ammunition, aviation gasoline and 146 embarked Marines. The fleet tug had discharged about 200 drums of gasoline and four howitzers, while the *YP-284* stood by awaiting lighters to put out from the base, when, at about 1015, the two vessels received orders from Naval Operating Base, Guadalcanal to abandon unloading and run for Tulagi. The *Seminole* and *YP-284* immediately ceased transferring men and materials ashore and set off, making maximum turns, hoping the enemy would remain occupied with the minesweepers. Such was not to be. The tug was a little short of mid-channel and the slower YP only some five miles off Guadalcanal when the Japanese destroyer line broke contact with *Trevor* and *Zane*. Both ships immediately recognized their increased peril and took evasive action. The *Seminole* changed course and headed for Lengo Channel, while *YP-284* did an about face and started to run for Guadalcanal.<sup>39</sup>

With the ultimate result of the coming fight obvious to all aboard the *YP-284*, Lt. Christian Rasmussen engaged the enemy with his meager three-inch bow gun. The one-sided battle was short. The Japanese DDs opened fire on the YP at about 1050. The second salvo set fire to her cargo and a direct hit to the engine room damaged the refrigeration system ammonia receivers, filling the ship with fumes. Rasmussen then ordered engines stopped and all hands including the Marines aboard to abandon ship. The enemy continued firing and the YP sank within minutes, about five miles east of Lunga Lagoon off Koli Point, carrying three Marines to the bottom. One section of Battery "I" of the 10th Marines, numbering about forty-five officers and men, was aboard, having been unable to disembark at Guadalcanal. No crewmen were killed, although many suffered wooden splinter wounds.<sup>40</sup>

Having dispatched the YP, the Japanese destroyers turned their attention to the *Seminole*. During the preceding battle, she had changed course, trying to close the shore and get under the protection of the Guadalcanal shore batteries. Naval gunfire found the *Seminole* at about

1115, followed by two additional salvos that set fire to the drums of aviation gas on deck. Five minutes later she was ablaze with burning gasoline pouring into the ship's interior through the shell holes. Lt. Comdr. William G. Fewel gave the order to abandon ship, and shortly afterwards the tug slipped beneath the surface in twenty fathoms of water, a half mile offshore between Lunga and Koli Points. As a majority of the gun rounds had passed through the *Seminole's* sides without exploding, casualties were much lighter than they would have been otherwise; only one sailor killed and two wounded. For their actions, the officers and men of the *YP-284* and *Seminole* received a battle star to affix to their Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medals.<sup>41</sup>

The vanquishers of the two little ships did not emerge from the action unscathed. Off Lunga Point, Marine shore batteries and F4F aircraft from Marine Fighting Squadron 121 damaged the *Akatsuki*, F4Fs the *Ikazuchi*, and U.S. Army Air Force P39s the *Akatsuki* and *Shiratsuyo*.<sup>42</sup>

### **YP-239 STEPS UP HER EFFORTS**

Following the enemy action on 25 October, only the *YP-239* remained of the three ex-tuna clippers which had formed the core of the Cactus Navy, and she now worked even harder to provide crucial support to troops on Guadalcanal. A former Marine described his role in assisting the YP in ferrying gasoline to Guadalcanal and being caught aboard her out in open waters at the commencement of the naval battle of Guadalcanal on 12 November 1942:

We were assigned working parties on most days, the more common being retrieving 55-gallon drums of gasoline from Tulagi harbor. Supplies were coming more frequently now and Guadalcanal had no harbor. Additionally, the Canal [Marine slang for Guadalcanal] would be subject to three or four bombings a day and was more dangerous. Supply ships would enter Tulagi harbor under cover of darkness and dump their load of gasoline which was destined for the airplanes at Henderson Field as well as for the PT (motor torpedo) boats. The base for the PT boats was hidden under large trees at the far end of Tulagi harbor nearest Florida Island. The supply ships could unload rapidly that way and try to get as far away as possible before sunrise since any ship caught in daylight was sure to be sunk. We would swim out into the harbor, grab a gasoline drum, and holding the drum with both hands we would kick our feet to propel ourselves to the small dock. This was rather tiring work. . . .

It would take quite a while to retrieve the drums and then we would load them onto the old YP boat, also kept hidden at the far end of the harbor, and take them over to the Canal after dark. [Due to her shallow draft] the YP boat could come closer ashore than the supply ship. We would then roll the drums overboard while other Marines stationed on Guadalcanal would move them ashore onto the beach. While this procedure took about the whole Company on the Tulagi end, only a few of us were needed aboard the YP boat for the night crossing.

I made the night crossing three or four times. Usually the crossings were without incidence, but on one occasion it got pretty exciting. It was the night of November 12th and we were about halfway across en route to Guadalcanal when I could feel the boat increase to top speed, turning back to Tulagi as it did so. A sailor came running by and I asked him what was up. He said they had just received a radio message that said the Japanese fleet was heading south and the U.S. fleet was traveling north. They were due to meet right about here, right about now. He had not more than said those words when both fleets opened fire with us right between them, and shells were roaring overhead going in both directions.

Of all the ships out there, our little boat was absolutely at the bottom of the list of targets, which I kept telling myself. On the other hand, we were a wooden-hulled boat armed with only a machine gun. Even though traveling at top speed, we were only going about ten miles an hour. Every inch of our deck was covered with drums of high octane aviation fuel, except for where I was sitting on the fantail. My seat was a rack of highly explosive depth charges used to fight submarines. Although we didn't amount to anything, I was afraid someone would pop off a small round at us just for the fun of it. Top speed also meant sparks were flying out of our stack, which illuminated us quite nicely, though it was not necessary as both fleets were firing starshells overhead which lit up the night sky. It was an hour before we entered Tulagi harbor and I knew we had made it.<sup>43</sup>

The Japanese made several attempts to retake Henderson Field between August and November 1942. The naval and land battles, and the smaller skirmishes and raids of the Guadalcanal Campaign culminated in the naval battle of Guadalcanal fought between 12 and 15 November. The battle was the last Japanese attempt to land enough

troops to retake Henderson Field, but it was unsuccessful. The inability of the Japanese to capture Henderson Field doomed their effort on Guadalcanal, and they evacuated their remaining forces by 7 February 1943, conceding the island to the Allies. The importance of the Guadalcanal Campaign was summarized by Adm. William F. Halsey, Jr., USN, commander, South Pacific Force and South Pacific Area:

*Before Guadalcanal the enemy advanced at his pleasure—after Guadalcanal he retreated at ours.*<sup>44</sup>

## LAURELS FOR THE CACTUS NAVY

For his heroic actions in command of the *YP-239*, Chief Warrant Officer Howard H. Branyon, USN, received the Navy Cross. The associated citation reads:

The President of the United States takes pleasure in presenting the Navy Cross to Howard H. Branyon, Chief Boatswain, U.S. Navy, for extraordinary heroism and devotion to duty in action against the enemy while serving [as the] Commander of Patrol Ship *YP-239*, in the waters between Tulagi and Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands, during the period from 1 September 1942 to 2 November 1942. Chief Boatswain Branyon was in command of a small auxiliary naval craft used in transporting essential men and supplies. His craft averaged at least one trip a day, many of the trips having been made under heavy enemy fire, and at night, under the most trying circumstances. In spite of the obstacles and great danger present, Chief Boatswain Branyon carried out his missions with extreme courage and skill, setting an example to his command. His unflinching leadership resulted in an uninterrupted flow of reinforcements and supplies without which the ground troops would have been greatly hampered. The conduct of Chief Boatswain Branyon throughout this action reflects great credit upon himself, and was in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.<sup>45</sup>

In late August when *YPs* 346, 284, and 239 arrived at Guadalcanal to take up their duties, their officers and crew members numbered approximately fifty, as each had a ship's company of some seventeen men. Two members of this small group, Branyon and Vaughn, received Navy Crosses, as did Marine PFCs Nevle and Murphy, who served as gunners aboard the 346 during the Tasimboko Raid. One third of the group, the officers and crewmen of the *YP-284*, earned a battle star for combat with enemy destroyers. The Secretary of the

Photo 1-4

January, 1945 PACIFIC FISHERMAN 1

# RESCUES 11 WAR SHIPS!

**CHALLENGER**  
SAN DIEGO

When a boat is designed and built for a specific job, a vessel pinch-hits in another service and turns in a remarkable record—then it's time to sit up and take notice. That's the story of the former San Diego tuna clipper **CHALLENGER**, now doing mercursion service for the United States Navy in the South Seas.

Her record of achievement, recently released, includes—

- \* Towing to safety 11 damaged warships
- \* Shelling enemy positions
- \* Shooting down Japanese bombers
- \* Putting raiding parties ashore
- \* Landing vital supplies on Guadalcanal under fire
- \* Rescuing survivors of sunken ships

The **CHALLENGER**, first electric driven tuna clipper, was built by the San Diego Marine Construction Company, and powered by three heavy duty Atlas Diesels, direct con- tuned to A.C. generators. She was regarded as the finest tuna boat sailing out of San Diego. Skipped by Joe Rogers, her peacetime record was an enviable one, and it was only natural that she was one of the first of the fishing fleet to be taken over by the Navy when war started.

The performance of any boat is largely the result of proper selection, installation, and handling of her power plant—three significant items which a vessel is fighting for her life. The record of the former **CHALLENGER** certainly reflects great credit upon her three Atlas Diesels.

**ATLAS IMPERIAL DIESEL ENGINE CO.**  
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CHALLENGER'S RECORD:  
GENERAL SERVICE—  
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**ATLAS**  
Imperial  
**DIESEL ENGINES**

ARMY **NAVY**

Tuna clipper *Challenger* featured in an advertisement in the *Pacific Fishermen* (January 1945). The Atlas Imperial Diesel Engine Co. highlighted that the tuna clipper's achievements as YP-239 included: towing to safety eleven damaged warships, shelling enemy positions, shooting down Japanese bombers, putting raiding parties ashore, landing vital supplies on Guadalcanal under fire, and rescuing survivors of sunken ships.

Navy, Frank Knox, awarded the 1st Marines on Guadalcanal the Presidential Unit Citation, the highest award a military unit may receive, and the equivalent, in degree of heroism, to the Navy Cross for an individual.

Citation:

The officers and enlisted men of the First Marine Division, Reinforced, on August 7 to 9, 1942, demonstrated outstanding gallantry and determination in successfully executing forced landing assaults against a number of strongly defended Japanese positions on Tulagi, Gavutu, Tanambogo, Florida and Guadalcanal, British Solomon Islands, completely routing all enemy forces and seizing a most valuable base and airfield within the enemy zone of operations in the South Pacific Ocean. From the above period until 9 December 1942, this Reinforced Division not only held their important strategic positions despite determined and repeated Japanese naval, air and land attacks, but in a series of offensive operations against strong enemy resistance drove the Japanese from the proximity of the airfield and inflicted great losses on them by land and air attacks. The courage and determination displayed in these operations were of an inspiring order.

The Marine Corps later added the *YP-239*, *284*, and *346* in gratitude for the support provided it by the intrepid little ships.<sup>46</sup>

## SHIP LOSSES

Almost all the tuna clippers that served as YPs during World War II were from San Diego, and a majority of the boats were from the Portuguese community, with many sons of Portugal aboard. As 1942 drew to a close, the community had already suffered the destruction of four of its boats: *YPs 346* and *284* at Guadalcanal, *YP-277* (ex-*Triunfo*) to a mine at French Frigate Shoals, and *YP-345* (ex-*Yankee*) to unknown causes, but most likely an enemy submarine, near Midway Island. The commanding officer of the latter ship, Chief Warrant Officer G. J. Brocato, and his crew of seventeen all perished at sea. Six more tuna clippers would be lost in subsequent years. An explosion of unknown origin sank *YP-235* (ex-*California*); *YP-279* (ex-*Navigator*) and *YP-281* (ex-*San Salvador*) foundered in storms or heavy weather; and *YP-239* (ex-*Challenger*), *YP-289* (ex-*Paramount*), and *YP-520* (ex-*Conte Grande*) sank or were destroyed during a typhoon off Okinawa in 1945.

Over the course of the war, 41 of the approximately 700 YP and patrol yachts would be lost, or damaged beyond repair, due to enemy action, storms or groundings:

- *YP-284* and *YP-346* were sunk by Japanese surface ships;

- Patrol yacht *Cythera* (PY-26) and YP-389 were sunk by German submarines;
- YP-345 sank due to an unknown cause, but most likely a Japanese submarine;
- YP-277 was lost to a sea mine;
- YPs 26, 235, 405, and 577 were destroyed by undetermined explosions;
- Converted yachts *Fisheries II* and *Maryanne* were destroyed to prevent capture at Corregidor, Luzon, Philippine Islands;
- YP-97 was lost due to the Japanese occupation of the Philippine Islands;
- YP-16 and YP-17 were lost due to the Japanese occupation of Guam;
- YPs 279, 281, and 331 foundered in heavy weather;
- Coastal patrol yacht *Moonstone* (PYc-9), and YPs 47, 74, 77, 383, 387, and 492 were sunk by collision;
- YPs 72, 73, 88, 94, 95, 128, 183, 205, 270, 336, 422, 426, 438, 453, and 481 were destroyed by grounding.<sup>47</sup>

## ADDITIONAL ACCOLADES

Three patrol yachts—*Isabel* (PY-10), *Siren* (PY-13), and *Southern Seas* (PY-32)—and the converted yachts *Fisheries II* and *Maryanne* would each earn a battle star, and thirteen YPs—41, 42, 56, 236, 251, 284, 415, 417, 421, 456, 514, 516, and 517—would garner another nineteen. The *Siren* received its battle star for convoy escort duty in the American Theater; all the others were awarded for combat in the Pacific.<sup>48</sup>

The diversity of the vessels awarded battle stars illustrates how thoroughly Navy representatives scoured America's numerous ports and harbors as well as the Service's own backwaters for remnants from World War I laid up in "mothballs" for vessels. The *Isabel*, the oldest, was commissioned on 28 December 1917, and was a veteran of World War I. The *Southern Seas* was laid down on 4 August 1920 as motor-yacht *Lyndonia* for Mrs. Cyrus Curtiss (the wife of the owner of the *Saturday Evening Post*). The yacht was later sold to Pan American Aviation Company, renamed *Southern Seas*, and subsequently sold to the Army on 30 December 1941 for use as a troop transport. After reefing at Tauria Pass, Cook Islands, on 22 July 1942, the Navy salvaged her for duty as a patrol yacht. The *Siren* was laid down in 1929 as the *Lotoland*, and was outfitted with a seaplane (a five-passenger Sikorsky).

The Navy bought the yacht from Col. Edward A. Deeds on 16 October 1940, and converted her to a coastal minelayer (CMc-1) before reclassifying its new acquisition as a patrol yacht on 15 November 1940.<sup>49</sup>

Of the YPs, 41, 42, and 56 were 98-foot long former Coast Guard cutters acquired by the Navy in the 1930s following the end of Prohibition and the associated need to use them to chase rum runners. Five of the ships were wooden-hulled former San Diego tuna clippers—*YP-236* (ex-*Europa*), *YP-284* (ex-*Endeavor*), *YP-514* (ex-*American Beauty*), *YP-516* (ex-*Queen Amelia*), and *YP-517* (ex-*St. Ann*)—and three others were steel-hulled Massachusetts fishing trawlers—*YP-415* (ex-*Swell*), *YP-417* (ex-*Calm*), and *YP-421* (ex-*Surf*). The record of the smallest YP was particularly impressive. The *YP-251*—a 79-foot former halibut schooner—and the 125-foot Coast Guard cutter *McLane* (WSC-146) were credited with sinking the Japanese submarine *RO-32*. The YP was commanded by a Dane who at age fifteen had run away from his Fresno, California, home, rode a freight train headed up the northwest coast, and joined a sailing ship to begin his career at sea.<sup>50</sup>