

### Story #33 Enemy Action

Navy men serve on fighting ships, service ships, work ships and other types of vessels. We who served on Net Tenders were on one of the not so glamorous ships, a work ship.

During WWII many of the Net Tenders earned battle stars for being subjected to or participated in sea battles, air raids and in some cases were attacked while out at sea.

This first story is about the USS ALOE AN-6 and USS BUTTERNUT AN-9. We would like to get more information from some of the men who served on these ships when they earned a battle star during the large air raid at Tulagi on 7 April 1943

This air raid was a part of Admiral Yamamoto's Operation "I", a series of massive air attacks aimed at American positions in the Solomons. Planes came down to attack ships in Tulagi Harbor and Lunga across the bay on the Guadalcanal side.

3 ships were sunk; a US Navy Destroyer, a Fleet Oiler and a New Zealand Corvette. Damage was also inflicted on other ships.

USS ALOE AN-6 lay moored to the Sturgis Dock. USS BUTTERNUT AN-9 was bow on to another dock with its stern anchor down about 500 feet with a mass of chain and anchors in the process of being loaded.

Lt. Donald Howard was skipper of Aloe. Lt. Tiler Kaune was skipper of Butternut.

At about 1230 an alert was received stating that a large flight of enemy planes were heading for Tulagi. At first Lt. Kaune didn't think too much of it as they had so many alerts in the daytime. Nothing had ever happened and if they got underway after every alert they would never get any net in as many of the alerts lasted for hours.

However this time the planes did show and dove down about 300 feet from ALOE heading for the Oiler. ALOE with her 3 inch gun and four 50 caliber machine guns contributed to the anti-aircraft barrage that helped to drive the attackers off, claiming one "Val" shot down, another possibly splashed and a third damaged. BUTTERNUT also responded with its 3 inch gun.

The destroyer Aaron Ward DD-483 was with a small convoy headed for Tulagi. She received orders to leave the convoy and cover LST 449. Bombs from the planes resulted in the sinking of Aaron Ward, killing 27 men and wounding 59.

The New Zealand Corvette HMNZS Moa sustained a direct hit from a 500 pound bomb and sank within four minutes. 5 men were killed and 7 wounded.

The Japanese were apparently after 2 Oilers. The 520 foot USS Tappahannock AO-43 was attacked by dive bombers, but no bombs hit the ship.

The 475 foot USS Kanawha AO-1 was not so lucky. She was the oldest fleet oiler in the navy, having been launched in 1915. Her superstructure was wooden. The slow and

vulnerable Kanawha was directed to leave the channel. Destroyer USS Taylor DD-468 preceeded her down the channel. USS PC 85 stood out after her. 15 planes commenced to dive on Kanawha. All 3 ships, the Tulagi shore battery and the various district craft (including ALOE and BUTTERNUT) opened fire. 5 planes released their bomb loads, which resulted in a near miss on the starboard bow, one near miss on either quarter, one hit under the bridge in cargo fuel oil tank and one or possibly two in the machinery spaces. The entire wooden superstructure was on fire. All power was lost. In the end the Commanding Officer decided to abandon ship.

After the ship had been abandoned USS BUTTERNUT AN-9, Fleet Tug USS Rail AT-139, a LCT and possibly another ship came alongside the stricken Kanawha in an effort to salvage the vessel and extinguish some remaining fires. At this time they heard rapping from the pump room on Kanawha. The cover leading to this compartment was opened and 2 men were rescued. Lt. Kaune, the Butternut skipper was concerned that the Kanawha might blow up, especially when her ammunition exploded while they were alongside.

Salvage efforts were not too successful. It is believed that the failure of successful salvage efforts on the part of the various vessels concerned was caused by the failure of the water tight hatch leading from the shaft alley to the after parts of the ship. One source from Butternut said that they did salvage some items including some bags of fresh potatoes.

The fleet tug Rail towed Kanawha to the west side of Tulagi, where she was beached shortly before midnight. However, she slid off into deep water and sank before daybreak. 19 of her crew were lost.

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#### FOLLOWING ARE A FEW OTHER ENEMY ACTION ENCOUNTERS BY OTHER NET TENDERS DURING WWII

Ash AN-7 and Cinchoma AN-12 were at Pearl Harbor during the attack on Dec. 7, 1941. Ash fired sporadically at some of the enemy planes but suffered neither casualties nor damage. Cinchoma manned both her 50 caliber machine guns and her 3 inch gun, and as the enemy repeatedly strafed her deck, she closed the gaps in the net defense protecting the dry dock.

Aloe AN-6 had 2 more enemy encounters during the war. In June 1944 she was cruising east of Guam when Japanese planes attacked at about 6 pm. Utilizing local control and observing excellent fire discipline Aloe's 20 millimeter and 50 caliber batteries scored hits on three enemy planes. Two of these Japanese aircraft crashed and the third departed in flames. Her last action with enemy planes came on 28 May 1945 while she was anchored in Nakagusuku Wan, Okinawa, serving as part of a net and buoy unit. During that morning she took a suicider under fire with all her guns as the kamikaze made a dive on the anchorage.

In early 1944 Holly AN-19 joined LST Flotilla 5 in preparation for the invasion of the Marianas. During the pre-invasion bombardment and reconnaissance on 17 June the fleet came under heavy air attack. Holly's guns assisted in downing several enemy planes; and when LCI-468 was damaged in the battle, Holly moved swiftly to take her in tow.

Locust AN-22 was off San Cristobel Island, Solomons in April 1943 with Task Unit 32.4.7 when she came under attack on the 5th. For about 5 minutes Locust with YAG-26 in tow, was not only dodging fire from a Japanese bomber but also a torpedo from a undetected enemy submarine.

Hackberry AN-25 was one of only 3 Net Tenders that served in Africa & Europe during the first part of the war. She took part in the important landings in southern France in August 1943. Hackberry helped transport garrison troops from the newly won Alpha beach on Isle du Levant. Hackberry remained in the area as Allied troops pushed forward from the beachhead, coming under fire from German shore batteries.

Snowbell AN-52 shot down her first enemy plane a single engine fighter on 25 May 1945 in

Buckner Bay, Okinawa. The plane crashed a few hundred yards from the ship.

In May 1945 Winterberry AN-56 was in Buckner Bay, Okinawa when 3 enemy dive bombers raided the anchorage. Winterberry opened up with her guns and assisted in bringing down two of the three raiders.

On March 28, 1945 Terebinth AN-59 was in the anchorage at Kerama Retto, Okinawa. Lookouts sighted an unlighted boat approaching the ship's starboard bow. When challenged the craft did not reply. It was too close to use the 3 inch gun so ship's gunners opened fire with small arms. The boat dropped a depth charge near Terebinth, veered to starboard and sped off as a violent explosion shook the net tender. Fortunately Terebinth was not damaged.

About 35 Net Tenders earned battle stars during WWII. Therefore there are numerous more stories that could be told about these ships .