

Ship's Section
Office of Public Information
Navy Department

APR 22 1946

NO OBJECTION TO PUBLICATION
FOR NAVAL SECURITY REASONS
OFFICE OF PUBLIC INFORMATION, U.S. NAVY

HISTORY OF USS SEMINOLE (AT 65)

Striking out of the dawn of October 25, 1942, three Japanese destroyers sank the gasoline-laden ocean going tug USS SEMINOLE (AT 65) with three salvos while she was steaming independently a few miles off Guadalcanal.

Only one man was killed and two were wounded. Further loss of life was averted when Jap projectiles passed clear through the ship without exploding. However, the rapid succession of accurate salvos set the high octane gasoline aflame, making it impossible to save the ship.

On the morning of the 25th, the SEMINOLE and USS YP-284 had arrived at Cateus from Ringbolt with a load of ammunition, gasoline, and troops. Unloading operations were interrupted then enemy destroyers were detected outside of Cateus.

Both the vessels left for the open sea in an attempt to elude the enemy. After bombarding the Ringbolt area, the faster destroyers turned southward to overtake the laden ships, which at best could not exceed 14 knots.

The SEMINOLE tried desperately to evade the speedier "cats" by seeking protection of shore batteries of the Marines of Guadalcanal, but the enemy's accurate fire sunk her just short of her objective. The YP had earlier met a similar fate.

The big tug avoided the Pearl Harbor disaster only by a matter of days. She arrived at San Diego, California, from Pearl Harbor on December 8, 1941. By the first of the year, the tug was on her way back to the war zone.

Performing many tasks hardly suited for a ship of her type, the SEMINOLE operated in the Southwest Pacific area, ferrying troops, cargo, and fuel among the islands.

On October 7, the SEMINOLE led two destroyers in a search for survivors of the USS MEREDITH (DD 434) and its convoy which consisted of the USS VIREO (ATO 144) and a tow. The MEREDITH, thoroughly riddled by Jap bombers, was sunk but the VIREO and the tow were found on midnight, October 18.

While the destroyers rescued survivors and stood guard against further attacks, the SEMINOLE rigged a tow line on the VIREO's barge and removed it safely to Ringbolt. A skeleton crew of volunteers was later put aboard the VIREO and it, too, was salvaged.

The SEMINOLE was built by the Bethlehem Steel Company, Staten Island, New York. Completed in March, 1940, the vessel was 205 long, 39 foot beam, and had full load displacement of 1500 tons.

158462

Op-38-C-LAC
AT65/A4-3(5) (401220)
Serial 238038

NAVY DEPARTMENT PRESS ROOM,
OFFICE OF NAVAL INTELLIGENCE.

NAVY DEPARTMENT
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS
WASHINGTON

20 December 1940

B. A. W. Jr.

From: Chief of Naval Operations.
To: Commanding Officer, USS SEMINOLE (AT-65).
Chief of Bureau of Ships.
Chief of Bureau of Ordnance.
Chief of Bureau of Navigation.
Chief of Bureau of Supplies and Accounts.
Chief of Bureau of Medicine and Surgery.
Chief of Bureau of Aeronautics.
Commandant, Navy Yard Mare Island, Calif.
Commandant, Navy Yard New York, New York.

Subject: USS SEMINOLE (AT-65) - Assignment of Home
Port and change in Home Yard.

1. San Diego, California is hereby assigned as the Home Port of USS SEMINOLE effective 15 January 1941.
2. The Home Yard of USS SEMINOLE is hereby changed from Navy Yard New York to Navy Yard Mare Island, California effective 15 January 1941.
3. The Bureaus concerned will issue necessary instructions relative to transfer of job orders, spare parts, et cetera.

R. E. INGERSOLL
Acting

Copy to:
CinCus, Combatfor, Combasefor
Comdts. All Naval Dists, Comdt. 3rd, 11th NDS
NSD, San Diego, Norfolk, NavData San Pedro
OinC, Fuel and Transportation Division, Passenger Sec. (S&A)
OinC, Fuel and Transportation Division, Freight Sec. (S&A)
Transportation Section BUNAV, Op-28 (10 copies)
Publication Section, Gen. Accounting Office, Wash. DC (2 cop.)
Bureaus and Offices and Divisions of Office of
Chief of Naval Operations.

From
ELEVENTH NAVAL DISTRICT
Public Relations Office
(San Diego)



SERIAL SB(a)-3429(44)

FOR IMMEDIATE PUBLICATION

The tragic but heroic story of the U.S.S. Seminole, a 205-foot sea going tug with a San Diego skipper, was disclosed by the Navy today as these squat little ships were given credit for the important roles they have played in the battle of the Pacific.

Captain William G. Fewel, USN, who with Mrs. Fewel makes his home at 2244 Plum Street, was skipper of the Seminole from the time she was commissioned in March, 1940, until she was sunk by Japanese destroyer fire off Tulagi, in the Solomon Islands, October 25, 1942.

Captain Fewel, now is assistant Fleet Personnel Officer, Pacific Ocean Area.

The Seminole and a few other small vessels served as the sole life line in 1942 for the small air force defending newly-won Guadalcanal. Planes on the island had to depend upon the small trickle of aviation gasoline which the tugs could haul from Tulagi, 22 miles away.

On October 25 the Seminole had just begun unloading a cargo of 550 drums of gasoline at Guadalcanal when three enemy destroyers were sighted. The tug got under way at once for Tulagi, with 400 gas drums still aboard, but it was soon apparent that she would be intercepted

by the Japanese warships. No air coverage was available at the moment because of a Jap air raid on Guadalcanal.

The destroyers opened fire on the Seminole, which by evasive action avoided hits from the first 15 salvos fired. Then a salvo struck the tug, igniting the aviation gasoline, and one shell passed through the deck, exploding in the after end of the main generator room, putting all main generators out of commission.

Captain Fowel, then a lieutenant commander, issued an abandon-ship order, but because of the intense fire and exploding drums of gasoline one life raft was all that the crew succeeded in getting clear of the ship. The tug still maintained headway and soon cleared the area where the survivors were clinging to the raft.

About 1,000 yards distant the Seminole shivered under the blast of a heavy explosion, quickly up-ended and sank stern first. One member of the crew had been killed, one wounded, and all survivors were rescued.

-- 52 --

11-11-44

HOLD FOR RELEASE
UNTIL 6 P.M. (E.W.T.)
NOVEMBER 8, 1944

TUGS PLAY VITAL PART IN FLEET OPERATIONS IN PACIFIC

They're squat little ships, lacking the glamor, speed and sleekness of the battleship, destroyer or cruiser, but they're industrious, sturdy and essential, and their work is never done. They salvage, tow, haul, patrol, rescue and, when the occasion demands, fight.

Such is the nature of the front-line tugs, operating in considerable numbers for Service Force, Pacific Fleet, doing their work quickly, bravely, tenaciously and efficiently, and, more often than not, under extreme duress.

Consider, for instance, the story of the USS MATACO currently operating for Service Force, a 205-footer which has traveled approximately 65,000 miles in the Pacific since she was commissioned 18 months ago, and which early in her career, towed a floating dry-dock from the West Coast of the United States to Australia, a dry-dock urgently needed for all-important repair work in the Southwest Pacific area. This powerful little tug has been involved in almost every major operation in the Pacific since and including the Gilbert's campaign, having recently made round trips from the Marshalls to both Saipan and Guam, engaging in routine but difficult odd jobs in those areas.

Although she was not primarily cut out for fighting, her armament scared off a Jap torpedo plane which attempted to blow her up while the Gilbert's campaign was in its hottest stages. Later she chugged about in the harbor at Roi, doing odd jobs in a setting of shell fire and heavy action during the early phases of that island's capture. From her position, usually three quarters of a mile off shore, she saw an enemy bomb hit an ammunition dump, and her crew winced at the concussion from the resulting explosion.

In the Marshalls operation she assisted in pulling a landing craft off the beach (she couldn't complete the job herself because of hastily being called out on anti-submarine patrol duty), pulled a sister tug off a reef, inspected and repaired the bent propeller of another vessel, repaired holes in two landing craft hulls and engaged in numerous other tugging chores for larger ships in the harbor.

Later she was used in a series of towing and escorting operations which took her thousands of miles back and forth through the Marshalls and Gilberts carrying ammunition and towing gasoline barges. Once she deviated from this type of work long enough to rescue a plane and its crew of two who had been forced down near the Namu atoll south of Kwajalein. The plane, as well as the crew, was brought aboard the MATACO and delivered safely to a place where it could be repaired and used again.

On another occasion the MATACO was ordered to clear four wrecked Jap landing ships from docking space at Ebeye Island to make the space available to our ships, another job she herself couldn't finish because

of hurry-up orders to transfer a mooring buoy from one ship to another.

Lieutenant (junior grade) Cecil O. Hall, U.S.N., of 44 Birch Street, Vallejo, California, the ship's executive officer, a slim, swarthy, medium-height Texan, has spent 23 years in the U.S. Navy, having enlisted at the age of 17 because "ever since I first saw a picture of the USS TEXAS (one of the Navy's oldest battleships) I made up my mind I wanted to be in the Navy." He was a quartermaster before being commissioned a Lieutenant (junior grade) about a year ago.

Then, there is the tragic story of the USS SEMINOLE, a gallant little ship of the same class, which gave up her life in a blaze of enemy destroyer fire on October 25, 1942, a few miles off Tulagi. At that time she and a few other small vessels served as the sole life line for the small air force bravely and stubbornly defending newly-won Guadalcanal, defending it on the small trickle of aviation gas which the SEMINOLE and her few cohorts could haul over from Tulagi, 22 miles away.

The SEMINOLE had just begun unloading her daily cargo of 550 drums (approximately 25,000 gallons) of aviation gas at Lunga Point, Guadalcanal, on the morning of October 25, 1942, when masts of three enemy destroyers were sighted northeast of Savo Island. The tug was promptly ordered to get under way for Tulagi, despite the fact that approximately 400 drums of gas still were aboard. She got under way full power, but it soon was apparent that Tulagi could not be reached prior to interception by the enemy destroyers. No air coverage was available because in the meantime the usual morning's Jap air raid on Guadalcanal's airfield had got into full swing. Attention of the enemy destroyers was diverted temporarily by a small patrol vessel which also was ferrying gas from Tulagi. This ship was quickly hit, set afire and sunk. The destroyers then opened fire on the SEMINOLE, which for approximately 15 salvos avoided hits by skillful evasive action directed by her skipper, Captain (then Lieutenant Commander) William G. Fewel, U.S.N., of 2244 Plum Street, San Diego, California. The first salvo hit and ignited the aviation gas, with one shell passing through the deck and exploding in the after end of the main generator room, putting all four main generators out of commission.

The abandon-ship order was given by Captain Fewel, one life raft being all that the crew succeeded in getting clear due to the intense fire and exploding drums.

The tug, still moving at a fair rate of speed, quickly cleared the survivors in the water and, when approximately 1,000 yards distant, shivered under the blast of a terrific explosion. And so the SEMINOLE, the second ship of her class to be commissioned on March 8, 1940, quickly up-ended and sank stern first. Her casualties were one man killed, one wounded. All survivors of the shelling were rescued from the water.

In her early days the SEMINOLE had served as a tow, covering approximately 3,000 miles towing decommissioned vessels from the Philadelphia Navy Yard to various Navy Yards on the East Coast. Later in the Pacific and prior to the Pearl Harbor attack she traveled additional thousands of miles towing barges between Pearl Harbor and Wake Island. Captain Fewel, who now is assistant Fleet Personnel Officer, Pacific Ocean Areas, was her skipper

from her date of commissioning until she went down.

And there was the USS NAVAJO, another heavy duty tug which, before she was sunk by enemy action, engaged in salvage operations involving more than 15 damaged ships, which included the carrier USS SARATOGA, two destroyers, and five cruisers. The USS MENOMINEE helped salvage a large portion of one of the most valuable and urgently-needed cargoes to be shipped into the South Pacific, a cargo whose total loss was threatened when the ship carrying it went aground in a storm.

And the USS UTE, which braved enemy bombs and the rough deadly waters and icy winds of the Aleutian Islands area to salvage a \$15,000,000 attack transport ripping her bottom on the jagged reefs where she had been swept in a storm? That transport, floated and repaired, since has participated in three big operations in the Pacific.

Then, there is the account of the USS APACHE, a tug whose crew was praised officially recently for its conduct under fire at Guam. She was ordered inshore to dislodge a beached landing craft which was being subjected to heavy enemy artillery and mortar fire. The landing vessel was one of five which had been beached purposely preparatory to unloading. All was quiet when the five first hit the beach, and with a calm sea, no trouble had been anticipated in the unloading. Suddenly, however, the ships were subjected to artillery and mortar fire from concealed enemy positions which supporting gunboats and destroyers failed to locate and destroy. The landing ships were ordered to get off the beach, and all but one managed to do so under their own power in the manner peculiar to landing craft. With the situation growing more difficult by the minute, the APACHE was ordered in to assist the helpless ship. The tug succeeded in closing with the landing vessel, passing a towing pendant aboard and easing it off the beach. The two retired to safety out in the harbor beyond the range of shore batteries, along with the other four landing craft.

Also on record is the story of the USS CHICKASAW which assisted in the removal of 380 Tinian casualties from a landing ship which had beached on a reef in heavy seas. The casualties had been placed aboard the landing ship as an emergency measure, and the vessel had beached on the reef while attempting to retract off the beach. Many of the casualties were gotten off by a breaches buoy suspended between the stranded ship and the CHICKASAW, while the rest were moved in small boats. It was a tedious 10-hour undertaking under adverse conditions, but not too difficult for the CHICKASAW and her determined crew.

An account of this length cannot more than scratch the surface of the overall job being done by the tug in this war. The records are packed with countless achievements performed over the length and breadth of the Pacific. Like the blocker on a good football team, it is an indispensable part of a successful offensive. The tug, in its homely, plodding way, is appraised one of Service Force's most essential ships.

NAVY DEPARTMENT

July 9 Seminole

HOLD FOR RELEASE
MORNING NEWSPAPERS
JUNE 5, 1944

PLAQUE DEDICATED TO OFFICERS AND MEN LOST IN "IRON BOTTOM BAY"

A bronze plaque, the first and only battle memorial so far erected in the Solomons Islands, was dedicated April 30, 1944, to the officers and men of the United States and Allied Navies who died in the fierce battles in "Iron Bottom Bay."

The plaque was unveiled on a small palm-studded hill overlooking Purvis Bay, inlet in Florida Island, British Solomons Islands. On the hill now stands the Iron Bottom Bay Club, an officers' recreation center built by the Seabees. In the bay below, approximately a half million tons of ships of the U.S. Navy, and of the enemy lie on the bottom. It was there that such noble men of war as the cruisers ASTORIA, VINCENNES and CHICAGO were sunk in battle. About 270,000 tons of Jap ships sank there.

The Reverend James Edwards, representing the Anglican Bishop of Melanesia, unveiled the memorial before a gathering of Naval officers and enlisted men on the hill, site of the original episcopal residence of the Bishop of Melanesia, which was dismantled by the Japs. The land is owned by the Church of England. A Protestant and a Catholic chaplain of the fleet gave the invocation and benediction.

Rear Admiral Robert W. Hayler, U.S.N., of 800 East Washington Street, Muncie, Indiana, who participated in the last sea action fought in Iron Bottom Bay -- the Battle of Tassafaronga, November 30, 1942 -- spoke briefly. He paid tribute to "all those members of the Allied land, air and sea forces who in the beginning fought against such fearful odds and in every case accomplished what they set out to do."

"Our enemy overran Tulagi early in April, 1942" Rear Admiral Hayler began. "On May 4, just two years ago, one of our carrier task forces struck Tulagi and sent to the bottom some four ships -- thus starting a series of actions which resulted literally in paving the bottom of the sea in this vicinity with ships.

"On July fourth of the same year, the Japanese landed in considerable strength on Guadalcanal and a little more than a month later, on August 7th, our troops landed here and at Guadalcanal. It was many months thereafter before we had forces and equipment really adequate for the tasks assigned us.

"It is altogether fitting," Rear Admiral Hayler continued, "that this tablet be erected in the Purvis Bay Area, because it was on this side where our troops first landed and where we suffered our greatest losses."

Addressing Reverend Mr. Edwards, Rear Admiral Hayler said:

"You and your associates will have no difficulty in remembering those early days. And since your work will continue long after ours is done, we give this memorial into your keeping. In so doing we know that it will remain a lasting tribute to those for whom it is dedicated, and a source of inspiration and courage for those who come hereafter."

Reverend Mr. Edwards said in reply that he was proud to accept in the name of his Bishop the "sacred duty of caring for the shrine. It will be cared for with respect love and dignity. God grant that we may always be inspired by their deeds."

The plaque carries this inscription: "In memory of the officers and men of the United States Navy and Allied Navies who gave their lives -- Iron Bottom Bay -- 1942-43 -- Dedicated by Members of the Iron Bottom Bay Club -- Port Purvis, Solomons Islands -- 20 March 1944".

United States ships that went down in the Iron Bottom Bay and vicinity were: ASTORIA, QUINCY, VINCENNES, ATLANTA, JUNEAU, NORTHHAMPTON and CHICAGO, 2 cruisers; JARVIS, USS BLUE, DUNCAN, BARTON, CUSHING, LAFFEY, MONSSEN, PRESTON, WALKE, BENHAM, DEHAVEN, and AARON WARD, all destroyers; the destroyer transports COLHOUN, GREGORY, LITTLE, the tanker KANAWHA; the transport JOHN PENN; fleet tug SEMINOLE; two cargo ships and four PT boats. The Australian cruiser CANBERRA also was lost there.

Japanese ships sunk in the area include two battleships, three cruisers, eleven destroyers, eight transports and seven other auxiliaries.

Captain Andrew G. Shepard, U.S.N., 235 Cobbs Hill Drive, Rochester, New York, first president of the Club, composed the words on the plaque. Frank Czajkowski, Quartermaster, Second Class, USNR, of 20 Milton Avenue, Amsterdam, New York, designed the lettering. A fleet tender made the plaque.

The Club was an outgrowth of several small and inadequate officers' recreation centers-- the Club Des Slot, the APD Beach and the PT base recreation center -- to which officers came between battles of the Solomons. Rear Admiral A. Staunton Merrill, U.S.N., of Natchez, Mississippi, formerly a Task Force Commander in the South Pacific, is credited with the initiative in the movement to build the club. He since has been ordered to Washington as Director of the Navy's Office of Public Relations. Captain Grayson B. Carter, U.S.N., El Cordova Hotel, Coronado, California, is currently president of the Club, and was present at the unveiling.

Other U.S. Navy officers who attended the ceremony included: Rear Admiral W.L. Ainsworth, U.S.N., 647 "A" Avenue, Coronado, California; Rear Admiral Richard L. Conolly, U.S.N., 509 Julian Street, Waukegan, Illinois; Rear Admiral L.F. Reifsnider, U.S.N., El Cordova Hotel, Coronado, California; Commodore William M. Quigley, U.S.N., whose address is in care of the Fifth Avenue Bank, 530 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York; Captain P.P. Powell, 4000 Cathedral Avenue, Washington, D.C.; and Commander D.R. Lee, U.S.N., 2716 10th Street, North, Seattle, Washington.

Allied officers attending the ceremony included: Colonel O.C. Noel, British Resident Commissioner; and Wing Commander J.A. Scott, Royal New Zealand Air Force.

(Photographs available in the Photographic Section, Office of Public Relations.)
