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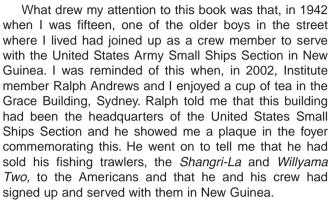
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BOOK REVIEWS

Forgotten fleet: a history of the part played by Australian men and ships in the U.S. Army Small Ships Section in New Guinea, 1942–1945¹

by Bill Lunney and Frank Finch

Forfleet Publishing: Medowie NSW; 1995; 192 pp.; ISBN 0 646 26048 0 (hardback); Ursula Davidson Library call number: 740 LUNN 1995



Forgotten Fleet is a unit history that was published with the assistance of 'Australia Remembers 1945-1995'. It tells how, in 1942, Japanese forces were perilously close to Australia and how little ships could serve in supplying Australian and American troops in New Guinea. Just like at Dunkirk, seamen rallied; and from all round Australia they came with trawlers, tug-boats, ferries even an ancient paddle-wheeler! Bill Lunney, one of the co-authors, was only 16 in 1943 and already a veteran of the Small Ships Section.

Over 3000 Australians volunteered to serve with this fleet and now we realise how important their mission was. In their small boats, with minimum support, they faced the perils of coral reefs, of tropical storms, and the constant fear of enemy attack. Milne Bay was the main base for the small ships as the air-strip there was of great importance to the Allies. Air attacks there were frequent, as were sea attacks from the Japanese Navy. By 1943, many of the boats had been destroyed, while many more were constantly under repair.

The main work of these ships was done between 1942 and 1943 when their support was essential as they could travel where larger vessels were unable to go. They carried supplies to build air-strips, fuel for planes and PT boats, trucks, jeeps, spare parts, guns and ammunition, medicines, clothes and food. Included in the last were lots of dehydrated egg powder, dried milk, dried apricots (great for making 'Jungle Juice'), even 18 gallon casks of 'Castlemain'. They returned to Australia with exhausted, wounded and dead servicemen.

They worked so hard to end the Japanese threat, but remained mostly ignored. Until the production of this book in 1995, their story had never been told and their sacrifice FORGOTTEN

The family of the late Ralph Andrews and all those brave men who served in the United States Army Small Ships Section in New Guinea must indeed be proud of their achievements.

had been forgotten. Well illustrated, the book is full of records of the memories of the participants, told in their own words and often from the logs they kept. It gives us a real insight into what was happening on our doorstep between 1942 and 1945.

Editor's Note: Forgotten fleet 2: an updated and expanded history of the part played by Australian men and ships in the US Army Small Ships Section in New Guinea, 1942-45, by Bill Lunney and Ruth Lunney, was published by Forfleet Publishing in 2004.