

## UNITED STATES NAVAL ADMINISTRATION IN WORLD WAR II

### COMMANDER IN CHIEF, PACIFIC FLEET

### MOTOR TORPEDO BOAT SQUADRONS

This text transcribed from an official Navy document by Jeffrey La Favre, June 2014. The document does not have a date of publication.

### PART III

#### DIMINUTION OF COMMTBRONSPAC

#### **A. ORGANIZATION OF THE COMMAND**

##### **1. Directives from higher command.**

The character of the war in the Solomons had altered the nature of the activity of Commander Motor Torpedo Squadrons, PACIFIC Fleet, accordingly. By 1944 the biggest and bitterest battles in the Solomons had become history of a year preceding. By mid-year 1944, Admiral Halsey and the THIRD Fleet had moved to the northwest. From that time until the "reactivation" of ComMTBRonsPac in May 1945 the history of ComMTBRonsPac became the story of a gradual decline.<sup>1</sup>

The first step was the dissolution of Task Group 30.3.<sup>2</sup> The squadrons in this task group were absorbed by composite Task Group 70.8<sup>3</sup> (a part of the SEVENTH Fleet) with Commodore Moran in command.

The second step followed the rapidly dwindling number of contacts with enemy surface vessels. Commander SEVENTH Fleet ordered Squadrons TWENTY-SEVEN and TWENTY-EIGHT to report to Commander THIRD Fleet at Manus for temporary duty.<sup>4</sup> (These two squadrons eventually were

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<sup>1</sup> Technically, it is incorrect to consider this period as the period of diminution of the PACIFIC Fleet type command, ComMTBRonsPac, as the command, per se, was virtually non-existent. Commodore Moran's apparent proclivity toward being invested with additional commands of a more vital nature relegated his activities as ComMTBRonsPac to the status of temporary additional duty.

In view of Commodore Moran's propensity toward combining his multifarious duties and executing them under one title, and in view of the subjugation of the MTBRonsPac type command in favor of the NorSols command through the force of circumstance, it has been necessary to present much of the material of this chapter from the point of view of ComNavNorSols rather than from the point of view of ComMTBRonsPac. Furthermore, the frequent juxtaposition of command titles in official correspondence (as evidenced by "War Diary for ComMTBRonsPac [a PacFlt subordinate command] and CTG 70.8 [a 7thFlt subordinate] command without careful delineation of command responsibility has made it virtually impossible to preserve the continuity of the historical development of ComMTRonsPac without resorting to the discussion of ComNavNorSols. Of added interest is the fact that although the MTBRonsSoPac command had been disestablished, Commodore Moran retained the title ComMTBRonsSoPac. This was purely a matter of expediency adopted by the Navy Dept. to obviate the necessity of requesting new legislation to enable Commodore Moran to retain his "spot" promotion.

<sup>2</sup> In accordance with Com3rdFlt's secret dispatch, serial 100333 of June 44. Noted in ComMTBRonsPac War Diary for first half of June 44, Paragraph 2, q.v. in appendix note.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, Paragraph 3.

<sup>4</sup> Com7thFlt's dispatch, serial 280727 of July 44.

transferred to ComMTBRons7thFlt; Squadron TWENTY-EIGHT reported at the PT base at Mios Woendi, near Biak, and Squadron TWENTY-SEVEN reported at PT base at Leyte after a tour of duty at Palau.) In the same month (August) the four old 77-foot Elco boats of Squadron THREE were sent to Milne Bay for ultimate transfer to MTB Squadrons Training Center, Melville, Rhode Island.<sup>5</sup> These transfers reduced the combatant force of CTG 70.8 from 73 to 49 motor torpedo boats.

The third step began when Commodore Moran discontinued all patrols in the Northern Solomons area on 24 November 1944<sup>6</sup> in preparation for the transfer of "all 46 operable PT boats under this command."<sup>7</sup> The four remaining squadrons departed the Northern Solomons Area in December and reported to ComMTBRons7thFlt in accordance with a directive from Com7thFlt.<sup>8</sup>

Meanwhile, however, three new squadrons had reported within a period of two months beginning in October. These squadrons, namely THIRTY-ONE with the tender ACONTIUS, THIRTY-TWO and THIRTY-SEVEN with the SILENUS, had been scheduled to report to ComMTBRonsPac which they did subsequent to unloading at the old Tulagi Base under ComSoPac. As type commander, Commodore Moran promptly placed these squadrons in a period of "combat training" at the base at Treasury.<sup>9</sup>

Step number four in the decline of ComMTBRonsPac was marked by the transfer of the last three squadrons from the Northern Solomons Area. Squadron THIRTY-ONE departed Treasury on 1 December 1944 and proceeded to Kossol Roads in the Palaus<sup>10</sup> where they reported to Commander Task Group 94.16 for operational control. Squadrons THIRTY-TWO and THIRTY-SEVEN departed Treasury on 15 February 1945 and reported to CO, NAB, Espiritu Santo to await forward movement. These two squadrons reported to ComSoPac for nominal operational control.<sup>11</sup>

The fifth and final step was climaxed by a series of actions which all but dissolved ComMTBRonsPac. In January 1945 Commodore Moran had forwarded a recommendation to Commander Service Force SEVENTH Fleet that the naval bases and command headquarters of ComNavNorSols be decommissioned and the command be dissolved.<sup>12</sup> The recommendation was approved and the dissolution of ComNavNorSols was put into effect on 1 March 1945. On 5 March Commodore Moran departed Torokina in pursuance of the directive from Com7thFlt<sup>13</sup> which detached him, and in accordance with a

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<sup>5</sup> In accordance with CNO dispatch, serial 311520 of July 44.

<sup>6</sup> cf. War Diary for Nov 44, Paragraph 4.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., Three boats were awaiting survey at Emirau.

<sup>8</sup> Com7thFlt's dispatch, serial 201401 of Nov. 44. This dispatch also ordered the roll-up of PT Base 16 at Emirau.

<sup>9</sup> cf. a more detailed account of the combat training under the section on training.

<sup>10</sup> In accordance with CinCPac's dispatch, serial 222351 Nov 44 and CTG 70.8's dispatch, serial 270350 Nov 44, Ron 31 had been alerted for the forward movement in accordance with ComSoPac's dispatch, serial 240327 Nov. 44.

<sup>11</sup> The move down to Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides was made necessary by the imminent disestablishment of NavNorSols which included the roll-up of PT Base 9 at Treasury.

<sup>12</sup> ComNavNorSols secret ltr CNNS/A4-3, serial 0020 of 15 Jan 45.

<sup>13</sup> Com7thFlt dispatch, serial 250952 of Feb 45. The same dispatch also ordered the final roll-up and disestablishment of ComNavNorSols.

directive from BuPers which ordered him to report for temporary additional duty in the Navy Department to confer on naval matters.<sup>14</sup>

This step left the handling of the remaining affairs of ComMTBRonsPac in the hands of one officer, Lt. J. I. Everest, SC, USNR,<sup>15</sup> who assumed administrative duty on verbal orders from Commodore Moran. This one officer and one chief yeoman were the sole remaining members of ComMTBRonsPac's staff. There matters stood until Commodore Bates was ordered to assume command.

## **2. Relations with superior and coordinate commands.**

The decisions which had been reached within the higher echelons of command and which had prefaced the conference in Brisbane in May 1944 between Commodore Moran and the Commander SEVENTH Fleet and the subsequent reshuffling of Northern Solomons forces, created an entirely new situation for the Commander Motor Torpedo Boat Squadrons, PACIFIC Fleet: ComMTBRonsPac was regarded by Com7thFlt as the type commander for the motor torpedo boats in the Northern Solomons Area; he was not recognized as such by CinCPac, who, technically, was his immediate superior in command.

In so far as can be determined from official records available for reference, only two squadrons had been assigned by CNO to CinCPac.<sup>16</sup> At the time of the reorganization of the command areas within the Northern Solomons, both of these squadrons had been outfitting in the States, and they did not report to ComMTBRonsSoPac until late in the year.

On the other hand, the seven MTB squadrons which had been operating in the Northern Solomons Area under ComMTBRonsSoPac had been reassigned to the SEVENTH Fleet. Of the remaining squadrons in the Pacific, not one had been assigned to ComMTBRonsPac for either operational or administrative control.

Thus, the net effect, from the stand point of CinCPac and CNO, was that ComMTBRonsPac continued to remain solely a "paper" command during the months from mid-June through October 1944.

As the squadrons which had been assigned to the Northern Solomons had been designated as units of the SEVENTH Fleet, and as the SEVENTH Fleet operated as an autonomous naval force attached to the Supreme Allied Commander Southwest Pacific Area, Commodore Moran in his capacity of ComMTBRonsPac, obviously, would not have normally exercised type command or operational command of these squadrons. Notwithstanding, ComMTBRonsPac assumed administrative control of these SEVENTH Fleet operational units since Com7thFlt had not directed these squadrons to report for administrative control to the SEVENTH Fleet MTB type command.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> BuPers dispatch, serial 172255 of 5 Feb 45.

<sup>15</sup> cf. Lt. Everest's memo to Comm. R. W. Bates on subject "ComMTBRonsPac – Administration of." See Appendix.

<sup>16</sup> PacFlt conf Notice 21CN-44, dated 1 July 44, Organization of Pacific Fleet; and CNO ltr, serial 0444623, dated 22 July 44.

<sup>17</sup> ComMTBRons7thFlt commanded by Comdr. S. S. Bowling, USN.

Feasibility and expediency evidently had directed the course which was adopted by ComMTBRonsPac and Com7thFlt in determining the administrative responsibility for the seven NorSols squadrons. Presumably, the decision had been made at the Brisbane conference. As the ultimate disposition of the NorSols squadrons apparently had not been determined, and in view of the fact Commodore Moran had been invested with two commands, ComNavNorSols and ComMTBRonsPac (the former having been concerned with operational control of motor torpedo boats under SEVENTH Fleet, and the latter having been concerned with administrative control of motor torpedo boats under CinCPac) the squadrons were directed to report to ComMTBRonsPac for type administration.<sup>18</sup>

Although any attempt to disentangle the chain of command (MTB) and command relations external of the NorSols Area during the period from 15 June 1944 through 1 March 1945 would result in utter confusion, it would have been extremely difficult, to say the least, for Commodore Moran not to have maintained close liaison with himself. For this reason, the anomalous command condition detracted little from the successful accomplishment of the mission which had been assigned to motor torpedo boats in the Northern Solomons Area.

Furthermore, ComMTBRonsPac, at long last, had acquired some motor torpedo boat squadrons over which he, as ComMTBRonsPac, per se, and not as ComMTBRonsSoPac or ComNavNorSols, could exercise administrative command and fulfill his duties as a type commander. This spark of life was short-lived, however, as the squadrons gradually disappeared. By 1 March 1945 only four squadrons, which were scattered throughout the Pacific, remained under the administrative control of ComMTBRonsPac.

Command relations for the motor torpedo boat organization on the coordinate level became uniformly smooth and effective within<sup>19</sup> the Northern Solomons Area in the period following the re-alignment of responsibility there. Circumstances naturally were conducive to cooperative activity; joint operations and joint training<sup>20</sup> became characteristic of the period.

The Army and Navy forces in the Solomons had the common fate of having been relegated to an area which the most active phases of the war had passed by. Being together on the important, if monotonous, duty of continuously neutralizing and weakening the enemy forces<sup>21</sup> remaining in the area, much mutual support and much cooperation was almost inevitable as they carried out the routine execution of their assigned common task.

The first official action of the newly-established Combined Command (ComNavNorSols, ComMTBRonsPac, and ComSerFor7thFltSubComNorSols) was to shift the headquarters to Torokina, Bougainville,<sup>22</sup> in order to be in proximity to the two other commands, ComAirNorSols (USMC) and ComGen14thCorps (USA), the only other commands in the NorSols area on a strictly coordinate level.

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<sup>18</sup> ComNavNorSols Operation Plan 1-44, dated 15 June 44, so directed.

<sup>19</sup> Relations with coordinate commands external of the Solomons area, notably with ComMTBRons7thFlt, were notoriously poor.

<sup>20</sup> See Training Program, Chapter II, Sec. B-2 (d).

<sup>21</sup> Approximately 70,000 troops. Allied estimates made at the time placed the figure at about 45,000 troops.

<sup>22</sup> See Headquarters and staff, Chapter III, Sec. A-3.

ComAirNorSols was located directly across the road from the big, newly-constructed Quonset hut which was the headquarters building for the Combined Command. The Headquarters of the Fourteenth U. S. Army Corps was located not far distant.

Good liaison was maintained among the three commands at all times; there were no recorded instances of mutual interference as the three commands worked in their respective spheres. And when missions overlapped, units of the three commands (ComNavNorSols, ComAirNorSols, and ComGen14thCorps) worked together with the satisfying precision and harmony that impels the participants to seek renewed contacts. More joint action against the enemy was arranged.

One example was that of the Jasasa tactics<sup>23</sup> promulgated in ComNavNorSols Operation Plan 1-44. Based on “finding, fixing, and finishing,” the enemy submarine, the plan made close coordination between aircraft and anti-submarine surface vessels essential.<sup>24</sup>

### **[Black Cat VP-44 cooperation]**

An even better example, and one which was carried into actual practice more often, were the joint operations of the MTB's and PBY's. These joint operations were initiated on the night of 10 July with the Black Cats of VP-44<sup>25</sup> in an attempt to establish a blockade of the entire Bougainville coast. The motor torpedo boats that operated from the base at Green Island covered the northern end of Bougainville and the motor torpedo boats that operated from the base at Treasury Island covered the southern area. Satisfaction was expressed by all hands as regards the good coordination during the patrols, and joint operations with the new Black Cat squadron were continued from time to time until February 1945. At this time, the need for joint anti-barge action had disappeared, the old Solomons motor torpedo boat squadrons had been moved over to New Guinea, the PT Base at Green Island had been rolled up, and VP-44 was occupied with other commitments.

One valuable product of this harmonious relationship was the promulgation of a doctrine: Joint Operating Instructions (for) Blackcat-MTB-PGM Operations.<sup>26</sup> This doctrine was published under the joint auspices of ComAirNorSols and ComNavNorSols. The document is an excellent crystallization of the experience gained in the joint operations.

Also from the cooperating minds and mimeographs of ComAirNorSols and ComNavNorSols came a doctrine embracing joint operations of Night Fighters and MTB's.<sup>27</sup> The introductory remarks are more subdued in tone than those introducing the MTB-Black Cat doctrine; nonetheless, they reflected the unquestioned success in neutralizing the Jap float planes which had developed remarkably clever tactics<sup>28</sup> in attacking motor torpedo boats.

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<sup>23</sup> Joint Air Surface Anti-submarine Action, ComNavNorSols Operation Plan 1-44, Annex B, dated 15 June 44.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> ComMTBRonsPac and CTG 70.8 War Diary for July 44.

<sup>26</sup> q.v. Appendix

<sup>27</sup> q.v. Appendix

<sup>28</sup> cf. Joint Operating Instructions Night Fighter-MTB-Gunboat Operations, secret serial 00130.

The doctrine points out that the benefit derived from cooperation between MTB's and Venturas at the time was based on the Japs' reluctance to attack when a night fighter was present and the hope that cooperation could be developed to the point where improved radar would insure positive effectiveness.

From the point of view of motor torpedo boat personnel, they had had their uneasy moments from "friendly" night fighters along the Bougainville coast as early as December 1943. There had been intermittent instances of strafing by Venturas in various areas from that time until the incident of 21 July 1944, which was the comic climax to a series of such incidents resulting from defective liaison with units of the Southwest Pacific Forces external of the Northern Solomons Area.

In several instances, MTB's operating from Emirau had been strafed in a desultory fashion by Venturas from Pitylu in the Admiralty Islands.<sup>29</sup> The boat captains, because they had had reason to believe the Venturas had been carrying the wrong recognitions signals, had fallen into the habit of carrying recognitions signals for several successive days on one night patrol, contrary to all security orders. For example, let us assume that: from the air, a Ventura pilot, on the last leg of his tiresome and targetless patrol, spotted strange small craft off the coast of New Ireland headed for Emirau, and he challenged the craft. And further, let us assume that, from the surface, the skipper of one of these small craft (which were motor torpedo boats) noticed the single-letter recognition signal blinking at him from overhead. If the challenge was incorrect he would rush down into the charthouse and would hurriedly leaf through his collection of recognition signals to find one that would correspond as to hour and letter (disregarding the day). Meanwhile, the Ventura pilot would be making his first run, perhaps, firing a few careless bursts. The MTB skipper would anxiously blink the recognition signal—corresponding to the challenge of the Ventura pilot—whereupon the latter would retire, and each would go its own way.

### **[MTB-Ventura friendly fire incident]**

The disaffection between MTB's and Venturas reached a peak when on the morning of 21 July 1944, a Ventura in company with another plane which took no part in the action, fired a few bursts at motor torpedo boats returning from patrol off the New Ireland coast. Although there were no casualties, the upshot was the usual mass of reports by all parties concerned and an investigation, ordered by ComNavNorSols, which clearly revealed the defective liaison at several levels of command.

The pilot reported that he had received no answer to his visual challenges and that he had "fired several bursts ahead of their (MTBs') bows, and the only answer was a radical change in course".<sup>30</sup> The radical change in course referred to was undoubtedly the boats' circle to the right, a standard recognition procedure for motor torpedo boats operating in the NorSols Area.<sup>31</sup> After the Ventura had begun its second run, one of the MTB's fired emergency flare signals.

All boats had had white stars with a blue field clearly painted on the day-room canopy. Throughout the encounter attempts had been made to contact the plane on all VHF channels and on two TCS

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<sup>29</sup> Not within the jurisdiction of ComAirNorSols.

<sup>30</sup> See statement of pilot concerned, Appendix.

<sup>31</sup> See ComNavNorSols Investigation Summary, serial 0250, dated 15 Aug 44. See Appendix

frequencies. The maneuvers of the plane and the boats had hindered the reading of visual signals. Many signals had not been received or had been no doubt misunderstood. The guide MTB had signaled "PT 319" several times. The plane stated that it had sent "That is the wrong reply, answer challenge N N N"; "Why don't you answer challenge?"; "Do you have recognition signals?" None of these messages had been received by the boats.

As soon as the plane had begun visual challenges, the boats first had given "D" the correct reply for the hour and day. When it had not been accepted, the boats had tried "F", the ship-to-ship reply. After the plane's second run, a stern strafing run, and the plane had not accepted the visual replies nor the correct red-yellow flares, the boats had tried the letter "H", the reply for the challenge "N" for the period 1700-2300, 20 July 1944.

The plane then signaled, "Sorry, any damage?" To which the boats replied, "Negative," and all participants retired.

In his letter of 28 July<sup>32</sup> Commander Aircraft SEVENTH Fleet stated that, although it had no vital effect on the above proceedings, it was noted that the recognition signals carried by the plane and the answer finally given by the boat were both incorrect!

The investigation revealed that the communication department of CTG 70.2 at Pitylu had failed to provide proper recognition signals to the pilot prior to his departure from the field, and that the MTB Section Leader<sup>33</sup> had fallen back on the routine of shuffling through his private collection of recognition signals to find a letter that would correspond with the plane's challenge.

ComNavNorSols<sup>34</sup> wrote to Commander Motor Torpedo Boats EMIRAU that while the latter's letter<sup>35</sup> relative to the abovementioned incident had evidenced a commendable attitude toward the problem of MTB recognition procedure, it also had demonstrated a surprising disregard for Task Group 70.8 Operation Plan.<sup>36</sup>

Of special significance, for the purposes of this history, particularly from the standpoint of command relations, stood the glaring fact of practically no liaison and absolutely no standardization of recognition procedures, whatsoever, between the MTB's operating under the SEVENTH Fleet along the New Guinea coast and those motor torpedo boats operating under the SEVENTH Fleet along the Northern Solomons coasts—adjacent areas: Planes operating from the New Guinea-Admiralties region under SEVENTH Fleet commands other than ComAirNorSols were accustomed to contacting motor torpedo boats on the TCS radio utilizing the "common fighter frequency". This frequency was used by most planes and by all motor torpedo boats operating in the New Guinea-Admiralties sector. The recognition procedure of the NorSols MTB's, including the circle to the right on odd days GMT<sup>37</sup> and to the left on even days GMT,

<sup>32</sup> ComAir7thFlt ltr, serial 0395, dated 28 July 44.

<sup>33</sup> Lt. Comdr. L. W. Ewell, USNR, MTB Area Commander EMIRAU.

<sup>34</sup> ComNavNorSols ltr, serial 00180, dated 22 Sep 44.

<sup>35</sup> ComMTBsEMIRAU ltr, serial 0250, dated 15 Aug 44.

<sup>36</sup> ComNavNorSols Operation Plan No. 1-44, dated 15 June 44.

<sup>37</sup> ComNavNorSols ltr, serial 0250, dated 15 Aug 44.

was unknown to planes and motor torpedo boats of the adjacent area. Furthermore, MTB's operating in the NorSols Area had the additional VHF short range radio equipment for ease in communicating with planes; the MTB's operating in the New Guinea-Admiralties region did not.

Apropos of this situation, it should be remembered that in May 1944, prior to the re-alignment of the NorSols Area which had resulted in the creation of two MTB subordinate commands within the SEVENTH Fleet, that ComMTBRonsSoPac had written<sup>38</sup> ComMTBRons7thFlt regarding the work being done toward improving recognition procedures for motor torpedo boats. There is no evidence to indicate that any action was taken in the direction of standardization of recognition procedures within the two areas.

After the EMIRAU incident had occurred and the investigation had revealed the extraordinary collapse of recognition procedure, Commodore Moran again wrote<sup>39</sup> -- this time to Com7thFlt via ComAir7thFlt -- recommending that the NorSols MTB-PGM identification and recognition procedure be given wide dissemination to all air units in the Southwest Pacific Area, and that it be made standard doctrine for all motor torpedo boats and gunboats operating within the SEVENTH Fleet area. There is no evidence to indicate that any action whatsoever was taken.

As the year progressed the Allied strategy for this area was directed toward the consolidation of the NorSols Area. American Army and Navy forces were gradually withdrawn and were replaced by Australian and New Zealand forces. (Aside from the many and complex purely military considerations leading to this move, the Northern Solomons Area discussed herein, not including Choiseul or New Georgia, was politically a part of the Australian mandate with the northern border at the Equator).

Relations between "Yank" and "Digger" in personal and official intercourse have been nearly always on a firm footing of friendliness and mutual respect. Bases and communication facilities and certain light naval craft were handed over to the Australian-New Zealand forces quietly, and with a minimum of difficulty. Also handed over was the unspectacular but important task of clearing out and consolidating the land areas therein, with the emphasis on Bougainville.

An excellent illustration of the general tenor of command relations at this time within the NorSols Area was provided in the strike at the Mamagata area, near the mouth of the Puruata River (Bougainville) on the morning of 26 December 1944. The strike was to simulate the softening-up phase preceding a landing for the purpose of providing a diversion for Australian troop activity a little distance to the north.

The diversionary attack group consisted of 24 fighter bombers, 4 PGM's, 2 LCI(G)'s and 12 MTB's. While four of the planes provided air cover for the surface units, the remaining planes bombed and strafed the designated area. Upon completion of this phase of the attack, the planes relayed valuable information to the surface units relative to the location of shore batteries, and the gunboats then proceeded in to 1000 yards and commenced shelling the area. As they retired from the area, the motor torpedo boats

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<sup>38</sup> ComMTBRonsSoPac ltr, serial 0081, dated 16 May 44.

<sup>39</sup> ComNavNorSols ltr, serial 0250, dated 15 Aug 44.

closed to 300 yards and completed the bombardment; then rejoining the gunboats, all surface units retired with air cover overhead.

The operation proved very successful. The senior officer present during the diversionary attack, A New Zealand general, who had been observing the operation from one of the planes, expressed extreme pleasure at the measure of coordination effected.

Prior to the departure of all motor torpedo boats from the area on 15 February 1945, the only coordination which had been effected within the area and which has not been previously discussed was that with the Coastwatchers. These gallant individuals, well-known to the natives and long familiar with the terrain, had proved to be of inestimable value to the military forces. Allied commanders had been kept well informed of enemy troop, ship and plane movements, bivouac areas, and military installations, facilitating the destruction of these enemy resources. The native scouts which the Coastwatchers had trained were of great value to motor torpedo boat operations because of their thorough knowledge of the poorly-charted, reef-strewn coast.

It is desired to note briefly at this time that, although ComNavNorSols was a SEVENTH Fleet subordinate command, and although Commodore Moran had been designated as ComSerFor7thFltSubComNorSols, ComSerFor7thFlt did not provide the majority of the logistic support for the NorSols Area. On the contrary, it had been decided at the Brisbane conference in May 1944, prior to the re-alignment of the NorSols Area, that ComSeronSoPac would assume the responsibility of providing logistic support for all naval activities in the Northern Solomons. Further discussion of this arrangement will be undertaken in Section B-3 of this chapter.

In summation, the coordination which had been developed within the NorSols Area gave clear evidence that motor torpedo boats do not have to be restricted to operating areas wherein no other friendly forces will operate, but that motor torpedo boats are fully equipped for and capable of operating with allied units of land, sea, and air very effectively, when proper coordination between commands is effective.

### 3. Headquarters and staff.

#### (a) Location.

At least a month before he officially had reported for duty as Commander Allied Naval Forces Northern Solomons<sup>40</sup> and before the re-allocation of the NorSols Area to the Southwest Pacific Area, Commodore Moran had been notified of the projected changes,<sup>41</sup> and he had laid plans to move his headquarters to a suitable location.

Halfway up the western Bougainville coast lay the tiny thumb of land, Cape Torokina. This point, and the three miles of narrow beach which extended in a northwesterly direction, had been the scene of the landings made by the THIRD Marines on 1 November 1943, the year preceding. The beach inside Torokina Point and the shallow anchorage there was fronted to seaward by Puruata Island; a half-mile length of sand and foliage, which had been scorched, shattered and burned by bombings and bombardments, both American and Jap. From the time of the initial landings in November 1943 until 25 April 1944, the SoPac MTB squadrons had used Puruata Island as a temporary advance base.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, by the time the staff of the Combined Command<sup>43</sup> had arrived, the MTB's had gone, and such facilities as had been maintained were converted to the needs of a small craft pool.

There was no fully satisfactory anchorage in the region, either for MTB's or for larger vessels, because there was no protection from the heavy surf that pounded in from the Solomon Sea.<sup>44</sup>

Terrain conditions were not much better.<sup>45</sup> The beaches were narrow, and in many places quite steep. For more than a mile inland the footing consisted of swamp, except for two narrow corridors of land raised a few inches above swamp level. Inland was the usual dense and tangled tropical growth. The perimeter had never been extended very far by the American forces, and was subject to intermittent attacks and infiltration by the Japs.

Nevertheless, the Torokina region, standing halfway up Bougainville, had the merit of being the approximate geographical center of the Northern Solomons Area, or "Solomons-New Ireland Axis," as it was frequently called in reference to operation matters. And from the standpoint of liaison, Torokina had the further advantage of already being the location of the headquarters of the Fourteenth U. S. Army Corps, and ComAirNorSols.

Both the construction of the new headquarters and the movement of equipment and personnel were accomplished with speed. On 1 June the bulldozers of the 36<sup>th</sup> SeaBees began clearing the jungle

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<sup>40</sup> Reported 15 June 44.

<sup>41</sup> Comdr. W. C. Specht's (Chief Staff Officer, ComMTBRonsPac) ltr, dated 20 May 44, to Capt. J. E. Whelchel, USN, ComSeronSoPac Chief of Staff. In Appendix note.

<sup>42</sup> cf. Chapter II, Sec. B-3, Logistics.

<sup>43</sup> ComMTBRonsPac-ComNavNorSols-SubComSerFor7thFlt.

<sup>44</sup> Sea and terrain conditions from various sources including interviews, Office of Naval Intelligence COMBAT NARRATIVES-Solomon Islands Campaign: XII, and sailing directions for Pacific Islands, Vol. 1, 1938, H. O. publication No. 165.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

growth and began grading. When ComMTBRonsPac approved the site in an inspection tour made upon his return from the Brisbane conference, the concrete floors of the main buildings had been laid.<sup>46</sup> On 9 June personnel and equipment began leaving the old ComMTBRonsPac-ComMTBRonsSoPac headquarters at Bau Island, Rendova. Personal gear and the more important office furniture, files, mess gear, jeeps and many miscellaneous items were transferred with ease and efficiency by utilizing practically every means of transportation available, including the STRATFORD,<sup>47</sup> APC's, MTB's, and air transport. By 15 June 1944 construction of all buildings had been completed, including the big Quonset (40' x 100') building that was to be the office. This corrugated sheet iron administration building had two symmetrical wings which consisted of 20' x 48' Quonset huts attached to either side of the main building. A SeeBee signwriter had nailed up a sizable sign with block letters;

COMNAVNORSOLS  
COMMTBRONSPAC

On 18 June, when the last contingent had arrived from the old headquarters, everything was occupied and operating.

**(b) Size, character and organization of the staff.**

Technically, ComMTBRonsPac had no staff.<sup>48</sup> Prior to the disestablishment of ComMTBRonsSoPac and the re-designation of CTG 30.3 as CTG 70.8, ComMTBRonsSoPac had directed all of his staff personnel to report to ComNavNorSols for temporary additional duty pending the receipt of permanent duty orders and of clarification of the exact status of the new organization.

In the first week in June Commodore Moran returned from the conference with Commander SEVENTH Fleet. During this conference the scope of the NavNorSols command had been determined. Furthermore, it had become apparent that Commodore Moran would not assume type command of all SEVENTH Fleet motor torpedo boats. With this information at hand, it was evident that the size of the temporary staff could be reduced. However, this matter was held in abeyance until after the new headquarters had been established.

The actual size of the ComNavNorSols staff at this inception is not known. Estimates as high as 100 officers have been obtained from unverified sources. A more accurate figure would probably be nearer to 75.<sup>49</sup>

On 20 June 1944 ComNavNorSols initiated action to reduce the size of his temporary staff and to establish a permanent staff.<sup>50</sup> He requested that specific officers who had been assigned to the staff on

<sup>46</sup> cf. MOSQUITO BITES for 1 July 44. Appendix.

<sup>47</sup> cf. Chapter II, Sec. B-3, Logistics, for information concerning the special status of this ship.

<sup>48</sup> This situation had also existed during the SoPac period, wherein all personnel who had been attached to the ComMTBRonsPac-ComMTBRonsSoPac organization had had permanent duty orders to the ComMTBRonsSoPac staff.

<sup>49</sup> Comdr. W. C. Specht's (ComMTBRonsSoPac Chief Staff Officer) personal letter to Capt. J. E. Whelchel, USN, (ComSeronSoPac Chief of Staff), dated 20 May 44.

<sup>50</sup> ComNavNorSols ltr, serial 0130, dated 20 June 44.

temporary additional duty be reassigned to permanent duty on the ComNavNorSols staff. Of the remainder of the temporary staff, he recommended that those officers who were eligible for rotational leave be returned to the States, and that those officers who were not eligible for rotational leave, but who were in excess, be reassigned to either ComMTBRons7thFlt or to Com7thFlt as appropriate.

Although specific information is lacking, the gradual diminution of naval activity in the Northern Solomons Area, the reassignment of the larger surface units to other areas, the transfer of facilities to the Australian-New Zealand forces, and the roll-up of several of the bases, permitted a continual reduction in the size of the staff. By November 1944 it had been reduced to approximately twenty officers and Commander W. C. Specht, USN, was relieved as Chief Staff Officer by Commander C. McKellar, Jr., USN.

As the disestablishment of NavNorSols was imminent, while, on the other hand, the future status of ComMTBRonsPac had not been determined, those officers who were most familiar with motor torpedo boat operations were retained until after MTBRons THIRTY-ONE, THIRTY-TWO, and THIRTY-SEVEN had completed their combat training.

By 1 March 1945 all motor torpedo boats and other surface craft had been reassigned and orders<sup>51</sup> had been received which directed the disestablishment of NavNorSols and which ordered the detachment of Commodore Moran from the SEVENTH Fleet.

Coincidental with his detachment from the SEVENTH Fleet Commodore Moran had received orders from BuPers to report to the Navy Department for temporary additional duty.<sup>52</sup> Inasmuch as no decision had been rendered relative to the future existence of ComMTBRonsPac, and inasmuch as only four squadrons remained under the administrative control of ComMTBRonsPac, Commodore Moran detached all staff personnel but one officer and one Chief Yeoman. He ordered the officer, Lt. J. I. Everest, SC, USNR, to assume temporary additional duty as ComMTBRonsPac (Administrative) and to "hold down the fort" until such time as the status of the command was clarified. Lt. Everest continued in this capacity until Commodore R. W. Bates assumed command on 20 May 1945.

No information is available at this time relative to the staff organization. However, it is assumed that it was similar to that of the staff of ComMTBRonsSoPac.

It should be noted that wherein the old ComMTBRonsSoPac staff had been concerned almost solely with the administration and operation of motor torpedo boats the ComNavNorSols staff was concerned with the operation and/or administration of naval bases, destroyers, destroyer escorts, gunboats, in addition to motor torpedo boats; yet, the majority of the officer personnel of the ComNavNorSols staff were MTB officers.

In retrospect, it may seem odd that the staff of a composite naval task group should have been composed of MTB officer personnel, but it should be remembered that the MTB squadrons had

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<sup>51</sup> cf. Chapter III, Sec. A-1

<sup>52</sup> cf. Chapter II, Sec. A-1. Apparently CinCPac had not been informed of Commodore Moran's detachment from the SEVENTH Fleet and of his assignment to BuPers.

comprised the greater part of the task group; and further, the destroyers and destroyer escorts had been detached in August, leaving only the MTB's, PGM's, and miscellaneous small craft.

**(c) Functioning of the staff.**

The functioning of the staff must have been quite a complex affair. The majority of the staff officers functioned in a dual capacity, and in some instances, a triple capacity, in order to execute properly the functions of the three commands with which Commodore Moran had been vested. In so far as can be determined, those officers who had been ordered to report to Commodore Moran's staff in a permanent duty status,<sup>53</sup> reported as personnel attached to the staff of ComNavNorSols. This duty was their primary duty.

As has been previously indicated,<sup>54</sup> no staff had been assigned to ComMTBRonsPac. Technically, Commodore Moran, alone, was the sole representative of this command. However, many of the officers of the ComNavNorSols staff were assigned unofficial collateral duty on the "staff" of ComMTBRonsPac. Presumably, those motor torpedo boat technicians and specialists who had been assigned to the staff of ComNavNorSols, were concerned with only those matters pertinent to the maintenance and operation of motor torpedo boats. In other words, their "unofficial" collateral duty became their primary duty.

Those staff officers who were concerned with logistics functioned in a triple capacity. Not only were they concerned with the activities of ComNavNorSols and ComMTBRonsPac, but they were also assigned unofficial collateral duty on the "staff" of Commander Service Force, SEVENTH Fleet, Subordinate Command, Northern Solomons. Here again, technically, the staff was non-existent. Commodore Moran, in himself, was the commander and the entire staff of ComSerFor7thFltSubComNorSols.

The assignment of Commodore Moran as the commander of three subordinate commands which were administered by two separate Fleets<sup>55</sup> would have presented an insurmountable obstacle if Commodore Moran had adhered to normal administrative procedure and had established three separate staffs. The staff organization would have been unwieldy and the resultant paper work would have greatly hampered effective administration and operation of the three commands. Thus, by and large, Commodore Moran reduced the entire situation to a common denominator: one letterhead and one staff, ComNavNorSols.

The records available indicate that by far the greatest majority of all correspondence was initiated under the title ComNavNorSols. One of the rare instances in which the title ComMTBRonsPac was used was in the War Diaries; even then, no separate War Diary was submitted for ComMTBRonsPac, but rather, the activities of all three commands were combined and only one War Diary was issued under the title "War Dairy for ComMTBRonsPac and CTG 70.8". ComSerFor7thFltSubComNorSols was not mentioned in the title.

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<sup>53</sup> ComNavNorSols ltr, serial 0130, dated 20 June 44.

<sup>54</sup> cf. Chapter III, Sec. A-3 (b).

<sup>55</sup> ComNavNorSols and ComSerFor7thFltSubComNorSols reported to Com7thFlt; ComMTBRonsPac reported to CinCPac.

A certain degree of confusion was inevitable. However, this was confined, in the main, to relationships with commands external of the NorSols Area. Another command, or more specifically, an MTB squadron commander, not familiar with the organization in the NorSols Area, would initiate a dispatch or correspondence to ComMTBRonsPac and, oftentimes, would receive a reply from ComNavNorSols or CTG 70.8.

However, in so far as its effect upon the operations in the Northern Solomons Area, the staff functioned remarkably well. Considering the circumstances, and the complexity of the organization, mistakes in the preparation of various documents by the staff were surprisingly few.<sup>56</sup>

## **B. ACTIVITIES OF COMMTBRONSPAC**

### **1. Organization of command; relations with bases, squadrons and tenders.**

With the designation of Commodore Moran as ComNavNorSols and ComSerFor7thFltSubComNorSols, effective as of 15 June 1944, combined with the retention of his command as ComMTBRonsPac, the lack of unity and the disaffection that had previously existed<sup>57</sup> among bases, squadrons, and coordinate commands was dissipated. The scope of Commodore Moran's authority was all-inclusive within the Northern Solomons Area and there was little opportunity for any serious friction to develop without being summarily resolved.

Technically, from the standpoint of chain of command, confusion was rampant: MTB Bases reported for administrative and operational control to ComNavNorSols via the Area Commander; the Area Commander was attached to the staff of ComNavNorSols; the MTB squadrons reported for operational control to ComNavNorSols via the Area Commander; they reported for administrative control to ComMTBRonsPac via the same Area Commander, yet the Area Commander was not attached to the staff of ComMTBRonsPac; the tenders reported for operational control to ComNavNorSols via the Area Commander, but there is no indication as to whether they reported for administrative control to ComNavNorSols, ComMTBRonsPac, or to some Service Force command.<sup>58</sup>

However, by completely disregarding the technicalities of command responsibilities and jurisdiction, Commodore Moran assembled an effective combat organization. For practical purposes Commodore Moran relegated his authority as ComSerFor7thFltSubComNorSols and ComMTBRonsPac to virtual obscurity, and he blandly answered correspondence addressed to ComMTBRonsPac in his capacity as ComNavNorSols. Although this practice was undoubtedly confusing to commands external to the Northern Solomons Area it had no apparent effect on the operations and administration within the area.

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<sup>56</sup> The ORGANIZATION OF ALLIED NAVAL FORCES, NORTHERN SOLOMONS, dated 8 Aug 44 and promulgated by ComNavNorSols, serial 02341, dated 10 Aug 44, listed under the heading "Task Unit Commanders" the following: Task Group 70.8, Task Group 70.8.1, Task Group 70.8.2, and so on. The use of the titles "Task Group" and "Task Unit" had obviously been confused.

<sup>57</sup> Chapter II, Sec. A-2 and B-1

<sup>58</sup> ComNavNorSols Operation Plan #1-44, dated 15 June 44.

The fact that the chain of command was confused was obscured by the fact that Commodore Moran was the commander of all Allied naval forces which were concerned with operations in the Northern Solomons.

**[Task Units 70.8.3, 70.8.5 and 70.8.6 included PGM's]**

For operational purposes, ComNavNorSols formed Task Unit organizations in each local area.<sup>59</sup> Motor torpedo boat squadrons, bases and tenders (and in some instances, gunboats) were grouped into one Task Unit organization and were operated as such. For example, a senior experienced motor torpedo boat officer was ordered to the staff of ComNavNorSols for duty (1) as Commander Motor Torpedo Boats, Treasury Islands and Commander Task Unit 70.8.3, which included the tender, USS MOBJACK, Treasury-based MTB's, LCI(G)'s, PGM's and Motor Torpedo Boat Base 9, (2) as Commander Motor Torpedo Boats, Green Island and Commander Task Unit 70.8.5 which included the tender, USS VARUNA, Green-based MTB's, LCI(G)'s, PGM's [this needs checking, I believe all PGM's were based at Treasury – Jeffrey La Favre] and Motor Torpedo Boat Base 7, and (3) as Commander Motor Torpedo Boats, Emirau Island and Commander Task Unit 70.8.6 which included Emirau-based MTB's, LCI(G)'s, PGM's [again this needs checking, I believe all PGM's were based at Treasury – Jeffrey La Favre] and Motor Torpedo Boat Base 16.

The centralization of local administrative and operational control in the Area Commander proved highly effective and eliminated many of the opportunities for friction between base and squadrons and tender and squadrons that had previously existed.

The administrative relationship of the squadrons to ComNavNorSols-ComMTBRonsPac was far from clear. MTBRons THREE, FIVE, ELEVEN, TWENTY, TWENTY-THREE, TWENTY-SEVEN and TWENTY-EIGHT had been designated by CNO as units attached to the SEVENTH Fleet. However, these squadrons did not report for administrative control to SEVENTH Fleet MTB command, ComMTBRons7thFlt. On the contrary, ComNavNorSols directed that all NorSols MTB squadrons and gunboats (!) report administratively to ComMTBRonsPac. There is no evidence to indicate Commodore Moran's authority to create this administrative anomaly. Furthermore, there is no evidence to indicate that CinCPac was cognizant of the assumption of administrative control of certain SEVENTH Fleet MTB units and gunboats by ComMTBRonsPac or further, that CNO was cognizant of this peculiar situation. CNO continued to list<sup>60</sup> these squadrons as units of the SEVENTH Fleet.

Although the dual responsibility of the squadrons did not directly affect operations within the NorSols area, it did affect the flow of replacement personnel to the area. The net result was that the squadrons which operated in this area received no personnel replacements from the SEVENTH Fleet MTB command because insofar as ComMTBRons7thFlt was concerned they were under the administrative control of a PACIFIC Fleet subordinate command. On the other hand, they received no personnel

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<sup>59</sup> ComNavNorSols Operation Plan #1-44, dated 15 June 44.

<sup>60</sup> CNO ltr, serial 0444623, dated 22 July 44.

through the PACIFIC Fleet subordinate command because CinCPac and the Navy Department (more specifically CNO and BuPers) considered them as units of the SEVENTH Fleet.<sup>61</sup>

The logic which dictated this peculiar state of affairs is somewhat obscure. Presumably, when the seven squadrons had been reassigned to the SEVENTH Fleet and had been placed under the operational control of ComNavNorSols, it had been deemed inadvisable to place them under the administrative control of the SEVENTH Fleet type command who was far removed from the scene of operations and who was totally unfamiliar with the operations in the NorSols Area. Other factors that may have been brought to bear were the disparity in rank between ComNavNorSols and ComMTBRons7thFlt<sup>62</sup> and the previous designation of Commodore Moran as the PACIFIC Fleet type commander for MTB's.

By 1 December 1944 all the SEVENTH Fleet squadrons which had operated in the NorSols Area had departed. In the meantime, the first of the three new PACIFIC Fleet squadrons had reported for duty. MTBRon THIRTY-ONE had reported in the latter part of October to ComMTBRonsPac for administrative control and for combat training pending transfer to a forward area.<sup>63</sup> ComMTBRonsPac had assigned this squadron to CTG 70.8 and it had operated in conjunction with local forces in maintaining the blockade of the Northern Solomons.

In December MTBRon THIRTY-ONE departed for the Palaus and MTBRons THIRTY-TWO and THIRTY-SEVEN reported to ComMTBRonsPac for administrative control and for combat training.<sup>64</sup> When the disestablishment of ComNavNorSols threatened to become an actuality and when the roll-up of PT Base 9 at Treasury Islands became imminent in February 1945, MTBRons THIRTY-TWO and THIRTY-SEVEN were transferred to Espiritu Santo to await forward movement.<sup>65</sup> They were placed under the nominal operational control of ComSoPac, but they remained under the administrative control of ComMTBRonsPac, although the latter command had been reduced to a command in name only.

Little mention has been made of MTBRon TWENTY-SIX which was stationed in Pearl Harbor during this period. This squadron was directed to report to ComMTBRonsPac for administrative control during January 1945,<sup>66</sup> but it remained under the operational control of ComCruDesPac and provided training services for fleet units which passed through Pearl Harbor en route to the forward areas.

From the time of the departure of Commodore Moran on 5 March 1945 from the Northern Solomons Area until time of Commodore Bates' assumption of command of MTBRonsPac the situation remained completely static.

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<sup>61</sup> cf. Chapter III, Sec. B-3.

<sup>62</sup> The latter being commanded by a Commander.

<sup>63</sup> ComMTBRonsPac and CTG 70.8 War Diary for Oct 44.

<sup>64</sup> ComMTBRonsPac and CTG 70.8 War Diary for Dec 44.

<sup>65</sup> ComMTBRonsPac and CTG 70.8 War Diary for Feb 44 [should be Feb 45].

<sup>66</sup> ComMTBRonsPac and CTG 70.8 War Diary for Jan 44. [should be Jan 45].

## 2. Operations

### (a) General strategic nature.

The over-all strategical picture presented during the period of diminution was that of approximately 70,000<sup>67</sup> enemy ground forces in the Northern Solomons Area. These forces controlled the major portion of the land area of the Gazelle Peninsula in New Britain, Bougainville, New Ireland, Buka, and the Shortland Islands.<sup>68</sup> They maintained isolated coast defense guns and radar installations along the shore line in the vicinity of their major installations. Although the enemy air fields in the area were still intermittently serviceable, the negligible number of planes encountered presented no serious menace to allied shipping; the damage inflicted by the small number of enemy float planes which were operational was also negligible.

During this period, enemy shipping within the area was limited to a few small craft of non-descript nature and a few serviceable barges. Occasionally, the enemy attempted to bring supplies into the area in cargo-type submarines.<sup>69</sup>

The Allied strategy was directed toward the decimation of the enemy troops through the maintenance of a tight blockade in an effort to starve the enemy into submission, and through the continued expansion of Allied-held territory. The scope of the operations was necessarily limited because of the lack of availability of Allied forces for major operations in this area.

ComNavNorSols assumed that the enemy might attempt to supply and/or evacuate some of his isolated personnel in the Northern Solomons Area by means of aircraft and/or submarines, that he would resist to the last any advances of offensive action by Allied forces, and that he would continue to utilize his few remaining barges for movements of personnel and supplies within the area. Thus, the mission enjoined upon Task Group 70.8 was that it would "maintain a tight surface blockade of enemy-occupied territory to prevent and destroy hostile seaborne traffic along and within the 'Solomons-New Ireland Axis' . . . in close cooperation and in conjunction with Allied ground and air forces in the Northern Solomons Area." In addition this Task Group was directed to "assist as necessary in escort function of South Pacific Forces within the Northern Solomons Area . . ." <sup>70</sup>

As has been previously stated<sup>71</sup> the primary mission of motor torpedo boats in the Solomons had become the disruption of enemy barge traffic. In the period of diminution, however, the barge traffic diminished until it became merely a trickle. As the surface targets disappeared, the motor torpedo boats shifted their attention to shore installations.

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<sup>67</sup> ComNavNorSols Operation Plan 1-44, dated 15 June 44, estimated the size of the enemy force, an estimate of 45,000 troops having been given.

<sup>68</sup> Later the enemy occupied the northwestern tip of Choiseul.

<sup>69</sup> ComNavNorSols Operation Plan 1-44, dated 15 June 44.

<sup>70</sup> ComNavNorSols Operation Plan 1-44, dated 15 June 44.

<sup>71</sup> cf. Chapter II, Sec. B-2 (a).

They landed scouting parties within enemy-held territory; they strafed beach areas and they bombarded enemy bivouac and supply areas with mortars, 37mm guns, and 40mm guns. In general, their mission was to heckle the enemy ashore as much as possible and to attack any target of opportunity.<sup>72</sup>

There was one statistical whimsy that illustrated the versatility of the motor torpedo boat and was indicative of the general trend of the period of diminution. During July 1944 motor torpedo boats destroyed one 75' gunboat and nine barges; during August they destroyed three barges. By September barge traffic had become virtually non-existent and the boat captains had become increasingly bold in their search for targets; they concentrated their attention on shore installations. The tally of enemy equipment destroyed during September included three barges and three motor trucks (!); for October, the tally included two barges and five motor trucks (!).

The attacks during the remaining months of the period were confined to strafing and to bombardment of shore installations and bivouac areas.

**(b) Forces available.**

Task Group 70.8 consisted of eleven Task Units when it was activated in the Northern Solomons Area on 15 June 1944. These eleven units were grouped by the Task Group Commander into three operational categories at the outset.<sup>73</sup>

One operational category was comprised of Task Unit 70.8.1 and Task Unit 70.8.2 which included destroyers and destroyer escorts. With these vessels, the history of ComMTBRonsPac is concerned only from the standpoint of command relations, joint operations and, more especially, training.<sup>74</sup> DesDiv FORTY-ONE reported to CTG 70.8 for temporary duty on 15 June;<sup>75</sup> four ships of CortDiv FORTY reported prior to 1 July,<sup>76</sup> and two more reported prior to 20 July, a total of six DE's. A proportional amount of this force of escort and screening craft were in a repair status, rather than in an operational status,<sup>77</sup> so this segment of forces available was never very large. Neither the destroyers nor the destroyer escorts remained attached to Task Group 70.8 for any extended period of time. During August, DesDiv FORTY-ONE was reassigned to CTF 78;<sup>78</sup> during September and October, CortDiv FORTY also was reassigned to CTF 78.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> cf. Chapter III, Sec. A-2.

<sup>73</sup> cf. ComNavNorSols Op. Plan 1-44, dated 15 June 44.

<sup>74</sup> cf. Chapter III, Sec. B-2 (c).

<sup>75</sup> ComMTBRonsPac and CTG 70.8 War Diary for last half of June 44.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> For example, ComNavNorSols report to Com7thFlt on Location and Status of Ships and Amphibious Craft, serial 00126, dated 22 July 44, showed two DD's and four DE's in repair status at SoPac bases. Seemingly, the duty with ComNavNorSols represented an excellent opportunity to get these ships into shape for duty in more active forward areas a little later on.

<sup>78</sup> ComMTBRonsPac and CTG 70.8 War Diary for Aug 44.

<sup>79</sup> ComMTBRonsPac and CTG 70.8 War Diary for Oct 44.

Six PC's reported to CTG 70.8 in October as replacements for the six DE's and remained with ComNavNorSols until the command was deactivated on 1 March 1945.<sup>80</sup>

The second operational category was comprised of five task units which included the five NorSols Naval Advanced Bases<sup>81</sup> and the miscellaneous naval craft which were assigned to them. With these task units, also, the history of ComMTBRonsPac is only indirectly concerned. It was their function to defend the bases, to assist in the protection of SoPac shipping in the Northern Solomons Area, and to provide for the expeditious unloading of all cargo. The miscellaneous naval craft which were assigned to the Naval Advanced Bases included a total of 48 LCT's which remained with CTG 70.8 until its disestablishment;<sup>82</sup> four LCT's were based at Munda under the command of Commander Naval Advanced Base, New Georgia; 19 LCT's were based at Torokina under the command of Commander Naval Advanced Base, Torokina; 13 LCT's were based at Green Island under the command of Commander Naval Advanced Base, Green Island, and 12 LCT's were based at Emirau Island under the command of Commander Naval Advance Base, Emirau Island. Also in the picture of "miscellaneous naval craft assigned" were six YM's and six SC's<sup>83</sup> which were based at various times at the Naval Advanced Bases at New Georgia, Treasury, Green, and Torokina.<sup>84</sup>

The third operational category was comprised of the several MTB Squadrons and their respective bases at Treasury, Green and Emirau Islands.<sup>85</sup> As of 15 June, there were seven MTB Squadrons – a total of 75 motor torpedo boats. There were also twelve LCI Gunboats, eight PGM Gunboats, and one LCGM Gunboat available. These craft were ordered to maintain maximum readiness consistent with the existing base and tender repair facilities. The third operational category was subdivided into the following task units:

- (1) Task Unit 70.8.3 (Commander Motor Torpedo Boats, Treasury) which was comprised of MTB Base NINE, MTB Squadron THREE (77' Elco-type boats which were employed in training), MTB Squadron TWENTY, MTB Squadron TWENTY-EIGHT, the MTB tender USS MOBJACK (AGP-7), and PGM Division ONE (eight Gunboats).
- (2) Task Unit 70.8.5 (Commander Motor Torpedo Boats, Green) which was comprised of MTB Base SEVEN, MTB Squadron TWENTY-THREE, MTB Squadron TWENTY-SEVEN, and the MTB tender, USS VARUNA (AGP-5).
- (3) Task Unit 70.8.6 (Commander Motor Torpedo Boats, Emirau) which was comprised of MTB Base SIXTEEN, MTB Squadron FIVE, and MTB Squadron ELEVEN.

ComNavNorSols Operation Plan 1-44 also listed Task Unit 70.8.4 (Commander Naval Advanced Base, Torokina) with the third operational category. Actually, no MTB's had been based at Torokina since 1

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<sup>80</sup> ComMTBRonsPac and CTG 70.8 War Diary for Oct 44.

<sup>81</sup> ComNavNorSols Op. Plan 1-44, dated 15 June 44.

<sup>82</sup> ComNavNorSols weekly reports to Com7thFlt on Location and Status of Ships and Amphibious Craft in CTG 70.8.

<sup>83</sup> Based usually in pairs.

<sup>84</sup> ComNavNorSols weekly reports to Com7thFlt on Location and Status of Ships and Amphibious Craft in CTG 70.8.

<sup>85</sup> ComNavNorSols Op. Plan 1-44, dated 15 June 44.

April 1944.<sup>86</sup> As of 15 June, however, there were twelve LCI Gunboats based at Torokina; six of these were reassigned to the SEVENTH Fleet Amphibious Forces during July.<sup>87</sup>

Numerically, Task Group 70.8's forces remained roughly constant from 15 June through July and early August 1944; the only reduction in forces available in addition to the above-mentioned LCI Gunboats was effected by the reassignment of the USS MOBJACK (AGP-7) and LCGM Gunboat to CTG 70.1<sup>88</sup> in the latter part of July.

During the latter part of August, ComNavNorSols experienced the first deep cut into the forces available. Three squadrons of motor torpedo boats and one tender were reassigned. Squadrons TWENTY-SEVEN and TWENTY-EIGHT and the tender, the USS VARUNA, were ordered to report to the Commander THIRD Fleet at Manus for temporary duty.<sup>89</sup> Squadron THREE, which was comprised of 77' Elco type boats which had been in service since the earliest days of the Solomons campaign and which were now used for training purposes only, was finally decommissioned.<sup>90</sup> As has been indicated above, DesDiv FORTY-ONE was also reassigned during this month.

During September and October, as has been previously indicated, the only loss in forces available that was sustained was that of CortDiv FORTY. However, the forces available were augmented by the arrival of six PC's. Thus, the forces available within Task Group 70.8 now consisted of four MTB squadrons, the gunboats, and such miscellaneous amphibious craft as had been assigned to the Naval Advanced Bases.<sup>91</sup>

The forces in the NorSols area were augmented somewhat in the latter part of October with the arrival of the first boats of MTB Squadron THIRTY-ONE and the tender, USS ACONTIUS (AGP-12). These units, in addition to MTB Squadrons THIRTY-TWO and THIRTY-SEVEN and the tender, USS SILENUS (AGP-11), which arrived in the latter part of December 1944, had been assigned to CinCPac to ComSoPac for temporary duty pending further assignment. ComSoPac had reassigned the squadrons and the tenders to ComMTBRonsPac for temporary duty undergoing combat training.<sup>92</sup>

The status of these units was somewhat different from that of the four other squadrons which remained in the area temporarily.<sup>93</sup> ComMTBRonsPac assigned MTB Squadron THIRTY-ONE and the USS ACONTIUS to CTU 70.8.3 and they remained at Treasury until their departure from the Northern

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<sup>86</sup> cf. Chapter III, Sec. A-3 (a).

<sup>87</sup> In accordance with Com7thFlt disp 150007 of July 44.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> In accordance with Com7thFlt's disp 280727 of July 44.

<sup>90</sup> In accordance with CNO's disp 311520 of July 44.

<sup>91</sup> In the ComMTBRonsPac and CTG 70.8 War Diary for Sep 44, the USS JAMESTOWN (AGP-3) was mentioned for the first time in this period as a part of the forces available, indicating that this ship reported during September. The exact date on which this ship reported is not known, nor is the exact date of her departure known, as the War Diaries are unfortunately vague; but it is presumed she was reassigned to CTG 70.1 in early December as CTG 70.1 Operation Plan 3-44 listed this ship as attached to CTU 70.1.8, as of 30 Dec 44.

<sup>92</sup> ComMTBRonsPac and CTG 70.8 War Diary for Nov 44.

<sup>93</sup> MTB Rons 5, 11, 20, and 23.

Solomons. Thus, a PACIFIC Fleet squadron operated with SEVENTH Fleet units under the operational control of a SEVENTH Fleet Task Group Commander.

On 1 December 1944 MTB Squadron THIRTY-ONE and the USS ACONTIUS were detached from CTG 70.8 and departed for Palau<sup>94</sup> in accordance with CinCPac's directive.

In the early part of December 1944 the four remaining squadrons, FIVE, ELEVEN, TWENTY, and TWENTY-THREE, were detached from CTG 70.8 and were reassigned to CTG 70.1.<sup>95</sup> With the departure of these squadrons, no MTB's were available for patrol work until the arrival of MTB Squadron THIRTY-SEVEN and the first echelon of MTB Squadron THIRTY-TWO on 27 December.<sup>96</sup>

These units, augmented by the arrival of the remainder of MTB Squadron THIRTY-TWO in January maintained a blockade of designated areas<sup>97</sup> in the NorSols area as a part of their combat training until their detachment from CTG 70.8 on 15 February 1945. These units were directed by CinCPac to proceed to Espiritu Santo, New Hebrides, to await forward movement.<sup>98</sup>

The remaining units of the forces available in CTG 70.8 were reassigned in accordance with Com7thFlt directives prior to the deactivation of ComNavNorSols-CTG 70.8 on 5 March 1945.

### **(c) Policy and control of operations.**

Obviously, the policy for motor torpedo boat operations in the Northern Solomons Area was shaped by the peculiar situation which was obtained therein. While operations in the other Pacific areas were moving the lines of active conflict to the threshold of the Dutch East Indies, to the Philippines, and to the Volcano Islands, activity in the Northern Solomons Area was confined to a simple and continuous process of whittling down the enemy forces which remained holed-up within the area.

Because of the limited forces available, the success of operations within the NorSols Area was almost wholly dependent on the establishment of the greatest possible amount of coordination and cooperation among the forces of land, sea, and air. Throughout the period of diminution the policy of conducting joint MTB-PBY, MTB-Night Fighter, and MTB-DD operations, which had been initiated by ComMTBRonsSoPac, was continued as long as the necessary forces were available.

ComNavNorSols established numerous local operating areas within the NorSols Area in order to "coordinate the operations of PT's and gunboats, other surface units of Task Forces and Aircraft in the Northern Solomons Areas to simplify the designation of operating areas for PT's and gunboats, and to insure that our aircraft and surface forces will know the location of our PT Boats and gunboats at all times."

<sup>94</sup> ComMTBRonsPac and CTG 70.8 War Diary for Dec 44.

<sup>95</sup> In accordance with Com7thFlt's disp 201041 of Nov 44.

<sup>96</sup> ComMTBRonsPac and CTG 70.8 War Diary for Dec 44.

<sup>97</sup> WILLIAM, OBOE, and QUEEN. Cf. Appendix.

<sup>98</sup> Data obtained from ComMTBRon 32 in an interview.

The designated areas were primarily hunting areas. Aircraft were allowed to hunt barges only by day unless working in conjunction with MTB's. In order to insure maximum destruction of enemy barges which had been driven ashore or which had been wrecked during a previous night's action, MTB's were allowed to remain in their assigned areas until 0800 L. If in an emergency the boats were unable to clear their assigned areas by 0800 L, ComNavNorSols directed them to make every possible effort to notify all NorSols air commands as soon as possible. Aircraft were restricted from bombing or strafing until after 0900 L in those areas which had been designated for MTB operations for the previous night. And when the boats returned from patrol areas, they were directed not to approach within two miles of the coastline.

When motor torpedo boats were directed to make special daylight reconnaissance of coastal areas, all air commands were notified at least 12 hours in advance, and 24 hours in advance whenever possible. In the event that Night Fighters or Black Cats were directed to cooperate with or work in conjunction with motor torpedo boats in attacks on barges or larger enemy surface craft, the motor torpedo boats were forbidden to open fire on any aircraft in the immediate vicinity without first obtaining the permission of the pilot of the friendly aircraft which was operating in the area.

Every possible effort was expended toward avoiding clashes between friendly planes and MTB's or between friendly surface ships and MTB's. Insofar as was practicable ComNavNorSols notified ComAirNorSols by 1400 L daily of the number of MTB's on patrol and the areas to which they had been assigned during the subsequent 24-hour period. MTB's were forbidden to depart from their designated areas except in passage to and from the base, or unless they were called out by other surface units which were operating in the vicinity, or unless they were directed by friendly aircraft to enemy surface units in adjacent areas. In the latter two cases, the motor torpedo boats were forbidden to attack enemy shipping until after definite contact had been made with the friendly forces which were involved and until after positive information had been obtained regarding their location. Conversely, aircraft were forbidden to attack enemy small craft, or other shipping not positively identified as to type, in MTB areas at night unless they had been assigned to work with MTB's or unless they had definite knowledge that no MTB's were operating in or near the area concerned.

MTB's and gunboats operated in the vicinity of larger Allied surface units only during special prearranged strikes and when directed by ComNavNorSols or when they had been called out to assist in an emergency. In either case, ComAirNorSols was immediately notified of the situation and was informed of all unscheduled MTB movements.

Control of MTB operations in the Northern Solomons Area was at all times vested in ComNavNorSols (CTG 70.8). ComNavNorSols issued daily dispatch orders to the MTB Area Commanders which designated the local areas which were to be patrolled each night and the number of boats which were to be assigned to each area. Generally, two boats were assigned to each patrol area and they operated as a tactical unit.

Upon receipt of the daily dispatch orders from ComNavNorSols, the Area Commander in each area assigned specific boats and Section Leaders for each patrol. He amplified the basic orders as necessary

and included such additional local information as was available from native scouts and coastwatchers; he designated specific targets which were to be attacked. When it became advisable, native scouts were assigned to the patrols to aid in the navigation of poorly charted waters and to pinpoint objectives located ashore.

From time to time, ComNavNorSols issued orders for combined operations against specific objectives. These strikes were usually conducted either in support of or as a diversion for Allied ground operations and required the coordination of land, sea, and air forces. The basic orders contained the general outline of the attack and the subordinate commanders were directed to confer and effect the necessary coordination of details.

Action or contact reports were forwarded by dispatch by the commanders concerned to CTG 70.8 as soon as possible. Amplified reports (positive) in the form of the standard action or contact report were forwarded in the routine manner. In addition to these reports, the Area Commander submitted a daily dispatch report of patrol results (negative or positive) for the preceding night, and in the event the patrol results were negative, a written report was also submitted by the Area Commander to ComNavNorSols as soon as practicable.

The entire period was marked by the number of joint operations and the success of these operations between MTB's and other Allied land, sea, and air forces. It was proved that motor torpedo boats could operate successfully with other units when the policy and the directives governing joint operations had been clearly set forth and when an honest effort had made to acquaint each type with the capabilities and limitations of the other type, and when proper coordination had been effected.

#### **(d) Training programs.**

One of the outstanding features of the motor torpedo boat organization in the Solomons, particularly during the period of diminution, was the emphasis which was placed on operational training.

Further training of MTB personnel was an absolute necessity. The scope of motor torpedo boat activities varied widely with the different areas of operation and it was constantly being extended. The Motor Torpedo Boat Training Center, Melville, Rhode Island, had been unable to keep pace with the developments in the combat areas. Consequently, personnel arrived in the forward areas incompletely trained.

The feasibility of conducting a vigorous training program was enhanced by the fact that (1) all Allied surface forces were under a single, comparatively small, operational command; (2) ComNavNorSols and ComAirNorSols were literally neighbors; and (3) the enemy could no longer muster a strong defense against Allied surface attacks. This latter factor insured the most effective type of operational training for unseasoned MTB personnel. The possibility of actual combat was ever present, but the possibility of each error in judgment becoming fatal was lessened.

Commodore Moran, in his capacity as ComMTBRonsSoPac, had pioneered the joint MTB-DD exercises;<sup>99</sup> now as ComNavNorSols (and also as ComMTBRonsPac) he was in a position to continue these operations and to further the establishment of an effective doctrine. He directed all DD's, DE's, and MTB's, when not otherwise committed, to take every opportunity to engage in joint exercises and to apply the lessons learned therein to actual combat operations whenever possible. It was essential that the MTB personnel secure this training because for some period of time training of motor torpedo boat personnel had centered around anti-barge tactics, and little attention had been devoted to the execution of torpedo attacks against major vessels. Furthermore, the DD's and DE's obtained valuable experience in formulating anti-MTB tactics.

Cooperation between MTB's and PBY's had long been synonymous with MTB operations in the Solomons.<sup>100</sup> The policy of utilizing PBY's to spot for MTB's had been originated by ComMTBFlot ONE in the early days of the Solomons campaign. This policy had been continued and had been expanded until it finally had been formulated into a doctrine by ComMTBRonsSoPac. This doctrine formed the basis for all MTB-PBY combat operations and exercises which were conducted in the Northern Solomons. Whenever a new squadron of either motor torpedo boats or PBY's reported to the NorSols Area, they were given immediate training with the other member of the combat team.

By November 1944, virtually all enemy barge traffic had ceased, and ComNavNorSols had recommended the disestablishment of the NorSols command. All of the SEVENTH Fleet squadrons had departed with the exception of TWENTY, and that squadron remained only a short time longer. The MTB Bases at Emirau and at Green were being rolled up; only MTB Base NINE in the Treasury Islands remained in operation.<sup>101</sup>

MTBRon THIRTY-ONE arrived in the latter part of October and was based at MTB Base NINE. As the southeastern end of Bougainville and the northwestern end of Choiseul were within easy patrolling distances of the Treasury Islands, boats of MTBRon THIRTY-ONE were assigned nightly patrols in these areas. The more experienced officers in MTBRon TWENTY were assigned as instructors, and although the patrols were not particularly fruitful from the standpoint of enemy destroyed, they provided excellent training opportunities, particularly in the navigation of poorly charted waters.

ComNavNorSols directed<sup>102</sup> the Commander Motor Torpedo Boats, Treasury Islands, to institute an intensive training program which included exercises in fueling at sea, towing, anti-aircraft gunnery, torpedo firing, barge patrols in assigned barge patrol areas, recognition and emergency identification procedures, communications, maneuvering board problems, piloting, intelligence evaluation, and safety precautions.

The USS ACONTIUS (AGP-12) which had arrived with MTBRon THIRTY-ONE had had no experience in tending motor torpedo boats. Therefore, ComNavNorSols directed that the ACONTIUS be given every

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<sup>99</sup> cf. Chapter II, Sec. B-2 (d).

<sup>100</sup> cf. Chapter II, Sec. B-2 (d).

<sup>101</sup> ComMTBRonsPac and CTG 70.8 War Diary for Oct 44.

<sup>102</sup> ComNavNorSols ltr, serial 00217, dated 27 Oct 44.

opportunity to effect repairs, to haul out boats, to conduct fueling at sea and towing exercises, and to guard communication circuits for the boats.

Although much of the training was a repetition of that which the personnel had received at MTBSTC or at shakedown, neither the basic training nor the shakedown training had provided the incentive to learn that which was offered in the Solomons. On patrol, there was the ever-present danger of drifting mines; there was the potential danger of enemy shore batteries; and there was the danger of running aground in the reef-strewn waters of enemy territory.

When MTBRons THIRTY-TWO and THIRTY-SEVEN arrived in company with the USS SILENUS (AGP-11) at Treasury Islands in the latter part of December they engaged in a similar training program until their departure from the area on 15 February 1945.<sup>103</sup>

### **3. Logistics**

#### **(a) General.**

The re-alignment of the Northern Solomons Area had posed a peculiar logistic problem, the distinctive solution of which had been evolved at the Brisbane conference.<sup>104</sup> At the time of the conference, the Northern Solomons Area had been within the jurisdiction of ComSoPac, and ComSeronSoPac had been responsible for providing the necessary logistic support for that area. However, with the transfer of the area to the jurisdiction of the SEVENTH Fleet on 15 June 1944, ComSeronSoPac's responsibility would have been terminated, and logistic support for the area would then have become a function of ComSerFor7thFlt. Thus, the Brisbane conferees had been confronted with the problem of ascertaining which of two factors should have been given paramount consideration in the determination of the logistic responsibility for the NorSols Area: (1) strict adherence to the chain of command which would have resulted in the logistic support becoming a function of ComSerFor7thFlt, or (2) subjugation of the principle of chain of command in favor of expediency and South Pacific geography which would have resulted in the logistic support remaining a function of ComSeronSoPac.

In the event that it had been decided to have adhered strictly to the chain of command to have had ComSerFor7thFlt provide the necessary logistic support for the NorSols forces, this would have entailed the disestablishment of those facilities which had been established by ComSeronSoPac for the logistic support of the NorSols Area, and the establishment of replacement facilities by ComSerFor7thFlt. It would have entailed intensive reorganization of shipping facilities within the SEVENTH Fleet at a time when they had been struggling to support the SoWesPac Area and when they could have ill afforded to have expanded their area of logistic responsibility.

On the other hand expediency and South Pacific geography had favored the retention of the existing facilities, regardless of deviation from the normal chain of command and responsibility. Logistic facilities within the SoPac Area were well established. ComSeronSoPac was fully cognizant of the logistic problems of the NorSols Area, particularly, of those which pertained to motor torpedo boats. This point

<sup>103</sup> ComMTBRonsPac and CTG 70.8 War Diaries for Dec 44, Jan 45, and Feb 45.

<sup>104</sup> Conference between Commodore Moran and Com7thFlt at Brisbane on 20 May 44.

was of paramount concern to Commodore Moran because the major portion of the new Task Group 70.8 would be comprised of motor torpedo boats.

A great deal of time and effort had been previously expended in establishing satisfactory logistic support for motor torpedo boats in the Solomons. These efforts had now begun to bear fruit, and for the first time it appeared as though MTB's would be provided with an adequate supply of proprietary spares. On the other hand, ComMTBRons7thFlt was experiencing a dire shortage of proprietary spares, and he had had to resort to improvisation and to procurement of substitute material from Australia. Obviously, the SEVENTH Fleet could not have provided adequate logistic support for any additional MTB squadrons.

Therefore, it had been decided that, with the exception of personnel, ComSeronSoPac would continue to provide all logistic support for those naval forces which had been assigned to ComNavNorSols.

Apparently, in order to implement this decision, Commodore Moran was assigned additional duty by Com7thFlt as Commander Service Force SEVENTH Fleet Subordinate Command for the Northern Solomons.<sup>105</sup> In so far as can be determined from documentary data available, he rarely functioned in this capacity, per se, and the exact function and scope of the command is not known.

The designation of ComSeronSoPac as the source of logistic support for NavNorSols was most fortunate. The forces which had been attached to ComSoPac had been reduced considerably, while shipments of supplies to the SoPac Area had been correspondingly increased. This was particularly applicable to MTB proprietary spares. Little by little manufactures and the Bureau of Ships had caught up with the great backlog of requisitions<sup>106</sup> and had begun to ship the materiel in quantity.

As regards non-technical stock, motor torpedo boats were assured of an adequate supply. Where previously there had been considerable friction and bickering between bases and squadrons over the matter of the supply of non-technical stock, ComNavNorSols was now in the position to insure that MTB's were maintained in the proper degree of logistic readiness; he not only controlled the operations of the boats, but he also controlled the operations of the bases that supported the boats.

A clear indication of the existence of a logistic paradise within the NorSols command was evidenced when those motor torpedo boat squadrons which had been operating within the Northern Solomons were transferred to ComMTBRons7thFlt. These squadrons were transferred fully equipped with the

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<sup>105</sup> ComNavNorSols Operation Plan #1-44, dated 15 June 44.

<sup>106</sup> OinC SPDC Navy 131 ltr to BuShips, dated 12 July 44, which stated: "In the past the lack of a centralized requisitioning activity has caused undue duplication of materials requested. Requisitioning activities have had no records of materials issued or in the area and few or no records of materials already requisitioned or en route. Requisitions have furthermore been submitted without uniformity and through varying channels, requesting shipment to designators inaccessible to normal shipping. Requisitions were submitted without foresight requesting rush shipments of already critical spares.

"The resulting picture, when this jumble of miscellaneous requisitions arrived at the source of supply without explanation, taken by BuShips when placing contracts for spares was to derive a 'Happy Medium' from the requisitions so submitted . . . and to replace contracts (with the manufacturer) for what seemed reasonable quantities. . ."

squadron allowance of spare parts. Sixty-nine overhauled Packard engines were also included in the transfer.

Later, when MTBRons THIRTY-ONE, THIRTY-TWO, and THIRTY-SEVEN arrived in the area, a six months' supply of spare parts was made available to each squadron. At last, motor torpedo boats had an abundance of spare parts.

**(b) Maintenance of bases.**

The maintenance of MTB Bases during this period presented no particular problems: it was a simple matter of continuing an established routine.<sup>107</sup> The one noticeable change was the shift in the operational and administrative control of the Bases.

During the SoPac period the MTB Bases had been under the immediate operational and administrative control of the local Naval Advanced Base Units; the MTB Area Commanders had had no jurisdiction over them. However, with the re-alignment of the NorSols Area the MTB Bases had become administratively and operationally responsible to ComNavNorSols;<sup>108</sup> he severed their former ties with the local Naval Advance Base Units and he directed the respective MTB Area Commanders to assume both administrative and operational control of the MTB Base which supported their squadrons.

As motor torpedo boats no longer operated to the south and east of the Treasury Islands, there was no longer any need for MTB Base ELEVEN at Rendova. The roll-up of this Base had been completed shortly after Commodore Moran's headquarters had been moved to Torokina, and on 20 June 1944,<sup>109</sup> this Base was made available to ComMTBRons7thFlt. However, no immediate action was taken. It was not until September 1944 that ComMTBRons7thFlt<sup>110</sup> requested that the transshipment of MTB Base ELEVEN to Mios Woendi<sup>111</sup> be expedited. ComNavNorSols notified<sup>112</sup> ComSerFor7thFlt that, although this Base had been prepared for shipment for some period of time, no shipping instructions had been received, nor had any cargo space been made available. Furthermore, no information had been received as to what disposition was to be of the personnel who had been attached to the Base. The exact date of the eventual transshipment of this Base is not known.

As the squadrons were gradually withdrawn from the NorSols Area, the MTB Bases at Green Island and Emirau Island were rolled up as rapidly as possible. ComNavNorSols directed the final roll-up of Base SEVEN at Green and Base SIXTEEN at Emirau on 8 December<sup>113</sup> in accordance with a directive from ComSerFor7thFlt.<sup>114</sup> This directive further stipulated that the facilities and equipment of these two

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<sup>107</sup> cf. Chapter II, Sec. B-3.

<sup>108</sup> ComNavNorSols Operation Plan 1-44, dated 15 June 44.

<sup>109</sup> CTG 70.8 dispatch 200350 of June 44.

<sup>110</sup> CTG 70.1 dispatch 030629 of Sep 44.

<sup>111</sup> In the Schouten Islands directly north of Geelvink Bay in NW New Guinea.

<sup>112</sup> ComNavNorSols' ltr, serial 00199, dated 6 Oct. 44.

<sup>113</sup> ComNavNorSols' ltr, serial 00274, dated 8 Dec 44.

<sup>114</sup> ComSerFor7thFlt dispatch 070831 of Dec 44.

Bases should be combined and one new MTB Base Unit should be formed. By the end of December 1944 this new unit was ready for transshipment.<sup>115</sup>

The only MTB Base that remained was MTB Base NINE at Treasury. This Base remained in operation until after MTBRons THIRTY-ONE, THIRTY-TWO, and THIRTY-SEVEN had completed their combat training period. With the departure of these squadrons Base NINE was rolled up and made available for transshipment to a forward area.

**(c) Transfer, rotation and handling of MTB personnel.**

This section of the history is concerned with the personnel policies and problems of the MTB Squadrons under Commodore Moran's cognizance during the period of diminution, namely, THREE, FIVE, ELEVEN, TWENTY, TWENTY-THREE, TWENTY-SEVEN, TWENTY-EIGHT, THIRTY-ONE, THIRTY-TWO and THIRTY-SEVEN.<sup>116</sup> Since the change in area assignment and responsibility on 15 June, Commodore Moran was responsible to the SEVENTH Fleet as Commander, Allied Forces, Northern Solomons, and as Commander, Service Force SEVENTH Fleet Subordinate Command, (NorSols); and further, he was responsible to CinCPac by virtue of his title as Commander Motor Torpedo Boat Squadrons, PACIFIC Fleet. It had been decided in the Brisbane conference<sup>117</sup> that Commodore Moran in his capacity as ComNavNorSols would retain operational control of the MTB squadrons then operating in the NorSols area. Strangely enough, however, ComNavNorSols, with the apparent concurrence of Com7thFlt, ordered these squadrons<sup>118</sup> to report to ComMTBRonsPac for administrative control.<sup>119</sup> The three squadrons<sup>120</sup> which had been assigned to the PACIFIC Fleet by CNO did not report for duty until approximately 1 November 1944.<sup>121</sup>

No documentary evidence is available to indicate that word of this "special" arrangement was ever passed to CinCPac, to the MTB Detail Desk in BuPers, or to CNO until November 1944. Thus, in retrospect, the personnel perplexities of the period which were created by the tangled chain of command and which were possibly attributable in a lesser degree to the "rear area" status of the seemingly ambiguous NorSols command, are more understandable. Before presenting the personnel situation as it existed within the multiplicity of commands extant during this period, the following facts must also be noted:

- (1) The replacement officers and men were handled separately and by different organizations before reporting to squadrons for assignment. Officer personnel were ordered by BuPers to a

<sup>115</sup> ComMTBRonsPac and CTG 70.8 War Diary for Dec 44.

<sup>116</sup> For purposes of discussion herein MTBRons 3, 27, and 28 have been excluded. THREE was a training squadron and was decommissioned in August; 27 and 28 were relatively new squadrons and they needed no replacements prior to their departure from the area in August.

<sup>117</sup> cf. Chapter III, Sec. B-1 (a).

<sup>118</sup> FIVE, ELEVEN, TWENTY, TWENTY-THREE

<sup>119</sup> ComNavNorSols Op. Plan 1-44, dated 15 June 44.

<sup>120</sup> THIRTY-ONE, THIRTY-TWO, THIRTY-SEVEN.

<sup>121</sup> ComMTBRonsPac and CTG 70.8 War Diary for Oct. and Nov. 44.

Fleet MTB Task Group or Type Command. The personnel officer of these latter organizations then reassigned the replacement officers to the various squadrons as needed.

- (2) The enlisted replacements were sent out by draft from MTBSTC to the Transportation and Dispersal Center (TADCEN) Shoemaker, California. A new draft was formed at Shoemaker and shipped to a Fleet Service Force. The drafts were in turn reassigned to a Fleet MTB organization.
- (3) Commodore Moran was actually entitled to receive replacement personnel through two sources after the re-alignment of commands on 15 June. As ComNavNorSols and ComSerFor7thFltSubComNorSols, he was theoretically entitled to receive a proportionate share of replacements assigned to the SEVENTH Fleet MTB's. But, inasmuch as he had ordered the ComNavNorSols Squadrons to report administratively to ComMTBRonsPac, he was able to request personnel through the latter command.

It should also be pointed out that because of the changes and apparent duplication of the functions and responsibilities, correspondence among the personnel officers of the various commands concerned revealed<sup>122</sup> that even they were not certain of the procedures that should have been followed in requesting, transferring, and rotating personnel.

During this same period an officer<sup>123</sup> with no knowledge of MTBs' personnel requirements and problems, and even less knowledge of the idiosyncrasies of the NorSols command, was placed in charge of the MTB Detail Desk in the Bureau of Personnel.

Coincidentally BuPers changed its officer personnel policy for the entire Navy.<sup>124</sup> The innovation of this policy affected MTB's to the extent that replacement officers were thereafter assigned to individual squadrons rather than to Fleet MTB Task Group or Type Commanders. Likewise, officers who were eligible for rotational leave received direct Bureau orders, whereas, formerly, such orders had been initiated by the Fleet Task Group or Type Commander concerned.

It has been explained hereinbefore<sup>125</sup> that every effort had been made to work out a rotation policy consisting of a 12-month tour of duty for boat personnel and an 18-month tour of duty for the shore-based personnel. ComNavNorSols indicated<sup>126</sup> that it was considered desirable to maintain this policy. A shortage of replacements during this period, however, resulted in its curtailment and officers and men were rotated to the States whenever replacements became available.

By August, the lack of replacement personnel had become critical. The seriousness of the situation was indicated in ComNavNorSols Staff Personnel Officer's letter to the Commander Motor Torpedo Boat Squadron ELEVEN, in which he stated that, "The Melville officers are not coming in as great numbers as I

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<sup>122</sup> Personal file of Lieut. Comdr. D. Agnew, USNR, ComNavNorSols Staff Personnel Officer

<sup>123</sup> Lieutenant Gillstrap, USNR

<sup>124</sup> Personal ltr from Lt. Comdr. Clark, USNR, XO, MTBSTC to Lt. Comdr. Agnew, dated 14 Aug 44.

<sup>125</sup> Chapter II, Sec. B-3 (i).

<sup>126</sup> Personal file of Lt. Cmdr. Agnew.

had hoped. Squadron FIVE requires several more and we should start relieving Squadrons TWENTY and TWENTY-THREE next month. For this reason, I hope you keep your requirements at a minimum.”<sup>127</sup>

Over a month later, there apparently was no indication that replacement officers would arrive in the near future, and the Staff Personnel Officer in a letter to the Executive Officer, MTBSTC, stressed the fact that ComNavNorSols had not received any replacement personnel in the past six months.<sup>128</sup>

In an effort to ascertain the reason for the lack of replacements, ComNavNorSols ordered his Staff Personnel Officer to Brisbane to confer with the representatives of ComSerFor7thFlt. As a result of this conference, ComSerFor7thFlt agreed thereafter to assign 40% of all MTBSTC-trained personnel to ComNavNorSols.<sup>129</sup> In the interim, ComNavNorSols had received a letter which indicated that ComSerFor7thFlt would soon receive 290 MTBSTC-trained men.<sup>130</sup> ComNavNorSols immediately requested ComSerFor7thFlt to assign 115 of this group to him in order that the original complements of Squadrons TWENTY and TWENTY-THREE could be relieved.

In the early part of October, thirty replacement officers were assigned to ComMTBRons7thFlt. ComNavNorSols,<sup>131</sup> on 11 October, requested ComSerFor7thFlt to reassign a minimum of twelve of this group of officers to his command. This request was made, not only because the officers were sorely needed, but to determine whether or not the 40% policy was applicable to officer personnel as well as to enlisted personnel.

In November the Staff Personnel Officer put his finger on the crux of the whole personnel situation when he wrote<sup>132</sup> Com7thFlt's Personnel Officer that “It is apparent that BuPers had for some time been sending officers for all squadrons listed in the SEVENTH Fleet Organization to ComMTBRons ComMTBRons7thFlt for assignment. The result is that all of Commander Bowling's ComMTBRons7thFlt men go home in around 10 months—we have some that have been out of the United States over 18 months.”

Apparently the first indication that ComNavNorSols had that the new Bureau policy was actually functioning was when he received a letter<sup>133</sup> from the Commander Motor Torpedo Boat Squadron TWENTY-THREE in which he stated that much to his “surprise and consternation” he had received BuPers orders which had directed the detachment of eight officers in his squadron for return to the United States. Information copies of these orders had not been sent to ComNavNorSols nor to ComMTBRonsPac.

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<sup>127</sup> Lt. Comdr. Agnew's personal ltr to Lt. W. S. Humphrey, dated 10 Aug 44.

<sup>128</sup> Lt. Comdr. Agnew's personal ltr to Lt. Comdr. Clark, dated 1 Oct 44.

<sup>129</sup> Staff Personnel Officer's memo to ComNavNorSols, serial 0462, dated 21 Oct 44.

<sup>130</sup> SubComSerForPacFlt ltr, serial 24043, dated 28 Aug 44.

<sup>131</sup> ComNavNorSols dispatch 110614 of Oct. 44.

<sup>132</sup> Personal ltr from Lt. Comdr. Agnew to Lt. (jg) Moon, dated 6 Nov 44.

<sup>133</sup> Personal ltr from Lt. A. W. Ferron, USNR, to Lt. Comdr. Agnew, dated 3 Nov 44.

In an endeavor to disentangle the personnel situation, the Staff Personnel Officer wrote<sup>134</sup> the MTB Detail Officer in the Bureau of Personnel and summarized the personnel problems of the NorSols MTB's. He explained the MTB organization within the SEVENTH Fleet and he called attention to the fact that the title ComMTBRons7thFlt was a misnomer, because it did not embrace the squadrons under the command of ComNavNorSols. He further stated that "Since 15 June, the date when responsibility for the Northern Solomons passed from SoPac to SoWesPac, we have received 10 officers for assignment to MTB squadrons in this area. We have not received any of the officers ordered to ComMTBRons 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet for assignment. Based on a normal tour of duty of one year in the area, we will require 54 MTB officers before the end of the year. . ."

By the time the proper channels had been determined and the procedures had been evolved for handling ComNavNorSols MTB personnel, CNO had ordered Squadrons FIVE, ELEVEN, TWENTY, and TWENTY-THREE to report to ComMTBRons7thFlt for further assignment.

In the meantime, MTBRon THIRTY-ONE, the first of the three PACIFIC Fleet squadrons previously mentioned, had arrived in the area. This squadron and the two squadrons<sup>135</sup> which reported later were confronted with identical personnel problems:<sup>136</sup> each squadron was heavily over-complemented with senior officers and senior rated men. In the case of officers, each squadron had nearly a score of senior Lieutenants, many of whom were experienced MTB officers. With an over-abundance of Lieutenants, junior officers could not be advanced to positions of greater responsibility, nor could senior officers be assigned tasks in any way commensurate with their ability or their experience.

As far as can be determined, six experienced senior MTB officers were sent to ComMTBRonsPac to fill out the complements of MTBRons THIRTY-TWO and THIRTY-SEVEN. Since each squadron was already over-complemented with ranking officers, the problem of absorbing the six additional officers into the squadrons was extremely difficult.

The same static condition existed with the enlisted personnel. Since all of the senior rates were filled, there were no openings for advancement in the lower rates. This loss of incentive for the squadron personnel posed serious morale problems. THIRTY-TWO and THIRTY-SEVEN later augmented their forces with small drafts of seamen from the Service Force pool at Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides, but no additional MTBSTC-trained rates or officers were added during this period.

The handling of personnel during the period was marked by the lack of official correspondence relative to this mater, and the abundance of personal letters and unofficial memoranda exchanged between the Staff Personnel Officer and subordinate, coordinate, and superior commands. Though this method may have been expedient in certain instances, the confusion and delay can, in part, be attributed to the fact that decisions which had been rendered had no official standing.

[end of Part III]

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<sup>134</sup> Personal ltr from Lt. Comdr. Agnew to Lt. Gillstrap, BuPers, dated 8 Nov 44.

<sup>135</sup> MTBRons 32 and 37.

<sup>136</sup> Interview with Lt. Comdr. R. C. Wark, USNR, (former ComMTBRon 32).