

UNITED STATES NAVAL ADMINISTRATION IN WORLD WAR II

COMMANDER IN CHIEF, PACIFIC FLEET

MOTOR TORPEDO BOAT SQUADRONS

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PART II

INCEPTION OF COMMTBRONSPAC

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A. ORGANIZATION OF THE COMMAND

1. Directives from higher command.

The title of Commander Motor Torpedo Boats, PACIFIC Fleet, (ComMTBRonsPac) was delegated to Commodore E. J. Moran, USN, in a letter¹ of 1 February 1944 from the Headquarters of the Commander-in-Chief, United States Fleet. The Commander-in-Chief, U. S. PACIFIC Fleet (CinCPac) officially notified Commodore Moran of his new title in a confidential letter² on 5 March 1944. Commodore Moran, who was Commander Motor Torpedo Boat Squadrons, South Pacific Forces (ComMTBRonsSoPac) at this time, reported for duty³ as ComMTBRonsPac on 9 March by dispatch to CinCPac.

As ComMTBRonsPac, Commodore Moran sent out a letter⁴ to all PACIFIC Fleet Motor Torpedo Boat Squadrons which issued administrative instructions for the new organization in the even[t] that MTBRons were assigned to the FIRST, FIFTH, and NINTH Fleets. His administration of Motor Torpedo Boat Squadrons, THIRD Fleet remained unchanged.

The reasons for the creation at this time of a Type Commander for motor torpedo boats assigned to the PACIFIC Fleet is not clear. Apparently this new command was intended to fit a plan of action that did not materialize immediately. As indicated in the previous paragraph, the administrative jurisdiction of ComMTBRonPac did not embrace those motor torpedo boats operating in the SoWesPac area under the SEVENTH Fleet, nor did it embrace those motor torpedo boats operating in the SoPac area as these boats continued to report for administrative control to Commodore Moran in his capacity as ComMTBRonsSoPac and to report for operational control to the THIRD Amphibious Force (CTF 31) with headquarters at Guadalcanal. Furthermore, the administrative jurisdiction of ComMTBRonsPac failed to embrace the following: (1) those squadrons operating under the Commander, Alaskan Sector, Northwestern Sea Frontier; (2) the squadron based at Toboga Island,

¹ US Flt. Hdq., Navy Dept. serial 0400 of 1 Feb 44.

² CinCPac's conf serial 0800 of 5 Mar 44.

³ ComMTBRonsSoPac War Diary for April, Para. 5.

⁴ ComMTBRonsPac conf serial 073 of 17 Apr 44.

Republic of Panama, operating under the Commander, Panama Sea Frontier; and (3) those squadrons based at Pearl City, Pearl Harbor, T. H., operating under the Commander, Hawaiian Sea Frontier.⁵

In regard to the squadrons in the Alaskan area, no information is available as to why they were not placed within the administrative jurisdiction of ComMTBRonsPac. However, the factors affecting the operation and administration of the Panama-based squadron are somewhat more obvious: (1) the Panama-based squadron (Squadron FOURTEEN) consisted of only five of the original Huckins-type motor torpedo boats whose operating capabilities were most dubious; (2) the Huckins-type boat was not a standard type motor torpedo boat, there being only eighteen (18) boats of this type in service; and (3) these boats were to be retained in the Panama area for training purposes. Nevertheless, administrative control of this unit by ComMTBRonsPac would have ensured the use of a standard MTB doctrine, the importance of this point resting within the fact that the primary mission of Squadron FOURTEEN was to provide anti-motor torpedo boat training for fleet units en route to the Pacific areas.

The situation in the Hawaiian Sea Frontier in regard to motor torpedo boat operation and administration is analogous to that in Panama. Here again, the physical condition and obsolescence of the boats precluded their use in active combat areas; MTB Squadron ONE consisted of five of the original 77-foot Elco-type boats which had been operating in the Hawaiian-Midway area since August 1944 [I believe the year should be 1941 -- Squadron ONE was directed on August 13, 1941 to prepare for assignment to the Pacific Fleet according to the book **At Close Quarters**, page 59, available at <http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USN/CloseQuarters/PT-2.html>] while MTB Squadron TWENTY-SIX was comprised of ten of the aforementioned Huckins-type boats. The primary mission of these units was to provide anti-motor torpedo boat training for fleet units, and, as in the instance of Squadron FOURTEEN, administrative control of Squadron ONE and Squadron TWENTY-SIX by ComMTBRonsPac would have ensured a standardized doctrine.

The CinCPac directive creating ComMTBRonsPac gave one possible indication of a future trend: paragraph 3 of this directive stated that when "the MTB Base being established at Pearl City, Pearl Harbor... (was) ready in all respects to function as a repair and engine overhaul base for motor torpedo boats... the Commanding Officer of that base (was directed) to report to the Commander-in Chief, U. S. PACIFIC Fleet for duty," indicating the possible extension of the jurisdiction of the Type Commander over the operating bases. However, one month later, prior to the completion of this base, the abovementioned paragraph was cancelled.⁶

Thus, a PACIFIC Fleet Type Command was established without any units having been assigned over which that command exercised administrative or operational control. Those squadrons listed in CNO directives as having been assigned to PACIFIC Fleet had been reassigned by CinCPac to ComSoPac and were administered by ComMTBRonsSoPac.⁷ It was not until 15 June 1944 that ComMTBRonsPac assumed administrative control of any squadrons.

⁵ CNO serial 0239823 of 25 Apr 44.

⁶ ALPAC #39, dated 9 Apr 44.

⁷ CNO serial 0239823, dated 25 Apr 44; CNO serial 0303423, dated 19 May 44.

ComMTBRonsSoPac continued to exercise quasi-operational control over motor torpedo boats under his administrative control. Technically, CTF 31 exercised direct operational control over all motor torpedo boats operating in the SoPac area. Actually, however, ComMTBRonsSoPac made it a practice to order a senior MTB officer to CTF 31 Headquarters for temporary additional duty as MTB Liaison Officer, who assisted in the drafting of a daily dispatch to ComMTBRonsSoPac which designated the MTB operating areas for the night and further designated the number of boats to be assigned to operate in each area. ComMTBRonsSoPac relayed this directive to the Area Commanders concerned, adding such supplementary directives as may have been pertinent. In other words, the broad operational plans for MTB operations in the SoPac area were originated by CTF 31, who delegated to ComMTBRonsSoPac the authority to augment CTF 31 directives concerning MTB's with any detailed instructions necessary to the execution of the basic operational directive. ComMTBRonsSoPac, in turn, usually delegated this authority to his Area Commanders. As the demand for special missions arose within various operating areas, these operations were cleared with CTF 31 by ComMTBRonsSoPac before they were placed into execution.

Direct operational control of all MTB's in the SoPac area was given ComMTBRonsSoPac when Task Group 30.3 was formed on 1 May⁸ "for the purpose of blockading the enemy-held coasts of Bougainville, New Hanover, New Ireland and adjacent islands."

This consolidation of operational control in 30.3 or ComMTBRonsSoPac undoubtedly occurred as a result of ComMTBRonsSoPac's earlier letter⁹ to ComSoPac in which he pointed out that CTF 31 had been given general combat operational control of all MTB's. In certain combat areas, however, Commander of a Naval Base or Shore-Based Senior Officers Present had also been given operational control. This divided control resulted in several unfortunate and tragic clashes between friendly forces.¹⁰ He recommended that a directive centralizing operational control be issued immediately.

[PGM gunboats mentioned in paragraph below]

This directive¹¹ foreshadowed the next big change in commands when it not only placed 96 MTB's under the operational control of Commodore Moran, but also 12 LCI gunboats, 8 PGM gunboats, 1 LCGM gunboat, two PT tenders (AGP's) and 1 APc.

The immediate effect of ComMTBRonsSoPac assuming operational control was noted in the number of increased actions during the month of May.¹² Patrols were more than doubled and more stress placed on joint operations which perceptibly tightened the Jap blockade.

Meanwhile there had been but few contacts with enemy warships since the close of the Guadalcanal campaign. The enemy was no longer sending warships into the Solomons area and the war was rapidly moving north and west.

⁸ Com3rdFlt's dispatch 210440 Apr 44.

⁹ ComMTBRonsSoPac's 0013 secret serial of 14 Jan 44.

¹⁰ See Organization of the Command, Part 2.

¹¹ Com3rdFlt's dispatch 210440 Apr 44.

¹² MOSQUITO BITES for 1 June 44, Page 1.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Admiral Halsey was relieved of his command as ComSoPac on 14 June, and this aggressive Admiral and his THIRD Fleet moved out of the Solomons area for more active fields of operation.

In view of the consolidation of the Southern Solomons and of the redivision of command areas in the South Pacific placing all territory west of 159° East under the cognizance of Commander SEVENTH Fleet, it was apparent that there was no further need for PT boats in the reorganized South Pacific Forces. Therefore, Task Group 30.3 was dissolved at 0001 Love June 15 upon reporting to Commander SEVENTH Fleet for duty in accordance with Commander THIRD Fleet's secret dispatch 10033 of June.¹³ Task Group 30.3 was then absorbed by Task Group 70.8.

2. Relations with superior and coordinate commands.

ComMTBRonsPac relations with the Chief of Naval Operations and with other bureaus in the Navy Department were conducted in a manner normal to that of any type commander.

Frequent requests for information and recommendations were initiated by the various bureaus to ComMTBRonsPac in an effort to clarify and establish a definite policy in relation to the type, *i.e.*, determination of armament, establishment of a type doctrine, recommendations relative to logistic support, and improvements in design.

The bureau subdivisions which were concerned with MTB operations, design, and maintenance were included in the mailing list of MOSQUITO BITES, a monthly summary of MTB activities published originally by ComMTBRonsSoPac and later by ComMTBRonsPac.

MTB's were new to our Navy. There was no centralization of MTB organization in the Navy Department and each bureau had to refer its problems to operating areas because of the lack of previously established policy and the lack of experienced MTB personnel in the Navy Department. The pace of this war was such that by the time this correspondence was returned to the Navy Department via channels, the point in question had been solved by a makeshift adaptation in the operating area or the suggested solution was already outmoded. Often improvements in design or armament effected in the operating areas were not approved by the cognizant bureau for months after they had been proved in combat.¹⁴

The MTB program as originally set up consisted of about 50% Reserve officers and 50% Regular Navy. This ratio was soon to be broken down with the majority of officers being drawn from the Reserve. The USN officers, obviously, were in positions of responsibility, *i.e.*, division leaders, squadron commanders, and area commanders. After one or two tours of duty, the USN officers applied for transfer, usually to larger combatant types inasmuch as the latter type of duty was necessary for furtherance of their respective careers. Consequently there were no combat-trained officers of sufficiently high rank available for the important job of coordinating MTB activities in the Navy Department. There were several capable, combat-trained Reserve officers available throughout the war, but all of them lacked the rank for such a post.

¹³ ComMTBRonsSoPac War Diary for June 44, paragraph 3.

¹⁴ Mount used for 37mm gun.

The dearth of MTB combat officers in positions of lesser importance in the Navy Department was significant. MTB activities (viz. maintenance, design, operations of patrol craft) were often merged with other craft and as a consequence, many decisions on MTB equipment were made by personnel who had no practical experience with the type.

The situation was further complicated by the obvious fact that the Bureaus were responsible for handling MTB's in the Solomons, New Guinea, Alaska, the Panama Canal, the English Channel, and the Mediterranean areas. Each theater presented different operating conditions, *i.e.*, the boats were principally used as gunboats in New Guinea and as torpedo boats in the early Solomons campaign; in the Mediterranean theater they were used alternately as gunboats and motor torpedo boats. Climatic conditions presented a varied maintenance problem. The divergence of opinions on maintenance, armament, design, etc., caused one officer attached to CNO to remark: "I wish the PT's would make up their minds what they want."

The solution obviously called for the assignment of one senior MTB officer to coordinate all MTB activities with a staff composed of one combat-trained liaison officer from each theater of operation. The staff would be set up on a definite rotation program. This would insure the constant flow of officers and, thus, information from the combat theaters to the senior MTB co-ordinator in the Navy Department and enable the staff to properly initiate recommendations for changes in maintenance, design, logistics support, and doctrine.

Command relations with Motor Torpedo Boat Squadrons Training Center (MTBSCT) at Melville, R. I., consisted of an exchange of publications (MOSQUITO BITES and SKEETER) and of personal correspondence between Comdr. W. C. Specht, USN, Chief Staff Officer, ComMTBRonsPac, and Comdr. D. J. Walsh, USNR, Commanding Officer of MTBSTC. The training center also forwarded copies of their semi-annual report on experimental work conducted at the MTBSTC base, Melville, R. I., and copies of their weekly progress report submitted to COTCLant.

Much of the co-ordination effected was through the medium of personal correspondence among various commands as the type was new, the organization relatively small, and senior officer in the program well acquainted with one another. In many instances this method of exchange of ideas proved far more expeditious than routing matter through official channels.

There are no records available to indicate that command relations with CinCPac were other than normal. Official correspondence from the Navy Department was channeled through CinCPac en route to ComMTBRonsPac.

Nor is it clear how cordial were the relations with the next higher echelon of command before Commodore Moran was assigned as ComMTBRonsSoPac and later ComMTBRonsPac.

It is evident, however, from Commodore Moran's personal correspondence as ComMTBRonsSoPac that he did have many friends among the key personnel of ComSoPac and ComSeronSoPac. After using a

formal inside address on his letters,¹⁵ he used first names and sobriquets in the salutations suggesting friendships of long standing. He then proceeded to lay his MTB problems on the line before these ranking officers.

It is impossible to estimate how much this expedited problem-solving in MTB's, but Commodore Moran was the first MTB officer of sufficient rank to be able to call flag officers in the next echelon of command by their first names.

ComMTBRonsSoPac summarized the problems and lessons learned from joint operations with coordinate commands in a letter¹⁶ to ComSoPac. One serious command problem concerned the "Coordination of offensive operations of dis-associated air and naval units operating in the same or adjacent areas."

[PT sinks the USS McCAWLEY by mistake]

A clear-cut example of the problem was the sinking of the USS McCAWLEY,¹⁷ Admiral Turner's flagship in Blanche Channel on 1 July 1943 by PT boats patrolling out of the newly established base at Rendova. Lt. Comdr. R. B. Kelly, USN, ComMTBRon 9, had been told in the brief that there were no friendly vessels in his area. That evening, upon sighting a large transport and a smaller vessel in the area, he radioed the base and was once again informed that there was no friendly shipping in the area. He therefore passed the word to the boat captains and the transport was torpedoed.

Prior to this incident the flagship had been hit by Jap planes that afternoon and was being towed by an ocean-going tug across the channel. Lt. Comdr. Kelly was called to Guadalcanal for an investigation and exonerated of any blame in the sinking.

[Friendly fire – U.S. destroyer attacks PT boats by mistake]

Another unfortunate incident occurred soon after the U. S. Marines established a beach-head on Cape Torokina, Bougainville,¹⁸ at dawn on 1 November 1943. Puruata Island was cleared on the night of the 2nd after some bitter fighting, and PT's moved in and used this as their base on the next morning. Operational orders were received from CTF 31 at Guadalcanal the first two days and patrols ten miles northwest and ten miles southeast of the cape were effected. But communications collapsed and operational orders from CTF 31 were not received the next three days. Consequently the boats did not patrol. The enemy lost no time in taking advantage of the inactivity and landed barge-loads of reinforcements near the savagely contested perimeter, first at night, and then in broad daylight.

The Commanding General of the Marines became so incensed at this state of affairs that he ordered the boats out on continuous 24-hour patrols whether or not orders were received from Guadalcanal. Commander Farrow, USN, in charge of the MTB operations, asked concerning friendly shipping

¹⁵ ComMTBRonsSoPac secret serials 005, 0017, and 0019 of 11 Jan 44 and 20 Jan 44.

¹⁶ CMTB's secret serial 0013 of 14 Jan 44.

¹⁷ Interview with Lt. Rhoads, Chief Mach. Payne and Lt. J. K. Roberts aboard the USS ACONTIUS on 19 Oct 45.

¹⁸ Interview with Lt. Rhoads, Chief Mach. Payne and Lt. J. K. Roberts aboard the USS ACONTIUS on 19 Oct 45.

movements before sending the boats on patrol. The Marine Headquarters had no information available concerning them.

In the afternoon a friendly aircraft dropped one bomb which exploded 25 yards off the bow of one boat. The plane pilot, realizing his mistake, flew away.

Early the next morning the southeast MTB patrol was taken under radar-directed fire by four destroyers for approximately 45 minutes. The attacked MTB's used violent evasive action and gradually opened the distance from their pursuers to eight miles. Meanwhile, they passed the word via radio to the northern MTB patrol to stand by to launch a torpedo attack as they drew the "Jap" (!) destroyers into the trap.

The destroyers had been the scouting force for an echelon of friendly shipping. One DD skipper had set up a radio guard on the MTB frequency and overheard the exchange of messages. By the time the word was passed to all destroyers the northern patrol had fired two torpedoes –both misses. The southern section had reversed course and was ready to launch an attack of its own when the following radio transmission was heard: "Humblest apologies. We are friendly vessels."

The solution suggested for such problems was centralization of operational control, dissemination of friendly air, sea, and land movements to neighboring commands, and the establishment of exclusive operating areas for MTB's. Intensified recognition drills, improved and standardized recognition procedure were also advocated.¹⁹

The joint use of MTB's and Black Cats [sea float planes] was strongly recommended for anti-barge patrols. The Cats not only spotted, illuminated, bombed, and strafed targets well, but shot down and drove away enemy float planes which had been extremely menacing to MTB's during this period.

It was further suggested that mutual benefits could be derived from joint-training exercises between MTB's and DD's and that it was feasible and practicable for a destroyer to vector MTB's in action against the enemy.

As a result of these recommendations, an MTB Liaison Officer was sent to CTF 31 headquarters, and on 5 April a letter was received from CTF 31 which placed the recommendations in the form of directives which clarified MTB operating procedure as follows:

1. Defined barge-hunting areas for MTB's
2. Designated a time for MTB's to leave operating areas.
3. Specified liaison with Commander Aircraft Solomons.
4. Directed MTB's to remain out of destroyer operating areas unless specifically directed to enter such areas by ComTHIRD Fleet.
5. Designated procedure for MTB's to follow in daylight operations on the approach of friendly or unidentified craft.

¹⁹ ComMTBRonsSoPac secret ltr, serial 0013, dated 14 Jan 44.

Commodore Moran²⁰ earlier manifested an interest in evolving an MTB-Destroyer doctrine. He thought the combination of an MTB guided by the DD's fighter-director showed great possibilities for future campaigns. MTB-DD exercises were held in January, February, and until the 13th of March.²¹ In the meantime an MTB-DD doctrine was written and approved.

Other correspondence is noted between coordinate commands concerning training programs and friendly aircraft-MTB recognitions, but the identification problem was not yet solved. Two events occurred during March and April which slowed these programs and brought about a change in command relations.

[Loss of PT 283 by friendly fire]

On 17 March 1944 PT-283 was lost when hit by a salvo from a friendly destroyer. Details of the action,²² from information available at this writing, are not clear, but there is no evidence of further DD-MTB exercises until after Commodore Moran was Commander of Allied Naval Forces, Northern Solomons, a composite task group which included both DD's and MTB's.

[The Cape Pomas tragedy – friendly fire]

SoPac planes attacked SoWesPac MTB's (PT's 346, 347, and 350) on two separate instances during daylight on 29 April 1944²³ off Cape Pomas, New Britain. The first of these "engagements" occurred early in the morning when two Corsairs spotted two craft (actually PT's 347 and 350) which they assumed were "enemy gunboats". One of the boats was aground on a reef (PT 347) and the other was standing by when the Corsairs made a strafing attack which resulted in three men killed and five men wounded on the PT 350 and material damage to the PT 350; The PT 347 was not hit and there were no casualties on that boat. Return fire from the boats resulted in the loss of one Corsair which was shot down; the pilot was not seen again after the plane crashed.

The second "engagement" occurred the afternoon of the same day after the surviving Corsair pilot had reported his attack of the morning on the "enemy gunboats" and the ComAirSols operations officer had ordered out a force of four F4U's, six TBF's, four F6F's, and eight SBD's "to strike immediately". In the meantime, the PT 350 had retired to Talasea, New Britain, because of material damage and personnel casualties, and the PT 346 with the Commander Motor Torpedo Boat Squadron TWENTY-FIVE aboard had arrived at the scene of the attack to make an inspection. Shortly after the arrival of the PT 346 the second attack occurred, and in spite of the frantic efforts of the MTB's to identify themselves, the boats were completely destroyed by fires and explosions resulting from the attack; the personnel in the water were strafed again and again. In addition to the loss of the two boats, this engagement resulted in the destruction of one F4U, one F6F and the death of

²⁰ ComMTBRonsSoPac secret ltr, serial 0017, dated 20 Jan 44.

²¹ ComMTBRonsSoPac War Diary for March 1944.

²² ComMTBRonsBougainville action report, serial 00130, dated 18 Mar 44.

²³ Cape Pomas Tragedy, MOSQUITO BITES for 1 Jun 1944; Record of Proceedings of an Investigations Conducted by Order of Commander South Pacific Force to inquire into incident involving Southwest Pacific PT Boats and South Pacific Aircraft.

both pilots, the death of 14 officers and men on the boats (either at the time of the attack or from wounds sustained during the attack), and the wounding of an additional 14 men and officers on the boats.

ComSoPac directed Commodore Moran to make an immediate investigation of this tragedy. The investigation revealed that confusion in command areas, faulty navigation on the part of the pilots, and difficulties in identification and recognition procedures were all contributing factors. Although the losses were sustained by SoWesPac MTB's, excerpts from the record of the investigation are included herein as an excellent indication of the problems which confronted MTB-aircraft relationships. Specifically, Commodore Moran, the Investigating Officer, recommended:

“That all PT boats, gunboats and aircraft in the South West Pacific Area be equipped with VHF radio so that positive voice communication may at all times be established between the PTs, gunboats and friendly aircraft in their vicinity.”

“That an equal responsibility for mutual identification be placed both upon PT boats, gunboats and aircraft prior to attacking or assuming a hostile attitude.”

“That insofar as practicable PT commands will inform allied air commands in their own and adjacent areas prior to 0300 Z daily of the location of PT operations for that night and the number of boats involved.”

“That to aid in identification during daylight operations allied PT boats will employ the following identification signals upon being examined by friendly or unidentified aircraft:

- (a) Display a five foot white star on blue background on deckhouse abaft bridge.
- (b) Keep radar mast in vertical position and run a yellow flag three feet by four feet from a gaff or yard arm from radar mast.
- (c) Display United States colors from staff at stern of boat.
- (d) If way is on, circle in accordance with aircraft procedure – right on odd days GCT, left on even days GCT – upon being inspected by friendly or unidentified aircraft.
- (e) Boats will call aircraft on VHF radio as follows: ‘Any aircraft these are friendly peter tares’.
- (f) Boats may use red or orange smoke grenades for further emergency identification.

“That during darkness PTs will use the single letter challenge and reply prescribed for small craft and, in event of attack by aircraft believed to be friendly will fire the emergency two star identification signal.”

“That PTs will use ABK unit whenever friendly or unidentified aircraft are in vicinity.”

“That aircraft inspecting unidentified surface craft especially look for the presence of a type SO Radar Mast which is the most readily distinguished feature of all PT boats.”

“That allied air commands thoroughly familiarize all pilots in the following:

- (a) Location of lines of demarcation between own and adjacent areas of operations and restrictions regarding the crossing thereof.
- (b) Aerial photos of allied PT and gunboat types as viewed from various altitudes in various attitudes
- (c) Aids for identification employed by allied PT boats and gunboats against friendly and unidentified aircraft.
- (d) Operating areas currently in use by allied PT boats and gunboats.

“That prior to each mission all aircraft pilots be briefed as to the location of any allied PT boats or gunboats known to be operating in the vicinity of the area covered by that flight.”

“That during daylight, allied aircraft upon sighting small craft in allied PT or gunboat operating areas refrain from attacking or assuming hostile attitude, until a positive attempt has been made to identify same – *i.e.*, one or more planes from the formation break off from the flight and come down abeam of the unidentified target, widely circling same inspecting for such distinguishing features as the radar mast and the aids employed by allied PT boats for self-identification.”

“That a zone be established ten miles on either side of the line of demarcation between the South Pacific and Southwest Pacific Areas and that allied PT boats and gunboats be prohibited from operating in that zone.”

“That where forces of two or more areas of operations are operating in the vicinity of the dividing lines, the liaison officers be exchanged and that these officers be charged with the duty of keeping themselves informed of current and future operations and seeing that such information is disseminated to the appropriate combat units of the forces to which they are assigned as liaison officers.”

“That at no time shall aircraft make simulated attacks against friendly PT boats or gunboats unless the boats and planes involved are in positive communication with each other and such tactics are mutually agreeable to all units involved.”

“That when aircraft have a mission in the vicinity of a line of demarcation, all pilots should be briefed specifically as to the location of such line, restrictions regarding crossing, and the possibility that the friendly surface craft from the adjacent area may be operating in the vicinity of that line although specific information regarding the location of such craft is lacking.”

Training in identification and recognition procedures was intensified. MTB Intelligence Officers called on nearby aircraft fighter and bomber commands and gleaned all possible information on aircraft strikes as well as informing the air commands of MTB operations and supplying lectures and pictures on salient MTB recognition features.²⁴ The recognition problem was a difficult one, for, as one of the pilots

²⁴ The Navy Department recognition department devoted but little time and the Recognition Journal but little space to MTB recognition until the middle of 1944.

commented: "You can show us the photos now, but those boats look considerably different when you're underway and you're looking down on them from the air."

The best cooperation on MTB recognition was obtained from one Marine Wing Commander who wrote an order that each pilot ride one MTB patrol. Many of the pilots returned to ride patrols for the second and third times. The MTB's had no friendly "clashes" with this commander's planes.

Some pilots complained about the practicality of some MTB recognition procedures. Further investigation of the latter revealed many were not fool-proof, but meanwhile an MTB intelligence officer worked out the pilot-rescue plan which was most effective in selling airmen MTB identification procedures. The pilots were familiarized with the areas and scope of MTB operations before each strike. The pilots were encouraged to keep a flashlight with them in the event they were forced down. Before the MTB skippers left for patrols, air ops phoned MTB Intelligence Officers and supplied them with the initials of downed pilots and their last known position. This information was passed to the MTB skippers at their brief. The downed pilots were to send their initials by code if they suspected MTB's in the vicinity. The MTB captains were instructed to blink the pilot's initials back in reverse order. Then, depending on the circumstances, a rescue could be effected or the pilot's position radioed to air operations.

It is not known how many pilots were rescued under this plan, but the 1 May 44 edition of MOSQUITO BITES tells of towing into Green Island a Black Cat which had been searching for the crew members of a downed TBF. Three days later two boats patrolling in the same general area rescued the lost airmen.

The morale value of the plan among the pilots was considerable. Invitations for pilots to visit the MTB base on club night also resulted in excellent joint cooperation.

After the Cape Pomas tragedy, ComMTBRonsSoPac summarized the MTB-aircraft cooperation in SoPac²⁵ in a letter to ComMTBRonsSEVENTH Fleet. The obvious purpose was to exchange experiences with SoWesPac and perhaps initiate a standard identification procedure for all MTB's in the Pacific in the belief that this may reduce the clashes between friendly forces.

But meanwhile another operational problem had arisen. The Jap float planes, which were more than a match for the Black Cats, intensified their heckling attacks on the MTB's in May. Float planes were sighted 49 times in a period of 24 days and made 29 separate attacks on the boats.

While there were no boats lost to these heckling attacks, the near bomb missies on several occasions had the effect of neutralizing the MTB patrols. Boat crews sent out to destroy barge traffic were spending most of their patrol time nervously scanning the skies in the search for the float planes.

The attacks increased in frequency until one section was bombed three times on 14 May²⁶ and another four times on 16 May.

²⁵ ComMTBRonsSoPac secret ltr, serial 0081, dated 16 May 44.

²⁶ MOSQUITO BITES for 1 June 44, pp. 7.

It was evident that a plane with more speed and armament than a Black Cat was needed and a conference between the night fighter command (who piloted PV's [Ventura bombers]) and the MTB operations officer was held in Munda on 17 May and another at Torokina on 19 May. Experiments were held off Green Island on the 20th, and a night fighter sent out on the 21st with the patrolling boats. An enemy plane appeared shortly after communications were established with the night fighter. A modified radar arrangement had been installed aboard the boat to partially eliminate the vertical blind spot of the SOA radar, but even this didn't help as the enemy plane retired before the night fighter could be vectored to him.

On subsequent nights when the night fighter (PV) was in contact with the boats, the enemy didn't appear. On the nights that the MTB's patrolled without the night fighters, they were bombed and occasionally strafed. On the night of 3-4 June²⁷ the MTB's were again attacked by a float plane, but on this occasion they were in communication with a night fighter. The float plane swooped in at low altitude for a bombing run and the MTB's opened up. Meanwhile the PV was vectored toward the target. The pilot ordered the MTB's to cease firing. The float plane retired immediately. The PV pilot was certain that the tracer fire of the boats was directed at him. It was obvious that such a joint operation was a complicated one at the outset and after this setback there is no evidence of further attempted MTB-night fighter cooperation.

The command relations as enumerated above were mostly precipitated by necessity. The Army Air forces, the Army ground forces, the Marines, and other Naval forces were all operating in a relatively small area. After several unfortunate clashes between these friendly forces, the circumstances necessitated immediate corrective steps. Since the pace of war was such that one person or unit could not keep up with the movements of nearby friendly sources through ordinary channels, it was obvious that an organization should be set up which would include liaison between all friendly forces in one combat zone.

[PBY sea planes work with PTs]

Command relations with the PBY's or Black Cats seem worthy of a separate treatise. Commander Allan P. Calvert, USN, first initiated this relationship when he was Commander of Motor Torpedo Boat Flotilla ONE at Tulagi. He ordered the MTB captains to ride the Black Cats, not only for the value of studying landmarks, reefs, etc. in patrol areas, and to instill an appreciation of the problems of aircraft operating with the boats at night, but also for the purpose of developing an esprit de corps among friendly forces.

From the first relationships²⁸ evolved at Guadalcanal, it was soon evident that the MTB's and the PBY's had identical missions, many of the same problems, and could increase their combat effectiveness by working together on patrols. This combination was particularly successful when the barges began hugging the coasts and hiding under the cover of shore batteries. Out of these experiences a PT-Black Cat doctrine was evolved and operations between the two units became standardized.

²⁷ ComMTBRon 28 secret ltr, serial 001, dated 7 June 44.

²⁸ MOSQUITO BITES for 1 July 44, Page 3.

With the help of the Black Cats, the MTB's were able to shoot up many barges that would have otherwise escaped the MTB blockade. The MTB's in turn cooperated in every possible way. During the Emirau invasions, for example, no facilities had been provided for the Black Cats, though they were scheduled to operate from there. An MTB squadron and tender made all their facilities available to the Black Cat squadron.

When MTB-Black Cat cooperation was discontinued on 12 June 1944 and the Black Cats left for another theater of operations, there was a mutual exchange of laudatory messages.

In summation, cordial command relations are obviously necessary for the most efficient functioning of a type command in war. The instrument for providing those relations was lacking in the original organization. Better liaison must be established in island bases and in the combat areas by including a liaison officer in every command whose special duty is to initiate and maintain command relations with friendly forces operating in the same areas.

3. Headquarters and staff.

(a) Location of ComMTBRonsPac

Headquarters for the combined ComMTBRonsPac-ComMTBRonsSoPac command were located at Bau Island, a small island approximately one mile north of Rendova in the British Solomon Islands (BSI). During the early days of the Rendova campaign, a temporary operating base was set up on Lombari Island, another small isle which barley rose out of the sea just west of Bau.

When PT operations were inaugurated there on 1 July 1943 the smaller of the two islands was sufficient for the berthing and servicing of a few boats, but the island was only two feet above the mean high-water level, which left it practically submerged during spring tides. In the first two months the enemy air power had not been neutralized and foxhole duty during air raids included many salt water immersions.

During the first hectic days the Jap-Marine artillery duels placed Lombari in the line of fire with the enemy on Munda and the Marines on Rendova alternately lobbing shells over the PT base. Duds frequently landed on or around the island, a fact which did not enhance its livability.

Bau Island was partially covered with a dense jungle growth which precluded its use as a temporary base, but when ComMTBRonsSoPac decided on about 1 October to move Motor Torpedo Boat Base Eleven in and establish his headquarters there, a small Construction Battalion Unit worked a month in clearing, excavating and filling in a site for base construction.

It was soon apparent after its initial establishment that Bau Island was a fortunate choice both strategically and geographically. Landings had just been made by our forces on the Treasury Islands and on Cape Torokina, Bougainville, and MTB's were patrolling out of these newly-established beachheads

two days after the initial landings.²⁹ Cape Torokina was approximately 200 miles away and the Treasury Islands 150 – both within easy PT cruising range.

The base was across the lagoon from the Munda air strip. In order to facilitate the shipment of certain critical spares to bases where they were most needed, ComMTBRonsSoPac worked out a daily air-freight cargo allowance with ComAirMunda. A similar type of arrangement for mail service accelerated the handling of official correspondence and prompt delivery of stateside mail.

The base was well protected in a cluster of islands on the leeward side of Blanche Channel. The two channel entrances to Bau Island were generally narrow though one was of sufficient width and depth for passage of AGP's or DD's. Reefs were abundant and guarded the remaining water passageways to the MTB base. There was ample room for protected anchorages between Bau and Rendova Islands and the boats were dispersed to buoys in nests of two or three when not engaged in training exercises, the mail run to Munda, or docked in front of headquarters for repairs or alterations.

Large pontoon docks, flanked by a torpedo dock and three drydocks, were installed directly in front of ComMTBRons headquarters. As many as ten boats could be tied outboard of the pontoon docks during the day, but the boats were dispersed to their anchorages at night.

(b) Size, character, organization of staff.

Commodore Moran's Navy experience centered around fighting cruisers and other large vessels of war. When named ComMTBRonsSoPac, he was placed in command of boats that were unfamiliar to him.

When Commodore Moran was informed of his new assignment, he immediately began asking Navy friends in the Pacific and writing stateside acquaintances in an effort to ascertain the most qualified man in MTB's.³⁰ The unanimous choice was Commander W. C. Specht, USN, who conducted many of the pre-war PT experiments, commanded MTB Ron ONE at Pearl Harbor, and then founded and developed the Motor Torpedo Boat Squadrons Training Center at Melville, R. I.

Meanwhile Commander Specht apparently had a working agreement with the Bureau of Naval Personnel that he was to be given command of a destroyer upon being relieved of his billet at Melville by his Executive Officer, Lt. Comdr. D. J. Walsh, USNR. This change of command was executed on 18 September 1943, about the same time, apparently, as the arrival of a dispatch to BuPers from Admiral Halsey requesting Commander Specht's services as Chief Staff Officer for Commodore Moran. Commander Specht arrived in SoPac to take over this latter billet on 28 November 1943.

Since BuPers did not have an experienced MTB officer in their department, they depended on the recommendations of the C. O. at MTBSTC when making MTB assignments. Inasmuch as Commander Specht, as CO of MTBSTC, originated such recommendations and probably knew the qualifications and

²⁹ Night of 27-28 Oct 43 on Treasury and the night of 3-4 Nov 43 on Cape Torokina, Bougainville, according to MTB Intelligence Summary.

³⁰ Information gleaned in an interview with Comdr. D. J. Walsh, USNR, aboard the USS ACONTIUS on 24 Oct 45.

combat experience of more MTB officers than anyone else, he immediately wrote Lt. Comdr. Walsh requesting his best available officers. In some cases these officers held key positions at the training center. Inasmuch as both organizations were anxious to build up the best possible staffs, there was considerable correspondence between the two MTB organizations over personnel. As in other organizations, requests from the field were usually given preference over other recommendations.

ComMTBRonsSoPac's staff as of a 12 March 1944 roster,³¹ just three days after Commodore Moran reported for additional duty as ComMTBRonsPac, consisted of a Chief Staff Officer and eight department heads. Forty-six additional officers were listed as being attached to the staff in various subordinate capacities. Twenty-six of these 46 officers were on temporary duty, either from operating squadrons, higher echelons of command, or from one of the Navy bureaus.

This staff was set up to take care of ten operating squadrons which were comprised of approximately 350 officers and 2500 men. It is thought this was a normal complement for handling ten squadrons. The adequacy of such a staff was difficult to evaluate. Two officers³² on temporary duty were sent out by the Bureau of Ordnance to install and indoctrinate the SoPac operating personnel in the Duvall system of Torpedo Fire Control. Eight of the group were assistant Intelligence Officers on temporary duty from SoPac. Those officers on temporary duty from squadrons were either Medical Officers, Communications Officers, Supply or Disbursing Officers.

It is evident that the lower echelon of the staff was in a constant state of flux. Squadron TWENTY-SEVEN had arrived in the area and was undergoing operational training at this time. Four of its officers were immediately detached for staff duty. Later as their squadron moved forward, the squadron complement was restored to full strength (though not necessarily the same personnel) and officers from other squadrons were detached for temporary duty. Although it would be difficult to prove any tangible values accruing from this staff rotation policy, the overall effects must have been beneficial. Each squadron usually contained officers who were familiar with the organization of the staff and its functions.

The staff was not rank-heavy at this particular time. Of the eight department heads, there were four Lt. Comdrs., two Lieutenants, and two Lieutenants (jg). Eleven Lieutenants, 23 Lieutenants (jg), eleven Ensigns and two warrant officers filled out the staff.

A staff roster of one and one-half months later³³ reveals the addition of one senior staff member, a Chaplain.

Lt. Comdr. Maddox had been relieved as Materiel Officer by Lieut. O. W. Hayes who was on temporary duty from Squadron NINE. Lieut. Hayes was apparently the first of several staff officers who were combat trained with a squadron and then transferred³⁴ to the staff for additional duty.

³¹ ComMTBRonsSoPac organization of MTBRons.

³² Lt. (jg) R. B. Lord and Lt. (jg) J. W. Clements.

³³ ComMTBRonsSoPac staff organization as of 25 Apr 44

³⁴ ComMTBRonsSoPac conf ltr to all MTB Area and Squadron Commanders, South Pacific, dated 31 Dec 43.

(c) Functioning of staff.

Inasmuch as the tenor of the war had slowed considerably in the Northern Solomons area, the staff not only performed its normal functions in the prosecution of the war, but under the leadership of Commodore Moran and Chief Staff Officer W. C. Specht, it gradually assumed new responsibilities and functions.

The staff gradually worked out a unified squadron policy, both from an administrative and operating standpoint. Heretofore, when there were but a few squadrons available and operational demands were heavy, each squadron operated on a "hand-to-mouth" basis, used makeshift equipment, functioned without an organized administrative setup, and went into combat without specialized pre-combat training.

In order to standardize operating procedure, lighten the load of base maintenance from the combat squadrons, and tighten the chain of command, a directive was issued which initiated a new command organization headed by the Area Commander. His duties and responsibilities as well as those of his staff were defined therein. In the same doctrine a new logistics plan was set up whereby ComMTBRonsSoPac was to take over all base equipment, spare parts materiel, regardless of former squadron designation, and assume the responsibility for maintaining stock levels and screening requisitions, thereby insuring an equitable distribution of all critical spares to Area Commanders. In order to carry out this plan the squadrons were directed to transfer all of their enlisted personnel to ComMTBRonsSoPac except those regularly assigned to the boats. Staff instructions were issued³⁵ which sharply defined the duties of each staff department head.

The first complete operational doctrine³⁶ emanating from the combat area was evolved about the same time. A study of this treatise reveals the vast amount of experimental work and the varied training programs which were formulated under the direction of the staff in this period.

The MTB armament had been standardized except on the gunboats which were still in the experimental stages. Standardized communication procedures while on patrol, anti-barge tactics, torpedo attack methods, joint operations with the Black Cats, a tentative DD-MTB doctrine, the use of the radar maneuvering board technique for torpedo attacks were all presented in detail.

The staff not only sought more effective operating procedures, but served as a "clearing house" for the bureaus in Washington, providing usage factors, testing equipment, and recommending changes and innovations for the boats. The MTBRonsSoPac command pioneered the use of the M4 37mm gun on MTB's, secured VHF radios from the air corps and installed them aboard the boats, and proved the inadequacy of the Lawrence Aircraft generators for use on MTB's. It was discovered these generators were too noisy to be operated topside on a war patrol and that they did not run cool enough when installed in the engine room.

³⁵ ComMTBRonsSoPac "Staff Instructions", dated 12 Feb 44.

³⁶ ComMTBRonsSoPac secret ltr to All MTB Area and Squadron Commanders, dated 10 Feb 44.

In fact, Comdr. Specht's letter to CNO³⁷ in January 1944 reveals many recommendations that were standard equipment on the boats arriving in the operating area at war's end. He urged for example that a true bearing scale be installed for the radar P.P.I. scope; that a repeater P.P.I scope be installed at the conning station; that the 233-A-type VHF radios be placed on new construction; that the chartroom be enlarged, rearranged, and better ventilated; that every boat be equipped with two auxiliary generators; and that a low cut-in engine generator be developed.

Additional forced ventilation in the chartroom was provided on new construction. Four boats of Squadron THIRTY-SEVEN³⁸ had the true-bearing indicator and range converter added to the radar. Squadron THIRTY-EIGHT apparently was the first squadron to have the 233-A-VHF radio, two auxiliary generators, and the SO-3 radar installed as standard equipment. It also was equipped with the M9 37mm which Comdr. Specht had recommended in an earlier letter to BuOrd. The low cut-in generator was devised and installed on new construction beginning with Squadron THIRTY-SIX.

Thus the staff used this period for tightening the administrative organization of MTB's, standardizing and improving the operational procedures, and for testing new MTB equipment.

The mechanical functioning of the staff was apparently much the same as other organizations in the combat area. Since there was no official flag secretary³⁹ the correspondence was apparently routed by a trained yeoman through the proper channels.

A study of the routing slips for the correspondence of this period reveals all incoming correspondence was routed through the Chief Staff Officer and then to the action addressee. The staff seemed adequate for the organization. There is no evidence of dilatory handling of correspondence. The air mail service mentioned previously greatly expedited the handling of such correspondence inasmuch as it required only one day for a letter to reach the most forward operating squadron or any of the rear bases in the SoPac area. It is doubtful if any MTB organization ever had better mail service.

B. ACTIVITIES OF COMMTBRONSPAC

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

When ComMTBRonsSoPac reported to CinCPac for additional duty on 9 March as ComMTBRonsPac, the next lower echelon of command was the Area Commander. Of the six officers designated as Area Commanders,⁴⁰ five were in charge of bases established at Bougainville, Treasury, Green Island, Tulagi, and Rendova⁴¹ while the sixth was the Liaison Officer to CTF 31 at Guadalcanal.

Operating under the cognizance of the Area Commanders were the ten squadrons in the SoPac area at this time. The placing of the squadrons under Area Commanders somewhat submerged

³⁷ ComMTBRonsSoPac secret ltr to Chief BuShips, serial 0016

³⁸ Interview with Lt. Comdr. Clarke W. Faulkner aboard the USS ACONTIUS on 4 Nov 45.

³⁹ ComMTBRonsSoPac staff organization as of 25 Apr 44.

⁴⁰ ComMTBRonsSoPac Organization Roster of 12 Mar 44.

⁴¹ Collateral duty inasmuch as Rendova was headquarters for ComMTBRonsSoPac

the identity and individuality of the squadrons, but this change of command was necessary for the flexibility and efficiency of command.

The evolution of the Area Commander coincided with the island-hopping tactics our forces adopted in the Northern Solomons and other theaters of war.

When a landing was made at Rendova on 30 June 1943, a PT Operating Base was set up on Lombari Island – as previously noted. The Senior Officer Present, a Commanding Officer of a Ron, was, of course, in charge of the establishment of the Lombari base. But as each Senior Squadron Commander was relieved, a new organization, a change of base personnel, and oft-times new base equipment was required as each Ron carried much of its own base gear. The inefficiency of such a plan was self-evident.

The lack of proprietary spares in the SoPac area was becoming more critical. There was a dearth of spares arriving from the States as requisitioned, and the new squadrons were bringing only as many as could be carried aboard each boat.⁴²

In order to surmount these problems with available equipment and personnel, ComMTBRonsSoPac issued a directive⁴³ which set up an Area Commander and staff independent of the operating squadrons, pooled all of the material and base equipment under ComMTBRonsSoPac, and redistributed the squadron base personnel.

The Area Commander, who in all cases was a combat-trained Senior Squadron Commander, was placed in direct charge of the PT Operating Base and materiel and of the operating squadrons attached to the base. Thereby an Area Commander and his staff was independent of the squadrons. He and his staff could be relieved or an operating squadron could be relieved without impairing the efficiency of the operations.

All Ron requisitions were routed through the Area Commander to the ComMTBRonsSoPac Supply Officer,⁴⁴ who carefully screened each request for critical spares. Thus the latter assumed responsibility for the equitable distribution of critical items as needed by the Area Commanders.

This plan functioned smoothly as set up until the MTB Operating Base was replaced by the Motor Torpedo Boat Base Units – a larger, more permanent type of base. These MTB Base Units, which consisted of approximately 200 officers and men and 1500 tons of gear, were under the operational and administrative control of ComSeronSoPac. When such a unit was staging or in operation, the Officer-in Charge was under the immediate cognizance of the

⁴² MOSQUITO BITES of 1 Mar 44 points out that the last three Rons, totaling 32 boats, arrived in the area with only the amount of spares that could be carried on the boats themselves. The 1 Apr 44 issue of MOSQUITO BITES suggests that many of the boats were arriving “loaded to the gun’ls with toilet paper, soap, grease, and oil.” For the information of future Rons a suggested list of critical spares was prepared and included in the same issue.

⁴³ ComMTBRonsSoPac conf ltr of 31 Dec 43.

⁴⁴ More adequately described in Logistics, Part II, Section B-3.

nearest Naval Base Commander.⁴⁵ It is evident that this created some rather weird relationships.

[delay of completion of MTB Base 9 on Treasury Islands]

Neither ComMTBRonsSoPac nor the Area Commander could issue any orders directly to the MTB Base Unit Commander. Routing orders through channels, particularly those requiring immediate compliance was impractical because of the time lag. As a consequence, Commodore Moran was advised how and where to build headquarters by the Naval Advanced Base Commander.⁴⁶ When constructing Base Nine at Treasury the NAB Commander refused to clear any ground or go ahead with any construction as suggested by ComMTBRonsSoPac until each specific item was approved by ComSeronSoPac. This base was not completed until five months after the establishment of an MTB Operating Base.

As ComMTBRonsSoPac pointed out, the Naval Advanced Base Commander at no time assumed responsibility for the overhaul and repair of the boats nor in supplying the boats with the necessary non-technical items. Inasmuch as ComMTBRonsSoPac was responsible, as Type Commander, for the effective blockade of the Solomons-Bismarck Archipelago Axis, he assumed these responsibilities.

Nor did ComMTBRonsSoPac nor the Area Commander have any authority over the personnel of the MTB Base Unit. This fact further strained the relations inasmuch as the Motor Torpedo Boat Base Units were originally conceived under the premise⁴⁷ that MTB operating personnel would augment the MTB Base Unit personnel in overhauling and repairing squadron boats. This was necessary because the personnel of the MTB Base Unit was only sufficient to administer, maintain, and operate base facilities with a small number to assist in boat repairs. The MTB Base Unit, therefore, rarely had anyone with a knowledge or an appreciation of MTB's or their operating problems. These factors increased the difficulties of harmonious administration in a divided command.

ComMTBRonsSoPac, therefore, wrote three letters⁴⁸ to his higher echelon of command requesting that this command relationship be squared away, but no effective action was instituted until Commodore Moran was placed under the SEVENTH Fleet cognizance and named as a Commander Service Forces Subordinate Command SEVENTH Fleet.

[PT tenders]

⁴⁵ ComSoPac 001802 secret serial of 11 Sep 44.

⁴⁶ ComMTBRonsSoPac 0019 secret serial, dated 20 Jan 44.

⁴⁷ ComMTBRonsSoPac secret ltr, serial 0040, dated 26 Feb 44.

⁴⁸ ComMTBRonsSoPac secret ltr, serial 005, dated 11 Jan 44. ComMTBRonsSoPac secret ltr, serial 0019, dated 20 Jan 44. ComMTBRonsSoPac secret ltr, serial 0040, dated 24 Feb 44.

When Commodore Moran reported⁴⁹ to CinCPac on 9 March 1944 for additional duty as ComMTBRonsPac, he had two tenders under his indirect cognizance. These were the USS MOBJACK (AGP-7), a converted AVP-type tender, which reported⁵⁰ to him on 14 January 1944 at Rendova, B.S.I., and the USS VARUNA (AGP-5), a converted LST, which reported⁵¹ on 13 February of the same year. The USS JAMESTOWN (AGP-3), a converted yacht, which had seen long and favorable service as a PT tender in the Solomons, had been directed to return to the States for overhaul and had departed⁵² Rendova on 4 February 1944.

The tenders were under the administrative command of ComSeronSoPac and under the operational command of CTF 31. The Commander of this Task Force assigned the tenders to work under the temporary operational control of ComMTBRonsSoPac. After these tenders reported for duty, their relations with the bases and squadrons were about as follows: The Repair Officer of a base, a Squadron Commander, and the Captain and Repair Officer of the tender would meet, discuss, and divide the repair work between the base force and tenders. An availability schedule was made up and the squadrons were kept advised by the tender of the availability date for each PT boat scheduled for repair. When a PT boat was placed in a repair status alongside a tender, the tender assumed full responsibility for effecting repairs. The PT boat captain conferred frequently with the tender Repair Officer; he exacted conformity with ship's regulations from the PT crew; and he assigned working parties from the boat crew to aid the tender repair forces as necessary.

Not only did the tender provide repair facilities, but it messed the PT boat crew and provided limited recreational facilities. The latter consisted of a nightly movie, when a blackout was not in effect, an occasional sale of ice cream, and a modicum of small stores and ships store articles. The use of showers depended upon the potable water-making abilities of the tender. These services and "luxuries" were generally appreciated by the PT crews patrolling in the forward areas inasmuch as the standard of living was lower on the boats than on the tenders. Some friction was created if PT men abused these privileges or if some tenders discriminated against the boat crews in small matters such as restricted use of the ships service or an inferior seating arrangement at the movies.

Presumably the Tender Captain worked under the cognizance of the Area Commander who was in charge of the Operating Base and of the PT operations for a designated area. When the Tender Captain was senior to the latter, the Area Commander was placed in the position that he could only advise the Tender Captain and ask for his cooperation. The effectiveness of this equivocal relationship, therefore, depended entirely on the individual personalities of the Commanding Officers involved. In some cases the relations were cordial, but in other instances there was a clash of personalities. Wherein this relationship was not cordial, the seniority

⁴⁹ ComMTBRonsSoPac War Diary for March 1944.

⁵⁰ Secured from War Diary of USS MOBJACK during an interview with Lt. Comdr. McClain, USNR, on 5 Nov 45, by Lt. (jg) C. F. Imhof.

⁵¹ ComMTBRonsSoPac War Diary for February 1944.

⁵² ComMTBRonsSoPac War Diary for February 1944.

inverted, the personal relations between the Area Commander and the Tender Captain incompatible, the efficiency of the operation was definitely curtailed.

As far as can be determined there was no attempt to form a group of mobile task unit organizations, consisting of assigned squadrons, a tender, a PT Operating Base, and an Area Commander as the senior ranking officer and Task Unit Commander. Actually the insufficient number of tenders in the area necessitated a constant shuttling of the MTB repair ships from base to base to fulfill the shifting demands of repair work. But it is known that Commodore Moran repeatedly emphasized the need for a unity of MTB command in letters to his next higher echelon. For example, he concluded one letter⁵³ to ComSoPac with the statement: "The relation between Motor Torpedo Boat Repair Base units and their personnel, as well as Motor Torpedo Boat Tenders, and Motor Torpedo Boat Squadrons and their personnel, are so closely interwoven, it does not make for efficiency, unity or harmony, to have divided control of these units, particularly in the forward and combat areas."

Direct operational control of the two tenders was delegated to Commodore Moran when he was directed⁵⁴ to form Task Group 30.3 and take over the operational control of all MTB's in the South Pacific. Upon assuming this command, he more than doubled⁵⁵ the number of MTB nightly patrols during May and the first fifteen days of June. This placed a heavier repair load on both tenders and bases, but the MOBJACK and VARUNA, the first two ships in the South Pacific which had been specially designed for PT tending, were well oriented in the repair picture by this time and assumed the extra load without difficulty.

Both tenders remained in the Solomons for a short time after Commodore Moran was directed⁵⁶ to assume command of the Allied Naval Forces, Northern Solomons on 15 June 1944 under cognizance of the SEVENTH Fleet.

2. Operations

(a) General strategic nature.

[barges and gunboats]

The PT transition from use as a torpedo boat to that of a gunboat was complete by the time ComMTBRonsSoPac was designated as ComMTBRonsPac [March 9, 1944].

In the savage Guadalcanal campaign the boats were effectively used as torpedo boats against convoys of enemy destroyers, light cruisers, and troop transports. Numerous enemy ships were sunk or damaged by torpedoes from the "cockle-shell" torpedo boats, but their most important strategic function was the

⁵³ ComMTBRonsSoPac secret Serial 0400 of 26 Feb 44.

⁵⁴ Com3rdFlt's secret dispatch 210440 of April 44.

⁵⁵ MOSQUITO BITES for 1 June 44, Page 1, para. 2.

⁵⁶ Com3rdFlt's secret dispatch 100333 of June 44.

heckling of the large Jap convoys, better known as the “Bougainville⁵⁷ Express”, which seriously hampered the landing of the intended reinforcements of troops and supplies on Guadalcanal.

During these actions the PT’s used their light caliber machine guns only for shooting out enemy searchlights. But as the enemy warship strength diminished and their major anchorages were constantly harassed by our increasingly strong air arm, the enemy was forced to use submarines and barges to carry on inter-island and coastwise traffic in the Northern Solomons and the Bismarck Archipelago. The air arm liquidated any daylight barge traffic, but this force was ineffective at night. The primary mission⁵⁸ of MTB’s, therefore, became the disruption of nightly barge traffic in order to prevent enemy counterattacks on our small but concentrated forces.⁵⁹ Meanwhile the boats were also used for secondary missions such as anti-submarine patrols (though lacking any sonic equipment), the landing and evacuating of friendly troops, escorting friendly shipping, embarking and disembarking reconnaissance parties, strafing and shelling enemy shore installations, and for the rescue of downed pilots.

The enemy attempted to spread its forces over the entire Northern Solomons-Bismarck Archipelago Axis. In contrast the Allies concentrated their forces around air strips and anchorages suited for the nearby erection of shore-based supply depots. When the blockade was established, some 70,000 odd, widely-dispersed Jap troops were cut off from their supply lines.

At first the MTB’s destroyed a considerable number of defenseless barges, but the enemy soon improvised new methods and devices for maintaining their barge traffic.

One evening a PT sighted an enemy barge and began raking the enemy craft with shells from their light automatic weapons as was customary in sinking barges. The bullets could be seen ricocheting off the sides of the barge. A moment later the barge opened with a withering blast of fire – either from a 37 or 40mm – and the PT was forced to break off the engagement. This barge had added both armor and armament.

Thereafter the barges traveled in convoys with one or two armored barges in escort. At the same time the enemy used more and more float planes to hamper and harass the PT patrols and oft-times neutralized their effectiveness. The enemy also established lookouts and a system of signals which kept their forces informed when PT’s were in the area. The barges hugged the coast and stayed under the shadow of numerous shore batteries as much as possible during their nightly inter-island runs.

In counter-defense the PT’s experimented by mounting 37mm anti-tank guns on the bows of the boats. The gun was secured to the deck with lines and braced by coconut log stringers which were attached to the charthouse canopy. The weapon was crude but effective. Later an aircraft type 37mm,⁶⁰ as used on the P-39 fighter planes, was installed. A suitable mount for PT’s was devised and these guns were added to the boats as fast as they could be procured from the Army Air Corps.

⁵⁷ Later designated as the “Tokyo Express” by Admiral Halsey.

⁵⁸ ComMTBRonsSoPac Operation Plan No. 2-44

⁵⁹ Allied air fields and Naval Advanced Bases.

⁶⁰ The Mark 4 37mm was not authorized by BuOrd, though universally used in the forward areas.

Some PT boats as well as LCM's, LCI's, and SC's were converted to gunboats. All PT's added more 20mm and 50's on the decks. The PT armament was further augmented by 60mm mortars with illuminating shells as soon as these weapons could be solicited from the Army ground forces. As a result of earlier liaison⁶¹ with PBY's, a plan for a PT-Black Cat doctrine was formulated and successfully used in destroying the enemy.

Thus, although not used against torpedo targets, the PT's were used effectively in carrying on the war of attrition against the enemy.

(b) Forces available.

Even with nine⁶² operating squadrons under his administrative cognizance in January 1944, ComMTBRonsSoPac revealed⁶³ it was still difficult to maintain sufficient boats in the combat areas to carry out the nightly assignments by Task Force 31.

The patrol assignments were not particularly excessive at this time, but other factors contributed to the curtailment of continuous operation of the individual boats. The squadrons were far below boat complement: of the nine operating squadrons, ComMTBRonsSoPac actually had only 73⁶⁴ boats under his administrative control in the SoPac area.

The Pt's were susceptible to fouling underwater machinery on floating objects and to grounding on the poorly charted, reef-strewn Northern Solomons axis. There was only a minimum of critical spares in the area. Consequently the MTB maintenance crews were forced to resort to all types of "jury rigs" which frequently lasted one (or part of one) patrol. For example, the continuous addition of gear – particularly electrical equipment such as the fluxgate compass, the TCS radio, the IFF, the VHF radio and the SO radar constantly overloaded the electric potential of the boats, causing premature failures of both batteries and auxiliary generators.

[The Squadrons]

Only Squadrons FIVE, TWENTY, and TWENTY-THREE of the nine operating squadrons had a full complement⁶⁵ of boats. Squadron THREE was composed of all but four of the remaining 77' Elco boats in the area – boats which had participated in the crucial Guadalcanal Campaign – and now were ready for decommissioning. Despite constant repairs these boats were unable to withstand the rigors of protracted combat patrols. Since the Guadalcanal Campaign, when the patrols were seldom more than 30 miles from their base, the patrols had been gradually lengthening in duration and distance which increased the engine hours and augmented maintenance problems.

⁶¹ [see] Part II, A-2.

⁶² Squadrons 3, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 19, 20, 23.

⁶³ ComMTBRonsSoPac secret serial 0013 of 17 Jan 44.

⁶⁴ CNO serial 017423 of 12 Jan 44.

⁶⁵ CNO serial 017423 of 12 Jan 44.

Squadrons FIVE and SIX were earlier divided and part of each squadron transferred to the New Guinea theater. Squadron FIVE was augmented by four 77' boats of Squadron TWO⁶⁶ and two new Elcos from the States (PT's 318 and 319) before January 1944. Squadron SIX not only was split into two parts early in the campaign, but lost⁶⁷ two boats in combat. For replacements, three boats from Squadron TWELVE were assigned to SIX (PT's 187, 188, and 189) in the fall of 1943. The normal complement was originally twelve boats per squadron, but three of the squadrons under ComMTBRonsSoPac, namely NINE, NINETEEN, and TWENTY were assigned⁶⁸ only ten boats when commissioned. Squadron TEN had only seven of its twelve original boats remaining at this time. Nine operating squadrons had a full complement⁶⁹ of boats. Squadron TWO, which had been augmented by the transfer of the six Squadron FIVE boats (PT's 109-114) on 22 September 1942 had been gradually emasculated through reassignment and combat and operational losses; it had been eventually decommissioned in the latter part of October 1943. The first reduction in the forces of Squadron TWO had occurred at Noumea with reassignment of the PT's 113-114 to Div. 17. Later numerous combat losses had been sustained during the early part of the Solomons campaign: several of the 77-foot boats had been destroyed in action in the latter part of 1942; and the PT's 112 and 111, both 80-foot types, had been destroyed in action with enemy surface vessels on 11 January and 1 February 1943 respectively. Shortly thereafter, however, the forces of Squadron TWO had been once again augmented; five boats (PT's 144-148) of Squadron EIGHT had become separated from the rest of the EIGHT and they had been reassigned to Squadron TWO. However, in May 1943 Div. 23 had been activated and PT's 144-148 plus PT 110 had been transferred from Squadron TWO to form this new unit.⁷⁰ One final attempt had been made to rejuvenate Squadron TWO: on 8 July 1943 ComSoPac had directed Squadron 11-2 to proceed to Funafuti, Ellice Islands, to relieve Div. 2 of Squadron ONE. However, the execution of this order had been held in abeyance until 23 July at which time Squadron 11-2 had proceeded to Funafuti, but it was not until 22 September 1943 that the four boats of Div. 2 of Squadron ONE (PT's 21, 23, 25, and 26) had reported for duty in the Solomons area and had been assigned to Squadron TWO. In the meantime, Squadron TWO on 1 August had sustained another loss when the PT 109 had been destroyed in action with an enemy destroyer in the New Georgia area [this was John F. Kennedy's boat, who later became President of the United States].

By October it had become apparent that the four boats which had formerly comprised Div. 2 of Squadron ONE were in such poor material condition that they were unfit for further combat and on 6 October three of these boats (PT's 23, 25, and 26) had been reclassified as small craft and on 11 October one boat (PT 21) had been stricken from the list. Apparently ComMTBRonsSoPac had given up all hope of further rejuvenation of TWO and the four remaining 77-foot boats (PT's 36, 40, 47, and 59) had been reassigned to Squadron THREE. Thus, after a long and colorful existence Squadron TWO had been decommissioned.

⁶⁶ Rebuilt at Fyfes Shipyard, New York City, just a few months previous, according to ComMTBRonsSoPac conf ltr S-82 of 12 Dec 43.

⁶⁷ Interview with Lt. Comdr. C. H. Faulkner, former Commander of Squadron SIX, aboard USS ACONTIUS on 12 Nov 44.

⁶⁸ CNO's conf serial ltr 017423 of 12 Jan 44.

⁶⁹ CNO Serial 017423 of 12 Jan 44.

⁷⁰ Div 23 was assigned to the New Guinea area.

Squadron THREE was comprised of all but three of the 77-foot boats which remained in the area – boats which had participated in the crucial Guadalcanal campaign and which were now ready for decommissioning. Despite constant repairs these boats were unable to withstand the rigors of protracted combat patrols. Since the Guadalcanal campaign, when the patrols had seldom been more than 30 miles distant from the base, the patrols had been gradually lengthened in duration and distance which had increased the burden of maintenance. Pending ultimate disposition of these craft, they were placed in a relatively inactive status and used for training purposes.

As has been previously indicated Squadrons FIVE and SIX had been split into several separate divisions and had also been subjected to frequent reorganization. Five of Squadron FIVE's boats had been transferred to Squadron TWO in Panama, on 22 September 1942. At the time of the transfer replacements had been scheduled from new construction and the PT's 314-319 had been tentatively designated as such. Prior to delivery, however, an urgent need for additional 80-foot boats had arisen at the Motor Torpedo Boat Training Center and four of the original six replacements (PT's 314-317) had been reassigned to Squadron FOUR in exchange for four 77-foot boats (PT's 62-65). These four boats had been completely overhauled at Fyfe's Shipyard on Long Island, New York, and eventually they, in addition to the PT's 318 and 319, had joined Squadron FIVE in the Solomons.

Squadron SIX had not only been split with the assignment of Div. 17 to New Guinea and Div. 16 and Div. 18 to the Solomons, but it also had sustained combat losses in the Solomons: PT 117 had been lost to enemy air action at Rendova on 1 August 1943, and PT 118 had been grounded on Vella LaVella on 7 September 1943 and subsequently had been destroyed to prevent capture. However, the forces of Squadron SIX had been previously augmented on 10 May 1943 by the transfer of three boats (PT's 187, 188, and 189) from Squadron TWELVE.

The normal complement had originally been twelve boats per squadron, but three of the squadrons under ComMTBRonsSoPac, namely NINE, NINETEEN, and TWENTY⁷¹ had been assigned only ten boats when commissioned. Furthermore, Squadron TEN had only seven of its twelve original remaining at this time. Two boats (PT's 165 and 173) had been lost when the tanker, the SS STANVA MANILA, which had been consigned to transport part of the squadron from the States to Noumea, was torpedoed on 24 May 1943. Others had been lost by grounding or in actions against enemy aircraft: the PT 164 had been destroyed by enemy air action at Rendova on 1 August 1943; the PT 166 had been destroyed by allied air attack at New Georgia on 20 July 1943; and the PT 172 had been grounded on Vella LaVella on 7 September 1943 and had been destroyed to prevent capture.

Although Squadron ELEVEN was listed⁷² as having a complete complement of boats in January, this squadron was actually separated into two units; Squadron ELEVEN and Squadron ELEVEN-TWO. The latter detachment, which comprised four boats (PT's 177, 182, 185, and 186) had been separated⁷³ from Squadron ELEVEN on 23 July 1943 and had proceeded to Funafuti in the Ellice Islands.

⁷¹ CNO ltr serial 017423 of 12 Jan 44.

⁷² CNO's conf serial ltr 017423 of 12 Jan 44.

⁷³ MOSQUITO BITES of 1 May 44, Page 2.

The exact status of Squadron ELEVEN-TWO was in doubt at this time. The Commanding Officer wrote⁷⁴ ComMTBRonsSoPac that there was some question in his mind whether or not his organization was a separate squadron. He pointed out, however, that he had been going ahead on this assumption and had rated men, filed administrative reports, administered discipline, and assumed the duties and prerogatives of a commanding officer, although BuPers and CinCPac still listed ELEVEN-TWO as an integral part of Squadron ELEVEN.

ComMTBRonsSoPac assured⁷⁵ the Commanding Officer of ELEVEN-TWO that his assumption of duty as a Squadron Commander was not out of order inasmuch as the "South Pacific Force of 20 December 1943 lists Squadron ELEVEN-TWO as a separate unit." Commodore Moran further recommended that the Commanding Officer should always explain the separate and detached status in all correspondence to prevent confusion. When the Commanding Officer of ELEVEN-TWO submitted⁷⁶ his MATERIAL REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS for February, he suggested that his unit be moved into an active theater of operations inasmuch as the boats had not been used for operation in three months, boat maintenance for such a small detached unit was difficult, and the morale among the men was very low. ComMTBRonsSoPac favorably endorsed the letter⁷⁷ and suggested the detachment be transferred under his cognizance. Further correspondence is not available, but it is indicated⁷⁸ that Squadron ELEVEN-TWO reported to ComMTBRonsSoPac on 28 April 1944 and was thereafter directed to rejoin Squadron ELEVEN at Emirau Island, arriving there on 13 May 1944.

The correspondence concerning the fate of the aforementioned 77' boats of Squadron THREE was voluminous and eventually productive of results. There had been some question about the condition of the eleven boats comprising the squadron as early as 1 October 1943 when BuShips letter to the Vice Chief of Naval Operations requested⁷⁹ that ComMTBRonsSoPac inspect the boats and submit a written report on their material condition. This report⁸⁰ indicated that PT's 36, 40, 45, 46, and 60 be placed out of service immediately and stripped of spare parts for use on the 77' type boats remaining in service.

Two months later Comdr. D. J. Walsh, USNR, C.O. of the Motor Torpedo Boat Squadrons Training Center at Melville, R. I., requested⁸¹ that three of the 77' boats be shipped back to Melville for the training of the personnel of the newly-organized Repair Training Unit.⁸² In the interim, PT's 38 and 61 were designated⁸³ as pilot boats on 8 February 1944 and placed under the administrative and operational control of ComSeronSoPac. Approximately a month and a half later CNO placed⁸⁴ the PT's 36, 40, 45,

⁷⁴ ComMTBRon 11-2 secret ltr to ComMTBRonsSoPac of 13 Dec 43.

⁷⁵ ComMTBRonsSoPac secret ltr 0022 of 23 Jan 44.

⁷⁶ ComMTBRon 11-2 secret ltr of 29 Feb 44 (no serial included).

⁷⁷ ComMTBRonsSoPac secret serial 0051 of 15 Mar 44.

⁷⁸ ComMTBRonsSoPac War Diary for April, Paragraph 9.

⁷⁹ BuShips conf ltr C-PT/L9-3(516-816-801) of 1 Oct 43.

⁸⁰ ComMTBRonsSoPac conf ltr S82 of 12 Dec 43.

⁸¹ C.O. of MTBSTC conf serial 044 (ab) ltr of 20 Feb 44.

⁸² Described more adequately in Part II, B-2-d (Training Program).

⁸³ ComMTBRonsSoPac War Diary for Feb 44.

⁸⁴ CNO conf disp 281900 Mar 44 to CinCPac and ComMTBRonsPac.

and 60 out of service. Three of these boats (PT's 36, 40, and 45) were later assigned⁸⁵ to the Training Center at Melville for use by the Repair Training Unit as requested. The PT's 39, 47, 48, and 59 were retained⁸⁶ in service in the SoPac area for experimental and training purposes.

In this period the forces of ComMTBRonsSoPac were augmented by two 12-boat squadrons, TWENTY-SEVEN and TWENTY-EIGHT. The first echelon of six boats of Squadron TWENTY-SEVEN reported to ComMTBRonsSoPac on 26 February 1944.⁸⁷ The remainder of the boats arrived at Rendova a few days later. After brief operational training, this squadron was assigned to relieve sections of Squadrons FIVE and NINE at the MTB Base, Treasury.

Squadron TWENTY-EIGHT also arrived in two sections, the first echelon arriving⁸⁸ at Rendova on 20 March 1944 and the second echelon reporting⁸⁹ on about 1 May. The delay was occasioned by the breakdown of the crane used for unloading the boats from the deck of the tanker at Tulagi. After pre-combat indoctrination, the boats were assigned to the Area Commander, Green Island, for war patrols.

Three 77' Elcos (59, 60, and 61) had been converted to motor gunboats before⁹⁰ 1 January 1944. Since these were placed out of service, as mentioned above, the PT's 282, 284, and 285 (Higgins) were converted⁹¹ into gunboats to replace the 77' boats. Torpedo launching racks, torpedoes, 20mm guns and mounts, and depth charges (with release tracks) were removed from the prospective gunboats. Replacing these weapons were two 40mm cannon, twin 50's in the turrets, and four twin 50's on the main deck centerline. The personnel were protected by gun splinter shields and light armor which was placed along the cockpit.

Although the original order for the decommissioning⁹² of Squadron NINETEEN (Higgins) was issued on 19 April by CNO, the actual physical decommissioning did not take place until 15 May at Green Island.⁹³ Squadron NINETEEN was a comparatively new squadron which had lost one boat (PT 239) in a fueling accident.⁹⁴ Meanwhile Squadrons TWENTY and TWENTY-THREE (also Higgins) had lost two boats each⁹⁵ in war actions. When it was decided to consolidate the squadrons, the lowest numbered squadron (NINETEEN) was decommissioned, and the boats and crews⁹⁶ divided among the other two Higgins squadrons.

⁸⁵ CNO restr serial ltr 103823 of 15 Apr 44.

⁸⁶ MOSQUITO BITES for 1 Apr 44.

⁸⁷ MOSQUITO BITES for 1 Mar 44, Page 2.

⁸⁸ ComMTBRonsSoPac War Diary for Mar. 44.

⁸⁹ MOSQUITO BITES for 1 May 44, Page 2.

⁹⁰ Interview with Lt. Rhoads, Executive Officer of USS ACONTIUS, on 15 Nov 45. Lt. Rhoads was formerly boat captain of PT 59. He estimated the 77' Elco MTB's were converted to gunboats by 15 Sep 43.

⁹¹ MOSQUITO BITES for 1 Mar 44, Page 2.

⁹² CNO conf disp 191910 Apr 44 to CinCPac

⁹³ MOSQUITO BITES for 1 June 44, Page 10.

⁹⁴ Squadrons NINETEEN and TWENTY were commissioned as 10-boat squadrons.

⁹⁵ TWENTY – PT's 247 and 251; TWENTY-THREE – PT's 279 and 283.

⁹⁶ When transferred to another squadron, the boat and crew were transferred as one.

Meanwhile the combined strength of our air, land, and sea forces were constantly driving the enemy back toward its homeland; the Solomons-Bismarck Archipelago campaign was rapidly settling to a war of attrition as the Allied Forces continually moved northward and westward.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the transfer of squadrons from the Solomons to New Guinea was accelerated during this period.⁹⁷ The first squadron to be affected by this trend was TEN. This squadron departed Green Island on 19 April 1944 and arrived at Saidor, New Guinea, the following day to report to ComMTBRons7thFlt for further duty in compliance with a THIRD Fleet directive.⁹⁸

[8 PGM gunboats of PGM Division ONE]

The exact motivations between the upper echelons of command for the creation of Task Group 30.3 are not entirely known, but this formation had an important bearing on forces available.

ComMTBRonsSoPac was directed to form Task Group 30.3 by the Commander THIRD Fleet⁹⁹ on 1 May 1944. The formation of Task Group not only placed the 96 MTB's in the SoPac area under his direct operational control, but twelve LCI gunboats, eight PGM gunboats, one LCGM gunboat, two PT tenders and one APC.¹⁰⁰ Thus, for the first time since he was named Type Commander of MTB's in the SoPac area, ComMTBRonsSoPac was able to direct the operational use of the boats. The mission of the Task Group was to blockade the enemy-held coast of Bougainville, New Hanover, New Ireland and adjacent islands to the northeastward. After pre-combat training, the LCI's and PGM's were used in anti-barge patrols as a replacement for the MTB squadrons transferred to ComMTBRons7th Flt.

The next squadron exodus from ComMTBRonsSoPac occurred exactly nineteen days later¹⁰¹ when Squadrons SIX and NINE departed Green Island to report to ComMTBRons7thFlt for further duty. In the interim, Cominch sent a dispatch¹⁰² ordering the decommissioning of Squadron SIX. Upon reporting to ComMTBRons7thFlt for duty, SIX was thus the lowest numbered squadron under the cognizance of that command. The boats and crews of SIX were split up and reassigned other squadrons lacking a minimum complement¹⁰³ of ten boats.

There were no further transfers of MTB squadrons to the Southwest Pacific area prior to the disestablishment of ComMTBRonsSoPac and CTG 30.3 on 15 June 1944.

(c) Policy and control of operations

As Type Commander, ComMTBRonsSoPac had administrative cognizance over all of the MTB's in the SoPac area on 1 January 1944. And, although he was also charged with maintaining¹⁰⁴ a

⁹⁷ Div 17 and Div 23 were reassigned earlier

⁹⁸ Com3rdFlt disp 180015 of Apr 44.

⁹⁹ Com3rdFlt's secret disp 210440 of Apr 44.

¹⁰⁰ ComMTBRonsPac and SoPac and CTG 30.3 War Diary for May 44.

¹⁰¹ MOSQUITO BITES for 1 June 44, Page 10.

¹⁰² Cominch conf disp 121627 May 44 to Com7thFlt.

¹⁰³ CNO's conf serial 0303423 of 19 May 44.

¹⁰⁴ As later stated in ComMTBRonsSoPac ltr, serial 0040, dated 26 Feb 44

specified number of motor torpedo boats in the combat areas in a ready condition at all times, he did not have direct operational control of the boats.

Daily orders for MTB operations were received by dispatch from Commander Task Force 31 (THIRD Amphibious Force) at Guadalcanal. This message specified the night's patrol areas and the number of boats that were to operate in each area. ComMTBRonsSoPac acknowledged the orders, and then, after having augmented the basic operational plan with such additional details as pertinent, forwarded the directives to the respective Area Commanders who made the specific boat assignments and briefed the Boat Captains prior to each night's patrol.

The following morning the dispatching of messages was reversed: The Section Leader¹⁰⁵ sent in a brief dispatch of his patrol results to his Area Commander. The sum of these reports from all Section Leaders was dispatched to ComMTBRonsSoPac who forwarded a summary of the results of all SoPac MTB patrols to CTF 31. These initial reports were, of course, followed by amplifying reports as necessary. The Area Commander included the number of boats "in commission" or ready for the forthcoming patrol when forwarding his daily action summary dispatch to ComMTBRonsSoPac.

The actual mechanical process of patrol assignments worked as follows: Each operating squadron supplied the Area Commander with a list of boats which were "in commission". The Area Commander apportioned the patrol areas and assigned a Section Leader for each patrol.¹⁰⁶ If the Area Commander had two squadrons available for combat patrols, he usually alternated squadrons on succeeding nights. The competitions engendered usually developed considerable squadron esprit de corps. When three squadrons were operating from the same base, the boats frequently had to be assigned without regard to squadron designation (*i.e.*, boats of one squadron might be assigned to operate with those of another squadron), although it was the general policy to assign to a single patrol area boats of the same squadron.

The fact that the areas to be patrolled and the number of boats to be assigned to each area was determined by CTF 31, whose headquarters were some 500 to 600 miles from the actual scene of operations, limited the freedom of action of subordinate commanders in the forward combat areas. Commodore Moran wrote¹⁰⁷ on 14 January 1944 that he thought "Combat operational control should remain centralized and vested in the hands of one command and in the case of MTB's, be initiated through the Motor Torpedo Boat Area Commander or Senior Officer Present Afloat in combined defensive or offensive operations." Thus, ComMTBRonsSoPac, in essence, advocated the creation of a task group-task unit organization wherein operational control of all MTB's and related units would be delegated to ComMTBRonsSoPac as Task Group Commander with either the MTB Area Commander or the Senior Officer Present Afloat, in the instance of combined operations, delegated as Task Unit Commander.

¹⁰⁵ Officer-in-tactical command of a two or three-boat section.

¹⁰⁶ Section Leaders were usually experienced senior Boat Captains who were relieved of active command of a boat and served as officer-in-tactical command of a patrol section. They usually were billeted at the base and were assigned collateral duties with their squadron.

¹⁰⁷ ComMTBRonsSoPac ltr, serial 0013, dated 14 Jan 44.

For reasons unknown, a task group organization giving ComMTBRonsSoPac operational control of MTB's and related craft was not created until 1 May 1944 coincidental with the departure of the majority of the THIRD Fleet from the SoPac Area.

However, it was obvious that closer coordination between MTB's and other allied forces was imperative, and, thus, an alternative plan was adopted: the assignment of a senior combat-experienced MTB officer to the staff of CTF 31 for duty as MTB Liaison Officer.

The assignment of an MTB Liaison Officer to the staff of CTF 31 did bring about better coordination between motor torpedo boat operations and those of other allied units. Furthermore, in view of the failure to create an MTB task group organization in January 1944, the assignment of an MTB Liaison Officer became a vital alternative: Guadalcanal was the Intelligence "center" of the SoPac Area as well as headquarters for CTF 31; a plot of all friendly movements was maintained there and intelligence of the enemy from all of the many¹⁰⁸ Allied forces in the Solomons was funneled into this "center".

From available information it appears that Commander H. Farrow, USN, former Squadron Commander of MTBRon FIVE, became the first combat-experienced MTB Liaison Officer ordered to Task Force 31. The exact date of his assignment can be traced to within a ten-day period. MOSQUITO BITES for 1 March 1944 states that Commander Farrow was one of several MTB officers on the first Green Island reconnaissance party of 10 January. Commodore Moran mentioned in a letter¹⁰⁹ ten days later that "Commander Farrow is our Liaison Officer with Task Force 31 and he has been given all information relative to our wants and needs for the next move..." It is obvious, therefore, that the MTB Liaison Officer not only helped with MTB patrol assignments, but he also advised the Task Force staff concerning the capabilities and limitations of the boats, and aided in planning new forward movements. However, there was one inherent danger in this arrangement: in effect operational control of MTB's was delegated to the MTB Liaison Officer. Oftentimes a liaison officer will lose sight of his original objective and will cease to function as a representative of his command but will become imbued with new policies and doctrines of the staff to which he is temporarily attached and these policies and doctrines may be entirely alien to those of his own organization.

Although prior to 1 May 1944 ComMTBRonsSoPac did not have direct operational control of MTB's operating in the SoPac Area, he did set up a rotation policy and direct the movements of the squadrons to and from the forward combat areas. ComMTBRonsSoPac states¹¹⁰ that in order to insure a high standard of morale and efficiency it was necessary to remove the personnel to the back areas after three months in the forward combat areas. Coincident with personnel rotation was the need for engine changes¹¹¹ and general overhaul of the boats if they were to be maintained at peak efficiency. In general, the squadrons remained in the rear areas approximately one month before being reassigned.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ Army and Marine Ground Forces, Australian Coastwatchers, Army and Marine Air Forces, New Zealand Army, and other Allied units.

¹⁰⁹ ComMTBRonsSoPac ltr, serial 0019, dated 20 Jan 44.

¹¹⁰ ComMTBRonsSoPac ltr, serial 0013, dated 14 Jan 44.

¹¹¹ Effected after 700-750 hours of operation according to ComMTBRonsSoPac ltr, serial 005, dated 11 Jan 44.

¹¹² Contemplated movements, MTBRonsSoPac for 4 Jan, 4 Mar, and 15 Apr 44.

Another noteworthy policy of this period was the Chief Staff Officer's (Comdr. W. C. Specht) personal participation and leadership in MTB operations. During the preliminary reconnaissance of Green Island¹¹³ he led a patrol party, in company with other friendly units, and despite hostile enemy fire obtained information of much value for the successful occupation of Green Island on 15 February 1944.

On the night of 29-30 February, Comdr. Specht led a Task Unit of 12 motor torpedo boats, in conjunction with two Destroyer Divisions, into Rabaul Harbor, New Britain, (the first Allied vessels to enter the harbor since its capture by the Japs) to harass and destroy enemy shipping. As soon as the DD's had bombarded known shore batteries the MTB's entered the harbor. Heavy rainstorms hampered the operation and the results were disappointing. The MTB's located no torpedo targets, but did damage or sink four enemy barges.

On 25 March 1944, Comdr. Specht served as Area Commander for eight MTB's during the landing and occupation of Emirau Island. He was relieved as Area Commander by Lt. Comdr. LeRoy Taylor, USN, on 9 April and resumed his duties as Chief Staff Officer.

Enemy contacts had dwindled considerably by April and other fleet units in the SoPac area were being slowly withdrawn and directed to more active war theaters. The SoPac MTB's had been slowly augmenting their forces (from 73 boats on 1 January to 96 boats on 1 May) and were selected as the unit to maintain "the blockade of the enemy-held coast of Bougainville, New Hanover, New Ireland and adjacent Island groups to the Northeastward, destroying all shipping encountered".

Commander THIRD Fleet's dispatch¹¹⁴ directed ComMTBRonsSoPac to form Task Force 30.3 on 1 May 1944 and assume complete operational control of all MTB's and other assigned forces in continuing the war of attrition against the enemy in the Northern Solomons-Bismarck Archipelago Axis. Upon forming CTG 30.3 ComMTBRonsSoPac was given operational cognizance over 96 motor torpedo boats, 12 LCT gunboats, eight PGM gunboats, and one LCGM gunboat.

ComMTBRonsSoPac clearly expressed his attitude toward future operations in a memo¹¹⁵ when he stated: "...It is desired to vigorously and aggressively pursue the mission assigned us in order to achieve the best possible results. Area and Squadron Commanders are urged to keep boat personnel instilled with the desire to destroy the enemy and encourage all hands to think of new and different ways to do it. Patrols continuously negative tend to cause a lack of interest... Even though negative patrols do not seem to accomplish anything, the presence of boats in the area provide a source of danger, harassment and discouragement to the enemy which contributes directly towards hastening his downfall ... The quicker we whittle down and destroy the Jap in the areas assigned, the quicker we can move to more fertile fields."

Meanwhile the ComMTBRonsSoPac Intelligence Officer indicated that his personnel would expand¹¹⁶ the scope of their activities considerably in order to furnish the Area Commanders with the best possible

¹¹³ MOSQUITO BITES for 1 Mar 44 and Recommendation for Award of Silver Star to Comdr. Specht.

¹¹⁴ Com3rdFlt's disp 210440 of Apr 44.

¹¹⁵ ComMTBRonsSoPac, serial 371, dated 24 Apr 44.

¹¹⁶ ComMTBRonsSoPac, serial 0068, dated 4 May 44.

information. The following day a memo¹¹⁷ pointed out that the boats were leaving the bases for patrols at a standard time each night and leaving the actual patrol areas too early the following morning, thus providing the Japs with a timetable – and definite hours of darkness during which they could move their forces without interference.

Immediately upon assuming operational control, ComMTBRonsSoPac set in motion a vigorous policy and more than doubled the number of patrols in May. As a result of a more thorough and less predictable coverage (from the Jap point of view) of the area, the SoPac MTB's destroyed 57 barges¹¹⁸ during May as against a total of eight in April. The boats were also used for several other purposes including mine laying in river mouths after making careful inshore soundings for the most suitable locations. Other MTB crews boarded and stripped several wrecked Jap ships off New Hanover, collecting much gear and several code books.

Meanwhile three of the PGM gunboats which were placed under ComMTBRonsSoPac's operational cognizance on 1 May¹¹⁹ arrived at Rendova. The personnel of these craft were given tactical training and intelligence indoctrination before departing for Treasury Island where they were directed to operate with MTB's in anti-barge patrols. Later several more LCI's and PGM's were assigned to the MTB Base at Treasury. A memo¹²⁰ indicates that considerable difficulty was experienced in organizing and coordinating the attacks.

ComMTBRons TREASURY was the first Area Commander who was able to compare the effectiveness of the MTB's PGM and LCI gunboats in anti-barge warfare. He was soon very favorably impressed with the possibilities, however, and immediately dispatched a top secret letter to the Chief of Naval Operations (via channels) recommending that more of these craft be converted to gunboats to "take the place of the Motor Torpedo Boats now being used for anti-barge work, for which they are obviously unsuited".¹²¹

ComMTBRonsSoPac in his forwarding endorsement to this letter contended that the alleged mis-use of motor torpedo boats as gunboats had no basis in fact, that up until this time there were not sufficient LCI and PGM gunboats available for anti-barge patrols. Meanwhile motor torpedo boats had been available in increasingly large numbers and in the absence of torpedo targets, the boats had been used most effectively for disrupting barge traffic at night. By removing torpedoes and the torpedo launching racks, considerable fire power was added without any reduction in speed. There had been relatively few losses of boats or personnel against the total number of barges destroyed. ComMTBRonsSoPac believed that MTB's and PGM gunboats would prove an effective patrol combination, and he recommended that more gunboats be made available with anti-submarine sound gear. ComMTBRonsPac concluded by saying: "As an all around threat and (as a) multi-purpose small craft operating in the relatively smooth waters in the Southwest Pacific Islands and in the Philippines, it is considered that Motor Torpedo Boats

¹¹⁷ ComMTBRonsSoPac, serial 090, dated 5 May 44.

¹¹⁸ MOSQUITO BITES for 1 June 44, Page 1.

¹¹⁹ MOSQUITO BITES for 1 May 44, Page 11.

¹²⁰ ComMTBRons TREASURY memo to Comdr. Specht, dated 10 May 44.

¹²¹ ComMTB TREASURY, serial 0001, dated 18 May 44.

cannot be excelled. The Japanese have admitted this in recently captures documents and deplore the fact that they have failed to develop and exploit Motor Torpedo Boats in a similar manner.”

The initial fourteen days of June were not nearly as productive of enemy targets (one barge destroyed, one probable), indicating¹²² that enemy barge traffic had almost ceased for the period.

ComMTBRonsSoPac continued a thorough coverage of the area nonetheless to disrupt any further traffic until 15 June 1944 when Task Group 30.3 was dissolved.¹²³

(d) Training program.

As has been indicated in an earlier chapter,¹²⁴ this period was marked by the development of an intensive training program both for new squadrons and for combat squadrons rotated to repair bases for overhaul and modernization. Until this period of 1 January 1944 to 15 June 1944 the operational demands on available MTB's had been excessive, which had precluded any training possibilities. As enemy contacts dwindled, however, and new squadrons augmented the forces available, a training program was inaugurated, more efficient operating procedures were sought, and doctrines for combined MTB-DD and MTB-PBY operations were evolved and standardized.

As has been previously noted,¹²⁵ Bau Island was an excellent site for the headquarters of ComMTBRonsSoPac. Not only was it within easy distance of the forward operating areas, but the base had protected anchorages, and was close to the Munda Air Strip, which provided obvious advantages. The site was also ideally suited as a pre-combat training center. Blanche Channel, immediately to the east of Bau and Rendova Islands represented a body of protected water ten miles wide and thirty miles long at its narrowest dimensions. This channel was used¹²⁶ for torpedo-firing exercises, anti-barge exercises, DD-MTB exercises, and MTB-PBY exercises. Markers for a measured nautical mile had been placed just before the channel entrance to Bau Island so that all boats could make accurate speed runs and recalibrate their speed curves whenever underway in the channel.

One island (Sikuleleki) bordering Renard Cove on the east side of Rendova had been reserved exclusively for gunnery drills. On one side of the island a large, white-painted rock served as a surface target for the boats and was used for simulated gunnery runs.

Commodore Moran disclosed his own rapt interest regarding training programs in a letter to Rear Admiral Carney, USN, Chief of Staff, Commander South Pacific¹²⁷ during the middle of January. Commodore Moran stated that Lt. Comdr. Westholm, USN, the staff training officer during this period, had used every opportunity to keep the personnel in a high state of training by lectures, demonstrations, gunnery and torpedo drills, and by joint exercises with other units.

¹²² ComMTBRonsSoPac, serial 00100, dated 23 June 44.

¹²³ Com3rdFlt's secret disp 100333 of June.

¹²⁴ Chapter II, Sec. A-3 (c), Functioning of Staff

¹²⁵ Chapter II, Sec. A-3 (a), Location of ComMTBRonsSoPac.

¹²⁶ ComMTBRonsSoPac ltr, serial 055, dated 26 Mar 44.

¹²⁷ ComMTBRonsSoPac ltr, serial 0017, dated 20 Jan 44.

Inasmuch as the MTB's had encountered no torpedo targets, the crews had become "gun-conscious." In an effort to counteract this tendency and to evolve the most efficient fighting units possible, considerable emphasis was placed on torpedo firing and on joint exercises with the DD's and PBY's.

In February Lt. (jg) Thomas E. Falvey, USNR, who had succeeded Lt. Comdr. Westholm as director of the training program, early inaugurated an extensive "post-graduate" course for the personnel of all squadrons temporarily based at Rendova. The boat officers were given daily instruction in the "Little Red School House", a small wooden hut just back of the long Quonset building which housed ComMTBRonsSoPac. Classes were conducted on a regular schedule in torpedo approach and attack by radar and maneuvering board, joint MTB-DD and MTB-PBY tactics, landing operations, anti-barge attacks, recognition and anti-aircraft tactics.

These classes augmented the MTB-PBY barge hunting exercises, radar-torpedo firing exercises, and joint MTB-DD operations which were being held in Blanche Channel. Arrangements for attendance at these classes and exercises were worked out between the Squadron Commander and the Training Supervisor. Lectures and exercises were repeated so that each student was able to attend one session of each.

In addition, each squadron commander, section leader, and boat captain was required to ride at least one patrol in one of the PBY's which had been assigned to operate in conjunction with MTB patrols.

Several MTB-DD and MTB-PBY exercises had been conducted prior to the formal organization of the training program. Tentative doctrines for joint exercises with both units had been submitted by ComMTBRons SoPac in late December.¹²⁸ Although there is no documentary evidence that either of these doctrines had been formally approved by the upper echelons of command, the tentative doctrines were used in subsequent training exercises. ComMTBRonsSoPac recommended¹²⁹ that these tentative procedures be considered standard doctrine. It was further suggested that these exercises, which required considerable team-work by both units, be conducted¹³⁰ at every opportunity.

From the time of the inception of motor torpedo boats, numerous so-called doctrines had been evolved in addition to the official doctrine (and revisions) which had been promulgated by Cominch. Generally speaking, the official MTB doctrine had been rendered obsolete prior to its promulgation; and motor torpedo boat operations had been extended far beyond the scope of the official doctrine. In lieu of adequate revision each area commander had developed his own doctrine, each at variance with the other. To add to the confusion, improper liaison had existed between MTBSTC and the MTB combat areas; the instruction at Melville had often been founded upon ancient doctrine and had often failed to include recent innovations in force in the combat areas.

With an eye toward establishing a standardized MTB combat doctrine for all areas, ComMTBRonsSoPac directed two officers to write out a summarizations of the MTB tactics which were currently in use. The

¹²⁸ ComMTBRonsSoPac secret ltr of 25 Dec 43 on DD-MTB Direction Doctrine and Procedure and ComMTBRonsSoPac secret ltr of 28 Dec 43 on Black Cat-MTB Operations.

¹²⁹ ComMTBRonsSoPac ltr, serial 0018, dated 20 Jan 44.

¹³⁰ See Chapter II, Sec. A-2, Relations with superior and coordinate commands and Chapter II, Sec. B-2 (a), General strategic nature. The MTB-PBY combination formed an excellent combat team for disrupting barge traffic.

first digest of combat tactics was prepared¹³¹ by Lt. (jg) Kersey, USNR. This digest covered night torpedo attacks, anti-barge tactics, anti-aircraft tactics, and recognition procedure with unidentified ships or aircraft. The principal dissertation was on MTB torpedo firing, although the digest did not include the radar-plot technique which was then being discussed in the classroom and was being practiced during exercises.

Lt. (jg) Falvey completed¹³² his "Notes on Subject Tactics" just before he was placed in charge of the training program. He used a considerably different approach and included more general combat information in his treatise than had Lt. (jg) Kersey. The material was not only broken down into a readable outline form but it included such topics as armament of boats, inter-boat communications, general gunnery instructions, operations with the DD's and PBY's, use of radar plot for torpedo firing, and notes on Japanese barges.

It should be stressed that the reports submitted by Lt. (jg) Falvey and Lt. (jg) Kersey did not constitute MTBRonsSoPac doctrine, nor were they promulgated as such. In so far as can be determined, there was no official MTB doctrine for the SoPac Area other than the long obsolete doctrine promulgated by Cominch. The Falvey-Kersey reports were forwarded to all interested parties by ComMTBRonsSoPac for information and comment in the hope that, in cooperation with other MTB commands, a standardized MTB doctrine could be evolved.

Considerable interest was evidenced by other commands in MTB-DD operation. The joint MTB-DD training exercises and a captured Japanese document which had been translated and distributed by the Joint Intelligence Center, Pacific Ocean Areas¹³³ may have prompted an airmailgram¹³⁴ of 7 April from the Commander Destroyers, PACIFIC Fleet to his representative in the South Pacific Area. ComDesPac directed his SoPac representative to study the Destroyer-anti-MTB problem and to submit a proposed doctrine.

The study was conducted by ComDesPac's SoPac representative, Captain J. E. Hurff, USN.¹³⁵ In his opinion, the enemy had lost a golden opportunity to deal Allied forces heavy losses in the Solomons by not having used MTB's in considerable quantities against our forces. Captain Hurff added that this opportunity would be repeated in the Philippines and that it would be asking a great deal of luck not to expect the Japs to use many motor torpedo boats in the near future.

After explaining MTB tactics and the radar-detection ability of DD's, Captain Hurff set forth his proposed Destroyer-anti-MTB tactics. When planning operations in enemy MTB waters, he advised that additional DD's should be provided. He suggested utilization of the anti-submarine screen as set forth in USF 10A and further recommended that one or more pickets be stationed 12,000 yards in the van. Upon contact, the formation should maneuver away as in a submarine attack. The screening destroyers within range

¹³¹ ComMTBRonsSoPac ltr, serial 0015, dated 18 Jan 44.

¹³² ComMTBRonsSoPac ltr, serial 0034, dated 10 Feb 44.

¹³³ JicPca Item No. 5782-A.

¹³⁴ ComDesPac airmailgram 070428 of Apr 44.

¹³⁵ Representative of ComDesPac conf ltr, dated 19 Apr 44.

of the enemy boats should open fire immediately with the 5" and 40mm as controlled by the main director, and they should maneuver to keep the MTB's on their quarter if possible.

When asked to comment and forward recommendations concerning the proposed doctrine, ComMTBRonsSoPac particularly stressed¹³⁶ the importance of the destroyers laying down a heavy volume of barrage fire around and ahead of the attacking Motor Torpedo Boats. He stated that this tactic combined with high speed and radical changes of course, which would tend to place the MTB's abaft the beam, would practically nullify any chance of a successful torpedo attack by the MTB's. ComMTBRonsSoPac also invited attention to the neutralizing effect of Japanese float planes on MTB patrols and he advocated the use of planes to precede the passage of destroyers through water guarded by enemy MTB's and to "illuminate, strafe, and bomb all suspicious objects sighted".

There is no evidence from available records that MTB-DD training exercises were conducted after 17 March 1944. On this night a destroyer and a motor torpedo boat had been collaborating on shelling an enemy-held beach when a salvo from the destroyer hit the MTB amidships. This unfortunate action was undoubtedly a setback to further development of joint operations during this period.

With this exception, the training program proceeded on an orderly, scheduled¹³⁷ basis. MOSQUITO BITES for 1 June reported that the usual advanced training program had been made available during the past month – one indication that the training program had become an established part of the operation schedule at Rendova.

When Commodore Moran was directed¹³⁸ to form Task Group 30.3 on 1 May, his new command embraced operational cognizance over 96 MTB's and 12 LCI and 8 PGM gunboats in the South Pacific Area. It was his responsibility, therefore, to indoctrinate the gunboats in pre-combat training. The Rendova training facilities and program were therefore used for this purpose. Training Supervisor Lt. H. A. Fairbrother, USNR, who had relieved Lt. (jg) Falvey¹³⁹ reported that efforts had been made to formulate a joint MTB-gunboat anti-barge doctrine. MOSQUITO BITES¹⁴⁰ reported that during the first fifteen days of June (the closing days of this period) "PGM's 2, 3, 4 and 6 arrived and received advance combat training at Rendova. The completion of the training of these PGM's concluded the Rendova training program".

The training program instituted at Rendova has been referred to hereinbefore as a "post-graduate" training, inasmuch as all officers and men who were attached to squadrons had been given their initial training at the Motor Torpedo Boat Squadrons Training Center (MTBSTC) located on Narrangansett Bay at Melville, R. I. Although this Training Center will be discussed in other administrative histories, a brief discussion concerning it has been included herein to illustrate its relationship with the ComMTBRonsSoPac training programs of this period.

¹³⁶ ComMTBRonsSoPac ltr, serial 0086, dated 22 May 44.

¹³⁷ Consult Appendix for training schedules as recorded in MOSQUITO BITES and ComMTBRonsSoPac's War Diaries.

¹³⁸ Chapter II, Sec. B-2 (c), Policy and control of operations.

¹³⁹ MOSQUITO BITES, dated 1 June 44.

¹⁴⁰ MOSQUITO BITES, dated 1 July 44.

MTBSTC had been established in March 1942 with Lt. Comdr. W. C. Specht, USN, (later Chief Staff Officer, ComMTBRonsSoPac) as commanding officer. It had been organized as a school for the training of personnel which were to be assigned to MTB squadrons. All candidates for MTB service were selected from volunteers. The officer candidates were chosen from midshipman and officer indoctrination schools and naval training centers by a board of veteran MTB officers who had interviewed each candidate. The enlisted men were combed from the volunteers at various naval service schools and recruit training centers.

The prospective MTB officers who had reported to ComMTBRonsSoPac during this period had completed a two-month indoctrination course at MTBSTC, Melville, R. I., where they had majored in tactics, MTB navigation, and boat handling. Additional instruction had been given in MTB gunnery, torpedoes, radar, recognition, engineering, and radio. The primary emphasis in the Melville training had been placed on the use of an MTB as a torpedo boat. Since most of the MTB actions in the Northern Solomons had been gun battles with barges and shore batteries, ComMTBRonsSoPac evidently deemed it best to set up a pre-combat training program which would complement the Melville schooling.

At MTBSTC the MTB boat crews had been given a specialized course of either two or three months¹⁴¹ in their rate as applicable to MTB's. The crews also had received instruction in other phases of MTB operation. The amount of this general training had varied. At one time the stress had been placed on "every crew member being able to perform every job aboard the boat". This program frequently had resulted in a radioman knowing how to free an air-lock of a heat exchanger of the main engines, but being unable to properly read blinker messages. This principle was forthwith abandoned in favor of presenting each rated man more thorough and advanced training in his own rate.

One phase of instruction which had been lacking in any MTB training program was a unit which would prepare officers and men for duty as a member of an MTB Base Unit and as repair officers and repair crew aboard MTB tenders. The Repair Training Unit was organized at Melville in February 1944. This unit, as the name implies, thereafter supplied trained personnel for this all-important function.

Because of improper liaison with the MTB combat commands, MTBSTC had failed to keep abreast of motor torpedo boat activities in the combat areas, and, thus, personnel had reported for duty in these areas improperly trained. The need for additional training was obvious.

3. Logistics.

(a) General

From an historical point of view the problem of logistic support is somewhat complicated by the lack of proper documentary evidence. Much of the material has been obtained in personal interviews with Lt. Comdr. J. I. Everest, SC, USNR, who was attached to the Staff ComMTBRonsSoPac and later to the Staff ComMTBRonsPacFlt.

¹⁴¹ The officer training was later lengthened to three months. In the final month the officer trainee was assigned as a third officer aboard one of the MTB training boats.

In actuality, at no time during this period did ComMTBRonsPacFlt function as a command concerned with the logistic support or readiness of motor torpedo boats. This function was handled by Commodore Moran and his staff under the title ComMTBRonsSoPac and as such will be discussed herein.

The problem of logistic readiness for motor torpedo boats had reached the intolerable stage by 1 January 1944. New squadrons were arriving in the area improperly equipped with proprietary spares. Squadrons which had been operating for some time in the area were experiencing critical shortages of both proprietary spares and G.S.K. items. Contributing factors were the initial shortages of spares upon the outfitting of the squadron, difficulties encountered by squadrons in moving squadron spares from initial unloading point to the operating bases, the inability of major supply areas in the rear of the theater of operations to keep abreast of the current needs and constant shifting of squadrons, and the paucity of cargo space made available for shipment of PT spares from the rear bases to the operating areas. These factors, coupled with the general practice of each squadron hoarding what materials and spares it may have had on hand to the detriment of another squadron operating in the same area, necessitated the immediate reorganization of logistic channels.

(b) Organization

At the beginning of 1944 a concerted attempt was made to reorganize the existing system.¹⁴² The Staff of ComMTBRonsSoPac was reorganized as pertaining to the matter of logistic support and readiness. The Staff Materiel Officer was held responsible for the procurement and distribution of proprietary spares and the Staff Supply Officer was required to keep the Staff Materiel Officer advised as to the procurement and distribution of non-technical stock. In other words, an unofficial department of logistics was created. Additional facilities were constructed adjacent to PT Base 11 at Rendova and this unit was made the central distributing agency for the logistic support of all PT Operating Bases¹⁴³ and squadrons. (It is desired to emphasize that no effort was made to supply the main engine overhaul bases of the MTB Base (staged) Units, but rather to augment existing facilities of these units.) All materials were assembled by the Staff "Logistics Department" and were distributed on the basis of the need in the various areas.

Each Area Commander was assigned¹⁴⁴ a personal staff to assist in the organization and the operation of PT Operating Bases or MTB Base Units. A supply officer and several storekeepers were assigned as a part of the Area Commander's staff for the purpose of maintaining proper stock levels.

On 9 March the establishment of ComMTBRonsPacFlt affected the organization of the "Logistic Department" in no way, as the Staff merely assumed additional duty as the Staff ComMTBRonsPacFlt with personnel and procedure remaining the same. However, in the latter part of March the incumbent Staff Materiel and the Staff Supply Officers were detached for rotational leave and, with the assignment of the new Staff Supply Officer as head of the Logistics Department, further reorganization and an

¹⁴² ComMTBRonsSoPac ltr A3-1(2), dated 31 Dec 43.

¹⁴³ Vide Logistics (g).

¹⁴⁴ ComMTBRonsSoPac ltr A3-1(2), dated 31 Dec 43.

intensified training program in stock control, etc., was considered necessary. The Staff Materiel Officer now advised the Staff Supply Officer as to requirements and critical shortages of proprietary spares.

A Supply Officer was assigned to take charge of the organization of the logistic support and readiness for the PT's during the landing on Emirau Island and he was further directed to establish a supply department to service PT's operating in this area subsequent to the landing. This method proved extremely satisfactory.

In April the Supply Corps personnel attached to PT's in the SoPac area increased in sufficient numbers to permit the activation of the aforementioned training program. Both Supply Corps officers and storekeepers of newly arrived squadrons had little training in advance base work and/or in association with PT proprietary spares. (The Supply Corps officers were ordered to squadrons for disbursing duties only, the standard practice having been to assign a line officer in each squadron collateral duty as Squadron Stores Officer.) The Supply Corps officers and storekeepers were ordered by ComMTBRonsSoPac to report to the Staff for temporary additional duty and were assigned one month's duty in receiving and shipping and one month's duty in warehousing, and then assigned duties, commensurate with their experience and aptitude, at the advanced bases where they were directed to report to the Area Commander for duty as a member of his staff.

Each squadron submitted a weekly report via the Area Commanders to the Staff Supply Officer listing materials and spares used for maintenance. Each area supply officer reported weekly to the Staff Supply Officer his stock level of certain critical proprietary and standard stock items. The former reports became the basis of the usage factor reports submitted to BuShips. The two reports enabled the Staff Supply Officer to order intelligently and to shift critical spares from one area to another as the need became apparent.

(c) Non-technical stock

The logistic support for the motor torpedo boats in forward and combat areas in regard to standard stock items, clothing and small stores, and ships store stock (hereinafter referred to as non-technical stock) was most unsatisfactory as was evidenced by ComMTBRonsSoPac letter of 10 February.¹⁴⁵ ComMTBRonsSoPac pointed out that although the Advanced Base Naval Units were directed to supply motor torpedo boat squadrons in their respective areas with non-technical stock, they were unable to comply. The net result, despite existing directives to the contrary, was that responsibility for logistic support, in so far as the non-technical stock was concerned, rested on the rear Motor Torpedo Boat Base Units (principally Base 11 at Rendova). These bases were not properly stocked, however, nor were they allowed to build up a surplus sufficient to carry the load.

ComMTBRonsSoPac recommended two possible solutions to the problem of supplying non-technical stock:

¹⁴⁵ CMTB/L8 Serial 032 of 10 Feb 1944 to ComSeronSoPac.

- (1) Establishment at a forward MTB base of a stock of non-technical items – the selection of the base to be dependent upon proximity to established shipping and available storage space.
- (2) Designation of an already established Advanced Naval Supply Depot Annex as the direct source of supply, delegating authority to ComMTBRonsSoPac to by-pass the local Advanced Naval Base Unit. All squadron and base requisitions would be submitted to ComMTBRons SoPac for screening and assignment of priorities rather than to local Advanced Naval Base Units who, in most cases, were unable to decide on motor torpedo boat requirements.

It was further suggested that the tenders and boats could be utilized to some extent for transporting supplies. However, this suggestion proved overoptimistic as the transportation problem became more acute as supply lines lengthened. For example, as a result of the above-mentioned letter, authority was granted ComMTBRonsSoPac to draw a 120-day supply of GSK stock from the major supply depot (Espiritu Santo, N. H.). However, by September only 50% of the stock requisitioned had been delivered.

During February, March, and the early part of April 1944 an attempt was made by each of the MTB area supply officers to comply with the directives as set forth by ComSeronSoPac.¹⁴⁶ This directive placed the responsibility upon the local Advanced Base Naval Units for supplying provisions, GSK, fuel, etc., to all naval activities in their respective areas. This procedure was correct, but it normally did not produce results. As a last resort PT area supply officers were ordering from PT Base 11. PT Base 11 assumed the responsibility of screening requisitions and ordering for all bases. Although this method provided some relief, it was impractical from an overall setup. In the latter part of April a conference was held between representatives of Staff ComMTBRonsPac and Commander Joy, USN, representing the Naval Supply Depot, Espiritu Santo. It was generally agreed that the situation had been clarified sufficiently to attempt to re-establish and to conform to ComSeronSoPac's system of supply as applicable to PT boats, bases, and tenders. Materials (chamois, wood, screws, sandpaper, steel wool, paint, etc.) previously ordered in February from Advanced Base Naval Units and never supplied were now becoming available.

During April ComMTBRonsPac made a concerted effort to obtain accurate usage factors on all material from PT squadrons, bases, and tenders to establish an automatic flow of materials.

Finally on 8 June a conference was held at Rendova, B.S.I., with representatives of ComMTBRonsSoPac, SPDC Noumea, and ComSeronSoPac (Force Maintenance).¹⁴⁷ Points under discussion were: (1) Determination of responsibility of SPDC, Noumea, (2) automatic flow of materials, (3) usage factors, (4) status of requisitions, (5) Bureau contracts, and (6) shipping facilities. The conference was not too productive of immediate action but cooperation among various commands was engendered.

No significant changes in the supply of non-technical stock were effected prior to redivision of command areas as of 15 June 1944.

¹⁴⁶ ComSeronSoPac secret ltr., serial 00270 of 7 Feb 44.

¹⁴⁷ ComMTBRonsSoPac Staff Materiel Officer's Memo Report of 8 June 44.

(d) Proprietary spares.

The supply of proprietary spares for PT boats in the combat areas had been unsatisfactory since the arrival at Tulagi, B.S.I., of the first shipment of PT spares belonging to MTB Ron 3. All the squadron's proprietary spares had been left in Noumea, and the shipment consisted of large quantities of soap powder, toilet paper, and similar articles which, while they increased the comforts of jungle living, contributed nothing to the maintenance and/or repair of a disabled PT boat.

In view of the almost complete breakdown of the PT supply lines from the States, a pool of spare parts proprietary to PT boats was established as directed by ComMTBRonsSoPac at Base 11, Bau Island (Rendova) B.S.I. in January 1944. (This was in line with ComMTBRonsSoPac's policy of augmenting base supplies and equipment wherein possible.) In other words, the commissioning allowance of proprietary spares (plus those spares acquired through devious means – usually "midnight requisitioning") which each squadron procured prior to departure from the States, and which was transported to the forward areas in company with the squadrons, was assembled at Base 11 and issued under the supervision of the Staff Materiel Officer in accordance with the needs of the various areas. This procedure of utilizing spares belonging to new squadrons to repair boats of older squadrons obviously continued to function only as long as new squadrons arrived at a more rapid rate than the attrition rate of old squadrons; and further, that new squadrons arrived in the area fully equipped with their allowance of proprietary spares. The March 1944 issue of "MOSQUITO BITES" underlined the obvious fact that "Motor Torpedo Boats cannot operate effectively without adequate spare parts and constant replenishment by the bureaus concerned." This same issue further pointed out that new squadrons were arriving in the SoPac area very inadequately equipped with "critical spares". The April issue of "MOSQUITO BITES" recommended that new squadrons bring more proprietary spares and less mundane GSK items to the combat areas. These factors, coupled with the failure to receive an automatic flow of proprietary spares from the bureaus concerned, created a critical situation.

Numerous attempts were made to resolve the difficulties. In April 1944 a comprehensive study was initiated by the Staff Supply Officer to determine usage factors to ascertain the requirements of a squadron for a period of six months.

The exact procedure for procurement of proprietary spares and establishment of the automatic flow system was set up in April. This system (previously discussed herein) remained in effect as long as ComMTBRonsSoPac had squadrons in combat operations in the Northern Solomons.

Semi-official correspondence¹⁴⁸ between Commander W. C. Specht, USN, Chief Staff Officer, ComMTBRonsSoPac and Bureau of Ships personnel indicated that BuShips was ordering spares and

¹⁴⁸ Semi-official correspondence of Lt. Comdr. E. B. Coulter, USNR, BuShips (Patrol Craft Maintenance) of 20 May 44, of which excerpts are quoted herewith: "... BuSandA was supposed [historian's underlining] to supply quite a quantity of Copperoyd paint to their Naval Supply Depot in the area which apparently [historian's underlining] is Noumea... We automatically ship the initial sets of spares to an area such as yours to furnish the original stock then we procure additional spares which are put into Mechanicsburg [Pennsylvania] or Clearfield [Utah] so that when you have used up 50% or 60% of any one item or group of items you can send a requisition through channels to Mechanicsburg and the material will be available for immediate shipment..."

building up a stockpile, but delay in receipt of these items in combat areas was the major problem. Additional spares were procured by BuShips and were shipped to Noumea. However, specific details of shipments were lacking and apparently information as to general shipping data was not made available to ComMTBRonsSoPac.

As previously indicated,¹⁴⁹ a conference was held at Rendova on 8 June for the purpose of clarifying the general logistics readiness of motor torpedo boats. After much controversy a general agreement¹⁵⁰ was reached which defined the responsibilities of and the procedures to be used by each of the participants (*i.e.* ComMTBRonsSoPac, SPDC Noumea, ComSeronSoPac) in supplying MTB's in the SoPac area. However, there was no immediate increase in receipt of proprietary spares by MTB's in the operating areas; the ideas were on paper but only time would prove the merit of the system.

Thus, there was still much to be desired in the supplying of proprietary spares to combat operating MTB's and if immediate steps were not taken to resolve effectively the existing delays and confusion, it would be impossible to continue to maintain the maximum number of MTB's available in operating condition.

(e) Shipping.

The lack of available shipping space for MTB spares added to the difficulties experienced by MTB operating personnel in the maintenance of equipment.

In the early part of 1944, what proprietary spares were being shipped from the "bureaus concerned" were shipped to SPDC Noumea, and from there supposedly transshipped to the operating areas. The lack of organization and the lack of a definite policy as to where spares were to be transshipped resulted in vital material becoming lost, strayed, or stolen. Oftentimes, spares were transshipped from Noumea to Espiritu Santo, then transshipped again to Guadalcanal or Tulagi, and if they survived this ordeal they might finally reach forward combat areas.

In February 1944 ComMTBRonsSoPac¹⁵¹ suggested that available shipping space could be augmented by PT boats and tenders carrying spares when proceeding to and from repair and overhaul, but as the supply lines lengthened as the war moved westward this plan proved too optimistic and additional facilities became an absolute necessity.

In April ComSeronSoPac¹⁵² attempted to alleviate the situation by allocating monthly 244 tons of shipping space for PT spares to be shipped to Treasury and Rendova. This did not produce the relief expected because of transshipment delays and "losses" at Guadalcanal. (It was amazing how proprietary spares, plainly marked for PT's could "disappear" while awaiting transshipment at Guadalcanal.)

¹⁴⁹ Vide Logistics (c).

¹⁵⁰ ComMTBRonsPacStaff Materiel Officer Memo of 8 June 44.

¹⁵¹ ComMTBRonsSoPac ltr L8, Serial 022 of 10 Feb 44.

¹⁵² ComSeronSoPac ltr, Serial 01604 of 20 Apr 44.

[APC 33]

On 20 April¹⁵³ the APC 33 was placed under operational control of C.T.G. 30.3 for the purpose of running shuttle trips between sources of supply in the rear areas and the operating areas. This craft, however, was of limited assistance in the combat area because of its slow speed and the necessity of forming with slow convoys. As the area became more stabilized its value increased.

[USS STRATFORD (AP-41)]

Although documentary evidence is conspicuously lacking in regard to the exact relationship existing between the USS STRATFORD (AP-41) and the PT command, casual comments in "MOSQUITO BITES" and in semi-official memoranda of PT personnel leave no doubt that the USS STRATFORD afforded valuable logistic support to motor torpedo boats operating in the Solomons. The USS STRATFORD was not under the operational control or administrative control of Commodore Moran in any of his various capacities; however, in view of the fact her primary mission as a unit of C.T.U. 32.5.8 was to make inter-island shuttle trips carrying cargo and personnel, she soon became an unofficial member of the PT organization. In addition to cargo space officially allocated for PT spares, numerous "unofficial arrangements" were made between PT operating personnel and the ship which materially expedited the transshipment of priority PT cargo between various bases in the Solomon and New Hebrides Islands. The appearance of the USS STRATFORD at a PT base was always a welcome sight.

Attempts were made during June¹⁵⁴ to have spares routed directly from the States to Treasury Island, but ComSeronSoPac's representative maintained that this plan was not feasible and that shipments would continue to be made to Espiritu Santo and then transhipped.¹⁵⁵

Arrangements were also made at this time to have SPDC, Noumea, and Espiritu Santo forward advance bills of lading, etc., to facilitate tracing of shipments. However, the value of this information was in direct ratio to the degree of reliability of the mail service.

Thus, shipping facilities, or the lack of shipping facilities, produced an extremely critical situation wherein, even if it was possible to secure proprietary spares from the States, it was highly improbable that an adequate supply could be "broken loose" from supply depots in the rear areas to provide adequate maintenance for the MTB's in the operating areas.

(f) Fuel.

The methods of procuring fuel and fueling boats varied with the exigency of the moment and the facilities available.

¹⁵³ C.T.G. 31.1 dispatch 202329 of April.

¹⁵⁴ ComMTBRonsPacFlt Staff Materiel Officer Memo of 8 June 44.

¹⁵⁵ It is known from interviews conducted with officers familiar with this period that arrangements were made with SCAT for an allotment of air cargo space for transshipment of priority cargo to forward areas. However, files available have revealed no documentary evidence on this matter.

Where docks had been constructed the usual practice was to procure 100-octane gasoline from the nearest aviation unit and fuel the boats from trucks at the dock. However, in the formative days of a new PT base the boats were often fueled from drums on docks or from drums carried in bowser boats, gasoline buoys, or from YOG's depending on what was available.

Although the tender, USS JAMESTOWN (AGP-3) had facilities to carry 23,000 gallons of 100-octane gasoline, these facilities were rarely used because: (1) all ship's activities ceased during fueling of a boat, and (2) the relatively small capacity would have necessitated frequent refueling of the tender. Although the USS VARUNA (AGP-5) reported for duty with ComMTBRonsSoPac on 13 February 1944 and the USS MOBJACK (AGP-7) reported on 14 January 1944 (USS VARUNA, gasoline capacity – 60,000 gallons; USS MOBJACK, gasoline capacity – 80,000 gallons), neither ship was utilized to any great extent for fueling PT boats.

In spite of the hazards incumbent to the use of "jury-rigged" fueling facilities, the constant shifting of the available tenders from base to base coupled with the fact that fueling PT boats necessitated interruption of their primary duties – repairing PT boats – made it impractical to depend on these vessels as the primary source of fuel. Each Area Commander made the necessary arrangements to procure fuel from either a local aviation unit (Army, Navy, or Marine Corps) or, in lieu of this, from the local Advanced Base Naval Unit.

(g) Bases

In contrast to the general policy of the SEVENTH Fleet motor torpedo boat command, which utilized floatation equipment and such tenders as available to establish temporary bases in the operating areas, the majority of those bases established in the SoPac area were of a more permanent nature.

In the early days of the Solomons campaign such base facilities as existed were the product of the energies of the various squadron personnel with such assistance as they could obtain from SeaBee units. With the arrival of Motor Torpedo Boat Base Units the major physical facilities (pontoon equipment, quonset huts, cranes, etc.) improved considerably; however, these bases were poorly equipped with proprietary spares and often the bases were not established until several months subsequent to the date motor torpedo boats first began operating in a new area. Furthermore, the personnel attached to these MTB Base Units had had no operating experience with motor torpedo boats and were usually totally unfamiliar with their requirements. The Motor Torpedo Boat Base Units were under the administrative and operational control of ComSeronSoPac.

During January and February of 1944 it was apparent the effect of ComSoPac's directive¹⁵⁶ placing all small boat pools, landing craft repair facilities, and MTB Base Units under the cognizance of ComSeronSoPac, was deleterious to the logistic support and readiness of motor torpedo boats. Considerable difficulty was encountered in attempting to coordinate motor torpedo boat operations with MTB Base Units. The lack of experienced and qualified personnel in MTB Base Units was serious;

¹⁵⁶ ComSoPac ltr 001802 dated 11 Sep 43.

the inability of motor torpedo boat personnel to agree with commanders of Naval Advanced Base Units in matters pertaining to the layout of the bases was productive of long delays (viz. Treasury); the inability of Officers-in-Charge of MTB Base Units and Commanders Naval Advanced Base Units to undertake long-range planning for the logistic support of motor torpedo boats because of lack of familiarity with the requirements of the type posed a serious problem, necessitating emergency measures at a later date by ComMTBRonsSoPac to augment inadequate supplies; and the delays in staging and moving MTB Base Units to the forward areas placed an undue load on the operating personnel. Vigorous representations¹⁵⁷ were made by ComMTBRonsSoPac protesting this policy. Every possible effort was made to have the operational and administrative control of these MTB Base Units returned to the type commander, in order that the logistic support and readiness of a highly specialized type of craft would be controlled by qualified and experienced personnel.

In the early part of January 1944¹⁵⁸ ComMTBRonsSoPac established a system that augmented and in many instances paralleled the functions of the MTB Base Units: PT Operating Bases were established under the direct control of the Area Commanders, who in turn were responsible to ComMTBRonsSoPac. A personal staff was assigned each Area Commander to assist him in the operation and maintenance of boats operating in his area. In general, these PT Operating Bases consisted of some fifty men and officers and some fifty tons of gear.¹⁵⁹ In some instances (Lambu Lambu and Torokina), these units were established where it was not contemplated to establish an MTB Base Unit, but where fueling, messing, berthing, and minor repair facilities would be required for a short period of time. In other instances (Treasury, Green and Emirau) these units became the advanced guard to establish interim facilities until the MTB Base Units could be established and placed in operation. After the MTB Base Units were operative, the original PT Operating Base personnel and equipment served to augment the new facilities; the personnel served in an advisory capacity to the MTB Base Units, as part of the staff of the Area Commander, and as the receiving and distribution agency in the area for PT spares which were assembled by ComMTBRonsSoPac at Rendova and forwarded to the combat areas. This procedure reduced the necessity of those organizations and personnel unfamiliar with the logistic support of motor torpedo boats requisitioning and distributing spares.

During February and March of 1944 ComMTBRonsSoPac initiated further action in an effort to increase the effectiveness of the logistic support provided by the local Advanced Base Naval Units and the MTB Base Units.¹⁶⁰ These letters detailed the logistic requirements of motor torpedo boat squadrons necessary for definite periods of time and were promulgated so that other commands would be able to anticipate the needs and plan accordingly.

¹⁵⁷ Commodore Moran's memo, serial 005, dated 11 Jan 44 to Rear Adm. Cobb (ComSeronSoPac); Commodore Moran's memo, serial 0019 dated 20 Jan 44 to Captain Dupre (Staff ComSoPac (PT Readiness)); ComMTBRonsSoPac ltr, serial 0040, dated 26 Feb 44 to ComSoPac.

¹⁵⁸ ComMTBRonsSoPac ltr A3-1 (2), dated 31 Dec 43.

¹⁵⁹ ComMTBRonsSoPac ltr, Serial 0013, dated 14 Jan 44.

¹⁶⁰ ComMTBRonsSoPac ltr, serial 0037 to ComNavBase, Green Island, dated 25 Feb 44 and ComMTBRonsSoPac ltr, serial 0038 to ComNavBase, Forearm, dated 3 Mar 44.

In April 1944¹⁶¹ Commodore Moran forwarded to all Prospective Naval Base Commanders, Officers in Charge of Motor Torpedo Boat Base Units staging, and Prospective Motor Torpedo Boat Area Commanders a detailed plan covering the “construction and establishment of future Motor Torpedo Boat Operating and Repair Bases”. In this letter it was pointed out that many of the Naval Base Commanders and their staffs, as well as Officers in Charge of MTB Base Units, were unfamiliar with the PT operational and repair requirements or the facilities necessary to effect these. An offer was made by ComMTBRonsSoPac to assign temporarily one or more experienced PT officers to each Prospective Naval Base Commander for liaison duties in connection with the establishment of future bases. However, the voluminous correspondence was not productive of any immediate action.

Motor Torpedo Boat Base Units were established in the SoPac area as follows:

PT Base 2

This base had been established prior to January 1944 at Espiritu Santo and it served primarily as a major engine overhaul base (MEO). Approximately fifty engines were overhauled each month.

PT Base 3

This base, established prior to January 1944, was located at Tulagi, and it supplemented the original establishment set up by squadron personnel in the early days of the Solomons campaign. This was utilized as a major overhaul and repair base and continued to function in this capacity until the middle of April 1944, whereupon, in view of the westward movement of hostilities and the establishment of similar facilities nearer the actual scene of combat, the usable equipment of this base was re-allocated to augment the equipment of PT Base 7.

PT Base 7

This base was located at Green Island, having been moved in shortly after the landing on 17 February, and was in operation by the latter part of March 1944. Facilities were available for routine repairs and overhaul. The re-allocation of Base 3 equipment proved invaluable to the operation of this base; PT Base 7 had been shuttled around the Solomons area for approximately one year and by the time it was placed into operation much of the equipment had been lost or damaged beyond repair.

PT Base 8

This base was staging at Tulagi but was finally abandoned and the equipment was re-allocated to PT Base 3 prior to its disestablishment and to PT Base 11.

PT Base 9

PT Base 9 was located on Stirling Island in the Treasury Island group, having supplemented the original PT Operating Base equipment brought in with the landing. Although the motor torpedo

¹⁶¹ ComMTBRonsSoPac ltr, serial 0059, dated 24 Apr 1944.

boats began operating from Treasury on 27 October 1943, this MTB Base Unit did not arrive until February 1944, nor did it become fully operative until early April 1944 at which time it was completely equipped to undertake major repair and overhaul work.

PT Base 11

PT Base 11 was established prior to January 1944 on Bau Island adjacent to Rendova, B.S.I. It was a major overhaul and repair base and was considered the headquarters base. The original MTB Base Unit facilities had been expanded to include an area maintained by ComMTBRonsSoPac to collect all available proprietary spares and non-technical stock required by motor torpedo boats and to re-issue this material in accordance with the previously discussed logistics plan.

PT Base 16

This base was located at Emirau and provided repair and routine overhaul facilities for the boats operating in that area. Considerable coordination apparently had been effected amongst the commands concerned prior to the landing and this base unit was moved in very soon after the landing on 20 March 1944 and was operative by the middle of April, in notable contrast to PT Base 9 which did not become fully operative until approximately five months after the landings at Treasury.

PT Operating Bases were established in each new operating area by ComMTBRonsSoPac as previously indicated. The only PT Operating Base that continued in existence without being augmented by an MTB Base Unit during this period was that at Torokina. Motor torpedo boats moved into this area on 3 November 1943 and a PT Operating Base was immediately established on Puruata Island. It continued to function as a PT Operating Base until 25 April 1944, whereupon it was disestablished. Boats requiring repairs in excess of available facilities were sent to Treasury or to Rendova. The PT Operating Base at Treasury served a vital function, as considerable delay was experienced in establishing this base as previously indicated. This PT Operating Base was augmented with a crane barge and pontoon drydock as an interim measure.

It is apparent that the policy of withdrawing MTB Base Units from the cognizance of the type commander (ComMTBRonsSoPac) and placing them under the cognizance of ComSeronSoPac, and more directly under the cognizance of the Commander Naval Advanced Base Unit as ComSeronSoPac's representative in the local area, was definitely not conducive to effective organization and logistic support. This situation was not clarified during this period in spite of the voluminous correspondence and the vigorous objections of ComMTBRonsSoPac. This policy of having an organization unfamiliar with the capabilities and requirements of motor torpedo boats provide logistic support and assure logistic readiness would collapse completely unless the closest possible liaison was maintained between operating personnel and base organizations. The success or failure of an MTB Base Unit was in direct proportion to (1) the cooperation effected between the area commander and his staff, the squadron commanders and boat personnel on one hand, and the officer in charge and the PT base personnel on

the other, and (2) the amount of additional gear and spares which MTBRonsSoPac was able to provide to augment the existing facilities and equipment.

(h) Tenders.

Motor torpedo boat tenders (AGP's) operating in the SoPac area during this period were the USS JAMESTOWN (AGP-3); USS VARUNA (AGP-5) and USS MOBJACK (AGP-7). However, the USS JAMESTOWN departed for overhaul on 4 February 1944 prior to the establishment of ComMTBRonsPacFlt. Her facilities were extremely limited as the ship was a converted yacht and was not designed as a PT tender. She was not equipped to provide the facilities necessary to service motor torpedo boats during initial landings and was held at Rendova where greatest utilization of her shop facilities, such as they were, could be made. She made numerous shuttle trips between forward areas and rear bases, transporting personnel for "operational leave" and picking up general cargo and PT spares.

The USS MOBJACK which reported to ComMTBRonsSoPac on 14 January 1944 was a converted AVP-type tender. She was originally designed to accompany motor torpedo boats on initial landings, providing logistic support pending the establishment of a PT Operating Base or an MTB Base Unit. The USS MOBJACK was a great improvement over previous tenders: She had sufficient fire power to make her participation in initial landings practicable; she had a gasoline capacity of 80,000 gallons (as contrasted with the 23,000 gallon capacity of the USS JAMESTOWN); she could provide fresh provisions and potable water to motor torpedo boats during the invasion period; and her shops were sufficient to effect emergency and minor repairs and to service ordnance equipment. The USS MOBJACK was not equipped with facilities to haul a PT boat; however, if a PT boat sustained serious hull damage during invasion periods, there was rarely little time to devote to repairs. If necessary, temporary repairs could be effected and the damaged boat removed to rear bases to effect major repairs, or the boat was placed temporarily out of service in the area pending the arrival of drydocking facilities.

The most successful staging of motor torpedo boats for forward movement was effected with the USS MOBJACK when she supported MTB Ron 11 subsequent to the invasion of Emirau on 20 March 1944 and remained there until MTB Base 16 had been placed in a fully operational status, whereupon the USS MOBJACK returned to Treasury arriving there on 19 May. She remained at Treasury until 7 July, augmenting the facilities of MTB Base 9.

The USS VARUNA was a converted LST-type tender with facilities available for effecting major repairs. An "A" frame was installed enabling the tender to lift motor torpedo boats a sufficient distance out of the water to make repairs to underwater gear and the bottom. She had a fuel capacity of 60,000 gallons. The ordnance and engineering shops were well equipped and the tender proved a valuable asset to motor torpedo boat operations. In view of the low degree of maneuverability incumbent upon this type of ship and the relatively weak fire power, she was not utilized to service PT's on initial landings. She reported to ComMTBRonsSoPac for duty at Rendova on 13 February 1944 and was ordered to Treasury on 15 February where she remained until 29 February when she departed for duty at Green Island. Here she augmented the repair facilities of MTB Base 7.

The arrival of the USS VARUNA and the USS MOBJACK was a long step forward in the solution of the maintenance and repair problems confronting motor torpedo boat operating personnel. At long last ships were provided that were designed and equipped to perform a specific mission—tending motor torpedo boats—though numerous improvements were yet to come.

(i) Personnel.

Lack of sufficient trained personnel causing curtailment of operational leave and recreation and rotation of personnel posed a serious problem for ComMTBRonsSoPac in the early part of 1944.¹⁶²

The complement of early PT squadrons consisted of two (2) officers and eight (8) men for each boat with a small base force consisting of yeomen, pharmacist's mates, and other miscellaneous ratings. Generally, a PT boat crew (enlisted) consisted of three (3) machinist's mates (later changed to motor machinist's mates), a radioman, a ship's cook, a torpedoman's mate, a quartermaster, and either a seaman or a gunner's mate. With the increase of the armament of a PT boat additional personnel, usually gunner's mates or seamen, became a necessity.

Although both officer and enlisted personnel were often obtained direct from general detail, the majority of the personnel were graduates of the Motor Torpedo Boat Training Center (Melville, R. I.). Upon completion of their training they were assigned either to new construction or to reliefs for personnel operating in the combat area. MTBSTC allocated personnel to the various areas (with the confirmation of BuPers) and those personnel assigned as reliefs for personnel attached to SoPac PTs were ordered to report to ComMTBRonsSoPac for further assignment. ComMTBRonsSoPac maintained accurate records of each individual's combat record and length of present tour of duty and when the individual had fulfilled all requirements he was returned to the United States for rotation, if the necessary relief was available. Those individuals returned for rotational leave and reassignment were ordered to report to MTBSTC upon completion of their 30-day leave. They were then given refresher courses and additional instruction in new equipment prior to reassignment.

However, because of the scarcity of trained personnel being supplied from MTBSTC and the mobility of PT operations, serious difficulties were encountered by ComMTBRonsSoPac in maintaining key personnel in the most vital areas. With the establishment of PT Operating Bases and Area Commander's staffs it was obvious that the existing personnel organization had to be revised. In Commodore Moran's directive of 31 December 1943¹⁶³ the necessary changes were effected to ensure a flexible organization at PT Operating Bases wherein the Area Commanders could be relieved without affecting the base; squadrons could be relieved without detriment to Area Commander or base; and base personnel could be relieved without affecting the whole.

To effect this change ComMTBRonsSoPac directed that, wherein prior to this directive each squadron had maintained its own base force personnel, all squadron personnel other than those "regularly

¹⁶² ComMTBRonsSoPac ltr, Serial 0013, dated 14 Jan 44.

¹⁶³ ComMTBRonsSoPac ltr A3-1 (2), dated 31 Dec 43.

assigned to boats as members of regular or relief crews and operating as such” were to be transferred to ComMTBRonsSoPac for redistribution and assignment by him. ComMTBRonsSoPac further pointed out that the influx of trained officer and enlisted personnel from MTBSTC should be sufficient in the future to allow rotation of personnel at the end of twelve (12) months of duty in the area instead of eighteen (18) months, as heretofore, and still provide sufficient personnel for several reserve crews for each squadron.

However, in January 1944¹⁶⁴ ComMTBRonsSoPac notified ComSoPac that “lack of sufficient trained personnel, operating boats, and spare parts, and the necessity for maintaining adequate patrols in the combat area have been a great strain on both personnel and spares”. This statement was given wider distribution when portions of this letter were reprinted in the March issue of “MOSQUITO BITES”. Other type craft, particularly aircraft and submarines, were assigned definite operation and overhaul schedules as well as definite policies in regard to relief, rotation, leave and recreation of personnel. This had not been established with regard to PT’s and the constant combat patrols with frequent close quarter engagements indigenous to PT duty coupled with the rigors of existence in tropical battle areas for long periods of time produced a marked decrease in efficiency and morale, particularly after twelve (12) months. Commodore Moran stated¹⁶⁵ that “removal of personnel to back areas after three months in the combat area will be necessary and operational leave and recreation after a period of six months appears to be indicated”.

Although considerable personnel had been received from the States, the number was insufficient to meet the requirements created by (1) the increase of boat complement to fourteen (14) men to compensate for additional armament, radar, etc., (2) the creation of a reserve crew for each boat as directed by VCNO, and (3) the filling of vacancies caused by death, injuries, sickness, and those individuals returned to the United States for new construction. As no immediate relief was in sight and as the situation became increasingly critical, arrangements were made with ComSoPac for the transfer of personnel from general detail to PT duty, four hundred and twenty-nine (429) enlisted men being transferred during the month of May. Although only fifty-eight (58) enlisted men were received from MTBSTC during this month, the additional personnel obtained from general detail enabled ComMTBRonsSoPac to return ninety-seven (97) enlisted men to MTBSTC for rotational leave and reassignment and to send eighteen (18) officers and one hundred (100) enlisted men to New Zealand for operational leave.

Every possible effort was expended to establish and adhere to a definite policy of a twelve-month tour of duty for boat personnel and an eighteen-month tour of duty for shore based personnel and to provide for operational leave after six (6) months of combat duty. It was some time, however, before theory became practice.

[end of Part II]

¹⁶⁴ ComMTBRonsSoPac ltr, Serial 0013, dated 4 Jan 44

¹⁶⁵ ComMTBRonsSoPac ltr, Serial 0013, dated 4 Jan 44.