

OUR NAVY, A FIGHTING TEAM

GUNBOATS

Our gunboats range from the ocean-going 1936 edition, the *Erie* and *Charleston*, to the river gunboat of the *Luzon* type.

Both the *Erie* and *Charleston* were designed to act as flagships of the Special Service Squadron, the "Banana Fleet," in Central American waters.

These ships have 2000 tons displacement, are 328 feet in length, and have a speed of 20 knots. The main battery consists of three turrets of one 6-inch gun each. A good-sized anti-aircraft battery completes the armament. Each ship carries a folding plane. The cruising radius is listed as 8000 miles.

Knowing that these ships would operate in the tropics the compartments on the ship were made roomy and comfortable and good ventilation was provided. Also there is quite a bit of extra space where troops can be carried if there is a need for them during landing operations.

The mission of these ships was to cruise in Central American waters and protect American lives, shipping, and U. S.-owned interests ashore in case of insurrections or revolutions, which were prevalent for many years in those regions. Whenever a newspaper announced that a movement was on foot in a certain Central American port to overthrow the present incumbent in office, there was always a terse statement at the end of the dispatch to the effect that a United States gunboat had recently arrived in port, an excellent indication that our intelligence officers were keeping in close touch with the various political situations that were continually brewing.

Prior to building the above type the Special Service Squadron was composed of the older types of gunboats, the *Galveston*, *Sacramento* (shifted from China Station in 1939), *Paducah*, and *Dubuque*. The *Sacramento* was completed in 1914, is 1140 tons, 226 feet in length, with a speed of 12.5 knots, and carrying three 4-inch guns and nine aircraft guns. This type was preceded by the *Paducah* and *Dubuque* type of 1903. These gunboats are 1085 tons, 200 feet long, and have a battery of four 4-inch guns and a number of 6-pounders for AA. Their speed is 12.5 knots. This old type had only a single screw.

On the China Station constant gunboat patrols were necessary to protect our nationals, shipping, and interests ashore against marauding Chinese warlords and pirates. For the North China Patrol the *Tulsa*, 1270 tons, 241 feet in length, and mounting three 4-inch guns and a number of anti-aircraft guns, was used. The *Asheville*, of the same type, held down a similar post for the South China Patrol, basing either at Hong Kong or Canton.

For patrolling the Chinese rivers, mainly the Yangtze, we constructed, in 1928, a number of twin-screw, shallow-draft gunboats. These varied in size from the 560-ton,

210-foot, 16-knot *Mindanao* to the 370-ton *Wake*, 159 feet long and with a speed of 14.5 knots.

Of the original number the *Panay* was bombed and sunk by the Japs on December 12, 1937, and almost precipitated the war four years ahead of time. There was a strong feeling among our armed forces at the time that the Japs were trying to force the inevitable war by that act, and vigorous retaliation was urged. The Japs were not slow to detect the feeling and immediately made abject apologies.

The *Tutuila* was transferred to the Chinese Navy in March 1942 after the remainder of our Asiatic surface fleet faced inevitable destruction at Manila. The sinking of the *Oahu*, *Mindanao*, and *Luzon* at the second battle of Manila Bay will be described later in this chapter.

The *Wake*, acting as a station ship at Shanghai, was captured by the Japs on December 8, 1941.

This completes the story, for the time being, of our river gunboats, ships that did such yeoman service up and down the Yangtze, saving families from pirates, protecting many millions of dollars' worth of oil stores and tankers, keeping law and order up and down the turbulent river. Not a gunboat remains in our possession—they have either been sunk or are in other hands.

Dozens of converted yachts, from the 3000-ton *Vixen* to the tiny *Emerald*, have been acquired to work as patrols for Inland Patrol, examining and boarding ships, and maintaining patrols up to a dozen miles offshore. Their armament varies from machine guns to 4-inch guns and depth charges.