

Peril in the Java Sea

Any time more than one plane was sighted they were sure to be enemy.

—Lt. William L. Kabler citing an adage common in the Asiatic Fleet after its retirement south to the Netherlands East Indies following the Japanese invasion of the Philippines on 8 December 1941. This comment was in reference to there being no need to identify as the enemy two flights of planes approaching his ship, the USS *Heron*, on 31 December, which preceded a number of bombing, strafing and torpedo attacks on the seaplane tender.¹

The morning of 31 December 1941, the *Heron* (AVP-2) was proceeding on a southerly course in the Molucca Sea—a part of the western Pacific within the Netherlands (Dutch) East Indies—when she came under the first of a series of withering attacks from Japanese aircraft that day. The small seaplane tender was assigned to Patrol Wing Ten, part of the small United States Asiatic Fleet, which had been forced to leave the Philippines following the Japanese invasion of the Archipelago. When war broke out on 7 December (the 8th in the Philippines), the Wing consisted of the twenty-eight PBY-4 Catalinas of Patrol Squadron VP-101, ten light seaplanes of its utility squadron, and the seaplane tenders *Langley*, *Childs*, *William B. Preston*, and *Heron*.²

Catalinas were the most-produced flying boat of World War II and at 66 feet in length with a wingspan of 104 feet, were fairly good sized. The utility squadron's supporting seaplanes, four J2Fs, five OS2Us, and one SOC, were smaller. The Grumman J2F Duck was a single-engine amphibious biplane used for utility and air-sea rescue duties. The Vought OS2U Kingfisher was an observation floatplane, whose normal armament was .30-caliber machine guns and two 100-pound bombs. It was the successor for the Curtiss SOC Seagull, a single-engine scout observation biplane, which would continue to serve much longer than expected during the war.

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Photo 1-1



PBY-5A Catalina drops an aircraft torpedo during tests in 1942-1943. Patrol Wing Ten utilized the earlier model PBY-4 aircraft during the Defense of the Java Sea. U.S. Naval History and Heritage Command Photograph #NH 94118

Wing personnel were not surprised on 8 December, when they learned that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor. The Catalina pilots had received orders in late November to begin carrying out patrols to the west of Manila, along the coast of Indo-China across the South China Sea. Up until 2 December, plane crews detected nothing alarming. On that day, however, a sighting was made of twenty Japanese merchant ships, including troop transports, present in Cam Ranh Bay, French Indochina (now Vietnam). The following day, there were fifty ships, including cruisers and destroyers. On 4 December, they had vanished. Forty-eight hours later, British patrols from Singapore spotted the Japanese armada moving westward across the Gulf of Thailand. On the 5th, 6th, and 7th of December, Wing Ten aircraft on patrol from Manila met Japanese planes patrolling in the vicinity of the Luzon coastline. Although not yet at war with one another, there was tension associated with these meetings. “Each outfit, of course, had their machine guns manned, kept a wary eye on each other and avoided each other like stiff-legged dogs.”³

President Franklin D. Roosevelt was well aware that drumbeats warning of Japan’s militaristic intentions were drawing nearer. He sent Admiral Thomas C. Hart, commander-in-chief Asiatic Fleet, a message on 1 December with the highest-secrecy classification directing him to undertake a classified operation. (A detailed account is provided in my book *Battle Stars for the “Cactus Navy”*: *America’s Yachts and Fishing Vessels*

in World War II.) During hearings held in 1945, members of Congress stated their belief that this action—in which the patrol yacht *Isabel* was sent to reconnoiter Cam Ranh Bay with its heavy concentration of Japanese ships—had been intended to provoke a war with Japan.

JAPANESE INVASION OF THE PHILIPPINES

When Patrol Wing Ten received word that Pearl Harbor had been attacked, wartime watches were already in effect, planes were loaded with bombs with full crews and full allowances of ammunition aboard, and the Wing was ready in all respects for combat with the exception of final dispersal. Existing war plans directed seaplane tenders and aircraft to scatter to lakes, swamps, coves, bays or any other place with suitable cover and facilities. Prior to this action, the ships were situated as follows:

- *William B. Preston* (AVD-7) was at Davao Bay, Mindanao, in the southeastern Philippines, tending three Catalina seaplanes;
- *Heron* (AVP-2) was at the Balabac Straits—which connects the Sulu Sea in the southwestern Philippines with the South China Sea to the northwest—tending five OS2U Kingfishers;
- *Childs* (AVP-14) was on the east side of Manila Bay tending five Catalinas; and,
- *Langley* (AV-3), the flagship, was at Manila Bay as well, loading gas, oil, and stores.⁴

Nine of the remaining eighteen PBYs were operating from a lake called Laguna de Bay, located sixty miles southeast of Manila near the town of Los Banos. The others were at Olongapo in Subic Bay, sixty miles north of Manila. In ensuing days, the planes at Davao Bay conducted searches to the southeast of the Philippines scouting for enemy forces, those at Balabac Straits to the southwest of the archipelago toward Borneo, and those at Manila Bay and Subic Bay, to the west and northwest of Luzon.⁵

Japanese control of the skies quickly made it unfeasible for Patrol Wing Ten to remain in the Philippines. Enemy dive bombers and destroyers chased the *William B. Preston* out of Davao Bay and, on 12 December, Japanese “Zeros” attacked and destroyed seven PBYs refueling on the water in Subic Bay at Olongapo. By Sunday, 14 December, the Japanese were sending flights over Luzon daily and they had everything their own way over Manila Bay. This untenable position necessitated relocating the Wing’s seaplanes and tenders southward. Such a move would also provide a reprieve for personnel

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fatigued by combat-related duties. *Childs* had been tending planes at night, which “meant that the crew was at [their] General Quarters stations a good bit of the day and they were at their fueling station for servicing the PBYS most of the night and it was becoming a 24-hour schedule and they were getting very little sleep.”⁶

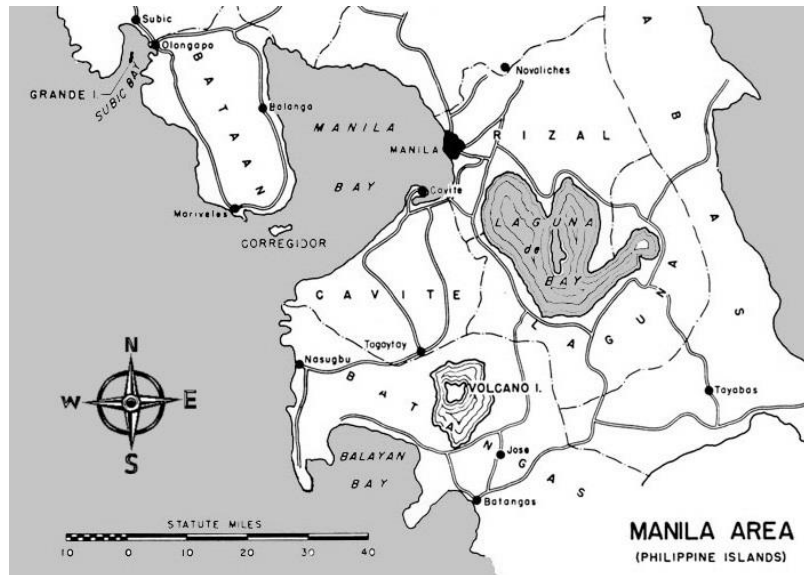
There was never any expectation that the Asiatic Fleet could remain in the Philippine Islands. The existing war plan charged it to support the U.S. Army presence in the Philippines as long as the defense of the islands continued. However, due to the fleet’s small size, all that could be reasonably expected, should Japanese forces invade the archipelago, would be for it to retire or fight a delaying action. Ultimately both actions occurred. Following receipt of Navy Department orders on 20 November 1941 to fall back, Admiral Hart had begun to move his fleet southward.⁷

Patrol Wing Ten maintained its patrols until the fleet was safely down in southern Borneo and then brought up the rear. When the Wing withdrew from the Manila area, only seventeen Catalinas remained, of which eleven could fly. The six disabled PBYS had gasoline tanks, fuselages and wings full of holes from Japanese aircraft machine guns and shipboard anti-aircraft guns. The two remaining J2F Ducks also made their way south, crammed with five-gallon cans of gasoline to help extend their range. They landed where they could and gassed every so often until they reached Balikpapan, on the east coast of Borneo. They, and four OS2U Kingfishers that joined them, comprised the remaining planes of the utility squadron.⁸

Departing the Manila area on 14 December, *Childs* proceeded southwest to Cavite to load bombs, and then to Cebu in the southern Philippines to fuel before continuing southward to Balikpapan, Borneo. While she was moored at the Standard Oil dock at Cebu, an old Filipino man approached the ship. Lt. Comdr. John L. Pratt, the tender’s commanding officer, described the man who apparently had previously served in the United States Navy:

You could see that he had washed, and pressed, and polished his uniform, which showed signs of many years’ wear. He came up to the dock, looked up at the bridge saluted and said, “Captain, I am ready for duty.” Needless to say, we took him on board, and I believe he is still with Patrol Wing 10 and very proud of it, and we were very proud of him.⁹

Map 1-1



Manila Bay area of Luzon Island, Philippine Islands

Source: http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USN/Building_Bases/maps/bases2-p391.jpg

JOURNEY OF THE SEAPLANE TENDERS SOUTH

While *Childs* was in transit to Balikpapan, a Japanese submarine trailed her for almost a day. It would show up astern occasionally, but she was easily able to outdistance it each time, thereby avoiding attack. From Balikpapan, *Childs* and the other three seaplane tenders—the *Heron*, *William B. Preston*, and *Langley*—moved farther south into the Netherlands East Indies. Stretching 314 feet in length, the *Childs* and *William B. Preston* were sister ships; former destroyers commissioned in 1920. *Heron*, a 188-foot ex-World War I minesweeper, was smaller and two years older. At 542 feet in length the *Langley* was the largest of the three ships, and of even greater age, having been commissioned on 7 April 1913 as the collier *Jupiter*. Following conversion to the Navy's first aircraft carrier in 1920, she was renamed *Langley*. In 1937 the Navy converted her to a seaplane tender (AV-3). The *Langley* had been the first tender to leave the Philippines. She slipped out of Manila Bay under the cover of darkness the evening of 8 December and travelled south with the fleet oilers *Pecos* (AO-6) and *Trinity* (AO-13), escorted by the destroyers *Barker* (DD-213) and *Paul Jones* (DD-239). The Navy, judging the *Langley* to be particularly vulnerable to

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destruction by the enemy, sent her to Darwin, Australia, to serve as an aviation support ship. Because she had been designed to haul coal, the *Langley's* designers had given her large cargo holds, and not the multiple compartments found in warships, which divide the interior area of a ship's hull into smaller spaces by the use of structural members. This made her more vulnerable to sinking in the event of battle damage. Moreover, she had only a modest outfit of anti-aircraft guns to protect herself from attack by enemy planes.¹⁰

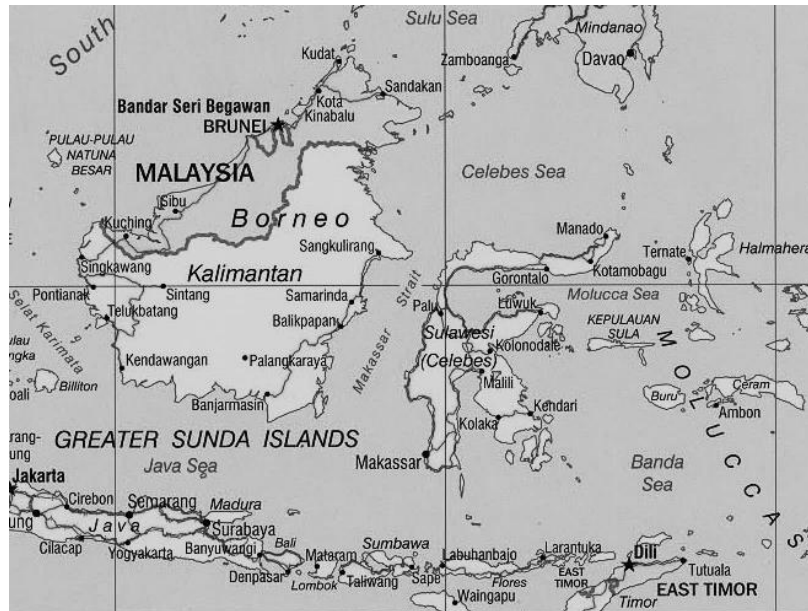
Map 1-2



Philippine Islands: Luzon south to Mindanao

The tenders *Heron* and *William B. Preston* arrived at Balikpapan on 16 December, where aviation gasoline and fuel oil were available, and then proceeded to Soerabaja, a large port city in northeast Java. (This city is today Surabaya, Indonesia, and this name is used hereafter.) Aboard the *Heron*, crewmembers were very interested in Java and in enjoying some fine Dutch beer. There proved to be girls and good restaurants, as well as beer ashore, but leisure activities had to compete with the business at hand. All four tenders had reached Surabaya, but orders sent *Childs* and *Heron* to Ambon, a seaport and the main town on Ambon Island, a thousand miles to the northeast. The *Langley* was dispatched with the Wing's remaining three OS2Us to Darwin, the capital city of Australia's Northern Territory, situated on the Timor Sea. After a short period of supporting anti-submarine patrols from that port, she was ordered to Fremantle, 2,260 nautical miles southward along Australia's western coast. From Fremantle, her planes flew anti-submarine patrols and escorted Allied ships traversing nearby waters.¹¹

Map 1-3



Southern Philippines, Malaysia and Borneo (formerly Borneo) and Indonesia (formerly the Netherlands East Indies)

The relocation of the *Langley* to Australia left the *William B. Preston* at Surabaya, and the *Childs* and *Heron* at Ambon, to tend planes that would serve as the U.S. Navy's "eyes of the fleet" for the defense of the Netherlands East Indies. A newly formed ABDA (American-British-Dutch-Australian) command, encompassing all Allied forces in South East Asia, had orders to hold the Japanese north of the Malay area for as long as possible. By this action, it was hoped the Allies could retain control of the Indian Ocean and the western sea approaches to Australia. The patrol wing was to conduct flights over the sea passages north of the Malay barrier in order to give adequate warning of any Japanese movements in force southward. The barrier was a notional line that ran down the Malayan Peninsula, through Singapore and the southernmost islands of the Dutch East Indies.¹²

Heron loaded the Wing's two Grumman J2F Ducks aboard and left Surabaya on Christmas Day, 1941. She reached Ambon four days later on 29 December. Ambon would prove to be a fairly good seaplane base; there was considerable gasoline available and it offered a good harbor with a ramp to haul out planes to work on and repair. *Childs* arrived with one OS2U, and the three planes immediately started to carry out patrols, searching to the north into the Halmahera Islands (the site of a Japanese naval base), the Molucca Passage, and adjacent Molucca Sea. Ten Catalina PBV-4s soon joined these aircraft, after damage they had received in the Philippines was "patched up" by the Dutch air station at Surabaya.¹³

Childs made herself at home at Ambon, finding a coral ridge along the shoreline she could moor to and endeavor to hide from detection by the enemy. Her crew cut down palm trees and lashed them to the ship's masts and stacks, and covered the remaining topside areas with palm fronds. This effort to look like part of the scenery, while assisting the shore facilities in rearming and refueling planes, was undertaken for self-preservation during Japanese air raids on island facilities.¹⁴

HERON DISPATCHED TO AID DESTROYER PEARY

Heron was sent from Ambon on 29 December to assist the *Peary* (DD-226), which had been attacked by two groups of aircraft the previous day while making the run south from Manila. By evading dropped bombs and torpedoes, the destroyer had escaped harm from a quartet of Japanese bombers with only minor strafing damage. However, an Australian PBV out on patrol had sighted the enemy aircraft, reported them, and misidentified the *Peary* as Japanese. As a result, three Australian Lockheed Hudson bombers, based at Ambon, appeared

that evening and made two runs each on the destroyer. Shrapnel from near bomb misses killed one crewman and wounded two others, perforated the ship's hull plating in several places, including the steering compartment, and severed the steering cables.¹⁵

Steering by manual movement of the rudder, the *Peary* shaped a course across the Molucca Sea. In early morning on 29 December, she arrived at the tiny island of Maitara—located across a channel from Ternate, a much larger member of the Maluku group (also known as the Moluccas)—and moored to palm trees on its northeast side. *Heron* arrived at Ternate in early evening the following day. After four hours spent trying to convince local authorities that she and *Peary*, for whom she was searching, were American ships, she was informed that the destroyer had sailed earlier. Having failed to find her, *Heron* left to make the return transit to Ambon.¹⁶

HERON SURVIVES MULTIPLE AIRCRAFT ATTACKS

In mid-morning the following day, 31 December, *Heron* sighted a four-engine seaplane approaching at a low level. Because it resembled a Sikorsky VS-42 flying boat, a type flown by the Dutch, the ship's commanding officer, Lt. William L. Kabler, USN, ordered his gunners to hold fire until positive identification was made. As two “red meatballs” under the wings of the Japanese Kawanishi H6K “Mavis” became visible, all the ship's guns—two 3-inch mounts and four .50-cal. machine guns—opened. At 0930, the aircraft came in on a bombing run, but apparently machine gun fire discouraged it from dropping any ordnance on its first pass.¹⁷

The plane climbed to altitude and came back in on another attack. *Heron* maneuvered violently to avoid dropped 100-pound bombs, and they fell well clear of her. A third attack followed, but again caused no harm. About that time, a rainsquall developed to the southwest and the seaplane tender ran for the shelter it offered. Kabler believed that by these means he had evaded the enemy. However, at about 1100 when *Heron* came out of the squall, the plane was off her starboard beam, sitting on the water waiting patiently for the ship to reemerge. The aircraft continued to shadow the seaplane tender until mid-afternoon, when six more Mavis—two sections of three patrol planes each—arrived.¹⁸

About 1520, one of the sections broke off from the other and came in on a horizontal bombing attack. The first pass was apparently not to the planes' liking, and they swung around and came in up wind on a second attack. A third attack followed. Each time, the *Heron* maneuvered to avoid the dropped bombs. The second section then

tried its luck. On the first run, 3-inch rounds hit one of the planes, which started smoking, dropped out of the formation, and retired northward. The two remaining aircraft made one more pass. As before, Kabler was able to dodge the free falling ordnance through rudder commands. Up to this point, three aircraft had dropped twenty-two 100-pound bombs, all of which the ship had managed to avoid. However, there would be no reprieve for *Heron* and her crew as still more enemy aircraft—five twin-engine land-based bombers, and three addition four-engine patrol planes—arrived overhead.¹⁹

The former were Mitsubishi G3M “Nell” bombers. Three weeks earlier, groups of this type and Mitsubishi G4M “Betty” bombers had attacked and sunk the battleship HMS *Prince of Wales* and the battlecruiser HMS *Repulse* off the eastern coast of Malaya. News of this tragedy stunned British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, who immediately recognized that British and American naval forces in the region now faced much graver damage:

In all the war, I never received a more direct shock.... As I turned over and twisted in bed the full horror of the news sank in upon me. There were no British or American ships in the Indian Ocean or the Pacific except the American survivors of Pearl Harbor, who were hastening back to California. Over all this vast expanse of waters Japan was supreme, and we everywhere were weak and naked.²⁰

The bombers made a pass over *Heron* but, apparently not liking the run, did not release any bombs. At 1600, after proceeding down wind and reversing course, they came in on a run dropping sticks of 100-pound bombs. The term “stick” denoted a group of several bombs, falling one above the other, straight down. The seaplane tender was unable to avoid them all. A shrapnel-loaded, high-explosive bomb hit a shackle near the top of her mainmast and detonated on contact, blasting holes of considerable depth in the steel mast, destroying one shroud shackle and block, slacking and damaging all shrouds, and dropping the boat boom on the motor launch in the starboard skids. The blast radiated in all directions from the point of impact. Shrapnel went through the 1 ¼-inch thick steel engine room hatch and ricocheted around the space. A bomb splinter penetrated the manhole cover (bronze ½-inch thick) to the rudder yoke compartment, located about seventy feet aft of the impact. Three other bombs hit the water and detonated off the ship’s port bow at a distance of forty-five feet. Hot shrapnel penetrated her side (¼-inch plate) in about twenty-five places and started fires in the paint locker

and commissary storeroom located on the upper level of the forward hold. Kabler described the bomb-blast damage to *Heron* and carnage among the crewmen topside:

This attack damaged the ship considerably. Pieces of shrapnel from the bomb hit on the mainmast, cut all the stays to the boat booms, and injured most of the gun crew of the machine guns there. The near misses off the port bow set the paint locker in the forward store room on fire, damaged the port three inch gun and killed one of the lookouts and injured all of the gun crew on the port three inch gun and all the gun crews on the port machine guns.²¹

Photo 1-2



Evasion of Destruction by Richard DeRosset portrays a strafing run by three Japanese “Mavis” flying boats following their unsuccessful torpedo attack on the USS *Heron* (AVP-2) on 31 December 1942. *Heron* shot down one of the aircraft with her starboard 3-inch gun; her port gun had been disabled by earlier combat action. This final attack followed a series of earlier ones by twelve other enemy aircraft against the seaplane tender as she sailed alone in the Java Sea. Due to heroic actions by her captain and crew, *Heron* survived overwhelming odds during the long ordeal.

Fifteen minutes later, the three patrol planes (likely Mavis) which had been awaiting their turn, formed into a “torpedo anvil” at 1615 and came in on an attack. One approached on the ship’s starboard bow, one on her port bow, and one on her port quarter. Fortunately, the aircraft did not synchronize their movements to arrive together,

and Kabler was able to sequentially turn *Heron* “bow to” each of the planes as they released their torpedoes. This tactic is designed to minimize the cross-section a ship presents to a torpedo streaking toward it, and it worked. Each of the “fish” passed harmlessly down either the port or starboard side of the seaplane tender. Not deterred, the planes continued in and strafed *Heron*, causing additional personnel casualties aboard ship. The attack was not completely one-sided as *Heron*’s single operational 3-inch gun shot down one attacker.²²

But for the near perfect actions of captain and crew over a period of several hours, the *Heron* would have been sent to the bottom by bombs or torpedoes from one or more of the fifteen Japanese aircraft. The demands made on the propulsion plant due to violent ship maneuvering by Kabler to avoid bombs and torpedoes, caused the engine room to become so hot and full of steam that watch standers donned gas masks. The twenty-four-year-old former minesweeper had not, in her recent past, been able to make more than about 10 knots. However, when the bridge demanded more speed, her engineers had gotten everything possible out of her old boilers and steam turbines, and had her up to about 14 knots at one time.²³

Sadly, *Heron* suffered twenty-six casualties—almost half of her crew—due to bomb blasts and the strafing attack. Despite the harm done his ship by the enemy, Kabler tried to rescue the crew of the downed *Mavis*. Although aflame, it had succeeded in landing on the water nearby allowing its crew to abandon. After first sinking the plane with gunfire, Kabler twice maneuvered *Heron* through the surviving airmen, enabling rescue lines to be thrown them. The Japanese, however, refused to accept any assistance to save them. Concerned about the threat posed by any enemy submarines nearby, Kabler then departed the area. He explained:

The crew escaped from the plane that was shot down while it was burning on the water, and seeing the crew in the water, we turned the ship back to try to pick them up. We stopped the ship and threw them life lines. They all refused the life lines and, since we were in submarine waters, it was not advisable to remain there for much time, so we proceeded on our course....²⁴

That night, the crew extinguished the fires on board, pumped firefighting water out the forward hold—bringing the ship back on an even keel—and repaired her port three-inch gun. Badly battered, *Heron* arrived at Ambon the following morning. An officer ashore described the demeanor of the men aboard the seaplane tender thus: “Her crew was fighting mad, with fighting spirit and morale at the

highest pitch. The ship obviously was not ready to fight immediately, but they were eager to return to get another shot at the Japs.” After making port, *Heron’s* captain obtained medical care for her wounded and buried her dead. A military funeral for Chief Quartermaster Dennis Allmond, USN, and Coxswain Michael Borodenko, USN, was attended by the *Heron’s* officers and crewmembers as well as by a number of men from *Childs* and a large part of the native Dutch population.²⁵

Photo 1-3



Formal photograph of Capt. William Laverett Kabler, USN, later in his career.
Courtesy of NavSource
(http://www.navsource.org/archives/02/people/kabler_william_1.jpg)

Admiral Hart promoted Kabler to lieutenant commander and awarded him the Navy Cross Medal. (Kabler would retire from the Navy with the rank of rear admiral.) Two other individuals, Chief Boatswain William Harold Johnson, USN, and Machinist's Mate Second Class Robert Lee Brock, USN, also received the Navy Cross. Johnson and Brock were machine gunners who, despite being injured or wounded, continued to engage enemy aircraft from their exposed positions during prolonged combat. The *Heron's* executive officer, Lt. Franklin Duerr Buckley, USN, received the Bronze Star for his direction of "accurate and effective anti-aircraft fire to destroy one and damage at least one more of the hostile bomber planes, thereby disrupting the Japanese attack." The associated medal citations are provided in Appendix C.²⁶

SHORTLIVED DEFENSE OF THE JAVA SEA

Heron tended aircraft at Ambon while being patched up through the combined efforts of her own crew and that of *Childs* until 4 January 1942, when she was sent to Darwin, Australia, for additional repairs. This work was completed on the 19th, and she was ordered to Saumlaki, a port city and site of a Dutch garrison on the south end of Yamdena in the Tanimbar Islands. Saumlaki lay about 300 miles south of Ambon, which Allied forces would be forced to abandon on 26 January. *Heron* was only able to remain at Saumlaki for a short time until 5 February. By then Japanese forces had landed at Ambon and enemy patrols were coming too close to Saumlaki, resulting in the tender receiving orders to return to Darwin.²⁷

Capt. John V. Peterson, USN, former commander Patrol Wing Ten, described in an interview in February 1944 the conditions that seaplane tenders and PBYs faced at Ambon prior to its abandonment:

We could not operate there because we were almost always under continuous observation, bombardment or strafing. The Japanese had soon disposed of the few Dutch fighters and were continuously attacking the Australian Hudsons and our Catalinas on patrol. We then started a mobile operation from the following bases: Kendari in the Staring Bay area of the Celebes, the Tanimbar Islands group, Koepang in Timor, Soemba Islands, Flores Islands and Darwin, North Australia, as well as operating the patrols from Surabaya.²⁸

When Wing Ten was forced to abandon Ambon, *Childs*, *Heron*, and *William B. Preston* continued to operate with two or three planes each at various islands. Usually they stayed in one area for a few days,

fueling the planes at night. While the PBVs were out on patrol, the ships stood out to sea so that they would have maneuvering room in the event of an attack. This was the only means by which the tenders and their aircraft could survive and continue to carry out patrols as the Japanese moved south.²⁹

During the latter part of January and early February, the Wing flew reconnaissance in the Makassar Straits, Balikpapan and Java Sea areas. The fabric-covered, lightly-armed seaplanes of Wing Ten were in truth entirely unsuited for the type of operations the Japanese forced them to undertake. That is, reconnaissance duties in the face of not only heavy anti-aircraft opposition, but also fighter opposition. Despite these shortcomings, their young pilots and flight crews persevered. Five Wing Ten personnel—three aviators and two enlisted plane crew members—would receive the Navy Cross Medal, and eleven aviators the Distinguished Flying Cross.³⁰

Their sacrifices would, however, be for naught. During the Battle of the Java Sea and the ensuing Battle of Sunda Strait, 27 February-1 March, all of Dutch Rear Adm. Karel Doorman's Allied Striking Force, except four American destroyers, were destroyed by Japanese invasion forces. Following these devastating losses, the American-British-Dutch-Australia combined command effectively ceased to exist. Japanese amphibious forces invaded Java on 28 February and the remnants of the Allied navies fell back to Australia. Peterson described the final days of seaplane patrols:

As soon as the Japanese had dispersed our surface forces in the battle of the Java Sea, they immediately started making landings north and west of Surabaya and at several other places along the north coast of Java. By this time the wing had about five or six effective patrol planes and they were rapidly deteriorating due to lack of spare parts such as generators, pumps of all kinds, and due to continuous operations. On the night of the 28th it was necessary to report to the High Command in abandoning that we could no longer carry out any patrols due to the poor conditions of our planes and especially our radio equipment. That is, we could send the planes out but we had no assurance that we would get any further reports.³¹

RETIREMENT TO AUSTRALIA

In the final days of the Allied defense of the Netherlands East Indies, all the combatant ships except for those engaged in the battle of the Java Sea had shifted around to Tjilatjap on the south coast of Java, which had a fairly good harbor. Wing Ten used this base for ten days

or so before the Allied command released the American forces from the Java area on 1 March. Remnants of the Wing found their way to Perth, a large city situated on the Swan River in Western Australia, by various means of transportation including aircraft, surface vessel, and submarine. *Heron* was sent to Broome, a coastal town about 1,400 nautical miles up the coast from Perth, where the Australian blood-red desert floor met the turquoise of the Indian Ocean against a palette of red earth, sandstone cliffs and white beaches. She transported excess Wing personnel, of which there were many because while many PBVs had been lost in combat the crews of most had been rescued. Following her arrival there, *Heron* made preparations to tend planes that were being dispatched to Broome as well.³²

LAURELS FOR WING TEN PATROL SQUADRONS AND SEAPLANE TENDERS

In recognition of the collective heroic actions of the aviators of Patrol Wing Ten in the Philippines area and Netherlands East Indies, the Navy awarded Patrol Squadrons 22, 101, and 102 the Presidential Unit Citation, the highest award for heroism a unit might receive and equivalent to the Navy Cross Medal for an individual. The seaplane tender *Heron* received the Navy Unit Commendation for her actions during the defense of the Netherlands East Indies. The seaplane tenders *Childs*, *Heron*, and *William B. Preston*, and these three patrol squadrons earned battle stars for the period 8 December 1941 to 3 March 1942, during which they conducted offensive operations in the Philippines, covered the retirement of the Asiatic Fleet south to the Netherlands East Indies, and conducted reconnaissance and offensive operations in the unsuccessful Allied defense of the Java Sea.

Battle Stars for the Philippine Islands Operation

Ship or Squadron	Award Dates	Commanding Officer
<i>Childs</i> (AVD-1)	8 Dec 41-3 Mar 42	Comdr. John L. Pratt
<i>William B. Preston</i> (AVD-7)	8 Dec 41-3 Mar 42	Lt. Comdr. Etheridge Grant
<i>Heron</i> (AVP-2)	8 Dec 41-3 Mar 42	Lt. Comdr. William L. Kabler
VP-22	9 Jan-3 Mar 42	Lt. Comdr. Frank O'Beirne
VP-101	8 Dec 41-3 Mar 42	Lt. Comdr. John V. Peterson
VP-102	8 Dec 41-3 Mar 42	Lt. Comdr. Edgar T. Neale

