

Foreword

David Bruhn sets out in this, his latest book, to retrace the march of naval actions that saw the Allies drive the Japanese invaders back to their homeland from the verges of the vast Pacific that they had rapidly attacked and occupied in 1941 and 1942. David has made these vicarious voyages before employing a format rich in vignettes and illustrations. Each has been from the perspective of specific types of ships with emphasis on those that have performed heroic actions and/or earned battle stars for their campaign ribbons.

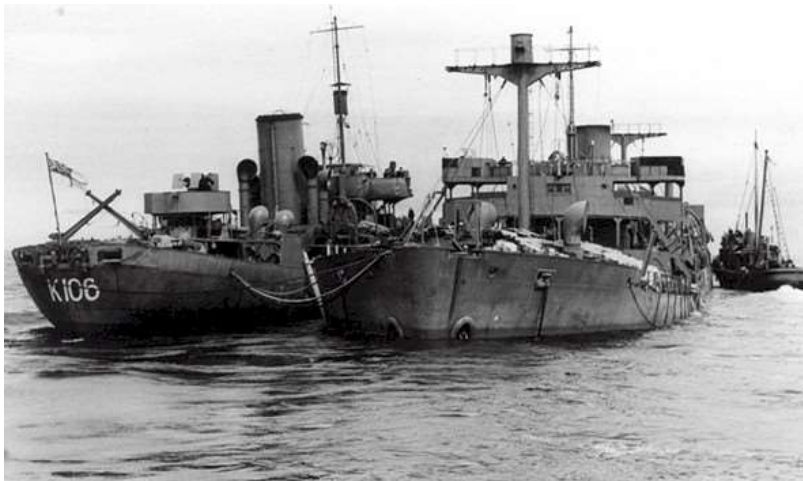
The subject this time is cargo ships that brought troops, arms and supplies to the various landing beaches on the islands that had to be secured to enable the Allies to continue their march across the Pacific. Although other types of ships are mentioned such as repair ships and fleet oilers and large troop transports, the focus with respect to US Navy ships is limited to two specific types of cargo vessels. Otherwise, considering the vast numbers and types of vessels employed by US Forces, in various combat operations, their stories could not be contained in a single volume.

Ready to Haul, Ready to Fight also covers the valuable contributions of supply ships of the Royal Australian Navy, and British merchantmen. The latter vessels were a part of the “Fleet Train” of the British Pacific Fleet that joined the Pacific war in 1945. Because of fewer such ships, David was able to expand his coverage, somewhat, of Allied ships beyond only cargo ships. In particular he has included stories of three former passenger liners that the RAN requisitioned and employed in various roles including troop transports.

The US Navy ships featured are Cargo Ships (AKs) and Attack Cargo Ships (AKAs). Initially, all Navy cargo vessels were designated AK. In early 1943, “Navy brass,” wanting to employ some of its cargo ships (AK) and transport ships (AP) in direct support of island assaults, modified, then redesignated these vessels assault cargo ships (AKA) and assault transports (APA). The most significant change to the ex-AKs was equipping them to carry amphibious landing craft.

Canada participated in the Pacific war along with its huge contribution to the one in Europe. Even before Pearl Harbor she sent troops for the fruitless defence of Hong Kong and then in 1942 for the defence of Alaska and the Pacific Northwest. It is amazing that the Japanese while penetrating south to the very doorstep of Australia and New Zealand were also able to attack the North American coast with their submarines, shelling light houses, attacking shipping and throwing fear into local inhabitants. It was a remarkable feat given the vastness of the Pacific. They learned well from the lesson of Commodore Perry and, as a result of their experience in the Sino-Pacific, Russo-Japanese and First World wars, developed into a first class “Blue-water Navy.”

Photo Foreword-2



Corvette HMCS *Edmundson* (K106) alongside the sinking SS *Fort Camosun* at the entrance of Juan de Fuca Strait – vessel was salvaged because cargo of lumber and timber helped her stay afloat after being torpedoed by a Japanese submarine, 20 June 1942. Photograph source unknown – acquired from *For Posterity Sake*

Following the death and destruction wrought by Japan on ill-prepared Allied forces during the early months of the war, US and Australian soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines picked themselves up, and slowly began to drive the Japanese aggressors back toward their home islands. This progress came at a great cost, in terms of lives and (speaking only regarding the Allied navies) of ships and aircraft lost. The most intense battles were thousands of miles from sources of supply, and victories at sea, in the air, and on land, could not have been achieved without supply ships – hundreds of them, ships such as described in this book.

Existing older ships were first employed but their numbers were limited and steadily being diminished by German North Atlantic submarine wolf packs. With these losses, and even more on expanding battle fronts in many theaters of war, North American shipyards and their personnel came to the fore. Records compiled by naval architect Tim Colton give proof of the huge contribution of these yards in supplying the war efforts in the Pacific and in Europe (whilst keeping the British people from starving). He lists a total of 5,858 vessels as “Ships, Boats and Large Barges Built for the U.S. Maritime Commission,” and 436 “Merchant Ships” constructed in Canada.

It is gratifying to me that 255 of the large cargo ships (referred to as “10,000-tonners”) were launched from seven yards in my home province of British Columbia. These were of three related types. North Sands which employed three Scotch (fire tube) type coal fired boilers, Victory type with two oil-fired water-tube boilers and the “Canadian Type” a modified Victory ship which could burn both coal and fuel oil.¹

Although only our cruiser HMCS *Uganda* participated in actions with the British Pacific Fleet, our naval aviators distinguished themselves with the Fleet Air Arm aboard the Royal Navy carriers. Additionally, our shipyards produced many of the “Fleet Train” vessels which supported the BPF. These included eight “Fort” merchant vessels employed as “Stores-Issuing” ships, and at least two RN commissioned repair ships HMS *Farnborough Head* and HMS *Beery Head*—all based on Victory ship hulls with oil-fueled boilers. All of these vessels were built and modified in British Columbian yards. Of special importance to fleet sailors, West Coast Shipbuilders Ltd. of Vancouver converted the former RN minelayer HMS *Menestheus* to an amenities ship. Her service was short-lived, but greatly esteemed; equipped with her own brewery, she was affectionally known as “The British Brew Barge of WWII.”²

Canada’s North Sands and Victory type ships were similar to their cousins the US Liberty ships. The principal difference in construction was that they were, for the most part, of rivetted construction, whereas the US ships were welded. Riveting was generally performed by four-men crews working eight-hour shifts, round-the-clock, 7 days a week. The rivet-heater used a portable forge located close by to the riveting to raise the rivets to a yellow heat and then he threw them with tongs to the rivet-passer who caught them in a sheet-metal funnel like-contraption called a “bucket” and ran them to the nearby work, and inserted them with tongs into the waiting holes where the riveter, with

his holder-on (or sometimes called “bucker”) pressing the rivet heads in place, and quickly flattened the tail ends with his pneumatic gun. With 383,000 rivets required per hull, multiple hulls under construction and multiple crews at work, the dock mates had to be alert, lest they get hit and burned by one in a swarm of airborne rivets.³

Photo Foreword-3



Riveters (man on right may be Elio Lus), Date: possibly 1943.
NVMA #27-795 Versatile Pacific Shipyards Inc. Fonds,
courtesy Archives of North Vancouver

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