

A Japanese 14 meter *Dai Hatsu* Army Type A barge. These were used for transporting men, equipment, and supplies between the islands. Landing craft gunboats were utilized to combat them. U.S. Navy Technical Mission to Japan, *Target Report—Characteristics of Japanese Naval Vessels*, Article 10—*Landing Craft*, 6 February 1946, p. 23.



A Japanese Navy Type A barge is shown underway on a canal in China.

In mid–November 1942 the Japanese attempted to send a convoy of eleven destroyers and eleven transports under Rear Admiral Raizo Tanaka down the “slot” to reinforce their troops on Guadalcanal. In the midst of the continuing naval battles for the island of Guadalcanal, the transports came under attack on 14 November 1942. Rising to the defense against these troop reinforcements were American Marine and Navy aircraft flying off Henderson Field on Guadalcanal and some from the carrier *Enterprise*. Fifteen Army B-17s from Espiritu Santo joined in the fray. The aircraft took a heavy toll of the transports, sinking seven and destroying the remaining four which had beached themselves on Guadalcanal.



Type A barges were used by both the Japanese Navy and Army. The Navy version had a deckhouse while the Army version did not. The Navy version carried sixty men and that of the Army 100-120. They had a length of forty-nine feet and a beam of eleven and one-half feet. The Army barge shown above was captured and put to use by the American forces. This was a common occurrence in the war zone. NARA 890G 1022361.

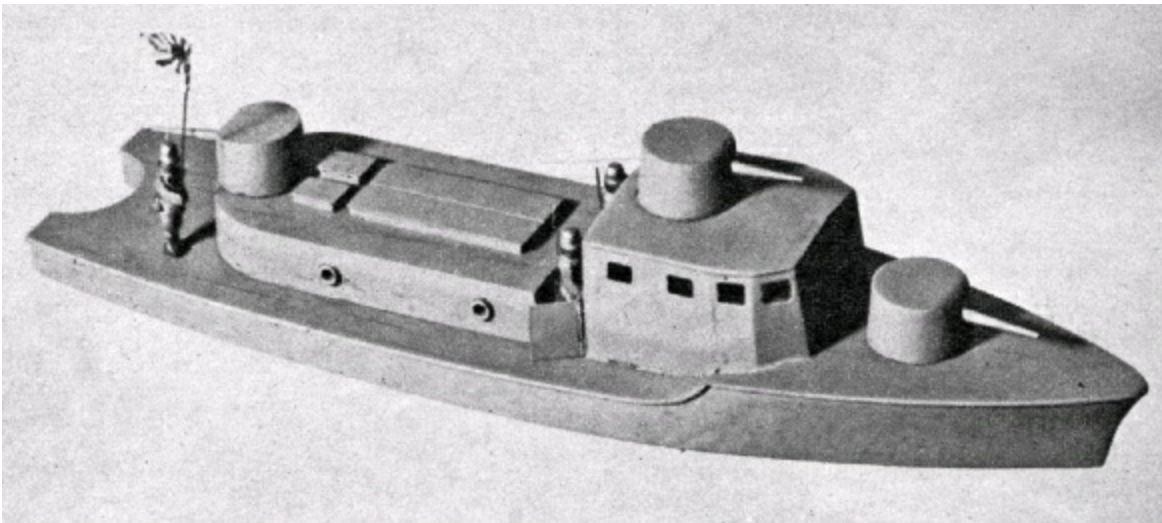
The Japanese observed that a destroyer screen with fighter cover was not enough to protect feebly armed ships; they must have close support from heavily gunned men-of-war. And they also learned the need of an additional airfield to help protect the “Tokyo Express.” The Americans noted how greatly the effectiveness of carrier planes was increased when they were provided with an optional land base.^{[16](#)}

With such heavy losses the Japanese began to depend increasingly on smaller ships and craft such as barges to supply their forces in the Solomons.

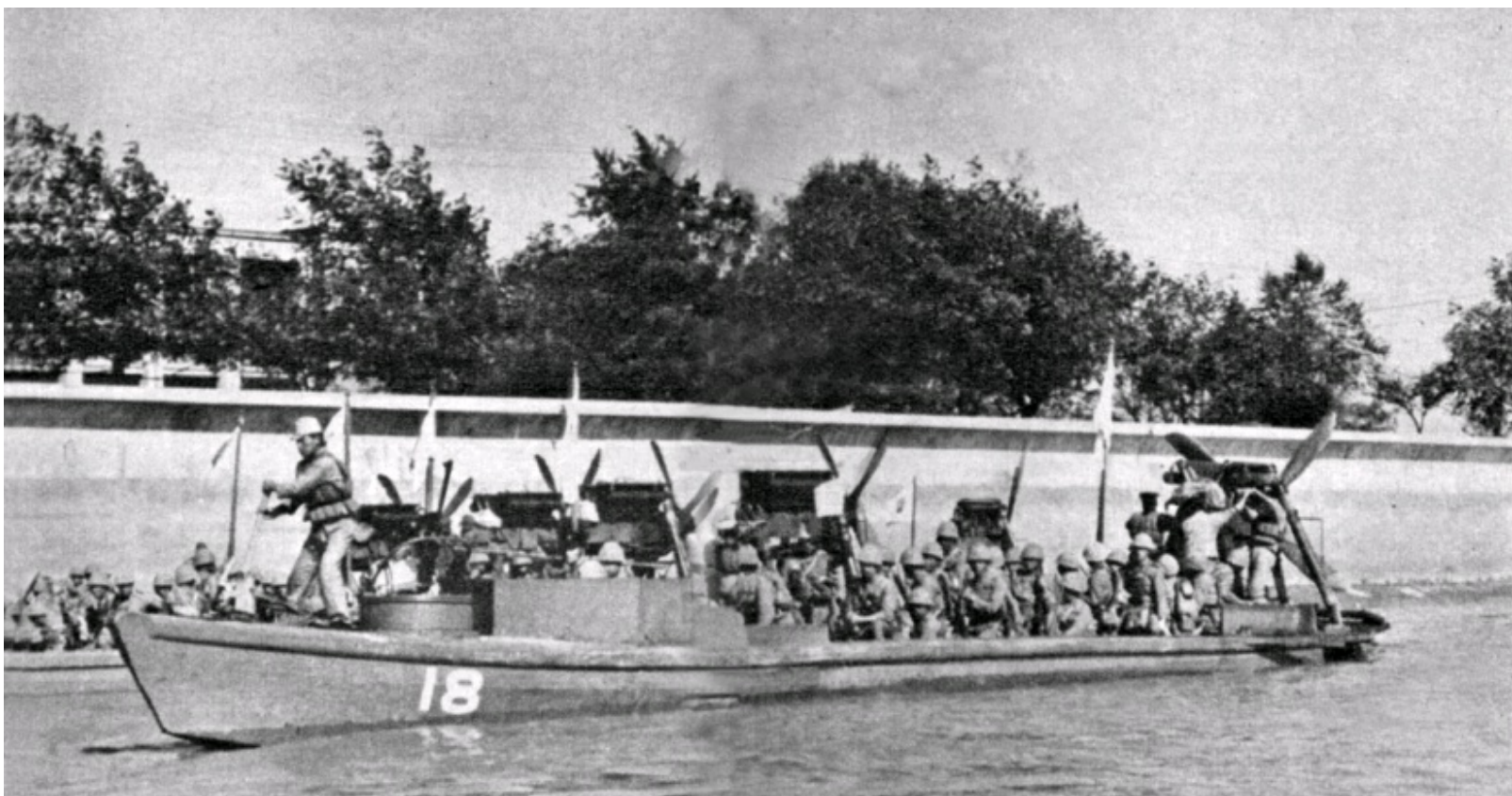


The Type B landing craft was one of the smallest Japanese barges, having an overall length of thirty feet and a beam of seven and one-half feet. It was capable of eight to ten knots and carried forty men. U.S. War and Navy Departments, *U.S. Army-Navy Journal of Recognition*, No. 7, March 1944, p. 44.

In February 1943 it became necessary for the Japanese to supplement their troop strength in Lae, New Guinea. They planned to transport an additional 6,900 18th Army troops from Rabaul to Lae to reinforce the beleaguered garrison there. The convoy, carrying men and supplies, departed Rabaul at midnight on 28 February 1943. Under the overall command of the escort commander, Rear Admiral Masatomi Kimura, the convoy totaled eight transports and eight destroyers. By this time the Japanese had learned not to send ships loaded solely with men or supplies as the loss of either could seriously endanger the invasion attempt. Each transport carried a combination of men and supplies so that if some were lost, any individual ship would be capable of landing men and supplies together, thereby preserving their fighting efficiency. Only one day out of port, the convoy was spotted by American aircraft and tracked from that point on. On 2 March, the Americans and Australians struck. Particularly effective were the B-25s and A-20s of Lieutenant General George C. Kenney's V Air Force. The convoy was under continuous attack from 2 to 4 March. When the Battle of the Bismarck Sea was over, all eight of the Japanese transports and four of the eight destroyers had been sunk. Of the men on the ships only 2,734 were saved.¹⁷ "Thereafter no big ships were risked within range of enemy air power. As had happened in the Solomons, New Guinea began to be supplied by barge."¹⁸ By the spring of 1943, American intelligence estimated that the Japanese had 6,000 barges in service and that this number would increase.¹⁹



The Japanese Type C barge was heavily armored and diesel powered. It was designed to carry troops and also to support landing operations. It was forty feet long and could make twenty-five knots. U.S. War and Navy Departments, *U.S. Army-Navy Journal of Recognition*, No. 7, March 1944, p. 45.



The Japanese Type E barge could be recognized by the aircraft-type propeller on the stern and the round machine-gun tub forward. Here a soldier uses a pole to move the barge away from the others prior to starting the engine. This barge had a flat bottom and could transport about sixty men into very shallow water. It was sixty-three feet long with a beam of nine feet. U.S. War and Navy Departments, *U.S. Army-Navy Journal of Recognition*, No. 7, March 1944, pp. 46–47.



A Japanese Type D barge lands troops near Canton, China, on 12 October 1938. This type of barge was built in several variations ranging from 38 feet to 70 feet. NARA 306-NT-1151-J-4.



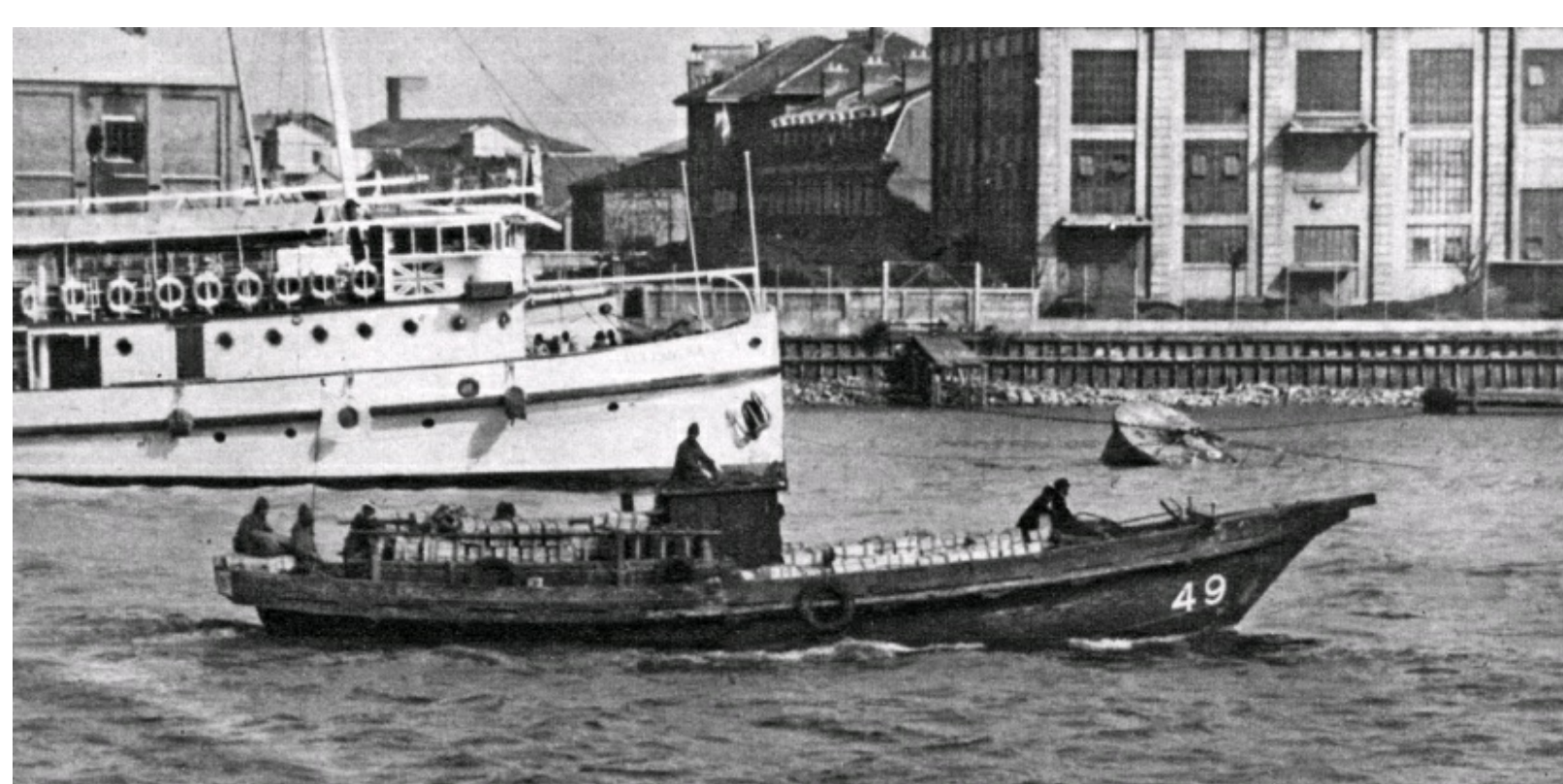
The Type F Japanese barge was designed as a small personnel carrier. At a length of twenty-one feet and with a beam of seven feet, it could carry approximately twenty men. It was not armed and the crossbeam could be moved to shift compartment arrangements. U.S. War and

Barges came in several types and most ranged from around fifty to sixty-five feet in length. The larger barges might be armed with two Oerlikon guns and the smaller ones with one or two machine guns. Some barges were as small as thirty feet and were used for the local transportation of troops. The interception and destruction of these barges was of major importance, particularly in the southwest Pacific.

The War Department noted

the barge fleets have turned out to be fine substitutes for cargo vessels and transports, particularly since some sea lanes have been so badly slashed by U.S. air power. To cut down barge losses the Japanese have set up an ingenious short-hop water route. Each leg of the trip, from staging point to staging point, takes a night's sail. The barges usually operate in shallow reef-infested waters inaccessible to U.S. destroyers and PT boats. During the day they remain in hiding, concealed under overhanging trees or are camouflaged on open beaches.

Since 13 Type A barges, each carrying ten tons of supplies, can maintain 20,000 men for a day, the tremendous value of the Japanese barges becomes apparent.^{[20](#)}



The Japanese Type G landing boat was used to haul reinforcements and supplies once a beachhead was established. It was fifty-two feet long with a beam of thirteen feet. It was unarmed and capable of eight knots. An identifying feature was the small deck house amidships. U.S. War and Navy Departments, *U.S. Army-Navy Journal of Recognition*, No. 7, March 1944,

Further reports indicated that

[a] convoy of 73 large barges can move a Japanese infantry regiment and a substantial amount of rations and ammunition a distance of 79 nautical miles 80 land miles, approx per night for several nights, with proper day concealment and fuel supply.... A fleet of 37 large barges seems to be sufficient to transport a Japanese infantry regiment about 34 miles in 36 hours including two nights.^{[21](#)}

Barges might be used between islands, but might also be used to transport troops from one section of an island to another. This was due to the ever-present and impenetrable jungle on most of the islands. As a result of the dense jungle, most enemy troop concentrations were on the coast where they could easily be supplied. Forcing a supply line through heavy jungle, particularly in mountainous terrain, was well nigh impossible. Constant rain, heat, and humidity made traversing sections of the jungle on these islands extremely difficult, therefore the only practical way to move men was along the coast by boat. This was noted by the Americans in regard to their own troops. "Throughout the campaign on New Guinea, Allied and Japanese forces clung to small enclaves on the coast, leaving the impenetrable hinterland mainly to itself. Because of the dense jungle abruptly rising beyond the shores, 95 percent of the US Army's supply movements in New Guinea had to be made by boat."^{[22](#)}

Many LCI conversions, as well as the LCS(L)s sent to intercept the barges, mounted a 3"/50 gun for greater effect. This gave them an advantage over the larger barges. Their ability to go into shallow waters allowed them to hunt barges successfully. On such missions they were frequently accompanied by PT boats.

SUICIDE BOATS

By late 1943 the Japanese had recognized that they were in serious danger of losing the war. The island-hopping campaign of the Americans had left their troops isolated on bypassed islands.