



# THEY WOULD NOT SURRENDER

JOHN MORRILL AND THE MEN OF THE QUAIL DURING THE FIGHT FOR THE PHILIPPINES AND THEIR AMAZING ESCAPE TO AUSTRALIA

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In many ways, the USS *Quail* was just one of the thousands of ships that have served with the US Navy since the service's inception. However, it is often not just the ship but the men that serve aboard them that make the ordinary extraordinary.

*Quail* was a *Lapwing*-class minesweeper that was built by the Chester Shipbuilding Company in Chester, Pennsylvania, as Minesweeper No. 15 (redesignated AM-15 on 17 July 1920). Laid down on 14 May 1918, she was launched on 6 October 1918 and commissioned on 29 April 1919, just a bit too late to see service in the Great War.

With the massive number of mines laid in the North Sea, there was a great need for minesweepers and *Quail* headed toward Kirkwall, Scotland, where she would join the North Sea Mine Sweeping Detachment. Participating with this

force, *Quail* participated in the hunt to clear the North Sea of mines and this hazardous duty went on until 25 November 1919. From that point, she steamed for the much warmer waters of Cuba where she became part of the Atlantic Fleet. By September 1922, she was attached to the submarine base at Coco Solo in the Panama Canal Zone and operated throughout the Caribbean.

This was relatively easy duty and *Quail* made a 1923 East Coast cruise but then she was pulled into the Navy Yard at Philadelphia for repairs and overhaul. Once this was completed, she was back at sea and by 1927 she would be patrolling off the west coast of Nicaragua during America's troubles with that nation. In 1927, she again steamed to the Caribbean to conduct fleet maneuvers with a variety of vessels.

Then, it was back for another tour

of the East Coast as she sailed between Virginia and Massachusetts while participating in several war games. By 1929, she was back at Coco Solo and then became part of the control force in the Panama Canal Zone, leaving that vital area in 1931 to make the long voyage to Pearl Harbor where she would be stationed until 1941. At Pearl, her duties included a survey voyage to Alaska. With mounting tensions in the Pacific, *Quail* sailed to Palmyra Atoll, due south of the Hawaiian Islands and roughly one-third the way between Hawaii and American Samoa. Landing on 25 July 1940, *Quail* carried a construction force to build a naval air station as part of America's militarization of the area.

On 8 December 1941, USS *Quail* was in the Philippines when the Japanese attacked. The ship's executive officer was



USCG Lt. Thomas James Eugene Crotty who had attended the USCG Academy in New London, Connecticut, where he excelled amongst his peers. After graduation, he served aboard various Coast Guard cutters based out various locations all over the USA. He was first assigned to the USCGC *Tampa* based out of Staten Island, New York. On 8 September 1934, fire broke out aboard the liner *SS Morro Castle* off Long Beach Island, New Jersey. Crotty and the crew of *Tampa* immediately participated in the rescue efforts during the disaster and were responsible for saving many lives.

After serving aboard other cutters where he received high marks, in April 1941 he reported to the US Navy's Mine Warfare School in Yorktown, Pennsylvania. He then went for additional training at the Mine Recovery Unit in Washington, DC, and became the Coast Guard's leading expert in mine operations, explosives, and demolition.

On 28 October 1941, Crotty arrived at the Cavite Navy Yard in the Philippines and was assigned to building the Manila Bay Minefield since war with Japan was becoming more likely on a daily basis. With the Japanese invasion of the Philippines, the Cavite Navy Yard was heavily bombed on 10 December. Crotty was the only Coast Guardsman stationed in the Philippines and consequently the only Coast Guardsman to participate in the Philippine campaign.

As American troops began retreating to the Bataan Peninsula and the island of Corregidor, Lt. Crotty supervised the demolition of strategic facilities and



USS *Galveston* (CL-19) with *Quail* (AM-15) at the left. The photo was taken at Corinto, Nicaragua, around January 1927 during the Nicaraguan revolution.



*Quail* alongside the radio-controlled target ship Coast Battleship No. 4 (ex-USS *Iowa*, Battleship #4) probably in Panama waters during February/March 1923. *Quail* provided salvage support during exercises with the target ship.



*Quail* during 1933/1934 with a Loening amphibian on her aft deck.



The *Lapwing*-class was extremely efficient and could accomplish numerous missions. *Quail* was photographed at French Frigate Shoals with a VJ-6 Loening OL-8 observation amphibian.