EVEN IN PEACE, the "expendables" are still expendable.

It wasn't that the Navy wanted to expend those fast, hard-hitting little PT boats now. On the contrary, when the first plan for the postwar fleet was drawn up, the motor torpedo boat squadrons had a definite place in the Fleet. Forty-eight of them were to be kept on active duty, four were to be assigned for experimental use, four of the PTs' mother ships, the AGPs, were to be kept on active duty and five in an inactive status.

But economics dictated otherwise. Sent to all affected commands recently, a message from the Chief of Naval Operations announced that all PTs but four which are to be used for experimental purposes and all AGPs are to be disposed of.

Colorful Record

Navy spokesmen gave assurance that the PTs weren't considered obsolete or even excess. It was just that the personnel of the gallant little craft which have the credit for striking the first offensive blow for America in World War II were needed elsewhere — in and out of the Navy. Too, maintenance of a PT force in peacetime would be a costly project because of the relatively short life of the little boats, requiring almost continuous new construction to maintain the squadrons. Besides, should war ever break out again, production of the boats could be begun rapidly. The PTs just had to go.

As the doughty motor torpedo boats take their honorable discharge many hands will want to recall their spectacular record. Even the carefully couched communiques and the formal citations accompanying the awards and decorations that came later were unable to cover up the daring of the little craft. And even if they had, the Nation would have got the stories elsewhere, mainly from the thousands of words written by hundreds of correspondents and other writers who found in the PT boats one of the most colorful subjects of the war.

Bataan! Corregidor! Out of those tragic last days of the Philippines came the first of the amazing stories of the wartime deeds of the PTs. It was there that Comdr. John D. Bulkley, then a lieutenant, led his famed MTBRon3 in successful forays against the Japanese, all the while maintaining courier service between American forces, escorting merchant ships in and out of Manila Bay, rescuing ship survivors, strafing enemy shore installations, ferrying wounded and destroying war material that would have fallen into the enemy's hands.

The six boats of MTBRon3 cost the Japs a lot, far more than is shown in the scoreboard of four months of action between 10 Dec 1941, when the Japs first felt the sting of the Navy's "mosquitoes" during a raid on Cavite Navy Yard, and 8 April, when two of the squadron's PTs attacked a Jap cruiser and four destroyers in the Mindanao Sea off Cebu. Still the scoreboard, based on Comdr. Bulkley's 1942 report, is impressive:

- One cruiser damaged and beached;
- Two cruisers damaged (one almost certainly sunk) by torpedo hits;
- One 5,000-ton ship, believed to be an aircraft tender, sunk;
- One 5,000-ton ship, type unidentified, sunk;
- One tanker set afire by torpedoes;
- Two landing barges bearing troops sunk, and
- Three divebombers and one seaplane destroyed.

It was on 19 January that the first Jap cruiser became a PT target — at the request of the Army whose units were being blasted by two enemy ships lying in Subic Bay off Bataan. Two PTs were to carry out the attack, separating at the entrance of the bay and rendezvousing at Port Pinanga at the inner end. One PT didn't make it; Bulkley's did and his description, as recounted in the book, "They Were Expendable," gives a vivid picture of the attack.

Jap Reception Committee

"It was darker than hell," relates Bulkley, "and the shore was lined with Jap field guns. We had got in a little way when a Jap searchlight spotted us and blinked out a dot-dash challenge. We changed course. A field piece opened up, but none of their shells fell near us.

"By this time, the Japs on Grande Island realized something funny was going on. They broke out .50-caliber machine gunfire at us — we could see the tracer bullets. Then the fun started — lights and big shore batteries rambling all over the bay, feeling for us. We could hear the shells whistle over our heads. The lights and flashes really helped us because they enabled us to pick out the shore line and tell where we were.

"By 1 o'clock we were where we planned to meet [the other boat] and go in together for the attack. [It] didn't show up and there was nothing to do but go in alone. To make the sneak, we rounded Binanga Point at..."
IN THE PHILIPPINES a study in mixed emotions is presented by the crew members of this PT boat on patrol.

idling speed. Everything was quiet — no firing down here. Then we saw the cruiser ahead in the dark not 500 yards away. We crept up on her and had just readied two torpedoes when a searchlight came on and in dot-dash asked us who we were.

“We answered all right—with two torpedoes. Then I gave our boat hard rudder and started away; it isn’t safe for an MTB to linger near a cruiser. One of our torpedoes hit home. Looking back we saw red fire rising and heard two more explosions which might have been her magazines.

“But we had no time to look at the fireworks, for we were into plenty trouble. One of our torpedoes had failed to get out of its tube and was stuck there, its propellers buzzing and compressed air hissing so you couldn’t hear yourself think. A torpedo is adjusted to fire after its propeller has made a certain number of revolutions; after that, it is cocked like a rifle and even a good hard wave-slap on its nose would set it off, blowing us all to glory. Our torpedoman ... used his head fast. He grabbed a handful of toilet paper, jumped astride the wobbling, hissing torpedo and jammed the vanes of the propeller with the toilet paper, stopping it.

“Flames on the cruiser were lighting up the bay behind us. All over Subic hell was breaking loose. With motors roaring and the boat skipping around in that rough water, I guess we made considerable commotion. Anyway, the Tokyo radio, reporting the attack next day, said the Americans had a new secret weapon—a monster that roared, flapped its wings and fired torpedoes in all directions; it was only us, but we felt flattered.

The last was understatement. The Jap cruiser was so badly damaged that the enemy had to beach her.

NEW GUINEA crews discuss the previous nights raid during this "Monday morning re-hash" at their base.

MTBRon3 is probably most famed for sneaking General Douglas MacArthur, his wife and son and 20 members of his staff off Corregidor past Jap shore batteries and on to a rendezvous with a bomber which took the general to Australia. Later MTBRon3 spirited Philippine President Manuel Quezon, his wife, two daughters, cabinet members and presidential staff off the island to safety.

For their heroism in the Philippines, men of MTBRon3 were awarded 80 War Department decorations and four decorations of the Philippine Commonwealth, as well as many Navy awards. Comdr. Bulkley was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor carrying with it a citation which declared: "The remarkable achievement of Lt. Bulkley's Command ... is believed to be without precedent in this type of warfare."

"Without precedent" is a phrase that often describes the action of all PTs. Although they date back to 1875 when the British Navy introduced a small torpedo-carrying boat which was later discarded because countermeasures reduced its effectiveness, the modern PT didn’t really come into its own until World War II.

During the early days of the Pacific war the motor torpedo boats occupied a far more important place in the overall strategy than their weight and size seemed to merit. This probably was the result of the need for saving larger naval units for defensive operations during those hard-pressed days when America was preparing her comeback. During the latter part of the war, when great American task forces and fleets roamed the Pacific, striking at will, little attention was given the little boats but, nevertheless, they continued to carry out important and spectacular assignments in areas where the big units seldom operated.

It was at Guadalcanal that PTs proved their worth in island warfare. Arriving at Tulagi just across from Guadalcanal in October 1942, the PTs went to action immediately, surprising a Jap task force shelling Henderson Field and Marine positions. For several months thereafter the PTs were the only U. S. surface ships stationed at Guadalcanal.

The citations told how MTBrons12 and -21, "dauntlessly exchanging gunfire with heavily armored gunboats and barges, airplanes and shore emplacements," diverted hostile artillery fire to themselves in protection of Allied land forces. The citations went on to say that the PTs "have steadily destroyed the enemy's ships carrying
A PHILIPPINE squadron speeds back to its base after participating in army landings above Ormoc, Leyte, P. I.

troops, food and combat supplies; they captured Japanese personnel, landed in hostile territory and effected air and sea rescue missions."

Probably the most daring air-sea rescue of the war was effected by two PTs operating under the command of Lt. Murray Preston, Washington, D. C., who was awarded the Navy Cross for leading the PTs to the rescue of a flier downed in Wasili Bay of Halmahera Island back in September 1944.

When it was learned that a flier was downed in the tiny bay which is part of Kaoe Bay, Lt. Preston volunteered to lead the PTs through the narrow, heavily mined straits leading into the bay, past the numerous Jap shore batteries which lined both the bay and the straits. The flier, who was bobbing around in a lifer aft, had maneuvered close enough to hold on to the anchor chain of a small, abandoned Jap ship in Wasili Bay. Jap attempts to capture him were beaten off by American carrier planes whose pilots were flying continuous protective “cover” for their fellow flier.

Zigzagging through the American and Japanese minefield under heavy and concentrated fire from the Jap shore batteries, the two PTs dashed into the bay, rescued the flier and safely escaped. To effect the rescue, the PTs underwent Jap shellfire for two and one-half hours.

One of the “hottest” jobs handled by the PTs was that of setting up an operating base and incidentally providing protection for our landings at Mindoro in the Philippines back in mid-December of 1944. Patrolling off the beaches after the landings, the squadrons were without air cover or the support of other surface units for three days during which Japanese planes attacked almost continuously — and with determination.

In those three days the PTs shot down 20 of them or damaged every Jap plane that came within their vision.

For the PTs’ heroic work at Mindoro, MTBRons 13 and -16 and PTs 227 and 230 were commended by the Secretary of Navy for serving as the only naval force present following the retirement of the invasion convoys and thus the major obstruction to enemy counterlandings from near-by Luzon, Panay and Palawan.

In the Battle of Surigao Straits, the PTs won high praise for helping to rout a great Jap task force made up of battleships, cruisers and destroyers. The PTs — 39 of them spread out over a large area in groups of three — made the first contact with the Jap force and through their torpedo attacks knocked the Jap force off balance. The enemy ships were forced to resort to star shells, searchlights, AA and secondary battery fire in beating off the PTs, thus exposing their position to larger U. S. Fleet units deployed for battle farther up the strait.

The tactics of the PTs are those of the guerrillas — dash in, hit and run. To launch their Sunday punches, they often had to get within almost...
CAMOUFLAGED for protection against Jap aircraft, a motor torpedo boat blends with its jungle surroundings.

“spitting” distance of their targets. PT 195 bore down to within 100 yards of a small Jap freighter to attack and sink the enemy ship off Cebu during the Philippine campaign. One of the PT’s officers, in describing the attack, says:

“Due to torrential rains we had to close to within 100 yards but still couldn’t identify the target. Suddenly machine gunfire poured toward us so we opened fire in return, starting a small fire on the freighter.” The fire silhouetted the freighter, enabling the gun crew on the PT to identify their target on the boat’s second run. The coup de grace was delivered and the ship was last seen buckling amidships and settling in the water.

In the Mediterranean two PTs took on two German destroyers, luring them away from the convoy they were supposed to be protecting. When the Nazi force was contacted, the two PTs moved in close, let go their torpedoes at the destroyers and turned away. The destroyers gave chase, but the little plywood boats hid in their own smoke screen, dashing in and out to fire at the destroyers which were believed hit by the torpedoes. One of the PTs escaped without a scratch, the other was hit, wounding two of the crew. Meanwhile, the Nazi convoy had been wiped out by other Allied craft including another American PT.

The MTBRons received a lot of praise for their patrol successes during the Normandy landings. During the invasion, heavy seas swamped landing craft and forced heavily armed PTs to put out sea anchors. Farther out, a line of PTs pitched and tossed along an imaginary line. Suddenly, radar showed a “positive contact.” The little fleet converged on the point, finding several German E-boats trying to sneak in among the Allied ships and add to the havoc caused by the storm. The PTs opened up with such a heavy barrage that the E-boats turned and fled, repulsed almost without firing a shot.

What manner of vessel are these mighty midgets that can take on several hundred times their weight in enemy warships? Well, they’re sleek looking jobs, much like the speedboats and cabin cruisers seen aound U. S. resorts. Capable of 40 knots or more (enough speed to outrun any war vessel afloat) from three 1,350-horsepower engines, the PTs are about 80 feet long, about 20 feet amidships and displace approximately 75 to 80 tons.

It’s surprising how much of an arsenal is crammed aboard the little plywood craft. There are four torpedoes — two forward and two aft — all pointing forward.

In addition to the torpedoes, the typical motor torpedo boat mounts two twin .50-caliber machine gun mounts, one 20-mm., one .37-mm., and one 40-mm gun and carry several automatic rifles and submachine guns as well as depth charges.

With an enviable war record — they sank and damaged hundreds of times their own weight in enemy shipping as well as carried out many less colorful missions for the Fleet — there’s no doubt that MTBRons will rejoin the Navy when the need arises.