

ROCKY RIVER

- by Capt. Gerry Ouderkirk and The Editor -

Many unlucky Great Lakes vessels have left their names on the charts by way of the shoals they have "discovered. The big wooden tug ROCKY RIVER had to leave the lakes and change her name twice before she could leave a name on a desolate rock located in the Canadian arctic.

This tug, which had a relatively short career on the lakes, began life as a U.S. naval vessel. Laid down as YN-62 on July 5, 1943 at the Everett-Pacific Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company yard at Everett, Washington, she was re-classed as an Ailanthus Class net laying ship on January 20, 1944, and she was launched on February 15th of the same year. The new vessel was commissioned as U.S.S. SATINLEAF (AN-43) on April 8th, and she sailed for San Pedro, California, shortly thereafter with Lt. Arthur B. Church in command.

As built, SATINLEAF was 194.5 feet in length, 37.0 feet in the beam, and 13.5 feet in depth, and her displacement was 1,100 tons light or 1,275 tons fully loaded. She carried a crew of 56 and was fitted with one single 3"/50 gun mount and four twin 20 mm gun mounts. She could achieve a speed of 12 knots, being propelled by a 12-cylinder diesel-electric engine, 320 mm by 333 mm, rated at 2,500 h.p. This machinery was manufactured in 1944 by the Busch-Sulzer Bros. Diesel Engine Company at St. Louis, Missouri. Busch-Sulzer was the brainchild of brewing king Adolphus Busch, who purchased rights to Rudolf Diesel's design through Sulzer Bros. in 1897. After World War Two, the assets of Busch-Sulzer were sold to Nordberg at Milwaukee.

SATINLEAF was a handsome tug with considerable sheer to her wood hull. She was given a slightly raked stem and what best could be described as a spoon-bill stern. Three heavy fender strakes ran along each side of the hull in the midships area to protect her wooden side planking from rubbing damage. The main deck was flush, with only an open post-and-wire rail forward. A closed bulwark was fitted in the midships area to provide some protection for the superstructure, and there was a lower closed bulwark aft.

An accommodations cabin was located on deck slightly aft of midships, with shelters fore and aft of it to protect the winches. Another deckhouse was located above it, on either side of this upper house being placed a lifeboat worked with radial steel davits. Set a half-deck level above the forward end of the main cabin was a fairly large pilothouse, which had bridgewings enclosed by high closed rails. The pilothouse had six windows across its front and two windows and a door in each side. Around the monkey's island was fitted another high closed rail. The too-small smokestack, virtually unraked and with a very prominent cowl around its top, was set just abaft the pilothouse. There were two tall pole masts; the fore, set forward of the main cabin, was very heavy and sported a boom and, right at the mast's tip, a prominent open-cage crow's nest. The mainmast was set immediately abaft the main cabin.

SATINLEAF arrived at San Pedro on May 9, 1943 for a shakedown, and sailed from there on June 13th to join the Service Force, 7th Fleet, at Funafuti, travelling by way of Pearl Harbor. On July 27th, she departed Funafuti towing an Army barge which she delivered to Milne Bay, New Guinea, on August 6th. Afterwards, she was employed there until October 1st as a defence and general utility vessel, with the exception of making a barge delivery to Manus (in the Admiralty Islands) during September. On October 1st, SATINLEAF sailed for Brisbane, Australia, where she loaded sonar buoy equipment for use in the forthcoming assault at Leyte Gulf in the Philippine Islands. Picking up personnel for the buoy unit at Milne Bay on October 15, she arrived at Leyte on October 29, shortly after the initial troop landings.

SATINLEAF immediately began laying sonar buoys and she guarded them into the following year. On January 20, 1945, she became the Harbor Entry Control Vessel, which duty she performed until relieved on March 12. For the next month, she was employed in general utility work in San Pedro Bay and Guiuan