

Mathew Lapham Singleton was born on 8 November 1875 at Dublin, Ireland. He died on 8 August 1943 at Papua New Guinea and was interred at Port Moresby (Bomana) War Cemetery, in section A3, row E, plot 23. His Commonwealth War Graves Commission record indicates that he was employed in the U.S. Small Ships Section of the Australian Merchant Navy. [1]

WWI Service

Mercantile Marine War Medal and British War Medal ribbons were issued at Auckland on 9 February 1921. Mercantile Marine War Medal and British War Medal were issued at Auckland on 22 August 1922. [7] His medals were authorised on the Main Roll. They were initially sent to M.L. Singleton at 105 Green Lane, Auckland. [8]

Mathew Lapham Singleton was recorded on the Second Division, N.Z.E.F. Reserves List with the occupation of Marine Officer and address as Great South Road, Green Lane Auckland. [9]

Biographical Notes

Mathew Lapham Singleton served as a private in the Frontier Light Horse (Late) District Mounted Rifles during the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902. His service number was 975. He was awarded the Queen's South Africa Medal (bar Cape Colony) and the King's South Africa Medal (based South Africa 1901 and South Africa 1902). [2]

On 11 August 1912, Singleton was appointed Officer in Charge of a local gaol for the Fiji Constabulary. He remained in the role until 1914.[3]

Mathew Lapham Singleton was listed on the Parnell General Electoral Roll as a master mariner and his address was given as Great South Road, Green Lane, Auckland. He was employed by the Union Steam Ship Company as chief officer on a number of its vessels during and after WWI. [4]

During WWII, Mathew Lapham Singleton volunteered for service in the U.S. Army Small Ships Section and was deployed to Papua New Guinea. He died on 8 August 1942, aged 67, while on active service and is interred in the Port Moresby (Bomana) War Cemetery. The following is a summary of the role of the U.S. Army Small Ships Section, prepared by the Australian Government Defence Honours and Awarded Appeals Tribunal.

"A need was identified by the US Army for small ships to transport men and materiel in support of its forces in New Guinea and the Pacific Islands. Small ships would be required to operate in uncharted waters which were studded with concealed shoals, rocks and reefs. The ships had to be small enough to have the shallow draft that would enable them to approach and land men and materiel directly over beaches as the armies did not always operate around convenient harbours.

In 1942, General Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Allied Commander South West Pacific Area (SACSWPA), established the USASS Section under the direct command of the US Army. This organisation was in essence SACSWPA's private 'merchant navy'. It ensured that General MacArthur would have access to merchant shipping support without having to compete with the US Navy for priority. USASS was organised and managed by the US Army Transportation Service (USATS) on behalf of SACSWPA. Ships and boats for USASS were obtained from various sources in Australia. This was done by outright purchase, charter or requisition of suitable ships. The ships ranged in size from small coastal and riverine fishing and trading vessels to larger ocean going and merchant ships, some of 10,000 tons or more. Personnel to crew the fleet were engaged either by direct recruitment by USATS or via the US Maritime Administration, which set up offices in Australia to recruit merchant seamen and other personnel for USASS.

The Australian civilians recruited were generally either too young or too old to serve in the Defence Forces or were medically unfit for military service. It was necessary for prospective recruits to have a 'manpower clearance'. In this regard, the Commonwealth of Australia Manpower Directorate actively engaged with the prospective recruits to ascertain their willingness to be employed by the USASS and then provided the required clearances for that to occur. Civilian merchant seamen were engaged under contract to the US Government. Rates of pay were set out in the contract and these, together with the other conditions of service, were markedly more generous than those offered to members of the British Merchant Navy. They were also superior to the pay and conditions of Australian Military personnel serving in small ships operated by the Australian Army, such as those serving in Australian Army water transport units, which performed similar functions to the US Army Small Ships.

The USASS flew the US flag for command and administrative reasons and carried not only troops, but also ammunition, food and medical supplies, artillery pieces and even towed tanks. They often brought the wounded and dead back to Australia. They were frequently in great danger and endured high casualties. The small ships were initially operated in support of the allied forces in New Guinea but later many vessels operated in other areas such as the Philippines. Beyond the end of the Second World War, some elements of the USASS and personnel continued to serve in support of the post-war allied occupation of Japan." [5]

Australian Civilian Personnel who served with the United States Army Small Ships Section between 8 December 1941 and 2 September 1945 were entitled to 1939-45 Star, Pacific Star, War Medal 1939-45, and Australia Service Medal 1939-1945. [6]

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1. Registry of Shipping and Seamen - Merchant seamen's campaign medal records 1914-1918, Series BT351, Record D8094062. TNA; Find a Grave. Find a Grave Memorial, Memorial Id 23791085; Commonwealth War Graves Commission. Find War Dead. Retrieved from <http://www.cwgc.org/find-records/find-war-dead/casualty-details/75196093>.
 2. Volume 12, p.204. Queen's South Africa Medal - South African Colonial Corps. Reference WO 100/247, Record C3764011. TNA.
 3. Colony of Fiji (1915). Blue Book of Fiji 1914. Suva: Government Printer. p.122.
 4. New Zealand Electoral Rolls, 1853–1981. Auckland, New Zealand: BAB microfilming. Microfiche publication, 4032 fiche.
 5. Defence Honours and Awarded Appeals Tribunal (24 March 2014). Inquiry into Unresolved Recognition for Service with The United States Army Small Ships Section. Canberra: Australian Government. pp. 8-9.
 6. Australian Government Department of Defence. United States Army Small Ships. Retrieved from Defence Honours & Awards <https://www.defence.gov.au/medals/GeneralInfo/US-Small-Ships.asp>.
 7. War Medals Issued: 1914-1918 War - L to Z. Merchant Navy War Medal Card Index, Maritime N.Z., Item R10383640. ANZ Registry of Shipping and Seamen - Merchant seamen's campaign medal records 1914-1918, Series BT351, Record D8094062. TNA.
 8. Merchant Service War Medal: Correspondence with British Government re issue of. Inwards letters and registered files, Marine Department, Item R19985431. ANZ.
 9. New Zealand Expeditionary Force Reserve – 1916-1919 Microfiche 1-23 BAB Microfilming, Auckland, New Zealand