

“Ocean Joss”

Ships in Focus

The ship that was Mister Roberts

USS Hewell (AKL 14)

By Geoff Walker

The award winning “**Mister Roberts**”, the 1955 film that was well appreciated by mariners of the era, in which is told the story of the fictional ship **USS Reluctant (AK 601)**, known to the crew as the “**Bucket**”, during the waning days of World War 2 in the Pacific. The story reflects on the ship and her crew, who are stationed in a remote island “backwater” of the Pacific Ocean and their well-intentioned executive/cargo officer, Lieutenant (Jnr grade) Douglas “Doug” Roberts, who tries to shelter his despondent and downhearted crew from the harsh and disliked captain.



Above, the USS Hewell known in the film as “**the Bucket**” (Unknown copyright / Wikipedia-Public Domain)

The US Navy vessel that portrayed the role of imaginary **USS Reluctant (AK-601)**, a.k.a. “**the Bucket**” in the movie's exterior shots was a former U.S. Army Freight and Passenger/Freight and Supply (FP/FS) vessel, which was originally commissioned in the Navy following World War II. The **USS Hewell (AG-145)** is credited by the US Navy as the ship assigned to the filming of the fictional **USS Reluctant** in the movie.

The **USS Hewell (AG-145/AKL-14)** was a Camano-class cargo ship constructed for the U.S. Army as FS-391 shortly before the end of World War 2. The ship was procured by the U.S. Navy in 1948 and was configured as a transport and cargo ship, serving with the U.S. Pacific Fleet, as well as notable service in the Korean War.

She was a small vessel of 176 ft LOA, 31 ft Beam, and Loaded Draft of 14 feet and was of only 500 tons displacement and 705 tons when fully laden. Launched in 1944 for the US Army she was later transferred to the USN in 1948 as AG-145 but was reclassified in June 1949 as **AK-14**. She was equipped with twin GM diesel engines, each of 500 HP, driving twin screws and generating a service speed of 13 knots. She had two holds/hatches and was self-sustaining with derricks and cargo winches.

Her light armament comprised of only two 0.5 inch (12.7 mm) machine guns; one port side and one starboard side of the flying bridge.

Following redesignation as a light cargo ship or AKL-14 in June 1949, she continued her duties of transporting cargo among the Pacific Islands, including the Caroline Islands and the Marshall Islands.

At the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950 **USS Hewell** shifted her base of operations to Japan from where she shuttling supplies and ammunition between Japan, Okinawa and Guam, to Korea earning distinction for her service. The little cargo ship returned to her normal inter-island cargo carrying routine in October, remaining on that duty until August 1951 when she sailed to Pearl Harbor for overhaul, then between November 1951 to March 1953, **USS Hewell** transported supplies and ammunition on the shuttle route from Japan and Korea, conducting an unglamorous but vital role.

following another overhaul at Yokosuka, Japan, between April and June 1953 the small cargo ship resumed supply runs from Japan for the troops in Korea. On 31 July 1953 the ship picked up 200 South Korean Marines in Wonsan (now North Korea) for transport to South Korea .The ending of hostilities in August 1953 did not see her supply missions cease, and **USS Hewell** remained in the same role until mid-1954, when she made a cruise through the central Pacific Island bases before arriving at Pearl Harbor in July.

She made her film debut In late August 1954 when she was sent to Midway Island, Naval Base arriving there on 28 August, to help film the movie "**Mister Roberts**". The film was partially shot on board **USS Hewell**, with underway footage filmed off Midway harbor. Some minor modifications were made to her to facilitate the famous "Palm Tree" scene. The small cargo ship then sailed back to Hawaii to resume filming off Kaneohe Bay.

Once filming had completed each USN crewmember received a token payment and a cigarette lighter with **USS Hewell** and **Mister Roberts** engraved on it, as a memento of their appearance in the movie. Soon thereafter, the **USS Hewell** sailed to Astoria, Oregon, where she remained until she decommissioned 15 March 1955, and allocated to the Columbia River Group, Pacific Reserve Fleet. **USS Hewell** remained in reserve until 1959, when she was struck from the Navy List and sold commercially in June 1960, fate unknown, except for her finally going to the breakers in Seattle, Washington sometime in 1973.

End

References: In researching this article the Author drew on the following as references: The films'a plot, Wikipedia – Public Domain.

Disclaimer: This is a "**Not for Profit**" document. Unless otherwise specified, images are from various unknown sources in the Public Domain and used for review, commentary, and educational purposes only. Photographs of unknown copyright – All reasonable attempts made to source copyright holders have proved unresponsive. Owners of these images should make themselves known by contacting me via oceanicsolutions@gmail.com and I will be pleased to give due accreditation or have them removed. No infringement of copyright is intended.