Basic Detail Report

00015687

Title
United States Navy submariner's uniform trousers : Captain Robert C. Gillette USN

Date
c 1942

Medium
Textile; cotton

Dimensions
Overall: 1030 x 500 mm, 500 g

Name
Trousers

History
During World War II, both the Australian public and the Allied Commanders agreed that the Australian mainland would almost inevitably be invaded by Japanese forces. With the fall of well-fortified Allied bases such as Singapore and the bombing of northern Australian ports, there was every possibility that the unprotected coastline of Australia would be vulnerable to further attacks. Between 1942 and 1945, Fremantle Port was one of the most important naval bases in the Indian Ocean hosting over 170 American, British and Dutch submarines, their support vessels and land-based facilities. During this time, the Royal Australian Navy did not have any submarines of its own having transferred its last to submarines to the Royal Navy in 1931, and relied on the support of its allies. Fremantle Port became the largest submarine base in the Southern Hemisphere, with over 410 Allied patrols leaving the port during this period. The United States forces played a dominant role in the war with Japan, particularly in the south-west Pacific region. Thousands of US troops streamed into Australia, resulting in complex socio-economic changes to Australian society. In Fremantle, the United States Navy took over 16 warehouses and other buildings and by 1944 over 200 civilians were employed directly in United States Navy facilities. The first United States submarine to arrive at Fremantle was in early March 1942 with the USS HOLLAND. For the next three years the United States submarine patrols leaving the port outnumbered all the Allied patrols combined - a total of 353. One of the United States submarines based at Fremantle was USS LAPON, which participated in United States Navy patrols in April, June, September and November of 1944. Captain Robert Charles Gillette was born on 7 April 1917 in Chicago, Illinois, and followed in his father's footsteps by attending the US Naval Academy at Annapolis. Gillette graduated in 1939, and reported to the aircraft carrier USS LEXINGTON where he served until February 1942, at which time he was transferred to Submarine School at New London, Connecticut. Following his graduation from Submarine School he reported to the submarine USS LAPON, aboard which he served as navigator and executive officer for eight war patrols operating in

the Pacific, based first at Pearl Harbor and later at Fremantle. Throughout 1944, USS LAPON successfully hunted Japanese shipping in the South China Sea and off Luzon, sinking the Japanese transport vessels TOYOKUNI MARU, NICHIREI MARU and HOKUROKU MARU; the cargo ships WALES MARU, BIZEN MARU and KYODO MARU; and the tanker TINSHIN MARU. The LAPON received the Navy Unit Citation for sinking or damaging over 100,000 tons of Japanese shipping, for which Captain Gillette received two Silver Stars. His first command was USS BLACKFISH which he assumed in March 1945. While Captain Gillette was Commanding Officer, BLACKFISH was responsible for the rescue of 28 downed aviators during one of her war patrols. For these rescues, Captain Gillette received a Letter of Commendation. Following World War II, Captain Gillette was assigned various duties with the Bureau of Naval Personnel, and completed his last tour of active duty as Commander of Submarine Flotilla TWO until he retired from active duty in July 1969.