H-Gram 016: Forgotten Valor in the North Pacific

14 March 2018

Contents:

75th Anniversary of World War Two

Battle of the Komandorski Islands: Forgotten Valor–The Charge of USS Bailey, *26 March 1943*

Seaman First Class D. L. Applewhite using a sound-powered telephone aboard USS Salt Lake City *(CA-25), March 1943. Photographed just after the battle of the Komandorski Islands, which took place on 26 March 1943. Note heavy arctic battle clothing (80-G-50232).*

On 26 March 1943, a mostly forgotten battle occurred in waters about 100 miles south of the Komandorski Islands, midway between the end of the U.S. Aleutian Island chain and the Soviet Kamchatka Peninsula. An outnumbered U.S. Navy force, centered on the heavy cruiser USS Salt Lake City *(CA-25), engaged a superior Japanese force in a four-hour-long daylight long-range gunnery duel (one of the last pure surface actions in naval history). At the end of the battle, despite thousands of rounds fired, no ships were lost on either side and personnel casualties were very few. The battle has gone down in history as a case of "much sound and fury signifying nothing," to quote Shakespeare. Nevertheless, at one point the engagement was on the verge of becoming what could have been the worst defeat in U.S. naval history, with the potential loss of over 3,000 men in freezing waters. However the battle also included one of the most courageous*

actions in U.S. naval history, specifically the charge of the destroyer USS Bailey *(DD-492, DESRON 14 embarked) with USS* Coghlan *(DD-606) and USS* Monaghan *(DD-354) in trail through a deluge of shellfire against the Japanese cruiser line at the most desperate and critical point in the battle. This action never really got the recognition it deserved. For more on the charge of* Bailey, *please see attachment H-016-1, and for more on the Aleutian Islands Campaign please see attachment H-016-2.*

Battle of the Atlantic: The Lost Boarding Party, 10 March 1943

I thought this piece written by Captain James Bloom, MC, USN (Ret.), was particularly interesting, and was an incident I had never heard of, which in my view qualifies it as "forgotten." It is an example of extraordinary bravery by U.S. Navy personnel in far-flung places that is indeed worth remembering. Nowadays, "MIOs" (maritime interdiction operations) have become almost so routine that they may lead to complacency. They are actually extremely dangerous, as exemplified by the experience of the volunteer boarding party from the destroyer USS Eberle *(DD-430) that went aboard the German blockade runner* Karin *in March 1943 just south of the equator in the Atlantic. Six U.S. Navy warships would be named after Sailors on the boarding team who made the ultimate sacrifice in an action that resulted in three Navy Crosses (one posthumous) and six posthumous Silver Stars. For more on this heroic boarding team, please see attachment H-016-3.*

100th Anniversary of World War One

The Disappearance of USS Cyclops

On 4 March 1918, the collier USS Cyclops *(Fuel Ship No. 4) departed from an unscheduled stop at Barbados en route to Baltimore and vanished with 306 people on board, including a number of passengers, and a cargo of manganese ore. There were no distress calls and no trace of her has ever been found. Although initially assumed to be lost due to German submarine or raider activity, British intelligence (which by then was reading German naval radio traffic very successfully, and sharing it with the United States) had no evidence of German activity related to* Cyclops, *and German records reviewed after the war showed no indication that the Germans had anything to do with the ship's loss—nor did they have any knowledge of it other than what they learned from press reports. The unexplained nature of her loss has provided for decades of fun and frolic by conspiracy buffs, and numerous and varied theories have been advanced, ranging from storms, catastrophic hull failure, mutiny, sabotage, and methane gas to space-time warp, aliens, and the Bermuda Triangle. The ship did disappear in what is now known as the Bermuda Triangle, although that term did not come into use until the 1950s. Although the idea that ships or aircraft are more likely to disappear in the Bermuda Triangle than anywhere else has been thoroughly debunked, USS* Cyclops *and Flight 19 (the disappearance of a flight of five U.S. Navy Avenger torpedo bombers from NAS Fort Lauderdale in December 1945) are always at the top of the list of "mysterious" events in the Bermuda Triangle for those inclined to believe in it. Catastrophic structural failure is actually the most likely cause. For more on* Cyclops, *and the identical fate of two of her three sisters, please see attachment H-016-4.*

120th Anniversary of Spanish American War

USS Oregon's *Dash to Glory*

As tensions continued to rise between the United States and Spain in the spring of 1898 following the sinking of USS Maine *in Havana Harbor, Cuba, the new battleship USS* Oregon *(Battleship No. 3) was ordered to sail from San Francisco to the U.S. east coast as fast as possible. This was not an easy strategic decision due to a recent war scare with Japan over the Sandwich (Hawaiian) Islands. Stripping* Oregon *from the Pacific coast would leave Japan with two battleships in the Pacific and the U.S. with none. The voyage would also not be easy because the need for haste dictated a course around the southern tip of South America via the perpetually stormy Cape Horn. Nevertheless, departing on 19 March 1898,* Oregon *made the 14,000-mile voyage*

to the U.S. east coast in 66 days, arriving at Jupiter Inlet, Florida, on 24 May. She did indeed get pounded severely while in the vicinity of Cape Horn, but that did not significantly slow her down. During her voyage, the United States declared war on Spain (announced on 25 April retroactive to 21 April), which Oregon *learned about during a brief stop for coal in Rio de Janeiro on 30 April. (The Battle of Manila Bay between the U.S. and Spanish navies would occur on 1 May.) Later, while off the coast of Brazil,* Oregon *even suffered a stubborn coal fire in a bunker next to one of her magazines, which her crew successfully extinguished, without need to put into port. Perhaps even more amazing,* Oregon *suffered no breakdowns during the unprecedented transit. The prowess of her engineers became legendary in the U.S. Navy. Immediately upon arrival in Florida,* Oregon *was ordered to join the U.S. naval blockade of Santiago, Cuba, in which a Spanish squadron was trapped. (As tensions had increased, Spain had sent four armored cruisers to Cuba over the heated objections of Spanish navy leaders, who insisted their ships were not ready for war—they were right.) Even with the wear and tear of the arduous voyage,* Oregon *was still the fastest battleship in the blockade and she would play a prominent role in the final defeat of the Spanish squadron when it tried to break out of Santiago. (I will cover the Battle of Manila Bay and the Battle of Santiago in future H-grams.)* Oregon*'s voyage had been a press sensation; newspapers hyped her progress every step of the way, making her arguably the most famous ship in the U.S. Navy to that point except for "Old Ironsides." The press bequeathed the moniker "Bulldog of the Navy." Her voyage was also used as an argument by politicians and others to bulldoze all opposition to building a canal across Panama, by any means necessary, including annexation of Panama. As fast as she was,* Oregon *had still not been able to get to the U.S. east coast before the war started, and leaving the west coast "defenseless" in the meantime was a serious strategic risk. Such arguments eventually carried the day in favor of building a canal (which would cost far more lives than the entire Spanish-American War). For more on USS* Oregon *and her descent from a national historic monument to an ignominious and sad end, please see attachment H-016-5. Attachment H-016-6 is a photograph of* Oregon *with a "bone in her teeth."*

USS Bailey *(DD-492), December 1942 (80-G-264956).*

H-016-1: Forgotten Valor: The Charge of USS *Bailey*, 26 March 1943

H-Gram 016, Attachment 1

Samuel J. Cox, Director NHHC

March 2018

"Suggest for your consideration retiring action," stated the message from Rear Admiral Thomas Kinkaid, Commander of U.S. Naval Forces in the Aleutian Islands, adding that U.S. Army Air Force bombers would reach the scene of battle in about five hours. The message provoked laughter on the bridge of the light cruiser USS *Richmond* (CL-9), flagship of Rear Admiral Charles H. "Soc" (short for "Socrates", his USNA nickname) McMorris, CTF 16.6, which isn't the response one might normally expect from men facing annihilation, but was not atypical of American Sailors in extremis. For over an hour and a half, TF16.6, centered on the heavy cruiser USS *Salt Lake City* (CA-25), had been engaged in a desperate long-range daylight gunnery duel with a Japanese force in the middle of nowhere at the edge of the Bering Sea, 500 miles from the U.S. base at Adak and 400 miles from the nearest Japanese base at Paramushiro in the Kuril Islands. Outgunned and outnumbered two-to-one by a faster Japanese force that was blocking the way toward Adak, and clueless to

how overmatched in torpedoes they were, the U.S. force was in serious trouble. With a water temperature of 28 degrees (F) and air temperature of 30 degrees, both sides clearly knew that any ship that went down would almost certainly leave no survivors.

In another two hours of running battle, *Salt Lake City* would be dead in the water, hit five times by shells from the heavy cruisers *Nachi* (victor of the Battle of the Java Sea and partially responsible for sinking three Allied cruisers) and *Maya*, with her engine room crews chest deep in freezing water and fuel oil trying to stem the flooding. With *Salt Lake City* crippled, there would be little hope for the elderly *Richmond* and four U.S. destroyers. What would come to be known as the Battle of the Komandorski Islands was shaping up to be yet another debacle.

The battle had started off well at first light on 26 March 1943, when the U.S. force sighted two large Japanese armed transports that intelligence reports said would be trying to resupply the Japanese garrisons occupying the U.S. islands of Attu and Kiska in the Aleutians. With the exception of a destroyer, Japanese escorts were initially unseen. Rear Admiral McMorris was expecting that the small convoy would be escorted, but his force had been sized to be equal to that of the Japanese Fifth Fleet (Northern Force) based in the Kurils, so at worst he expected an even fight. What intelligence had missed, however, was the arrival in the Kurils of a second Japanese heavy cruiser, the *Maya*, recently repaired after a crippled U.S. Navy aircraft had crashed into her in the Solomon Islands during the battles for Guadalcanal. (*Salt Lake City* herself had only recently completed repairs from damage incurred during the Battle of Cape Esperance, off Guadalcanal in October 1942.) Instead of a few escorts, Vice Admiral Boshiro Hosogaya had brought the entire Fifth Fleet: two heavy cruisers, two light cruisers and six destroyers.

Nachi opened fire first at 21,000 yards at *Salt Lake City* and, in an impressive feat of gunnery, missed just short on the first salvo, and carried away an antenna on the cruiser with a second salvo that just missed. U.S. officers marveled at the tight dispersion of the Japanese salvos. Then, *Nachi* suffered an engineering casualty that caused an electrical problem, temporarily jamming her entire main battery at maximum elevation and likely sparing *Salt Lake City* from a devastating series of hits. *Salt Lake City* responded with equally impressive gunnery, hitting *Nachi* with a shell on each of the third and fourth salvos. The first hit by a shell from *Salt Lake City* impacted a few feet aft of *Nachi*'s bridge, killing several signalmen, but miraculously (for the Japanese) sparing Vice Admiral Hosogaya and his staff in the spray of shrapnel that ripped through the bridge. Nevertheless, the near-death experience appears to have affected Hosogaya's nerve. From then on, *Nachi* and *Maya* used their speed advantage to keep their distance, maneuvering to bring the most guns to bear rather than rapidly closing the distance to *Salt Lake City* so that the Japanese cruisers' heavier armor would be an advantage. (All three heavy cruisers had the same main armament, ten 8-inch guns, but *Salt Lake City* had been built to comply with the Washington Naval Treaty and had sacrificed armor to meet the 10,000-ton displacement restriction, and her class was derisively known in the U.S. Navy as "tinclads.")

During the engagement, the Japanese fired 42 Type 93 oxygen ("Long Lance") torpedoes at the U.S. ships with no hits, although two or three passed directly under *Richmond* (one right under the bridge.) U.S. officers refused to believe their own lookouts, still failing to comprehend that the Japanese had torpedoes that could go over twice as far as their own. However, the "schools of fish" cited in U.S. after-action reports correspond to Japanese torpedo launches recorded in Japanese documents. During the rest of the battle, *Salt Lake City* fired hundreds of rounds, mostly from her two aft turrets. Sailors humped almost 200 8-inch

rounds (256 pounds each) from the forward magazines through the ship to the aft turrets to keep *Salt Lake City* in the fight. The cruiser's fire resulted in numerous near misses and only two more hits, one in *Nachi*'s empty torpedo bank, saving *Nachi* from the major secondary explosions that doomed *Mikuma* at Midway. Over 200 Japanese shells impacted within 50 yards of *Salt Lake City* before the enemy started scoring hits through gaps in what was generally a very effective U.S. smoke screen.

As *Salt Lake City* hoisted the "my speed zero" signal, and a Japanese shell shot away the "zero" flag, the cruiser's executive officer, Commander Worthington Bitler, shook Captain Bertram Rogers' hand and calmly said, "Looks like this is it." The same feeling was noted across the entire task force. Rogers had to make a wrenching command decision. With no speed and no electrical power, he could fight the ship to the last in manual mode as the proverbial sitting duck, or he could order abandon ship and hope that at least some of his crew could make it through the freezing water to the destroyer USS *Dale* (DD-353) standing by, and hope the faster Japanese destroyers would not run down *Dale* once *Salt Lake City* could no longer keep them at bay. Rogers, in his first combat action, had displayed an utterly cool and calm demeanor throughout the battle (as had Bitler and every other senior officer in the battle), which served to inspire his crew. Rogers ordered "abandon ship," then instantly belayed the order before it could be transmitted, and decided *Salt Lake City* would go down with her guns firing. He also radioed Rear Admiral McMorris on *Richmond* and requested that the destroyers conduct a torpedo attack on the Japanese.

Records are not clear as to whether Roger's request or the request of Captain Ralph S. Riggs, the DESRON 14 commander embarked on USS *Bailey* (DD-492), to conduct a torpedo attack with three of his destroyers reached McMorris first. What is clear is that Riggs anticipated the order; as soon as he saw *Salt Lake City* go dead in the water, he issued all necessary preparatory orders to the destroyers. McMorris then had a wrenching command decision. If the destroyers tried to flee there was at least some chance they could get away, but a daylight torpedo attack against a superior and completely alerted enemy force was considered suicidal, particularly since Japanese 8-inch, 5.5-inch, and 5-inch guns outranged U.S. torpedoes. With only slight hesitation, McMorris ordered "execute." With equal calmness, Riggs ordered *Bailey*'s skipper, Lieutenant Commander John Atkeson, to commence the attack, with USS *Coghlan* (DD-606) and USS *Monaghan* (DD-354) in trail.

As *Bailey* burst from the smoke screen at flank speed heading directly for the Japanese cruisers, smoke from her stacks and chemical smoke generators on her stern provided some degree of protection to *Coghlan* and *Monaghan*. But nothing could conceal *Bailey*. Every Japanese skipper, fire-control director, and gunner knew exactly what *Bailey* was doing, and every gun in range concentrated their fire on the destroyer. Hundreds of shells narrowly missed, and the deluge of explosions was described as "like Niagara Falls." There was reportedly not a dry eye on the bridges of *Richmond* and *Salt Lake City*, moved by the magnificent display of courage and the near certitude of what would happen to the 750 men aboard the three destroyers. Yet, as *Bailey* steamed through the maelstrom, the Japanese kept shooting behind the duck. Japanese witnesses reported incredulity that the "outstandingly valiant U.S. destroyer" emerged time and again from the deluge of water from what they thought were sure hits. As the range closed to 10,000 yards, *Bailey*'s 5-inch guns found their mark, hitting *Nachi* several times; one hit may have knocked out *Nachi*'s forward turret. However, Japanese fire also finally found its mark, and a hit on *Bailey* decimated her forward damage-control party, killing four and wounding seven, one mortally. Riggs was concerned that his amazing luck would not last, so he ordered

torpedoes launched at maximum effective range and *Bailey* launched all five (one of which probably would have hit the light cruiser *Abukuma* had it not prematurely detonated). Suffering another direct hit (which failed to detonate—*Bailey* crewmen rolled the unexploded 8-inch shell over the side) and several damaging near-misses that perforated the forward fire room and forward engine room with shrapnel, *Bailey* began to lose speed. As *Coghlan* drew alongside the battered *Bailey* to assume the lead, it became increasingly clear that not only had the Japanese turned away from the torpedo attack, but they were leaving the scene of battle. With a decisive victory within his grasp, Hosogaya had decided to call it a day.

After the war, records would show that Hosogaya actually made the decision to disengage just before the charge of the three "Irish" destroyers, but that does not detract in the least from their valor—and the Americans certainly did not know that at the time. His decision appeared to be based on the fact that he was running low on fuel and ammunition, frustration that none of his torpedoes had hit anything, poor reporting from his one scout aircraft that failed to report *Salt Lake City*'s grave situation due to the effective U.S. smoke screen and anti-aircraft fire, and mostly his (unfounded) fear of imminent air attack. Factors that fed his uneasiness were the length of the engagement (four hours,) *Salt Lake City*'s switch to general-purpose ammunition when she'd exhausted armor-piercing rounds, (the general-purpose ammunition produced a very different shell burst and actually appeared to provoke a heavy volley of Japanese anti-aircraft fire into the overcast at non-existent planes, as the Japanese thought they were being bombed) and spoofing by *Salt Lake City* radiomen on the air control frequency intercepted by Japanese radio intelligence. Regardless, Hosogaya's lack of characteristic Japanese aggressiveness would cost him his job and he was involuntarily retired.

On the American side, *Salt Lake City*'s engineers displayed incredible ingenuity and perseverance in working through the damage and flooding to get her boilers re-lit; she was actually only without engine power for a few minutes. The cruiser only suffered two killed, including the first lieutenant, Lieutenant Commander Windsor Gale, while *Bailey* suffered five killed. Japanese casualties are unknown, but believed to be about 27 killed, all on *Nachi*. No ships were lost on either side. Riggs, Atkeson, and Rogers were each awarded a Navy Cross for their actions (and all eventually retired as flag officers). The three other destroyer skippers were each awarded a Silver Star, as was the executive officer of *Salt Lake City* (and all four retired as flag officers.) McMorris was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal for his actions, as well as some criticism for not launching his scout plane (which was destroyed on *Salt Lake City*'s catapult by Japanese fire) which would have prevented him being surprised by the size of the Japanese force. Nevertheless, McMorris went on to be Admiral Nimitz's chief of staff for the duration of the war. In addition, the Japanese transports (three total in two groups) also turned away, so TF16.6 accomplished its mission.

The log entry on *Salt Lake City* probably sums it up: "This day the hand of Divine Providence lay over the ship. Never before in her colorful history has death been so close for so long a time. The entire crew offered its thanks to Almighty God for His mercy and protection." They also offered their profuse thanks (and all the ice cream they could eat) to the crew of *Bailey* and the "Irish" destroyers of DESRON 14.

As an epilogue, none of the Japanese ships that fought in the Battle of the Komandorski Islands survived the war. All of the U.S. ships survived with the exception of *Monaghan*. The destroyer that sank a Japanese midget submarine inside Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941 and earned 12 battle stars would succumb to Typhoon Cobra off the Philippines on 18 December 1944, with the loss of all but six of her crew. *Salt Lake City* was

used as a target for two atomic bomb tests, and survived, before being sunk as a target by a torpedo from the submarine USS *Blenny* (SS-324) in 1948.

(Sources for this note include volume VII of Samuel Eliot Morison's History of U.S. Naval Operations in World War II: Aleutians, Gilberts and Marshalls*; and John A. Lorelli's* The Battle of the Komandorski Islands, March 1943*, published by Naval Institute Press in 1984. Lorelli's book is a real gem. His description of the resourcefulness of the* Salt Lake City*'s "black gang" and damage-control parties in saving their ship is inspiring. His depictions of the leadership characteristics of participants in the battle and how they reacted under fire is also very interesting. Almost to a man they seemed to be Nimitz clones: cool, calm, utterly professional, no flamers or braggarts, and absolutely no panic.)*

Dutch Harbor, Unalaska Island, Alaska, 3 June 1942: A Navy machine gun crew watches intently as Japanese aircraft depart scene after the attack. Smoke in background is from the steamer SS Northwestern*, set ablaze by a dive bomber (80-G-11749).*

H-016-2: The Aleutians Campaign, 1942–43

H-Gram 016, Attachment 2
Samuel J. Cox, Director NHHC
March 2018

The Japanese carrier-based air attacks on Dutch Harbor in the Aleutian Islands chain of the U.S. Alaska Territory on 3 and 4 June 1942 (Operation AL) are frequently described as a diversion for the main Japanese navy operation at Midway (Operation MI). Operation AL was not a diversion. It was a complementary operation for the purpose of setting the conditions for a Japanese occupation of the Aleutian Islands in order to prevent the United States from using them as a base to attack Japan from the north. Japanese intelligence had some indication that the Americans were working on a very-long-range strategic bomber (what would become known later as the B-29 Superfortress). In addition, the Japanese were still not completely certain where the Doolittle Raid of April 1942 had originated. So, as to take no chances of another loss of face from another bombing raid, the Japanese navy general staff pushed for an operation to seize the

Aleutians—over the objection of Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, who viewed the operation as a diversion from what he expected to be the decisive battle of the war, at Midway (from Yamamoto's perspective, it was a diversion, but of his own resources). Yamamoto's intent was to draw as many U.S. ships, especially aircraft carriers, to the vicinity of Midway so that he could destroy them. Having U.S. ships chase after a diversion in the Aleutians was not his desire. Nevertheless, the navy general staff insisted on including an Aleutian operation as a condition for approving Yamamoto's Midway plan, and Yamamoto reluctantly acquiesced. As it turned out, Yamamoto could have sorely used the planes from the medium carriers *Junyo* and *Ryujo* committed to the Aleutian operation. Given how few U.S. planes were still operational after the first day of the Battle of Midway, those 60 to 80 planes might have changed the outcome.

The Aleutians campaign traditionally gets short shrift compared to Guadalcanal and I am afraid I will be guilty of the same. It did not take long for both sides to realize just how badly they had underestimated the adverse effects of climate and weather on operations in the Aleutians and that due to the terrible conditions and logistics challenges neither side was going to be able to use the Aleutians as a springboard to invade the other. Both sides quickly realized that the Aleutians were more a liability than an advantage, and that any forces sent there were at the cost of forces sorely needed elsewhere. As a result, both sides tried to minimize the number of forces committed. In the end, the Aleutians amounted to a side show that had negligible effect on the outcome of the war. This, of course, is no consolation to the almost 1,500 American servicemen who lost their lives in the campaign. There are also numerous instances of valor that deserve to be remembered.

The following is not meant to be a comprehensive treatment of the Aleutian Islands campaign, but is rather just the highlights of the campaign focused on U.S. and Japanese naval actions.

At 0258 (just before dawn) on 3 June 1942, the two carriers of Japanese Carrier Division Four, under the command of Rear Admiral Kakuji Kakuta, launched an air strike against the U.S. base at Dutch Harbor on the island of Unalaska in the eastern Aleutians, the only U.S. base of consequence in the area. Neither the *Junyo* nor the *Ryujo* were first-line carriers. Both were conversions from other ships, with significant liabilities. For example, *Junyo* was too slow to launch Kate torpedo bombers, and *Ryujo*'s elevators were too small to operate Val dive bombers. However, working together, as Japanese carrier divisions trained to do, the two ships could put up a credible integrated strike package. In this case, the first launch was 34 aircraft (12 A6M Zero fighters, 10 B5N Kates—configured as high-level bombers—and 12 D3A Val dive bombers). Due to foul weather, half the planes did not find the target. *Junyo*'s planes turned back and only nine Kates and three Zeros from *Ryujo* attacked Dutch Harbor, which put up spirited anti-aircraft resistance and downed one aircraft.

U.S. forces in the Aleutians knew an attack was coming, based on the same intelligence code-breaking success that gave warning of the Midway operation. Unlike Midway, Dutch Harbor did not have precise intelligence on exactly when the attack was coming, nor was an extensive reconnaissance effort by PBY Catalina flying boats and U.S. Army Air Force bombers able to find the Japanese force in the fog and heavy cloud cover, so the first Japanese strike achieved tactical surprise. Radar on the seaplane tender USS *Gillis* (AVD-12) provided the first warning of the inbound raid. Fortunately, because of the intelligence warning, U.S. surface ships in the area were well clear of the threat, although Rear Admiral Robert "Fuzzy" Theobald, commander of Task Force 8 (two heavy cruisers, three light cruisers, plus destroyers) came under criticism

that his force was so far away (about 500 miles) that it was of no help either. However, given the unlikelihood of fighter support from land-based USAAF fighters, Theobold's actions were prudent given the presence of Japanese aircraft carriers. Theobold was also described by Samuel Eliot Morison as "one of the best brains and worst dispositions in the Navy" and his relationship with U.S. Army commanders in Alaska was always rocky at best. His inability to get along would eventually result in his relief by CNO King for doing a "substandard job" (King's words) and replacement with Rear Admiral Thomas C. Kinkaid. On the other hand, the U.S. Army Air Force boldly claimed to have driven off the Japanese carriers and saved Alaska from a Japanese invasion when they hit nothing.

The initial Japanese strike on Dutch Harbor caused damage to shore installations, but was not very effective. A Japanese strike aircraft sighted some of the nine destroyers of Commander Wyatt Craig's Destroyer Striking Group (TG 8.4) at Makushin Bay, and the Japanese launched a reconnaissance strike by four cruiser-launched float planes at 0900 to go after the destroyers, but were unable to find them. The Japanese strike was surprised by two USAAF P-40 fighters, which shot down two and damaged two aircraft. Japanese intelligence had failed to detect the construction of an airstrip and the movement of U.S. aircraft to Otter Point on the island Umnak. Expecting Dutch Harbor to have no fighter defense, the Japanese received a rude shock.

Weather continued to play havoc with both sides, but at 1600 on 4 June, the Japanese carriers launched another strike on Dutch Harbor of 32 aircraft (15 Zero fighters, 11 Val dive bombers, and 6 bomb-armed Kates). This attack pummeled Dutch Harbor pretty well, and six of the 20 PBYs were destroyed (23 Navy personnel killed). In the meantime, USAAF bombers found the Japanese carriers, but achieved no hits, losing a B-17 and a B-26. The returning Japanese strike stumbled on the Otter Point airstrip and was engaged by six P-40s; one Zero and two Kates were downed at a cost of four P-40s. Two Val dive bombers and one Zero fighter, damaged over Dutch Harbor, failed to return to their carrier. The Zero crash-landed on Akutan Island; the pilot was killed, but the mostly intact plane was recovered and eventually repaired to flying condition by the Americans enabling the United States to get a first-hand look the strengths and weaknesses of the Zero fighter. All told, the Japanese lost about eight aircraft and the United States about 14, a number on each side to operational causes and the weather. About 78 Americans and 10 Japanese were killed. (Of note, many accounts of losses on both sides conflict, so these numbers are my best guess.)

Late on 4 June, as his strike was already in the air en route Dutch Harbor, Rear Admiral Kakuta received word of the Japanese debacle at Midway and orders to break off the engagement in the Aleutians and head south, although it quickly became apparent that it was too late for Kakuta's force to affect the outcome at Midway. However, as a result of the carriers leaving, the Japanese cancelled a planned landing on Adak. The Japanese did go ahead with planned landings on Kiska on 6 June and Attu on 7 June at the far western end of the Aleutian Islands chain. The only U.S. presence on Kiska was a ten-man Navy weather station; the 500-man Japanese special naval landing force killed two and captured seven U.S. Navy personnel. Chief Petty Officer William C. House successfully evaded the Japanese for 50 days before freezing conditions and starvation forced him to surrender. Twelve hundred Japanese special naval landing force pesonnel met no resistance at Attu from an American schoolteacher (Mrs. Etta Jones) and 43 (or so) native Aleuts (including about 15 children). Charles Foster Jones, the schoolteacher's husband, was killed (possibly executed) and the Aleuts were shipped off to Japan as the Japanese occupied the island.

On the night of 16/17 June, the U.S. submarine *S-27* (SS-132) ran hard aground in thick fog on

Amchitka Island. Repeated attempts to get her off the rocks failed. Six distress calls were sent, but only one, with no positional data, was received. The crew used a rubber boat to rig lines to the shore, and men, provisions, medicine, and weapons were safely ferried to land and a makeshift camp was set up. Equipment was destroyed and classified material burned before the last men aboard, the commanding officer, executive officer, and radioman, came ashore at 1550 the next day. After 22 June, leaking chlorine gas prevented any further re-boarding of the sub. On 24 June, a PBY Catalina sighted the camp, made a water landing, and took off with 15 survivors; the remaining crew was recovered by three PBY flights the next day. The submarine was subsequently stripped of guns and only the hulk was left on the rocks.

On 18 June, U.S. Army Air Force B-17 and B-24 long-range bombers attacked Kiska Harbor and sank the Japanese oiler *Nissan Maru*. Periodic bombing raids on Japanese-held Kiska would continue over the next months.

On 4 July, USS *Triton* (SS-201,) C. C. Kirkpatrick commanding, on her fourth war patrol, hit and sank the Japanese destroyer *Nenohi* with one of two torpedoes fired after a ten-hour chase southeast of Attu Island. *Nenohi* capsized two minutes after being hit, and went down with 188 men including her captain. The destroyer *Inazuma* rescued 38 of *Nenohi*'s crew. On 9 August, *Triton* narrowly missed being hit by torpedoes from a Japanese submarine. On 15 March 1943, *Triton* was sunk with all hands on her sixth war patrol by three Japanese destroyers off the Admiralty Islands near the eastern end of New Guinea.

On 5 Jul 42, USS *Growler* (SS-215,) Lieutenant Commander Howard W. "Take her down!" Gilmore commanding, on her first war patrol, hit the Japanese destroyer *Arare* amidships with a torpedo just outside Kiska harbor. *Arare* exploded and sank with 104 of her crew. The destroyer *Shiranuhi* rescued 42 of *Arare*'s crew, including the commanding officer, despite having been hit by a torpedo from *Growler* that blew off her bow, killing three of her own crew. *Shiranuhi* counter-fired with two torpedoes that passed down each side of *Growler*. The destroyer *Kasumi* also had her bow blown off by a torpedo from *Growler*, killing ten crewmen. The only good thing for the Japanese that day was that when the *Growler* dove deep after the torpedo attack she did not see the seaplane tender *Chiyoda* (later converted to a light aircraft carrier), which the three destroyers were responsible for defending.

On 5 October, USS *Grunion* (SS-216,) Lieutenant Commander Mannert L. Abele commanding, on her first war patrol, was reported overdue and assumed lost with all hands, nothing having been heard from her since 30 July, when she reported heavy ASW activity in the vicinity of Kiska. Her fate remained unknown until her wreck was found in 2007 and correlated with Japanese sources. *Grunion* fired as many as six torpedoes at the armed Japanese cargo ship *Kano Maru*. Of the first two, one missed astern as *Kano Maru* maneuvered to avoid the sub, but the other hit the Japanese ship in the machinery room, causing her to lose propulsion, but failing to sink her. *Grunion* fired another torpedo that passed under *Kano Maru* and the magnetic exploder failed to function. The submarine fired possibly three more torpedoes; two definitely hit the ship, but failed to detonate. The first torpedo that missed may have circled back and hit *Grunion* on the periscope supports, but failed to explode. *Grunion* surfaced to attempt to sink the *Kano Maru* with her deck guns, but the Japanese gunners already had the range with their 3-inch guns. Japanese gunfire hit just aft of the conning tower and possibly elsewhere. Whatever the damage, it was sufficient for *Grunion* to lose depth control and sink. There were no survivors among her 60-man crew. *Grunion* sank two Japanese patrol boats in the days before she was lost. (There are multiple accounts of the engagement between *Grunion* and *Kano Maru*, and they don't match, so this is my attempt at a reconstruction.)

Between 18 and 27 July, a U.S. Navy task force under the command of Rear Admiral Theobold attempted several times to bombard Kiska Harbor, but was thwarted by thick fog and the collision of two destroyer-minesweepers with each other, while a third (of four) was rammed by the destroyer *Monaghan* (DD-354), which precluded a preliminary sweep for mines, aborting the bombardment. This was unfortunate because at the time the harbor contained numerous Japanese ships. The same task group, consisting of the heavy cruisers *Indianapolis* (CA-35, flagship) and *Louisville* (CA-28), and the light cruisers *Honolulu* (CL-48), *Nashville* (CL-43), and *St. Louis* (CL-49), four destroyers, and one destroyer-minesweeper under the command of Rear Admiral W. W. "Poco" Smith, tried again with somewhat better luck. Mindful of the adage that "a ship's a fool that fights a fort," Rear Admiral Smith was probably overly cautious, choosing to bombard the harbor via indirect fire over hills. Unfortunately, Japanese fighters successfully drove off the cruisers' SOC float scout planes, so there was no way to spot the fall of shot. Three of the SOCs recovered had over 100 bullet holes (one with 167.) One SOC from *Indianapolis* was lost, and two from *St. Louis* were damaged and had to recover at Umnak Island. A Japanese shore battery and Japanese aircraft also made some unsuccessful attacks against the U.S. ships. The results of the U.S. shelling included one Japanese Mavis long-range seaplane destroyed and two others damaged beyond repair, all at their moorings. The damaged cargo ship *Kano Maru* (survivor of the encounter with submarine *Grunion*) was set on fire and subsequently sunk by an attack by U.S. PBY Catalinas. Two Japanese destroyers, three sub chasers, and several midget submarines escaped damage.

On 30 August, about 4,500 U.S. Army troops were landed on unoccupied Adak Island in the central Aleutians, with the mission to establish an operational airfield. On the same day, the Japanese submarine *RO-61*, under cover of a gale, hit the seaplane tender USS *Casco* (AVP-12) while at anchor in Nazan Bay, Atka Island, killing five and wounding 20. Superb damage control by *Casco*'s crew was able to stem the flooding long enough for her skipper to get her underway and beach her, where she was later refloated and subsequently repaired and returned to service. The next day two PBYs (tended by *Casco*) caught the *RO-61* on the surface, probably recharging batteries, and damaged her with a depth bomb. The destroyer USS *Reid* (DD-369) followed the trail of oil, and conducted two depth-charge attacks that forced *RO-61* to the surface due to the sub starting to fill with chlorine gas. The *RO-61*'s crew attempted to man the deck gun, and some fired carbines at the *Reid*, but 20-mm fire cut down almost all those on deck. *Reid* finished her off with 5-inch guns, and *RO-61* sank with 59 of her crew, including the commanding officer. *Reid* radioed to *Casco*, "Got the sub that got you. Have five survivors for proof."

On 16 October, U.S. Army Air Force B-26 bombers attacked a Japanese resupply convoy near Kiska Island. A direct hit on the destroyer *Oboro* caused munitions that were being transported to explode and sink the ship. Only 17 of her crew, including the commanding officer, survived and were rescued by the destroyer *Hatsuharu*, which was also badly damaged in the attack.

On 26 October, the submarine USS *S-31* (SS-136), on her fifth war patrol, penetrated Otomae Wan (anchorage) off Paramushiro in the Kuril Islands and torpedoed and sank the cargo ship *Keizan Maru*. *S-31* grounded several times, but was able to escape. On *S-31*'s previous patrol, in the Aleutian Islands, she had been attacked twice by U.S. aircraft, suffered a chlorine gas leak when water from heavy seas entered the forward battery compartment, and her skipper, Lieutenant Commander Thomas F. Williamson, was killed when a Type X emergency identification flare exploded accidentally. *S-31* survived all eight of her war patrols.

On 27 December, heavy storm seas ripped two depth charges from their racks on the destroyer-minesweeper USS *Wasmuth* (DMS-15), which then exploded under her fantail, breaking her keel and severing her stern. The oiler USS *Ramapo* (AO-12) tried to tow *Wasmuth,* but was unable to due to the heavy seas. Nevertheless, *Ramapo* then came alongside despite sea state, and over the course of three hours successfully rescued all of *Wasmuth*'s crew. The abandoned *Wasmuth* finally sank on 29 December.

On 4 January 1943, Rear Admiral Thomas C. Kinkaid, who had been jerked out of command of a cruiser-destroyer group by CNO King just before the disastrous Battle of Tassafaronga, relieved Rear Admiral Theobold in command of U.S. naval forces in the Aleutian Islands. Kinkaid apparently could get along better with the Army than Theobold. Rear Admiral Charles H. "Soc" McMorris arrived about the same time to assume command of TF-16. McMorris had been in command of the heavy cruiser *San Francisco* (CA-38) at the Battle of Cape Esperance when she nearly fired on the heavy cruiser *Salt Lake City* (CA-25) by mistake (but McMorris had prudently held fire). McMorris had been relieved in command of *San Francisco* by Captain Cassin Young, who was killed aboard the ship in the Friday the 13th (November 1942) battle off Guadalcanal.

On 12 January, U.S. Army troops were landed on unoccupied Amchitka Island in the central Aleutians, also to establish an airfield. While covering the landing, the destroyer USS *Worden* (DD-352), veteran of Pearl Harbor, Midway, and the Eastern Solomons, met her match with an uncharted pinnacle in Constantine Harbor, Amchitka. The pinnacle tore a hole in her engine room that resulted in her losing all power. USS *Dewey* (DD-349) tried to tow her, but the cable parted and the strong current swept *Worden* onto the rocks and she began to break up in the pounding surf. While directing the abandon-ship effort, her commanding officer, Commander William G. Pogue, was swept overboard by a large wave, along with a number of his crew. Pogue was pulled unconscious from the freezing water and survived, but 14 crewmen perished. Under the circumstances, it was a credit to Pogue that more of his 186-man crew were not lost.

On 18 February, a U.S. task force under the command of Rear Admiral McMorris, embarked on the light cruiser *Richmond* (CL-9), consisting of the heavy cruiser *Indianapolis* (CA-35) and four destroyers, bombarded Chichagof Harbor on Attu Island in the far western Aleutians. Unfortunately, no Japanese ships were present and damage was minimal. During the night following the bombardment, *Indianapolis* and the destroyers *Coghlan* (DD-606) and *Gillespie* (DD-609) intercepted the Japanese transport *Akagane Maru* attempting to bring troops, supplies, and munitions to Attu Island. *Indianapolis* hit the *Akagane Maru* with her third 8-inch salvo, setting her on fire from stem to stern, followed by a large explosion. *Coghlan* and *Gillespie* were directed to finish her off with torpedoes. *Coghlan* fired three torpedoes; one passed directly under *Akagane* without exploding, one ran true but detonated prematurely, and the third missed astern. *Gillespie* then fired a torpedo that failed to explode. Her second torpedo porpoised on the surface and missed. *Coghlan* then fired numerous gun rounds, but the flaming ship would not go down. *Coghlan* fired one more torpedo that also detonated prematurely. As Samuel Eliot Morison wrote, "Now the destroyer sailors knew how the submariners felt about defective weapons." *Akagane Maru* eventually was sunk by more destroyer gunfire. All 140 aboard the the Japanese vessel perished. Two other Japanese supply ships saw the pyrotechnics from over the horizon and turned away, although one later returned and delivered supplies to Attu.

Following the loss of *Akagane Maru* (and others that had been hit by U.S. Army Air Force air attacks on Attu and Kiska), the commander of the Japanese Northern Force (Fifth Fleet) based in the

Kuril Islands, Vice Admiral Boshiro Hosogaya, decided not to risk any more ships, and would deliver further supplies via submarine. The Japanese army immediately appealed this decision, as the supply situation on both islands was becoming increasingly desperate and submarines could not possibly deliver enough. Hosogaya agreed to try again, but changed tactics. Instead of cargo ships trying to slip through to the islands singly, Hosogaya formed a convoy with a heavy screen of escorts, deemed Operation A-GO. The convoy successfully delivered supplies to Attu on 9 March and all ships returned safely to their base at Paramushiro in the Kurils. Yet even this was not enough, and the Japanese army petitioned for another convoy, setting the stage for what would become the Battle of Komandorski Islands.

On 15 March, TF16.6 departed Dutch Harbor, Alaska. Under the command of Rear Admiral McMorris, embarked on the elderly light cruiser *Richmond*, the force consisted of the heavy cruiser *Salt Lake City* (which had relieved *Indianapolis* as the duty heavy cruiser) and four destroyers. *Salt Lake City* had finally completed repairs from damage received during the Battle of Cape Esperance, where she had valiantly interposed herself between the Japanese cruisers and the severely damaged and burning USS *Boise* (CL-47). Among the upgrades to *Salt Lake City* was the creation of a space termed the "Combat Information Center," one of the first CICs (and the first that I can find) Unfortunately, the CIC would not be particularly effective during the Battle of the Komandorski Islands because the shock of the frequent firing of *Salt Lake City*'s main battery damaged the radar and communications equipment. The repeated shock also played havoc with the fire-control radars that had been installed on the cruiser, so they didn't work either. The Battle of the Komandorski Islands would be fought the old-fashioned way, with visual spotting of shell. Although all the U.S. ships in the battle had radar, and most, including *Salt Lake City*, had the newer (and much better) SG radar, Japanese lookouts still spotted the U.S. ships at the same time U.S. radar detected the Japanese. Nevertheless, the accuracy of Japanese fire convinced U.S. officers that the Japanese had radar when, in fact, none of the Japanese ships did. On 22 March, the Japanese "D Convoy" departed Paramushiro destined for Attu, with the entire Japanese Fifth Fleet as escort.

On 26 March, the Japanese D Convoy and escorts and the U.S. TF16.6 engaged each other near the Komandorski Islands. Please see attachment H-016-1 for more on this engagement and the "outstandingly valiant" charge of the destroyer USS *Bailey* (DD-492).

On 11 May, the United States invaded Attu. Gunfire support was provided by the old battleships *Pennsylvania*(BB-38,) *Idaho* (BB-42), and *Nevada* (BB-36), and air support by the escort carrier *Nassau* (CVE-16) and U.S. Army Air Force aircraft. An additional three heavy cruisers, three light cruisers, 19 destroyers, four attack transports, and other oilers, minesweepers, and small craft supported the landing. This was complicated by fog and heavy weather during which the destroyer *Macdonough* (DD-351) and destroyer-minelayer *Sicard* (DM-21) collided. Both survived, but *Sicard* was supposed to be the control vessel for the landing. The submarines *Narwhal* (SS-167) and *Nautilus* (SS-168) each sent one hundred scouts ashore on the north side of Attu to make final determination on the landing beaches. The destroyer-transport *Kane* (APD-18) groped through the fog and put 400 troops ashore several hours later. By nightfall, about 1,500 troops were ashore, as landing craft were repeatedly impeded by fog. On the south side, fog also hampered the landings, and the first wave of troops spent almost the entire day in landing craft waiting for the fog to clear, in what were fortunately calm seas on that side of the island. Once the fog lifted, another 2,000 troops went ashore. During the next week, the U.S. battleships and destroyers provided fire support to U.S. Army troops. On 22 May, the Japanese

counter-attacked with long-range flights by G4M Betty torpedo bombers from Paramushiro, attacking the destroyer *Phelps* (DD-360) and patrol gunboat *Charleston* (PG-51), which put up an effective anti-aircraft barrage and evaded about 17 torpedoes. The Bettys came back the next day and were intercepted by USAAF P-38 Lightning fighters, which shot down five Bettys at the cost of two P-38s; the surviving Bettys jettisoned their bombs and turned away. The Japanese navy also formed up a relief force consisting of four aircraft carriers, three battleships, seven cruisers, and 11 destroyers; however, the situation on Attu was deemed hopeless before the force could get underway and the mission was cancelled. On 29 May, with no hope of relief, the Japanese defenders mounted one of the largest *banzai* charges of the war, which penetrated deep into U.S. lines, resulting in hand-to-hand fighting in rear-echelon areas. When it was over, over 2,300 Japanese soldiers were dead, including the commander, Colonel Yamasaki, who had led the charge. Only 28 of the Japanese defenders were taken alive. U.S. casualties throughout the Kiska operation amounted to about 550 killed and 1,100 wounded (and another 1,800 casualties due to cold injuries and disease.)

On 21 May, Imperial Japanese Navy headquarters reached the decision to evacuate the garrison on Kiska, which eventually was known as Operation *Ke-Go*. Like Operation *Ke*, the evacuation of Guadalcanal, *Ke-Go* would be conducted with exceptionally effective operational security. As early as 30 May, the Japanese commenced the evacuation of Kiska by submarine. However, after losing three submarines and only getting about 800 soldiers off the island, the Japanese gave up on submarine evacuations and prepared for a surface operation, which commenced with a 16-ship force on 6 July, under the command of Rear Admiral Kimura. Also on 6 July, a U.S. Navy task force commanded by Rear Admiral Robert C. "Ike" Giffen embarked on heavy cruiser *Wichita* (CA-45), with two other heavy cruisers, one light cruiser, and four destroyers, bombarded Kiska, without much result. On 10 July, USAAF bombers flying from recently captured Attu flew their first bombing mission over the Japanese base at Paramushiro, but the Japanese ships were gone. However, the Japanese force ran low on fuel while awaiting sufficient fog cover to conceal their run to Kiska and returned to Paramushiro on 15 July. On 22 July, a major U.S. task force including the old battleships *Mississippi* (BB-41) and *New Mexico* (BB-40) bombarded Kiska again and succeeded in destroying several barracks buildings, but killing none of the well-dug-in Japanese troops. On the same day, Kimura departed Paramushiro for a second evacuation attempt.

On 26 July, a battle occurred that the U.S. Navy would just as soon forget, which became known as the Battle of the Pips. It began on 23 July, when a PBY Catalina reported radar contact on seven ships 200 nautical miles southwest of Attu. U.S. ships began to move to intercept, and the two destroyers covering Kiska Harbor were detached in pursuit, which unintentionally cleared the way for Kimura's evacuation force. In the meantime, the same force that had bombarded Kiska on 22 July pulled 80 miles away from the island to intercept the Japanese force. Just after midnight on 26 July, *Mississippi* reported radar contacts at 15 miles, and radar on *Idaho*, *Wichita*, and *Portland* (CA-33) also detected the contacts. However, neither *San Francisco* nor any of the destroyers picked up anything on radar. Nevertheless, at 0013, the battleships and cruisers opened fire on the radar contacts, expending 518 14-inch rounds from the two battleships and 487 8-inch rounds from the three heavy cruisers. In the confusion of night battle, lookouts reported seeing enemy star shells, torpedo wakes, lights, flares, concussions, and other battle phenomena. At 0044, Rear Admiral Giffen ordered a cease-fire since the radar contacts had disappeared. The next morning, a search revealed absolutely nothing, or as Samuel Eliot Morison lamented, "not even a dead whale." Morison chalked it up to

phantom radar echoes from mountains on the islands. Others have postulated that the contacts were rafts of migratory petrals that fly through the Aleutians in July every year. Although the Battle of the Pips quickly became the butt of many jokes, Giffen noted that it was the most realistic battle exercise he had ever experienced.

On 28 July, Rear Admiral Kimura's evacuation convoy arrived at Kiska Harbor, which was covered by a blanket of heavy fog. In under an hour, Kimura evacuated the entire garrison of 5,183 men and then got them safely to Paramushiro, leaving Kiska abandoned. Over the next two weeks, U.S. battleships, heavy bombers, and other ships and aircraft pummeled Kiska. Pilots even reported being fired upon by ground-based air defenses, which didn't exist. On 13 August, an invasion force of over 100 ships transporting 34,000 U.S. and Canadian troops arrived off Kiska. The Allies were shocked to encounter no opposition to the 15 August landings, although 17 Americans were killed in "friendly fire" incidents in the fog before realizing that there were no Japanese left on the island.

On the night of 17/18 August, the new *Fletcher*-class destroyer USS *Abner Read* (DD-526) had her entire stern blown off by what was later believed to be a drifting mine while supporting the landings on Kiska. Crewmembers asleep in aft compartments had little chance, and 71 were killed or missing, with another 47 wounded. *Abner Read* survived, and was repaired and earned four battle stars before she was sunk by a *kamikaze* off Leyte on 1 November 1944 with a loss of 22 of her crew.

The Aleutians never were developed as a base for B-29s to bomb Japan or as a corridor for invasion. The climate and logistics challenges were simply insurmountable. A relatively small force of USAAF bombers and land-based Navy bombers, primarily twin-engine PV-1 Venturas, flying from Attu, conducted periodic raids against Paramushiro and other Japanese facilities in range in the northern Kuril Islands. The Navy Venturas suffered one of the highest casualty rates of any Navy units in the war, many being lost to weather-related mishaps as well as Japanese fighters. These raids did tie down about 500 Japanese aircraft and 41,000 ground troops awaiting a northern Allied assault that never came. The cost of the Aleutian campaign to the United States for all services was about 1,500 killed, 600 missing, 3,400 wounded, 9 POWs, 225 aircraft lost, and the destroyer USS *Worden* and submarines USS *Grunion* (all hands) and *S-27* lost. The Japanese lost over 4,300 killed.

(Sources: Samuel Eliot Morison, History of U.S. Naval Operations in World War II*, Vol IV.* Coral Sea, Midway and Submarine Operations*, and Vol VII,* Aleutians, Gilberts and Marshalls; *NHHC* Dictionary of American Fighting Ships *for various ships; John Lorelli,* The Battle of Komandorski Islands; *and Parshall and Tully,* Shattered Sword: The Untold Story of the Battle of Midway.)

USS Eberle *(DD-430) circa 1943 (NH 73452).*

H-016-3: Battle of the Atlantic—The Lost Boarding Party, 10 March 1943

H-Gram 016, Attachment 3
Samuel J. Cox, Director NHHC/CAPT James Bloom, MC, USN (ret.)
March 2018

By 1942, the Allied blockade of Germany was pinching Hitler. Increasingly, Germany had to rely on trade with distant lands in the Far East. Thus, the *Kriegsmarine* commissioned blockade runners, who operated from occupied French Atlantic ports. Between 1940 and 1944, a total of 21 Asia-bound freighters attempted the breakout. Six of these fell victim to Allied warships, but the rest delivered 111,490 tons of cargo to Germany. One notable runner was the 7,323-ton *Karin*, the former Dutch passenger/cargo ship *Koya Nopan*. Armed with a 105-mm gun aft and four 20-mm cannon, she ran the blockade outbound in late 1942. In Malaysia, she loaded 4,000 tons of rubber and tin, and, on 4 February 1943, she put to sea for the return to Germany. Flying Dutch flags identifying her as *Kota Tjandi*, she coursed through the South Atlantic. However, the entry of Brazil into the war on 22 August 1942 had shifted control of the "Atlantic Narrows" between Brazil and Western Africa to the Allies. On 10 March 1943, Task Group 23.1, consisting of USS *Savannah* (CL-42), *Santee* (ACV-29), *Livermore*

(DD-429), and *Eberle* (DD-430), was cruising just south of the Equator.

An SOC-3 Seagull from *Santee* spotted a solitary ship cruising at 12 knots near the St. Peter and St. Paul archipelago. At 1633, *Savannah*, embarking task group commander Rear Admiral Oliver M. Read, Jr., fired warning shots across the freighter's bows. She hove to and signaled "FM" ("I am sinking"). *Eberle* ignored the Dutch flag and closed. Suddenly, explosions echoed across the waves and smoke began rising from the freighter. The vessel proved to be *Karin*, whose crew lowered boats and threw papers overboard. *Eberle*'s skipper, Commander Karl F. Poehlmann, dispatched 12 volunteers.

By 1649, heavy flames issued from the freighter. Lieutenant Junior Grade Frederick L. Edwards, leading the boarding party, gained the burning deck and ran for the bridge. Coxswain Joseph E.H. Metivier, Fireman First Class Dennis J. Buckley, Seaman Third Class William J. Pattison, Watertender Second Class Alex M. Diachenko, and three shipmates headed below decks to remove scuttling charges. The others fought fires in a gallant attempt to save *Karin*. However, the work of the 72 German crewmen had been too efficient. Poehlmann ordered the boarding party off just as three large explosions racked the bridge and after deckhouse. Holes were blown in *Karin*'s hull and Metivier, Buckley, Diachenko, and Pattison took the full force of the blasts. All below decks were killed instantly. *Eberle*'s whaleboat disintegrated into splinters. A second boat recovered Edwards and the injured Seaman First Class Alexander J. Bisheimer and Seaman Second Class Louis J. Doll—the only members of the boarding party to survive. *Karin* sank, the valorous attempt of the boarders having failed.

The entire German crew was rescued from their lifeboats and held as POWs. Edwards, Bisheimer, and Pattison received the Navy Cross; the remaining boarders were posthumously awarded the Silver Star. Signalman Pattison was subsequently remembered with USS *William J. Pattison* (DD-594). The World War II warships *Diachenko* (APD-123), *Dennis J. Buckley* (DD-808), *Metivier* (DE-582), *Tinsman* (DE-589), and *Myers* (DE-595) remember others who made the ultimate sacrifice with this fearless boarding party. The remaining boarders who lost their lives were: Fireman First Class William J. Jones; Carpenter's Mate First Class Robert M. Shockley; Machinist Mate First Class Merton B. Myers; and Seaman Second Class Wilbur G. Davis.

Sources:

"The Battle of the Atlantic II, U-Boat Operations (SRH-008), Chapter XIII, Surface Blockade Runners, Winter 1942–43 and 1943–44." At: http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/ETO/Ultra/SRH-008/SRH-008-13.html, retrieved 9 September 2017.

Bruhn, David. "Sailing Under False Colors." At: http://www.davidbruhn.com/9thBookChapter1.pdf, retrieved 9 September 2017.

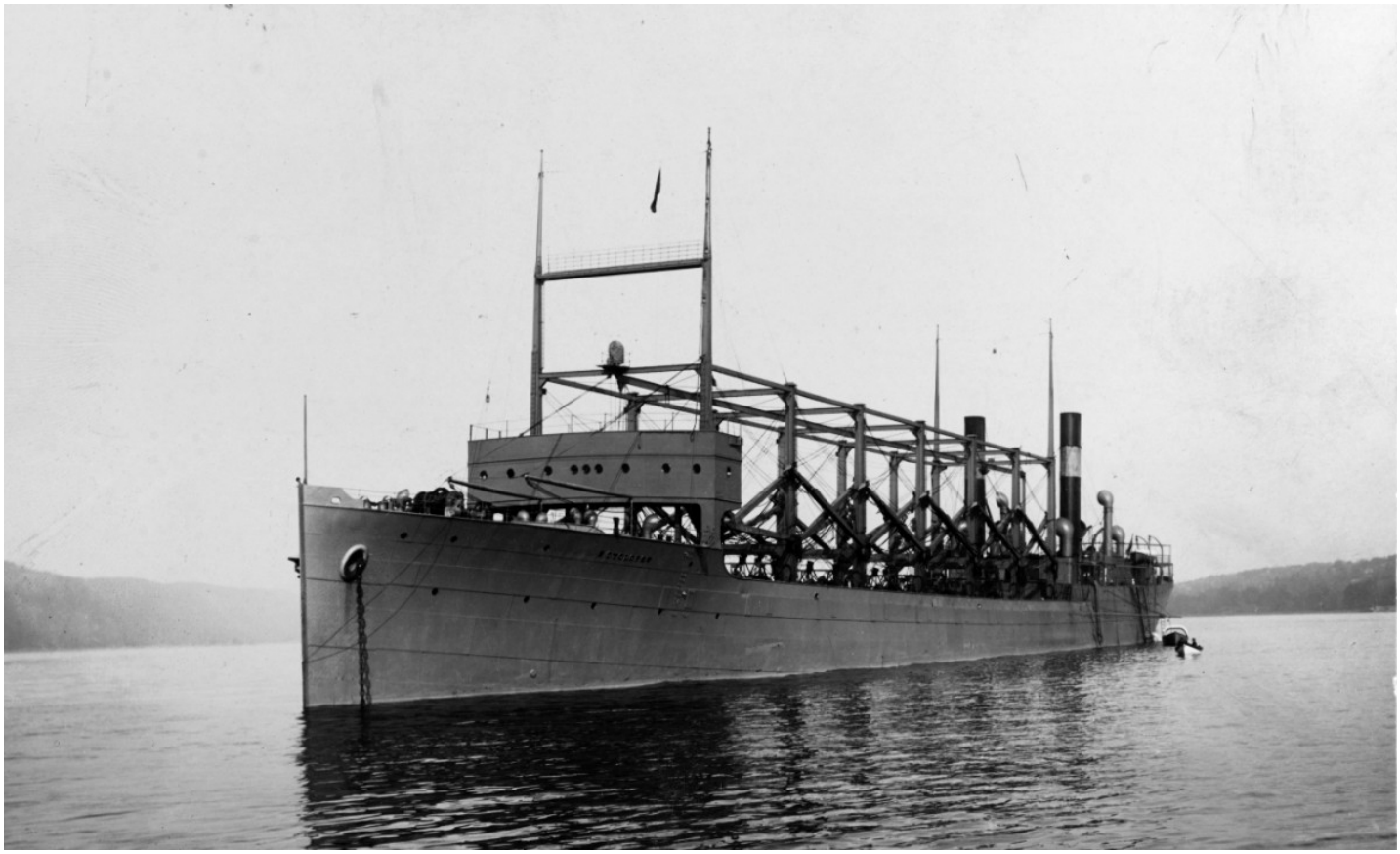
Department of the Navy, Naval History Division. *Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships*, Vol. 2 "C–F." Washington, DC: Government Printing Office (GPO), 1977.

———. *Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships*, Vol. 4 "L–M." Washington, DC: GPO, 1969.

———. *Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships*, Vol. 6 "R–S." Washington, DC: GPO, 1976.

———. *Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships*, Vol. 8 "W–Z." Washington, DC: GPO, 1981.

Morison, Samuel Eliot. *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II*, Vol. I, *The Battle of the Atlantic*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Co., 1947.



USS Cyclops *(Fuel Ship No. 4) anchored in the Hudson River, off New York City, on 3 October 1911 (NH 55549).*

H-016-4: World War I – *Cyclops* and Her Sisters

H-Gram 016, Attachment 4
Samuel J. Cox, Director NHHC
March 2018

In the early years following the loss of USS *Cyclops* (Fuel Ship No. 4), the mutiny and sabotage theories were prominent, and stemmed from the fact that the ship's captain, Lieutenant Commander George Worley, U.S. Naval Auxiliary Reserve, was actually Johann Frederick Wichmann and had been born in Germany. The Office of Naval Intelligence (which at the time had functions now done by NCIS) conducted an extensive investigation and determined that the "damned Dutchman," as many of his crew referred to him, was actually of Germanic origin and therefore suspicious. Nevertheless, although it was determined that Worley had many of the same leadership traits as Captain Ahab and Captain Bligh, there was no evidence that he was disloyal to the United States. Nor was there any evidence that any of his crew had seriously contemplated mutiny, although rumors reported by the U.S. consul in Barbados regarding *Cyclops*'s previous leg from Rio de Janeiro and Salvador, Brazil, to Barbados clearly indicated what we would now call a "toxic command climate."

Leaving aside the more outlandish theories, the most likely explanation is that a combination of *Cyclops*'s design characteristics and her cargo of ore resulted in her demise. She was designed to carry coal, not ore, and the different properties of ore may have interacted with a weakness in her design. Although comparatively modern (she was built in 1910), her power plant was reported to be

in poor condition, which might have contributed to her loss. However, the best evidence for the "design flaw" theory stems from the fate of two of her three sister ships. USS *Proteus* (AC-9) served without incident as a collier in the U.S. Navy until decommissioned in 1924. *Proteus* was sold to a Canadian company in 1941, whereupon sometime after 23 November 1941 she and her crew of 58 and a cargo of bauxite ore vanished without a trace in, where else, the Bermuda Triangle. USS *Nereus* (AC-10) also served as a collier until being decommissioned in 1922. Sold to a Canadian aluminum company in early 1941, she too vanished in the Bermuda Triangle with her entire crew and a cargo of bauxite ore sometime after 10 December 1941. Neither loss was the result of German submarines, so either the Bermuda Triangle aliens had it in for that class of ship, or there was something wrong with design of the ship when carrying ore, which was more dense than coal. A theory advanced by U.S. Navy Admiral George van Deurs (an early U.S. naval aviator), was that the acidic coal cargo could over time seriously erode the longitudinal support beams making them more likely to break under stress. A combination of weakened structures, dense ore, and heavy seas would be the most likely cause for the losses. Makes more sense to me than methane or aliens.

Cyclops's other sister was USS *Jupiter* (AC-3,) which was converted into the U.S. Navy's first aircraft carrier, USS *Langley* (CV-1), in 1922. Subsequently converted to a seaplane tender in the mid-1930s, *Langley* was sunk by Japanese aircraft south of Java on 27 February 1942 while attempting to ferry fighter aircraft to that island. Definitely no aliens involved with this one.

The loss of *Cyclops* is often described as the single largest loss of U.S. Navy lives not directly involving combat. Actually that distinction goes to the frigate USS *Insurgente* (a French frigate captured by USS *Constellation*, Captain Thomas Truxton in command, in the Quasi-War with France in 1799 and put into U.S. service). USS *Insurgente*, under the command of Captain Patrick Fletcher, sailed from Hampton Roads on 8 August 1800 for the West Indies and disappeared without a trace with her entire crew of about 340 in, you guessed it, the Bermuda Triangle. She was most likely sunk in the hurricane that hit the West Indies in September 1800, which also sank the brig USS *Pickering*, with the loss of all hands (about 105). The worst (by far) all-time loss of U.S. Navy life to "non-combat" causes was when TF-38 drove through Typhoon Cobra in the Philippine Sea on 18 December 1944. The destroyers USS *Hull* (DD-350,) USS *Spence* (DD-512,) and USS *Monaghan* (DD-354) were sunk, and 28 other vessels damaged, with a total of 790 killed and 80 injured.

(Sources: Primarily NHHC Dictionary of American Fighting Ships*, NHHC records, Wikipedia entry on* Cyclops*, and a wide range of internet articles, many of dubious reliability.)*

H-016-5: Spanish-American War—USS *Oregon*'s Dash to Glory

H-Gram 016, Attachment 5
Samuel J. Cox, Director NHHC
March 2018

USS *Oregon* (Battleship No. 3) was one of three *Indiana*-class battleships authorized by the Battleship Act of 1890 and the first battleship built on West Coast of the United States. She was launched in 1893 and commissioned on 15 July 1896. In H-Gram 015, I described many of the design flaws of the battleship USS *Maine* (which also afflicted her near-sister, USS *Texas*). However, much was learned from those designs and the *Indiana* class represented a major improvement. *Oregon*, along with her sisters *Indiana* (Battleship No. 1) and *Massachusetts* (Battleship No. 2), were comparable to battleships in the larger navies of the world, and their engineering plants were the equal of any. Each was armed with two twin 13-inch centerline gun turrets, one forward and one aft (the failed echelon turret placement used on *Maine* and *Texas* was abandoned). In keeping with world-wide pre-*Dreadnought* battleship design, she carried secondary armament of four twin 8-inch gun turrets, tertiary armament of four 6-inch guns, and several kinds of smaller weapons. The wide range of calibers made it practically impossible to accurately spot the fall of shell from the different guns. As a result, pre-*Dreadnought* battleships were prone to expend huge amounts of ammunition for very few hits.

The *Indiana* class was initially classified as "sea-going coastal battleships," an oxymoron intended to get the votes from both "expansionist" and "isolationist" members of Congress that apparently worked. The debate in Congress, and to some degree in the U.S. Navy, was still unresolved over whether the U.S. Navy should have a "battle line" that could fight it out with an enemy battle line, or whether the Navy should stick to a much cheaper strategy of commerce raiding coupled with coastal defense, hence the "sea-going" versus "coastal" distinction. Although well-armed and armored for their day (like other sea-going navies), the *Indiana* class had a relatively low freeboard (a "coastal" feature), which affected their sea-keeping ability (and made *Oregon*'s transit of the Horn all that much more sporty). When the *Indiana* class rotated their main battery turrets to broadside, it created a significant list in the direction of fire, an issue with her low freeboard, which was fixed by retro-fitting counterweights in the turrets. *Oregon* was also almost a knot faster than her east coast sisters due to a unique power plant design (and when top speeds of battleships were 15 to 17 knots, an extra knot was a big deal, and would be demonstrated at the Battle of Santiago). Of note, at the time, *Oregon* was "Battleship No. 3" not BB-3; the two/three-letter designations came in effect in 1920. (See attachment H-016-6 for a photograph of *Oregon* "with a bone in her teeth.")

Oregon was in dry dock in Bremerton, Washington, when the *Maine* exploded and sank in Havana Harbor, Cuba, on 15 February 1898. On 7 March, the Secretary of the Navy cabled Captain Alexander H. McCormick, commanding officer of *Oregon*, that the situation was getting worse and that he should get underway to load ammunition at San Francisco. McCormick had anticipated the order and was already at sea. Unfortunately, he fell seriously ill in San Francisco. Captain Charles E. Clark, in command of the cruiser USS *Monterey*, then in San Diego, proceeded to San Francisco to assume command of *Oregon*.

Oregon departed San Francisco on 19 March. Her first stop for coal was Callao, Peru. Captain Clark elected to skip a coal stop in Valparaiso, Chile. When entering the Straits of Magellan on 16 April, *Oregon* encountered a severe gale that prevented visibility of the shore, and the ship

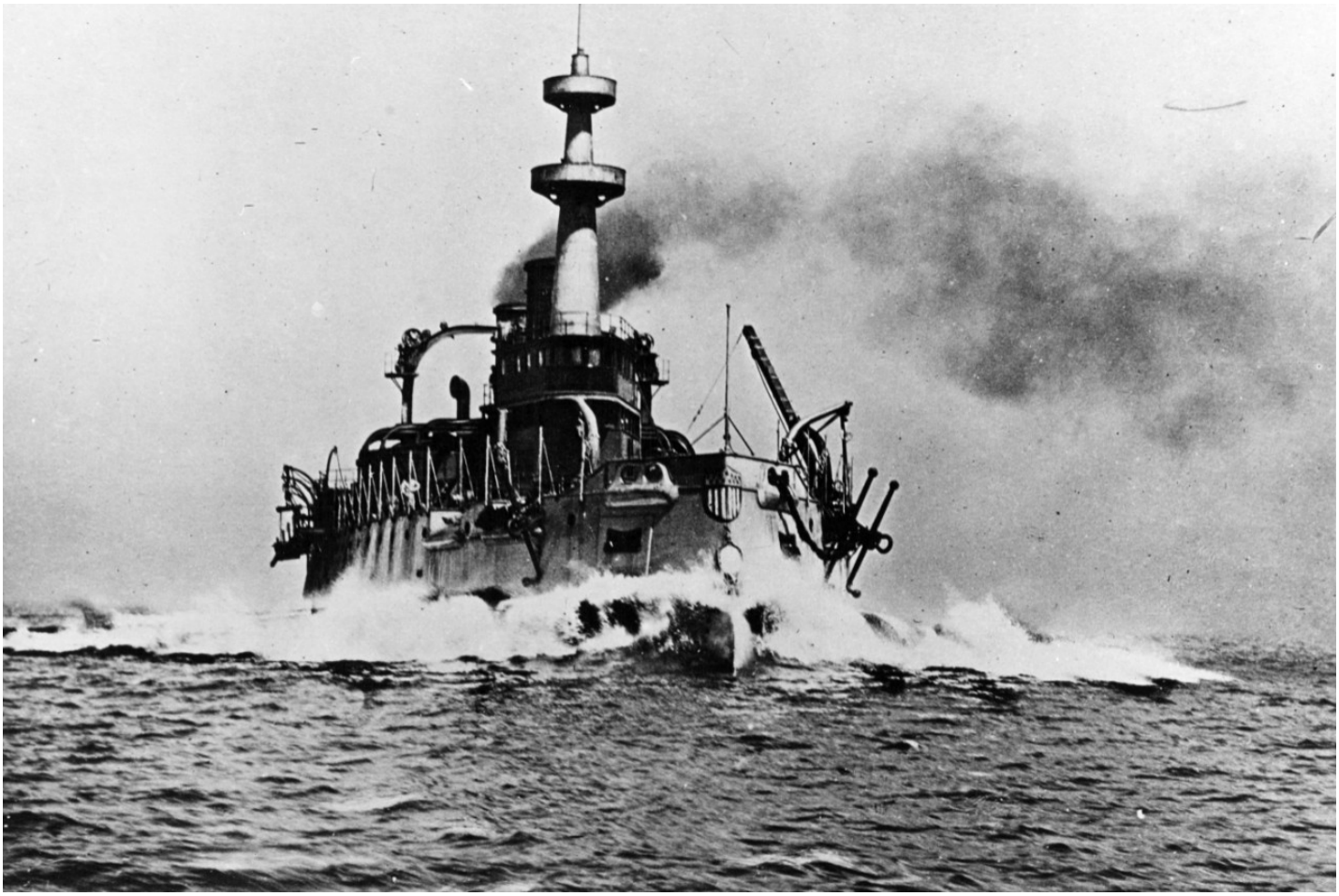
came dangerously close to being driven aground. She was forced to anchor, which fortunately held, and she survived a rough night. Arriving at Punta Arenas, Chile, she joined up with the gunboat USS *Marietta*, which had been travelling ahead to arrange for coal stops. The two ships then steamed together due to rumors of a Spanish torpedo boat (the *Temerario*) in the area, which actually slowed *Oregon* down. Both ships transited with guns manned and hatches sealed, which, made for a pretty miserable transit for the crews once the ships hit the tropics. *Oregon* departed Rio de Janeiro on 4 May after learning that war with Spain had been declared. She made further brief stops in Bahia, Brazil, and Barbados, before completing her voyage at Jupiter Inlet, Florida on 24 May, reporting ready for battle (and she was). On 26 May, she departed Jupiter Inlet via Key West and joined the blockade off Santiago, Cuba, on 1 June. I will cover *Oregon*'s war record in a future H-gram on the Battle of Santiago in July 1898. Among the crew of *Oregon* was Midshipman (and future five-star admiral) William Leahy, and then–Assistant Engineer Joseph M. Reeves, who as a rear admiral would become chief of naval aviation.

Following the end of the Spanish-American War, *Oregon* returned to her home port in San Francisco. She deployed to the Philippines beginning in March 1899 for a year at the onset of the Philippine Insurrection (or War for Independence from their perspective) supporting U.S. Army operations. She then served a year in China during the Boxer Rebellion, nearly sinking after hitting an uncharted rock on 28 May 1900. Following an overhaul, *Oregon* returned to the Far East in 1903, serving until she was decommissioned in 1906, after just eight years of service. The revolutionary new British battleship *Dreadnought* had made ships like the *Oregon* obsolete practically overnight. *Oregon* was briefly recommissioned in 1911 for no obvious reason and then went in and out of reserve status several times.

Recommissioned again at the onset of World War I, *Oregon* served as an escort for transport ships engaged in the Allied and U.S. intervention in Siberia in 1918 on the side of the "White Russians" during the Russian Civil War that followed the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917. (I will cover the Philippine Insurrection—during which then–Ensign Nimitz ran his destroyer aground—the Boxer Rebellion, and the Siberian intervention in future H-grams.) After being decommissioned again in October 1919, the Navy declared *Oregon* "incapable of further warlike service" so as to avoid scrapping her under the terms of the Washington Naval Treaty. In response to strong public demand, the Navy then loaned her to the State of Oregon as a monument and museum—and an extremely popular one at that—and her status as a historic icon appeared secure as she received thousands of visitors every year. However, after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the governor of Oregon offered to turn her back to the Navy due to the shortage of scrap iron for the war effort. The Navy quickly obliged and, despite President Roosevelt's reservations (but eventual approval), sold her for scrap. As it turned out, steel from *Oregon* was not really needed, but this was not realized until most of her superstructure, turrets, and fittings had been scrapped or scavenged. What was left of her was returned to the Navy. Her derelict hull (designated *IX-22*) was used as a towed dynamite storage barge during the invasion of Guam in June 1944 (my grandfather used some of this dynamite as a Seabee on Guam). *IX-22* remained at Guam until 1948, when a typhoon ripped her from her moorings. She was found three weeks later, still afloat, over 500 miles from the island. After being towed back to Guam, she was subsequently sold off in 1956 to a Japanese company, towed to Japan, and scrapped at the Kawasaki Yard—a very sad end for such a historic ship. The mast and the shield from the prow are still preserved in a waterfront park in Portland, Oregon.

(Primarily based on NHHC Dictionary of American Fighting Ships entry for USS Oregon*; however, a*

very thorough and interesting account can be found on the web at www.militarymuseum.org, "California's Battleship: The Story of USS Oregon*," by Major Norman S. Marshall, Robert Tucker, and Margaret A. Owens, Esq.)*



USS Oregon *(Battleship No. 3) running her initial trials, off San Francisco, California, in 1894 (NH 75019).*

H-016-6: USS Oregon "with a Bone in Her Teeth"

H-Gram 016, Attachment 6
Samuel J. Cox, Director NHHC
March 2018