

H-Gram 044: "Floating Chrysanthemums"—The Naval Battle of Okinawa

3 April 2020

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75th Anniversary of World War II

Operation Iceberg: Background to the Invasion of Okinawa

The Battle of Okinawa was the bloodiest battle of the Pacific War and lasted almost three months, from late March to June 1945. Over 4,900 U.S. Sailors died, more than U.S. Army (4,675) and U.S. Marine Corps (2,938) personnel did in the land battle. Almost the entire Japanese garrison of 77,000 died, along with about half the civilian population of Okinawa. The island was the key strategic stepping-stone necessary for follow-on operations to invade Japan. To accomplish the mission, the U.S. Navy had to transport, supply, and defend over 500,000 U.S. Army and Marines



Scene off the Okinawa invasion beaches during the pre-invasion bombardment, circa 1 April 1945. In foreground are LCS-16, LCS-15, and LCS-14. USS West Virginia (BB-48) is beyond them, at left. Firing in right distance is USS Idaho (BB-42) (NH 96606).

over vulnerable logistics lines thousands of miles long, and then defend the forces on the island while in range of thousands of Japanese land-based aircraft, whose kamikaze suicide tactics made them much more effective than conventional attackers.

The Japanese strategy ashore, in the air, and on the sea, was to drag out the fight as long as possible, while inflicting as many casualties as possible, and make it clear to the Allies that any invasion of Japan would be enormously costly as the Japanese proved their willingness to fight and die to the last man. In the case of the kamikaze,

this meant choosing to sacrifice their lives for the cause. Although the idea of the kamikaze, to knowingly intend to die, was alien to an American mindset, there were innumerable examples of U.S. sailors demonstrating resolve as great as the Japanese pilots. Gunners stood their ground, firing on kamikaze to the bitter end (20-mm gunners “died in the straps”), other times continuing to fire as their ship burned around them. Damage control teams repeatedly refused to give up on their ships even when it seemed all hope was lost; sometimes they pulled off a miracle, sometimes they didn’t, but they often died trying. The fuel in the kamikaze aircraft resulted in more fire on impact than conventional bombs and, as a result, among the many Sailors wounded was a high proportion of severe burn injuries.

The Japanese may have lost the battle and lost the island, but they also made their point. By the time the battle was over, there was no doubt in anyone’s mind just how horrific the casualties would be on both sides in any invasion of Japan.

For more on the background for the invasion of Okinawa, please see attachment H-044-1.



USS Hancock (CV-19) afire after being hit by a kamikaze attack off Okinawa, 7 April 1945. Note fires burning fore and aft, and TBM Avenger flying over the carrier. Photographed from USS Pasadena (CL-65) (80-G-344876).

“Floating Chrysanthemums”: The Naval Battle of Okinawa, Part 1

To paraphrase Winston Churchill, if the U.S. Navy should last for 1,000 years, the Battle of Okinawa should be remembered as its “finest hour.” For

almost three months, the ships of the U.S. Navy operated at the end of an immensely long logistics trail, constantly within range of large numbers of land-based aircraft, defending the U.S. Army and Marine forces locked in a protracted bloody battle ashore on Okinawa. Facing an onslaught of over 1,400 kamikaze attacks by pilots determined to die to defend their homeland, the ships of the U.S. Navy didn’t flinch, despite horrific casualties. Some of the ships that took the worst of the kamikaze attacks survived and some didn’t; there was a significant degree of chance involved in determining the outcome. What was consistent throughout, however, was the extraordinary valor of the ships’ crews. At Okinawa, the price of victory was extremely high: over 4,900 U.S. Sailors gave their lives for our nation and that sacrifice deserves to be remembered forever.

The initial two weeks of the invasion of Okinawa went reasonably well, and losses were relatively light, with the exception of destroyer Halligan (DD-584), which hit a mine on 26 March and sank with heavy loss of life (153) when her magazine blew. The minesweeper Skylark (AM-63) hit a mine and sank. The gunboat LCI(G)-82 was sunk by a small Japanese suicide boat. Frequent raids by small groups of kamikaze aircraft and conventional air strikes took a toll, with two fleet carriers (Franklin–CV-13–and Wasp–CV-18), escort carrier Wake Island (CVE-65), five destroyers, one destroyer escort, one destroyer-minesweeper, one destroyer transport, and six attack transport/cargo ships being damaged enough to be put out of action for more than 30 days.

The first of ten major kamikaze attacks occurred on 6 and 7 April 1945. The Japanese term was Kikusui (“Floating Chrysanthemums”) Operation No. 1, in which 355 kamikaze aircraft and another 340 planes in a conventional strike and escort roles attacked U.S. forces off Okinawa. U.S. naval intelligence knew the major raid was coming and senior U.S. commanders were warned, and the ships received general warning. Many of the

kamikaze pilots had much less experience than those at Lingayen Gulf in January 1945, and many fell easy prey to the large numbers of radar-directed U.S. Navy fighters. Those that made it through the fighter gauntlet tended to go after the first ship they saw, and the U.S. destroyers on the northern radar picket stations bore the brunt of the attacks.

The destroyers Bush (DD-529) and Colhoun (DD-801) were sunk after epic fights against overwhelming odds and despite extraordinary damage control efforts. The destroyer-minesweeper Emmons (DMS-22) also put up a fight for the ages before she succumbed. Epic damage control efforts saved destroyers Newcomb (DD-586), Luetze (DD-481), Witter (DE-636), and Morris (DD-417) from sinking, although their damage was so severe that they would not be repaired. Of this group, Newcomb and Luetze's heroic fight was one worthy of legend. Four more destroyers and two destroyer escorts were badly damaged and put out of action for at least 30 days. The kamikaze also sank an LST and two Victory ships loaded with ammunition. The fleet carrier Hancock (CV-19) was hit on the second day of Kikusui No. 1 and damaged enough that she had to return to the States.

As bad as it was, from the Japanese perspective, the results of Kikusui No. 1 were far less than they hoped, given the numbers of aircraft that they sacrificed. That wouldn't stop them from trying nine more times in the next two months with mass wave attacks (and small-scale attacks continued almost constantly). Kikusui No. 1 was the largest such mass attack, but it wouldn't be the most damaging.

For more on the first weeks of the Naval Battle of Okinawa and Kikusui No. 1 up to the start of Kikusui No. 2 on 11 April 1945, please see attachment H-044-2. H-Gram 045 will continue the story.

"Operation Heaven Number One" (Ten-ichi-go): The Death of Yamato, 7 April 1945

The Japanese super-battleship Yamato, the most powerful battleship in the world with her 18-inch guns, sortied from Japan on 6 April 1945 to oppose the U.S. landings on Okinawa. She would be no match for 390 carrier aircraft from the U.S. Fast Carrier Task Force (TF 58) that swarmed Yamato on 7 April 1945 and ensured she didn't get anywhere near Okinawa. U.S. naval intelligence knew the details of the operation almost before senior Japanese navy commanders (and before the skippers of Yamato, the light cruiser Yahagi, and the eight destroyers that would escort Yamato on a one-way suicide mission as the "Surface Special Attack Force"—without air cover). Those same skippers argued vociferously against the mission, believing it would be futile and wasteful, or as Captain Tameichi Hara of Yahagi stated, "like throwing an egg against a rock." However, in the end, every one of those skippers executed their orders to the best of their ability.

With the advance warning, U.S. commanders Admiral Raymond Spruance (Fifth Fleet), Vice Admiral Marc Mitscher (CTF 58), and others were ready. U.S. submarines picked up Yamato as she exited the Inland Sea and tracked her all night. U.S. scout planes from the TF 58 carriers, and Mariner flying boats operating from a tender at Kerama Retto (southwest of Okinawa), knew where to find her and tracked her all morning. At 1000 on 7 April, five fleet carriers and four light carriers of TF 58 launched a first wave of 280 fighters, dive-bombers, and torpedo bombers. Not long afterward, three fleet carriers and one light carrier launched 110 more aircraft. Although 53 aircraft from the first wave didn't find Yamato in the difficult cloud conditions, it didn't matter. The Japanese force put up a valiant fight, and Japanese skippers demonstrated their extraordinary skill at avoiding bombs and torpedoes through maneuver; but the great volume of anti-aircraft fire was also wildly

inaccurate. Cumulative damage took its toll on Yamato and, by the end, both she and Yahagi had become torpedo and bomb sumps.

For the loss of ten aircraft and 12 men, the aviators of TF 58 sank Yamato, Yahagi, and four destroyers (two sunk, two scuttled), and one of the surviving destroyers had to steam backwards to Japan without her bow. About 4,240 Japanese sailors (3,055 from Yamato alone) gave their lives for the emperor and to defend their homeland. They knew their mission was doomed from the start, but they did their duty anyway. But, like their kamikaze brothers, they made a statement that they would never quit, no matter the odds, and they were prepared to fight to the death. The United States certainly got the message that an invasion of Japan would be a bloodbath of extreme proportions for both sides.

For more on the sinking of Yamato, please see attachment H-044-3.

As always, you are welcome to disseminate H-grams further as you desire. "Back issues" can be found at Naval History and Heritage Command's website. NHHC's homepage has much more information about the Battle for Okinawa and many other events in U.S. naval history.



Troop-laden LVT-4 amphibious tractors head for the Purple and Orange landing beach areas, just before H-hour of the invasion of Okinawa, 1 April 1945. In the background, USS Tennessee (BB-43) fires her 5-inch/38-caliber secondary battery at the objective area (80-G-309930).

H-043-1: Operation Iceberg— Background to the Battle for Okinawa

*H-Gram 044, Attachment 1
Samuel J. Cox, Director NHHC
April 2020*

Although this H-gram focuses on the operations of the U.S. Navy during the Battle for Okinawa, some background on the reasons for taking Okinawa and on the land campaign that lasted from 1 April to 22 June 1945 is in order.

Throughout the Pacific War, Chief of Naval Operations Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King's vision was to drive across the central Pacific, take Formosa, and then establish a base of operations on the Chinese coast, blockade Japan, and use Chinese troops for any invasion of Japan. However, General Douglas MacArthur won the debate to take the Philippines instead of Formosa and, as King anticipated, MacArthur's forces became stuck in a protracted campaign on that archipelago. Moreover, although the Japanese forces were on a desperate defensive everywhere else in the Pacific, they went on a massive offensive in China in the summer of 1944. The *Ichi-go* offensive rolled up General Clair

Chennault's airfields (which were undefended by ground forces). It decimated the Nationalist Chinese armies in which General Joseph Stillwell had invested so much in training and hard-to-obtain supplies (many of which had to be flown into China over the Himalayas)—at least those forces Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek wasn't hoarding to use against the Chinese Communists after the United States took care of Japan for him. So, with U.S. strategy and plans in China a total disarray, and Formosa deemed too tough a nut to crack, Okinawa became the alternative.

Okinawa is an island in the Ryukyus chain that runs southwesterly from southern Japan to Formosa, with Okinawa about equidistant (340–360 nautical miles) between the southern Japanese island of Kyushu, Formosa, and the coast of China. The island is about 100 nautical miles long, and 10 nautical miles wide, oriented along a northeast/southwest axis, with a number of irregular peninsulas protruding and numerous smaller islands scattered about. Among the islands was a group about 20 nautical miles to the southwest of the southern end of Okinawa known as Kerama Retto, which would prove invaluable as a reasonably protected anchorage for ammunition ships, supply ships, oilers, tenders, and damaged ships. Okinawa is 4,000 nautical miles from Pearl Harbor, 1,200 miles from the major U.S. fleet anchorage at Ulithi, and 900 miles from the advanced U.S. Naval facility being established at Leyte.

The date set for the invasion of Okinawa, code-named "Operation Iceberg," was set for 1 April 1945, and the plan called for capturing Kerama Retto a few days before that. Bombing and shelling of the island would commence about 23 March 1945. The basic plan called for 16,000 men from four divisions (two Army divisions and two Marine divisions) to go ashore on the Hagushi beaches on the southwest coast of Okinawa, closer to the southern end of the island than the northern, with the intent to quickly capture the two major airfields (including Kadena). Then, the

Marines would attack toward the northern end of the island and the Army to the south. Over the next days, up to 183,000 U.S. combat troops would come ashore, followed by service troops from all services, eventually reaching over 500,000 (which would include 18,000 Navy personnel, mostly Seabees and medical). The ground campaign would be under the command of U.S. Army Lieutenant General Simon Bolivar Buckner (who would be killed by Japanese artillery a few days before the end of the battle).

The Japanese had about 77,000 troops on Okinawa, and another 20,000 native Okinawans pressed into service, all under the command of Lieutenant General Mitsuru Ushijima. Like General Tadamichi Kuribayashi, his counterpart on Iwo Jima, Ushijima proved to be an able commander who had learned lessons from previous Pacific battles, particularly the folly of trying to defend at the beachhead in the face of overwhelming U.S. naval gunfire and carrier aviation strikes. Japanese intelligence correctly predicted that Okinawa would be the next major U.S. objective and correctly predicted the timing, so the Japanese were well prepared. Ushijima conceded the (correctly) expected landing area and the airfields, and concentrated the bulk of his forces in deeply dug-in and well-concealed concentric lines of defense at the southern end of the island, although a significant number were also dug-in on the northern part of the island. As a result, the U.S. Navy poured a weeks' worth of stupendous pre-invasion bombardment mostly into where the Japanese weren't. (The amount of ordnance expended was staggering: 1,500 16-inch rounds, 4,600 14-inch rounds, 750 12-inch rounds, 5,800 8-inch rounds, 7,200 6-inch rounds, was well as over 50,000 5-inch rounds, and prodigious amounts of aerial bombs, rockets, and napalm.) Japanese accounts marveled at the "rain of steel," that mostly wasn't falling on them.

Except for a few *kamikaze* and conventional air attacks (and sea mines) the main amphibious assault on Okinawa on 1 April 1945 was virtually

unopposed, and U.S. Army soldiers and Marines captured the airfields and reached the opposite coast on the first day. It all had a "too good to be true" sense to it. And it was. As the Army moved south, the resistance steadily stiffened and then turned into a bloody protected slog. Each time Japanese defensive positions were about to be overrun, at great cost, the Japanese fell back on yet another line of defenses. (Watching the movie *Hacksaw Ridge* will give a much better sense of this than anything I can describe.) The battle would not be deemed over until 22 June. In the meantime, the Navy had to stay and fight it out against massed waves of *kamikaze* aircraft, also at great cost.

Organization for the Amphibious Phase of Operation Iceberg

The overall commander of Operation Iceberg was Commander-in-Chief Pacific Fleet and Pacific Ocean Areas, Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz.

The operational commander was Commander U.S. Fifth Fleet, Admiral Raymond A. Spruance, embarked in heavy cruiser *Indianapolis* (CA-35). Due to the complexity of the operation, Spruance and *Indianapolis* arrived with the earliest forces off Okinawa.

The commander of the Joint Expeditionary Force (Task Force 51) was Vice Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner, embarked in amphibious command ship *Eldorado* (AGC-11). Lieutenant General Simon B. Buckner, USA, was also embarked as Commanding General Expeditionary Troops (Task Force 56). Buckner would report to Turner until the amphibious phase was over and then he would report directly to Spruance.

The invasion force was absolutely massive and, including amphibious craft, numbered 1,213 ships. When added to the 88 ships of the Fast Carrier Task Force (TF 58) and over 95 ships in the logistics force, plus 22 Royal Navy ships in TF 57, there were over 1,400 ships and amphibious craft

involved. To meet the plan of simultaneously landing four divisions of troops required eight transport squadrons, each with 15 assault transports, 6 assault cargo ships, 25 LSTs, 10 LSMs, and 1 LSD. There were 179 attack transports and 187 LSTs to carry the initial 172,000 combat troops and 115,000 service support troops who would land in the initial weeks.

Task Group 51.1, the Western Islands Attack Group, was commanded by Rear Admiral Ingolf Kiland, embarked in amphibious command ship *Mount McKinley* (AGC-7) and was responsible for capturing Kerama-shōto prior to the main amphibious landing. Task Group 51.2, the Demonstration Group, was commanded by Rear Admiral Jerauld Wright, embarked in amphibious command ship *Ancon* (AGC-4), and was responsible for conducting a diversionary demonstration on the southeast coast of Okinawa to draw Japanese attention away from the main landing area. (It didn't work.)

Task Force 52, the Amphibious Support Force, was commanded by Rear Admiral W.H.P. Blandy, embarked in amphibious command ship *Estes* (AGC-12), and included the Support Carrier Group (TG 52.1) under the command of Rear Admiral C. T. Durgin, with 18 escort carriers for close air support. TF 52 also included the Mine Flotilla (122 mine and patrol craft), Underwater Demolition Flotilla, and Gunboat Support Flotilla. Finally, the force also encompassed 53 LCIs and LSMs, mostly configured to fire rockets.

Task Force 53, the Northern Attack Force, was commanded by Rear Admiral L. F. Reifsnider, embarked in amphibious command ship *Panamint* (AGC-13) and was responsible for landing the Marine divisions on the northern of the main landing beaches. The commander of the Marines' III Amphibious Corps, Major General Roy S. Geiger, USMC, was embarked. III Amphibious Corps included the 1st, 2nd, and 6th Marine Divisions.

Task Force 54 was the Gunfire and Covering Force, commanded by Rear Admiral Morton L. Deyo, embarked in older battleship *Tennessee* (BB-43). TF 54 also included pre-war battleships *Maryland* (BB-46), *Colorado* (BB-45), *West Virginia* (BB-48), *Idaho* (BB-42), *Nevada* (BB-36), *New York* (BB-34), *Texas* (BB-35), and *Arkansas* (BB-33), along with 9 heavy cruisers, 3 light cruisers, 24 destroyers, and 8 destroyer escorts.

Task Force 55, the Southern Attack Force, was commanded by Rear Admiral John L. Hall, embarked in amphibious command ship *Teton* (AGC-14), and was responsible for landing the U.S. Army divisions on the southern main landing beaches.



Six USS *Hancock* (CV-19) TBM torpedo bombers fly near Okinawa while supporting the invasion forces, 4 April 1945 (80-G-319244).

Task Group 50.8 was the Logistics Support Group Fifth Fleet, commanded by Rear Admiral D. B. Beary (probably the real hero of the battle) embarked in light cruiser *Detroit* (CL-8), with over 95 logistics ships.

Task Force 57 was the carrier force from the British Royal Navy's Pacific Fleet commanded by Vice Admiral Sir H. B. Rawlings, RN, and included five large carriers (British fleet carriers only embarked about 45-50 aircraft, but had armored flight decks). A Royal Navy battleship and six

escort carriers also participated for a total of about 22 ships. TF 57 guarded the southern axis of air attack from Formosa and suppressed Japanese airfields in the Sakishima Islands, southwest of Okinawa.

Task Force 58, was the Pacific Fleet's Fast Carrier Force, commanded by Vice Admiral Marc A. Mitscher, with his Chief Of Staff, Commodore Arleigh A. Burke, embarked in *Bunker Hill* (CV-17). TF 58 initially included 17 carriers (10 *Essex*-class fleet carriers, *Enterprise* [CV-6] and six *Independence*-class light carriers). Each carrier air group was different, but typically each *Essex*-class carrier had about 65 fighters (mostly F-6F Hellcats, although some air groups had a mix of Hellcats and F4U Corsairs; several Corsair squadrons were from the Marine Corps). Additionally, each air group usually had about four Hellcat night fighters, 15 SB2C Helldiver dive-bombers, and 15 TBM Avenger torpedo bombers, for an air group numbering between 95 and 102 aircraft. The light carriers typically embarked about 25 Hellcat fighters and 9 TBM Avenger torpedo bombers (the light carriers didn't embark Helldivers). Based on lessons learned from the *kamikaze* attacks in the Philippines, as well from as the destruction of most of the Japanese navy, the number of dive-bombers and torpedo bombers on the carriers were significantly reduced in favor of a greater load of fighters. However, the fighters increasingly trained in the role of fighter-bomber, a mission that the Corsairs, in particular, were very good at.

TG 58.1 was commanded by Rear Admiral Joseph J. "Jocko" Clark, embarked in *Hornet* (CV-12) and included fleet carriers *Wasp* (CV-18) and *Bennington* (CV-20), and light carriers *Belleau Wood* (CVL-24) and *San Jacinto* (CVL-30). After *Wasp* was damaged during the strikes on Japan on 19 March, fleet carrier *Hancock* (CV-19) shifted from TG 58.3 to TG 58.1.

TG 58.2 was commanded by Rear Admiral R. E. Davison (later Rear Admiral G. F. Bogan) embarked on *Franklin* (CV-13). TG 58.2 also

included fleet carriers *Randolph* (CV-15) and *Enterprise* (CV-6). *Franklin* was gravely damaged during the carrier strikes on Japan on 19 March 1945 and had to return to the U.S.

TG 58.3 was commanded by Rear Admiral Frederick C. "Ted" Sherman, embarked in *Essex* (CV-9). TG 58.3 also included fleet carriers *Bunker Hill* (CV-17) and initially *Hancock* (CV-19), and light carriers *Cabot* (CVL-28) and *Bataan* (CVL-29).

TG 58.4 was commanded by Rear Admiral Arthur W. Radford and included fleet carriers *Yorktown* (CV-10) and *Intrepid* (CV-11), and light carriers *Langley* (CVL-27) and *Independence* (CVL-22).

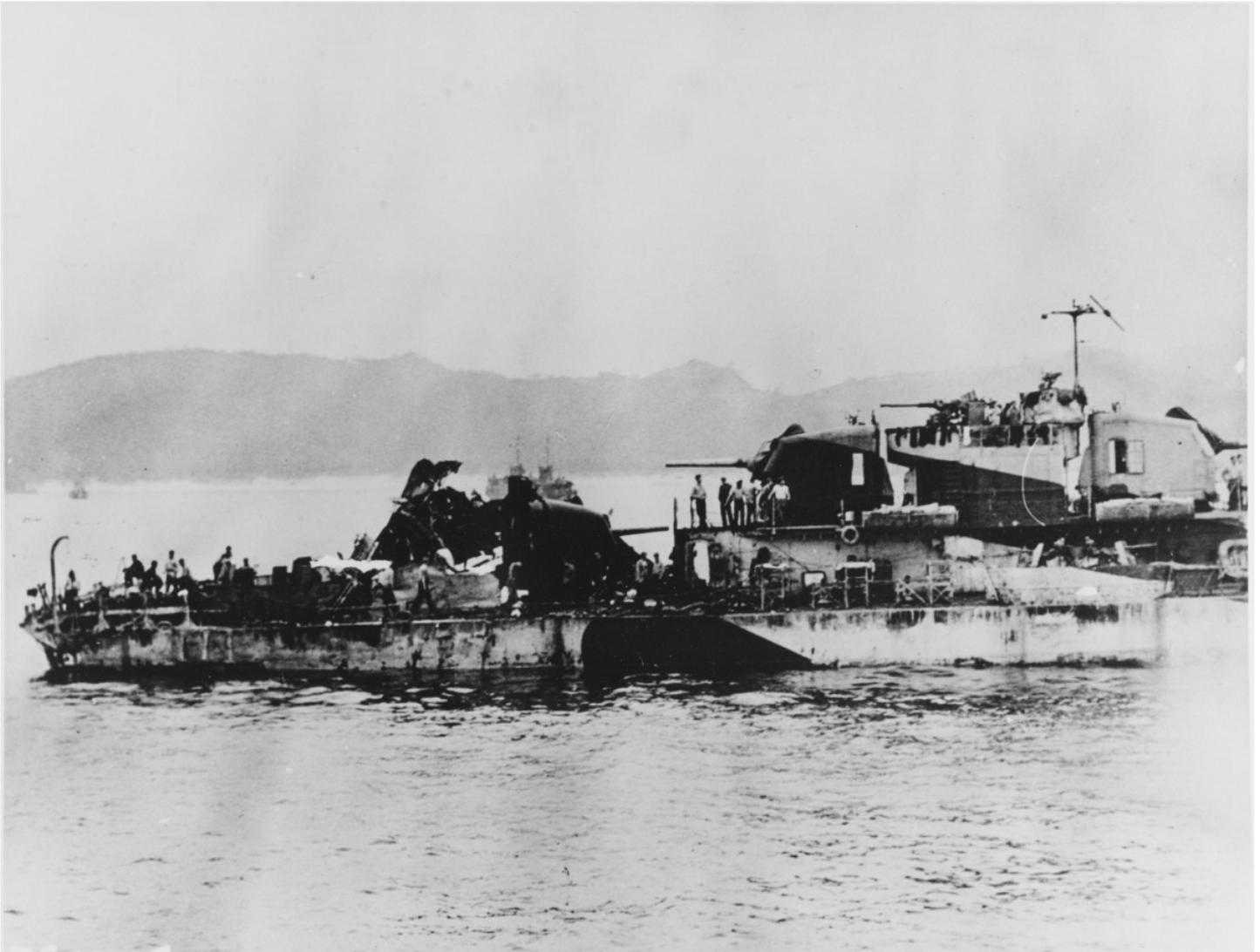
Scattered among the TF 58 task groups were eight new fast battleships: *North Carolina* (BB-55), *Washington* (BB-56), *South Dakota* (BB-57), *Indiana* (BB-58), *Massachusetts* (BB-59), *New Jersey* (BB-62), *Missouri* (BB-63), and *Wisconsin* (BB-64), primarily to provide anti-aircraft protection to the carriers and to guard against a surprise surface attack. To counter the possibility of the Japanese super-battleship *Yamato* making it through the carrier air gauntlet, a force of seven of these fast battleships was formed to intercept her. This would have resulted in 54 16-inch guns against the slightly faster *Yamato* and her nine 18.1-inch guns. It probably wouldn't have been much of a contest.

TF 58 had a total of 88 ships, including the new battle-cruisers *Alaska* (CB-1) and *Guam* (CB-2), each with nine 12-inch guns in three triple turrets, but also very effective anti-aircraft platforms.

For the course of the Naval Battle of Okinawa, please see attachment H-044-2; for more on the sinking of the Japanese battleship *Yamato*, please see attachment H-044-3.

Sources include: *NHHC Dictionary of American Fighting Ships* (DANFS) for U.S. ships and combinedfleet.com for Japanese ships. *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II*,

Vol. XIV: Victory in the Pacific by Samuel Eliot Morison, Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1969; *Japanese Destroyer Captain* by Tameichi Hara, New York: Ballantine Books, 1961; *Combined Fleet Decoded: The Secret History of American Intelligence and the Japanese Navy in World War II* by John Prados, New York: Random House, 1995.



USS Leutze (DD-481) after being gravely damaged by a kamikaze attack on 6 April 1945 off Okinawa (NH 65822).

H-043-2: H-044-2: "Floating Chrysanthemums"—The Naval Battle of Okinawa, Part 1

H-Gram 044, Attachment 2
Samuel J. Cox, Director NHHC
April 2020

Roll Call of Valor and Sacrifice

The Battle of Okinawa was so massive that it is impossible to capture the scope of the U.S. Navy's

valor and sacrifice in a relatively short piece. Victory has a price, and in the case of Okinawa an incredibly high one, just over 4,900 U.S. Navy personnel. This H-gram focuses only on those actions that resulted in significant U.S. damage and casualties, from the initiation of the operation in late March 1945 to the end of the first Japanese mass suicide air attack, *Kikusui* No. 1 on 8 April. Each U.S. ship listed below was sunk or put out of action for over 30 days, but in every case there are superb examples of the Navy core values of honor, courage, and commitment, and core attributes of initiative, accountability, integrity, and—especially—toughness. I do not cover the innumerable near misses and close calls or

minor damage, or frequent shoot-downs of Japanese aircraft.

For the most part, casualty figures are from Appendix 2 in Samuel Eliot Morison's *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II, Vol. XIV: Victory in the Pacific*. In many cases, more detailed analysis in years since has led to changes in the casualty figures—frequently with deaths being somewhat higher as those who died of wounds much later are factored in, but these are scattered in various accounts. If I came across other more recent figures, I used the higher number. For symbols denoting ship damage/repair status, I've used the following:

* = sunk

= damaged beyond repair

= repairs completed after the war ended

19 March 1945

Franklin (CV-13) ## and **Wasp (CV-18)**. See H-Gram H-043.

20 March

Halsey Powell (DD-686). As the U.S. Fast Carrier Task Force (TF 58) continued to steam away from Japan after the U.S. carrier strikes on Kure and the Inland Sea, destroyer *Halsey Powell* was pulling away after refueling alongside carrier *Hancock* (CV-19), when a Zeke kamikaze attempting to hit *Hancock* overshot and hit the destroyer near her after 5-inch mount, jamming her steering gear. The Zeke's bomb went clear through *Halsey Powell's* hull without exploding. *Halsey Powell* used her engines to steer and avoided colliding with *Hancock*; she suffered 12 killed and 29 wounded.

23 March

The Fast Carrier Task Force (TF-58) commenced air strikes on Okinawa on 23 March and would strike again during the following two days.

24 March

The first U.S. minesweepers arrived off Okinawa and commenced clearing channels. To date, most Japanese islands had not had very many mines, but the minesweepers found some at Okinawa.

25 March

Fast battleships temporarily detached from TF 59 bombarded targets on Okinawa. The bombardment task unit included battleships *New Jersey* (BB-62), *Missouri* (BB-63), and *Wisconsin* (BB-64) in the primary landing area, and *Massachusetts* (BB-59) and *Indiana* (BB-58) at another.

Shore bombardment of Kerama Retto commenced. The group of small islands was about 20 nautical miles southwest of Okinawa and created a relatively protected (from the weather) anchorage area. Taking the Kerama Retto islands for use as an advance staging base, which initially met major opposition, was the idea of Vice Admiral Turner, overcoming concerns that the operation would result in a Japanese response that would exhaust U.S. capability before the landings on Okinawa took place. Turner persisted and won out, and it turned out to be one of the smartest moves of the entire campaign. Another reason to take the islands was to keep the Japanese from using them as a base for small suicide boats—250 such one-man craft were found concealed on the islands when they were captured. Most of the islands were under U.S. control by the end of 26 March.

26 March

Rear Admiral Durgin's Escort Carrier Groups (TG 52.1) of 18 escort carriers in five task units arrived

over the course of 25–26 March, commencing air strikes on Okinawa. The first air opposition occurred on the morning of 26 March with a flight of nine *kamikaze*. Shore bombardment by the pre-war battleships commenced, and *Nevada* (BB-36) was damaged by a *kamikaze*, but continued bombardment operations. Shore bombardment continued every day up until the landings.

Halligan (DD-584).* At 1835 on 26 March, while conducting a fire support patrol offshore Okinawa, *Halligan* hit a moored mine dead on. The explosion at the bow detonated her two forward magazines, blowing off everything forward of the forward stack, and inflicted heavy casualties of 153 dead, including the commanding officer (Commander C. E. Cortner) and executive officer, and wounded 39. Only two of 21 officers were among the 80 survivors. The abandoned after end drifted aground and was hit by shore battery fire.

Kimberly (DD-521). While on radar picket duty, *Kimberly* was attacked by two D3A Val dive-bombers. Despite radical maneuvering and accurate anti-aircraft fire, one Japanese pilot kept his damaged and flaming Val in the air, getting astern of *Kimberly* and crashing into the aft 40-mm gun mount, killing four men and wounding 57. Despite the damage, *Kimberly* remained on patrol until Kerama Retto was captured before she headed to Mare Island for repairs on 1 April. On the same day, a Val *kamikaze* hit destroyer-transport *Gilmer's* (APD-11) galley deck house before going over the side and killing one, wounding three, and causing relatively minor damage.

27 March

O'Brien (DD-725). Under the command of Commander William Outerbridge, and after providing star shell services for U.S. forces ashore on Kerama Retto, destroyer *O'Brien* was attacked at dawn by Japanese aircraft. *O'Brien* shot one plane down, but one D3A Val dive-bomber with a

500-pound bomb crashed into the port side amidships, setting off a large explosion that resulted in 50 dead and 76 wounded. Despite severe damage, the destroyer was able to make it to Mare Island for repairs. This was the second time *O'Brien* had been hit by a *kamikaze*—the first was on 6 January 1945 in Lingayen Gulf and caused light damage. Outerbridge had been in command of *Ward* (DD-139) when she fired the opening shot of the Pacific War, sinking a Japanese midget submarine shortly before the 7 December 1941 air attack on Pearl Harbor. While in command of *O'Brien*, Outerbridge had to scuttle *Ward* after she had been crippled by Japanese air attack in the Philippines on 7 December 1944.

Murray (DD-576). While screening Task Force 58 carriers, a single B6N Jill torpedo bomber attacked, launching a torpedo at *Murray* before it was shot down. The torpedo passed through *Murray* before exploding, doing relatively little damage, but killing one and wounding 16 men. Some accounts say it was a bomb. (*Murray* later was the first destroyer to gain and maintain contact on a Soviet submarine during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962).

28 March

Skylark (AM-63).* While leading a group of minesweepers sweeping mines off Okinawa, minesweeper *Skylark* hit a moored mine, which caused a large fuel fire on the surface. As her crew tried valiantly to save the disabled vessel, she drifted into a second mine 20 minutes later, causing her to sink in less than 15 minutes. Somewhat miraculously, only five men were killed and 25 wounded by the explosions. Every one of her 105-man crew who made it into the water was rescued.

LSM(R)-188 ##. While supporting the U.S. landings on Kerama Retto, *LSM(R)-188* (medium landing ship [rocket]) was attacked at night by

Japanese aircraft still operational on Okinawa. *LSM(R)-188* was badly damaged and suffered the loss of 15 killed and 32 wounded (of her crew of about 80). The damage would not be repaired before the war ended.

29 March

Fast Carrier Task Force (TF 58) conducted large-scale fighter sweeps over the southernmost Japanese home island of Kyushu in an attempt to suppress any air opposition to the impending landings on Okinawa. Two 15-plane squadrons of PBM Mariner flying boats flew into Kerama-shōtto on 29 March and commenced reconnaissance operations.

Wyandot (AKA-92). At about 0400, a Japanese bomber dropped two bombs over attack cargo ship *Wyandot*. One bomb hit close aboard the starboard quarter, while the second went into the water and hit the ship below the waterline, causing the two forward holds and magazine to flood. Due to great damage control, *Wyandot* remained afloat. Luckily, only one crewman was wounded and none killed. *Wyandot* put her landing craft into the water to tow her to Kerama-shōtto, where she was quickly repaired and returned to Okinawa to offload her cargo of ammunition, gasoline, vehicles, and provisions intended for U.S. Army forces.

30 March

Underwater demolition and reconnaissance of the beaches on Okinawa commenced.

31 March

Elements of the Marine Amphibious Reconnaissance Battalion captured several small islands off the beach area without opposition. These were to be used as forward artillery positions to support the landings.

Indianapolis (CA-35). The first major U.S. combatant to be knocked out of the Battle for Okinawa was Fifth Fleet commander Admiral Raymond Spruance's own flagship, the heavy cruiser *Indianapolis*, veteran of nine previous battles. After having bombarding Japanese positions on Okinawa for seven days, and shooting down six planes and damaging two others, *Indianapolis* was attacked by a lone Ki-43 Oscar fighter that came right out of the dawn sun. With less than 15 seconds to react, *Indianapolis'* 20-mm gunners hit the plane, but not before it released its bomb. The plane struck a glancing blow on the ship, causing minimal damage. The bomb, however, passed through the crew's mess, through berthing, fuel oil tanks, and the keel before exploding underneath the ship with an effect similar to an influence mine. Nine crewmen were killed, 20 were wounded, the bottom was holed, and the Number 4 propeller shaft was damaged. An attempt to repair the ship at Kerama-shōtto discovered the damage was more severe than initially thought and the damaged shaft was accidentally lost in deep water. Spruance transferred his flag to battleship *New Mexico* (BB-40). *Indianapolis* transited to Mare Island for repair, setting in motion the chain of events that would lead to her role in transporting the components of the first atomic bomb to the B-29 bomber base on Tinian, and to her tragic demise just before the war ended.

1 April

The main landings on Okinawa take place at the Hagushi beaches. Other than a few air attacks, the landings were essentially unopposed.

LST-884 #. As part of a demonstration group maneuvering off southeast Okinawa that was intended to draw Japanese attention away from the main landing area on the southwestern coast of the island, *LST-884*, with 300 Marines embarked, was hit by a *kamikaze* at 0549. Ammunition exploded and raging fire forced the ship to be abandoned. The destroyer *Van*

Valkenburgh (DD-656) came alongside and put a fire and repair party aboard, aided by four support landing craft (LCS) that acted as makeshift fireboats, and succeeded in getting the fires out by 1100. *LST-884* suffered 24 Sailors and Marines dead and 21 wounded. Her damage was so bad that she was not repaired, and her stripped hulk was scuttled in May.

***Hinsdale* (APA-120) ##.** Prior to dawn, as attack transport *Hinsdale* was making her way to the transport area to debark about 1,200 Marines for a “demonstration” (deception) landing on the southeast coast of Okinawa on D-Day, she was attacked by a Japanese *kamikaze*, believed to be a Kawasaki Ki-61 Tony fighter, armed with three bombs. An alert petty officer (James O. Perry) saw the *kamikaze* approaching and cleared the deck area that was packed with Marines before the plane crashed into the engine room on the port side. Two bombs detonated (a third was a dud), killing all but one sailor in the engine room by scalding steam and exploding boilers. Had the Marines not been cleared, it would have been more horrific than the 16 who were killed and 39 wounded. The ship’s dangerous 13-degree list was corrected and she was towed to Kerama Retto. She returned to the States for repairs, which were completed after the war ended.

***Alpine* (APA-92).** Attack transport *Alpine* had just commenced disembarking troops onto landing craft for the main amphibious assault on Okinawa when she was attacked by two Japanese aircraft. *Alpine* shot down the first and hit the second. The flaming plane aimed for *Alpine*’s bridge, but lost control and crashed into the port side, causing two large explosions and fires. In 90 minutes, *Alpine*’s crew had the fires under control and resumed unloading the rest of her troops and cargo. *Alpine* suffered 16 dead and 27 wounded.

***Adams* (DMS-27).** Operating southeast of Kerama Retto, a badly damaged Japanese aircraft crashed just astern of the destroyer-minesweeper *Adams*, but the two bombs exploded under her stern,

jamming her rudders to the right and causing severe damage, but amazingly killing and wounding no one. Two *kamikaze*, possibly expecting easy pickings from the circling destroyer, commenced an attack. One was shot down by *Adams* and the other by destroyer *Mullany* (DD-528), which raced to assist. *Adams* was towed to Kerama Retto for emergency repairs before continuing to Mare Island, where she was repaired just in time to get back to the western Pacific for the end of the war.

2 April

***Achernar* (AKA-53).** At 0043, attack cargo ship *Achernar* was hit by a *kamikaze* on the starboard side and, almost at the same time, by a bomb on the port side. By 0100, damage control teams had the fires out and list corrected with a loss of 5 dead and 41 wounded. She proceeded to the U.S. West Coast via Kerama Retto for repairs.

***Goodhue* (APA-107).**

Japanese *kamikaze* attacked transports *Goodhue* and *Telfair* (APA-210). One *kamikaze* was hit and blew up in mid-air. The second was hit and “bounced like a billiard ball from hell” between the kingposts of *Telfair* before falling overboard, killing one and wounding 16. The third *kamikaze* aimed for *Goodhue*’s bridge, but was hit and deflected enough that it clipped the mainmast, then crashed into a cargo boom, before falling into aft 20-mm gun tubs and then into the water. Nineteen Sailors and five soldiers were killed, and 84 Sailors and 35 soldiers wounded. The damage did not prevent *Goodhue* from continuing to support the Okinawa landings until late April, when she departed for repairs.

***Henrico* (APA-45) ##.** At sunset, a P1Y Frances twin-engine bomber dove out of a cloud formation at attack transport *Henrico*, flagship of Transport Division (TRANSDIV) 15 and crashed into the bridge. The aircraft’s two bombs penetrated into the ship before exploding, killing 49 and wounding 125. Among the dead were

Captain Elmer Kiehl (TRANSDIV 15), Captain W. C. France (*Henrico* commanding officer), and Colonel Vincent Tanzola, USA (305th Infantry Regiment commander). The executive officer assumed command and damage control teams brought the flames under control. She sailed under her own power to Kerama Retto and then to San Francisco, but repairs would not be complete before the war ended. (*Henrico* would later be awarded a Navy Unit Commendation for her role in the Inchon landings in September 1950 during the Korean War).

Dickerson (APD-21) #. After disembarking her troops to capture the island of Keise Shima off Okinawa, destroyer-transport *Dickerson* was hit by a *kamikaze* on the night of 2 April. Approaching from the stern, the *kamikaze* sheered off the tops of her two funnels before hitting the bridge from behind, knocking down the mast and igniting intense gasoline fires that killed the commanding officer (Lieutenant Commander Ralph E. Lounsbury, USNR) and many others. Almost at the same time, a second *kamikaze* hit dead center of the forecastle, tearing a hole the entire width of the ship. Despite valiant attempts to bring the fires under control, the fires threatened the forward magazine and forced the ship to be abandoned. *Dickerson* lost 54 men and 23 were wounded. The ship continued to burn itself out, but didn't sink. She was towed to Kerama Retto, but the damage was too severe and she was towed out and scuttled on 4 April.

3 April

Prichett (DD-561). In the pre-dawn hours, destroyer *Prichett* fought off several aircraft while at radar picket station Number 1, north-northwest of Okinawa, and, working with a night fighter, knocked down two. Finally, one aircraft closed in and planted a 500-pound bomb on her fantail, holing the ship below the waterline and starting a fire. In order to minimize the flooding and bring the fire under control, *Prichett* was obliged to steam at 28 knots, but she remained on station

until relieved at noon, warding off additional air attacks. No crewmen were killed or wounded, and *Prichett* eventually made it to Kerama Retto for initial repairs.

LST-599 ##. In the early morning, Japanese planes attacked the Kerama Retto anchorage. *LST-599's* gunners blew the wing off a *kamikaze*, but the plane still struck and penetrated the main deck and then exploded, destroying most of the gear of a Marine fighter squadron and wounding 21. Repairs would not be completed until after the war.

LCT-876 #. While being piggy-backed on *LST-599*, *LCT-876* was badly damaged by the same *kamikaze* and not subsequently repaired. Two crewmen were wounded.

Foreman (DE-633). While on anti-submarine patrol at the entrance to the Kerama Retto transport anchorage, destroyer escort *Foreman* was hit by a bomb that passed clean through the ship, detonating 30 feet under her keel and flooding one of her fire rooms and knocking out power. Two Sailors were killed and three wounded. The situation was under control within 30 minutes and *Foreman* proceeded into Kerama Retto for emergency repair and then to Ulithi, returning to Okinawa in June.

Wake Island (CVE-65). Dusk was approaching as escort carrier *Wake Island* was operating southeast of Okinawa and providing air support to ground forces ashore. Radar reported an incoming Japanese raid of five planes at the same time a huge wave slammed the ship, knocking two FM-2 Wildcat fighters off the flight deck into the sea. Two other Wildcats on the hangar deck broke free at the same time. At 1744, a *kamikaze* dove out of the clouds, barely missing the forward port corner of the flight deck and exploding abeam the forecastle. Moments later, a second *kamikaze* narrowly missed the bridge and exploded on hitting the water ten feet from the ship, blowing a 45-by-18-foot hole in the hull

below the waterline, causing extensive damage to the main condensers, water and fuel tanks, and forcing shutdown of the forward engine due to salting. Other than the Japanese pilot, no one was killed or wounded. *Wake Island* proceeded to Guam for repair and returned to Okinawa on 20 May to resume air support to ground operations.

4 April

LCI(G)-82*. Infantry landing craft (gunboat)
LCI(G)-82 was sunk by a Japanese *Shinyo* suicide boat during a night attack off the east coast of Okinawa, with 8 killed and 11 wounded.

5 April

Nevada (BB-36). While firing on Japanese targets near Naha, Okinawa, a Japanese shore battery fired on both battleship *Nevada* and heavy cruise *Salt Lake City*. At 1740, *Nevada* was hit by five rounds of 6- or 8-inch shells, suffering two killed and 16 wounded, but she remained operational. (*Nevada* had already been damaged on 26 March while shelling Japanese airfields, shore batteries, and supply dumps on Okinawa.) One Japanese aircraft was repeatedly hit by anti-aircraft fire, turning into a flaming torch over *Nevada*, and fell on her deck next to turret Number 2, damaging both 14-inch guns so they could not be fired, plus taking out three 20-mm gun mounts. *Nevada* suffered 11 killed and 49 wounded in that attack, but kept firing with her other three main battery turrets.

6 April: Kikusui ("Floating Chrysanthemums") Attack No. 1

By 6 April 1945, in reaction to the U.S. landings on Okinawa, the Japanese had amassed about 700 aircraft in Formosa and the southern Japanese island of Kyushu to attack the U.S. force. The Japanese launched their first and largest mass *kamikaze* attack, *Kikusui* No. 1, during which 230 Japanese navy and 125 Japanese army (355 total) *kamikaze* attacked U.S. ships off Okinawa through



USS Rodman (DMS-21) and USS Witter (DE-636) receiving repairs at Kerama Retto on 9 April 1945. Both had been hit by kamikaze attacks on 6 April off Okinawa (NH 69111).

7 April. Another 340 or so planes conducted conventional attacks. Some attacks occurred in large formations and others occurred in small numbers or even by single aircraft at almost all hours, so the threat was near constant. Dawn and especially dusk were the worst times, as the Japanese tried to time the bigger raids for when U.S. combat air patrols were returning to their carriers before nightfall.

Haynsworth (DD-700). Destroyer *Haynsworth* was patrolling off Okinawa when she was attacked by a Judy dive-bomber at about 1300. After the plane's bomb missed by 1,000 yards (the plane was being pursued by Hellcat fighters and may have jettisoned the bomb). The Judy then came in for a *kamikaze* attack, hitting *Haynsworth* at the front of the forward superstructure and sending a fireball through the combat information center, main radio room, and radar transmitter room. *Haynsworth's* casualties were seven dead and 25 wounded. She remained in action. On the following day and rescued eight crewmen from the carrier *Hancock* (CV-19) who had ended up in the water after the carrier was hit by a *kamikaze*. *Haynsworth* then proceeded to Mare Island for repairs.

Bush (DD-529)* and Colhoun (DD-801)*. The destroyer *Bush* (DD-529) was on duty on radar picket station No. 1 (the northernmost on the flight path from Kyushu) when *Kikusui* No. 1 came in. Many of the *kamikaze* pilots were very inexperienced and went for the first ship they saw, and, as a result, the radar pickets often bore the brunt of the attacks. After troops had been put ashore on Okinawa, some amphibious craft such as LCS's were assigned to radar picket stations to add some anti-aircraft fire, act as rescue vessels, and occasionally became targets themselves.

Destroyer *Colhoun* was operating nearby on radar picket station No. 2 and had been attacked 11 times by Japanese bombers during the course of the day, but all bombs had missed in what appeared to be more nuisance attacks. However, about 1500, 40 to 50 Japanese *kamikaze* approached from Kyushu and commenced attacks on *Bush*, while another 12 went after destroyer *Cassin Young* (DD-793) occupying radar picket station No. 3 to the east of *Bush* and *Colhoun*.

As the mass attack commenced, *Bush* shot down two Val dive-bombers and drove off two others. Then a Jill torpedo bomber (carrying a bomb) bore in for an attack with an apparently skilled pilot who jinked and wove his way through a torrent of anti-aircraft fire, hitting *Bush* amidships between the two stacks. The plane's bomb detonated in the forward engine room, killing everyone in the space along with most of the crewmen in both fire rooms. Escaping steam smothered the fires (and killed crewmen) and mobile hand-pumps were used to control flooding. Although badly damaged and dead in the water, the list was corrected and it appeared *Bush* could be saved. *Colhoun* began closing at 35 knots to assist, bringing four combat air patrol fighters along, to join four that arrived overhead *Bush*. Additional fighters were dispatched, but soon there were so many Japanese aircraft that it turned into a giant air-to-air mêlée over the radar picket stations.

At 1635, *Colhoun* arrived in sight of the afire *Bush* just in time to interpose herself between *Bush* and an incoming flight of 15 Japanese aircraft. *Colhoun* shot down one *kamikaze*, which crashed between the two ships, then shot down a second and a third, until a fourth already flaming *kamikaze* hit the *Colhoun* amidships, killing the gunners in the 40-mm mounts while the plane's bomb exploded in the after fireroom, killing everyone in the space and rupturing the main steam line. In the meantime, another *kamikaze* made directly for the *Bush*, and with his ship a sitting duck, the commanding officer ordered all the crewmen who were topside fighting the fires (about 150) to jump overboard for safety, but the 40-mm gunners continued firing and the plane turned away looking for easier pickings.

Just as *Colhoun* was getting her fires under control, at 1717 she was attacked by three more *kamikaze*. One *kamikaze* was shot down by *Colhoun's* gunners, and a second downed by fire from *Bush* and *LCS-84*. The third *kamikaze* crashed into *Colhoun's* forward fire room, and the bomb detonated, blowing both boilers and breaking the keel, and the ship lost all power and communications and went dead in the water. Nevertheless, damage control teams once again got the fires and flooding under control, but at 1725 yet another *kamikaze* attack came in, with three planes approaching from three directions simultaneously. *Colhoun*, with all guns in manual, shot down one *kamikaze* and hit the other two, which both kept coming. One hit the after stack, fell on top of the Number 3 5-inch gun, fell over the side where it exploded, dousing the fires, but washing everyone on the fantail overboard. The third *kamikaze* missed *Colhoun* and went for *Bush*, hitting her amidships with such force the *Bush's* hull was virtually severed in two, with only her keel holding her together. Nevertheless, her crewmen climbed out of the water and had the fires almost under control again when she was hit by a fourth *kamikaze*. This crashed into her port side and ignited a massive fire that killed (or fatally burned)

all the wounded who had been collected in the wardroom, and the entire bow of the ship was in flames.

Still, neither crew would give up their ship. *Colhoun's* crew continued with a bucket brigade. Expecting his ship to break in two, *Bush's* commanding officer tried to take steps to ensure that both halves would be salvageable. At 1800, yet another *kamikaze* made a run at *Bush*, but apparently decided she was already done for and crashed into *Colhoun* instead, despite receiving multiple hits from *Colhoun's* gunners, who wouldn't give up. *Bush's* crew continued to try to save her, but, as dusk approached, she lost her fight to a very large swell that caused her tortured keel to break, and both hull segments finally went under. *LCS-64*, damaged herself in the battle, picked up some of *Bush's* survivors. Others were picked up during the night, but a number died in the cold water from wounds and hypothermia. *Bush* lost 94 valiant men, including the commander of Destroyer Division 98, Commander James S. Willis, and 32 wounded of 333 aboard. Commanding Officer Commander Rollin Everton Westholm would be awarded the Navy Cross (to go with a Silver Star awarded while in command of *PT-112* during action off Guadalcanal in 1943). Willis was also awarded a posthumous Navy Cross.

Destroyer *Cassin Young* arrived on scene as *Colhoun's* commanding officer, Commander George Rees Wilson, had finally—and reluctantly—given the order to abandon ship. *LCS-84* picked up about 200 of *Colhoun's* crew, which were transferred to *Cassin Young*. *LCS-87* came alongside *Colhoun* and took off the remaining men, except for a skeleton crew of four officers and 17 men who were still trying to save the ship. By the time the fleet tug *Pakena* arrived at 2320, the fires had flared up again, the ship was listing 23 degrees, and could not be towed in the rough sea. *LCS-87* took off the skeleton crew and *Cassin Young* sank the gallant *Colhoun* with gunfire. *Colhoun's* casualties included 35 dead and 21

wounded. Wilson was awarded his second Navy Cross (to go with a Navy Cross and Silver Star awarded while in command of destroyer *Chevalier* [DD-451] in actions in the central Solomon Islands in 1943).

***Newcomb* (DD-586) #.** At about 1800 6 April, as the battleship bombardment force was withdrawing from the beachhead area to their night disposition, 12 Kate torpedo bombers and Oscar fighters came in so low that lookouts saw them before radar. All ships opened fire with a massive volume of anti-aircraft fire. *Newcomb* was the first to be hit when a *kamikaze* crashed into her after stack. The destroyer shot down a second *kamikaze*, but, at 1806, a third hit her amidships and the large bomb or torpedo the plane was carrying exploded deep in the ship, destroying both engine rooms and the forward fire room. Despite the severe damage, *Newcomb's* forward guns kept firing on a fourth *kamikaze*, which kept on coming and struck the ship on the forward stack, adding a new supply of gasoline to the already raging inferno in *Newcomb's* mid-section. In the smoke of the explosion, observers on other ships first assumed *Newcomb* had gone down.

Leutze (DD-481) raced to rescue survivors, swinging her boats out to lower them in the water, only then to discover *Newcomb* was still afloat despite the mass of flame from her bridge to her Number 3 gun. *Leutze's* commanding officer was 1941 Naval Academy graduate, Lieutenant Leon Grabowsky, in command since the ship's commanding officer had been badly wounded when she was hit by shore fire off Iwo Jima. Grabowski brought *Leutze* alongside *Newcomb* at 1811, passing hoses over to help fight the fires. At 1815, a fifth *kamikaze* was aiming for *Newcomb's* bridge, but was hit by a 5-inch shell and crashed onto *Leutze's* fantail instead, starting a fire in the after ammunition-handling room, jamming her rudder, and opening many compartments to the sea. One of *Leutze's* repair parties continued to fight the fires on *Newcomb* while others fought to

save *Leutze*, which was in danger of sinking herself. There were numerous accounts of heroism on both ships, but Morison's quote from Lord Nelson probably sums it up: "They fought as one man and that man a hero." *Newcomb's* valiant crew, under the command of Commander Ira E. McMillian, saved their ship at a cost of 43 dead and 64 wounded. McMillian would be awarded the Navy Cross (to go with the Silver Star he had received while in command of *Newcomb* during the Battle of Surigao Strait). *Newcomb* was awarded a Navy Unit Commendation. She was ultimately towed back to the United States, but was not repaired.

***Leutze* (DD-481) #.** After disengaging from her heroic attempt to assist *Newcomb* when destroyer *Beale* (DD-471) came alongside to assist, *Leutze's* crew brought the fire and flooding under control and she was towed into Kerama Retto by



USS Morris (DD-417): Starboard view from director's deck of damage received in the mass kamikaze attack off Okinawa on 6 April 1945. Photo taken in the Kerama Retto anchorage, June 1945 (NH 9448).

minesweeper *Defense* (AM-317), herself hit by two *kamikaze* that luckily caused only minor damage and only wounded nine. *Leutze* lost 8 crewmen and 34 wounded. Acting Commanding Officer Lieutenant Grabowsky was awarded the Navy Cross. His award citation states: "...Although substituting for LEUTZE's regular commanding officer [he] handled his ship like a veteran commander and maintained a high standard of fighting efficiency on board his gallant craft throughout a long and terrific aerial attack. By his fearless leadership and outstanding courage in the face of grave danger, he contributed to the destruction of an enemy plane and to the preservation of his own and another destroyer..." *Leutze* was brought back to the United States, but repairs were halted at the end of the war and never completed.

***Defense* (AM-317) ##.** After shooting down one *kamikaze*, being hit by two, rescuing 60 sailors from destroyer *Newcomb* and towing crippled destroyer *Leutze* into Kerama Retto, *Defense* sailed for the U.S. West Coast, but her repairs were not completed until after the war ended. During the *kamikaze* hits on 6 April, *Defense* suffered nine wounded.

***Witter* (DE-636) # and *Morris* (DD-417) #.** Destroyer escort *Witter* was operating with destroyer *Gregory* (DD-802) on anti-submarine patrol duty off southern Okinawa when they were attacked by two Japanese aircraft at 1612. *Gregory* shot one down and *Witter* gunners hit the other, but the burning plane kept coming and hit *Witter* at the waterline, with the plane's bomb exploding in the forward fire room, and killing six crewmen and wounding six. Damage control parties got the flooding under control and *Witter* was steaming on her own power toward Kerama Retto at ten knots, accompanied by *Gregory*, destroyer *Morris* (DD-417), *Richard P. Leary* (DD-664), and the tug *Arikara* (ATF-98).

Morris detached from the group, but then came under attack by a single Kate torpedo bomber.

Although *Morris* gunners hit the *Kate* repeatedly, it kept coming and crashed on the port side between 5-inch gun mounts Number 1 and 2, igniting stubborn fires that took two and a half hours to put out. *Richard P. Leary* arrived to assist and escorted *Morris* to Kerama Retto. *Morris* suffered 13 killed and 45 wounded. Although both *Witter* and *Morris* eventually made their way back Stateside, repairs were never fully completed on either ship.

Hyman (DD-732). Destroyer *Hyman* was covering the transport area when she was attacked by four *kamikaze* at 1612 on 6 April. *Hyman* shot down three of the *kamikaze*, but was hit by the fourth on her torpedo tubes, which resulted in a massive explosion and flooded the forward engine room. As damage control parties stopped the flooding and put out the fires, *Hyman's* gunners, along with gunners on destroyer *Rooks* (DD-804), which had come to *Hyman's* aid, helped to down two more *kamikaze*. *Rooks* had already shot down five Japanese aircraft earlier in the day and would remain in nearly constant action off Okinawa until late June, suffering no hits and no casualties in an incredible lucky streak. *Hyman* suffered 12 killed and over 40 wounded, but the ship was saved. She returned from repair in the United States just in time for the Japanese surrender.

Howarth (DD-592). Destroyer *Howarth* was steaming with light cruiser *St. Louis* (CL-49), protecting the transport area, when a two-plane Japanese *kamikaze* attack came in about 1600. The two ships combined to shoot the first *kamikaze* down. The second *kamikaze* barely missed *Howarth*, passing between her stacks and crashing in the water on the far side. *Howarth* began heading to assist *Hyman*, when two groups of four Zeke fighters commenced an attack on her. From the first group, one was shot down, two missed, and the fourth just grazed the fantail before hitting the water. A fifth Zeke was shot down, but the sixth aimed for and hit the main battery gun director, killing nine and wounding 14. As damage control parties were quickly

bringing the fires under control, *Howarth's* 40-mm guns shot down yet another Zeke attacking from the stern. *Howarth* made it to Kerama Retto under her own power and then Stateside for repairs.

Mullany (DD-528) ##. Destroyer *Mullany* was on anti-submarine patrol when she was attacked by a solo *kamikaze* at 1745. Despite being hit numerous times, the *kamikaze* kept coming and crashed into the after deckhouse. As damage control parties swung into action, *Mullany's* depth charges blew up in a massive explosion. As the ship's crew struggled to keep her afloat, *Mullany's* forward gunners engaged three more inbound *kamikaze*, downing two and causing the third to turn away. After an hour of fighting the fire, the temperature in the aft magazine reached a level where it was at risk of exploding, and the commanding officer, Commander Albert Momm, gave the order to abandon ship. Minesweepers *Gherardi* (DMS-30) and *Execute* (AM-232) rescued survivors and were then joined by destroyer *Purdy* (DD-734), which came alongside to fight the fires. Commander Momm took a skeleton crew back on board. An attempt to tow *Mullany* failed, but the skeleton crew was able to light off one boiler and get her underway again to Kerama Retto. *Mullany* suffered 30 dead and 36 wounded. She eventually made her way back to the United States, but repairs were not complete before the war ended.

Fieberling (DE-640). Destroyer escort *Fieberling* suffered damage from a near miss by a *kamikaze*, but incurred no casualties. She escorted a convoy of unloaded transports to Guam and, after repairs, returned to Okinawa on 28 June.

Rodman (DD-456/DMS-21) ## and Emmons (DD-457/DMS-22)*. The destroyer-minesweepers *Rodman* and *Emmons* were covering a group of six small minesweepers sweeping a channel off Okinawa, when they were attacked by a large group of *kamikaze*. The first *kamikaze* popped out of the clouds with little warning, hitting *Rodman* from forward and its bomb exploded under the

superstructure. Damage control teams brought the fires under control by 1600 and *Rodman's* engineering plant was still in order. *Emmons* was maneuvering to assist *Rodman*, when the swarm of *kamikaze* descended. *Emmons* circled the wounded *Rodman*, shooting down six *kamikaze*, but two got through to *Rodman* and crashed into her, one causing a fire that gutted the superstructure after hitting the captain's cabin.

At this point, a large number of Marine Corps fighters arrived overhead and engaged the Japanese, shooting down as many as 20 aircraft. *Emmons* downed six more *kamikaze*, but was then overwhelmed. Marine Corsairs bravely flew into *Emmons'* anti-aircraft fire in pursuit, but couldn't prevent the ship from being hit by five *kamikaze* in quick succession; four others narrowly missed. *Emmons'* fantail and rudder were blown off when two of the *kamikaze* crashed into her stern simultaneously. A third hit her forward 5-inch gun. The fourth hit just under the bridge, killing everyone in the combat information center (four officers and ten men). Intense fire went into the pilothouse, forcing the badly burned commanding officer, Lieutenant Commander Foss, and others to seek shelter on the bridge, which, however, was gone, and they were forced to jump over the side. The fifth *kamikaze* strafed the ship, then circled back and crashed into the already destroyed superstructure.

The gunnery officer, Lieutenant J. J. Griffin, took command of *Emmons* as the wounded skipper was in the water and the executive officer was dead. Gun crews were still firing and downed a sixth inbound *kamikaze*. The ship was listing ten degrees, fires burning throughout and ready ammunition was exploding, but the good news was the sprinklers in the ammunition-handling rooms worked and the power plant was intact. Griffin worked to save the ship, as teams brought the superstructure fire under control, topside weight was jettisoned, and the less-severely wounded were put overboard in life rafts. After an hour of fighting the fire forward, there was a large

explosion in the forward handling room. With help, the ship might still have been saved, but the damaged *Rodman* was in no condition to help anyone and all fleet tugs were occupied with other cripples. The small minesweepers had rescued some *Emmons* crewmen from the water, including the skipper.

Griffin finally gave the abandon-ship order. The small mine disposal vessel *PGM-11* stood by *Emmons* until the end, coming alongside the burning ship to take off the last 60 men around 2000. Still, *Emmons* drifted for another two hours until destroyer-minesweeper *Ellyson* (DMS-19) arrived, but couldn't put a party aboard due to the rough sea. On order, she sank the valiant *Emmons* with gunfire. Of *Emmons'* crew, eight of 19 officers and 53 out of 237 men were killed, with four officers later succumbing to burn wounds; 71 others were wounded.

Rodman made it to Kerama Retto with 16 dead and 20 wounded. Her repairs were not completed before the war ended. (*Rodman* went on to star as the fictitious USS *Caine* in the movie *The Caine Mutiny* in 1954 before being transferred to the Taiwanese navy, where she was involved in two collisions—earning the nickname in Chinese for “Ram”—and finally running aground in 1969.)

Emmons was awarded a Navy Unit Commendation for actions prior to her sinking. Her crew were awarded a Navy Cross, four Silver Stars, and eight Bronze Stars. Lieutenant Griffin was awarded one of the Silver Stars (I can't find who received the Navy Cross). *Emmons'* wreck site was discovered in shallow water in 2001 and has become a popular dive suite. The builder's plaque was illegally removed by a diver. Warship wrecks and their contents remain sovereign property of their nation in perpetuity, and, working with NCIS, NHHC was able to recover the plaque. It has since undergone extensive conservation treatment to prevent the rapid deterioration that occurs when an artifact is improperly removed from salt water.



USS LST-447 is hit by a kamikaze while entering the Kerama Retto roadstead on 6 April 1945. Photographed from the deck of USS Tulagi (CVE-72). LST-447 was gutted by fire after this hit and sank the following day (80-G-339258).

LST-447 *. Besides being a place of refuge for damaged ships, Kerama Retto also had a large concentration of ammunition and fuel ships. As *LST-447* was approaching the Kerama roadstead at 1627, she spotted two Zeke fighters heading in to the anchorage, opened fire, and hit one of them, which then changed course and aimed for the landing ship. Despite being hit by more anti-aircraft fire, the Zeke crashed the ship just above the waterline and its bomb exploded inside the LST, starting a massive fire. Within ten minutes, the vessel had to be abandoned, and then burned for 24 hours before she finally sank. Five crewmen were killed and 17 wounded.

Hobbs Victory * and Logan Victory *. Meanwhile, other *kamikaze* passed up the LST and took aim at the escort carrier *Tulagi* (CVE-72) and three Victory ships being used as ammunition carriers. One *kamikaze* commenced a run on *Tulagi*, but shifted to *Logan Victory* instead. Her Merchant Marine crew promptly abandoned her; most of the 16 dead and 11 wounded were in the Naval Armed Guard. *Hobbs Victory* quickly got underway, but was hit in the aft of her bridge and also quickly abandoned, with 15 killed and three wounded. Both ships drifted burning and exploding for a day before any ship went close enough to sink them with gunfire. The Navy-manned *Las Vegas Victory* was in the act of offloading ammunition onto smaller landing

craft and shot down the *kamikaze* that tried to attack her.

7 April

Bennett (DD-473) ##. At 0850, while on radar picket duty, destroyer *Bennett* was hit by a *kamikaze* that damaged the forward engine room and knocked out all electrical power. Seven crewmen were killed and 14 were wounded, but the ship was able to make it to Kerama Retto on her own and then to Puget Sound for repairs. These weren't completed before the war ended.

Wesson (De-184). At 0917, while on screening duty off the west coast of Okinawa, destroyer escort *Wesson* was engaging three Japanese aircraft crossing ahead of her when a fourth dove out of the clouds and crashed into her torpedo tube bank. Fortunately, there was not a catastrophic explosion, but her crew fought fires and flooding in the engineering spaces. Destroyer *Lang* (Dd-399) came alongside to assist, transferred a submersible pump, and then attempted to take *Wesson* in tow, but the line parted. Nevertheless, *Wesson* was able to make it to Kerama Retto under her own power and then to San Francisco for repairs. Eight crewmen died and 23 were wounded.

Hancock (CV-19). Although *Hancock's* 53-plane strike failed to find *Yamato* in the lousy weather conditions (see attachment H-044-3), one Japanese *kamikaze* found *Hancock* at 1212. Attacking from ahead, the plane dropped a bomb that hit the port catapult forward. Then, the aircraft cartwheeled across the deck, crashing into some parked aircraft aft. The explosions and fires killed 72 crewmen and wounded another 82. Damage control teams had the fires out in 30 minutes. *Hancock* was able to recover her own strike and then continue operations on an emergency basis. She detached on 9 April to Pearl Harbor for repairs and returned to combat action in June.

Maryland (BB-46) ##. After steaming north with the other old battleships to counter the sortie of the Japanese battleship *Yamato* before being called off when Task Force 58 aircraft sank her, *Maryland* was hit at dusk on top of main battery turret Number 3 by a *kamikaze* with a bomb. The explosion destroyed the 20-mm guns near the turret and started a fire that cooked off 20-mm ammunition. *Maryland's* casualties were 16 killed and 37 wounded. Turret Number 3 remained useable, but did not fire again, although *Maryland* continued shore bombardment duty for another week before heading for repairs. Back at Puget Sound shipyard, *Maryland* commenced a major weapons upgrade that was not finished by the time the war ended.

PGM-18 * Gunboat *PGM-18* struck a mine off Okinawa and sank, with a loss of 14 crewmen killed and 14 wounded.

YMS-103 * Auxiliary motor minesweeper *YMS-102* struck a mine and sank off Okinawa. Five of her crew were killed and none wounded.



USS Hancock (CV-19) casualties are buried at sea on 9 April 1945. They were killed when Hancock was hit by a kamikaze while operating off Okinawa on 7 April (80-G-328574).

8 April

Gregory (DD-802) ##. Destroyer *Gregory* had assumed duty on radar picket station No. 3 north of Okinawa when her lookouts sighted three Japanese aircraft coming out of the setting

sun. *Gregory's* gunners immediately opened fire and, although the first aircraft took repeated hits with parts and pieces falling off, it still crashed into *Gregory's* port side amidships just above the waterline, flooding the forward engine and firerooms. *Gregory's* gunners didn't flinch and kept firing on the second and third *kamikaze*, downing both of them close aboard. Damage control teams had the fires out in short order and *Gregory* steamed to Kerama Retto under her own power and then to Pearl Harbor for repairs, which weren't complete when the war ended. Somewhat amazingly, *Gregory* suffered only two wounded and none killed. Of note, *Gregory* was under the command of Commander Bruce McCandless, who had been awarded a Medal of Honor for assuming command of heavy cruiser *San Francisco* (CA-38) after Captain Cassin Young, other senior officers, and embarked Rear Admiral Dan Callaghan were all killed during the 13 November 1942 night battle off Guadalcanal.

YMS-92. Auxiliary motor minesweeper *YMS-92* was damaged as a result of an air attack. Although she suffered no casualties, she was put out of action for over 30 days.

9 April

Charles J. Badger (DD-657) ##. In low light before sunrise off Naha, Okinawa, an 18-foot Japanese *Shinyo* suicide boat made a run at destroyer *Charles J. Badger*, dropping a depth charge close aboard and then speeding away (apparently without the suicide part). No one was killed or injured, but the powerful blast caused serious flooding and knocked the destroyer's engines off line. A second *Shinyo* was detected and fired on by destroyer *Purdy* (DD-734). The *Shinyo* dropped its depth charge and sped away. The cargo ship *Starr* was attacked by another *Shinyo*, but an LSM alongside absorbed the blast, which in this case was a suicide for the Japanese. Three other boats and 15 Japanese swimmers armed with hand grenades were also detected and dispatched in

this series of attacks. Meanwhile, the flooding was quickly controlled on *Charles J. Badger* and she was towed to Kerama Retto for temporary repairs. She then proceeded to Bremerton for additional repairs which weren't complete when the war ended.

New York: Ballantine Books, 1961; *Combined Fleet Decoded: The Secret History of American Intelligence and the Japanese Navy in World War II* by John Prados, New York: Random House, 1995.

Sterrett (DD-407). Destroyer *Sterrett* was on patrol at radar picket station No. 4 northeast of Okinawa when she was attacked by five Val *kamikaze*. *Sterrett's* gunners caused the first *kamikaze* to seek an easier target. The second *kamikaze* was destroyed by 5-inch gunfire from *Sterrett*, but the third, despite repeated hits, pressed home the attack and hit the destroyer amidships at the waterline. Despite loss of electrical power to all guns and directors, *Sterrett's* gunners kept firing and brought down the fourth *kamikaze*, although the fuselage passed over the ship and hit the water on the far side. What happened to the fifth *kamikaze* is unknown. Steering control was out, as were all communications, and the forward fuel tanks were ruptured. Moving at 32 knots when she was hit, *Sterrett's* fires were extinguished in part by spray, and the crew did the rest. Steering control was reestablished, and the ship made it to Kerama Retto and then to Bremerton for repairs.

Hopping (APD-51). While conducting a reconnaissance of what would become known as Buckner Bay on the east side of Okinawa, destroyer-transport *Hopping* exchanged fire with a Japanese shore battery, silencing the battery, but getting hit several times in return. Two crewmen were killed and 18 wounded. She subsequently proceeded to Ulithi for repairs, returning to Okinawa on 17 May.

Sources include: *NHHC Dictionary of American Fighting Ships* (DANFS) for U.S. ships and combinedfleet.com for Japanese ships. *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II, Vol. XIV: Victory in the Pacific* by Samuel Eliot Morison, Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1969; *Japanese Destroyer Captain* by Tameichi Hara,



The Imperial Japanese Navy's super-battleship *Yamato*, shown here during pre-commission running trials in the Bungo Strait between the Home Islands of Kyushu and Shikoku, 20 October 1941 (NH 73092).

H-043-3: "Operation Heaven Number One" (*Ten-ichi-go*)—the Death of *Yamato*, 7 April 1945

H-Gram 044, *Attachment 3*
Samuel J. Cox, Director NHHC
April 2020

Senior U.S. Navy commanders in the Pacific, including Admiral Raymond Spruance, Commander U.S. Fifth Fleet, knew what the battleship *Yamato*'s mission was before almost anyone on *Yamato* did. The execute order for Operation *Ten-ichi-go* ("Heaven Number One") was intercepted on 26 March 1945 and decrypted. Over the next days, additional messages were intercepted and decrypted by

Fleet Radio Unit Pacific (FRUPAC) and also OP-20-G in Washington that provided increasingly detailed information on the operation's timing and made specific mention of *Yamato* on 5 April.

Operation *Ten-ichi-go* was the Imperial Japanese Navy's plan to react to the U.S. invasion of the island of Okinawa, which Japanese intelligence correctly determined would occur at the end of March 1945. (The actual U.S. landings on Okinawa commenced 1 April 1945, but carrier strikes and shore bombardment began a week earlier and the landings on the small islands of the Kerama-shōtto group just southwest of Okinawa occurred on 27 March.)

Yamato was essentially doomed by a question from Emperor Hirohito during a briefing on 29 March about plans for Japanese air opposition to expected landings on Okinawa. He asked what the Japanese navy was doing. This was taken by senior Japanese navy leaders as implicit criticism of their service's inaction. By this time, there

wasn't much left of the Japanese navy that was still operational, and fuel was in critically short supply. The debate up to that point was whether to keep the fleet in home waters as a last-ditch defense or to send it on what everyone knew would be a one-way mission to attack the overwhelming U.S. forces expected to be at Okinawa. The emperor's question clinched it. The commander in chief of the Combined Fleet, Admiral Soemu Toyoda, resolved to send what was left of his force out in a blaze of glory.

The mission was given to Vice Admiral Seiichi Ito, commander of the Japanese Second Fleet (pretty much all that was left of the Combined Fleet), embarked on the super-battleship *Yamato*. On 29 March, *Yamato* was ordered to take on fuel and ammunition, and loaded 1,170 shells for her nine 18.1-inch guns (in three triple turrets), 1,629 shells for her six 6.1-inch guns (in two triple turrets), 13,500 anti-aircraft shells, and 11.5 million rounds of machine-gun ammunition. It would not be enough.

Vice Admiral Ito initially objected to the mission, viewing it as futile and wasteful. According to the plan, *Yamato*, light cruiser *Yahagi*, and eight destroyers would form a "Surface Special Attack Force" (the term "special attack" was understood to mean suicide) and sortie on 6 April 1945. This would be carried out in conjunction with a mass aerial *kamikaze* attack by over 350 airplanes (*Kikusui* No. 1). The force would transit to Okinawa on 7 April (with only a few hours of minimal air cover), to arrive in daylight hours in the U.S. transport area off southwestern Okinawa on 8 April. The ships were to sink as many troop transports as possible, then beach themselves and continue firing as long as they had ammunition. At that point, the crews would go ashore to fight and die to the last man along with their army comrades.

When the details of the mission were finally briefed on 5 April to the Japanese ship captains who would carry it out (it had been kept secret

from them), it provoked the closest thing to a mutiny in the Japanese navy. The chief of staff of the Combined Fleet, Vice Admiral Ryunosuke Kusaka, flew in from Tokyo to ensure that Ito would comply with Admiral Toyoda's orders. The ship captains were then assembled on *Yahagi* and briefed. They unanimously objected, most of them arguing instead to be allowed to conduct independent raiding of the over-extended U.S. supply lines. As later described by the captain of *Yahagi*, Captain Tameichi Hara, the meeting was quite contentious. None of the captains was afraid to die—they just objected to the sheer folly of attacking in daylight without air cover, believing that they wouldn't get anywhere close to Okinawa. (They were right.) They eventually fell in line when informed that this was what the emperor wanted, that the force would serve to support the mass *kamikaze* air attack, and that it was an order. They were also given the option of not participating, an option none of them took.

Yamato and her sister ship *Musashi*, sunk during the Battle of Leyte Gulf, were, at 65,000 tons displacement (72,000 tons fully loaded), the largest battleships ever built. Even before the war, the Japanese understood that they could never match the U.S. Navy for quantity, but were convinced they could build a better battleship. Design commenced in 1934, construction began in 1937 (in great secrecy) and *Yamato* was commissioned in December 1941 just after Pearl Harbor. Her main armament consisted of three triple 18.1-inch gun turrets that could hurl a 3,200-pound shell (compared to 2,700 pounds for the U.S. 16-inch shells) to a range of just over 22 miles. Her waterline armor belt was 16 inches thick. Her secondary armament was significantly altered during the war by removing two of her four triple 6.1-inch turrets in favor of increased anti-aircraft armament, which, by 1945, included 12 dual 5-inch gun mounts, 54 25-mm triple mounts (162 guns), and smaller machine guns. *Yamato* had been fitted with multiple air and surface search radars, as well as radio-intercept capability. She had suffered minor damage in the

bridge area from a bomb hit by a Helldiver dive-bomber off *Intrepid* (CV-11) during U.S. carrier strikes on Kure and the Inland Sea on 19 March, but was fully fit for battle.

Yamato was commanded by Captain Kosaku Aruga (spelled Ariga in some accounts). Also, accounts differ as to whether he was a captain or rear admiral. To buck up morale, many captains of capital ships received a "accelerated" promotion to rear admiral in 1944. Thus, it's possible Aruga was "selected," but not yet "promoted." In keeping with Japanese practice of posthumous promotion for death in battle, he was promoted to vice admiral after *Yamato* was sunk, that much is fact.

The rest of the Surface Special Attack Force consisted of the light cruiser *Yahagi*, and eight destroyers. *Yahagi* was a relatively small light cruiser (6,600 tons) completed in 1943 and intended for use as a destroyer flotilla leader. With only three twin 6-inch gun turrets, she was no match for U.S. light cruisers with their four triple-turret, rapid-fire 6-inch guns. *Yahagi* was commanded by Captain Tameichi Hara (the only Japanese destroyer skipper at the start of the war who was still alive at the end of the war), with Rear Admiral Keizo Komura, commander of Destroyer Squadron 2, embarked. The destroyers were Destroyer Division (DESDIV) 17 (*Isokaze*, *Hamakaze*, *Yukikaze*), DESDIV 21 (*Asashimo*, *Kasumi*, *Hatsushimo*), and DESDIV 41 (*Fuyuzuki*, *Suzutsuki*). The destroyers were an assortment of different classes (what was left in operation, since the Japanese would lose 120 destroyers during the war), but all were armed with powerful Type 93 "Long Lance" 24-inch torpedoes.

Before getting underway, the Surface Special Attack Force put ashore 67 recently arrived midshipmen of the Etajima Naval Academy Class No. 74, although many begged to stay. In addition, sick sailors and also the oldest sailors were sent to shore. The morale aboard *Yamato* was described as not being very good, especially

after the crews were informed they were on a one-way mission. (Although some accounts say that, according to the plan, the ships were only given enough fuel to reach Okinawa, they actually received as much fuel as was available to give.)

U.S. submarines were already waiting for *Yamato*, with orders to report rather than attack, although with the force transiting at 22 knots and frequently zig-zagging, successful attack in all but the luckiest circumstances was unlikely. As *Yamato* and escorts were transiting the Bungo Strait between the Home Islands of Kyushu and Shikoku on 6 April 1945, submarine *Threadfin* (SS-410) sighted the force at about 1745 and issued a contact report in the clear that was intercepted by *Yamato*. At 1830, destroyer *Isokaze* sighted *Threadfin* on the surface. At 2144, the submarine issued a detailed contact report with an accurate force disposition. Submarine *Hackleback* (SS-295) then picked up surveillance, issuing four contact reports during the night as *Yamato* transited southwesterly along the coast of Kyushu. A Japanese destroyer peeled off three times to keep *Hackleback* at bay. However, in order to keep up with *Yamato*, these forays were short-lived. The submarine radio traffic transmitted in



Just after 1240 on 7 April, *Yamato* maneuvers frantically under the initial attack by USS *Bennington* (CV-20) and USS *Hornet* (CV-12) aircraft as a bomb explodes off her port side. The fire in the area of her forward 6.1 inch turret can be clearly seen (L42-09.06.05).

the clear, reporting *Yamato* by name, and reported by Japanese radio intelligence, did nothing to improve the sense of foreboding felt by the senior officers on *Yamato*. (The *Yamato* force had a Nisei radio-intelligence operator. Although born a U.S. citizen, he had been studying in Japan when the war broke out and had the choice of execution or serving in the Imperial Japanese Navy.)

Both the U.S. Fifth Fleet commander, Admiral Spruance, and Vice Admiral Mitscher (commander of the Fast Carrier Task Force, TF 58), who had access to the Ultra communications intelligence and were expecting the sortie, immediately reacted to the submarine reports. Mitscher ordered all four of his carrier task groups to proceed as soon as possible to launch positions northeast of Okinawa with the intent to destroy *Yamato* before it got anywhere near Okinawa. TG 58.1 and 58.3 were quickly on station. TG 58.4 had just finished refueling and would arrive just in time. TG 58.2 was in the act of refueling and wouldn't get there in time. Spruance gave orders to Rear Admiral Morton Deyo, commander of the Bombardment Force, to take his six old battleships and set up a blocking force northwest of Okinawa (as *Yamato* was circling around in that direction with the intent to stay as far from TF 58 as possible). During the night, this plan morphed into sending six new battleships detached from TF 58 into blocking position. This force include battleships *Massachusetts* (BB-59), *Indiana* (BB-58), *South Dakota* (BB-57), *New Jersey* (BB-62), *Wisconsin* (BB-64), and *Missouri* (BB-63) (54 16-inch guns), the battle-cruisers *Alaska* (CB-1) and *Guam* (CB-2), five cruisers, and 21 destroyers. They would not be needed.

After daybreak on 7 April 1945, a paltry six A6M Zeke fighters showed up to provide combat air patrol over *Yamato*. Between then and 1000, a total of 14 Zekes would provide cover. FRUPAC had the message that the air cover would end at 1000, which was also known to senior U.S. Navy commanders.

At 0657, destroyer *Asashimo*, with Captain Kotaki, DESDIV 21, embarked, sent a signal that she was having engine trouble and began to fall behind. This was taken as a yet another bad omen.

At 0823, a Hellcat fighter off *Essex* (CV-9) sighted *Yamato*, a contact that the battleship reported at 0832. The visibility was highly variable, but often not very good due to cloud cover. The fighter issued a contact report at 0832. At 0840, the Japanese reported seven Hellcats orbiting around the force. The Japanese fighters were unable to make contact before they left at 1000. With this contact information, Spruance ordered Deyo to ready the blocking force. Since *Yamato* could not get to the landing area before 8 April, there wasn't a big rush and Deyo convened a planning conference on his flagship *Eldorado* (AGC-11) at 1030 with plans to sortie TF 54 from the bombardment area at 1530. Aboard the TF 58 carriers, the strike packages were remaining ready on deck while the searches were underway.

Not long after the Hellcat sighting, two PBM-3 Martin Mariner flying boats began shadowing *Yamato*, maintaining discreet contact for the next five hours while mostly hidden in the clouds. The Mariners were subordinate to Patrol Bombing Squadron 21 (VPB-21), operating from the tender *Chandeleur* (AV-10), which had arrived at Kerama Retto on 28 March.

At 1000, Task Group 58.1 and Task Group 58.3 commence launching a 280-plane strike wave (132 fighters, 50 bombers, and 98 torpedo planes). TG 58.1, commanded by Rear Admiral J. J. "Jocko" Clark, embarked on *Hornet* (CV-12), included *Hancock* (CV-19), *Bennington* (CV-20), *Belleau Wood* (CVL-24) and *San Jacinto* (CVL-30). TG 58.3, commanded by Rear Admiral Frederick "Ted" Sherman, embarked on *Essex* (CV-9), included *Bunker Hill* (CV-17), *Bataan* (CVL-24), and *Cabot* (CVL-28). Mitscher, CTF 58, was embarked on *Bunker Hill*. *Hancock* for some reason launched her 53-plane strike late, and it never found

Yamato in the murk, reducing the overall first strike to 227 aircraft.

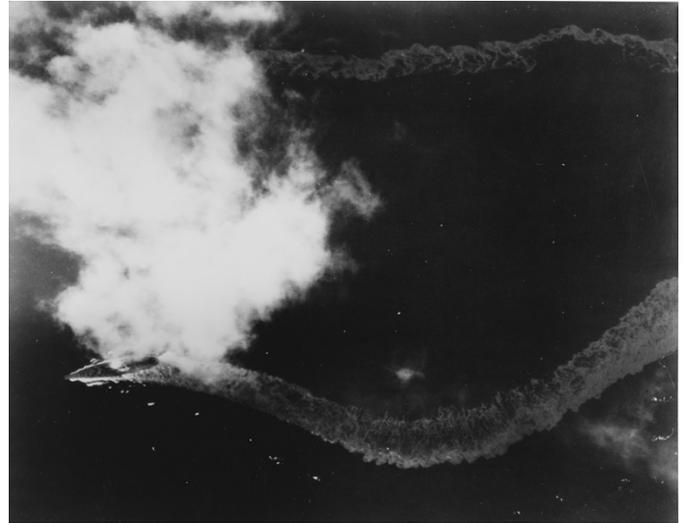
At 1014, the *Yamato* force sighted the two Martin Mariner PBM flying boats, and also noted that *Hackleback* was still trailing (the Japanese had made so many course changes during the night that the sub was able to “cut the corner” and maintain contact on the force). At 1017, *Yahagi* commenced jamming the Mariner’s communications, but by then it was too late. At 1017, *Yamato* opened fire with several of her special main-battery anti-aircraft shells (*sanshikidan* or “beehive” shells, somewhat like a giant shotgun shell), at the Mariners, which was equally futile, although the Mariners ducked back in the clouds.

At 1107, *Yamato*’s Type 13 air search radar detected a large aircraft formation inbound at the radar’s maximum range of 63 nautical miles, and noted the aircraft formation was splitting into two groups. The *Yamato* group cranked up speed to 25 knots.

At 1115, *Yamato*’s radar indicated the two air groups were at 44 miles and closing rapidly. The battleship received a 30-minute time-late report from an observation post on a small Japanese island north of Okinawa that 150 U.S. planes were headed in *Yamato*’s direction. The Japanese also noted eight Hellcats circling the force with impunity because of no Japanese fighter cover, and remaining outside anti-aircraft range.

At 1210, destroyer *Asashimo*, lagging behind the force, reported that she was under air attack, and radio transmissions from her ceased. *Asashimo* was first attacked by aircraft from *Bunker Hill* and then, a few minutes later, by aircraft from *San Jacinto*, which scored killing hits with torpedoes and bombs. *Asashimo* went down with all 330 hands. (Based on erroneous *San Jacinto* report, Samuel Eliot Morison misidentifies this ship as *Hamakaze*, but a photo shows a Yugumo-class

destroyer, which would be *Asashimo*, and which was also the one lagging behind.)



Yamato maneuvers while under attack by U.S. Navy carrier planes north of Okinawa, 7 April 1945, maneuvering evasively at a brisk 15 to 20 knots. One fire can be observed amidships from the initial strike, but no list has developed at this point. Photographed from a USS *Yorktown* (CV-10) plane (NH 62581).

At 1232, lookouts in the *Yamato* force sighted the first incoming strike wave. Captain Hara on *Yahagi* reported that the large formations of aircraft circled around the task force just outside anti-aircraft range for a number of minutes, some in clockwise rotation and some in counter-clockwise rotation, as strike leaders organized strikes on particular targets free of interference from Japanese fighters. At 1234, *Yamato* opened fire with her two forward main battery turrets, lobbing *sanshikidan* shells at the U.S. aircraft—to no effect.

At about 1237, U.S. aircraft commenced attack runs, with strafing and rockets from fighters (which quickly began decimating Japanese anti-aircraft gunners), and then bombs and torpedoes. The Japanese opened up with everything they had, which looked terrifying, but U.S. pilots quickly figured out that Japanese anti-aircraft fire was wildly inaccurate. Far more effective was the

extraordinary skill of Japanese ship captains in making evasive maneuvers to throw off aim and avoid numerous bombs and torpedoes. Numerous Helldivers from *Bennington* and *Hornet* attacked from *Yamato*'s port side and numerous near misses splashed all around the battleship, which was moving at flank speed (27 knots), before she was finally hit by two 1,000-pound armor-piercing bombs at 1240. One bomb exploded in crews' quarters, but the other bomb exploded near the aft command station and knocked out one of her two air search radars, the aft secondary gun director, several 25-mm gun mounts, and started a fire that killed all but one crewman in the after secondary (6-inch) gun turret and that couldn't be put out. One Helldiver was shot down.

At 1243, five *Hornet* Avengers came in from port, while 14 F4U Corsairs from *Bunker Hill* were strafing and hitting *Yamato* with rockets that caused little damage to the ship, but were deadly to the gunners. One Avenger was shot down, but three torpedoes went into the water. *Yamato* avoided two, but the third hit her port side at 1245. She quickly shipped 2,235 tons of water, but the list was soon corrected with effective counter-flooding. U.S. aircrew claimed additional bomb and torpedo hits in this first wave, but these were mostly near misses.

Light cruiser *Yahagi* steered away from *Yamato* in an attempt to draw attention away from the battleship—too successfully. At 1246, she took a direct torpedo hit in the engine room that killed the entire engine room crew and left her dead in the water, unable to avoid further hits. The destroyer *Isokaze* rushed to aid *Yahagi* and take off Rear Admiral Komura, but got pummeled by bombs before she got close. Meanwhile,

about 34 Hellcats and Corsairs and 22 Helldivers and Avengers worked over some of the other Japanese destroyers. A near miss on *Hamakaze* disabled her starboard shaft and then, at 1247, torpedo hits amidships blew her in half. A 500-pound general-purpose bomb hit *Suzutsuki* and blew off her bow. *Fuyutsuki* was hit by two dud rockets. The first U.S. attack wave ended about 1250.

At 1302, *Yamato*'s remaining air search radar detected a second inbound wave. These were 50 aircraft from *Essex* and *Bataan*. At 1322, an *Essex* Corsair hit *Yamato* in the port bow with a 1,000-pound general-purpose bomb. (Although U.S. carrier air groups' complement had been changed to have a mix of about three quarters fighters to defend against *kamikaze* and only one quarter bombers and torpedo planes, the fighters had been trained and gotten pretty good at being used in a fighter-bomber role, and, with no Japanese air opposition, had the freedom to do so.) Twelve Helldivers claimed several hits in the bridge area in exchange for five Helldivers damaged by anti-aircraft fire. By this point, *Yamato* was firing main-battery beehive shells set to detonate after one second (about 3,000 yards) from the ship, which U.S. aircraft just blew through.

At 1333, another 110 aircraft from TG 58.4 (*Yorktown*, *Intrepid*, and *Langley*), which had launched after the first wave of 280 aircraft, commenced their attack on *Yamato*. This time, all attacks concentrated on the battleship. Twenty Avengers attacked from the port side (concentrating torpedo attacks from the port side was deliberate, with the intent to capsize the ship). Three of the torpedoes hit in quick succession, and *Yamato* took on another 3,000 tons of water and a 7-degree list. Having already counter-

flooded to starboard, the only option *Yamato* had was to flood her starboard engine and boiler rooms. The desperate measure worked, but, with insufficient time to give warning, several hundred *Yamato* crewmen were drowned as a result, and the ship was slowed to 10 knots, which made her an easier target.

At 1342, another Avenger was shot down, but four more torpedoes were inbound from the port side and two hit. With *Yamato* slowed, U.S. torpedo planes started to deliberately target her stern to knock out her steering, and she became stuck in a starboard turn. *Yamato* took at least four more bomb hits in the superstructure area, which wiped out many of the remaining 25-mm guns. A bomb impact in the dispensary killed many of the wounded who had been gathered there, along with many of the medical personnel.

The executive officer reported to Captain Aruga that the damage control officers were dead and that counter-flooding could no longer correct the list, and recommended the ship be abandoned. Since *Yamato's* radios were destroyed, Vice Admiral Ito sent out a signal via flag hoist cancelling the operation and freeing the other ships to try to get back to Japan.

At 1402, *Yamato* took three more bomb hits amidships, and Aruga gave the abandon-ship order. At 1407, she was struck by at least the seventh torpedo, this time to starboard. At 1417, she took an eighth and ninth torpedo, both to port. By this point, the uncorrected list was passing 15 degrees to port, and alarms were warning of critical temperatures in the forward main battery magazines, with no working pumps to flood them.



Yamato maneuvers while under attack by U.S. Navy carrier planes north of Okinawa, 7 April 1945, maneuvering evasively at a brisk 15 to 20 knots. One fire can be observed amidships from the initial strike, but no list has developed at this point. Photographed from a USS Yorktown (CV-10) plane (NH 62581).

As *Yamato* continued to list to port, her starboard armor belt came out of the water and her vulnerable underside became exposed. Six *Yorktown* Avengers attacked from the starboard side, with their Mark 13 torpedoes re-set for a 20-foot depth—several hit.

Meanwhile, the dead-in-the-water *Yahagi* had soaked up at least 12 bombs and seven torpedo hits before she finally capsized and sank at 1405.

By 1408, *Yamato* had clearly begun to capsize and the ship was being abandoned. Vice Admiral Ito retired to his stateroom to go down with the ship. Captain Aruga lashed himself to the binnacle to do the same. By 1420, the main deck was vertical and, at 1430, *Yamato* had rolled over and just gone under when the No.1 forward magazine detonated in a massive explosion that killed almost all of *Yamato's* crew who had survived to that point and raised a pall of smoke that could be seen for 100 miles. More U.S. aircraft may have

been knocked down by the magazine explosion than by Japanese anti-aircraft fire.

Although accounts vary about how many crewmen were on *Yamato*, the most definitive appears to be that 3,055 of 3,332 crewmen were lost. According to Morison, there were only 23 officers and 246 enlisted sailors who survived, which doesn't exactly match, but is close. Vice Admiral Ito and Captain Aruga went down with the ship. Aruga would be posthumously promoted to vice admiral and Ito to full admiral. Ito's chief of staff, Rear Admiral Nobuei Morishita, was the senior survivor of *Yamato*.

Yahagi lost 446 of about 1,000 crewmen. Both Rear Admiral Komura and Captain Hara survived. Of the Japanese destroyers, *Asashimo* was sunk with all hands (about 330) and *Hamakaze* sank with a loss of 100 crewmen and 45 wounded (257 were rescued). *Isokaze*, which had her steering disabled by a near miss, suffered 20 dead and 54 wounded, and had to be scuttled by gunfire from *Yukikaze*. *Kasumi*, which had her steering disabled by two bomb hits, suffered 17 dead and 47 wounded, and was scuttled by two torpedoes from *Fuyuzuki*. *Suzutsuki* suffered 57 dead and 34 wounded, but, despite having her bow blown off, made it back to Sasebo, Japan, steaming in reverse the whole way; she was never repaired. *Fuyuzuki* suffered light damage from dud rockets, suffered 12 dead and 12 injured, and was repaired, but had her stern blown off by a mine after the August cease-fire. *Yukikaze* suffered three dead from strafing and survived the war. *Hatsushimo* suffered only three wounded on 6 April, but, on 20 July, struck a mine and was the last Japanese destroyer sunk in the war.

Japanese reports claim U.S. aircraft strafed survivors in the water, but also report that attacks ceased on destroyers that were picking up survivors. About 1,620 survivors of *Yamato*, *Yahagi*, *Hamakaze*, *Isokaze*, and *Kasumi* were rescued by the surviving Japanese destroyers. A U.S. PBM Mariner also rescued several Japanese survivors. About 1,187 crewmen of *Yahagi* and the four destroyers were lost. Combined with *Yamato*, about 4,242 Japanese sailors gave their lives for the emperor on 7 April. *Yamato* was still more than 300 nautical miles from Okinawa when she went down. The most powerful battleship in the world was no match for 390 U.S. carrier aircraft.

U.S. losses were 10 aircraft and 12 pilots and aircrewmembers.

Captain Hara of *Yahagi* later said the mission would be "like throwing an egg against a rock."

Sources include: *NHHC Dictionary of American Fighting Ships* (DANFS) for U.S. ships and combinedfleet.com for Japanese ships. *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II, Vol. XIV: Victory in the Pacific* by Samuel Eliot Morison, Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1969; *Japanese Destroyer Captain* by Tameichi Hara, New York: Ballantine Books, 1961; *Combined Fleet Decoded: The Secret History of American Intelligence and the Japanese Navy in World War II* by John Prados, New York: Random House, 1995.