

H-Gram 048: The Naval Battle of Okinawa—U.S. Flagships Hit, May–June 1945

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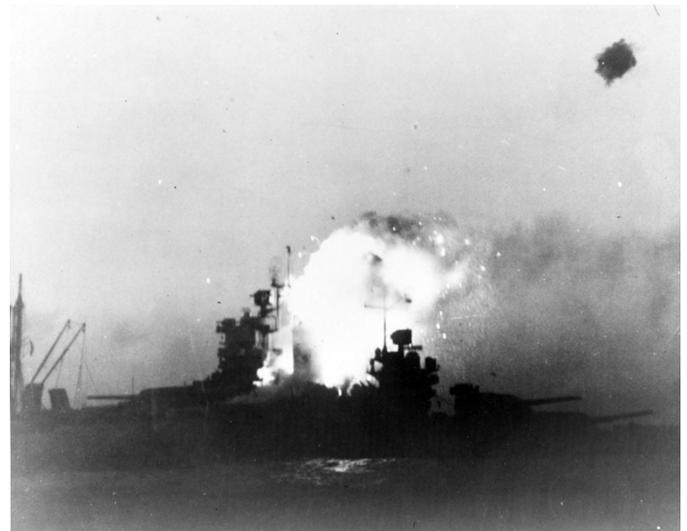
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75th Anniversary of World War II

This H-gram covers the naval battle of Okinawa from late May to early June 1945, including the kamikaze hits on flagships Bunker Hill (CV-17, Vice Admiral Marc “Pete” Mitscher), New Mexico (BB-40, Admiral Raymond A. Spruance) and Enterprise (CV-6, Vice Admiral Mitscher). All of these ships survived, although the hits on Bunker Hill caused the most casualties in a single ship from a kamikaze attack, with 396 crewmen killed. The mass kamikaze attacks Kikusui No. 6, 7, and 8, and Typhoon Viper are also discussed.

Kamikaze Attacks on U.S. Flagships off Okinawa

As the ground campaign at Okinawa dragged on in a bloody slog against fierce Japanese



USS New Mexico (BB-40), Fifth Fleet flagship, is hit by a kamikaze at dusk on 12 May 1945 while off Okinawa. Photographed from USS Wichita (CA-45) (80-G-328653).

resistance, Japanese kamikaze aircraft continued to hit U.S. ships around the island in a series of mass attacks of more than 100 aircraft, interspersed with smaller raids that could occur at any hour, creating immense strain on crews that had to react almost instantly to the threat. The great majority of Japanese kamikazes were shot down by U.S. fighters and antiaircraft fire, but planes flown by pilots who intended to die proved very difficult to stop, and invariably some got through even the best defenses.

On 11 May, two kamikazes in quick succession hit the carrier Bunker Hill, Vice Admiral Mitscher’s

Task Force 58 flagship, at a critical time, when the flight deck was packed with planes that were armed, fueled, manned, and about to launch. The result was a conflagration of unspeakable horror as 396 Americans died or went missing in the flames and suffocating toxic smoke, the largest loss of life aboard a single ship due to a kamikaze attack. Even when it seemed all hope was lost, Bunker Hill's gunners kept shooting, and her damage control teams never quit. They saved the ship, although she would never be operational as an aircraft carrier again. (Mitscher's chief of staff, Commodore Arleigh A. Burke, was awarded a Silver Star for extricating men from a burning compartment.)

On 13 May, a kamikaze hit Admiral Spruance's Fifth Fleet flagship, the old battleship New Mexico, the second time his flagship had been hit. For a time, Spruance was missing after the plane hit; he was finally found manning a firehose with other Sailors. Despite taking heavy casualties (54 dead Navy and Marine Corps personnel, mostly gunners), the battleships were built to take punishment, and New Mexico stayed in the line as the flagship until Spruance's turnover with Admiral William F. Halsey on 27 May. Spruance was awarded a Navy Cross.

No sooner had Vice Admiral Mitscher transferred his TF 58 flag to Enterprise than she, too, fell victim to a kamikaze attack. On 14 May, 26 Japanese planes attacked. Only one made it through the gauntlet to put Enterprise and her 20 battle stars (the record) out of action for the rest of the war. As the "night carrier," Enterprise had all planes de-armed and de-fueled, gasoline lines drained, and bomb magazines buttoned up, so her damage was far less severe than that of Bunker Hill. Enterprise would be the last carrier to be hit by a kamikaze. For more on the kamikaze attacks on the three flagships (and to see what actor Paul Newman had to do with it), see attachment H-048-1.

The Naval Battle of Okinawa (Continued), 11 May-5 June 1945

Between Kikusui No. 6 on 10-11 May and Kikusui No. 9 on 3-7 June, there was a steady toll of U.S. warships (mostly destroyers) sunk, damaged beyond repair, or put out of action for the rest of the war by kamikaze attacks. Some of these ships put up valiant resistance, shooting down multiple kamikazes before they could complete their attacks. Some U.S. ships faced one or two kamikazes that just kept on coming no matter how many times they were hit. In most cases the crews saved their ships when they should have sunk, even though many of those ships would never fight again. Crews on other ships simply never had a chance. In every case, a common theme was uncommon valor: Numerous Navy Crosses were awarded to commanding officers who continued to fight even as their ships burned. Navy Crosses went to junior officers, too, such as Ensign Leo D. Fay on Douglas H. Fox (DD-779), who despite mortal wounds led a decimated damage control team in saving the ship from a magazine explosion. Another was Lieutenant Edgar B. Wicklander, USNR, commanding officer of LCS(L)-356, who boldly brought his ship alongside a burning destroyer that had just suffered a magazine explosion and saved the lives of numerous stunned and wounded Sailors.

The most tragic events were the loss of destroyers Longshaw (DD-559) and Drexler (DD-741). Longshaw ran aground and was hit in a forward magazine by shore battery fire, which obliterated the entire ship forward of the bridge, killing 86 crewmen, including the commanding officer. Drexler, a new Allen M. Sumner-class destroyer, was hit by a kamikaze, which caused an explosion so powerful that she went down in less than a minute, taking 164 crewmen to the bottom with her. Damaged Bates (APD-47) was heroically towed into an anchorage area, only then to capsize and sink. LSM-135 was sunk while in the act of rescuing survivors. LST-808 became yet another ship lost to a kamikaze.

During this period, several ships were damaged beyond repair, including four destroyers: *Thatcher* (DD-514), *Butler* (DD-636), *Forrest* (DD-461), and *Shubrick* (DD-639); destroyer escort *O'Neill* (DE-188); and the three fast transports *Chase* (APD-54), *Bates*, and *Roper* (APD-20), which had been the first U.S. ship to sink a German U-boat, in 1942. They all would have sunk but for the heroic actions of their crews and some luck.

Other ships were badly damaged, and repairs were not completed until after the war ended: four destroyers, including *Braine* (DD-630), which survived despite high casualties (67 dead and 103 wounded); a fast destroyer transport; an assault transport; and an LCS (landing craft, support). Other ships were knocked out of action for more than 30 days, but made it back into the war before it was over.

The Japanese continued their dismal track record with *Kaiten*-equipped submarines, as an Avenger off escort carrier *Anzio* (CVE-57) caught *I-361* on the surface and sank her (and five *Kaiten* manned torpedoes) with a Fido acoustic homing torpedo.

Finally, several days after Admiral Halsey relieved Admiral Spruance and Fifth Fleet became Third Fleet again, Typhoon Viper hit. All four carriers in Task Group 38.1 suffered significant damage, particularly fleet carriers *Wasp* (CV-18) and *Bennington* (CV-20), which had their forward flight decks bashed in. The new heavy cruiser *Pittsburgh* (CA-72) survived, having had 104-feet of her bow torn off; fortunately, her skipper had just called the crew to battle stations, so the forward berthing compartments were empty and no one was killed. Although Typhoon Viper caused far less damage and far lower personnel losses than Typhoon Cobra had claimed in December 1944, the court of inquiry was scathing in its conclusions of "lessons not learned" from Cobra.

For more on the naval battle of Okinawa, see attachment H-048-2. And if you are getting tired of reading about *kamikazes*, imagine what the crews thought as they kept getting hit. There were still three more weeks to go in what seemed like an interminable battle, and they would be costly weeks, too.

For more on the background history of the invasion of Okinawa, please see H-Gram 044. See also H-Gram 045 and 046 for coverage of the earlier stages of the Naval Battle of Okinawa (March-May 1945).

Sources for this H-gram include the *Naval History and Heritage Command Dictionary of American Fighting Ships (DANFS)* for U.S. ships and "Combined Fleet of the Imperial Japanese Navy" (<http://combinedfleet.com>) for Japanese ships. Additional sources: *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II, Vol. XIV: Victory in the Pacific*, by Samuel Eliot Morison (Little, Brown and Co., 1960); *Kamikaze: To Die for the Emperor*, by Peter C. Smith (Pen and Sword Aviation, 2014); *The Twilight Warriors*, by Robert Gandt (Broadway Books, 2010); *Kamikaze Attacks of World War II: A Complete History of Japanese Suicide Strikes on American Ships by Aircraft and Other Means*, by Robin L. Reilly (McFarland, 2010); *Desperate Sunset: Japan's Kamikazes Against Allied Ships, 1944-45*, by Mike Yeo (Osprey, 2019); "Anti-Suicide Action Summary, August 1945," COMINCH Document P-0011, 31 August 1945; *The Fleet at Flood Tide: America at Total War in the Pacific 1944-1945*, by James D. Hornfisher (Bantam Books, 2016); *Combined Fleet Decoded: The Secret History of American Intelligence and the Japanese Navy in World War II*, by John Prados (Random House, 1995); *U.S. Navy Codebreakers, Linguists, and Intelligence Officers Against Japan, 1910-1941*, by Steve E. Maffeo (Roman and Littlefield, 2016); *Information at Sea: Shipboard Command and Control in the U.S. Navy from Mobile Bay to Okinawa*, by Timothy S. Wolters (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013); *Hell to Pay: Operation Downfall and the Invasion*

of Japan, 1945-1947, by D. M. Giangreco (Naval Institute Press, 2009). "Who Sank Destroyer Drexler," by Bill Gordon, <http://kamikazeimages.net>, 2006). Award citations are from "Military Times Hall of Honor" (<http://valor.militarytimes.com>).



USS Bunker Hill (CV-17), Task Force 58 flagship, burning after a kamikaze attack at Okinawa, 11 May 1945 (S-100-H.001).



Admiral William F. Halsey, Jr., and Fifth Fleet commander Admiral Raymond A. Spruance, aboard USS New Mexico (BB-40) off Okinawa, 27 April 1945 (80-G-322429).

H-048-1: *Kamikaze* Attacks on U.S. Flagships off Okinawa

H-Gram 048, *Attachment 1*

Samuel J. Cox, Director NHHC

May 2020

USS Bunker Hill (Task Force 58 Flagship), 11 May 1945

As destroyers *Hugh W. Hadley* (DD-774) and *Evans* (DD-552) were engaged in their epic fight for survival at Radar Picket Station No. 1 on

the morning of 11 May 1945 (see H-Gram 046), several Japanese aircraft of mass *kamikaze* attack *Kikusui* No. 6 made for the U.S. fast carriers of Task Force 58, which had been spotted by Japanese scouts the previous night operating east of Okinawa. Japanese planes trailed TF 58 aircraft returning from Okinawa missions and would get lost in the broken, low clouds and in the radar clutter of numerous U.S. aircraft. The *kamikazes'* target turned out to be Vice Admiral Mitscher's TF-58 flagship, *Bunker Hill*.

An *Essex*-class fleet carrier, *Bunker Hill* had been commissioned on 25 May 1943 and had been in

11 major battles (including Okinawa), beginning with the U.S. carrier strike on the Japanese stronghold of Rabaul on 11 November 1943 (see H-Gram 024). She had suffered minor damage from a bomb during the Battle of the Philippine Sea on 19 June 1944 (see H-Gram 032), but, for the most part, punishment had been pretty much one-sided. *Bunker Hill's* gunners had shot down about 20 Japanese aircraft, while her own air group claimed destroying 230 Japanese aircraft on the ground and another 474 in the air (including 169 in the Okinawa campaign), sinking 162,000 tons of shipping, and making a major contribution to the damage that sank the super-battleship *Yamato* on 7 April 1945 (see H-Gram 044-3). On the negative side, the commander of *Bunker Hill's* air group (CVG-84) had disappeared in his F4U Corsair near Okinawa on 25 March 1945 (his Navy Cross, awarded for leading the seven-carrier strike on Kure Naval Base on 19 March 1945, was posthumous).

At about 1000 on 11 May 1945, on *Bunker Hill's* 59th consecutive day of operations, about 25 of her aircraft were aloft, mostly from Marine F4U Corsair squadron VMF-221. Many of these aircraft needed to recover, but had to wait until the launch of 34 fighters, dive-bombers, and torpedo bombers that were spotted on *Bunker Hill's* flight deck, all armed, fueled, and manned, with the engines turning. At 1002, the flag duty officer summoned Vice Admiral Mitscher and his chief of staff, Commodore Burke, into the flag plot as the combat information center reported indications that Japanese aircraft might be mixed in with U.S. aircraft returning from close-air support missions over Okinawa, which was true. At 1004, Marine Major James E. Swett (who had become an ace and been awarded a Medal of Honor following his first combat mission, at Guadalcanal in 1943), flying one of the returning VMF-221 aircraft, observed a Japanese aircraft diving out of the low clouds at *Bunker Hill*. Swett made a radio warning call, but it was already too late. For most of *Bunker Hill's* crew on the flight deck, the only warning

they had was some of the 20-mm guns opening up a few seconds before impact.

The Japanese A6M Zeke fighter dove out of the clouds from the starboard quarter and aimed for the flight deck packed with planes, strafing as it came in. In a shallow dive, Ensign Yasunori Seizo released his 550-pound bomb a fraction of a second before his plane bounced off the flight deck and then slid through the parked aircraft, setting numerous planes aflame. The bomb penetrated the flight deck just abaft the No. 3 (aft) elevator, passing through the flight deck and gallery deck, into the hangar bay, and out the port side, detonating 20 feet outside the ship. The effect was horrific. Fragments from the bomb sprayed the gun sponsons, catwalks, flight deck and hangar bay, inflicting numerous casualties. Many of the planes in the hangar bay were also fueled, resulting in raging fires.

About 30 seconds later, a second Zeke, piloted by Ensign Kiyoshi Ogawa, popped out of the clouds, flew past the ship, then made a steep, climbing turn before assuming a high-angle dive. This time, the plane was met by a storm of fire from every gun on *Bunker Hill* and her escorts that could bear, but despite being hit multiple times, the plane kept coming, and the pilot released his bomb a moment before impacting at the base of the island. The bomb penetrated the flight deck and exploded in the gallery deck in a ready room packed with pilots. Fighter squadron VF-84 lost 19 officers and three enlisted men, and other squadrons also suffered heavy casualties.

Missing Mitscher and Burke by a matter of yards, one of the plane's wings and the motor crashed into the flag office, killing Captain Raymond W. Hege (the newly arrived staff flight surgeon, a by-name request from Mitscher), Lieutenant Commander Charles Steel (the flag secretary), Lieutenant Commander Frank Quady (assistant to the staff operations officer, Captain James Flatley), and 11 enlisted men of Mitscher's staff. Thick toxic smoke quickly forced Burke to order

everyone out of the flag plot. Burke would be awarded a Silver Star for going into a burning compartment to bring out wounded men. Mitscher watched the ensuing efforts to save the ship. With *Bunker Hill* crippled, Mitscher temporarily relinquished command of TF 58 to Rear Admiral Frederick "Ted" Sherman (TG 58.3) embarked on *Essex* (CV-9). Mitscher's flag cabin was burned, along with his uniforms, personal papers, and possessions.

At this point, a third *kamikaze* came out of the clouds, identified as a Judy dive-bomber. Despite the raging flight deck and hangar bay fires, gunners on *Bunker Hill* continued to man their weapons and fire on the *kamikaze*, assisted by gunfire from escorts. They knocked the plane down at close range without additional damage to the ship.

As huge fires burned out of control on the flight deck and the hanger bay, Captain George Seitz, *Bunker Hill's* commanding officer, put the ship into a hard 70-degree turn, which caused much of the flaming gasoline on the flight deck to go overboard, significantly aiding efforts to control the fires there. The fires in the hangar proved harder to put out. At one point, the fires were so bad that Captain Seitz gave an order for those aft to abandon ship, which resulted in considerable confusion as some obeyed, others refused (those who weren't immediately threatened by the fire), and many others did not hear the order.

Bunker Hill's chief engineer, Lieutenant Commander Joseph R. Carmichael, Jr., ordered his men to remain at their posts despite the influx of suffocating smoke. This action kept the boilers going, which kept up the water pressure to the fire mains and probably saved the ship, though at a heavy cost of 125 of the 500 men manning the engineering spaces. Both Lieutenant Commander Carmichael and Commander Shane H. King, the damage control officer, would be awarded the Navy Cross for leading the efforts to save the ship.

The executive officer, Commander Howell J. Dyson, who was seriously wounded in the first impacts, was also awarded a Navy Cross for leading firefighting parties until he collapsed.

The light cruiser *Wilkes-Barre* (CL-103) was commanded by Captain Robert L. Porter, Jr., who brought his ship hard alongside *Bunker Hill's* starboard quarter to fight the fires on the hangar deck and evacuate the wounded, as *Bunker Hill's* sick bay was badly damaged. (This maneuver was bold, given what had happened to *Birmingham* [CL-62] alongside *Princeton* [CVL-23] at Leyte Gulf.) *Wilkes-Barre* also passed firefighting and emergency breathing gear and handy-billy pumps, while also serving as a refuge for *Bunker Hill* Sailors trapped by the flames aft. Several destroyers also came alongside to help fight the fires. By about 1500, the combined efforts had the fires under control to the extent that *Wilkes-Barre* cast off, and destroyer *English* (DD-696) was able to come alongside to transfer Mitscher and his staff off *Bunker Hill* at 1620 via highline and thence to carrier *Enterprise*. Captain Porter would be awarded a Legion of Merit for his command of *Wilkes-Barre*.

Including 43 missing, who would never be found, and 13 *Bunker Hill* wounded who died on *Wilkes-Barre*, the total death toll was 396, making this the single most deadly *kamikaze* attack of the war. The wounded numbered over 260, many grievously burned. The burial-at-sea ceremony the next day would take eight hours and would be longest such ceremony in U.S. Navy history. Among the many dead were at least two pilots from Torpedo Squadron VT-84, Lieutenant Bernard Berry and Lieutenant Philip Nicklin Wainwright, who had not yet been awarded their Navy Crosses for their role in sinking the battleship *Yamato*. In an example of the fluke fortunes of war, a group of Avenger replacement pilots and aircrewmen had just flown in and were killed. However, one of the pilots had developed an ear infection and had not launched from Saipan, so he and his radioman-gunner Paul

Newman were spared. (Paul Newman had enlisted in the Navy to become a pilot, but could not assume the position once it was discovered he was color-blind; he would go on to a distinguished Hollywood career.)

Bunker Hill made her way to Ulithi Atoll under her own power and then via Pearl Harbor to Puget Sound shipyard in Bremerton, where her repairs were completed just as the war ended, whereupon she served in Operation Magic Carpet, the repatriation of thousands of American servicemen. Decommissioned in January 1947, she remained in reserve, but was never reactivated or modernized. She would be used in shock testing in the 1960s before being sold for scrap in 1973. In 1986, her bell was transferred to the Aegis-class cruiser *Bunker Hill* (CG-52).

Bunker Hill Navy Cross citations:

The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Navy Cross to Commander Howell Jesse Dyson, United States Navy, for extraordinary heroism and distinguished service in the line of his profession as executive officer of the Aircraft Carrier USS Bunker Hill (CV-17), in action against enemy Japanese forces in the vicinity of Okinawa on 11 May 1945. Receiving serious wounds when his ship was struck twice during determined enemy air attacks, Commander Dyson organized and led firefighting parties in combating a raging fire on board and continued his efforts until he collapsed from his wounds. His determination, courage and devotion to duty were in keeping with the highest traditions of the U.S. Naval Service.

The President of the United States takes pleasure in presenting the Navy Cross to Commander Shane Hastings King, United States Naval Reserve, for extraordinary

heroism and distinguished service in the line of his profession while serving as First Lieutenant and damage control officer on board Aircraft Carrier USS Bunker Hill (CV-17), in action against enemy Japanese forces in the vicinity of Okinawa on 11 May 1945. When his ship was struck twice during determined enemy air attacks, which resulted in extensive damage and raging fires on board, Commander King organized and led the firefighting and damage control parties in effecting repairs and controlling the fires, thereby contributing materially to the saving of the ship. His professional skill, courage and devotion to duty were in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.

The President of the United States takes pleasure in presenting the Navy Cross to Lieutenant Commander Joseph Rix Carmichael, Jr., United States Naval Reserve, for extraordinary heroism and distinguished service in the line of his profession as Chief Engineer aboard the Aircraft Carrier USS Bunker Hill (CV-17), in action against enemy Japanese forces in the vicinity of Okinawa, Ryukyu Islands, on 11 May 1945. When his ship was struck twice during determined enemy air attacks, Lieutenant Commander Carmichael led his force in combating fires and repairing damage, thereby maintaining the ship's maneuverability and fire-main pressure. By his professional skill, courage and devotion to duty, Lieutenant Commander Carmichael contributed materially to the saving of his ship and upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.

Silver Star citation for Commodore Burke:

The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Silver Star to Commodore Arleigh Albert Burke, United States Navy, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity as Chief of Staff to Commander, First Carrier Task Force, in action against enemy Japanese forces in the Pacific War Area on 11 May 1945. When the Flagship on which he was embarked was hit by two enemy suicide dive-bombers, Commodore Burke proceeded to a compartment in which personnel were trapped by fire and heavy smoke and succeeded in evacuating all hands. When the Flagship to which he had removed his staff was in turn hit by a suicide plane on 14 May, he again arranged for the transfer of his command to a new ship. In spite of all the difficulties, Commodore Burke maintained tactical control of the Task Force throughout, thereby contributing materially to the success of the operations. His skill, courage and devotion to duty were in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.

(Burke had previously been awarded a Navy Cross in command of Destroyer Squadron 23 "Little Beavers" in the Solomon Islands campaign in October-November 1943.)



USS Bunker Hill (CV-17) burning after being hit by a kamikaze off Okinawa, 11 May 1945. Photographed from USS Bataan (CVL-29) (80-G-274261).

USS New Mexico (Fifth Fleet Flagship), 12 May 1945

On 12 May 1945, the commander of the Fifth Fleet, Admiral Raymond Spruance, found himself in the crosshairs of *kamikazes* for the second time. Spruance's first flagship, the heavy cruiser *Indianapolis* (CA-35), had been hit by a *kamikaze* in the first days of the fight for Okinawa on 31 March. *Indianapolis* had to return to Mare Island for repair, and Spruance transferred his flag to the older battleship *New Mexico*. The ship had previously been hit in the bridge by a *kamikaze* at Lingayen Gulf in the Philippines on 6 January 1945, which had killed the commanding officer, Captain Robert Walton Fleming, and 29 other crewmen. *New Mexico* had been repaired at Pearl Harbor in time to participate in the landings on Okinawa, providing naval gunfire support to Army and Marine forces ashore. As late as 11 March, her guns had destroyed eight *Shinyo* suicide boats found hidden along the shore. Just after sunset on 12 March, *New Mexico* was returning to the Hagushi anchorage area off Okinawa, having completed a day of taking on more ammunition and supplies at Kerama Retto. Spruance was noted making the comment that it was "good *kamikaze* weather." Besides an eye for weather, Spruance also had warning from radio intelligence.

At 1856 on 12 May 1945, the destroyer *Shubrick*, on a radar picket station, reported two enemy aircraft at 35 nautical miles inbound to Hagushi with U.S. aircraft in pursuit. *New Mexico* switched on her air search radar and gained contact on the aircraft. At 1905, she gained visual contact on two Japanese aircraft with two U.S. F4U Corsair fighters on their tail. As the largest ship in the Hagushi roadstead, *New Mexico* became the target for these two Japanese army fighters, now under fire from numerous ships in the gathering darkness.

The first plane, a Nakajima N2K2 George fighter, kept coming through the intense antiaircraft fire

and hit *New Mexico* with machine-gun fire and was just about to crash on the ship when a 5-inch proximity round exploded directly under it, bouncing it up high enough that it just missed the foremast before crashing off the port quarter. Making good use of the diversion caused by the first *kamikaze*, the second plane, a fast Ki-84 Frank, came in from the starboard side at such high speed that the 5-inch gun directors could not slew fast enough, and the 40-mm and 20-mm only had about an eight- to ten-second window to engage.

The Frank crashed into *New Mexico* amidships in the 20-mm gun gallery. The plane's bomb exploded, perforating the funnel. The plane itself crashed at the base of the funnel, blowing a big hole that caused ready-service ammunition to fall down into a boiler room, which resulted in a massive explosion that destroyed three (of nine total) boilers. Fortunately, the draft of the funnel sucked up much of the fire (it looks like a blowtorch in photos) that might otherwise have added to the fire amidships. As it was, 54 men were killed (28 Navy dead and 3 missing, and 23 Marines killed) and 119 Navy and Marine personnel wounded. One of those killed was Radioman First Class Walter L. Rougeux, a radio intercept operator with the secretive Fifth Fleet Radio Intelligence Unit, who had provided early warning of this and numerous other attacks and was subsequently awarded a posthumous Bronze Star.

Admiral Spruance had been on the quarterdeck prior to the hit and was missing for a time. Staff members went searching for him, and the flag lieutenant finally found Spruance manning a fire hose with other crewmen. He and the damage control teams had the fires out in 21 minutes. Despite the damage and crew losses, Spruance determined that the tough old battleship was still capable of remaining in the line, and she continued firing on Japanese targets and serving as Spruance's flagship until 28 May 1945, when Spruance turned over command of the Fifth Fleet

to Admiral Halsey, who preferred the brand-new battleship *Missouri* (BB-63) for his flagship. *New Mexico* then proceeded to Leyte for repairs and rehearsals for the expected invasion of Japan. She would be in Tokyo Bay for the Japanese surrender in September.

The ship would be sold for scrap in 1947. As she was being towed from Boston to Newark, the towline parted in heavy weather, and the ship went adrift for a day before being corralled. When she arrived at Newark, two Newark City fireboats blocked the way, as the city of Newark had embarked on a "beautification" program and did not want any more ships scrapped on the waterfront. This set up a confrontation between the Lipsett Company tugs and the Newark fireboats, with the U.S. Coast Guard caught in the middle in what the press called the "Battle of Newark Bay." Fortunately, compromise was achieved, nobody got hurt, and the ship was scrapped.

Navy Cross citation for Admiral Spruance:

The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Navy Cross to Admiral Raymond Ames Spruance, United States Navy, for extraordinary heroism and distinguished service in line of his profession as Commander, Fifth Fleet, in action against enemy Japanese forces during the invasion and capture of Iwo Jima, Volcano Islands, and Okinawa, Ryukyu Islands, from January to May 1945. Responsible for the operation of a vast and complicated organization that included more than 500,000 men of the Army, Navy and Marine Corps, 318 combatant vessels, and 1,139 auxiliary vessels, Admiral Spruance directed the forces in his command with daring, courage and aggressiveness. Carrier units of his force penetrated waters of the Japanese homeland and Nansei Shoto and inflicted severe damage upon hostile

aircraft, shore installations and shipping. Under repeated enemy air attack during the Iwo invasion, Admiral Spruance was embarked on the USS Indianapolis (CA-35) when the starboard quarter of the vessel was crashed by a hostile plane which passed through the main deck causing many casualties. Shifting his flag to the USS New Mexico (BB-40) on 5 April, he continued covering operations for the assault on Okinawa in the face of desperate enemy resistance and despite the strain of constant alerts as Japanese kamikazes increased the fury of their attacks against our combatant and auxiliary vessels. On 12 May, another suicide plane crashed the deck of his flagship. His professional skill, brilliant combat tactics and determination in carrying the fight to the enemy reflect the highest credit upon Admiral Spruance and the United States Naval Service.

USS Enterprise (Task Force 58 Flagship), 14 May 1945

After carrier *Bunker Hill* was severely damaged by two kamikaze hits on 11 May 1945, Vice Admiral Mitscher shifted his flag to the venerable carrier *Enterprise*. At the urging of Commodore Burke and operations officer Captain Flatley (both Navy Cross recipients from earlier in the war), Mitscher directed two of his carrier task groups (TG 58.1 and TF 58.3) to proceed north on the night of 12-13 May 1945 and attack Japanese airfields on the home islands of Kyushu and Shikoku. TF 58 fighters conducted two days of offensive sweeps, while carrier bombers joined in with the fighters in attacking planes on the ground and airfield infrastructure, with the effect of delaying *Kikusui* No. 7 until 24 May.

Having transitioned to being the TF 58 "night carrier," with specially equipped aircraft and night-trained aircrews, *Enterprise* proved a less-than-ideal flagship with flight operations all night and general quarters all day. In the predawn

hours of 14 May 1945, *Enterprise* aircraft made a night strike on the Japanese Naval Air Station at Kanoye. Although damage was extensive, the Japanese took advantage of the close range of the U.S. carriers to launch a strike of their own.

Led by Lieutenant (j.g.) Shunsuke Tomiyasu, 26 Japanese A6M5 Zeke fighters, each armed with a bigger-than-usual 1,100-pound bomb (facilitated by the shorter range to the target) launched from Kanoye in two groups, the first 12 at 0525 and the rest at 0619. Radio intelligence and radar provided warning and U.S. combat air patrol was ready and waiting, picking off the Zekes one after another, shooting down 19 of them. Ships' gunners accounted for six more of the Zekes. Only one made it through the gauntlet, flown by Tomiyasu, who made effective use of cloud cover to mask his approach. Finally, with every gun in the task force that could bear shooting at him as he dove out of the clouds, and *Enterprise* hard over in an emergency turn, Tomiyasu executed a stunning acrobatic maneuver to finish in a high-speed, near-vertical dive into *Enterprise's* flight deck a few feet aft of the forward elevator. The plane and bomb plunged right through the flight deck, creating a 12-by-20-foot hole, with the plane disintegrating in the hangar bay and the big bomb penetrating several more decks. The force of the explosion separated the elevator structure from the decking and blew the decking 400 feet into the air. (This explosion resulted in one of the more spectacular photos of the war, but did not blow the whole elevator as high as 400 feet, as most captions have it.)

Captain Flatley was on the exposed bridge wing when he observed the kamikaze coming in on its terminal dive. He ducked into the flag plot and warned everyone there to hit the deck, which everyone did except Mitscher, who remained standing as the kamikaze hit his flagship for the second time in four days. As acrid smoke once again poured into the flag plot, Mitscher then had time to make a black-humor joke—that if the Japanese kept this up, it would re-grow the hair

on his head--before he and the staff were forced to evacuate the flag plot.

A severe fire ignited among the aircraft in the foremost part of the hanger deck, but because *Enterprise* was the "night carrier," all her aircraft had been defueled and de-armed, gasoline lines drained, and bomb magazine hatches secured. These precautions spared her from the catastrophe that overtook *Bunker Hill*. *Enterprise's* damage control teams had the fires out in under 30 minutes. She suffered 14 dead and 68 wounded and was once again put out of action, this time for good. *Enterprise* would, however, gain the distinction of being the last U.S. carrier to be hit by a *kamikaze*.

The wounded were transferred to hospital ship *Bountiful* (AH-9), while Mitscher and his staff transferred to carrier *Randolph* (CV-15) to continue the fight. The Japanese pilot was given a burial at sea off the stern. Mitscher took time to laud the crew of *Enterprise*, stating, "The performance of duty of the officers and men on the *Enterprise* under fire and their effective damage control measures were outstanding . . . , of the highest order and the most effective that I have seen during one year's service in TF 58. I was particularly impressed with the attitude of the ship's company in combatting fires when under fire; your ship is indicative of the high order of efficiency that is rapidly winning the war."

Thus ended the storied career of *Enterprise*, which earned a total of 20 battle stars (out of 22 that could be given, three more than any other ship and seven more than any *Essex*-class carrier). She suffered 13 hits or damaging near-misses on six separate occasions from Japanese bombs and *kamikazes* (plus two hits from "friendly fire" 5-inch rounds); luckily for her, she never took a hit from a Japanese torpedo. Her battles include the Doolittle Raid, Midway, Guadalcanal, Eastern Solomons, Santa Cruz, Philippine Sea, Leyte Gulf, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa--every major carrier operation in the history of the U.S. Navy except for

Coral Sea. She was awarded a Presidential Unit Citation and a Navy Unit Commendation. Her air group was credited with sinking 71 Japanese ships and vessels and damaging 192 more.

Enterprise was decommissioned in 1947. A plan to hand her over to the State of New York as a permanent memorial fell through. If any ship should have been saved, it was she, so several further attempts were made to preserve her as a memorial, including by school children who donated their pennies. In the end, the U.S. Navy decided that her scrap value was worth more than her historic significance. Her 16-foot stern nameplate survives, however, thanks to the supervisor of the commercial shipyard that scrapped her and to the Town of River Vale, New Jersey. Her bell is at the U.S. Naval Academy, rung for football victories over Army. Her commissioning plaque is in the National Museum of the United States Navy in Washington, DC, and her anchor is in Washington Navy Yard's Luetze Park, just outside my office window.

The commanding officer of *Enterprise* during the last *kamikaze* hit, Captain Grover Budd Hartley Hall, was awarded a Navy Cross for actions that covered the 20 March hit by dive-bombers.

Navy Cross citation for Captain Hall:

The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Navy Cross to Captain Grover Budd Hartley Hall for extraordinary heroism and distinguished service in the line of his profession as commanding officer of the aircraft carrier USS Enterprise (CV-6) in action against enemy Japanese forces in the Pacific War area on 20 March 1945. When his ship was struck and set on fire during a sustained attack by enemy dive bombers, Captain Hall skillfully directed his repair crews in carrying out prompt and effective damage control and, despite raging fires, exploding ammunition and

dense smoke which surrounded the bridge structure, continued to deliver maximum effective firepower against the hostile planes. By his leadership and devotion to duty he served as an inspiration to his officers and men and upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.



USS Enterprise (CV-6) burning after a kamikaze attack during the battle of Okinawa, 14 May 1945 (S-100-H.009).



Ships in Kerama Retto anchorage spread an anti-kamikaze smoke screen, 3 May 1945, seen from USS Sargent Bay (CVE-83). TBM Avengers and FM-2 Wildcats are on her flight deck. Ship in left center is USS Pinkney (APH-2), which had been damaged by a kamikaze on 28 April. Photographed by Photographer's Mate 1st Class Oliver E. Pfeiffer (80-G-342629).

H-048-2: The Naval Battle of Okinawa (Continued), 11 May–5 June 1945

H-Gram 048, Attachment 2
Samuel J. Cox, Director NHHC
May 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—more than 4,900 U.S. Navy personnel. This H-gram attachment focuses on only those actions that resulted in significant U.S. damage and casualties in the period between the sixth mass *kamikaze* attack (*Kikusui* No. 6) on 10–11 May 1945 and Typhoon Viper on 5 June 1945. I also include significant antisubmarine actions, as U.S. ships faced *Kaiten* manned suicide torpedoes from below in addition to the *kamikaze* threats from above.

Each U.S. ship listed here was sunk or put out of action for more than 30 days, but in every case there are superb examples of Navy core values—honor, courage and commitment—and Navy core attributes—initiative, accountability, integrity, and

especially toughness. I do not cover the innumerable near misses and close calls, frequent shoot-downs of Japanese aircraft, or instances of minor damage. So many damaged U.S. ships sought refuge at Kerama Retto that it acquired the black-humor nickname of "Busted Ship Bay."

For the most part, casualty figures are from Samuel Eliot Morison's *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II, Vol. XIV: Victory in the Pacific, 1945*, Appendix 2. In many cases, more detailed analysis in years since has led to changes in the casualty figures. These changes often give a greater number of deaths, as those who died of wounds much later are factored in. If I came across other, more recent figures, I used the higher number.

I have used the following symbols to distinguish among the fates of the various U.S. Navy vessels involved in the battle:

* = sunk

= damaged beyond repair

= repairs completed after the war ended

Kikusui No. 6 (150 Aircraft–70 Navy, 80 Army), 10-11 May 1945

Japanese massed suicide attack *Kikusui* No. 6 by 150 Japanese *kamikaze* aircraft cost over 463 American lives, making it the second worst of the *Kikusui* attacks in terms of deaths. The attacks on destroyers *Hugh W. Hadley* and *Evans* were covered in H-Gram 045. The attack on flagships *Bunker Hill* (11 May), *New Mexico* (12 May), and *Enterprise* (14 May) are covered in this H-gram's attachment H-048-1.

USS LCS(L)-88 (##), 11 May 1945

On 11 May 1945, destroyer *Douglas H. Fox* and destroyer-minelayer *Harry F. Bauer* (DM-26) were on a radar pickett station, along with *LCS(L)-52*, -88, -109, and -114, when they were attacked by

one G4M Betty bomber and four Ki-43 Oscar fighters. One of the *kamikazes* crashed *Harry F. Bauer* on the stern, plowing through the rack of depth charges and shoving them into the sea with none of them exploding. (*Harry F. Bauer* would prove to be one of the luckiest ships in the U.S. Navy.)

LCS(L)-88 shot down one of the Oscars, but another circled around to attack. Although *LCS(L)-88* shot off a wing with 20-mm fire, the plane kept coming for the ship until it was hit at point-blank range by the aft 40-mm and crashed in the water. The pilot still managed to release a 220-pound bomb that destroyed the 40-mm mount that had just shot him down, killing the entire gun crew. The bomb also disabled the steering and started a serious fire. The skipper of the LCS, Lieutenant Casimir Lucian Bigos, suffered a fatal head wound from bomb fragments. Therefore, engineer led the damage control effort that saved the ship, which suffered nine dead and seven wounded. *LCS(L)-88* was towed to Kerama Retto for temporary repair before making her way back to San Francisco, where she was when the war ended. Lieutenant Bigos was awarded a posthumous Silver Star. After the war, *LCS(L)-88* was loaned to the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force, which kept her in use from 1953 to 1964. The vessel was then transferred to the Philippines Navy to be cannibalized for spare parts in 1975.

During the Battle of Okinawa, 12 LCSs were hit by *kamikazes* and bombs, most while assisting destroyers on the radar picket stations, with a combined total of 65 crewmen killed and 103 wounded.

USS Bache (DD-470 ##), 13 May 1945

Although *Kikusui* No. 6 was over, small groups of Japanese aircraft continued to attack U.S. ships off Okinawa. At dusk on 13 May 1945, the destroyer *Bache* (DD-470), commanded by Lieutenant Commander Alan R. McFarland, came under

attack by several Japanese *kamikazes*. *Bache* had come to the rescue of other ships and survivors multiple times in the preceding month and had been attacked without sustaining significant damage, but now her luck ran out. She shot down the first two aircraft coming in at low altitude and badly damaged a third, which nevertheless hit the No. 2 stack with its wing before spinning down to the main deck. The plane's bomb exploded, rupturing steam and power lines, which caused extensive topside and engineering space casualties. Despite 41 dead and 32 wounded, *Bache's* crew brought the fires under control by 1912. The ship was towed to Kerama Retto before eventually making her way to New York City, where repairs were not yet completed when the war ended.

Bache would be reactivated in 1950 and would serve until 6 February 1968, when she was driven aground by a gale during a port visit to Rhodes, Greece. She was declared a constructive total loss and scrapped in place.

Lieutenant Commander McFarland was awarded a Navy Cross for his role in previous rescues and for saving his ship on 13 May 1945.

Navy Cross citation for Lieutenant Commander McFarland:

The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Navy Cross to Commander (then Lieutenant Commander) Alan Roberts McFarland, for extraordinary heroism and distinguished service in the line of his profession as commanding officer of the destroyer Bache (DD-470) during operations against enemy Japanese forces off Okinawa Shima in the Ryukyu Chain, from 1 April to 2 June 1945. Coolly vigilant as he patrolled the hazardous waters of his assigned picket station, Commander McFarland boldly met the challenge of Japanese kamikaze planes, hurling the full

force of his gun batteries at the aggressors and fighting off repeated attacks with unfaltering skill and accuracy to effect the destruction of seven hostile aircraft by his ship's gunfire and two additional planes by combat air patrol under his direction. Rendering valiant support during 15 days of intensive combat action, he unhesitatingly proceeded to the assistance of other vessels in his group as they sustained serious damage under the enemy's suicide dives, providing prompt firefighting and medical aid to damaged craft and assisting in the rescue of numerous survivors despite the constant threat of renewed aerial attack. A forceful leader, Commander McFarland, by his superb ship-handling, consistently sound judgment and unrelenting aggressiveness in the face of tremendous opposition, contributed essentially to the safety of all our forces in the Okinawa area, and his conduct throughout sustained and enhanced the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.

USS Bright (DE-747 ##), 13 May 1945

Also at dusk on 13 May 1945, the destroyer escort *Bright*, commanded by Lieutenant Commander William Alva McMahan, USNR, came under kamikaze attack as she was screening the transport area off southwestern Okinawa. At 1919, a single, low-flying Zeke fighter made it through the intense anti-aircraft barrage. Despite being hit in the engine and port wing, which sheared off, the Japanese pilot managed to hit *Bright* on the fantail, and the plane's bomb exploded. Damage was extensive. The after engine room was wrecked, the rudder was jammed hard left, both depth charge racks on the stern were damaged (but fortunately did not explode), the main deck was buckled with a large hole, and three compartments were flooded. Nevertheless, as *Bright* steamed in a circle for the next hour, her damage control teams gained the upper hand on

the fires, and her gunners joined with nearby destroyer transport *Barr* (APD-39) in shooting down another aircraft. Fortunately, *Bright's* casualties were surprisingly light, with no dead and only two wounded. *Bright* was towed to Kerama Retto for temporary repair before proceeding to Portland, Oregon, where she arrived in June 1945. Her repairs were not yet complete when the war ended. *Bright* would subsequently serve in the French navy as *Toureg* from 1950 to 1960 before being scrapped in 1965.



Japanese Mitsubishi A6M "Zeke" kamikaze plane crashing very near USS Essex (CV-9) off Okinawa, 14 May 1945. Note plane's broken tail and hole in wing (80-G-324120).

USS Douglas H. Fox (DD-779), 17 May 1945

Another significant Japanese dusk raid occurred on 17 May 1945. The destroyers *Douglas H. Fox* and *Van Valkenburgh* (DD-656), along with LCS(L)-53, -65, -66, and -67, were at Radar Picket Station No. 9, southwest of Kerama Retto. Commanded by Commander Ray Maurer Pitts, *Douglas H. Fox* had been named after the skipper of destroyer *Barton* (DD-599), who had been awarded a posthumous Navy Cross after his ship went down in the 13 November 1942 battle off Guadalcanal. Commanded by Commander Alexander Bacon Coxe, Jr., *Van Valkenburgh* was named after the captain of the battleship *Arizona* (BB-39) at the time of the 7 December 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor, who had been awarded a posthumous

Medal of Honor. *Van Valkenburgh* was a veteran *Fletcher*-class destroyer. She would be attacked 17 times during the Battle for Okinawa and would go to the rescue of four other ships in distress. Commander Coxe would be awarded a Silver Star for his cumulative actions during battle and *Van Valkenburgh* would receive a Navy Unit Commendation.

The ships on Radar Picket Station No. 9 had been at general quarters for three consecutive nights due to Japanese air activity, and, before dusk at 1800, they went to general quarters again. At 1900, *Douglas H. Fox's* air search radar detected unidentified aircraft to the southwest, and the fighter direction team vectored four F4U Corsair fighters on combat air patrol toward the contacts. However, the fighters failed to find the aircraft and were granted permission to return to base in the waning light. About 15 minutes after sunset, *Van Valkenburgh's* radar detected aircraft and, a few minutes later, *Douglas H. Fox* detected aircraft on her surface search radar coming in low. One Japanese plane commenced an attack, but despite wild evasive maneuvering was shot down by *Van Valkenburgh*. *Douglas H. Fox* then detected about ten aircraft commencing a coordinated attack from multiple directions on both destroyers. Both destroyers boosted speed and maneuvered to bring the greatest number of weapons to bear on the attackers.

At 1930, *Douglas H. Fox* commenced firing and downed a *kamikaze* with a 5-inch proximity-fused shell. A minute later, another was downed by combined 5-inch, 40-mm and 20-mm fire. A third, attacking from the opposite direction in the increasing darkness, was knocked down at the last moment by .50-caliber machine-gun fire. *Douglas H. Fox* then shot down two more *kamikazes*. *Van Valkenburgh* shot down three, one only 50 yards off the fantail, and LCS(L)-53 also knocked down one *kamikaze*.

At 1935, a *kamikaze* (tentatively identified as an army Ki-44 Tojo fighter) dove on *Douglas H.*

Fox from the starboard quarter and, despite having its tail assembly shot off on approach, crashed between the two forward 5-inch mounts (51 and 52). The bomb penetrated Mount 52 and exploded when it hit the main deck, blowing off the gun shield and killing the gunners and starting a fire in the No. 2 upper handling room. The plane sprayed flaming gasoline all over the forecastle, and both forward 5-inch mounts were put out of action. Bomb fragments sliced through several decks, rupturing the fire main and killing about half of the forward repair party. Despite a broken leg, broken arm, severe head wound, and burns (which proved fatal), Ensign Fay rallied the surviving team members and commenced successful efforts to prevent the forward magazines from exploding.

Meanwhile Mount 53 aft continued to fire in local control and, in conjunction with 40-mm and 20-mm fire, downed another *kamikaze* close aboard. The explosion spread burning gasoline over the stern. Remaining Japanese aircraft continued circling to assess the situation but did not attack. *Van Valkenburgh* closed alongside *Douglas H. Fox* just after 2100 to render assistance. One Japanese aircraft appeared to commence a run on the lucrative target but was either shot down by *Van Valkenburgh*, at a range of 12 miles (a pretty lucky shot), or was persuaded to turn away. At any rate, it disappeared from radar.

The destroyer *Converse* (DD-509) arrived and passed over a medical team. Destroyer *William D. Porter* (DD-579) arrived to relieve *Douglas H. Fox* of picket duty. Despite the damage, the fires on *Douglas H. Fox* were brought under control in fairly short order, and she suffered no damage below the waterline. She did suffer 10 killed and 35 wounded, however.

Converse then escorted *Douglas H. Fox* to Kerama Retto before proceeding to San Francisco for repair. Commander Pitts was awarded a Navy Cross, and Ensign Fay was awarded a

posthumous Navy Cross. *Douglas H. Fox* would go on to serve in the Chilean Navy from 1974 to 1998, after which interval she was decommissioned and scuttled off Cape Horn.

Douglas H. Fox Navy Cross citations:

The President of the United States of America takes pride in presenting the Navy Cross (posthumously) to Ensign Leo Daniel Fay, United States Naval Reserve, for extraordinary heroism and distinguished service in the line of his profession while serving as officer-in-charge of the Forward Repair Party on board the destroyer USS Douglas H. Fox (DD-779) when that vessel was attacked by enemy Japanese aircraft off the coast of Okinawa Gunto on the evening of 17 May 1945. Ensign Fay courageous and determined when an overwhelming number of Japanese aircraft viciously attacked his force from all sides and one of the planes crashed into the forecastle of the ship, demolishing the forward bulkhead and part of the deck near his station. Ensign Fay, despite critical injuries and severe burns suffered in the rapidly spreading flames, steadfastly refused assistance, valiantly remaining in command, [and] continued to direct his men in conducting repair activities and combating the fire until he was carried below for medical attention. Subsequently succumbing to his wounds, Ensign Fay, by his unwavering fortitude, dauntless perseverance and zealous conduct in defense of his ship, had served as a constant inspiration to his men and was in large measure responsible for saving the Douglas H. Fox for further action against the enemy. His great personal valor and self-sacrificing devotion to duty throughout the fierce action reflect the highest credit upon himself and the United States Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life for his country.

*USS Longshaw (DD-559 *), 18 May 1945*

The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Navy Cross to Commander Ray Maurer Pitts, United States Navy, for extraordinary heroism and distinguished service in the line of his profession as commanding officer of destroyer USS Douglas H. Fox (DD-779), in action against the enemy from 5 through 28 May 1945 off Okinawa in the Ryukyu Islands. With his vessel engaged in duty on a radar picket station in support of amphibious operations, Commander Pitts courageously fought his ship under constant threat of attack and on one occasion, during an aggressive and determined enemy suicide attack, directed his crew in destroying five Japanese aircraft. When the Douglas H. Fox was damaged by a suicide plane, he skillfully initiated damage control and firefighting measures and thereby contributed materially to saving his vessel from destruction. By his able leadership, aggressive fighting spirit and devotion to duty, Commander Pitts upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.



View of USS Enterprise (CV-6) immediately after the 14 May 1945 kamikaze strike off Okinawa. The hand-written arrow is a notation by then-Commodore Arleigh A. Burke and indicates parts of the ship's forward elevator, blown skyward by the explosion (S-100-H.007).

As a general rule, Japanese artillery batteries on Okinawa refrained from firing on U.S. Navy ships (doing so would likely result in return fire from battleships), preferring to remain hidden so that they could inflict maximum casualties on U.S. ground forces at the most opportune time, although there were exceptions. The old battleship *Nevada* (BB-36) took five hits from 6- or 8-inch shells from a nearby coastal defense battery at 1740 on 5 April 1945, when the invasion was still in its early days. On 18 May 1945, the destroyer *Longshaw* ran aground off the shore near Naha, presenting a lucrative target that a Japanese artillery battery chose not to pass up.

Longshaw, a *Fletcher*-class destroyer, was a veteran of nine battles, but her skipper, Lieutenant Commander Clarence William Becker, had only been in command for a week. He was a member of the U.S. Naval Academy class of 1939, and his promotion demonstrates how the massive wartime expansion of the U.S. Navy resulted in rapid upward mobility. Following four consecutive days of providing naval gunfire support to U.S. troops ashore (expending over 1,500 5-inch rounds), *Longshaw* put in to Kerama Retto for fuel, provisions, and ammunition reload on the evening of 17 May, with no rest to the crew due to alerts. *Longshaw* returned to Okinawa later that night, firing star shells in support of forces ashore.

As *Longshaw* was maneuvering to take up a gunfire station near Naha airfield (still in Japanese hands) at 0719 she ran hard aground on a coral reef. Attempts to back her off or work her off failed, as did an attempt by destroyer *Picking* (DD-685) to tow her off (the towline parted). The fleet tug *Arikara* (ATF-98) arrived, and her skipper and a radioman boarded *Longshaw* to assess the situation and determined that it would be necessary to wait for high tide to make an attempt.

At 1100, *Arikara* had just begun to take up slack on the towline when artillery shells began to

range on *Longshaw*, quickly straddling her. *Longshaw* returned fire, getting off several rounds before she was hit multiple times in quick succession on her port side, in the engine room, the No. 4 40-mm mount, the No.4 5-inch upper handling room, the No. 2 5-inch upper handling room, and the combat information center. She suffered a catastrophic explosion in a forward magazine that obliterated the forward part of the ship. The explosion killed almost everyone on the bridge (including the *Arikara* radioman) and mortally wounded Lieutenant Commander Becker. The damage was so severe that there was no hope of saving the ship. At 1115, Becker gave the order to abandon ship, although he never made it off himself.

At 1200, *LCI(L)-356* boldly came alongside *Longshaw*, and the skipper and crewmen went aboard to rescue many wounded men. *Longshaw's* casualties were very heavy. Of her crew of 291, 86 were killed and 97 wounded. *Longshaw* was deemed unsalvageable and was subsequently destroyed by U.S. gunfire and torpedoes. *LCI(L)-356* was awarded a Navy Unit Commendation and her commanding officer, Lieutenant Wicklander, was awarded a Navy Cross. Other members of the boarding team were awarded medals for valor. *Arikara* was awarded a Navy Unit Commendation.

LCI(L)-356 Navy Cross citation:

The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Navy Cross to Lieutenant Edgar B. Wicklander, United States Naval Reserve, for extraordinary heroism and distinguished service in the line of his profession as commanding officer of Landing Craft Infantry Three Hundred Fifty-Six (LCI-356), in action against the enemy on 18 May 1945 during the assault on Okinawa Shima. Upon bringing his ship alongside the blazing hull of a friendly destroyer (USS Longshaw), Lieutenant

Wicklander, in the face of extremely hazardous conditions from enemy shellfire and exploding ammunition, bravely boarded the stricken vessel and with a party of men rescued the survivors and fought the raging fires. When advised salvage was impossible, he refused to leave the scene until a careful check was made and all wounded were removed to a place of safety. His outstanding courage, determination and conspicuous devotion to duty contributed immeasurably to the saving of many lives. His conduct throughout was in keeping with the highest traditions of the Navy of the United States.



View of USS Enterprise (CV-6) immediately after the 14 May 1945 kamikaze strike off Okinawa. The hand-written arrow is a notation by then-Commodore Arleigh A. Burke and indicates parts of the ship's forward elevator, blown skyward by the explosion (S-100-H.007).

USS LST-808 (*), 18 May 1945

On the evening of 18 May 1946, *LST-808*, commanded by Lieutenant John Calvin Stevens, was anchored off Ie Shima, a small island off the west coast of Okinawa (where famous war correspondent Ernie Pyle was killed by Japanese machine-gun fire on 17 April 1945). Earlier that day, *LST-808* had completed delivery of fresh water and fog oil (for smoke- screen generation) to ships on radar picket duty off Okinawa. Although *LST-808* (and other vessels in the anchorage) was protected by a smoke screen

(which was standard practice), she was hit in the engine room by a torpedo from a low-flying Japanese aircraft at 2207, which killed five crewmen initially, although ultimately 17 personnel died and 11 were wounded. Most of the crew was evacuated except for a small security detail, and several landing craft pushed her onto a coral reef. However, at 1600 on 20 May, the immobile *LST-808* was hit and sunk by a *kamikaze*, fortunately with no further loss of life.

USS Chase (APD-54 #), 20 May 1945

At dusk on 20 May 1945, several *kamikaze* aircraft penetrated the Kerama Retto roadstead and into the transport area. Destroyer transport *Chase*, commanded by Lieutenant Commander George Orvil Knapp II, USNR, was attacked by a *kamikaze*. *Chase* shot the plane down but had to maneuver radically to avoid the falling wreckage, which crashed only 10 yards from the ship. The two bombs on the plane detonated, inflicting severe damage to *Chase*'s hull and causing the engine and firerooms to flood. The ship began to list to the point of being in danger of capsizing, all while her steering was jammed hard over to the left and as a second suicide plane had to be driven off. Nevertheless, her crew managed to keep her afloat, and she was towed to Kerama Retto and then across the Pacific to San Diego, where she arrived in October 1945, only to be decommissioned in January 1946, her repairs not having been completed. *Chase* was lucky, suffering 35 wounded but no deaths.

USS John C. Butler (DE-339), 20 May 1945

At dusk on 20 May 1945, destroyer escort *John C. Butler* was on radar picket duty north of the transport area near the island of Ie Shima off the west coast of Okinawa. She was still under the command of Lieutenant Commander John Edward Pace, who had been awarded a Navy Cross for his actions in command of the ship (which had been awarded a Presidential Unit

Citation) during "Taffy 3's valiant fight against overwhelming odds in the Battle off Samar on 25 October 1944. *John C. Butler* came through that battle virtually unscathed, despite a running gun battle with a Japanese heavy cruiser. *John C. Butler* also rescued many of the survivors of the escort carrier *St. Lo* (CVE-63) after she became the first major U.S. ship to be sunk by a *kamikaze*, also on 25 October 1944.

Prior to sunset, *John C. Butler* received an alert radio warning that 8 to 10 Japanese Zeke and Oscar fighters were headed her way, and a few minutes before sunset six *kamikaze* aircraft came in for the attack. The ship commenced firing and blew apart the first two aircraft before they commenced their dives. Gunners hit the third *kamikaze*, and the flaming plane clipped a radio antenna before crashing close aboard. A fourth aircraft was already in flames when it exploded in midair. The fifth aircraft was hit and damaged and lost control at the very end, sheering off radar antennas from the mast before it too crashed in the water. A sixth *kamikaze* was driven off by the arrival of Marine F4U Corsair fighters. *John C. Butler*'s gunners had downed four Zekes and an Oscar. Once again, the ship came through nearly unscathed with no dead and no wounded. The damage was significant enough that she had to proceed to Leyte for repairs before returning to Okinawa on 4 July 1945. Lieutenant Commander Pace was awarded a Silver Star and the ship a Navy Unit Commendation. *John C. Butler* served as a reserve training ship until decommissioned in 1957 and sunk as a target in 1971.

USS Thatcher (DD-514 #), 20 May 1945

The *Fletcher*-class destroyer *Thatcher* was a battle-hardened ship (12 battle stars) with an experienced skipper, Lieutenant Commander Charles Richardson Chandler, who had been awarded a Silver Star as executive officer of the destroyer *Drayton* (DD-366) and had survived serious burn injuries. On the evening of 20 May 1945, *Thatcher* was assigned radar picket duty,

guarding the transport area near Kerama Retto. The ship's radar detected a large number of Japanese aircraft heading for the anchorage and gave warning, and the planes were met with an intense barrage from all ships in the anchorage. *Thatcher* increased speed to 35 knots and maneuvered to bring maximum number of guns to bear at an approaching Ki-43 Oscar fighter coming in at low altitude. The fast Oscar sailed through the storm of fire, passed down *Thatcher's* port side, did some acrobatic stunt flying while popping up, reversed course, and then went into a steep dive, crashing into *Thatcher's* superstructure just aft of the bridge. The impact caused serious damage on the starboard side, blowing a six-by-nine-foot hole between the keel and the bilge, knocking out the radars, gyros, and all power and steering from the bridge. Lieutenant Commander Chandler made his way through the flames and debris to after steering, where he resumed control of the ship and directed damage control efforts.

Destroyer *Boyd* (DD-544) and destroyer-transport *Pavlic* (APD-70) came alongside to assist with firefighting and with the wounded. *Thatcher* suffered 14 dead and 53 wounded, but the crew controlled the flooding and put out the fires. The ship made her way to Kerama Retto under her own power. Lieutenant Commander Chandler was awarded his second Silver Star. Due to the backlog of damaged ships in Kerama Retto, *Thatcher* waited until 1 July to go into the floating dry dock, rode out a typhoon in Buckner Bay on 13 July, and then was hit by one of the last *kamikaze* strikes on 20 July. A Japanese aircraft infiltrated the anchorage and bounced off *Thatcher's* side above the waterline, exploded, and burned alongside, but did not do serious additional damage. *Thatcher* finally arrived at Bremerton on 20 August, but was not deemed suitable for additional repair and was scrapped.

Kikusui No. 7, 23-25 May 1945

Mass *kamikaze* attack *Kikusui* No. 7 included 165 *kamikaze* aircraft (65 navy and 100 army) and was strung out over several nights between 23 and 25 May. It started out mostly as a fizzle, with aircraft on the 23rd arriving after dark during a full moon. Radar Pickett Station No. 15, northwest of Okinawa, came under seven hours of intermittent attack, but only *LCS(L)-121* suffered damage—minor—from a near-miss bomb. The next night went not much better for the Japanese, with no damage inflicted on U.S. ships despite considerable effort, but would be noteworthy for a bold Japanese attack on the U.S. airfield at Yontan. The Japanese also commenced the eighth *Kaiten* suicide submarine mission, with the *Todoroki* ("Thunderclap") Group of four submarines departing Japan en route waters off Okinawa.

Yontan Airfield Attack, 24-25 May 1945

On the night of 24-25 May 1945, several waves of Japanese conventional bombers attacked Yontan and Kadena airfields on Okinawa and the recently captured airfield on Ie Shima, providing cover for Operation *Giretsu* (Faith). The operation called for twelve specially equipped Ki-21 Sally twin-engine bombers to crash land on Yontan airfield, each delivering ten special attack unit soldiers to destroy U.S. aircraft on the field. Unfortunately for the Japanese, several of the Sallys got lost in the darkness, and others turned back due to engine trouble. Only four Sallys were made it to the target area, and three were shot down by alert gunners.

One of the Sallys succeeded in making a belly landing on Yontan airfield and disgorged her ten commandos, which the U.S. forces defending the airfield were not expecting. During several hours of running gun battle, the Japanese destroyed seven aircraft, damaged 26 others with hand grenades and phosphorous charges, and blew up two fuel dumps containing a combined 70,000

gallons of gasoline. Eventually, U.S. forces hunted down and killed all the Japanese. Including those in the planes that were shot down, 56 Japanese were killed in the attack, while U.S. losses were two killed and 18 wounded.

USS Stormes (DD-780 ##), 25 May 1945

On 23 May, the newly constructed *Allen M. Sumner*-class destroyer *Stormes* arrived at Okinawa after escorting the heavy cruiser *Louisville* (CA-28) from Pearl Harbor, her first operational assignment. Two days later, she was hit by a *kamikaze* and knocked out of the war. *Stormes* was commanded by Commander William Naylor Wylie, who had previously been awarded a Navy Cross while in command of submarine *Scorpion* (SS-278) on her first war patrol in April-May 1943, the first mining of Japanese coastal waters. (*Scorpion* was later lost with all hands in 1944, probably after hitting a Japanese mine.)

On the morning of 25 May 1945, *Stormes* was at Radar Picket Station No. 15, where she was on anti-air screening duty for the Hagushi anchorage area off southwestern Okinawa. The weather was poor. Suddenly, at 0905, a Japanese plane dropped out of the overcast 2,000 yards from *Stormes*, passing between two U.S. aircraft. The aircraft was heading for destroyer *Ammen* (DD-527), located ahead of *Stormes*. The *kamikaze* suddenly flipped over, changed course, and dove into *Stormes*, hitting the aft torpedo bank. The bomb exploded in the No. 3 handling room, resulting in severe fires and a large hole in the hull between the propeller shafts, and flooding the stern of the ship. *Stormes* suffered 21 dead and 15 wounded, but her crew was able to control the flooding and put out the fires by noon. She slowly made Kerama Retto on her own power.

After temporary repairs in the floating drydock, *Stormes* crossed the Pacific in August even though only one shaft was operational. Repairs were not complete when the war ended.

Commander Wylie was awarded a Silver Star for his actions in saving the ship.

Stormes served in combat during the Korean War (three battle stars) and Vietnam (one battle star) before being sold to Iran in 1972, where she served as *Palang* ("Leopard") until being decommissioned in 1994. She still remains at Bandar Abbas, Iran.

USS Butler (DD-636), 25 May 1945

On 25 May 1945, the *Gleaves*-class converted fast minesweeper *Butler* was on patrol off Okinawa, under the command of Commander Robert Messinger Hinckley, Jr. Earlier in the war, *Butler* had escorted the French vessels *Richelieu* (a battleship) and *Montcalm* (a cruiser) from French West Africa (after the Vichy French in Africa had switched sides to the Free French) for overhaul at the Brooklyn Navy Yard. *Butler* had previously been attacked five times by *kamikazes*, with no direct hits, and had downed several. But, on 25 May, two bombs from a *kamikaze* exploded under *Butler's* keel, flooding the forward fireroom, rupturing steam lines, and causing the loss of all power. The ship suffered 14 killed and 15 wounded. (*West Virginia* [BB-48] was nearby and drove off two additional Japanese aircraft.) *Butler* eventually made it to Kerama Retto and then to the U.S. West Coast in August. She was subsequently decommissioned without being fully repaired. Commander Hinckley was awarded a Silver Star for his actions against Japanese aircraft and for saving his ship.

USS Spectacle (AM-305 #) and USS LSM-135 (*), 25 May 1945

The minesweeper *Spectacle* (AM-305), commanded by Lieutenant Gordon Bullitt Williams, had been in action off Okinawa since 25 March. At 0805 on 25 May, a *kamikaze* hit her under the port 40-mm gun tub, causing serious damage, jamming her rudder, and blowing many

of her crew over the side. The ship dropped anchor to avoid running down the men in the water. The fires were out of control, and the ship had to be abandoned. *LSM-135* was picking up survivors when she, too, was hit by a *kamikaze* at 0815 and had to be beached on a reef and abandoned. *Spectacle* did not sink, however, and was partially re-manned and towed to Ie Shima by fleet tug *Tekesta* (ATF-93). *Spectacle* lost 29 crewmen with 6 wounded, while *LSM-135* suffered 11 killed and 10 wounded. *Spectacle* subsequently proceeded to Kerama Retto and then to Seattle. Further repairs were not completed, and she was scrapped.

***USS Barry (APD-29*)*, 25 May (and 21 June) 1945**

On 25 May 1945, the converted fast transport *Barry*, commanded by Lieutenant Commander Clemens Francis Hand, USNR, was on patrol 35 nautical miles northwest of Okinawa. As a destroyer in the Atlantic, *Barry* had served in the screen of the highly successful escort carrier *Card* (CVE-11).

At 1300 on 25 May 1945, *Barry* sighted two Japanese planes coming in at low altitude at 2,200 yards and took them under fire. The lead plane was strafing before it was shot down. A few seconds later the second plane crashed *Barry's* starboard side below the bridge. Amazingly, no one was killed, but 30 were wounded. However, the plane's bomb, combined with the plane's gasoline tanks, ignited a major fire from *Barry's* ruptured oil tanks, threatening the forward magazine and cutting off access to the controls to flood the magazine. The crew fought the stubborn fire. Unable to flood the magazine, the commanding officer ordered that the ship be abandoned. The entire crew made it off safely. By 1500, the bow had settled enough in the water that the magazine was flooded, and a skeleton crew, assisted by crewmen from destroyer-transport *Sims* (APD-50) and *Roper*, re-boarded the ship and put the fires out.

Barry was towed to Kerama Retto and deemed beyond repair. Her hull was stripped of everything of value with the intent to tow her out to be used as a *kamikaze* decoy. As she was being towed out of Kerama Retto on 21 June, escorted by *LSM-59*, two Japanese *kamikazes* attacked; one crashed and sank *LSM-59* and the other crashed and sank the derelict *Barry*, fulfilling her decoy purpose even sooner than intended.

***USS Bates (APD-47*)*, 25 May 1945**

At about 1115 on 25 May 1945, the converted fast transport *Bates* (formerly DE-68), commanded by Lieutenant Commander Henry Albert Wilmerding Jr., USNR, was on patrol just south of Ie Shima when she was attacked by three *kamikazes*. The first plane crashed on her fantail on the starboard side, while the plane's bomb, released just before the *kamikaze* hit, exploded a few feet away from the ship, rupturing many hull plates on the starboard side. The second *kamikaze* crashed into the bridge area. The bomb from the third *kamikaze* hit close aboard, rupturing the hull on the port side. *Bates* went dead in the water and lost all fire main pressure, and the fires got out of control. The ship was surrounded by burning fuel oil and an attempt to come alongside by *Gosselin* (APD-126) was aborted. At 1145, Lieutenant Commander Wilmerding ordered the ship abandoned, with 21 dead and 35 wounded. The fleet tug *Cree* (ATF-84) succeeded in getting a towline onto *Bates* and towed her to the Ie Shima anchorage as *Bates* continued burning. After arriving at the anchorage, at 1923, *Bates* capsized and sank.

***USS Roper (APD-20#)*, 25 May 1945**

The converted fast transport *Roper* had the distinction of being the first U.S. Navy ship to sink a German U-boat, *U-85*, on 14 April 1942. (The subsequent looting of *U-85* by private divers beginning in the 1960s was part of the impetus

for the U.S. Congress to pass the Sunken Military Craft Act in 2004.)

On 25 May 1945, under the command of Lieutenant Commander Ulysses B. Carter, *Roper* was patrolling near Ie Shima when she was hit in the starboard bow by a *kamikaze* that wounded 10 crewmen. Despite the damage, *Roper* still proceeded to the assistance of *Barry*, which had been badly damaged by a *kamikaze*. *Roper's* damage was serious enough that she was ordered to return to San Pedro for repair, but with the end of the war and her age (she had been commissioned in 1918), repairs were not completed, and she was scrapped.

Liberty Ship William R. Allison, 25 May 1945

On 25 May 1945, the Liberty ship *William R. Allison* was hit by a torpedo from a Japanese aircraft while in a bay on the east side of Okinawa. She suffered eight killed and two wounded. Although she didn't sink, she was declared a constructive total loss and deemed not worth repair. However, she was accepted from the War Shipping Administration by the U.S. Navy and re-designated as a non-self-propelled floating dry storage ship.

She became known as USS *Inca*, but the name *Inca* had actually been given to another Liberty ship that had not actually been accepted by the U.S. Navy. Before the paperwork mix up that had led to her misnaming could be corrected, "*Inca*" (IX-229) was battered by typhoons and eventually driven aground in December 1945. Reports of her loss caused more paperwork confusion.

USS O'Neill (DE-188##), 26 May 1945

Destroyer escort *O'Neal*, commanded by Lieutenant Commander David Spencer Bill, Jr., spent 60 days on antisubmarine picket duty off Okinawa. On 25 May, she shot down a Japanese twin-engine bomber, and on 26 May she was hit

by a *kamikaze* in the starboard bow and knocked out of the war. Two men were killed and 17 wounded. Repairs at Saipan were not complete when the war ended. *O'Neal* subsequently served in the Netherlands navy as HMNLS *Dubois* from 1950 to 1967.

Fifth Fleet to Third Fleet: Admiral Halsey Relieves Admiral Spruance, 27 May 1945

On 27 May 1945, Admiral Halsey relieved Admiral Spruance, and the Fifth Fleet once again became Third Fleet. On 28 May 1945, Vice Admiral John "Slew" McCain relieved Vice Admiral Mitscher on board *Randolph*, and the Fast Carrier Task Force was re-designated from Task Force 58 to Task Force 38.

Neither Spruance nor Mitscher expected when they started the Okinawa campaign in mid-March that it would still be ongoing at the end of May. In that time, more than 90 U.S. Navy ships had been sunk or damaged badly enough to be out of action for more than a month. As U.S. ships were getting clobbered day after day off Okinawa, animosity among Navy commanders toward the Army began to grow, due to the Tenth Army's slow pace of advance in finishing off the Japanese deeply dug in on the southern end of Okinawa. Admiral Nimitz did his best to tamp down such criticism within Navy ranks, but the criticism of Army Lieutenant General Simon Bolivar Buckner by the war correspondents was vociferous and scathing. The very high casualties being suffered ashore only added fuel to the fire. Admiral Halsey disliked Admiral Spruance's approach of remaining tethered to supporting the forces ashore and wanted to take a more offensive approach. A few days later, this would result in Halsey driving the Third Fleet right into another typhoon (see H-Gram 039 for more on Typhoon Cobra in December 1944).

Kikusui No. 8, 27-29 May 1945

Massed *kamikaze* attack *Kikusui* No. 8 took place between 27 and 29 May, and would be the last one to employ more than 100 *kamikaze* aircraft, as the Japanese began to husband planes for the expected defense of the home islands. *Kikusui* No. 8 involved 110 aircraft (60 navy and 50 army) and would inflict significantly more pain than *Kikusui* No. 7, but not as much as *Kikusui* No. 6.

USS *Braine* (DD-630##), 27 May 1945

Braine and *Anthony* (DD-515) and four LCSs had been on Radar Picket Station No. 5 northeast of Okinawa for several days, and on 25 May had combined to shoot down five Japanese *kamikazes*, including a Betty bomber with an Ohka suicide plane. *Braine*, a *Fletcher*-class destroyer, was under the command of Commander William Wilson Fitts, who had previously been awarded a Silver Star as executive officer of a destroyer in the Aleutians and another Silver Star in command of *Braine* during an engagement with a Japanese destroyer in January 1945. *Braine* had been slightly damaged by shore fire during the bombardment of Tinian in June 1944. The *Fletcher*-class destroyer *Anthony* was also a battle veteran (seven battle stars), under the command of Lieutenant Commander Clyde James Van Arsdall, Jr., since July 1944.

The weather on the morning of 27 May was foul, and the eight U.S. Army P-47 Thunderbolt fighters on combat air patrol requested to return to base, which the fighter direction officer on *Braine* granted. No sooner that the P-47s were out of range than four Val dive-bombers dropped out of the clouds. Both destroyers and the LCSs opened fire on the Japanese aircraft. The first *kamikaze* was shot down. The second was set on fire at 2,000 yards from *Anthony* but kept coming, passing right over *Anthony* before making a sharp turn and crashing *Braine* in the No. 2. handling room, blowing the splinter shield right off the No.

2 5-inch gun mount, and the resulting explosion severely damaged the bridge and demolished the wardroom and officer's country. Commander Fitts was badly wounded, but refused to relinquish command while directing the continued defense of the ship. Meanwhile a third Val orbiting directly over *Anthony* tipped over into a steep dive. Gunfire from *Anthony* deflected the Val enough that it crashed 50 feet off the starboard beam, and parts of the plane and the pilot's body landed on *Anthony*. At the same time, another Val dove on *Braine*. The plane crashed into the sickbay and the bomb exploded in the No. 3 boiler uptake. The resulting explosion blew the No. 2 funnel right off the ship and completely wrecked the amidships superstructure.

After the second *kamikaze* hit, raging flames essentially divided *Braine* into three sections unable to communicate with each other, and the ship went dead in the water. Despite this, *Braine's* crewmen fought the fires, and two LCSs rescued men who'd been blown over the side, some of whom in this case were attacked by sharks. Once the air threat diminished, *Anthony* grappled *Braine* and came right alongside to help fight the fires and provide medical assistance. By noon, the fires were mostly out. *Braine's* casualties were heavy, with 67 dead and 103 wounded. *Anthony* was mostly unscathed and took *Braine* in tow until the former was relieved by fleet tug *Ute* (AT-76), which towed *Braine* to Kerama Retto. *Braine* subsequently transited to Boston for repairs, which were not completed before the war ended. *Braine* was recommissioned in 1951, starred in the movie *In Harm's Way* in 1964, and then served in the Argentine navy as *Almirante Domecq Garcia* from 1971 until she was sunk as a target in 1983.

Braine Navy Cross citation:

The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Navy Cross to Commander William Wilson Fitts, United States Navy, for extraordinary heroism and distinguished service in the

line of his profession as commanding officer of the destroyer USS Braine (DD-630), in action against enemy Japanese forces off the coast of Okinawa in the Ryukyu Islands, on 27 May 1945. Although painfully wounded when his ship was struck and severely damaged by two hostile suicide planes, Commander Fitts boldly initiated effective firefighting measures and directed the establishment of first aid stations for the wounded. Despite heavy and accurate enemy fire and the danger of exploding ammunition, he contributed greatly toward saving his vessel from destruction. By his courage, leadership and devotion to duty, Commander Fitts upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.

Anthony Navy Cross citation:

The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Navy Cross to Commander Clyde James Van Arsdall Jr., United States Navy, for extraordinary heroism and distinguished service in the line of his profession as commanding officer of the destroyer USS Anthony (DD-515) in action against the enemy from 25 through 27 May 1945, at Okinawa in the Ryukyu Islands. Immediately following a hostile suicide attack in which his ship shot down two enemy planes, Commander Van Arsdall courageously maneuvered his vessel alongside the fiercely burning USS Braine (DD-630) which had been struck by a Japanese suicide plane and, capably directing rescue operations, succeeded in saving the damaged ship from destruction and in rescuing many personnel who might otherwise have perished. His excellent leadership, gallant fighting spirit and devotion to duty throughout were in

keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.

Commander Van Arsdall was also awarded a Silver Star for other actions at Okinawa in command of Anthony.

USS Forrest (DMS-24#), 27 May 1945

On 27 May 1945, the Gleaves-class converted destroyer minesweeper *Forrest* (formerly DD-461) was screening other small minesweepers when she was attacked by three *kamikazes* that had dropped suddenly out of the clouds. *Forrest* shot down two of the *kamikazes*, but the third popped back up into the clouds and then attacked from a different direction with little warning. The *kamikaze* hit *Forrest* amidships on the starboard side at the waterline, killing 5 men and wounding 20. Her crew quickly got the fires under control, and she made Kerama Retto under her own power. She transited to Boston, where she was decommissioned without completing repairs and scrapped. The commanding officer of *Forrest*, Lieutenant Commander Sanford Elza "Red Dog" Woodard, was awarded a Silver Star. Lieutenant Commander Woodard had a previous Navy-Marine Corps Medal for rescuing five people from a merchant ship that had run aground in the Dutch East Indies in February 1942.

USS Rednour (APD-102##) and USS Loy (APD-56), 27 May 1945

Shortly before midnight on 27 May 1945, the converted high-speed destroyer transport *Rednour* (APD-102, formerly DE-592), under the command of Lieutenant Commander Roland Heinrich Cramer, USNR, was on an anti-air patrol station west of Okinawa in company with *Loy* (APD-56, formerly DE-160) and destroyer escort *Eisele* (DE-34). Several *kamikazes* attacked the group, with the first two heading for *Loy*. She shot down the first plane, which exploded in midair, but the second exploded close aboard

and showered *Loy* with fragments. The third plane veered off under heavy fire, while the fourth shifted aim for *Rednour* and came in from her starboard bow. Despite intense fire, the *kamikaze* crashed on *Rednour's* fantail, blasting a 10-foot hole in the main deck. *Rednour's* gunners kept firing and drove off yet another Japanese aircraft. Despite the damage, *Rednour* proceeded to Kerama Retto and then to San Pedro, where her repairs were completed after the Japanese surrender. *Rednour* later served in the Mexican navy as ARM *Chihuahua* from 1968 to 2001.

Loy, commanded by Lieutenant Commander Robert William Pond Jr., USNR, suffered three dead and 15 wounded in the attack. As *Loy* was heading to Hagushi Anchorage for temporary repair early on 28 May, she shot down another *kamikaze* that crashed just off her stern. She then proceeded to Leyte for more repair and was there when the war ended.

LCS(L)-119 (##), 28 May 1945

On 21 May, while returning from duty on a radar picket station, *LCS(L)-119* was attacked by two Val dive-bombers and one Nell twin-engine bomber. *LCS(L)-119* shot down the Nell at 1,500 yards off the port beam. The first Val dove from overhead, strafing the ship, before it barely missed off the port bow, spraying the *LCS(L)-119* with burning gasoline, which was quickly extinguished. The second Val turned away under fire.

On 28 May *LCS(L)-119's* luck ran out while she was on anti-suicide-boat patrol just outside the Hagushi anchorage. Shortly before midnight, the vessel shot down a Betty twin-engine bomber. However, shortly afterwards a Rufe (A6M2-N Zero floatplane) with a big bomb came out of the darkness and crashed *LCS(L)-119* on her starboard quarter near the engine room, starting a raging fire from amidships to the stern and causing ready-service ammunition boxes to cook off and explode. The vessel's pumps were knocked out and, for a time, the fire could not be

controlled. With 10 dead and 18 seriously wounded, the ship was in serious danger of being lost, until a tug came alongside and evacuated the wounded and put out the fire. The skipper of *LCS(L)-119*, Lieutenant Emil Saroch, Jr., was awarded a Silver Star for bringing the vessel alongside another burning ship and extinguishing the fire on 1 April, for shooting down two aircraft and driving off a third on 1 May, and, on 28 May, for saving his ship and going into a burning compartment to extricate and carry a wounded crewman to relative safety. *LCS(L)-119* was also awarded a Navy Unit Commendation. Her repairs were not completed until after the war was over. She ended up serving in the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense force from 1953 to 1958.

USS Drexler (DD-741*), 28 May 1945

Kikusui No. 8 attacks continued on the morning of 28 May, and Radar Picket Station No. 15 northwest of Okinawa took the brunt. The new *Allen M. Sumner*-class destroyers *Drexler* and *Lowry* (DD-770) were on station, along with *LCS-52*, *-55*, *-56*, and *-114*. *Drexler* was under the command of Commander Robert Lee Wilson, and *Lowry* was commanded by Commander Edwin Swain Miller. At 0650, radar detected an incoming raid, and both destroyers maneuvered to bring maximum firepower to bear. (High-speed and radical maneuvers were effective in throwing off the aim of bombers, but not of much use against a "guided" weapon like a *kamikaze*; the ships simply weren't fast enough relative to the speed of the *kamikazes*. U.S. tactics had evolved such that the primary consideration was to bring as many guns to bear on the *kamikaze* as possible.) Combat air patrol reported six aircraft inbound, and an F4U Corsair was able to shoot one of them down.

At 0700, the Japanese attack commenced with what appeared to be a well-coordinated scheme of maneuver by very good pilots flying fast aircraft, probably Japanese army twin-engine Ki-45 "Nick" fighters. The aircraft approached from

different directions, and one was shot down by the combined fire of combat air patrol, *Drexler* and *Lowry*. The second approached from *Drexler's* starboard bow and was aiming for *Lowry*. *Drexler* had to fire over *Lowry* to try to hit it. Hit multiple times, the *kamikaze* missed *Lowry* by several feet and seemed as if it was about to crash in the water when it pulled up and managed to hit *Drexler* instead, on the starboard side just above the waterline, knocking out all power and starting a large gasoline fire. Nevertheless, *Drexler's* fire-fighting teams had the fire out in about 30 seconds, and despite the damage, *Drexler's* gunners kept firing as more Japanese aircraft came in. Combined with *Lowry*, the gunners shot down two more aircraft. However, the next *kamikaze* came in trailing smoke with a Corsair on its tail. Hit multiple times, the *kamikaze* passed directly over *Drexler* from bow to stern and looked as if it was about to crash behind the ship when the pilot executed a stunning turning loop maneuver and re-attacked from the bow, grazing the signal bridge, ripping away halyards and boat davits, until the plane hit *Drexler's* aft stack. The plane's two bombs caused an explosion so devastating that it broke the destroyer's back, and she went under in less than a minute. U.S. fighters shot down the sixth *kamikaze* as *Drexler* sank. (Most accounts identify the aircraft that made the fatal blow as a Yokosuka P1Y Frances twin-engine bomber, but, based on Japanese records, that is not the case. Actually, all six planes would have been Nicks from the Army 45th *Shinbu* Squadron.)

Drexler sank so fast that few men below decks had a chance to escape, and 164 crewmen were lost with the ship. Of the 199 survivors rescued by *Lowry* and the LCSs, 51 were wounded, including the commanding officer. The catastrophic loss of *Drexler*, the latest class of U.S. destroyer, was of such concern that Commander Wilson was called back twice to Washington to provide more details.

USS Sandoval (APA-194##), 28 May 1945

During *Kikusui* No. 8, a number of *kamikazes* reached the transport areas off Okinawa, which had actually been the primary objectives of the previous *kamikaze* attacks, although few had made it that far. On 27 May, the attack transport *Sandoval* (APA-194) reached Nakagusuku Wan on the southeast coast of Nagasaki as a nighttime air raid was in progress. *Sandoval* commenced offloading Seabees and their equipment at dawn, but the process was interrupted by additional raid alerts.

At 0737, *Sandoval* opened fire on a Japanese army Ki-61 Tony fighter coming in low about 50 feet off the water. Despite taking hits, the Tony crashed into the port side of the pilot house, killing the executive officer and four others, and wounding the commanding officer, Commander Richard Casey Scherrer, and 28 others, three of whom later died from their wounds. The ship's navigator, Lieutenant Kewin (or Kevin) Vincent Kerth (or Keith), assumed command and directed the continued defense of the ship as a second *kamikaze* came in strafing, crossing 500 feet ahead of the bow before impacting the water. By 0800, damage control teams had the bridge fire under control. Another *kamikaze* came in at 0815, which missed the *Sandova I*, but managed to crash on the foredeck of the cargo ship SS *Joseph Snelling*. By 0830, all fires were extinguished, and *Sandoval* began offloading the Seabees. The cargo ships *Brown Victory* and *Mary Livermore* were also hit in the attack, but damage was not serious. *Sandoval* proceeded to Mare Island, California, but repairs were not complete when the war ended. *Sandoval* was later reactivated and served during the Korean War.

USS Shubrick (DD-639#), 29 May 1945

On the night of 28-29 May, *Gleaves*-class destroyer *Shubrick* was headed toward Radar Picket Station No. 16, west northwest of Okinawa, for her second stint as a radar picket ship.

Commanded by Lieutenant Commander John Chapman Jolly (USNA '39), *Shubrick* was a veteran of the landings at Sicily (where she'd been hit by a German bomb), Normandy (D-Day), and Southern France. She was transferred to the Pacific and, on 12 May, shot down two Japanese aircraft in concert with another destroyer.

At 2355 on 28 May, under a full moon, *Shubrick* spotted a twin-engine aircraft passing ahead with its running lights on. The ship immediately slowed down to minimize her wake and reduce the chance of being spotted, but to no avail. At 0007 on 29 May, the plane apparently detected *Shubrick* and commenced an attack. Some accounts indicate that two planes were involved, but make no mention of what the second plane did. *Shubrick* opened fire on the first aircraft, but it kept coming and crashed into the gun director and 40mm mount on the aft deckhouse, starting a large gasoline fire and killing the men in emergency radio. The plane's bomb, released just before the plane's impact, blew a 30-foot hole in the starboard side, flooding the after fireroom and engine room and trapping several men in the No. 3 magazine. A depth charge in one of the side-throwing mounts exploded, which caused more damage, but had the beneficial effect of blowing out the fire.

Shubrick continued to settle until by 0130 the fantail was awash. Destroyer *Van Valkenburgh* came alongside and took off the wounded and all but a volunteer skeleton crew, which managed to stem further flooding with additional handy-billy pumps provided by *Van Valkenburgh*. *Pavlic* came alongside at 0200 and passed over more pumps. *Shubrick* lost 35 men and suffered 25 wounded. Salvage tug ATR-9 took *Shubrick* in tow at 0510 to Kerama Retto. Following emergency repairs, *Shubrick* steamed across the Pacific on one engine to Puget Sound, where it was decided not to make further repairs, and the ship was sold for scrap. The commanding officer, Lieutenant Commander Jolly, was awarded a Navy Cross for his actions in saving his ship.

Thus ended *Kikusui* No. 8, with loss of another destroyer sunk, others badly damaged and over 250 U.S. Sailors killed.

Shubrick Navy Cross citation:

The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Navy Cross to Lieutenant Commander John Chapman Jolly, United States Navy for extraordinary heroism and distinguished service in the line of his profession as commanding officer of the destroyer USS Shubrick (DD-639) in action against enemy Japanese forces off Okinawa Shima, on 29 May 1945. When his ship was attacked by enemy suicide planes, Lieutenant Commander Jolly coolly and capably directed his guns in delivering prolonged and effective fire, destroying at least one hostile aircraft. [With the ship in danger of sinking after having been hit and severely damaged, Lieutenant Commander Jolly] disregarded the hazards of fire and exploding ammunition and, exercising initiative and considerable ability, took all possible measures and succeeded in keeping his ship afloat. His gallant leadership and perseverance were in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.

I-361 Sunk, 31 May 1945

On 28 May, a U.S. minesweeper sighted a Japanese submarine southeast of Okinawa. This was *I-361*, which had departed Japan on 24 May with the *Torodoroki* ("Thunderclap") Group, with five *Kaiten* manned suicide torpedoes on board. *I-361* was setting up on the convoy route from Saipan to Okinawa.

The escort carrier *Anzio*, with four destroyer escorts, immediately headed for the reported datum and commenced searches by embarked composite squadron VC-13 aircraft. At 0436 on 31

May, a TBM-3E Avenger flown by Lieutenant (j.g.) Sam Stovall gained radar contact. The Avenger dropped out of the clouds and caught *I-361* on the surface, firing four 5-inch rockets with two possible hits. The submarine crash-dived, and Stovall dropped sonobuoys and a Mark 24 "Fido" acoustic homing torpedo, which tracked and probably hit the submarine. Destroyer escort *Oliver Mitchell* (DE-417) felt the large underwater shock while still 15 nautical miles away. When *Oliver Mitchell* and *Tabberer* (DE-418) reached the datum, the sea was covered in a large oil slick, with planking and other debris present. *I-361* was lost with all 76 crewmen and five *Kaiten* pilots.

Kikusui No. 9, 3-7 June 1945

Kikusui No. 9 was strung out over five days from 3-7 June and was the smallest yet, with only 50 *kamikaze* aircraft (20 navy and 30 army). From the Japanese perspective, it was a failure, partly due to Typhoon Viper.

USS LCI(L)-90, 3 June 1945

On 3 June 1945, the U.S. Coast Guard-manned *LCI(L)-90*, under the command of Lieutenant (j.g.) William H. Nadon, USCGR, was attacked by a Japanese *kamikaze* fighter. *LCI(L)-90* was a veteran of the landings in French North Africa, Sicily, Anzio and Omaha Beach. The vessel was hit and damaged in the attack, but fortunately suffered only one dead and seven wounded. *LCI(L)-90* was out of action for the rest of the war. (One account says *LCI(L)-90* was hit on 14 June, although the table in Morison says 3 June.)

Typhoon Viper, 5 June 1945

On 1 June 1945, Fleet Weather Center Guam reported that a major storm was forming north of the Palau Islands. Early on 3 June, a search plane from Samar reported a typhoon east of the Philippines moving north. After the disastrous

typhoon of 18 December 1944, Third Fleet Commander Admiral Halsey and other senior task force and task group commanders were acutely sensitive to the movement of the typhoon, but accurate information was lacking. (It should be noted that forces under Halsey's command had avoided eleven typhoons since the Typhoon Cobra in December 1944.)

On 2 and 3 June, fast carrier Task Group TG 38.1, under Rear Admiral J. J. "Jocko" Clark, was supporting operations at Okinawa, while TG 38.4, under Rear Admiral Arthur Radford, was conducting fighter sweeps over Japanese airfields on Kyushu in line with Halsey's offensive strategy. Clark's group (TG 38.1) was scheduled to refuel early on 4 June, but Halsey ordered him to break it off and prepare for heavy weather. However, this typhoon, like the one in December 1944, was powerful, but it was also small and tight, so the weather remained deceptively good throughout 4 June. Refueling was resumed and concluded that evening. Nevertheless, at 1732, Halsey ordered Radford (TG 38.4) to desist from further strike operations until the anticipated storm passed.

Halsey, embarked on battleship *Missouri* (BB-63), and Vice Admiral McCain, commander of Task Force 38, embarked on carrier *Shangri-La* (CV-38), were both in company with Radford's TG 38.4. The first definitive word of the typhoon's location was a radar report of the eye, which came through at 2200 on 4 June from amphibious command ship *Ancon* (AGC-4). The report did not reach Halsey until 0130 on 5 June. This report caused some confusion, as it indicated a very high rate of advance that did not seem plausible. Halsey ordered the force to change from an easterly heading to 300 degrees, believing that this action would avoid the storm.

At 0246 on 5 June, Rear Admiral Donald Beary, commander of the refueling group (TG 30.8), about 30 miles south of TF 38.4, sent a message stating he believed that the 300-degree course was taking them into the storm rather than away

from it. McCain then changed TF 38's course from 300 to 360 degrees. Beary subsequently reported that course 360 was causing the escort carriers in his group to roll heavily, so he changed course back to 300 degrees, which, as it turned out, took his group right into the center of the storm, as he had initially predicted.

Rear Admiral Clark's group (TG 38.1) was between TG 38.4 and the refueling group. In TG 38.1, destroyer *Maddox* (DD-731) reported taking 60-degree rolls, and destroyer *John Rogers* (DD-574) lost steering control and one engine. Clark radioed that if he moved to 120 degrees, he could avoid the storm, which by 0240 was then visible on TG 38.1's radars. McCain hesitated in giving permission for Clark to proceed independently, and when he finally gave the permission, it turned out to be too late. In process of trying to find a good course for his destroyers in the rapidly mounting winds and seas, Clark inadvertently drove TG 38.1 right into the eyewall, with seas of 50-60 feet and winds near 100 knots, just after 0500. Radford's group (TG 38.4) further north actually fared pretty well by maintaining 360 degrees.

Virtually every ship in TG 38.1 and TG 30.1 suffered some degree of damage, with the new heavy cruiser *Pittsburgh* taking the worst of it. At 0555, winds blew a floatplane off the port catapult on the fantail, causing it to land upside down on the deck. A small fire broke out in the anchor windlass compartment that was quickly extinguished. At 0612, Captain John Edward Gingrich set damage control condition one, which dogged down the entire ship. At 0615, Gingrich ordered battle stations (Condition Z), which brought out all of the crewmen from the forward berthing compartments, an action which saved their lives. At 0630, *Pittsburgh* hit two massive seas, which ripped 104 feet of the bow clean off. For the next hours, *Pittsburgh* maneuvered to keep the forward bulkheads from collapsing, aided by the fact that the chief carpenter had

acquired double the normal allowance of shoring timber.

Pittsburgh survived and arrived at Guam on 10 June 1945. The tug *Munsee* (ATF-107) found the bow still afloat (which gave *Pittsburgh* her claim to being "the longest ship afloat") and, in what turned out to be an extremely difficult tow, brought it to Guam.

Pittsburgh's sister *Baltimore* (CA-68) suffered similar damage, but her bow did not break off. The light cruiser *Duluth* (CL-87) also suffered significant structural damage to her bow. One destroyer, *Samuel L. Moore* (DD-747), suffered significant superstructure damage.

All four of the carriers in TG 38.1 were damaged. *Hornet* (CV-12) and *Bennington* had 25 feet of their forward flight decks collapsed and the next 25 feet so weakened that the forward flight decks could not support aircraft. Both ships lost a catapult. The light carriers *Belleau Wood* (CVL-24) and *San Jacinto* (CVL-30) also suffered significant damage, but not as bad as the bigger fleet carriers. Aircraft losses were significant with 33 washed overboard, 36 jettisoned overboard, 7 damaged beyond repair, and 16 requiring major repair work.

In the refueling group (TG 30.1), the escort carrier *Windham Bay* (CVE-92) lost 20 feet of her forward flight deck and suffered a damaged elevator. *Salamaua* (CVE-96) suffered damage as well. The tanker *Millicoma* (AO) had all her booms on one side ripped away.

Although damage and personnel losses (one officer and five crewmen lost overboard, and four others seriously injured) in Typhoon Viper were far lower than in Typhoon Cobra (three destroyers lost and about 790 killed) in December 1944, the court of inquiry (COI) held in Guam and presided by Vice Admiral John Hoover was scathing in its criticism. The COI pointed out that the lessons learned from Typhoon Cobra had not been

followed. The COI further concluded that the course change to 300 degrees at 0134 on 5 June was "extremely ill-advised" given all information available. The COI also concluded that the fleet weather organization "did not function efficiently or effectively" and that radio communications in Third Fleet were so bad that corrective action was required. Moreover, the COI noted that the new cruisers were structurally deficient. Responsibility was primarily placed on Admiral Halsey and secondarily on Admirals McCain, Clark, and Beary. The COI even went so far as to recommend that "serious consideration" be given to assigning Halsey and McCain "to other duty." Secretary of the Navy James V. Forrestal wanted to relieve Halsey, but was talked out of it on grounds that such a move would give aid and comfort to the enemy. All commanders remained in their position, although afterward B-29s from the Marianas began flying typhoon reconnaissance missions.