

H-Gram 051: Victory in the Pacific

25 June 2020

This H-gram is in memory of those who almost made it home.

Ensign Wright C. "Billy" Hobbs, USNR

Ensign Eugene "Mandy" Mandeborg, USNR

Lieutenant (j.g.) Joseph G. Sahloff, USNR

Lieutenant Howard M. "Howdy" Harrison, USNR

The four names above are recorded in the memoirs of Fleet Admiral William F. Halsey, Jr., who asked that they should never be forgotten. Admiral Halsey had given the order to launch carrier strikes on the Tokyo area on the morning of 15 August 1945 to maintain unremitting pressure on the Japanese, as he was directed, even as surrender negotiations were ongoing. As the strikes were on their way in, Halsey received word that the Japanese had officially accepted the Allies' terms for surrender, and a recall order was broadcast. These four Hellcat fighter pilots of VF-88 were jumped and shot down by Japanese fighters while on their way back to the carriers after receiving the recall. Despite thinking the war was over in one moment and being engaged in a wild dogfight the next, these pilots still put up a courageous and hellacious fight, but were simply outnumbered. Halsey carried the burden of



Crewmembers of USS Pennsylvania (BB-38) pump out water over her quarterdeck, after being she was torpedoed in Buckner Bay, Okinawa, on 12 August 1945. Note the hoses led out through her aft 14-inch guns (NH 92512).

believing that he was responsible for sending these men to die in the last moments of the war, and he never forgot.

"Peace loving people throughout the world today are grateful to those who have given their lives to further the cause of freedom and democracy. But to the men whose very lives have been saved by the heroic deeds of their fighting comrades, this gratitude assumes the strength of an unpayable personal debt. Everlasting are the vivid memories of thousands of us who have seen our comrades sacrifice their lives so that we may live. If only the entire world could feel the same personal indebtedness toward those heroes, it would be a

great impetus toward attaining the free and peaceful world for which these men were fighting. The attainment of this goal can be our only reasonable tribute."

–From the report of LST-647, saved by the sacrifice of USS Underhill (DE-682) and 113 of her crewmen, sunk on 24 July 1945 while defending convoy TU 99.1.18 from a Japanese Kaiten manned suicide torpedo attack

24 January 1945: USS Extractor (ARS-15)– Last U.S. Ship Sunk by "Friendly Fire"

After being assured that there were no friendlies in the area, submarine Guardfish (SS-217), with two previous Presidential Unit Citations, fired a salvo of torpedoes at what Guardfish thought was a Japanese I-165-class submarine running on the surface. The target was actually the rescue and salvage ship Extractor, which had failed to decode a message directing her to return to Guam. Guardfish rescued 73 survivors of Extractor, but six crewmen were lost. Extractor was the only U.S. ship sunk by a U.S. submarine during the war. U.S. submarines were attacked by U.S. and Allied ships and aircraft on numerous occasions, but only one U.S. submarine was almost certainly lost due to "friendly" fire and two others were possibly lost as a result of U.S. action. The U.S. submarine Seawolf (SS-197) was probably sunk by destroyer escort Richard M. Rowell (DE-403) on 13 October 1943 with a loss of all 83 of her crew and 17 U.S. Army personnel on the way to a clandestine operation in the Philippines.

April-July 1945: Seven Minesweepers Lost During Landings on Borneo

Although overshadowed by the Okinawa campaign, there were three major landings on the Japanese-occupied island of Borneo in the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia), in which Australia provided the ground troops and the U.S. Seventh Fleet provided almost all the ships. The area had

been heavily mined by the Dutch (before the war), by the Japanese, and by sophisticated air-dropped U.S. magnetic and acoustic mines. Seven U.S. minesweepers were lost during these operations, several to our own mines. However, due to the work and sacrifice of these vessels, no other U.S. or Allied ships were sunk in the operations and only one U.S. destroyer was damaged by a mine.

24 July 1945: USS Underhill (DE-682)–The Last Destroyer Escort Lost

While defending a seven-ship convoy from attack by Japanese submarine I-53, destroyer escort Underhill rammed or was hit by a Kaiten manned suicide torpedo launched from I-53. This resulted in two massive explosions that obliterated the forward half of the ship. She went down with 113 of her crew, including the commanding officer, Lieutenant Commander Robert Maston Newcomb, USNR. I-53 got away, but so did the U.S. convoy with many hundreds of battle-weary U.S. Army troops being brought out of Okinawa. In 1998, Underhill was belatedly awarded a Navy Unit Commendation.

29 July 1945: USS Callaghan (DD-792)–The Last U.S. Destroyer Lost

The last U.S. destroyer to go down in World War II, Callaghan was sunk by a Japanese "Willow" biplane trainer with a 220-pound bomb. The U.S. high-tech radar proximity fuses didn't work on the wood and fabric biplane. Although the aircraft didn't do much damage, the bomb hit in a critical space and a delayed detonation wiped out the fire and repair parties. It also contributed to the rapid spread of fire, which set off 75 5-inch rounds. Callaghan went down quickly with a loss of 47 dead and 73 wounded. The next night, the Willow biplanes attacked again and one crashed into destroyer Cassin Young (DD-793). Cassin Young survived the severe damage, but 22 of her crewmen did not, including the prospective

commanding officer, Lieutenant Commander Alfred Brunson Wallace (USNA '39). The commanding officer was among the 42 wounded.

30 July 1945: USS Indianapolis (CA-35)–The Last U.S. Cruiser Lost

Following completion of her top secret mission to deliver components of the Hiroshima atomic bomb to Tinian in a record-breaking transit, the heavy cruiser Indianapolis was steaming from Guam to Leyte when she encountered Japanese submarine I-58 on the night of 29-30 July. In an ideal attack position just as the moon broke through the heavy cloud cover, I-58 hit Indianapolis with two of six torpedoes. Indianapolis went down in about 12 minutes. Although distress transmissions were made, none made it off the ship due to loss of power and damage. Of 1,195 men aboard, only 316 survived. As many as 200 to 300 went down with the ship and another 600 to 700 perished in a horrific four-day-plus ordeal of scorching sun, hypothermia, deadly salt water-induced hallucinations, and shark attack. The survivors were first discovered by accident by a PV-1 Ventura on 2 August. This was followed by a risky open-ocean landing by a PBY Catalina flying boat. The tragedy was compounded due to missed communications, faulty assumptions, and faulty operating procedures. No one ashore knew that Indianapolis was lost until destroyer escort Cecil J. Doyle (DE-368) arrived on scene at midnight, 2-3 August. The magnitude and circumstances of the loss just days before the Japanese surrender resulted in intense criticism of the U.S. Navy that reverberated for decades.

6 August 1945: USS Bullhead (SS-332)–The Last U.S. Submarine Lost

Eight U.S. submarines were lost in 1945 with all 687 men aboard. As Japanese shipping became increasingly scarce, U.S. submarines resorted to increasingly daring, and dangerous, attempts to

sink ships. Swordfish (SS-193), Barbel (SS-316), Kete (SS-369), Trigger (SS-237), Snook (SS-279), Lagarto (SS-371), and Bonefish (SS-223) were lost, several of them survivors of over a dozen war patrols. The last was Bullhead (SS-332), sunk on her third war patrol by Japanese army aircraft off Bali shortly after she completed a northbound transit of Lombok Strait. Bullhead was lost with all 84 hand, and was the last of 52 U.S. submarines lost during World War II with a total of 3,506 crewmen. The families of her crew would not find out until after the VJ-day celebrations. The commanding officer on Bullhead's first two patrols didn't make the third due to dysentery; years later, wracked by survivor's guilt, then-Rear Admiral (ret.) Walter Thomas "Red" Griffith committed suicide.

9 August 1945: USS Borie (DD-704)–Last Radar Picket Casualties

On 9 August 1945, Five Japanese B7A "Grace" torpedo bombers attacked four U.S. destroyers performing radar picket duty for the Fast Carrier Task Force (TF 38) off Honshu. One Grace crashed into destroyer Borie. Despite the severe damage and 48 dead and 66 wounded, Borie's crew saved their ship.

9-12 August 1945: USS Johnnie Hutchins (DE-360) and USS Oak Hill (LSD-7)–Last Japanese Submarine Attacks

Japanese submarine I-58 was not through after sinking Indianapolis. On 9 August, the submarine attempted to attack a convoy that turned out to be a U.S. ASW hunter-killer group, and lost two Kaiten in an unsuccessful attack on destroyer escort Johnnie Hutchins. On 12 August, I-58 attempted to attack landing ship dock Oak Hill with a Kaiten. Destroyer escort Thomas F. Nickel (DE-587) ran down the Kaiten, which scraped along her hull but did not detonate. The Kaiten subsequently self-destructed with no damage to U.S. ships.

12 August 1945: USS Pennsylvania (BB-38)– The U.S. Last Battleship Hit

Pennsylvania nearly met the fate she had avoided during the attack on Pearl Harbor when a single Japanese torpedo bomber slipped into an anchorage area off Okinawa and hit her with a torpedo in a vulnerable spot. Fortunately, the water was shallow, otherwise Pennsylvania might have been lost and joined her sister Arizona (BB-39). Pennsylvania suffered 20 dead in the attack.

13 August 1945: USS Lagrange (APA-124)– Last Ship Hit by Kamikaze

On the evening of 13 August, two Japanese kamikaze aircraft made it into an anchorage area off Okinawa and hit the attack transport Lagrange. She survived, but 21 men were killed and 89 wounded.

14 August 1945: USS Spikefish (SS-404) and USS Torsk (SS-423)–Last U.S. Submarine Victories

Tipped off by Ultra intelligence, Spikefish intercepted and tracked Japanese transport submarine I-373 before sinking her at dawn on 14 August. I-373 went down with 84 crewmen (1 survived), the last of 128 Japanese submarines lost in the war. Later that day, having penetrated the heavily mined Tsurushima Strait, Torsk torpedoed and sank Japanese escort ship CD-47 and then did the same to CD-13, using new acoustic homing torpedoes and passive acoustic torpedoes. CD-13 was the last Imperial Japanese Navy ship sunk by the United States before the surrender, going down with 28 crewmen. (Other Japanese ships would be sunk by U.S. mines in the weeks after the surrender.)

15 August 1945: Fighter Squadron VF-88– The Last Carrier Planes Lost

The Fast Carrier Task Force (TF 38) launched another round of heavy air strikes on targets in the Tokyo area, when word came from Washington, DC, that the Japanese government had officially accepted the Allies' terms for surrender. A recall message was transmitted to all aircraft in the air; those that were over still over water jettisoned their bombs and turned around. Those that were overland promptly headed back toward their carriers. On the way back, four Hancock (CV-19) F6F Hellcats were attacked by Japanese fighters, but none were lost. Six Yorktown (CV-10) Hellcats of VF-88 aborted their rocket attack on Atsugi Airfield. On the way back, these six Hellcats were intercepted by an overwhelming number of first-line Japanese pilots in first-line aircraft. It was a valiant fight, but four of the Hellcats went down and their pilots were lost, the last U.S. Navy pilots lost in combat during the war. A returning British strike was also attacked and one Supermarine Seafire from HMS Indefatigable went down. The pilot survived the bailout, but was executed by the Japanese that evening, the last Allied pilot lost in the war.

15 August 1945: USS Heermann (DD-532)– The Final U.S. Navy Combat Actions

In the afternoon after Emperor Hirohito's surrender announcement, a Japanese Judy dive-bomber attacked four U.S. destroyers on radar picket duty for the U.S. carrier force off Honshu, Japan. Destroyer Heermann shot the Judy down "in a friendly manner" with an assist from Black (DD-666) and Bullard (DD-660).

15 August 1945: Vice Admiral Matome Ugaki–The Last Kamikaze

Late in the afternoon following Emperor Hirohito's surrender announcement, the commander of Japanese kamikaze operations, diehard Vice

Admiral Matome Ugaki (who had survived the shoot down of Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto in April 1943), launched the last kamikaze mission, flying as a passenger in a Judy dive-bomber. Ten other aircrew (pilots and gunners) insisted on flying the last mission with him, although three planes turned back with mechanical problems. No U.S. ships were hit, 19 Japanese lost their lives, and Ugaki's plane probably dove into a sand bar in the darkness.

18 August 1945: The Last U.S. Combat Casualty

Japanese navy fighters violated the cease-fire on 17 and 18 August, attacking U.S. Army Air Forces B-32 Dominator bombers flying photo-reconnaissance missions over Tokyo. One B-32 was badly damaged and Sergeant Anthony Marchione was killed. He is considered to be the last U.S. combat casualty of World War II.

29 December 1945: USS Minivet (AM-371)– The Last U.S. Navy Ship Sunk

While working in concert with Japanese minesweepers to clear a minefield in the Tsushima Strait, minesweeper Minivet struck a Japanese mine and quickly sank with the loss of 31 of her crew. By some accounts, she was the last U.S. Navy ship sunk in World War II.

I have been fortunate and honored to have met a few of the dwindling number of World War II veterans, who quite deservedly get the hero treatment for their role during that terrible war that ensured our freedom today. However, almost to a man, they will invariably say that the real heroes were the ones who didn't return home. About 35,000 U.S. Navy personnel did not return, and most of them are still at sea.

There is an epitaph on a monument in India to British soldiers who fell at the 1944 Battle of Kohima that seems apt: "When you go home, tell

them of us and say, "For your tomorrow, we gave our today."

For more on the last sacrifices, please see attachment H-051-1.

As always, you are welcome to forward H-grams to spread these stories of U.S. Navy valor and sacrifice. Back issues of H-grams enhanced with photos may be found here [<https://www.history.navy.mil/about-us/leadership/director/directors-corner/h-grams.html>], along with lots of other interesting material on Naval History and Heritage Command's website.



USS Minivet (AM-371), photographed from USS Redstart (AM-378), sinking after hitting a mine of Tsushima Island, Japan, during mine clearance operations on 29 December 1945. At right is a Japanese mine-destroyer trawler moving into rescue survivors (80-G-607204).



USS Underhill (DE-682), the last destroyer escort lost by the U.S. Navy in World War II, off the Boston Navy Yard, Massachusetts, 21 June 1944 (19-N-66696).

H-051-1: The Last Sacrifices

H-Gram 051, Attachment 1

Samuel J. Cox, Director NHHC

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This turned into a bit of an opus, but it is my tribute to those ships and Navy personnel who made the ultimate sacrifice in the waning days of World War II.

24 January 1945: USS Extractor (ARS-15) – the Last U.S. Ship Sunk by “Friendly Fire”

On 21 January 1945, the *Anchor*-class rescue and salvage ship *Extractor* departed Guam en route

Leyte, Philippines, under the command of Lieutenant (j.g.) Horace M. Babcock, USNR, with a crew of 79. On 23 January, the ship received a garbled operational priority message that could not be decoded. Mindful of the requirement to maintain radio silence, the crew did not request a retransmission of the message. The message had directed *Extractor* to reverse course and return to Guam. Unknown to routing authorities there, *Extractor* continued on her way toward the Philippines.

At 2038 on 23 January 1945, the submarine *Guardfish* (SS-217) made radar contact on an unknown vessel at 11,000 yards. *Guardfish* was a veteran boat on her 10th war patrol, having earned a Presidential Unit Citation for her First and Second War Patrols and a second

Presidential Unit Citation for her eighth war patrol. The present patrol was her first under Commander Douglas Thompson Hammond and was up to this point a complete bust. She was returning to Guam empty-handed.

Guardfish tracked the contact through the night. Commander Hammond was well aware that the contact was in a "Joint Zone," where both U.S. submarines and surface ships could operate, and in which neither was allowed to attack contacts without positive identification and confirmation that the target was hostile. At 0113, *Guardfish* issued a contact report to Commander, Submarines Pacific (COMSUBPAC), requesting to know if there were any friendlies in the area. COMSUBPAC replied that there were no friendly submarines in the area, and warned that the contact might be American, while directing *Guardfish* to continue to track the contact. Upon *Guardfish* issuing another contact report, COMSUBPAC replied at 0338 that there were no friendlies in the area, unaware that *Extractor* had not reversed course as ordered.

Having been informed that there were no friendlies in the area, *Guardfish* took a position at 0542 13,600 yards ahead of the contact's track, with a 2,000-yard offset in order for the contact to be silhouetted against the predawn, eastern light. The seas were very choppy, and only the superstructure of the contact could be seen in the seas. Commander Thompson took four looks through the scope, and the executive officer two looks, as the contact approached. At 0605, both Thompson and the executive officer concurred that the contact was a Japanese type I-165-class submarine running on the surface. The Identification Friend or Foe (IFF) system had been incorporated into the air search radar (to warn the submarine against attack from friendly aircraft), but the surface search radar did not have IFF. As the contact was believed to be a Japanese submarine, *Guardfish* did not attempt to use underwater communications. At 0620 *Guardfish* fired four Mk. 18 electric torpedoes at the contact

from a range of 1,200 yards, with one explosion heard 1 minute 18 seconds later and a second explosion 8 seconds after that.

Sonarmen on *Extractor* heard the incoming torpedoes, and General Quarters was sounded. In the very rough seas and low light, the lookouts did not see the torpedoes, however, and the ship had almost no time to maneuver anyway. At least one torpedo struck *Extractor* on the starboard side, in the engine room, killing or wounding everyone in the space. Within three minutes the ship was listing severely, with the risk of imminent capsizing. Lieutenant (j.g.) Babcock gave the order to abandon ship.

On *Guardfish*, at 0623, as soon as the smoke cleared, Commander Hammond saw *Extractor's* stern start to rise out of the water. He realized that the contact was a surface ship and not a submarine. *Extractor* radioed a coded message that she had been hit and was sinking, which was heard and decoded by *Guardfish* as she was coming to the surface at 0630.

Guardfish immediately commenced rescue operations, bringing aboard 73 survivors over the next two hours, but six *Extractor* Sailors went down with the ship or were lost in the water. The Court of Inquiry determined that the sinking had been an unfortunate accident, absolving COMSUBPAC but criticizing Lieutenant (j.g.) Babcock for not breaking radio silence to request retransmission of an operational priority message. The court also criticized Commander Hammond for not using the underwater telephone. He received a formal letter of reprimand but remained in command of *Guardfish* for her last two war patrols, during which *Guardfish* only sank one Japanese fishing boat. At war's end, *Guardfish* was the only U.S. submarine to sink another U.S. Navy ship.

During World War II, there were also accidental attacks on U.S. submarines by U.S. and Allied aircraft and ships. These attacks were distressingly

frequent and provided a major impetus for developing IFF capability. Given how many of these “blue-on-blue” attacks there were, it is almost miraculous that more U.S. submarines escaped being sunk by our own forces—which is a testament to the skill of the submariners in avoiding being hit. It is also an indication of the great difficulty experienced by aircraft or ships in actually hitting a submarine. One U.S. submarine, *Seawolf* (SS-197), was almost certainly sunk by a U.S. destroyer escort. Two others, *Dorado* (SS-248) and *S-26* (SS-131), were possibly sunk accidentally, by friendly forces.

USS *Seawolf*. On 3 October 1943, about 35 nautical miles east of Morotai (off the northwest tip of New Guinea), Japanese submarine *RO-41* fired her last four torpedoes at the escort carriers of TG 77.1.2. The torpedoes missed *Fanshaw Bay* (CVE-70) and *Midway* (CVE-63, later re-named *St. Lo*) but not destroyer escort *Shelton* (DE-407), commanded by Lieutenant Commander Lewis B. Salmon, USNR. *Shelton* maneuvered to avoid the first torpedo, but a second torpedo hit her in the starboard propeller, causing extensive damage and progressive flooding. Destroyer escort *Richard M. Rowell* (DE-403) conducted an attack on a submarine before coming alongside *Shelton* and taking off her survivors. Thirteen of *Shelton*'s crew were killed, and although *Shelton* was taken in tow, she later capsized and sank. Two Midway aircraft subsequently sighted a submerging submarine and dropped two bombs and dye markers, despite being in a U.S. submarine safety lane. *Richard M. Rowell* prosecuted the datum and detected an acoustic signal that according to *Richard M. Rowell* bore no resemblance to any known recognition signals and was interpreted as a Japanese attempt to jam *Richard M. Rowell*'s sonar. *Richard M. Rowell* conducted several hedgehog attacks on the submarine and noted a small amount of debris and a large air bubble coming to the surface.

At 0756 on 3 October 1944, *Seawolf* had exchanged radar recognition signals with *Narwhal*

(SS-167), which was the last heard of *Seawolf*. Following the attack on *Shelton*, all four U.S. submarines in the vicinity were directed to report their position; only *Seawolf* failed to respond. *Seawolf*, under the command of Lieutenant Commander Albert Marion Bontier (USNA '35), was on her 15th war patrol and was on a clandestine mission to the Philippines to deliver supplies to Filipino guerillas. She had previously sunk 14 Japanese ships. This patrol was Lieutenant Commander Bontier's second as commanding officer of *Seawolf*. Bontier had previously been awarded a Silver Star as approach officer on the third war patrol of *Spearfish* (SS-190). In addition to her 83 crewmen, *Seawolf* had 17 U.S. Army passengers on board, all of whom were lost.

There were no Japanese reports indicating an attack on a U.S. submarine in that time or place. *RO-41* returned safely to port and did not report attacking a submarine. (*RO-41* was sunk off Okinawa in March 1945 with all 82 hands.) The commanding officer of *Richard M. Rowell*, Lieutenant Commander Harry Allen Barnard Jr. (USNA '36), remained in command and was awarded a Legion of Merit for sinking a Japanese submarine on 23 October 1944 (some accounts say this was *I-54*, but it was more likely *I-56*, which got away). Although *Seawolf* might have been lost due to an operational accident or an unrecorded Japanese attack, it is probable she was sunk by accident by *Richard M. Rowell*.

USS *Dorado*. On the night of 12 October 1943, a PBM Mariner flying boat attacked what it assessed as two German U-boats two hours apart in the eastern approaches to the Panama Canal. The new-construction submarine *Dorado* (SS-248), under Lieutenant Commander Earle Caffrey Schneider (USNA '33), was transiting to the Pacific via the Canal but failed to arrive on 14 October. The second attack by the Mariner was definitely *U-214*, confirmed in *U-214*'s log (the boat escaped). The Mariner had received incorrect coordinates for the restricted area associated with

Dorado's track. *U-518* was also operating in the area but did not record being attacked. Therefore the Court of Inquiry and most accounts indicate *Dorado* was sunk by accident by the *Mariner*. However, of the three depth charges and one bomb dropped on the first submarine, none was seen to explode, so it was possible *U-518* did realize she had been attacked. The description of the first submarine provided by the *Mariner* crew was very detailed and a much closer match to a U-boat than *Dorado*. In addition, unknown at the time, *U-214* also laid a minefield, and it is possible *Dorado* hit one. Regardless, *Dorado* was lost with all 77 hands.

USS S-26. On the night of 24 January 1942, submarine chaser *PC-460* was escorting four S-class submarines to commence defensive patrols on the Pacific side of the Canal Zone. When *PC-460* broke off escort, three of the four submarines (including *S-26*) failed to get the signal of *PC-460's* intent. In the darkness and confusion, *PC-460* rammed and sank *S-26*. The commanding officer, executive officer, and a lookout on the bridge of *S-26* survived, but the remaining crew of 47 was lost as *S-26* quickly went down. Most accounts attribute this to an accident, but some state *PC-460* mistook *S-26* for a U-boat and deliberately rammed her. I have been unable to track down the origin of the "deliberate ram" report, but given that *PC-460* attempted to back engines and turned to avoid the collision (not to mention this was on the Pacific side of the Canal), this is doubtful in my view as a "blue-on-blue" encounter.

April-July 1945: Minesweepers in the Last Amphibious Landings—Tarakan, Brunei, and Balikpapan

Unsung heroes of World War II were those who served on minesweepers, a critical component of almost every amphibious assault, and a very dangerous place to be. Although overshadowed in the history books by the *kamikaze* attacks of the Okinawa campaign, the last amphibious assaults of the war to recapture the island of Borneo from

the Japanese proved to be particularly dangerous (and controversial). Seven U.S. minesweepers were lost during this campaign from April to July 1945, several of them to more sophisticated U.S. mines that had been offensively laid.

The strategic importance of Borneo was the oil fields, which had been a critical Japanese objective at the start of the war. Before the war, Japanese oil fields on Sakhalin Island and Formosa (both under Japanese control) could only meet about ten percent of Japanese needs. Before the war, most of Japan's oil had come from the United States. When the U.S. government put an embargo on oil sales to Japan in response to Japanese aggression in China, Japan was faced with two unpalatable choices: Either give in to U.S. demands to withdraw from China, or go to war to take the oil they needed, of which the closest and best source was the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia), especially Borneo. The Japanese chose the latter.

At the start of World War II, the very large island of Borneo was divided into smaller British protectorates (Sarawak, Brunei, and Labuan) on the northwest coast and an area, larger than the others, under Dutch colonial control. The Dutch territory included the oil fields at Tarakan and Balikpapan on the east side of the island. (Brunei also had an oil field.) There were some Dutch defensive minefields at Tarakan and Balikpapan, some of which the Japanese found and swept. The Japanese then laid defensive mines of their own. Once Borneo was within range, U.S. aircraft laid offensive minefields. With acoustic and magnetic influence mines, the U.S. minefields were more sophisticated and therefore more dangerous than the Japanese minefields.

On the British side, the Bay of Brunei served as a major Japanese fleet anchorage for much of the war, as the inlet was protected from submarines and initially stood out of range of Allied aircraft. Nearer the end of the war, the Bay of Brunei was

further spared from Allied attack because the area was too close to the oilfields.

By the middle of 1944, U.S. submarines had sunk so many Japanese tankers that getting the oil to refineries in Japan became impractical. However, Tarakan crude oil could be burned in ships without being refined, and the Japanese were doing so. But Tarakan crude was also highly volatile and became a major factor in the loss of the carriers *Taiho*, *Shokaku* and *Hiyo* during the battle of the Philippine Sea.

Borneo was in Southwest Pacific Area of Operations, General of the Army Douglas MacArthur's command. Recapturing Borneo was last on MacArthur's agenda after operations to recapture most of the islands on the Philippines. The delay in taking Borneo was unfortunate, as about 2,000 Dutch, British, and Australian prisoners of war were starved, executed, or worked to death there in the last months of the war. Only six survived to the end.

Australia provided the ground troops for the Borneo landings, dubbed Operation Oboe. Most of the amphibious ships and gunfire support ships were U.S. vessels and subordinate to the U.S. Seventh Fleet, commanded by Admiral Thomas Kinkaid (promoted to four-star in April 1945) and the Seventh Fleet Amphibious Force, commanded by Vice Admiral Daniel Barbey (promoted to three-star in December 1944). In the course of the war, Barbey would plan and execute 58 amphibious assaults, 30 of them in 1945, along New Guinea's north coast, the Philippine Islands, and finally Borneo. The first operation was against Tarakan, designated Oboe 1, and the Commander of the Tarakan Attack Group (TG 78.1) was Rear Admiral Forrest Betton Royal, with gunfire support provided by Rear Admiral Russell S. Berkey's cruiser-destroyer group (TG 74.3).

The first move against Japanese-occupied Borneo was the capture of Tawi Tawi Island at the northeastern tip of Borneo, at the entrance to the

Sulu Sea, on 2 April 1945. Prior to the Battle of Leyte Gulf, Tawi Tawi had been a major Japanese fleet anchorage because of its proximity to the Tarakan oil fields. However, the anchorage was relatively exposed, so U.S. submarines had a good view inside even from periscope, and the area was a favorite hunting ground for the U.S. subs. *Harder* (SS-257), under Commander Samuel D. Dealey, sank three Japanese destroyers and badly damaged another off Tawi Tawi with short-range, "down-the-throat" torpedo shots between 6 and 9 June 1944, for which he was awarded a Medal of Honor (see H-Gram 032/H-032-1.) As the Japanese had not built up any facilities on the island, the capture was relatively uneventful, but the area was heavily mined.

The first ship loss of the Borneo campaign occurred on 3 April 1943, when auxiliary motor minesweeper *YMS-71* struck a mine and sank after her bow was blown off. (*YMS-71* had been one of the many ships damaged when the ammunition ship *Mount Hood* [AE-11] spontaneously blew up at Seeadler Harbor on 10 November 1944 [see H-Gram 039/H-039-5]. *YMS-71* was repaired, but her luck ran out at Tawi Tawi.) Two crewmen of the 32 aboard were missing and presumed dead.

Tarakan: Operation Oboe 1, April-May 1945. By the time the Japanese captured Tarakan on 11 January 1942, the Dutch had already engaged in a widespread sabotage effort against the oil production infrastructure. In retaliation, the Japanese executed between 80 and 100 Dutch and European civilians, which, however, left the Japanese without the key expertise necessary to get the fields operational again. They subsequently embarked about 1,000 petroleum engineers, technicians, scientists, and industrial experts on the *Taiyo Maru* to help in the Dutch East Indies oilfields, but the ship was torpedoed and sunk by the U.S. submarine *Grenadier* (SS-210) on 8 May 1942, and over 800 passengers drowned, a huge blow to Japan's plan to fully exploit their newly conquered territories.

The hydrographic survey, minesweepers, and covering force arrived off Tarakan on 27 April 1945. The fast transport *Cofer* (APD-62, ex-DE-208), under Lieutenant Commander Herbert C. McClees, served as flagship and mothership for the minesweepers and underwater demolition teams. The covering force (TG 78.1) included the light cruisers *Phoenix* (CL-46), *Boise* (CL-47), and HMAS *Hobart*, along with five U.S. destroyers and one Australian destroyer.

On 30 April, the destroyers *Philip* (DD-498) and *Jenkins* (DD-447) were providing covering fire for a small Australian force setting up an artillery battery on a small offshore island. Despite operating in a previously swept channel, *Jenkins* struck a mine and suffered extensive hull damage. Her bow came to rest on the bottom. The crew contained the flooding, and she was floated off the next day, suffering only one killed and 14 wounded, but she had to withdraw from the operation for repairs.

On 1 May 1945, the Tarakan Attack Force (TG 78.1), with Rear Admiral Royal embarked in amphibious command ship *Rocky Mount* (AGC-3), arrived with a heavily reinforced Australian infantry brigade (about 18,000 personnel, counting support units including U.S. Navy beach party detachments). The brigade was embarked on two Australian personnel transports, one U.S. attack cargo ship, one U.S. landing ship dock (*Rushmore*, LSD-14), 13 LSTs, 12 LCIs, 4 LSMs and 12 LCTs, and was escorted by seven more U.S. destroyers, three Australian frigates, two U.S. destroyer escorts, and 21 PT-boats. The landings at Tarakan went very well under a very heavy naval bombardment, as the Japanese opted for their by-then standard tactic of defending inland and not at the beach. The primary objective of the landing at Tarakan was the airfield, so that it could be used to provide land-based air support to the subsequent Borneo landings. However, the airfield was so badly shot up that it was not operational until the war ended.

On 2 May 1945, a carefully concealed Japanese shore battery of two 75mm guns at Tarakan opened up and hit three of the minesweepers in quick succession. Auxiliary motor minesweeper *YMS-481* sank, with a loss of six of her crewmen, and *YMS-364* suffered significant damage. *Cofer* rescued 18 survivors and silenced the Japanese battery for the time being, but it continued to fire sporadically on U.S. ships until the destroyer escort *Douglas A. Munro* (DE-422) finally knocked it out for good on 23 May. (DE-422 was named for Signalman First Class Douglas A. Munro, USCG, the only Coast Guardsman to be awarded a Medal of Honor, posthumously, for his actions at Guadalcanal on 27 September 1942.)

Brunei Bay: Oboe 6, June 1945. The second major operation during the Borneo campaign was a series of landings by Australian forces at several locations in and near Brunei Bay. As Brunei had been a key Japanese fleet anchorage and training area prior to the Battle of Leyte Gulf, it was heavily mined. U.S. minesweepers had cleared parts of it as early as 22–29 April 1945. However, the landings were postponed to 10 June 1945. Once again, Rear Admiral Royal's amphibious task group (TG 78.1) provided the lift for about 29,000 Australian troops, mostly Australians. Rear Admiral Berkey's covering force (TG 74.3) provided gunfire support and was augmented by the addition of the light cruiser *Nashville* (CL-43), repaired after the severe *kamikaze* hit on 13 December 1944 that killed 133 of her crew (see H-Gram 040/H-040-2). General of the Army Douglas MacArthur was embarked in the light cruiser *Boise* to observe the landings.

The minesweeping force (Mine Division 34) arrived off Brunei on 7 June 1945, led by fast transport *Cofer* and including 12 YMS-type auxiliary motor minesweepers and five of the larger, AM-type ocean-going minesweepers. At about 1600 on 8 June 1945, minesweeper *Salute* (AM-294), commanded by Lieutenant Jesse R. Hodges, USNR, was clearing a field of moored

contact mines when she struck one. The damage was severe. Her keel was probably broken, and she suffered nine men killed, most of them in the engine room. Casualties could have been worse, but based on hard lessons learned earlier in the war, all personnel who were not absolutely essential below decks were required to be topside (a lesson that explains why the frigate *Samuel B. Roberts* [FFG-58] suffered no deaths when she hit an Iranian mine while attempting to back out of a minefield, and her skipper had ordered everyone out from below the main deck). Nevertheless, *Salute's* crew fought hard to save her, aided by two landing craft that came alongside. *Cofer* sent a medical officer and a repair party in four boats to try to save the ship. It was a valiant but futile effort, and by midnight the *Salute* had to be abandoned, as the flooding was out of control, and she broke in two. *Cofer* eventually brought aboard 59 survivors, of which 42 were wounded. *Salute* was awarded five Battle Stars for her World War II service.

The minesweeping operations in Brunei Bay continued after the loss of *Salute* and the landings on 10 June. By 12 June, the minesweeping force had cleared 102 mines. The next day, the force cleared 92 more. Including the earlier sweep operations, more than 500 mines were ultimately cleared from Brunei Bay, and *Salute* was the only Allied ship lost during the Brunei landings. Unfortunately, after the conclusion of the landings, Rear Admiral Royal suffered a heart attack and died aboard his flagship *Rocky Mount*.

Salute's wreck is in shallow water, with the two halves of the ship on top of each other. It is a popular dive site, and over the years divers have made unauthorized recoveries of artifacts, some of which NHHHC has obtained and conserved. In November 2016, U.S. Navy Divers of MDSU-1 and Brunei divers made a survey of the wreck from USNS *Salvor* (T-ARS-62).

Balikpapan: Oboe 2, June 1945: The landing at Balikpapan on the east coast of Borneo was the

last major amphibious operation of World War II and was the most dangerous for the minesweepers. Balikpapan was also the site of one of the few U.S. Navy victories (the Battle of Makassar Strait) in the bleak first months of the war, when a squadron of four U.S. destroyers, under the command of Commander Paul H. Talbot, made a surprise night attack on 12 Japanese transports and their escorts, sinking four transports and one patrol boat (see H-Gram 003).

At Balikpapan, the U.S. minesweepers had to deal with old Dutch minefields, Japanese defensive minefields, and a large number of sophisticated, U.S. air-dropped acoustic and magnetic influence mines. Some of these mines had ship counters set as high as seven, meaning many ships (and minesweepers) could pass over them not knowing they were there, until finally a ship would trigger the mine. The Japanese had found and set some of these mines off, but not all of them. Ninety-three such influence mines had been air-dropped in the area, and none of them were set to deactivate. In addition, shallow water extended as much as six miles from the beaches, which forced the supporting naval gunfire support ships to stand off further than usual, adding to the vulnerability of the minesweepers.

Cofer and the minesweepers arrived off Balikpapan on 16 June in a force that initially included 16 YMS-type auxiliary motor minesweepers. As the extent and difficulty of the mine-clearing operation became apparent, this force would grow to three AM-type ocean minesweepers and 38 YMS.

On 17 June, ships of the covering force arrived and commenced 16 days of heavy shelling, the longest pre-invasion bombardment of the war, also accompanied by numerous air strikes. As the war seemed to be drawing to a close, there was great concern for minimizing the Australian casualties for an operation that some believed was not absolutely necessary for the defeat of Japan, as the Japanese forces there had been cut

off for a long time, hence the protracted shelling and air strikes. Initial gunfire support was provided by the light cruisers *Denver* (CL-58) and *Montpelier* (CL-57) and four destroyers. By the date of the landings, 11 cruisers and 34 destroyers had fired 38,000 shells at the beach, and Allied aircraft had dropped over 3,000 tons of bombs. And just to make things more difficult for the minesweepers, three or four Allied planes inadvertently dropped bombs near minesweepers. As the minesweeping operations were progressing, underwater demolition teams destroyed over 300 yards of beach obstacles.

On 18 June, *YMS-50* triggered a magnetic mine near her bow. The Japanese took the opportunity presented by the crippled *YMS* and opened fire with 75mm shore batteries. *YMS-50's* keel was broken, and she could not be saved. *Cofer* rescued 23 survivors. After the vessel was abandoned, she somehow stayed afloat and began drifting toward the shore, so *Denver* (CL-58) sank her with gunfire. (On 14 February 1945, while covering operations in Mariveles Bay, on the Bataan Peninsula, Philippines, *Denver* had rescued Sailors blown off the destroyer *La Valette* [DD-448] when she was badly damaged by a mine and came close to sinking. Six of *La Valette's* Sailors were killed and 23 wounded.)

On 19 June, *YMS-339* and *YMS-336* came under concerted shore fire, with 30 shells near-missing in the space of five minutes. When sweeping with gear in the water, the minesweepers were limited to about four knots, and when they came under fire, they would drop their gear so they could maneuver at higher speed and avoid being hit. This was certainly understandable, and the result was delays in clearing mines and lost minesweeping gear.

On 20 June 1945, *YMS-368* was damaged by a mine. Then *YMS-335* was hit by shore battery fire and suffered four men killed but did not sink. Then, on 22 June, *YMS-10* was hit and damaged by shore fire. The following day, *YMS-364* was hit

by a shell that failed to detonate, and her crew manhandled it over the side. On 24 June, *YMS-339* was damaged by a near miss from an Allied bomb, and the next day had a near miss from a Japanese bomb during the only air raid the Japanese were able to mount, by several G4M Betty bombers. One Japanese torpedo passed directly under *Cofer* without exploding, but the plane that dropped it was shot down.

Twenty-six June 1945 was the worst day for the minesweepers at Balikpapan, as *YMS-39* and *YMS-365* both set off mines and sank. *YMS-39* triggered a U.S.-laid magnetic mine and partly disintegrated, capsized, and sank in less than one minute, suffering four killed. *YMS-365*, commanded by Lieutenant (j.g.) Frederick C. Huff, USNR, also triggered an influence mine and then hit a contact mine. Miraculously, no one aboard *YMS-365* was killed, although 18 were wounded. After giving the abandon ship order, Lieutenant (j.g.) Huff was the last to leave before *YMS-365* broke in two and began to sink—well, almost the last. After the crew of *YMS-365* had been brought aboard *YMS-364*, the mascot dog of *YMS-365*, Doc, was seen to swim out of the wreckage and perch on the capsized hull. The survivors beseeched the commanding officer of *YMS-364* to let them rescue the dog. After obtaining permission from the officer in tactical command, *YMS-364* heaved to and crewmen from *YMS-365* dove into the water and rescued Doc (who'd been aboard for over two years, and who lived happily ever after).

On 28 June 1945, *YMS-47* was damaged by a mine and *YMS-49* was hit by shore fire. By then, only 12 *YMSs* were still operational.

On 30 June 1945, the destroyer *Smith* (DD-378) was hit by shore battery fire. Three shells all passed through her No. 1 stack, though none of them exploded, and the damage was superficial. (During the Battle of Santa Cruz on 26 October 1942, a crippled Japanese torpedo-bomber had deliberately crashed into *Smith* just forward of the

bridge in a devastating hit that killed 57 of her crew. Her skipper doused the raging fire by steering *Smith* into the wake of the battleship *South Dakota* [BB-57], all the while continuing to put up anti-aircraft fire in defense of the carrier *Enterprise* [CV-6], for which the ship was awarded a Presidential Unit Citation and the skipper a Navy Cross [see H-Gram 011/H-011-3]. *Smith* was repaired and earned six Battle Stars for her WW II service.)

The Balikpapan Attack Force (TG 78.2) was commanded by Rear Admiral Albert G. Noble, embarked in amphibious command ship *Wasatch* (AGC-9). TG 78.2 consisted of numerous transports, amphibious ships, and other vessels, screened by 10 destroyers, five destroyer escorts and one Australian frigate. The covering force was commanded by Rear Admiral Ralph Riggs and, was divided into three task groups, and included the Australian heavy cruiser HMAS *Shropshire* and light cruiser HMAS *Hobart*, the Dutch light cruiser HMNLS *Tromp*, and the U.S. light cruisers *Montpelier* (CL-57), *Denver* (CL-58), *Columbia* (CL-56), *Cleveland* (CL-55), *Phoenix* (CL-46), and *Nashville* (CL-43), as well as 14 U.S. destroyers and one Australian destroyer. General MacArthur was embarked in *Cleveland*. In addition to aircraft flying from the Philippines, air support was provided by Task Group 78.4, which consisted of the escort carriers *Suwannee* (CVE-27), *Block Island* (CVE-106), and *Gilbert Islands* (CVE-107), a destroyer and five destroyer escorts.

On 1 July 1945, the first day of the invasion, about 10,000 men from the Australian 7th Division were put a shore—almost half of the 21,000-strong in the invasion force. Japanese resistance at the beach was fairly light, although fighting grew more intense inland. The Australians encountered about 100 tunnels and more than 8,000 land mines and booby traps that had to be cleared. Most opposition was overcome by the end of July, but mopping-up operations were still ongoing when the war ended.

The Borneo operations proved to be very controversial after the war, especially in Australia. About 625 Australians were killed in the three major operations, which many believed to have been a pointless loss of life. With the advantage of hindsight, knowing that the Japanese would surrender in August, this is arguably true. The Japanese on Borneo certainly could have been bypassed and left to “wither on the vine,” but unlike other islands in the Pacific, there was a significant civilian population on Borneo that would have suffered along with the Japanese. Had the Japanese not surrendered when they did, the argument about whether the operation was “worth it” might have been different. As to whether the sacrifice of the minesweepers was unnecessary, the mines would have had to be cleared sooner or later anyway and, frankly, it was the U.S. mines that did the most damage.

The mines at Balikpapan claimed one more minesweeper on 8 July 1945, when *YMS-84* triggered an influence mine. *YMS-367* attempted to take *YMS-84* in tow, but the ship sank. Although 10 men were wounded, all 34 crewmen survived and were taken aboard *Cofer* which, fortunately, did not have to conduct another burial at sea.

The landing at Balikpapan cost four YMSs sunk, seven battle-damaged, eight minesweeper men killed, and 43 wounded, plus another 10 “stress cases” attributable to the constant strain uniquely associated with operating in a minefield. The relatively low number of casualties was attributable to the standard operating procedure of having no personnel below decks during minesweeping operations, but the casualties were sacrifices nonetheless in the closing months of the war. For all the effort, only 18 U.S.-laid magnetic mines and nine Japanese moored contact mines were swept; but this was good enough, as the only ship losses were the minesweepers themselves. 21 of the YMSs that were at Balikpapan from the early days of the operation were awarded the Presidential Unit Citation.

24 July 1945: USS Underhill (DE-682)—the Last U.S. Destroyer Escort Lost

Commencing on 14 July 1945, the Japanese launched their final naval offensive of the war, as six boats of Submarine Division 15 departed Japan on the ninth (and last) *Kaiten* mission. Designated the “*Tamon*” Group, the six submarines, *I-47*, *I-53*, *I-58*, *I-363*, *I-366*, and *I-367*, each embarked six *Kaiten* manned suicide torpedoes. Message traffic on the sortie was intercepted by U.S. radio intelligence and reported by Fleet Radio Unit Melbourne on 14 July: “Four subs have been ordered to carry out reconnaissance and offensive operations against Allied shipping. The first, *I-53*, leaves Bungo Suido on 14th to patrol halfway between Okinawa and Leyte Gulf.” The intelligence report was accurate but for the number of boats: It was six submarines, not four.

I-58 departed four days after *I-53*, and the others followed in the next days. With the exception of the first *Kaiten* mission, which sank the U.S. oiler *Mississinewa* (AO-59) at Ulithi Atoll on 20 November 1944 (see H-Gram 039/H-039-4), the previous eight *Kaiten* missions had been completely fruitless for the loss of eight mother submarines.

I-53 was under the command of Lieutenant Commander Saichi Oba and was a relatively new (commissioned in February 1944) C-3-class long-range cruising submarine. (Her sister, *I-52*, was sunk in the Atlantic near the Cape Verdi Islands on a “*Yanagi Mission*” to Germany on 23 June 1944 [see H-Gram 033/H-033-1]. In late August 1944, *I-53* had been converted to carry four *Kaiten* manned suicide torpedoes. After two unsuccessful *Kaiten* missions, she was modified again in April 1945 to carry two more *Kaitens* (six total). Each *Kaiten* had a 3,400-pound warhead and one pilot to guide it on its one-way mission (once launched, a *Kaiten* could not be recovered). Departing Otsujima on 14 July 1945, *I-53* arrived in her assigned operating area—about 260 nautical miles east-northeast of the Cape Engano

lighthouse on Luzon, Philippines, on the U.S. convoy track from Okinawa to Leyte—on 22 July 1945. While operating submerged on 24 July, *I-53* sighted a southbound convoy.

Task Unit 99.1.18 was three days out from Okinawa and included six LSTs (*LST-647*, *-768*, *-769*, *-991*, and two others) transporting the battle-scarred U.S. Army 96th Infantry Division to Leyte following three months of heavy fighting on Okinawa. The convoy also included the stores ships *USS Adria* (AF-30, misidentified in many accounts as a “troopship” or “merchant ship”). The convoy was escorted by the destroyer escort *Underhill* (DE-682), patrol escort ship *PCE-872*, four patrol craft (*PC-1251*, *-803*, *-804*, and *-807*), and two submarine chasers (*SC-1306* and *SC-1309*.)

USS Underhill was a *Buckley*-class destroyer escort armed with three single 3-inch guns, anti-aircraft weapons of various calibers, three 21-inch torpedo tubes, one hedgehog launcher, two depth charge racks, and eight side-throwing K-gun depth charge projectors. *Underhill* was commissioned 15 November 1943 and had previously served on convoy escort duty in the Atlantic and Mediterranean until commencing Pacific service in March 1945. She was named for Ensign Samuel Jackson Underhill, a naval aviator lost during the Battle of the Coral Sea on 8 May 1942 and awarded a posthumous Navy Cross. An SBD Dauntless pilot in Scouting Five (VS-5), Underhill had participated in the sinking of the Japanese light carrier *Shoho* on 7 May 1942. He was one of eight VS-5 SBDs held back from the strike on the Japanese carrier *Shokaku* in order to provide ASW patrol in defense of the carrier *Yorktown* (CV-5) when the main Japanese air strike came in. The SBDs courageously engaged the Japanese bombers and fighters, but four of the SBDs, including Underhill’s, were shot down. *Underhill* was under the command of Lieutenant Commander Robert Maston Newcomb, USNR, who had been with the ship since her commissioning—first as executive officer and then

as commanding officer. *Underhill* was not supposed to be the escort for this convoy but had replaced another ship that had mechanical problems.

Earlier in the morning on 24 July 1945, one of the submarine chasers broke down and had to be taken in tow by *PCE-872*. About the same time, between 0900 and 1000, a Japanese aircraft (reportedly a Ki-46 Dinah twin-engine high-speed reconnaissance aircraft) observed the convoy but never got closer than ten miles. Some accounts state the Dinah was reporting the convoy's movements to *I-53*, but Japanese records show *I-53* did not receive any such support, which would have been unusual from an army aircraft anyway.

As the largest and most capable escort, *Underhill* was steaming ahead of the convoy. At about 1415 on 24 July, she sighted an object ahead, assessed it to be a floating mine, and gave orders for the convoy to execute a 45-degree turn to port to avoid the hazard. At the same time, *Underhill* engaged the object with 20mm and rifle fire. (Some accounts indicate that this mine, if that is what it was, had been laid by *I-53* to divert attention, but *I-53* did not carry mines, so this is unlikely.) Nevertheless, as *Underhill* was shooting at the object, her sonar made contact on a possible submarine. She directed *PC-804* to investigate the contact.

Exactly what happened next varies in different accounts. According to Japanese records, *I-53* launched *Kaiten* No. 1 at 1425. Other accounts claim a second (or even third) *Kaiten* might have been launched. At 1451, *PC-804* conducted a depth charge attack that brought the submarine to periscope depth. *Underhill* attempted to ram the boat, but it dove, and at 1453 *Underhill* dropped a 13 depth charge pattern, which produced oily, debris-filled water. Lieutenant Commander Newcomb believed they had sunk a small submarine. He had just announced the news to his crew when *PC-804* sighted another periscope. At some point, according to the

Japanese, *Kaiten* No. 1 passed under *PC-804* and then surfaced near *Underhill*, which went to flank speed and attempted to ram the *Kaiten*'s port side. According to U.S. accounts, lookouts sighted periscopes of two more submarines heading for *Underhill*, one on each side. One of these might have passed underneath *LST-991* without exploding. The one to starboard of *Underhill* was reportedly too close to bring guns to bear, and *Underhill* rammed the one to port.

Whether there was one *Kaiten* or two, what is certain is that at 1507 two massive explosions in quick succession obliterated everything forward of the stack on *Underhill*. The blasts were due to some combination of *Kaiten* warhead(s) and a magazine or boiler explosion. The bridge, mast, and forward guns were blown clear off the ship, and other parts of the ship flew 1,000 feet into the air. All hands in the forward half of the ship, including the commanding officer, were killed, as that part of the ship went down almost instantly. There were casualties in the aft half, too, but the cascade of water from the huge explosions doused the flames, although it also washed many men overboard. The aft half of the ship remained afloat and upright for several hours.

Ten of the ship's 14 officers were killed, leaving Lieutenant (j.g.) Elwood M. Rich as the senior survivor. *PC-803* brought a surgeon from *LST-749*, the flagship of LST Group 46, while other PCs searched for survivors in the water—a search that was repeatedly disrupted by continued periscope sightings, probably imaginary, as *I-53* made its getaway and subsequently reported sinking a large transport. *PC-803* and *-804* took 116 survivors off the aft end of the ship at 1800 before being ordered to sink it with 3-inch and 40mm gunfire. Several other survivors were fished out of the water. Numbers vary in different accounts, but 112 (or 113, or 119) of *Underhill*'s crew of 238 (or 236) died. According to Samuel Eliot Morison, there is no indication that a submarine alert was sent out to the fleet about the loss of *Underhill*,

which would factor into the fate of the heavy cruiser USS *Indianapolis* (CA-35) on 29 July 1945.

Lieutenant Commander Newcomb was awarded a posthumous Silver Star for his actions in the moments before the sinking. However, it wasn't until 55 years later that Secretary of the Navy Richard Danzig approved the award of a Navy Unit Commendation for *Underhill* in 1998, at the instigation of Missouri Senator Kit Bond, who was convinced that *Underhill's* valor and sacrifice in defense of the convoy had not been adequately recognized at the time. Also in 1998, a belated Bronze Star with Combat V was awarded to Chief Boatswain's Mate Stanley Dace (posthumously). Dace had been instrumental in the survival of many men in the aft end of the ship and was the last man off. (An episode of the television show *JAG* featured a fictitious ship, the USS *Stanley Dace*.) Pharmacist's Mate Third Class Joseph Manory, who had kept many of the survivors alive, was awarded a Navy Commendation Medal with Combat V in 1998.

Although it can be argued that ramming what was essentially a big torpedo was not a good idea, Lieutenant Commander Newcomb had little choice under the tactical situation but to do what he did in order to protect the convoy. But for the sacrifice of *Underhill*, many Army soldiers aboard the slow and vulnerable LSTs might have been lost to additional *Kaiten* attacks from *I-53*. Although the following Navy Unit Commendation citation from 1998 contains a number of historical inaccuracies, it does accurately reflect the valor of *Underhill* and her crew.

The Secretary of the Navy takes pleasure in presenting the Navy Unit Commendation to USS Underhill (DE 682) for exceptionally meritorious service as lead ship in a convoy from Okinawa to the Philippines on 24 July 1945. As the senior ship assigned to escort seven tank landing ships and a merchant vessel carrying the battle-weary soldiers of the 96th Division, Underhill performed her

duties in an outstanding and heroic manner. Detecting an unidentified object in waters ahead of the convoy, she redirected the convoy to avoid the peril. As she proceeded to attempt to sink the object without success, her sonar detected further contacts and together with assigned submarine chasers began prosecuting several contacts. Successfully identifying and depth-charging the first of the Kaitens, Japanese midget suicide submarines, she proceeded to ram the next two in order to protect the convoy. The subsequent ramming caused two violent explosions that severed the vessel in half, sinking her and killing 113 of her men. With the enemy threat eliminated, the convoy continued safely on to the Philippines as planned. By their truly distinctive performance, self-sacrifice, and loyal devotion to duty, the officers and enlisted personnel of the USS Underhill (DE 682) reflected great credit upon themselves and upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.

A report on the sinking of the *Underhill* filed by *LST-647* on 18 October 1945 led with the following paragraph: "Peace-loving people throughout the world today are grateful to those who have given their lives to further the cause of freedom and democracy. But to the men whose very lives have been saved by the heroic deeds of their fighting comrades, this gratitude assumes the strength of an unpayable personal debt. Everlasting are the vivid memories of thousands of us who have seen our comrades sacrifice their lives so that we may live. If only the entire world could feel the same personal indebtedness toward those heroes, it would be a great impetus toward attaining the free and peaceful world for which these men were fighting. The attainment of this goal can be our only reasonable tribute." Hard to argue with that.

However, *I-53* wasn't finished yet. On 27 July 1945, *I-53* sighted another 10-ship, southbound convoy. Lieutenant Commander Oba initially assessed that the convoy was too far away to attack, but one of the *Kaiten* pilots beseeched Oba for the opportunity to make a long-range *Kaiten* attack. *I-53* launched *Kaiten* No. 2. Although a large explosion was heard an hour later, it was most likely the *Kaiten* self-destructing, as no ships in the convoy were hit.

On 7 August 1945, one day after the Hiroshima atomic blast, *I-53* sighted another southbound, Okinawa-to-Leyte LST convoy and commenced a submerged night approach. However, at 0023, *I-53* was counter-detected by sonar on the destroyer escort *Earl V. Johnson* (DE-702), commanded by Lieutenant Commander Jules James Jordy, USNR (USNA '35). (Like *Underhill*, *Earl V. Johnson* had been named for a VS-5 SBD Dauntless dive-bomber pilot who earned a posthumous Navy Cross by engaging Japanese fighters escorting the strike on the carrier *Yorktown* during the Battle of the Coral Sea on 8 May 1942.) *Earl V. Johnson* dropped 14 depth charges on the contact and then lost sonar contact. Contact was regained, and *Earl V. Johnson* conducted a second depth charge attack at 0055 and then a third depth charge attack at 0212. Patrol escort ship *PCE-849* then fired a hedgehog salvo at the contact. *I-53* survived all the attacks but suffered significant damage, with several batteries, the rudder engine, and all the lights knocked out.

At 0230, *I-53* launched her No. 5 *Kaiten* from a depth of 130 feet, and 20 minutes later *I-53* heard a large explosion. Meanwhile, lookouts on *Earl V. Johnson* sighted one torpedo approaching at 0235 and two more at 0245, one of which passed directly under *Earl V. Johnson's* keel before exploding on the far side at 0246. At 0256, *PCE-849* made another hedgehog attack on *I-53*, without success, as *Earl V. Johnson* subsequently regained sonar contact on the elusive sub.

At 0300, *I-53* launched her No. 3 *Kaiten* and heard another heavy explosion at 0332. Her remaining two *Kaitens* had mechanical problems and could not be launched. At 0326, *Earl V. Johnson* conducted yet another depth charge attack on a sonar contact, which resulted in a large explosion and a white puff of smoke, and the force of the explosion caused slight damage to *Earl V. Johnson*. This explosion might have been *Kaiten* No. 3. At this point Lieutenant Commander Jordy reported sinking a submarine and re-joined the convoy.

On 12 August, *I-53* returned to Otsujima, Japan, and offloaded two *Kaitens*. This would suggest that only one *Kaiten* was involved in the attack on *Underhill* and that reports of two or more *Kaitens* involved are the result of jittery and traumatized lookouts and the "fog of war." *I-53* was surrendered at the end of the war and scuttled by gunfire from the submarine tender *Nereus* (AS-17) on 1 April 1946 as part of Operation Road's End.

Of the other *Kaiten* mother submarines in the Tamon Group, *I-47* ran into a typhoon that ripped off one of her *Kaitens*, and *I-47* returned to port. *I-366* attacked a U.S. convoy north of Palau, and two *Kaitens* were defective and failed to launch. Three others that were launched probably ran out of fuel before reaching the convoy, and no U.S. ships were hit. *I-366* was scuttled as part of Operation Road's End. *I-367* had no success at all and after the war was also scuttled in the same operation. *I-363* was the last to depart Japan, on 8 August, and was subsequently diverted to the Sea of Japan to guard against a Soviet attack, as the Soviets had entered the war in the Pacific on 9 August. *I-363* was then strafed by U.S. carrier aircraft, with two Japanese crewmembers killed. Although *I-363* survived the war, on 29 October 1945, while transiting from Kure to Sasebo, she struck a leftover mine and sank. Ten crewmen were rescued, but the commanding officer and 35 others were lost. *I-58* would meet destiny and the heavy cruiser *Indianapolis* in the middle of the Philippine Sea on 29 July 1945.

29 July 1945: USS Callaghan (DD-792)—the Last U.S. Destroyer Lost

There had been a lull in *kamikaze* attacks around Okinawa following mass *kamikaze* attack Kikusui No. 10 (see H-Gram 049) and the end of organized Japanese resistance on the island on 22 June 1945. With Okinawa a lost cause, the commander of the Japanese *kamikaze* operations, Vice Admiral Matome Ugaki, was saving most of his remaining aircraft and pilots for the final defense of the Japanese Home Islands.

The lull was broken on the night of 28-29 July 1945 when five volunteer petty officer pilots of the Special Attack Corps 3rd Ryuko (Flying Tiger) squadron took off under a bright, third-quarter moon on a one-way mission from Miyakojima, an airfield formerly used for training on an island midway between Okinawa and Formosa (the flights had originated on Formosa). The pilots were flying navy Yokosuka K5Y Willow two-seat biplane trainers, known to the Japanese as Akatombo "Red Dragonflies" (they were painted a bright orange-red) and to the Allies as "Willows." The Willows had a maximum speed of about 120 knots and cruised at about 90 knots. Each of the Willows launched that night carried one 220-pound bomb. (These were not "float planes" or "seaplanes" as described in some accounts.)

By 29 July 1945, the number of radar picket stations around Okinawa had been reduced to two because of a lack of Japanese air activity. At Radar Picket Station 9A were three destroyers and three LCSs. The *Fletcher*-class destroyer *Callaghan* (DD-792), under Commander Charles M. Bertholf (USNA '34), had the commander of Destroyer Division Five (DESDIV 55), Captain Albert. E. Jarrell (USNA '25), embarked and was due to be relieved on station in two hours by the destroyer *Laws* (DD-558) in order to commence a return to the U.S. West Coast for refit. Cruising in formation ahead and behind *Callaghan* were the *Fletcher*-class destroyers *Pritchett* (DD-561), under Commander Cecil Caulfield, and *Cassin Young* (DD-793), under Commander John W. Ailes III

(USNA '30). The three LCSs (*LCS-125*, *-129*, and *-130*) were veteran "pallbearers" on station to provide additional anti-aircraft support and, probably more importantly, firefighting and rescue services.

By coincidence, *Callaghan* and *Cassin Young* were both named for officers killed aboard the heavy cruiser *San Francisco* (CA-38) during the bloody nighttime melee off Guadalcanal on Friday, the 13th of November 1942. Rear Admiral Daniel Callaghan was in command of the U.S. cruiser-destroyer force that engaged two Japanese battleships and escorts, while Captain Cassin Young was in command of Rear Admiral Callaghan's flagship *San Francisco*. Following the battle, during which Callaghan's force accomplished its mission of preventing a battleship bombardment of the U.S. Marines on Guadalcanal, at an extremely high cost, Callaghan was awarded a posthumous Medal of Honor. Captain Young, who had been awarded a Medal of Honor in command of the repair ship *Vestal* (AR-4) during the attack on Pearl Harbor, was awarded a posthumous Navy Cross (See H-grams 001 and 012). *Pritchett* was named for a Navy officer in the Civil War who had fought off a superior Confederate force while in command of the gunboat *USS Tyler* during the Battle of Helena, Arkansas (an unsuccessful Confederate attempt to relieve the siege of Vicksburg) on 4 July 1863.

At 0028 on 29 July, a low, slow aircraft was detected on radar at 13 nautical miles, closing the force at 90 knots. The destroyers shortly thereafter opened fire with their main battery guns, but the radar-proximity-fused 5-inch shells proved ineffective against the mostly fabric and wood aircraft. An intense barrage of 40mm fire and an additional barrage of 20mm fire also failed to stop the biplane as it commenced a *kamikaze* run at about 2,000 yards. The Willow passed between *Pritchett* and *Callaghan* before crashing into the main deck of *Callaghan* on the starboard side at 0041. The flimsy plane itself didn't do that much

damage, but the bomb penetrated into the aft engine room and detonated four minutes later, decimating the damage-control teams that had responded to the fire started by the crashed aircraft.

The fire amidships raged out of control and spread to *Callaghan's* No. 3 5-inch gun upper-handling room, resulting in the successive detonations of 75 5-inch rounds. The explosions caused severe hull damage and flooding. Exploding ready-use 40mm and 20mm ammunition cut down even more of *Callaghan's* crew as they bravely but vainly tried to control the fire and flooding. Within minutes, the fantail was underwater and the ship was developing a 15-degree list.

Commander Berthold called for assistance from *LCS-130*, which came alongside at 0110 to help fight the fire and take aboard wounded, having picked up 27 men who had been blown overboard (31 total, eventually). The commanding officer of *LCS-130*, Lieutenant William H. File Jr., was awarded a Silver Star for his actions that night, including shooting down another *Willow* that attacked at 0145. *LCS-125* and *-129* also came alongside, first to help fight the fires and then to evacuate the crew.

Berthold ordered all but a few key men off the ship to continue to try to save her, but it was beyond hope. At 0153, he and Jarrell boarded the LCS. *Callaghan* went down by the stern at 0235 followed by a large underwater explosion. *Callaghan* suffered 47 dead and 73 wounded. She was the last U.S. ship sunk by a *kamikaze*, the last destroyer lost in the war, and the last of 14 U.S. destroyers lost near Okinawa.

Meanwhile, the fire on *Callaghan* served as a beacon for the other *Willows*, which circled for a while before attacking. These aircraft may also have been guided by a G4M Betty bomber, one of which was reported shot down by a U.S. night fighter. One *Willow* made a run on *Cassin Young*

and was shot down at 0047. Another attacked *Pritchett* at 0143. Despite being hit multiple times, the *Willow* came very close to *Pritchett* when it crashed six feet from her port side. (*Pritchett* had survived and been repaired after being hit on the fantail by a 500-pound bomb on 3 April 1945.) The *Willow's* bomb detonated close aboard, dishing in *Pritchett's* hull plating, also causing significant damage to the portside superstructure, damage control racks, and radio power leads. Two crewmen were killed. Despite the damage, *Pritchett* continued to stand by *Callaghan* for two hours while *Cassin Young* guarded against further attack. Following the sinking of *Callaghan*, the LCSs and *Pritchett* transferred the survivors to *Cassin Young*, which took them into the Hagushi Anchorage, while *Pritchett* went to Kerama Retto for repair. *Pritchett* was awarded a Navy Unit Commendation for her service at Okinawa.



Damage to Pritchett's stern on 29 July 1945. While rescuing survivors from Callaghan, which had just sunk as a result of being hit by a kamikaze, Pritchett was also attacked by a kamikaze. It was shot down but exploded six feet off Pritchett's port quarter, killing two men and seriously wounding another (NH 69894).

Commander Bertholf was awarded a Navy Cross for actions by *Callaghan* earlier in the Okinawa campaign:

The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Navy Cross to Commander Charles Marriner Bertholf, United States Navy, for extraordinary heroism and distinguished service in the line of his profession as

commanding officer of destroyer USS Callaghan (DD-792), from 25 March to 29 June 1945 in the vicinity of Okinawa. During this period of almost continuous action Commander Bertholf repeatedly placed his ship, with coolness and excellent judgment, and in spite of attacks from enemy planes, suicide boats, submarines and shore batteries, in a position where it could be employed most effectively against the enemy. His ship was individually responsible for the destruction of one midget submarine and six enemy aircraft, and assisted in the destruction of many others, while continuing to provide fire support to our forces ashore and protection to important units of the fleet which materially contributed to the success of our operations against the enemy. His determination, professional skill and heroic conduct were in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.

Captain Jarrell was also awarded a Navy Cross for actions of DESDIV 55 earlier in the Okinawa campaign.

The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Navy Cross to Captain Albert Edmonson Jarrell, United States Navy, for extraordinary heroism and distinguished service in the line of his profession as commander of a Destroyer Squadron and of the screen of detached groups which served as Gunfire and Covering Force, in action against enemy Japanese forces on Okinawa, Ryukyu Islands, from March to May 1945. Alert to constant danger of enemy aerial attack and aggressively maintaining the officers and men of his command at the highest peak of efficiency during prolonged and hazardous naval operations, Captain Jarrell skillfully directed the ships of his command in

bringing effective gunfire to bear upon hostile aggressors in this area. Instantly assuming command of rescue and salvage operations when two destroyers were severely damaged in the intense aerial attack of 6 April 1945, he contributed to the saving of many lives and to the safe return of both crippled vessels. His unfaltering decision, cool judgment, and resolute fortitude in the face of continual peril reflect the highest credit upon Captain Jarrell and the United States Naval Service.

Yet the Willows were not finished yet. On the night of 29-30 July, three more Willows launched from Miyakojima en route to Okinawa. One Willow made it into the Hagushi anchorage on the southwest side of Okinawa and almost hit the high-speed transport *Horace A. Bass* (APD-124), commanded by Lieutenant Commander Frederick W. Kuhn. *Horace A. Bass* had shot down a Japanese *kamikaze* off Okinawa during the mass attack on 6 April 1944. While escorting a 17-ship convoy from Guam to Okinawa on 25 April 1945, she sank a Japanese submarine, probably *RO-109*, despite the submarine attempting to jam *Horace A. Bass*'s sonar and using every evasive trick in the book. However, at about 0230 on 30 July 1945, luck ran out for one *Horace A. Bass* Sailor (I've tried to find his name, without luck). Although there was radar warning that a plane was inbound, no lookouts sighted the low, slow aircraft until it was too late, and none of the ships engaged the plane. The Willow struck a glancing blow on the top of the superstructure, wrecking boat davits and life rafts and carrying away signal flags and halyards before crashing on the far side. The Willow's 220-pound bomb also missed, detonating close aboard and spraying the ship with shrapnel, killing one and wounding 15. The damage was not enough to require immediate repair, so *Horace A. Bass* continued operations around Okinawa. After the war, *Horace A. Bass* embarked the "prize crew" that then took possession of the Japanese battleship *Nagato*,

and she would later play an important role in the Inchon landings during the Korean War in September 1950.

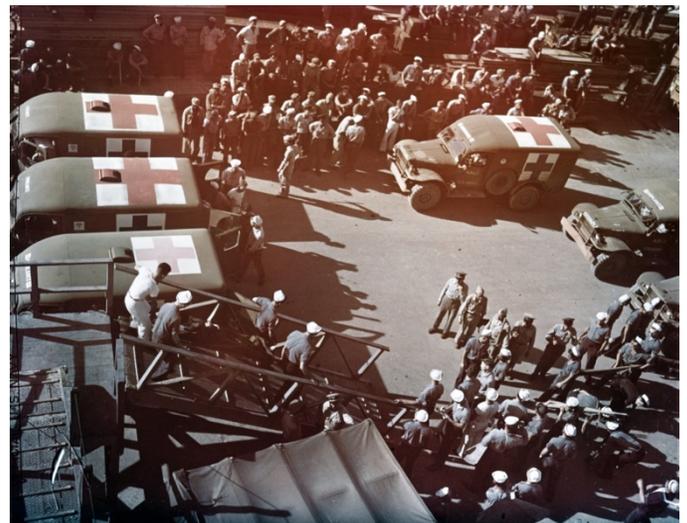
The destroyer *Cassin Young*'s luck ran out an hour after *Horace A. Bass* was damaged. *Cassin Young* had had two previous brushes: On 12 April 1945, she shot down five *kamikazes* before a sixth hit her foremast, causing the plane to explode in midair about 50 feet above the deck, showering the ship with fragments and flaming gasoline that wounded 50 crewmen, many seriously, but killed only one. The previous night, 28-29 July, *Cassin Young* had shot down a *Willow*, assisted in shooting down another, and picked up *Callaghan*'s survivors, all without being damaged. On the night of 29-30 July, *Cassin Young* had been assigned to screen the entrance to Nakagusuku Bay on the southeast side of Okinawa. At about 0325, two *Willows* approached. One was shot down (*Cassin Young*'s after action report indicated that, unlike more modern Japanese aircraft, the *Willow* didn't catch fire when hit and most shells passed clean through). The second *Willow* attacked *Cassin Young* from astern and flew alongside to starboard before hitting the aft boat davit and crashing into the ship, starting a serious fire. The bomb exploded in the fire-control room and knocked out radars, radios and communications with the forward fireroom. Despite extensive damage, the crew regained control by 0345 after jettisoning torpedoes and 40mm ammunition. Although the starboard shaft was locked up, the ship got underway to Kerama Retto for repair. Among the 22 dead was the prospective commanding officer, Lieutenant Commander Alfred Brunson Wallace (USNA '39), who had been aboard for three days. The commanding officer, Commander Ailes, was among the 42 wounded. *Cassin Young* was awarded a Navy Unit Commendation for Okinawa operations.

Commander Ailes was awarded a Silver Star as commanding officer of *Cassin Young* on 29 July 1945, and a Navy Cross as commanding officer

of *Cassin Young* for previous operations around Okinawa:

The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Navy Cross to Commander John William Ailes III, United States Navy, for extraordinary professionalism and distinguished service in the line of his profession as commanding officer of destroyer USS Cassin Young (DD-793), during air-surface action in the vicinity of Okinawa Jima, on 12 April 1945. While on radar picket station, Commander Ailes skillfully and courageously handled his ship during an attack by five enemy planes, destroying all enemy planes and keeping damage to his ship to a minimum. His ship was able to proceed to a friendly base, under its own power, after the action. His skill and courage were at all times in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.

Commander Ailes continued to serve and retired as a rear admiral in the mid-1960s.



Survivors of USS Indianapolis (CA-35), lost on 30 July 1945, being brought ashore from USS Tranquility (AH-14) at Guam, 8 August 1945. They are being placed in ambulances for immediate transfer to local hospitals (80-G-K-5988).

30 July 1945: USS Indianapolis (CA-35)–the Last U.S. Cruiser Lost

On 14 July 1945, Fleet Radio Unit Pacific (FRUPAC), decoded Japanese message traffic revealing the departure of submarine *I-53* that day. *I-53* would sink destroyer escort *Underhill* (DE-682) with a *Kaiten* manned suicide torpedo on 24 July. The “Ultra” message also revealed that another boat, *I-58*, would depart on 18 July for an operating area 500 nautical miles north of what was assessed to be Palau. According to the intercept, *I-47* and *I-367* would depart on 19 July to operate on the Okinawa-Marianas transit route. An additional intercept on 19 July confirmed *I-58*’s departure.

On 16 July, with her repairs complete following the *kamikaze* hit off Okinawa on 31 March 1945 (see H-Gram 044/H-044-2), the heavy cruiser *Indianapolis* departed Mare Island, California, on a mission with top secret cargo, with orders to proceed to Tinian via Pearl Harbor at fastest possible speed. Neither the commanding officer nor any of the crew knew what the cargo was; components of the first atomic bomb, which would be dropped on Hiroshima on 6 August 1945 (I will cover the U.S. Navy’s role in the atomic bomb in more detail in the next H-gram). By this time of the war, *Indianapolis* had earned ten Battle Stars and, for much of the war, had served as the flagship for Admiral Raymond Spruance for the U.S. Navy’s advance across the central Pacific–Gilberts, Marshalls, Marianas, Western Carolines, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa—with credit for downing nine Japanese aircraft, destroying the supply ship *Akagane Maru* in the Aleutians, and for numerous shore bombardments in support of U.S. Marines and Army fighting ashore.

The commanding officer of *Indianapolis*, Captain Charles Butler McVay III (USNA ’20), was a highly regarded, fast-track officer, and son of a four-star admiral, Charles B. McKay, Jr. (USNA ’90), who had been commander of the Asiatic Fleet in the early 1930s. Although many of *Indianapolis*’ crewmen were battle-hardened veterans, 250 of

her crew were going to sea for the first time, and the special mission prevented *Indianapolis* from conducting a planned two-month training period.

As predicted by U.S. Pacific Fleet Intelligence, Japanese submarine *I-58*, commanded by Lieutenant Commander Mochitsura Hashimoto, sortied from Japan on 18 July as part of the *Tamon Kaiten* group. *I-58* was a relatively new submarine, commissioned on 7 September 1944, with the capability to carry and launch a seaplane, although she never did. She was originally modified to carry four *Kaiten* manned suicide torpedoes, but in May 1945 had been further modified to carry six. The submarine had conducted three *Kaiten* missions with no luck, although Japanese reports claimed she sank an escort carrier and a large oiler. She had served as a radio relay for a daring Japanese suicide air mission to the U.S. Navy fleet anchorage at Ulithi Atoll on 10 March 1945 (Operation *Tan 2*), when only six of 24 P1Y Frances bombers reached Ulithi and one crashed into the carrier *Randolph* (CV 15), at anchor, killing 25 U.S. sailors and wounding 106 more.

Hashimoto, a 1931 graduate of the Japanese naval academy at Etajima, had been in command of *I-58* since her commissioning. During the attack on Pearl Harbor, he was serving on *I-24*, which had launched one of the five midget submarines intended to penetrate Pearl Harbor. (The midget launched by *I-24* missed the harbor and ran aground. Its pilot, Ensign Kazuo Sakamaki, was the only one of 10 midget submarine crewmen to survive and became the first Japanese prisoner of war of the United States.) Despite his frustration with lack of success, Hashimoto identified a possible target as a hospital ship (correctly) on 25 April 1945 and let it pass, only to be depth-charged by three U.S. destroyers the next day.

On 19 July, *Indianapolis* arrived at Pearl Harbor in a record time of 74.5 hours on her unescorted transit. She was given first-priority entry and exit for a short stop to refuel and drop off passengers,

before resuming her high-speed unescorted transit to Tinian. (The previous record of 75.4 hours had been set by light cruiser *Omaha* [CL-4] in 1932.)

On 22 July, FRUPAC intercepted another Japanese message adding two more submarines (*I-363*, *I-366*) to the *Tamon* Group and reiterating *I-58*'s vague operating area.

On the morning of 26 July, *Indianapolis* arrived at Tinian and offloaded her top secret cargo. She then steamed to Guam, arriving on the morning of 27 July.

On 27 July, intercepted Japanese message traffic was assessed to indicate that *I-58* had been sunk. This may have been *RO-47*, but certainly was not *I-58*, because *I-58* arrived in a position on the Guam-Leyte transit route (Route Peddie) on 27 July, about 250 nautical miles south of the position identified in the previous Ultra intercept—unbeknownst to U.S. naval intelligence.

During the brief stop in Guam on 27 July, Captain McVay received routing instructions and an intelligence brief. The brief did not include Ultra intelligence, as distribution was tightly held (it also wouldn't have been very useful, as the closest submarine to his intended track—*I-58*, 200–300 nautical miles off track—had been incorrectly assessed as sunk). Nor was McVay informed of the sinking of *Underhill* on 24 July, but that was about 600 nautical miles off his intended track. The intelligence report did include three possible submarine sightings (one on 22 July and two on 25 July) along his track (However, none of these was valid as *I-58* wasn't there yet and the reports were not high confidence).

Nevertheless, despite the appearance of a low submarine threat, McVay requested an escort as *Indianapolis* had no sonar or other ASW capability other than radar, eyeballs, and guns. He was informed that no escort ships were available. Having just made an unescorted transit from the

West Coast (and having made previous unescorted transits between Guam and Okinawa), this was not considered to be a show stopper. McVay was also trying to balance two opposite requirements: a desire to minimize further unnecessary wear on his engines after the high speed transit, and a desire to get to Leyte as soon as possible for anti-aircraft training that his crew desperately needed before going into battle for the invasion of Japan. *Indianapolis* departed Guam on the morning of 28 July, bound for Leyte, Philippines.

At about 1400 on 28 July 1945, *I-58* sighted a "large tanker escorted by a destroyer," about 300 nautical miles north of Palau. The tanker was actually the armed cargo ship *SS Wild Hunter*, commanded by Lieutenant Bruce Maxwell, USNR, and the destroyer was destroyer escort *Albert T Harris* (DE-447), under the command of Lieutenant Commander Sidney King. At 1629, lookouts on *Wild Hunter* sighted a periscope at 3,000 yards on the port beam, which quickly submerged. Eleven minutes later, a periscope appeared directly astern. *Wild Hunter*'s gunners hit it with their first shot from a 3-inch gun. The cargo ship also transmitted two messages reporting the action.

Albert T. Harris had been about 14 miles from *Wild Hunter* when the action commenced. The destroyer escort subsequently gained sonar contact at about 1810, and conducted four hedgehog attacks at 1842, 1852, 1930, and 1947. *Albert T. Harris*' contact and attack report was transmitted and rebroadcast by the Philippine Sea Frontier to all ships. *Albert T. Harris* regained contact later in the evening and conducted another hedgehog attack at 2026, and again at 2150, ultimately 10 total. (It would turn out that the gyro for the hedgehog launcher was off and every attack was 10 degrees off target.) Early the next morning, destroyer-transport *Greene* (APD-36) arrived to join in the search, making at least two depth charge attacks with no result.

Upon sighting and closing on *Wild Hunter*, *I-58* had launched *Kaiten* No. 2, followed about 12 minutes later by *Kaiten* No. 1. *I-58* recorded two explosions, but due to rain squalls could not assess the results of the attack. Regardless, both *Kaiten* were lost without hitting anything and *I-58* got away.

The submarine received orders addressed to all the *Tamon* boats to head toward the Okinawa-Leyte transit route, but, as Lieutenant Commander Hashimoto was already well south in the Philippine Sea, he improvised and headed first for the intersection of the Guam-Leyte route (Peddie Route) and the Palau-Okinawa route.

Multiple reports of the submarine actions from *Albert T. Harris* reached the combat information center and bridge watch of *Indianapolis*, although they apparently did not reach Captain McVay. False submarine reports were frequent, and no shore command provided any assessment of the validity of *Albert T. Harris*' reports. Nevertheless, submarines were considered an ever-present danger by lookouts and CIC watch personnel.

After sunset on 29 July, *Indianapolis* ceased zig-zagging by direction of McVay, who had discretion to do so under directives in effect at the time, which required zig-zagging during good visibility, including bright moonlight, neither of which was the case after dark on 29 July. By doing so, he could steam a slower speed, sparing his engines, and still reach Leyte at the desired time for optimum anti-aircraft training in the early morning. This was a calculated decision to both maximize training and avoid excessive wear on his engines. It was not a case of complacency. Nor is there any evidence the lookouts, bridge, and CIC watchstanders were less attentive than they should have been. As the ship was in the heat of the tropics, she was sailing in Condition III (wartime steaming, when danger of surprise air or submarine attack existed). This was typical in order to give the crew some bare minimum of

comfort, as higher conditions of readiness could not be sustained for too long.

At 2226 on 29 July (local time—some other accounts use other times), Hashimoto intended to surface, but it was so dark and visibility so poor, he decided against it. At 2335, he tried again and brought *I-58* to the surface as the moon started intermittently breaking through the clouds. Almost immediately, a lookout sighted a ship at 11,000 yards (6.3 nautical miles). At first, Hashimoto thought it was a surfaced submarine and he immediately took *I-58* down. Through his night scope, Hashimoto could make out a ship approaching, which he then estimated to be an *Idaho*-class battleship travelling at 12 knots (actually 17 knots). The geometry was a submarine skipper's dream: It didn't matter whether *Indianapolis* zigged or zagged or stayed on steady course—he couldn't miss. Hashimoto alerted the pilot of *Kaiten* No. 6 to man his torpedo, with No. 5 in reserve; however, he was convinced the *Kaiten* would not be able to find the target as dark as it was. Moreover, he didn't need to: The shot would be well within parameters for conventional torpedoes. When Hashimoto reached 4,400 yards, he realized that when he reached optimum firing position he would be too close for the torpedoes to arm, so he did a curving maneuver to solve that problem.

At 2356, at a range of 1,640 yards, Hashimoto fired all six of his bow Type 95 torpedoes at two-second intervals and set for 13 feet (4 meters). Hashimoto reported seeing three equally spaced hits: one near the bow, one just forward of the No. 1 8-inch turret, and third abreast the No. 2 turret near the bridge.

Given the infrequent glimpses of the moon and distances involved, the likelihood of a lookout seeing a periscope or torpedo wakes in time was very small, and no one did. There was no warning before the first torpedo hit *Indianapolis* at 0003 on 31 July near the bow just forward of the No. 1 turret. This hit caused a very large secondary

explosion. A second torpedo hit between the No. 2 turret and the bridge superstructure with devastating result, knocking out all communications in the forward part of the ship as well as the fire mains. The two engines in the forward engine room were knocked out, and one of two in the aft engine room was badly damaged and shut down. With no communications, the engine room crew did what they were trained to do and kept the remaining engine running at speed, causing *Indianapolis* to take in massive amounts of water through the gaping holes forward. Essentially, the cruiser drove herself under.

Since *Indianapolis* had survived severe damage at Okinawa, Captain McVay initially thought the ship might be saved, but within a few minutes it was clear that was not possible as the ship was going down by the bow and taking on a rapid list to starboard. McVay gave the order to abandon ship. He personally tried to ensure a distress message went out, but was washed over the side; he was one of the very last off the ship alive. Both main radio and radio No. 2 sent messages, but none actually went out due to loss of power and damage, although radiomen died trying. Within 12 minutes, *Indianapolis* rolled over and went down by the bow.

After observing the hits and *Indianapolis* still moving forward, Hashimoto decided that a second attack would be necessary, so he took *I-58* down to 100 feet to re-load torpedoes. He could hear a number of explosions, which were taking place on *Indianapolis* after she went under. When the explosions ceased, Hashimoto surfaced and went through the area of the sinking at 0100, but later reported seeing no sign of survivors. He then proceeded north and, at 0145, issued a radio report to higher headquarters reporting that he had sunk an *Idaho*-class battleship. The report was intercepted by U.S. Navy radio intelligence; however, it could only be partially decrypted. The class of ship sunk and the grid coordinates of the sinking were not recovered and remained

unknown to anyone in the United States until after the war. So, all Pacific Fleet Intelligence had was a report from *I-58* (previously thought to be sunk) reporting sinking an unknown ship in an unknown location with three torpedoes just after midnight on 29–30 July (the report was one of about 500 messages processed that day).

Of the 1,195 men (mostly Navy personnel, but also a Marine Detachment) aboard *Indianapolis*, somewhere between 200 and 300 went down with the ship. They might be counted among the lucky ones. Since the ship was still making way as it was being abandoned, survivors found themselves scattered across a considerable distance in about 10 different groups. A few of the groups had rafts, some had floater nets, some just had life jackets, and some had nothing. The largest group was about 400 men who only had life jackets. Most of the wounded and those without life jackets or belts succumbed the first night, probably around 100. Those that survived endured up to four and a half days of scorching sun during the day, hypothermia at night, vomiting from ingesting oil, unquenchable thirst, and shark attack. Those who succumbed to drinking seawater (which has the same effect as drinking poison) suffered hallucinations and paranoia before they died. In some cases this caused additional deaths among those in the water, as delusional men fought with each other believing they'd been infiltrated by Japanese. Only 316 men would ultimately survive the horrific ordeal; 808 enlisted men and 67 officers were lost (four more enlisted men would die shortly after being rescued).

The tragedy was compounded by the fact that no one except the Japanese knew *Indianapolis* had gone down, as no distress messages were received (reports surfaced years later claiming that distress messages had been received, but this is almost certainly not true, although not for lack of trying by some brave radiomen). It was also not due to *Indianapolis* being on a top secret mission in radio silence—that mission was over.

Rather, it was due to communications foul-ups and bad assumptions based on faulty standard operating procedures, and a degree of complacency ashore.

Indianapolis was due to arrive at Leyte on 31 July. When she did not arrive, port authorities assumed she had been diverted elsewhere, which was a common occurrence, and standard procedure was not to report the arrival and departure of warships (the Japanese had radio intelligence, too). So, authorities in Guam did not know that *Indianapolis* had not arrived at Leyte. The commander of U.S. Navy forces at Leyte (TG 95.7), Rear Admiral Lynde D. McCormick, did not know *Indianapolis* was on the way because the message to his flagship (ironically, the battleship *Idaho*) had been garbled in transmission and his communications team had not requested a re-transmission.

At around 1900 on 31 July, a U.S. Army Air Forces C-54E cargo plane passed overhead and reported seeing a “naval action” below (flares from the survivors). This report was dismissed and not passed on under the assumption that if there was a naval action going on, then the Navy already knew about it.

Not until the remaining survivors had been in the water for 84 hours (3.5 days), were they first spotted—by accident. A Lockheed PV-1 Ventura on ASW patrol from Palau passed overhead around noon on 2 August. The pilot, Lieutenant (j.g.) Wilber “Chuck” Gwinn, was actually back aft trying to fix his cantankerous trailing wire antenna when he looked down and saw a long oil slick. Descending in hopes of catching a damaged Japanese submarine on the surface, he then sighted about 30 survivors of unknown origin in the water that he suspected to be American (it was obvious they wanted to be rescued). He dropped life rafts and made a radio report. From then, things started to happen quickly. A second PV-1, flown by the squadron commander, Lieutenant Commander George Atteberry, and a

PBY Catalina flying boat, flown by Lieutenant Robert Adrian Marks, launched from Palau. As they were en route, Gwinn sighted and reported another 150 survivors. Additional aircraft were launched and ships diverted to the area at best speed.

Atteberry relieved Gwinn on station and guided Marks’ PBY to the area. Upon seeing bodies being attacked by sharks and knowing that no ship could get there before midnight, Marks took a vote from his crew and opted to make a dangerous open-ocean landing. It was successful, but damaged the plane so that it was no longer flyable (which was why it was against the rules to make this type of landing). Marks went after survivors who were floating alone rather than those on rafts and, over the course of several hours, picked up 56 survivors, lashing many of them on top of the wing overnight.

The first ship to near the area was the destroyer escort *Cecil J. Doyle* (DE-368), commanded by Lieutenant Commander Graham Claytor, Jr. (who would be Secretary of the Navy during the administration of President Jimmy Carter). Claytor could see planes dropping flares when he was still about two hours away, and he ordered his searchlight turned on and pointed straight up, which served as a beacon of hope and enabled many survivors to endure one more night. *Cecil J. Doyle* took aboard the survivors from Lieutenant Marks’ PBY and Marks’ crew before scuttling the damaged PBY with 40-mm fire. The ship then picked up 39 more survivors. *Cecil J. Doyle* sent the first message that identified the men as survivors of *Indianapolis*, sunk the night of 29–30 July. This message sent shock waves through the U.S. Navy all the way to Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King, Chief of Naval Operations, who unsurprisingly was most unhappy and immediately wanted to know how this could have happened.

During the next hours of 3 August, other ships converged on the area. Fast

transport *Bassett* (APD-73) picked up 151 survivors; destroyer *Ralph Talbot* (DD-390) picked up 24; fast transport *Register* (APD-92) picked up 12; and destroyer escort *Dufilho* (DE-423) found one survivor. Fast transport *Ringness* (APD-100) picked up 39, including the last group to be rescued on the evening of 3 August. The second-to-last group included Captain McVay and nine other men on a raft, rescued by *Ringness* at about 1030 on 3 August. Because the survivor groups were strung out so far, as far as McVay knew, the men on his raft were the only survivors. It should also be noted that McVay remained “in command” of the raft throughout, maintaining discipline and taking actions that enabled the survival of all 10 aboard. It was a demonstration of true leadership under the most incredibly trying conditions.

In addition to her own crew, *Indianapolis* was carrying a number of personnel in transit, so sorting out who was on the ship, who survived, and who didn't was very challenging. For many years, there was a discrepancy between the official Navy count of 316 survivors of 1,196 personnel on the ship and the *Indianapolis* survivors association, which maintained that 317 had survived. This discrepancy was not solved until 2018, when NHHC's Dr. Richard Hulver and author/filmmaker Sara Vladic collaborated and discovered that Radioman Second Class Clarence Donner had checked in aboard *Indianapolis* at Mare Island, but was only aboard for a few minutes before receiving orders to report to an officer's school. His departure was not logged. His family received notification that Donner was missing in action, and his mother sent a letter explaining that he was still very much alive. This got buried in the record for years. As a result, the Navy's official number of personnel aboard was off by one: 1,195 aboard with 316 survivors are the correct numbers.

The news for most of the families of men on the *Indianapolis* was especially cruel, as word came by telegram only a day or so before the

announcement of the Japanese surrender. The Navy waited to announce the loss of the ship until after families had been notified and, as a result, this announcement came the same day as the announcement that Japan had surrendered. The magnitude and nature of the loss resulted in a firestorm of criticism of the Navy from the public, press, politicians, the families of those lost at sea, and from the survivors, which would reverberate for years.

Lieutenant Commander Hashimoto's entire family was wiped out by the atomic blast at Hiroshima.

I will cover the *Indianapolis* court of inquiry and the court-martial of Captain McVay in a future H-gram.

6 August 1945: USS Bullhead (SS-332)—the U.S. Last Submarine Lost

At 0815 on 6 August, the U.S. B-29 bomber “Enola Gay” dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan. The same day, submarine *Bullhead* would become the last of 52 U.S. submarines lost during World War II, and the last of 33 known to be sunk as a direct result of Japanese action (eight others were lost on patrol in the Pacific to unknown causes, most probably due to Japanese mines). *Bullhead* was also the last U.S. Navy vessel lost before the end of the war. The submarine was lost with all hands. Her crew of 84 would be among the 375 officers and 3,131 enlisted men lost on the 52 submarines, out of 16,000 men who served in the U.S. submarine force during the war.

Between mid-1943 (with better torpedoes and intelligence sources) and late 1944, the U.S. submarine force essentially swept the sea of Japanese transports, cargo ships, and tankers. By early 1945, pickings had become slim. As a result, U.S. submarines engaged in increasingly daring and hazardous operations, often with diminishing returns for the danger involved. Eight U.S. submarines were lost in 1945, six of them certainly

due to direct Japanese action, and all of them with all hands—a total of 687 crewmen lost in action. Some of these submarines were relatively new, others had survived 12 or more war patrols. These eight submarines were *Swordfish* (SS-193), *Barbel* (SS-316), *Kete* (SS-369), *Trigger* (SS-237), *Snook* (SS-279), *Lagarto* (SS-371), *Bonefish* (SS-223), and *Bullhead*.

Swordfish, commanded by Commander Keats Edmond “Monty” Montross (USNA’37), was last heard from on 3 January 1945 off Kyushu, Japan, on her 13th war patrol. On 4 January, Japanese escort ship *Kaibokan CD-4* counter-attacked a submarine that had just torpedoed the small cargo ship *Shoto Maru*, which subsequently sank. It is likely that this submarine was *Swordfish*, lost with all 89 hands. Commander Montross had been awarded a Silver Star in command of the boat on her 12th war patrol. Also lost on *Swordfish* was her executive officer, Lieutenant Commander John Briscoe Pye (USNA ’39), youngest son of Vice Admiral William S. Pye, who had been acting Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet, after the relief of Admiral Husband Kimmel following the attack on Pearl Harbor. Pye’s oldest son, Lieutenant William Satterlee Pye (USNA’28) was flying with VF-3 off USS *Saratoga* (CV-3) when he was killed in a mid-air collision in 1938. Neither of the bodies of of Vice Admiral Pye’s sons was ever recovered.

Barbel, commanded by Lieutenant Commander Conde Leroy “Count” Raguet (USNA ’38), was on her fourth war patrol, when she was caught on the surface by two Japanese aircraft off Palawan Island, Philippines, on 4 February 1945. One bomb was a direct hit on *Barbel* near the bridge and she went down with all 81 hands. Raguet had been awarded a Bronze Star for previous submarine service.

Kete, commanded by Lieutenant Commander Edward “Gus” Ackerman (USNA ’39), on her second war patrol, was last heard from on 20 March 1945 in the vicinity of the Ryukyu Islands. It

is possible *Kete* was sunk by a mine (the area was heavily mined) or by Japanese submarine *RO-41*, which was in the area at the time (and subsequently sunk on 23 March), but *RO-41* made no report of an engagement, which is unlikely had one occurred. *Kete* also had suffered jammed bow planes on her previous patrol, necessitating repairs in Saipan, so an operational casualty cannot be ruled out. The submarine was lost with all 82 hands. Ackerman was awarded a posthumous Silver Star for this patrol, and previously had been awarded two Silver Stars aboard *Grayback* (SS-208), which had been lost with all hands on her 27 February 1944 during her 10th war patrol. Her wreck was located in November 2019.

Trigger, commanded by Commander David Rickart “Dave” Connole (USNA ’36), was on her 12th war patrol (the first with Connole as her skipper), having previously been awarded a Presidential Unit Citation for her fifth, sixth, and seventh war patrols, as well as a Navy Unit Commendation. On 27 March 1945, *Trigger* may have torpedoed and sunk the Japanese repair ship *Odate* in the East China Sea, although Japanese records indicate that *Odate* sank after her own depth charges blew up while being strafed by F6F Hellcat fighters. On 27 March, the Japanese launched an extensive air (some aircraft fitted with magnetic anomaly detection—MAD) and surface ASW sweep south of Kyushu in anticipation of the sortie of the super-battleship *Yamato*. On 28 March, a Japanese aircraft sighted a submarine and guided escort ships *Mikura*, *CD-33*, and *CD-59* onto the datum for an intensive two-hour-long depth-charge barrage (heard by other U.S. submarines in adjacent areas), that resulted in a large oil slick. This was probably *Trigger*, lost with all 89 hands. Later in the day, *Mikura* was sunk by *Threadfin* (SS-410) with the loss of all 216 hands, and *CD-33* was sunk with all 171 hands by U.S. carrier aircraft while attempting to rescue survivors, probably from *Mikura*.

Trigger was awarded 11 Battle Stars. Commander Connole had been awarded two Silver Stars and a Bronze Star for previous submarine service, and the frigate USS *Connole* (FF-1056), was named in his honor, serving from 1969 to 1992. Then-Lieutenant Edward L. "Ned" Beach, Jr., noted submariner and prolific author, served on *Trigger* for her first ten war patrols. He would subsequently serve with Commander George Street aboard *Tirante* (SS-420), when Street was awarded a Medal of Honor (see H-Gram 049), and as skipper of *Triton* (SSN-586) on her around-the-world submerged transit in 1960. Beach's 1952 book *Submarine!* memorialized *Trigger*.

Snook (SS-279), commanded by Commander John Franklin Walling (USNA '35), departed Guam on 25 March 1945 on her ninth war patrol as part of a wolfpack with *Bang* (SS-385) and *Burrfish* (SS-312). However, *Snook* had to return to Guam for emergency repair, departing again on 28 March with orders to join with *Tigrone* (SS-419) in the Luzon Strait/East China Sea area. *Snook* was last heard from on 8 April. Japanese records indicate that on 14 April a MAD-equipped Aichi E13A1 Jake single-engine float plane and a Kyushu Q1W1 Lorna (twin-engine ASW patrol craft) detected a submarine in the East China Sea and attacked it with depth charges. Escort ships *Kaibokan*, *Okinawa*, *CD-8*, and *CD-32* then proceeded to the datum for a concentrated depth-charge attack. *Okinawa* pursued a widening oil slick until contact was lost. This was possibly *Snook*, lost with all 84 hands. *Snook* was awarded seven Battle Stars for sinking 22 ships and damaging another 10. Commander Walling had previously been awarded a Silver Star as diving officer on *Flying Fish* (SS-229) for a successful attack on a *Kongo*-class battleship on 28 August 1942 (actually, it was the super-battleship *Yamato* and the torpedoes detonated prematurely, but it was still a bold attack).

Lagarto (SS-371), commanded by Commander Frank De Vere "Sparrow" Latta (USNA '32), was lost on her second war patrol on 3 May 1945

while operating in the Gulf of Siam in conjunction with *Baya* (SS-318), commanded by Lieutenant Commander Benjamin C. Jarvis (USNA '39). Latta was a highly experienced submarine skipper: He had been awarded a Silver Star as executive officer on *Narwhal's* (SS-168) third war patrol, a Navy Cross as commanding officer of *Narwhal's* fourth through ninth war patrols (inclusive), and a Legion of Merit as commanding officer of *Lagarto* and commander of a four-submarine wolfpack patrol. During this patrol, *Lagarto* sank a Japanese submarine (probably *I-371*).

On the night of 2-3 May, *Lagarto* and *Baya* coordinated an attack on a Japanese convoy transiting from Singapore to Ha-Tien, Japanese-occupied French Indochina (now Vietnam), consisting of the auxiliary transport *Tottori Maru*, a medium-sized vessel, and two radar-equipped escorts, including the minelayer *Hatsutaka*, which proved to be an unusually aggressive and effective escort. *Baya* attacked first at 2305 on 2 May. At 2307, *Hatsutaka* counter-detected *Baya* on the surface and opened fire with a withering barrage and numerous near misses. *Baya* fired three torpedoes at *Hatsutaka*, but the minelayer adroitly combed their wakes and all missed. At 2320, *Hatsutaka* caught *Baya* in her searchlight, forcing the submarine under. *Baya* fired another torpedo at *Hatsutaka* that also missed. At 2325, *Baya* surfaced again, only to be forced back under by a barrage of gunfire. At 2329, *Hatsutaka* dropped six depth charges on *Baya* that rattled her severely, and *Baya* broke off the attack, her skipper later reporting that, "It was nothing short of a miracle" she hadn't been hit. Nevertheless, *Baya* attacked again before dawn and was again driven off. Commander Jarvis would subsequently be awarded a Navy Cross for this engagement to go with two previous Silver Stars.

The two submarines continued to track the convoy and, before dawn on 3 May, *Baya* and *Lagarto* rendezvoused and the two skippers coordinated an attack plan. This time, *Baya* would issue contact reports while *Lagarto* would lay in

wait on the convoy's expected track and attack at 1400. *Baya* would proceed ahead and attack at 2000. That was the last heard from *Lagarto*, lost with all 88 hands. In 2005, a civilian dive team found a sunken submarine in the Gulf of Siam and, in 2006, Navy divers inspected the wreck site and determined that a large 18-by-9-foot rupture, probably caused by a direct hit from a depth charge, had caused the submarine to sink. An open torpedo door with no torpedo in the tube indicated the submarine had gone down fighting. NHHC underwater archaeologists confirmed the identity of the submarine as *Lagarto*.

On 13 May, *Hatsutaka* departed Ha-Tien for Singapore, again escorting *Tottori Maru*. At 0737 on 14 May, *Cobia* (SS-245) fired five torpedoes at *Hatsutaka*; two broached and *Hatsutaka* once again avoided the other three. *Cobia* then got stuck in the mud at 120 feet and was badly damaged as *Hatsutaka* hammered her with depth charges for an hour and a half. At 1430, *Hammerhead* (SS-364) fired three torpedoes at *Tottori Maru*, which also successfully evaded them. At 0020 on 15 May, *Tottori Maru* detected *Hammerhead* attempting a night surface attack and, along with *Hatsutaka*, opened fire, scoring multiple near misses. Finally, at 0127, *Hammerhead* hit *Tottori Maru* with one torpedo, which caused her to sink slowly. *Hatsutaka* picked up 19 survivors, but 52 crewmen went down with the transport. Finally, at 0525 on 16 May, *Hawkbill* (SS-366) fired six torpedoes at *Hatsutaka*, hitting with two. *Hatsutaka* refused to go down and was taken in tow until *Hawkbill* later fired three more torpedoes and *Hatsutaka* broke in two and sank.

Bonefish (SS-223), commanded by Commander Lawrence Lott Edge (USNA '35), was lost on her eighth war patrol during Operation Barney. Edge was a very experienced and aggressive skipper, who would be awarded two Navy Crosses (posthumously) for commanding *Bonefish* on her sixth and seventh war patrols, including sinking the Japanese destroyer *Inazuma*. Fitted with new mine-detection sonar, *Bonefish* threaded her way

through the extensive minefields in the Tsushima Strait, entering the Sea of Japan along with *Tunny* (SS-282) and *Skate* (SS-305) in June 1945 as part of the wolfpack "Pierce's Pole Cats." Two other groups of three U.S. submarines also entered the Sea of Japan, the first time U.S. submarines had entered the area since the loss of Lieutenant Commander Mush Morton and the *Wahoo* (SS-238) in the Le Perouse Strait on 11 October 1943 (see H-Gram 022/H-022-3). On 16 June, *Bonefish* reported sinking the 6,892-ton cargo ship *Oshikayama Maru*.

On 18 June, the submarine requested and received permission to conduct a daylight submerged patrol off Toyama Bay, and was not heard from again. *Bonefish* failed to show up for the rendezvous before the other eight submarines exited the Sea of Japan through La Perouse Strait on 24 June. *Tunny* waited outside the strait for three days to no avail. Japanese records indicate the 5,488-ton cargo ship *Konzan Maru* was sunk by a submarine in Toyama Wan on 19 June 1945. This provoked a sustained counterattack by the 31st Escort Division, including escort ships *Okinawa*, CD-63, CD-207, and CD-158, which dropped numerous depth charges, resulting in an oil slick and debris. This was almost certainly *Bonefish*, lost with all 85 hands. *Bonefish* sank 31 Japanese ships and was awarded five Navy Unit Commendations and seven Battle Stars during the war. Commander Edge was awarded a third posthumous Navy Cross for the last war patrol of *Bonefish*, the second-to-last U.S. submarine lost in the war.

Third Navy Cross for Commander Lawrence Edge:

The President of the United States of America takes pride in presenting a Second Gold Star in lieu of a Third Award of the Navy Cross (Posthumously) to Commander Lawrence Lott Edge, for extraordinary heroism and distinguished service in the line of his profession as Commanding Officer of USS BONEFISH

(SS-223) during the EIGHTH War Patrol of that vessel in the Japanese Sea off the west coast of Honshu, Japan. Fully aware of the extreme dangers involved, Commander Edge left port in his submarine on 28 May 1945, to conduct one of the first War Patrols to be made in this area. Boldly penetrating strong anti-submarine barriers, he entered the supposedly inviolable waters of the Japan sea and, with superb skill and daring, maneuvered BONEFISH into shallow, confined waters to launch his devastating torpedo attacks against enemy targets vital to the Japanese war effort. Striking with devastating speed and precision, Commander Edge succeeded in sending two valuable ships to the bottom despite strong hostile countermeasures. While continuing this smashing offensive, overwhelming counter-attacks were encountered which caused the loss of this outstanding submarine and her gallant commanding officer. A forceful and inspiring leader, Commander Edge, by his brilliant seamanship, initiative and indomitable perseverance, maintained in the face of tremendous odds, contributed essentially to the infliction of extensive damage and destruction on the enemy during this urgent mission and to the success of our sustained drive to force the capitulation of the Japanese Empire. His courage and resolute devotion to duty throughout reflect the highest credit upon himself, his intrepid command and the United States Naval Service.



Commander Lawrence Lott Edge (NH 49606)

Griffith (USNA '34). Griffith was the 25th- highest-scoring U.S. submarine skipper during the war, having been awarded two Navy Crosses and a Silver Star in command of *Bowfin* (SS-287) on three war patrols. The submarine was awarded a Presidential Unit Citation. However, by the spring of 1945, there wasn't much left to sink. During her first war patrol, *Bullhead* was attacked by a U.S. B-24 bomber and performed lifeguard duties, approaching within four miles of the Chinese coast, to rescue three aircrewmembers from a downed B-25 bomber. She also shelled a Japanese radio installation on Pratas Island. The war patrol was also notable for having Martin Sheridan of the *Boston Globe* aboard, the only war correspondent permitted to make a patrol on a U.S. submarine during the war.

Bullhead's second war patrol was in the Gulf of Siam in May and June 1945. She sank two small

Bullhead, commanded by Lieutenant Commander Edward Rowell "Skillet" Holt, Jr. (USNA '39), was sunk on 6 August 1945, the last U.S. Navy vessel sunk before the Japanese surrender announcement on 15 August 1945.

Bullhead was a *Balao*-class fleet submarine, commissioned on 4 December 1944, under the command of Commander Walter Thomas "Red"

freighters, a schooner, and a "submarine chaser," all with her guns as none were worth expending a torpedo. Although targets were few, Japanese air attacks were not, and the threat was everpresent.

When *Bullhead* arrived in Freemantle, Australia, after her second war patrol, Griffith was suffering from a severe bout of dysentery, as were some others in his crew. He was hospitalized and relieved by lieutenant Commander Edward Holt, Jr., a veteran of ten war patrols as executive officer of *Baya* from May 1944 to January 1945, and as executive officer of *Sealion* (SS-315) from April through July 1945. Holt had also been on *Grouper* (SS-214) when she torpedoed *Lisbon Maru* on 1 October 1942, not knowing the Japanese ship had 1,816 British and Canadian prisoners of war on board. Of these, 846 died when the ship went down on 2 October, many shot by the Japanese while trying to abandon the ship. (Many of the POWs were trapped in a hold after the only escape ladder broke and were last noted singing "It's a Long Way to Tipperary" as the ship went down.) *Bullhead* would be Holt's first command.

The submarine departed from Freemantle on 31 July on her third war patrol, with orders to participate in a wolfpack with *Capitaine* (SS-336) and *Puffer* (SS-268) in the Java Sea and South China Sea until 5 September and then proceed to Subic Bay. Before departing, about a dozen men were transferred off the boat, most temporarily due to minor ailments; a number were replaced by volunteers from other subs. On 6 August, *Bullhead* reported completing a northbound transit of Lombok Strait (between Bali and Lombok Islands, east of Java in the Japanese-occupied Dutch East Indies). This was the last heard from *Bullhead*. On 12 August, *Capitaine* arrived in the Java Sea and directed *Bullhead* to join in a scouting line with *Capitaine* and *Puffer*, but received no reply.

On 13 August 1945, a message was sent to all U.S. and Allied submarines to cease fire and

return to port. *Bullhead* was the only submarine not to acknowledge receipt as directed. On 15 August, *Capitaine* reported, "Have been unable to contact *Bullhead* by any means since arriving in area." *Bullhead* was subsequently reported overdue and presumed lost with all 84 hands. The families of those lost would find out after receiving word of the Japanese surrender and the end of the war.

There were multiple Japanese attacks on submarines near Bali around 6 August 1945, as British submarines HMS *Taciturn* and HMS *Thorough* were also operating in the area, and *Cod* (SS-224) and *Chub* (SS-329) transited through. *Bullhead* was most likely sunk by two Japanese Army Ki-51 Sonia dive-bombers, which reported attacking a submarine just north of Bali exiting the Lombok Strait on 6 August. The Japanese claimed two direct hits on the submarine with depth charges and reported orbiting for 10 minutes as large amounts of oil and air bubbles rose to the surface. There is speculation that the close proximity of mountains on Bali masked the Japanese aircraft from *Bullhead's* radar until it was too late.

Second Navy Cross for Commander Walter Griffith:

The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting a Gold Star in lieu of a Second Award of the Navy Cross to Commander (then Lieutenant Commander) Walter Thomas Griffith, United States Navy, for extraordinary heroism and distinguished service in the line of his profession as Commanding Officer of USS BOWFIN (SS-287), on the FOURTH War Patrol of that submarine during the period 28 February 1944 to 1 April 1944, in enemy controlled waters of the Celebes Sea and its eastern approaches. Repeatedly directing aggressive and well-planned attacks on heavily escorted enemy shipping,

Commander Griffith was responsible for sinking three large ships totaling 20,000 tons and damaging of an additional two ships totaling 11,464 tons. With high courage and superb seamanship, he twice took his submarine into the narrow and restricted water of Obi Strait for a series of daylight attacks on a troop-carrying transport and a cargo vessel escorted by enemy minesweepers and protected by as many as five enemy land-based bombers. On two occasions his ship was detected in the glassy seas of this strait and bombed by aircraft while pressing home an attack, and after the attack was counter-attacked by escort vessels which dropped many very close and heavy depth charges. Subjected to a total of six severe depth charge attacks, three close aircraft bombings, and two short-range surface gun attacks, he resolutely completed his mission with devastating results to the Japanese forces. His exceptional courage and professionalism and unwavering devotion to duty reflect the highest credit on Commander Griffith and the BOWFIN and the United States Naval Service.

However, like *Bullhead*, Griffith never really came home from the war either. Although he continued to serve in the Navy and made rear admiral, he was wracked for the rest of his life with survivor's guilt. Retired, divorced, and alone, he checked into a motel in Pensacola, Florida, in January 1966 and, at the age of 54, took his own life.



A war correspondent chatting with USS *Bullhead* (SS-332) crewmen in the submarine's galley. He is probably Martin Sheridan of the Boston Globe, who rode *Bullhead* during her first war patrol in March-April 1945. *Bullhead* was lost with all hands on 6 August 1945 (80-G-49455).

9 August 1945: USS *Borie* (DD-704)—Last Radar Picket Casualties

At 1102 on 9 August 1945, the B-29 "Bockscar" dropped an atomic bomb on Nagasaki, Japan. At 1345, five Japanese Navy Aichi B7A Grace torpedo bombers, led by Lieutenant (j.g.) Matsuo Ibaraki, launched from Kisarazu Airfield, northeast of Tokyo, with the intent to attack the U.S. carriers of TF-38. (The B7A was intended to be Japan's answer to the TBF/TBM Avenger torpedo bomber. The only two Japanese carriers that were capable of operating the heavy B7A, the *Taiho* and *Shinano*, had both been sunk by U.S. submarines before ever doing so. The B7A was only produced in very limited numbers.) That morning TF-38 (which also included British carriers) had launched 1,212 strike sorties at Japanese targets in Hokkaido and northern Honshu, during which U.S. aviators claimed destroying 189 Japanese aircraft on the ground. (A Royal Navy Corsair pilot, Lieutenant Robert Hampton Gray, DSC, Royal Canadian Navy Volunteer Reserve, flying off HMS *Formidable*, was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross for flying his flaming plane into the Japanese escort ship *Amakusa* after his bomb set off one of *Amakusa's* ammunition magazines, destroying the ship. He was one of only four Commonwealth pilots to be

awarded the Victoria Cross, the United Kingdom's highest honor.)

Operating off the Japanese port of Sendai, 50 nautical miles southwest of carrier Task Group 58.3, were four destroyers of Destroyer Squadron SIX TWO (DESRON 62), performing "Tomcat" radar picket duty for the carriers. Having learned the lesson of the vulnerability of single or even two ships on a radar picket station, this group had three new *Allen M. Sumner*-class destroyers: *John W. Weeks* (DD-701), *Hank* (DD-702), and *Borie* (DD-704). These were joined by the even newer *Gearing*-class destroyer *Benner* (DD-807). All of the destroyers had a main armament of three twin 5-inch/38-caliber gun mounts, two forward and one aft, to provide increased mutually supporting anti-aircraft protection. On 9 August, this did not help *Borie*.

Borie was the second U.S. Navy ship named for President Ulysses S. Grant's Secretary of the Navy. The first *Borie* (DD-215), a World War 1-vintage "four piper," had been lost on 2 November 1943 following an epic ramming and hand-to-hand battle with *U-405*, which went down first. DD-215, commanded by Lieutenant Charles Harris Hutchins, USNR, was awarded a Presidential Unit Citation and her crew received three Navy Crosses (including one for Hutchins), two Silver Stars, and one Legion of Merit for the action, although 27 men were lost. The second *Borie* had been commissioned on 21 September 1944 and had served with the TF 58/38 carrier force since Iwo Jima in February 1945. She was under the command of Commander Noah Adair, Jr., (USNA '31).

At 1454, somehow the first B7A Grace reached the picket group undetected and without being engaged by combat air patrol fighters. Despite the surprise, the destroyers opened fire and the Grace was hit multiple times but kept on coming. The damaged Grace flew right over *Hank* at low altitude as fuel pouring from perforated fuel tanks soaked the destroyer's bridge crew in gasoline.

The plane then went into a sharp bank and came in on *Borie* from the port quarter. The Grace released a large 1,764-pound bomb just before it crashed into *Borie*'s superstructure just aft of the bridge between the 5-inch gun director and the mast. This started a large fuel fire and blew many men over the side (most of whom were not recovered). Fortunately, the bomb passed clean through *Borie* and detonated off the starboard side, but the ship was sprayed with many bomb fragments that cut down even more men. All communications from the bridge were knocked out and control was transferred to after steering. Firefighting was complicated by 40-mm ready-use ammunition continuing to cook off, but, finally, the fires were brought under control and, as the ship had suffered no below-the-waterline damage, she was not in danger of sinking.

Over the next hour, the other four Graces attacked the destroyers and all were shot down without significant damage. *Hank* suffered one man missing and five wounded. Despite the fires and damage, *Borie* remained in her position in the formation and her guns continued to fire on the following Japanese aircraft. *Borie*'s casualties were high: 48 killed or missing and 66 wounded. Commander Adair was awarded a Silver Star for his actions in saving the ship and continuing to fight despite the severe damage. This would also be the last battle damage suffered by the U.S. Fast Carrier Task Force.

Borie identified the plane that hit her as a "Val" dive-bomber and, as a result, so do most accounts of the action. *Hank* and *Benner* identified the aircraft as a Grace, which was correct. However, the other planes were identified as "two Zekes," "a George," "a Jack," and "a Frank." They were all B7A Grace torpedo bombers carrying really big bombs. *Borie* returned to the West Coast for repairs and later served in the Korean War (five Battle Stars), Vietnam, and then in the Argentine navy as *ARA Bouchard*. On 2 May 1982, during the Falklands War, she apparently was hit by a torpedo from *HMS Conqueror* that failed to

explode (the other two torpedoes in *Conqueror's* spread of three sank the light cruiser ARA *General Belgrano* (ex-USS *Phoenix*, CL-46, with the loss of 323 Argentine sailors).

9-12 August 1945: USS *Johnnie Hutchins* (DE-360), USS *Oak Hill* (LSD-7), and the Last Japanese Submarine Attacks

By 9 August 1945, *I-58* had shifted operating areas to the Okinawa-Leyte convoy route after sinking heavy cruiser *Indianapolis* on 30 July. At about 0800, 260 nautical miles northeast of Luzon, Lieutenant Commander Hashimoto nearly made a fatal error when he decided to attack what he thought was a 10-ship convoy escorted by three destroyers. Actually, the convoy was Task Group 75.19, an anti-submarine hunter-killer group centered on the escort carrier *Salamaua* (CVE-96), whose only purpose was to find and sink submarines. As the "convoy" came closer over the next few hours, Hashimoto ordered three *Kaiten* readied for launch (No. 3, No. 5, and No. 6), but No. 3 and No. 6 developed engine trouble and could not launch, and No. 4 was readied. *Kaiten* No. 5 was launched at a range of 5,500 yards and, when Hashimoto thought a destroyer escort was heading for him, he ordered *Kaiten* No. 4 launched.

At 1143, destroyer escort *Johnnie Hutchins* (DE-360), commanded by Lieutenant Commander Hugh M. Godsey, sighted what at first was thought to be a whale, but quickly identified as a "midget submarine." (DE-360 was named in honor of Seaman First Class Johnnie Hutchins, who was awarded a posthumous Medal of Honor aboard *LST-473* at Lae, New Guinea, in 4 September 1943. A Japanese aerial torpedo was heading for *LST-473* when a bomb blew away the pilot house. Despite his mortal wounds, Hutchins took over the helm and steered the ship clear of the torpedo.)

Johnnie Hutchins engaged the "midget submarine" (*Kaiten* No. 5) with guns as it passed

down the ship's port side. At almost the same time, sonar detected another contact (*Kaiten* No. 4) ahead and to starboard. *Kaiten* No.5 was hit by gunfire and sank almost immediately. *Johnnie Hutchins* dropped a pattern of Mk. 8 magnetic depth charges on the second contact and reported hearing three explosions. However, at 1332, *Johnnie Hutchins* sighted another periscope about eight nautical miles from the first two, and this time the depth-charge attack resulted in a violent explosion. *Johnnie Hutchins* was credited with sinking two, possibly three "midget submarines" (although *I-58* reported only launching two *Kaiten*).

Late on the afternoon of 12 August 1945, *I-58* was running on the surface 360 nautical miles southeast of Okinawa and heading north, when her radar-detection gear gave warning of U.S. ships nearby. Hashimoto went to periscope depth when masts were sighted. He subsequently identified the contacts as a seaplane carrier being escorted by one destroyer. The contacts were actually the landing ship dock *OAK HILL* (LSD-7) being escorted from Okinawa to the Philippines by destroyer escort *Thomas F. Nickel* (DE-587), commanded by Lieutenant Commander Claude Smith Farmer, USNR. At a range of 8,800 yards, *I-58* launched *Kaiten* No. 3 at 1758.

At 1826, *Oak Hill* lookouts sighted a periscope approaching from her port quarter. *Thomas F. Nickel* poured on flank speed toward the contact and fired a shallow pattern of depth charges from her K-guns (side-throwing depth charges), thinking the contact was a conventional submarine. At 1837, *Oak Hill* lookouts sighted a torpedo in her wake, also seen by *Thomas F. Nickel* and described as a torpedo broaching the surface. *Thomas F. Nickel* attempted to ram the contact, which apparently scraped along under the hull, plainly audible to crewmen in the firerooms and one engine room. But, through the sheer fortune of war, *Thomas F. Nickel* did not meet the same fate as *Underhill* by a 3,400-pound *Kaiten* warhead. At 1842, *Oak Hill* reported she

was still being chased by the torpedo, which then came to a halt and self-detonated in a massive explosion. This was the last Japanese submarine and *Kaiten* attack of the war.

At 1905, *Thomas F. Nickel* sighted another periscope and depth-charged it, although what this was is unknown, as *I-58* made it back to Japan on 17 August 1945. *I-58* was scuttled by the U.S. submarine tender *Nereus* (AS-17) on 1 April 1946 as part of Operation Road's End.

12 August 1945: USS Pennsylvania (BB-38)– the Last Battleship Hit

Battleship *Pennsylvania*, the flagship of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, was one of the lucky ships during the attack on Pearl Harbor. Her luck almost ran out three days before the cease-fire ending the war. On the first day of the war, 7 December 1941, *Pennsylvania* was hit by one bomb from one of the over 350 Japanese aircraft that attacked Oahu, Hawaii. Because she was in the dry dock, she could not be sunk. *Pennsylvania* suffered 32 dead (18 of her own crew, the rest from other ships who were aboard), but she was operational within a week. On 12 August 1945, off Okinawa, a solitary Japanese aircraft hit *Pennsylvania* with one torpedo, killing 20 men and very nearly sinking her. Had she not been being towed into shallow water, she might very well have gone down and been the only U.S. battleship sunk since Pearl Harbor.

Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, *Pennsylvania* proceeded to San Francisco for repair. During the course of the war, she would be substantially modernized (including extensive anti-torpedo protection) and would be awarded eight Battle Stars. However, as a World War I-vintage battleship, her comparatively slow speed and high fuel consumption relegated her to a primary shore bombardment role in support of numerous amphibious assaults across the Pacific. She did get a measure of revenge for Pearl Harbor when she participated in the last

battleship versus battleship action in history, the Battle of Surigao Strait, on 24 October 1944 (See H-Gram 038). *Pennsylvania* subsequently came through the *kamikaze* attacks at Lingayen Gulf in January 1945 virtually unscathed. She then entered another period of major overhaul (including the replacement of her main and secondary armament guns and addition of improved radar, fire control systems, and more anti-aircraft weapons).

Pennsylvania departed San Francisco on 12 July 1945 en route Okinawa (and the anticipated invasion of Japan), under the command of Captain William Moultrie Moses. She got some target practice on Japanese positions on Wake Island on 1 August. A Japanese shore battery boldly returned fire, and a shell hit close enough that fragments knocked out one of *Pennsylvania's* 5-inch gun directors. She also lost one of her two Curtiss SC-1 Seahawk floatplanes when it was irreparably damaged trying to land in choppy seas.

Upon arrival at the anchorage in Buckner Bay, Okinawa, *Pennsylvania* became flagship of Task Force 95 when Vice Admiral Jesse Barrett "Oley" Oldendorf shifted his flag. Oldendorf was a highly successful commander (he was in command at the Battle of Surigao Strait, an action for which he was awarded a Navy Cross), but he was a bit of a magnet for bad luck. A 1909 U.S. Naval Academy graduate, he was in command of the Naval Armed Guard on the U.S. Army transport USAT *Saratoga* (ID-1305) when she was accidentally rammed and sunk by the steamer SS *Panama* in New York Harbor on 30 July 1917. His next ship was the troop transport USS *President Lincoln*, on which he was serving as gunnery officer when the ship was sunk by three torpedoes from German submarine *U-90* on 31 May 1918 while on a return transit from France (26 of 715 men aboard were lost when the ship sank in 20 minutes. *President Lincoln's* executive officer, Lieutenant Edouard Lazac [USNA '15]) was captured by *U-90* and was later awarded a Medal of Honor for his

subsequent escape—see H-Gram 023/H-023-2). Vice Admiral Oldendorf was onboard the battleship *New Mexico* (BB-40), when she took a bad *kamikaze* hit in the bridge area at Lingayen Gulf; he was unharmed, but casualties were high. Among the 30 dead were *New Mexico*'s commanding officer and a British lieutenant general (see H-Gram 040/H-040-3). On 11 March 1945, his barge collided with a buoy at the fleet anchorage at Ulithi Atoll and he broke his collarbone.

As dusk approached on 12 August 1945, the force at Buckner Bay received intelligence warning that an air attack was possible. In accordance with standard procedures, ships in the anchorage turned on their chemical smoke generators to screen the ships at anchor from attack. *Pennsylvania* did not have this capability, so smaller amphibious vessels circled the battleship trying to cover her in smoke, but the wind kept blowing it clear. When a lone Japanese torpedo bomber finally popped out of the twilight murk at close range with no further warning, *Pennsylvania* was the only ship in the anchorage not obscured by smoke, making her the obvious target.

The torpedo plane's aim was true, and the deep-running torpedo passed forward of light cruiser *St. Louis* (CL-49) before hitting *Pennsylvania* in a particularly vulnerable spot: aft and below the anti-torpedo blisters that had been added after Pearl Harbor. The torpedo blew a 30-foot-diameter hole in the hull well below the waterline on the No. 1 one shaft, and the ship rapidly began to flood, taking on a large amount of water. Because of the heat, many crewmen were sleeping topside and were blown into the air or overboard. Twenty crewmen were killed and many were wounded, including Vice Admiral Oldendorf, who suffered several broken ribs. The attack occurred so quickly that the Japanese plane does not appear to have been engaged and made good its getaway.

All compartments below the third deck and aft of frame 127 (everything aft of the aft main battery turret) flooded immediately and progressive flooding occurred through open doors and hatches. Three of her four shafts were damaged and she lost steering control. As the ship settled by the stern, the fight to save her went on all through the night. Fortunately, two salvage tugs were available to come alongside, adding their pumping capability. In the morning, *Pennsylvania* was towed into shallow water (and, for a time, probably was on the bottom) as pumping continued until finally the situation was stabilized.

On 18 August, *Pennsylvania* was towed out of Buckner Bay to the floating dry dock at Guam for temporary repair (thereby missing the Tokyo Bay surrender ceremony). She crossed the Pacific under her own power, although on 4 October she suffered a serious shaft casualty and divers had to go below and cut the shaft (and the screw fell to the bottom of the ocean). *Pennsylvania* subsequently survived being used as a target ship for the two atomic bomb test blasts at Bikini Atoll in July 1946. She remained at Kwajalein Atoll for radiological study before being deliberately sunk off the atoll on 10 February 1948. *Pennsylvania* was awarded a Navy Unit Commendation for her wartime service. The hit on *Pennsylvania* was the closest any U.S. battleship had come to sinking since the Pearl Harbor attack.

13 August 1945: Attack Transport Lagrange (APA-124)—Last Ship Hit by Kamikaze

The evening after *Pennsylvania* had been hit, two Japanese Zeke fighters, each armed with a 1,100-pound bomb, flew into Buckner Bay at 1947. They chose as their target the attack transport *La Grange*. Under the command of Captain Frank R. Walker (who had been awarded a Navy Cross as commander of Destroyer Squadron FOUR during the Battle of Vella LaVella on 6-7 October 1942—see H-Gram 022/H-022-5), *La Grange* was part of Transport Squadron SEVENTEEN (TRANSRON 17). She was a veteran of seven

amphibious landings, including the precursor landing to Okinawa at Kerama Retto, and had narrowly avoided being hit by a *kamikaze* on 2 April. Two days before the cease-fire, *La Grange's* luck ran out.

Unlike the night before, *La Grange* and other ships engaged the Zekes with anti-aircraft fire. However, despite being hit repeatedly, the two *kamikaze* kept coming. The first Zeke hit the aft end of *La Grange's* superstructure and both plane and bomb exploded in a massive fireball that knocked out all electrical power. This severely hampered the ship in fighting the fires that, at times, were 200 feet high. The second Zeke hit a king post, which spun the plane into the sea about 20 yards from the ship on the port side, but fuel and parts of the aircraft landed on the ship, causing more casualties and adding fuel to the fire (literally). The fires destroyed the bridge deck, communications spaces, and navigational aids. Despite the severe damage, the transport's damage control and repair parties eventually gained the upper hand and the ship remained afloat, at a cost of 21 killed and 89 wounded.

This incident may have served as part of the inspiration for the 1956 Hollywood movie *Away All Boats*, starring Jeff Chandler, which was one of the more realistic Navy war movies and featured color footage of actual *kamikaze* attacks. The movie was filmed aboard attack transport *Randall* (APA-224), and was also one of Clint Eastwood's first roles, an uncredited bit part as a Navy corpsman.

14 August 1945: USS Spikefish (SS-404), USS Torsk (SS-423), and the Last U.S. Submarine Victories

U.S. submarines continued operations right through 14 August 1945. On 5 August, U.S. Navy code-breakers determined that the new transport submarine *I-373* was going to depart Sasebo, Japan, on 9 August on a run to Takao, Formosa. Submarine *Spikefish*, commanded by

Commander Robert M. Managhan (USNA '38), was vectored to intercept. At 2100 on 13 August, *Spikefish* gained radar contact on *I-373*, lost contact, and then regained it at 0007 on 14 August. At 0419, the contact was positively identified as a Japanese submarine and, at 0424, *Spikefish* fired a full salvo of six torpedoes from 1,300 yards, hitting with two. At 0520, *Spikefish* surfaced in the extensive debris field and sighted five survivors, who refused rescue. One was forcibly brought aboard (who gave a false identification of the submarine). The other four survivors and 80 others who went down with *I-373* were lost. *I-373* was the last Japanese submarine of 128 lost in World War II (out of the Imperial Japanese Navy's total of 174).

Meanwhile, submarine *Torsk*, commanded by Commander Bafford Lewellen (USNA '31), had entered the Sea of Japan through the Tsushima Strait minefields and, on 14 August 1945, was operating off the Japanese west coast port of Maizuru. *Torsk* sighted a medium cargo vessel being escorted by *Kaibokan CD-47*. (*Kaibokan* were escort vessels similar in concept to U.S. destroyer escorts with similar armament, but significantly smaller at 750 tons.) At 1035, *Torsk* fired an experimental Mk. 28 acoustic homing torpedo that hit *CD-47* in the stern, blowing a large hole that caused her to sink rapidly. Her skipper, Commander Chiba, went down with the ship. *Torsk's* subsequent attack on the cargo ship was unsuccessful when her torpedoes hit an uncharted reef instead.

At about 1200 on 14 August, *Torsk* sighted a second *Kaibokan*, *CD-13*, arriving in the area looking for the submarine that had sunk *CD-47*. *Torsk* fired a Mk. 27 passive acoustic torpedo before going deep. *CD-13* gained sonar contact on *Torsk* and the submarine fired another Mk. 28 acoustic homing torpedo from a depth of 400 feet. At 1225, lookouts on *CD-13* sighted two inbound torpedo wakes, but the escort vessel was unable to evade them. She was hit by the Mk. 27 and then, a minute later, by the Mk. 28. *CD-13*

went down with the loss of 28 of her crew. *Torsk* was then held under for seven hours by attacks from Japanese aircraft. *CD-13* was the last Japanese warship sunk during World War II and *Torsk* was given credit for the last U.S. torpedo fired in the war. Commander Lewellen was awarded his second Navy Cross. *Torsk* is now a museum ship in Baltimore. (Several Japanese ships and submarines were sunk after the surrender by U.S.-laid mines that had yet to be cleared).

15 August 1945: Fighter Squadron VF-88—the Last Day of the War and the Last Carrier Planes Lost

At 0415 on 15 August 1945, Vice Admiral John "Slew" McCain's Fast Carrier Task Force (TF 38) launched a 103-plane fighter sweep of airfields in the Tokyo area to clear the way for a following strike by fighter-bombers, dive-bombers, and torpedo bombers launched at 0530. Among these fighters were 12 F6F Hellcats of Fighter Squadron EIGHT EIGHT (VF-88) embarked on carrier *Yorktown* (CV-10) and led by Lieutenant Howard M. "Howdy" Harrison. The VF-88 fighters were armed with rockets and their target was Atsugi Airfield, southwest of Tokyo. The suppression strike by the VF-88 fighters would be followed by a strike on the Shibaura electronics plant led by the Air Group (CVG-88) commander, Commander Seth "Pete" Searcy, including SB2C dive-bombers of VB-88, TBM Avenger torpedo bombers (all carrying 2,000-pound bombs) of VT-88, and F4U Corsairs of VBF-88 flying escort.

There had been intense discussion amongst Admiral Halsey (Commander U.S. Third Fleet), McCain, and the carrier task group commanders, including Rear Admiral Arthur W. Radford, about whether to launch the strikes planned for 15 August. There were multiple indications that the Japanese were about to announce their acceptance of the terms of the Allied Potsdam Declaration of 26 July 1945, which called on Japan to proclaim "unconditional surrender" or

face "prompt and utter destruction" (although the declaration left ambiguous the emperor's fate). At 1449, 14 August, Tokyo time, Radio Tokyo had announced that an imperial rescript (statement) from Emperor Hirohito would be forthcoming soon.

Halsey and other leaders were aware of ongoing negotiations between the United States and Japan via intermediaries (the Swiss government) following the atomic bombings of Hiroshima on 6 August and Nagasaki on 9 August, but final agreement had not been reached. Although Radford recommended delay, Halsey's guidance from Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz was to maintain unremitting pressure on the Japanese until surrender was official, and that's exactly what Third Fleet and TF 38 had been doing in the last days of the war. Halsey ordered the strikes to proceed.

TF 38's planned strikes on the Tokyo area on 12 August 1945 had been postponed due to a typhoon. In the strikes on 13 August, TF 38 carriers launched 1,167 sorties, firing 2,175 rockets and dropping 372 tons of bombs. TF 38 pilots claimed 254 Japanese planes destroyed on the ground with another 148 damaged, but only 18 shot down in the air. U.S. losses were unexpectedly light (considering the losses suffered during strikes in July), with only seven planes and one pilot lost, none to combat causes. McCain ordered the TF 38 carriers (which also included a British Royal Navy Task Group [TG 38.5] under the command of Vice Admiral Sir Henry Bernard Hughes Rawlings) to refuel on 14 August, with the next round of strikes set for 15 August. The lack of any appreciable air opposition on the 13th was puzzling, as U.S. carrier planes had brazenly attacked targets in the Tokyo area. The reason was because Lieutenant General Kanetoshi Kondo, commander of Tokyo air defenses, had concluded that it "seemed absurd to incur additional losses with the war obviously lost."

Elsewhere around Japan on 14 August, the fighting and dying was still ongoing. After dropping leaflets on Japanese cities on 13 August (which didn't elicit the desired response of a quick surrender announcement), the next day and night over 700 B-29 Superfortress bombers hit Japan in the largest air raid of the Pacific War, in a further attempt to convince the Japanese to quit trying to haggle over the emperor's fate.

Carrier Air Group 88 (CVG 88) had rotated aboard the carrier *Yorktown* in June 1945, and included a F6F Hellcat fighter squadron (VF-88), F4U Corsair fighter-bomber squadron (VBF-88), an SB2C Helldiver dive-bomber squadron (VB-88), and a TBM Avenger torpedo bomber squadron (VT-88). The skipper of VF-88 was Lieutenant Commander Richard "Dick" Crommelin, one of five brothers graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy (John '23, Henry '25, Charles '31, Richard '38, and Quentin '41). Dick Crommelin had two Navy Crosses from Coral Sea (where he had survived being shot down) and Midway, with 3.5 aerial kills. While flying on instruments in bad weather on 13 July 1945, he would be killed in a mid-air collision with another VF-88 Hellcat flown by Lieutenant (j.g.) Joseph G. Sahloff, and was posthumously awarded a Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) and Legion of Merit. (Sahloff and his plane survived). Dick's older brother Charles, also a Hellcat pilot and recipient of a Navy Cross and a Distinguished Flying Cross, was commander of Carrier Air Group 12 when he disappeared over Okinawa on 28 March 1945. John retired as a rear admiral, Henry as a vice admiral, and Quentin as a captain. The frigate *Crommelin* (FFG-37), in service from 1983 to 2012, was named in the brothers' honor. After his loss, Dick Crommelin was replaced as skipper of VF-88 by Lieutenant Commander Malcolm "Chris" Cagle.



Lieutenant Commander Richard Gunter Crommelin. (80-G-300367)

Dick Crommelin wasn't the only CVG-88 loss. In nine weeks aboard *Yorktown*, CVG-88 lost 14 pilots or aircrewmembers: five from VF-88, six from VBF-88, and three from VB-88. Five CVG-88 pilots were lost during strikes in the Tokyo area on 10 July, and another seven were lost during the strikes on Kure Naval Base on 24 July, for 12 combat losses. CVG-88 had been stood up in August 1944 and operated initially from Saipan. Although the squadron leaders were veterans with combat experience, this was their first combat tour for the great majority of the pilots on CVG-88. So far, there had been no air-to-air combat for CVG-88.

On 25 July, during a VF-88 sweep of Japanese airfields on Kyushu, Lieutenant Howard M. Harrison ditched in the Japanese Inland Sea after being hit by anti-aircraft fire. VF-88 Hellcats flown by Lieutenant (j.g.) Maurice "Maury" Proctor and Lieutenant (j.g.) Sahloff escorted a PBM Mariner "Dumbo" (rescue mission) flying boat, flown by Lieutenant (j.g.) George B. Smith, through bad weather on a daring rescue of Harrison, driving off a Japanese "destroyer" with rocket fire. The Mariner made a water landing, rescued Harrison

and a *Shangri-La* (CV-38) Corsair pilot, Ensign John H. Moore, who had also ditched nearby. After 45 minutes under the noses of the Japanese, the *Mariner* took off and then, almost out of fuel, made a dangerous open-ocean landing near the carriers. Everyone including the *Mariner's* 10-man crew were picked up by destroyer *Wren* (DD-568). The plane was scuttled by *Wren* and *Mertz* (DD-691).

On the morning of 15 August, Lieutenant Harrison's fighter team had not originally been scheduled for the mission. However, Harrison knew that Ensign Wright C. "Billy" Hobbs needed one more combat flight for a promotion to lieutenant (j.g.), so he arranged a switch.

The mission for Harrison's VF-88 Hellcats began to go bad almost from the start. They were supposed to join up with F4U Corsairs from carriers *Shangri-La* (CV-38) and *Wasp* (CV-18), but within a few minutes after launch the VF-88 Hellcats ran into severe weather. Unable to go around or over, Harrison detached two Hellcats to orbit and provide communications relay as he took his remaining 10 aircraft down low under the weather. It was still a rough go, and somehow four of the Hellcats got lost in the clouds, leaving Harrison and five other Hellcats to continue toward the target at Atsugi.

At about 0610 Tokyo time, the U.S. government received Japan's official acceptance of the terms of the Potsdam Declaration, relayed via the Swiss government. President Harry S. Truman called a press conference to make the announcement. At 0620, Fleet Admiral Nimitz sent an urgent message to Admiral Halsey stating that the Japanese had accepted the Potsdam Declaration terms. Halsey then received a transcript of Truman's official peace announcement, later remembering thinking, "God be thanked. I'll never have to order another man out to die."

Vice Admiral McCain promptly cancelled the strikes and ordered the recall of those already in

the air. When the aircraft got the word at about 0645, Harrison's Hellcats were already in sight of Atsugi and Commander Searcy's strike was about 30 miles behind, still over water. The bombers were ordered by CTF 38 to jettison their ordnance in the ocean and return to their carriers. Searcy authenticated the message and then turned his strike around. In the haste to dump ordnance, some lower formations were nearly hit by bombs falling from higher ones. The four lost VF-88 Hellcats had been waiting at a rendezvous point over Sagami Bay, but got the recall order and headed back to the carrier. Accounts stated that there was much whooping and hollering on the radios about the war being over until Searcy was able to re-establish order and communications discipline.

After hearing the recall order, Harrison led his group of Hellcats in a loop around Atsugi, staying out of anti-aircraft gun range, and commenced a return to *Yorktown*. His pilots were about five miles outbound from Atsugi and experiencing the same sense of euphoria as Searcy's strike (and all of TF 38's airborne aircraft) when they were jumped from high and behind by a dozen or so Japanese fighters. Accounts vary as to number (some say 15-20 Japanese aircraft) and type, but what is certain is that these were first-line aircraft flown by some of Japan's best remaining pilots, apparently incensed about the word they had received about Japan's surrender. It seems likely that there were eight Japanese Navy A6M Zero/Zeke fighters and four Mitsubishi J2M Raiden ("Lightning Bolt") Jack fighters of the 302nd *Kokutai* (Air Group) at Atsugi. (The Jack was a land-based, short-range, high-altitude Navy interceptor.) There may also have been Navy N1K-J Shiden George fighters involved, and some accounts indicate there may have been Japanese army aircraft (Ki-84 Franks) as well (these are possibly due to faulty identification in the heat of battle).

The six VF-88 Hellcats entered the air battle at a severe disadvantage, still weighed down by

rockets and wing tanks they hadn't had a chance to drop yet. They were outnumbered at least two to one, the Japanese had positional advantage at six o'clock high, and, except for Harrison, none of them had ever been in a dogfight before.

Nevertheless, the 600 hours of flight training that U.S. Navy pilots had before reporting to the fleet initially paid off. Rear Admiral Radford subsequently wrote: "A wild fight ensued, the last important air battle of the war." The after action report stated: "From then on it was a melee with everyone fighting in the same air."

Harrison turned the flight to face the Japanese, and he and Hobbs veered after one pair of Japanese fighters while Mandeberg and Sahloff went after another pair. Within moments, four Japanese planes were going down in flames. The third pair of Hellcats, flown by Lieutenant (j.g.) Maurice "Maury" Proctor and Lieutenant (j.g.) Ted Hansen, engaged in a head-to-head pass with two Japanese fighters, hitting both; one attempted to ram Hansen. Proctor then blew the wing off a third Japanese fighter, while other fighters made repeated passes on Hansen, which he jinked to avoid. By this time, Proctor and Hansen had lost track of the other Hellcats, when Proctor saw Sahloff's Hellcat trailing smoke with a Japanese fighter on his tail. Proctor then shot up the Japanese fighter and radioed Sahloff to make for the ocean. Proctor intended to escort Sahloff, but a Japanese fighter got on his tail. Fortunately, this was shot down by Hansen. Proctor was then attacked by seven Japanese fighters. He managed to shoot one of them down and he would make it to *Yorktown* with 28 holes in his aircraft.

Sahloff was last seen weaving in and out of clouds before he had to bail out. One Hellcat exploded at 7,000 feet and two others were seen to fall in flames. Lieutenant Howard M. "Howdy" Harrison, Ensign Wright C "Billy" Hobbs, Ensign Eugene "Mandy" Mandeberg, and Lieutenant (j.g.) Joseph G. Sahloff did not return, did not survive, and were never found. After action reports claimed

nine Japanese aircraft were shot down. While that number is probably too high, it was still a valiant fight against the odds—sadly, after the U.S. pilots thought they had made it through the war alive.

Following the CTF 38 recall order, four F-6F Hellcats from carrier *Hancock* (CV-19), returning from their aborted photo reconnaissance mission, were also intercepted by seven Japanese fighters (actually shortly before the VF-88 fighters were attacked). The Hellcats shot down four Japanese fighters without loss.

A 15-plane British strike from carrier HMS *Indefatigable*, including TBM Avengers and Fairey Firefly bombers escorted by five Supermarine Seafires was attacked by 12 Japanese fighters identified as "Zekes," as they were returning to their carrier. The British fighters shot down eight of the Zekes and a British Avenger torpedo bomber shot down a ninth. One Seafire fighter was shot down. The pilot, Sub-Lieutenant Fred Hockley, Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve, survived the bailout, but was captured and, later that evening, was summarily executed by the Japanese army. He was the last Allied pilot to die in the war against Japan. The two Japanese officers who instigated the execution were hanged as war criminals in 1947. This was the last British air combat mission of World War II.

By 1020 on 15 August, all of the TF 38 strike aircraft were back on board except the four Hellcats and one Seafire shot down, and two U.S. aircraft lost to operational causes (a total of seven TF 38 flyers had been lost). At 1055, Fleet Admiral Nimitz sent a message directing all offensive operations cease, but for all U.S. Navy forces to maintain an alert defensive posture. At 1100, Halsey's flagship, battleship *Missouri* (BB-63), ran up her large battle flags, sounded her whistle and horn for one minute, and hoisted the signal "Well done," followed by a speech by Halsey. However, there were still some Japanese aircraft that didn't get the word or ignored the word.

Following the recall of the morning strikes, and mindful of Nimitz's direction to maintain an alert defensive posture, Halsey issued an order to "investigate and shoot down all snooper. Not vindictively but in a friendly sort of way." Within a few hours, U.S. aircraft shot down eight Japanese planes over water, four of them during Halsey's victory speech. One Japanese D4Y Judy dive-bomber attempted to attack HMS *Indefatigable*, but was shot down by a pursuing *Hancock* F4U Corsair fighter. Parts of the plane landed on the Royal New Zealand Navy light cruiser HMNZS *Gambia*, whose anti-aircraft barrage was among the last shots of the war.

At noon Tokyo time on 15 August 1945, Emperor Hirohito's pre-recorded statement accepting Allied terms was broadcast to the Japanese nation. This was the first time the Japanese people had ever heard the emperor's voice. The broadcast almost didn't happen, as Japanese diehards mounted a coup attempt on the night of 14-15 August that came dangerously close to succeeding.

Following the emperor's broadcast, General of the Army Douglas MacArthur, who had been named by President Truman to be the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP) for the occupation of Japan, issued a directive via radio for the Japanese government to order an "immediate cessation of hostilities." The Japanese took no action until they received U.S. Secretary of State James Byrnes' diplomatic note accepting Japan's offer of surrender on the morning of 16 August. The imperial order for the entire Japanese armed forces to cease fire immediately went out at 1600 on 16 August. In the time between the emperor's broadcast and the official cease-fire, a few more Japanese aviators would die.

15 August 1945: The Final U.S. Navy Combat Actions

Later in the afternoon of 15 August 1945, four TG 38.3 destroyers *Heermann* (DD-532), *Black* (DD-666), *Bullard* (DD-660), and *Chauncey* (DD-667) were providing radar picket services 100 nautical miles southeast of Honshu under an overcast sky. (*Heermann* was one of the heroes, and survivors, of the Battle off Samar on 25 October 1944—see H-Gram 036.) Radar detected a Japanese aircraft at 17 miles. The plane dropped out of the clouds for a moment at a range of eight miles and, in another minute, came out of the overcast in a 20-degree dive heading for the destroyers. The destroyers increased speed and *Heermann* was the first to open fire. A radar-proximity fused 5-inch shell from the destroyer blew off part of the D4Y Judy dive-bomber's wing, causing the plane to go into a slow spin, in which it was hit by additional fire from *Black* and *Bullard* before splashing 200 yards from the latter. The commanding officer of *Heermann*, Commander Dwight M. Agnew, reported, "In accordance with verbal instructions from Commander Third Fleet, the Judy was shot down in a 'friendly manner'."

15 August 1945: Vice Admiral Matome Ugaki, the Last Kamikaze

Following Emperor Hirohito's broadcast, the commander of the Fifth Air Fleet (and Japan's *kamikaze* operations), Vice Admiral Matome Ugaki, recorded in his diary that he had never felt such shame, and that he alone was responsible for the failure of his pilots to stop the enemy. Ugaki had been Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto's chief of staff in the first years of the war. He had survived the crash of a G4M Betty bomber when it was shot down by U.S. P-38 fighters on 18 April 1943. Yamamoto was in the other Betty that was shot down and did not survive (see H-Gram 018/H-018-2). He then served as commander of Battleship Division ONE (*Yamato*, *Musashi*, and *Nagato*) during the Battle of Leyte Gulf. He assumed command of the Fifth Air Fleet and

Japan's *kamikaze* operations in February 1945. Ugaki's copious diary notes remain one of the most important primary sources on the Japanese perspective of the war.

In his diary, Ugaki noted that although the emperor had made the radio announcement, he had received no official orders to cease fire. He resolved that he would fly one last *kamikaze* mission against the Americans at Okinawa. However, Ugaki was not a pilot. His plan was to fly in a D4Y Judy dive-bomber subordinate to the 701st *Kokutai*. However, when word got out of his intent, all the remaining pilots and radiomen-gunners insisted on going too. Warrant Officer Akiyoshi Endo, whose seat Ugaki had taken, insisted on going on the mission, so Ugaki's plane had three persons aboard and the other 10 Judy's each flew with two. Eleven Judys, each with a 1,100-pound bomb and a half tank of gas, and 23 men launched at 1800 15 August 1945 from Oita Airfield and headed for Okinawa. Three planes turned back with mechanical trouble. Endo broadcast Ugaki's final stirring patriotic messages on the radio, with the last one at 1924, saying they were diving on a U.S. ship.

Exactly what happened to all of the eight Judys of Ugaki's *kamikaze* mission is unknown. One crashed into a hill on Okinawa. No U.S. ships were hit, although *LST-926* reported being attacked by several aircraft that were shot down or crashed in the sea. The others were either downed by anti-aircraft fire in the darkness or crashed into the ocean unable to find a target. On the morning of 16 August, *LST-926* reported finding a still-smoking Judy crashed into a sand bar 30 nautical miles off the northern tip of Okinawa. The plane had the remains of three men aboard, one with a short sword nearby. Ugaki had stripped all rank and identification from his uniform before launch, but had taken a short sword given to him by Yamamoto. The remains of the last *kamikaze* were buried on the sand bar.

18 August 1945: The Last U.S. Combat Casualty

On 17 August, four U.S. Army Air Force B-32 Dominator four-engine bombers flew a photo-reconnaissance mission over the Tokyo area, partially as a test of compliance with the cease-fire by the Japanese. (The B-32 Dominator was based on the B-24 Liberator bomber and was developed as a potential alternative to the more technologically advanced B-29 Superfortress, which had major developmental problems and delays. Only 116 B-32's were built.) The B-32s were attacked by Japanese navy fighters from Atsugi and Yokosuka, which did not cause significant damage, due to the defensive fire of the B-3's (which carried ten .50-caliber machine guns).

On 18 August, two B-32s flew the same mission, apparently expecting a different result, and were attacked by 14 Japanese Navy A6M Zeke fighters and three N1K2-J George fighters, whose pilots reportedly couldn't bear the shame of seeing the U.S. planes flying above Tokyo unmolested. The B-32 flying at 20,000 feet suffered minor damage, while the one flying at 10,000 feet suffered serious damage, with two of her crewmen wounded. The damaged B-32 made it to Okinawa, but photo assistant Sergeant Anthony Marchione died of blood loss and is considered the last U.S. combat casualty of the war. The B-32s claimed to have shot down at least two of the attacking Japanese aircraft. The next day, the Japanese were directed to remove the propellers from all aircraft and there were no further incidents.

29 December 1945: USS Minivet (AM-371)– the Last U.S. Navy Ship Sunk

The mines didn't know the war was over. Cleaning them up was a massive, time-consuming, and dangerous job that continued long after the Japanese surrender.

The fleet minesweeper *Minivet* (AM-371), named after an Asian cuckoo shrike bird, was commissioned on 29 May 1945. *Minivet* was an *Auk*-class, 221-foot-long, 890-ton vessel, with an armament of one 3-inch gun, two 40-mm, and two 20-mm guns, two depth-charge racks, and a crew of 111. *Minivet* didn't reach the Far East until 30 October 1945, well after the war was over. Under the command of Lieutenant Commander Richard Lagreze, *Minivet* was part of Mine Division TWENTY-THREE, operating out of Sasebo, Japan, with a force that included a number of Japanese minesweeping trawlers. For the first month, *Minivet* provided escort services to personnel and supply movements between Korea, Japan, and Okinawa. On 23 December, *Minivet* departed Sasebo with USS *Redstart* (AM-378), commanded by Lieutenant Robert Tate Irvine, and eight Japanese minesweeper-trawlers to spend Christmas sweeping mines in the Tsushima Strait between Japan and Korea, which had been heavily mined during the war by both sides.

On 29 December, the group was sweeping a field of shallow-laid Japanese moored contact mines. Following in the wake of the second pass of the day by the Japanese minesweepers, *Minivet* struck a mine that had been missed twice. *Redstart* immediately put a boat in the water, with a fire and rescue party to assist the stricken *Minivet*, but it was already too late. The damage was severe and, in only a few minutes, *Minivet* rolled over and sank. The Japanese trawlers responded without hesitation and courageously rescued 60 of *Minivet*'s crew from the frigid water, including the commanding officer, while *Redstart*'s boat rescued another 20. Some of these were saved because *Redstart* had released all her rafts into the water. However, 31 crewmen on *Minivet* were lost. *Minivet* was awarded one Battle Star for her service. By some accounts, she is considered the last U.S. Navy ship sunk in World War II.

(Sources include: *NHHC Dictionary of American Fighting Ships* (DANFS) for U.S. ships and

combinedfleet.com for Japanese ships; *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II*, Vol. XIV: *Victory in the Pacific*, by Rear Admiral 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 & Company, Inc., 2010; *Desperate Sunset: Japan's Kamikazes Against Allied Ships, 1944-45*, by Mike Yeo, Osprey Publishing, 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, 1910-1945*, by Captain Steve E. Maffeo, USNR (Ret.), 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; *The Naval Siege of Japan 1945: War Plan Orange Triumphant*, by Brian Lane Herder, Osprey Publishing, 2020; "Fire in the Skies, Ceasefire on the Ground," by David Sears, at historynet.com (originally in September/ October 2015 issue of *World War II* magazine); *Dogfight over Tokyo: The Final Air Battle of the Pacific and the Last Four Men to Die in World War II*, by John Wukovits, De Capo Press, 2019; Indianapolis: *The True Story of the Worst Sea Disaster in U.S. Naval History and the Fifty-Year Fight to Exonerate an Innocent Man*, by Lynn Vincent and Sara Vladic, Simon and Schuster, 2018; *A Grave Misfortune: The USS Indianapolis Tragedy*," by Richard A. Hulver and Peter C. Luebke (eds.), NHHC, 2018; "The Haunted Survivors of the USS *Bullhead*," by

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Ships in Leyte Gulf, Philippines, firing pyrotechnic flares to celebrate the news that Japan had accepted Allied terms, 15 August 1945. Collection of Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz. (NH 62594)