

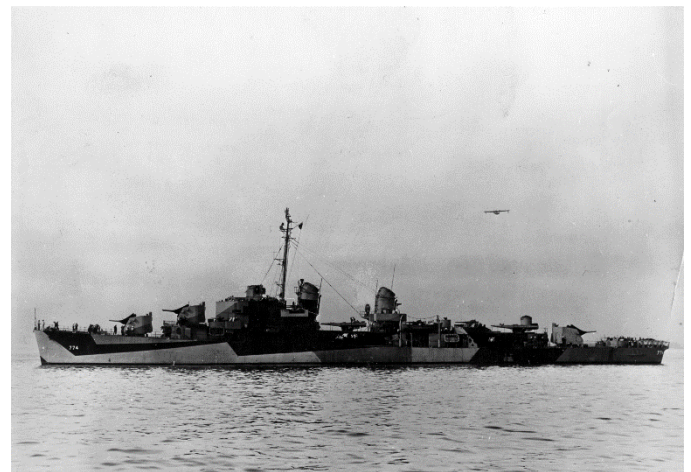


## H-Gram 081: A Legacy of Valor—Commander Hugh W. Hadley and Steward’s Mate First Class Charles J. French

6 March 2024

One of the responsibilities of Naval History and Heritage Command is to provide recommended ship names to the Secretary of the Navy, consistent with the traditional naming convention for that type of ship. The Secretary has sole authority for naming U.S. Navy ships. The only actual congressionally mandated directions for naming ships are that battleships must be named after states (not an issue any more) and no two ships in commission at the same time can have the same name. Everything else is “tradition” (i.e., the rules are there are no rules) and Secretaries of the Navy have been breaking the “rules” since the first Secretary, Benjamin Stoddert, named one of the first six frigates *USS Chesapeake*, because that’s where he had his home.

Nevertheless, last summer Secretary Carlos del Toro asked me to provide a list of 25 potential names for future *Arleigh Burke*-class guided missile destroyers. In keeping with my personal philosophy that ships should be named after combat heroes, or heroic ships, this gave me an excuse to compile my “all-time” names that I find to be most inspirational. In December 2023, the Secretary took my top pick off that list, naming DDG-141 after Commander Ernest Evans, commanding officer of the destroyer *USS Johnston* (DD-571), who was awarded a



*USS Hugh W. Hadley* (DD-774) (L45-130.03.01)

posthumous Medal of Honor for his actions during the Battle off Samar on 25 October 1944. In January, the Secretary took another off my list, naming DDG-142 for African-American Steward’s Mate First Class Charles Jackson French, known as the “Human Tugboat” for his heroic actions in a little-known night battle off Guadalcanal on 4-5 September 1942, for which he was recommended for a Navy Cross, but received a Letter of Commendation instead (upgraded to a posthumous Navy-Marine Corps Medal in 2022).

About the same time that SECNAV was announcing the *USS Charles J. French*, I received a request for information (RFI) from the commander of U.S. Naval Forces Central

Command/U.S. Fifth Fleet, Vice Admiral Brad Cooper. The RFI noted that in October 2023, the guided missile destroyer USS *Carney* (DDG-64) had shot down a total of 19 (Houthi) anti-ship missiles and attack drones (and subsequently shot down many more). His question was, which U.S. Navy surface ship has shot down the most aircraft?

It turns out that the cumulative record by a single surface ship is, somewhat surprisingly, not known. However, the record for a single ship in a single engagement is held by the destroyer USS *Hugh W. Hadley* (DD-774), with 23 aircraft destroyed (20 shot down and three kamikazes that crashed into the ship) off Okinawa on 11 May 1945. This is also quite likely the cumulative record for a single surface ship.

Commander Hugh W. Hadley is also on the list that I provided to the SECNAV, not only for his own actions, which earned a posthumous Silver Star, but also for those of the crew of the ship named after him, which earned a Presidential Unit Citation and a Navy Cross for her commanding officer. Commander Hadley was killed on the bridge of fast transport USS *Little* (APD-3) in the same battle in which Steward's Mate First Class French performed his heroics. Thus the impetus for this H-gram, which attempts to weave the threads of valor from one action to another, and to demonstrate my belief that the most important purpose of a ship's name is to inspire its crew to greatness.

### ***The Sacrifice of TRANSDIV 12***

On 15 August 1942, five days after the U.S. Navy "abandoned" the U.S. Marines on Guadalcanal, four navy fast transports (APDs) of Transport Division (TRANSDIV) 12 arrived off Lunga Point and unloaded ammunition, aviation gasoline, aviation maintenance gear, and about a hundred Marines and Navy personnel who would establish an airfield operations capability at what would become Henderson Field on Guadalcanal.

Making multiple supply runs to Guadalcanal over the next days, the lightly armed converted World War I-vintage obsolescent destroyers relied on speed for survival. None of them would survive the war. Three of them wouldn't survive the next three weeks.

USS *Colhoun* (APD-2) was bombed and sunk by 18 Japanese bombers while unloading off Guadalcanal on 30 August 1942, with the loss of 51 of her crew. USS *Gregory* (APD-3) and USS *Little* went down in a valiant but hopeless night fight against three Japanese destroyers just off Guadalcanal on 4-5 September 1942. Under the overall command of Commander Hugh W. Hadley, embarked on *Little*, as the two APDs turned to attack the Japanese destroyers that had just commenced shelling the Marines ashore, their slim chance of achieving surprise was accidentally betrayed by flares dropped from a U.S. Navy PBY Catalina, which mistook the APDs for a Japanese submarine. The startled Japanese, who had failed to previously detect the APDs, shifted their fire from the Marines ashore. Five hundred Japanese shells later, the two APDs were on the bottom of Ironbottom Sound with almost 90 crewmen, including Hadley and the skippers of *Gregory* and *Little*. Their sacrifice prevented further shelling of the Marines that night.

As the Japanese destroyers exited the area and continued to fire on survivors in the water, Mess Attendant Second Class Charles J. French of *Gregory* rounded up 15 mostly dazed and wounded survivors and pushed them onto a raft. A strong swimmer, he then tied a rope around his waist and proceeded to tow the raft through shark-infested waters and away from Japanese-held shoreline on Guadalcanal, where capture would have meant torture and death, for eight hours—according to an officer survivor on the raft—before they were rescued after dawn.

Left out of most histories of the battle of Guadalcanal, this action ("Miscellaneous Action in

the South Pacific” per Rear Admiral Samuel Eliot Morison) cost a similar number of Navy lives as Marines lost in the far more famous Battle of Bloody Ridge (approximately 90–100 killed in action) on Guadalcanal on 12–14 September. Rear Admiral Richmond K. Turner, commander of U.S. naval forces off Guadalcanal, wrote, “The officers and men serving in these ships have shown great courage and have performed outstanding service. They entered this dangerous area time after time, well knowing their ships stood little or no chance if they should be opposed by any surface or air force the enemy would send into those waters.” Yet, to support the Marines, they did.

Commander Hadley, Lieutenant Commander Harry F. Bauer (commanding officer of *Gregory*) and Lieutenant Commander Gus B. Lofberg (commanding officer of *Little*) were each awarded a posthumous Silver Star. Despite being recommended for a Navy Cross, French was awarded a Letter of Commendation signed by Admiral William F. Halsey.

### ***The Epic Fight of USS Hugh W. Hadley (DD-774), 11 May 1945***

Following the loss of *Colhoun*, *Little*, and *Gregory*, and the deaths of Hadley, Lofberg, and Bauer, the Navy would name destroyers after all of them. USS *Colhoun* (DD-801) would be sunk by kamikazes off Okinawa on 6 April 1945, as would USS *Little* (DD-803) on 3 May. USS Harry F. Bauer (DD-738/DM-26) would later be damaged by a Japanese kamikaze off Okinawa on 6 June and would earn a Presidential Unit Citation. The *Allen M. Sumner*-class destroyer USS *Hugh W. Hadley* was commissioned on 25 November 1944 and would make history.

On 11 May 1945, Japanese massed kamikaze raid Kikusui No. 6 (“Floating Chrysanthemums”) of about 150 suicide aircraft resulted in another horrific day, which included the truly epic fight by destroyers *Hugh W. Hadley* and *Evans* (DD-552) at radar picket station RP15, north-northwest of Okinawa. *Evans* shot down 14 or 15 aircraft before

she was put out of action by four kamikaze hits in quick succession. *Hugh W. Hadley* shot down 19 or 20 aircraft before she too was gravely damaged by a large bomb and three kamikaze hits. On both ships, the crews fought on and saved their ships, even when it seemed all hope was lost. Both ships were so badly damaged that neither was repaired. *Hugh W. Hadley* suffered 30 dead and 68 wounded, while *Evans* suffered 30 dead and 29 wounded (out of about 320 on each ship) in one of the most desperate battles against overwhelming odds in U.S. Navy history. *Hugh W. Hadley*’s tally was the highest number of aircraft shot down by a U.S. surface ship in a single engagement, and that of *Evans* was probably the second highest.

Vice Admiral Cooper’s RFI was followed up with, “Which U.S. Navy ship shot down the most aircraft with surface-to-air missiles, and has a ship ever shot down an anti-ship ballistic missile before now?” During the Vietnam War, USS *Long Beach* (CGN-9) shot down two, probably three, MiGs at long range with Talos missiles. USS *Sterret* (DLG-31) shot down one, possibly two, MiGs with Terrier missiles. USS *Biddle* (DLG-34) shot down two MiGs (one with Terrier missiles, one with guns), and USS *Chicago* (CG-11) shot down a MiG with Talos. No ship has previously shot down an anti-ship ballistic missile.

*For more on TRANSDIV 12 and USS Hugh W. Hadley, please see attachments H-081-1 and H-081-2 (note that H-Gram 010 and H-Gram 046 previously covered these subjects). Previous H-grams may be found here. Further dissemination is greatly encouraged.*

# H-081-1: "Miscellaneous Action in the South Pacific," 4-5 September 1942

H-Gram 081, Attachment 1  
Samuel J. Cox, Director NHHC  
March 2024

As the supply situation on Guadalcanal became critical, the four fast transports of Transport Division 12 (TRANSDIV 12) arrived on 15 August 1942, under orders from Vice Admiral Robert Ghormley, the commander of the South Pacific Area, to make all efforts to keep the deployed Marines supplied. The fast transports (converted World War I destroyers) *Colhoun* (APD-2), *Gregory* (APD-3), *Little* (APD-4), and *McKean* (APD-5), under the command of Commander Hugh W. Hadley, USN (U.S. Naval Academy '22), mostly delivered supplies and gear intended to make Guadalcanal's Henderson Field operational. The Marines had the benefit of captured Japanese rations, so food was not a critical issue. (The four APDs returned on 20 August with rations for the Marines.)

Commander Hadley flew his pennant on *Little*, originally commissioned on 6 April 1918 as *Wickes*-class Destroyer No. 79 under the command of Commander Joseph K. "We are ready now" Taussig. The ship was named for George Little (1754-1809), who served with distinction in the Massachusetts Navy during the Revolutionary War and in the U.S. Navy during the Quasi-War with France. He was most notably, or controversially, known for capturing the French corvette *Le Berceau* and seven other ships while in command of frigate USS *Boston*, two weeks after the Treaty of Mortefontaine ended the Quasi-War in September 1800.

The USS *Gregory* (Destroyer No. 82) had a similar service life as *Little*: commissioned on 1 June



Amphibious shipping and landing craft off the Guadalcanal invasion beaches on the first day of landings there, 7 August 1942. Photographed from on board one of the transports. Following the disastrous outcome of the Battle of Savo Island, the larger shipping was forced to withdraw on 9 August due to the threat of Japanese surface and air forces, making ongoing logistical support of the U.S. landing force precarious (80-G-374870).

1918, decommissioned on 7 July 1922, converted to fast transport (APD-3), and recommissioned on 4 November 1940. It was named after Rear Admiral Francis Gregory (1780-1866) who had a colorful early career fighting pirates along the Louisiana coast and conducting maritime guerilla operations on the Great Lakes during the War of 1812. Eventually, he became a rear admiral during the Civil War as the superintendent of construction of naval vessels being built in private shipyards, including ironclads. Lieutenant Commander Harry Frederick Bauer (USNA '27) became its second commanding officer after recommissioning, on 13 December 1941, also his first command.

Hugh W. "Rooster" Hadley graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1922. According to the *Lucky Bag* yearbook, his extracurricular activities were four years of choir and two years of "probation." The jargon-laden entry suggests he narrowly avoided dismissal. Nevertheless, he was commissioned on time as an ensign, initially serving on the battleship USS *Pennsylvania* (BB-38). He would go into submarines, serving on USS *S-47* (SS-158) and USS *S-27* (SS-132), before assuming command of *S-27* in 1932. In April



1936, he became executive officer of the destroyer USS *Roper* (DD-147) before assuming command of that ship in September 1937. His previous tour prior to assuming command of TRANSDIV 12 was as executive officer, Submarine Base, Coco Solo, Panama.

Japanese reinforcement efforts of Guadalcanal began on 16 August 1942, as Japanese destroyers began landing troops and supplies on Guadalcanal at night. This would set the pattern for the first months of the battle. Japanese destroyers, and their own versions of destroyer-transports, would arrive at night to offload troops and supplies, with the intent of being far enough back up the Solomon Island chain by daylight to avoid being attacked by U.S. carriers or Henderson Field-based aircraft.

During daylight hours, Japanese land-based bombers, escorted by Zero fighters, would fly from airfields in the northern Solomons to try to strike U.S. carriers, bomb the Marines on Guadalcanal, or sink any U.S. ships attempting to resupply the Marines ashore. By the end of August, the pattern was essentially that the Japanese owned the night at sea. Control of the sky during the day was hotly contested with heavy losses in aircraft on both sides, but any Japanese ships caught in daylight were vulnerable to U.S. attack.

On 30 August 1942, under a mostly cloudy sky, the fast transport *Colhoun*, commanded by Lieutenant Commander George B. Madden (USNA '31), paid the price while covering offloading from the transport *Kopara* (AK-62/AG-50) with *Little*. While Marine fighters were on the ground were refueling following an earlier air attack, a flight of 18 Japanese twin-engine bombers arrived overhead. The bombers



USS *Little* (APD-4) in its configuration as a fast transport tied up to a mooring buoy, circa early 1942. Note the ship's camouflage (NH 97784).



Fast transport USS *Gregory* (APD-3) photographed in port, circa early 1942 (NH 97782).

spotted *Colhoun* through a lucky break in the clouds and, from high above *Colhoun's* four 20mm anti-aircraft guns' range, unleashed an astonishingly accurate barrage of bombs. Although trying to get up to speed, *Colhoun* suffered two direct hits, and then a string of five near misses along the length of the hull, which caused major structural damage, before two more direct hits. *Colhoun* sank in under two minutes, losing more than 50 of its crew. This may have been the most accurate bombing of a ship by high-altitude horizontal bombing during the war. Lieutenant Commander Madden survived the attack, would command other destroyers, and

retire as a rear admiral. He was awarded a Silver Star for his actions on this date, although the citation bears no resemblance to the actual events.

From 30 August to 5 September 1942, with TRANSDIV 12 embarked, *Little* and *Gregory* remained in the Guadalcanal area, transporting supplies from ships offloading in Tulagi Harbor across the sound to the beach at Guadalcanal. On 4 September, *Little* and *Gregory* embarked with the Marine 1st Raider Battalion from Tulagi, transported them to Savo Island in response to reports that the Japanese had landed on the island (the Japanese apparently had just left), and then disembarked the Raiders back on Guadalcanal, by which time night had fallen.

Due to overcast and low haze, it was a very dark night, and with no navigation aids to show the way through poorly charted waters to Tulagi, Hadley opted to spend the night off Lunga Point, Guadalcanal. What Hadley did not know was that a Japanese "Tokyo Express" supply run had arrived off Guadalcanal that same night, consisting of the light cruiser *Sendai* and 11 destroyers. (At the time, the almost nightly Japanese supply and reinforcement runs were known to those on Guadalcanal as the "Cactus Express." "Tokyo Express" was a later invention by the press.)

Six of the Japanese destroyers offloaded about 1,000 Japanese troops on Guadalcanal to the west of *Little* and *Gregory*, adding to the enemy's build-up. Three Japanese destroyers, *Yudachi*, *Hatsuyuki*, and *Murakumo*, passed just north of *Little* and *Gregory* to the east. Neither the Americans nor the Japanese sighted each other on the dark night. At 0056 on 5 September, the three Japanese destroyers opened fire on Marine positions ashore on Guadalcanal. At first, *Little* and *Gregory* thought the fire was coming from a Japanese submarine (it was also routine on many nights for a Japanese submarine to surface and

lob a few rounds at the Marines). Both ships went to general quarters and prepared to attack the "submarine."

However, when radar on *Little* indicated four separate contacts (although there were only three), *Hadley* faced a difficult decision. He knew his elderly ships wouldn't stand much chance against any Japanese destroyers. He could remain in place and hope the Japanese would not detect him when they returned westward to exit the area. He could also attempt to flee to the west and hope the Japanese would not detect and run him down—the term "fast transport" was relative to other transports, not destroyers. (Hadley didn't know it, but this course to the west would have taken him toward an even larger Japanese force.) Or he could hope that with the Japanese focused on shelling the shore, he might have the advantage of surprise and could launch a desperation attack. He chose this third course of action.

As *Little* and *Gregory* turned to attack, a U.S. Navy PBY Catalina flying boat searching for the "submarine," and not knowing the U.S. ships were in the area, dropped a string of flares directly ahead of them. Although their cover was blown and all hope of surprise was lost, the two hopelessly outgunned APDs charged at the startled Japanese destroyers. At 0100, the three Japanese destroyers, modern ships (of three different classes) with advanced fire control, exceptional night-fighting capability, and a total of 17 five-inch guns and 26 24-inch torpedo tubes, quickly shifted their fire from the beach to the onrushing U.S. ships.

The battle was short and ugly. Initial Japanese salvos still had antipersonnel rounds loaded, which caused no real structural damage, but decimated American gunners in the exposed topside gun mounts. However, soon the two APDs were riddled by shellfire, as the Japanese fired more than 500 rounds in a matter of 15 minutes.

Hadley and Lofberg were both killed on the bridge of *Little* by the avalanche of shellfire, and the ship was helplessly ablaze by 0115. *Little* would go down by the stern at 0140.

*Gregory* was hit just as badly. With two boilers bursting and the deck engulfed in flames, Lieutenant Commander Bauer gave the order to abandon ship. Although severely wounded, Bauer made it into the water, but he directed Ensign Robert Adrian (USNA '43, graduated '42) and another sailor who were assisting him to go to the aid of another wounded shipmate. Bauer was never seen again. The burning and derelict ship went down on an even keel about two hours later.

At 0123, the Japanese destroyers steamed between the two burning and sinking ships, right through survivors, still pouring fire into the ships and men in the water. By this time, all of *Gregory's* and most of *Little's* crew were in the water—those that were still alive. Out of the nearly eight officers and 98 enlisted men aboard both *Gregory* and *Little*, almost 90 sailors from the two transports were lost that night or subsequently died from their wounds. (The figure of 22 killed on *Little* and 11 on *Gregory* in Rear Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner's original report, subsequently reflected in Navy historian Rear Admiral Samuel Eliot Morison's account, was incorrect. Even Richard Franks' excellent book on Guadalcanal gets the casualties correct in the appendix of overall losses, but incorrect in the account of the battle itself. Most other works don't even mention it.)

As the Japanese ships continued shooting at survivors, *Gregory's* steward's mate Charles Jackson French began gathering up the wounded survivors and pushing them onto a raft. These included Ensign Adrian, who had injured his legs and had shrapnel in his eyes. In Adrian's account, everyone in the raft was wounded. Adrian noted that the raft was drifting toward the Japanese-held shoreline on Guadalcanal. French volunteered to go in the water and tow the raft. As

French started to tie a rope around his waist, Adrian tried to talk him out of it. French replied that he feared the Japanese more than the sharks (which were plentiful in the area) and said, "Just tell me if I'm going the right way." French was only 5'8" and 195 pounds, but was a strong swimmer. In Adrian's account, French towed the raft for about eight hours, before they were sighted by aircraft and rescued by Marines in a Navy landing craft.

After the rescue, authorities tried to remove French from the other survivors and send him to a segregated rest area. To their credit, the surviving crew of *Gregory* refused to allow French to be separated in such a manner.

After Ensign Adrian's account went "viral" on national radio, French briefly attained national hero status, with newspapers for African American audiences extolling his valor and advocating for an award. The *Pittsburgh Courier* noted, "There is not much opportunity for heroism in a ship's galley or an officer's wardroom. But all the men on a ship are in DANGER in time of battle, no matter where they are serving or what their skin pigment may be." French subsequently served on the destroyer USS *Endicott* (DD-495) in the Atlantic and Mediterranean, and then on USS *Frankford* (DD-497) under fire during the landings at Omaha Beach, Normandy, and then Southern France.

Although recommended for a Navy Cross, French was awarded a personal Letter of Commendation from Admiral William F. Halsey, then commander of U.S. forces in the South Pacific Area. The citation reads:

*For meritorious conduct in action while serving on board of a destroyer transport which was badly damaged during the engagement with Japanese forces in the British Solomon Islands on September 5, 1942. After the engagement, a group of 15 men was adrift on a raft, which was being*

*deliberately shelled by Japanese naval forces. French tied a line to himself and swam for more than two hours without rest, thus attempting to tow the raft. His conduct was in keeping with the highest traditions of the Naval Service.*

Why Halsey's letter says "two hours" instead of "eight hours," is a mystery. The level of the award is somewhat less of a mystery. Admiral Halsey would probably be miffed to learn that French "only" received a letter of commendation from a four-star admiral. The Bronze Star was only created in August of 1942, and U.S. Navy personnel were first awarded the Silver Star in World War II that same month. In short, there wasn't really anything between a letter of commendation and the Navy Cross at the time of the event, although by the time Admiral Halsey issued the letter in 1943, the Bronze Star, Silver Star, and Navy and Marine Corps Medal were options. Although the posthumous award of the Navy and Marine Corps Medal in 2022 (for valor in action not involving direct combat with the enemy) was arguably a step in the right direction, why that award was chosen is a mystery (to me) given that Halsey's letter and accounts of the battle stated that the Japanese were shooting at survivors in the water when French commenced his actions (which sounds a lot like direct combat to me).

The "5030" notice (after the U.S. Navy ship-naming regulation) produced by NHHC to describe the rationale for naming DDG-142 after French provided this description:

*Honors Steward's Mate First Class Charles Jackson French (1919-1956), an African American whose bravery and endurance saved fifteen of his shipmates. Raised in Nebraska, French enlisted in the United States Navy as a Mess Attendant in 1937. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, he re-enlisted and served aboard*

*GREGORY (APD-3). On the night of 5 September 1942, GREGORY was struck by Japanese naval forces off Savo Island and her crew was ordered to abandon ship. As the ship went down, French gathered fifteen crewmen from the sea and pulled them onto a raft, just as the Japanese ships turned their guns from the crippled vessels to the Sailors floating in the water. Tying a rope around his waist, French swam through shark-infested waters for several hours until, around sunrise, when they were spotted by U.S. aircraft and rescued. This earned French the moniker "the human tugboat." In honor of his heroic actions, French received a letter of commendation from Admiral William F. Halsey, Jr. in 1943. He was posthumously awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Medal in 2022.*

Note, contrary to many published accounts, French was not a petty officer first class. At the time, a steward's mate first class was equivalent to a seaman first class (today's E-3 seaman), except that African Americans ranked below all white sailors due to the racist regulations in effect. At the time of the action, French was a mess attendant second class (seaman second class then/E-2 seaman apprentice now). The Messman Branch was renamed Steward Branch in 1943, and mess attendants were renamed steward's mates, so instead of French being promoted to mess attendant first class he was promoted to steward's mate first class. The next promotion would have been to either cook third class or steward third class with ultimate promotion to chief cook or chief steward. Note however, that chief cooks of chief stewards, who were Black, ranked below petty officer third class, who were white. African Americans in the Steward Branch were not afforded petty officer status until 1950.

French was mustered out of the U.S. Navy on 9 March 1945 as a steward's mate first class. He died on 11 November 1956 at the age of 37 due



to alcoholism most likely induced by post-traumatic stress disorder.

For their heroism against overwhelming odds, Hadley, Lofberg and Bauer were awarded posthumous Silver Stars. The *Sumner*-class destroyers, USS *Hugh W. Hadley* (DD-774), USS *Lofberg* (DD-759), and the *Robert H. Smith*-class destroyer minelayer, USS *Harry F. Bauer* (DD-738/DM-26) were named in honor of the heroes of this "miscellaneous battle."

Commander Hugh Hadley was one of 27 members of the USNA Class of '22 to die during World War II. His posthumous Silver Star citation reads:

*The President of the United States of America takes pride in presenting the Silver Star (posthumously) to Commander Hugh William Hadley, United States Navy, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity as Commander of Transport Division TWELVE during action against enemy Japanese forces in the Solomon Islands for the period 7 August to 5 September 1942. Under frequent air, surface and submarine attack by a desperate and persistent foe, Commander Hadley, although handicapped by limitation of firepower and reduction of armament, successfully disembarked troops during initial landing operations and thereafter fed vital reinforcements and supplies to the Tulagi and Guadalcanal garrisons. During the tense period prior to the development of our own local air facilities, he and his command were continually subjected to vigorous Japanese bombardment while operating in logistic support of our established positions. Subsequently conducting night patrols and furnishing anti-submarine screen for cargo vessels, Commander Hadley, by his superb seamanship and heroic devotion to duty,*

*contributed materially to the success of our strategic operations in the island area. He gallantly gave up his life in the service of his country.*

### ***The Fate of the Ships Named After the Heroes of TRANSDIV 12***

**USS *Colhoun* (DD-801):** The *Fletcher*-class destroyer was commissioned on 8 July 1944, shot down multiple kamikazes, but was hit by several off Okinawa on 6 April 1945. After a valiant attempt to save the ship, it was hit yet again by another kamikaze that broke its back. The destroyer sank with the loss of 35 men killed and 25 wounded.

**USS *Gregory* (DD-802):** A *Fletcher*-class destroyer commissioned on 29 July 1944 and under the command of Commander Bruce McCandless (Medal of Honor, USS *San Francisco* [CA-38], Guadalcanal, 13 November 1942), it was damaged by kamikazes off Okinawa on 8 April 1945. It was in repair when the war ended. Decommissioned on 15 January 1947. Recommissioned on 27 April 1951. Decommissioned 1 February 1964. Used as a target in 1971. Earned two Battle Stars for World War II service and four Battle Stars for Korean War service.

**USS *Little* (DD-803):** Commissioned on 19 August 1944, the *Fletcher*-class destroyer was hit by four kamikazes in four minutes off Okinawa on 4 May 1945, which caused a large explosion that broke the keel, sinking her in 12 minutes with 31 dead and 79 wounded.

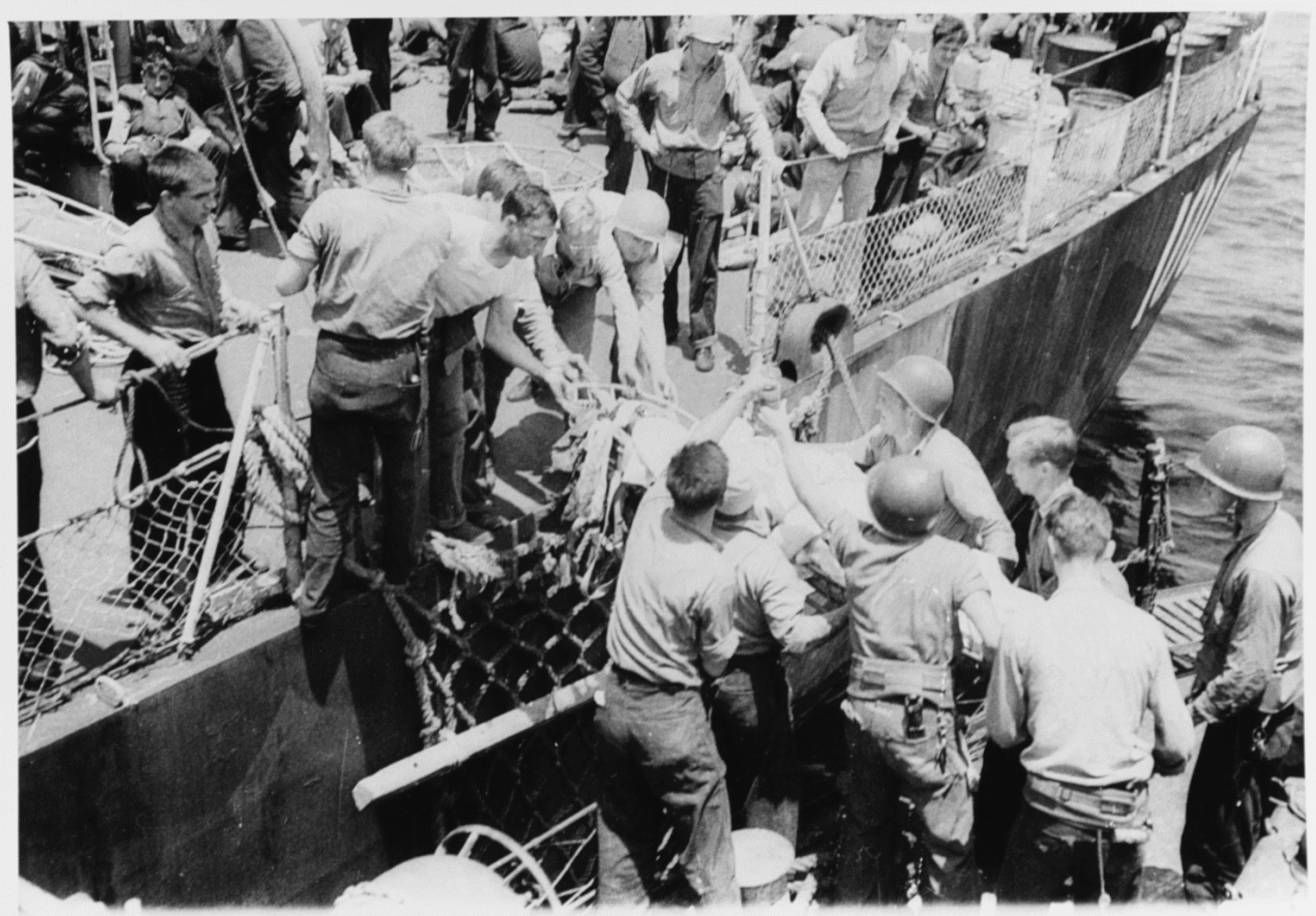
**USS *Harry F. Bauer* (DD-738/DM-26):** The *Robert H. Smith*-class destroyer (DD-738) was converted to destroyer-minelayer (DM-26), and was commissioned 22 September 1944. It shot down 13 Japanese aircraft during the course of the Okinawa campaign and was hit by a torpedo that didn't explode. On 6 June 1945, it suffered what

was thought to be a near miss by a kamikaze. However, 17 days later a live 550-pound bomb was found in a fuel tank "three threads from detonating." Awarded a Presidential Unit Citation, the destroyer was decommissioned 12 March 1956 and stricken and scrapped in 1971.

**USS Lofberg (DD-759):** Commissioned on 26 April 1945, too late to take part in World War II, the *Allen M. Sumner*-class destroyer earned seven Battle Stars for Korean War service and escorted carriers in Gulf of Tonkin during Vietnam War. It was decommissioned on 15 January 1971 and sold to Taiwan for spare parts in 1974.

**USS Hugh W. Hadley (DD-774):** The *Allen M. Sumner*-class destroyer was commissioned on 25 November 1944 and damaged beyond repair on 11 May 1945. The destroyer was decommissioned on 5 December 1945 and scrapped in 1947 (see H-081-2).

**USS Charles J. French (DDG-142):** *Arleigh Burke*-class guided missile destroyer authorized for construction.



Casualties from USS *Evans* (DD-552) are brought aboard USS *PCER-855* from USS *Ringness* (APD-100). *Evans* and its consort *Hugh W. Hadley* (DD-774) were heavily damaged by kamikaze attacks while on radar picket duty off Okinawa on 11 May 1945 (80-G-331077).

## H-081-2: The Epic Fight of the *Hugh W. Hadley* (DD-774) and *Evans* (DD-552): Kikusui No.6, 11 May 1945

*H-Gram 081, Attachment 2*  
*Samuel J. Cox, Director NHHC*  
*March 2024*

Kikusui No. 6 launched the morning of 11 May 1945 from Japanese airfields on the southwestern Japanese home island Kyushu. It consisted of 150 kamikaze aircraft, including 70 from the navy and 80 from the army. Like preceding missions, it included a hodgepodge of virtually every type of aircraft in the Japanese

inventory, resulting in wildly inaccurate recognition calls by U.S. ships and aircraft. The Navy's Radar Picket Position No. 1 (RP1) lucked out this time. The main Japanese attack came in farther west over RP15, located 40 nautical miles northwest of the designated Transport Area off the southwest coast of Okinawa.

Located at RP15 was the new *Allen M. Sumner*-class destroyer *Hugh W. Hadley*, under the command of Commander Baron J. Mullaney (USNA '28) with a fighter direction team embarked. Also located at RP15 was the *Fletcher*-class destroyer *Evans*, named after the first commander of the Great White Fleet, Rear Admiral Robley "Fighting Bob" Evans ("The Fighting Bob" became the ship's nickname). *Evans* was commanded by Commander Robert J. Archer (USNA '28). Four amphibious vessels were also stationed there, including a landing ship

medium (rocket), *LMS(R)-193*, and three landing craft support (large), *LCS(L)-82*, *LCS(L)-83*, and *LCS(L)-84*.

At dusk on 10 May 1945, the two destroyers jointly shot down a Japanese aircraft at 1935. Other single aircraft were detected passing by to Okinawa in the darkness and could not be engaged, but resulted in the crews being at general quarters for much of the night.

On the morning of 11 May 1945, *Hugh W. Hadley's* fighter direction team had control of 16 F6F Hellcats of Fighter Squadron 85 (VF-85) off the newly arrived new-construction Essex-class carrier *Shangri-La* (CV-38). *Hugh W. Hadley* also had control of two Marine F4U Corsairs of VMF-323 flying from airfields on Okinawa captured from the Japanese (Kadena and Yontan). The combat air patrol (CAP) tactics at the radar picket stations were becoming more standardized. The Navy aircraft from the Fast Carrier Task Force (TF 58) would be vectored to intercept incoming Japanese raids between 25 and 50 nautical miles out, while the Marine fighters would hold close to the ships at the picket station to deal with any leakers from the "outer air battle."

About 0730, radar on *Hugh W. Hadley* and *Evans* began picking up multiple Japanese aircraft approaching from the north. Commander Mullaney looked at the radar picture in the combat information center (CIC) and the CIC evaluator showed five major groups with an estimated total of 156 aircraft, which wasn't far off. The Navy CAPs were vectored to intercept the oncoming Japanese aircraft (other TF 58 fighters would join in), resulting in the largest air-to-air action of the Okinawa campaign. Communications between *Hugh W. Hadley* and the CAP became increasingly challenging due to the intensity of the action, but by 0800 it was estimated that 40-50 Japanese aircraft had been shot down by Navy fighters. Unfortunately,

somewhere around 100 additional Japanese aircraft were still coming.

The Marine fighters were directed to intercept the aircraft and, before long, they were engaged in dogfights ranging up to 10 to 20 miles from the ship. The number of Japanese aircraft was overwhelming. The Marines shot down several planes, and even after they ran out of ammunition, continued to harass Japanese aircraft, forcing at least some of the inexperienced Japanese pilots to crash into the ocean.

At 0740, an undetected Japanese Jake floatplane (normally launched from battleships/cruisers) approached *Hugh W. Hadley*. The Jake was pursued by a CAP fighter, was hit, and blew up in a large explosion. *Evans* also reported shooting down a Jake at roughly the same time at 0753. It is likely that this was the same aircraft, and it is uncertain whether *Hugh W. Hadley*, *Evans*, or CAP was responsible for its destruction.

Many more Japanese aircraft continued to come into view with the lead elements seemingly intent on flying past the destroyers in order to reach the transport area. *Hugh W. Hadley* shot down four such aircraft. Subsequently, a very large number of Japanese aircraft turned their attention to *Hugh W. Hadley* and *Evans* and by 0830, both ships were in a desperate fight against overwhelming odds, with each being attacked repeatedly by groups of four to six aircraft. In their frantic maneuvering, a gap of as much as two to three miles opened up between *Hugh W. Hadley*, *Evans*, and the supporting amphibious ships, such that mutual support became less effective. By 0900, *Hugh W. Hadley* had shot down 12 Japanese aircraft, many on kamikaze attack runs. Some aircraft crashed close aboard in near misses, including one Val dive-bomber that crashed 20 feet astern at 0835 and another Val that had its wing shot off and crashed 100 yards away. At this point, *Hugh W. Hadley* was not



USS *Evans* (DD-552) (80-G-187725).

seriously damaged; however, urgent calls were going out on the radio for CAP to return and provide overhead support.

Meanwhile, *Evans* was putting up a terrific fight of its own. Planes attacked *Evans* from all different directions between 0830 and 0900, and the ship shot 15 of them down and assisted in downing four more. At 0830, three Kate torpedo bombers were sighted boring in from the port quarter and *Evans* shot all three of them down. Over the next 15 minutes, *Evans*' gunners downed a mix of seven aircraft identified as Kates, Jills, and Zeros (navy dive- and torpedo bombers and fighters) and Tonys (an army fighter). One of the Kates got close enough to drop a torpedo before it went down. Commander Archer ordered a hard left rudder and the torpedo missed ahead of the bow by only 25 yards.

Following the torpedo attack, a Tony fighter was shot down by both *Evans* and *Hugh W. Hadley*, crashing 3,500 yards from *Evans*. Then, a Val dive-bomber, on a suicide dive, was hit and the pilot lost control, missing *Evans* and crashing 2,000 yards away. Shortly thereafter, an army Ki-43 Oscar fighter dropped a bomb that missed, and was subsequently shot down while attempting to crash into *Evans*. An Oscar and a Jill torpedo bomber also made a run in from the port side, but both were shot down close aboard. A few minutes

later, *Evans* shot down another Tony fighter on an attack run.

*Evans*' extraordinary run of good luck, and obvious anti-aircraft skill, ran out at 0907 when a Judy dive-bomber came in from the port bow and crashed into the destroyer at the waterline, holing the ship and beginning to flood the forward crew's berthing compartment. Nevertheless, *Evans*' guns kept firing and another Tony was knocked down at 8,000 yards by a direct hit from a 5-inch shell.

Amid the smoke of intense anti-aircraft shell bursts, it became increasingly difficult to spot incoming aircraft and, at 0911, *Evans* took its second hit by a kamikaze, which crashed portside amidships just below the waterline and flooded the aft engine room. Two Oscar fighters then hit *Evans* in quick succession. The first Oscar released a bomb in a near vertical dive that exploded deep in the ship in the forward fireroom, destroying both forward boilers, while the crashed plane ignited gasoline fires. The second Oscar hit the ship from the starboard side, starting more fires and inflicting additional severe damage.

At 0925, as *Evans* went dead in the water, two Corsairs chased a Japanese aircraft into range of *Evans*' guns, which hit the plane, causing it to miss the ship's bridge and crash close aboard on the other side. At this point, apparently believing *Evans* was done for, Japanese aircraft focused on the other ships. This gave *Evans*'s crew a respite to save their ship, including resorting to bucket brigades and portable fire extinguishers, as pumps and fire mains were mostly out of action.

As *Evans* was being hit by four kamikazes in quick succession and being effectively knocked out of the battle, *Hugh W. Hadley* was facing a coordinated attack by ten Japanese aircraft. At 0920, four kamikazes came in from the starboard bow, four more from the port bow, and two from

astern. In one of the most astonishing displays of gunnery prowess, *Hugh W. Hadley's* gunners shot all ten down without taking a hit. Then, the destroyer's luck ran out and it was hit by a bomb and three kamikazes in quick succession.

Accounts vary widely as to the type of aircraft and order of hits. I rely primarily on the Navy Bureau of Ships (BUSHIPS) "Final Damage Report on USS *Hugh W. Hadley*," which differs in some significant ways from Commander Mullaney's initial after-action report and even from Morison, particularly regarding whether the *Hugh W. Hadley* was hit by an Ohka rocket-assisted manned flying bomb. According to the initial after-action report, a Betty bomber flying at low altitude (600 feet) astern launched an Ohka, which hit *Hugh W. Hadley* amidships. The BUSHIPS report discounts this for several reasons: the aircraft engine and bomb tailfin were found in impact areas, the impact came from forward of the beam, and the fact that an Ohka launch profile was usually at 20,000 feet. Additionally, a direct hit amidships by a 2,600-pound warhead probably would have sunk the ship in short order. Nevertheless, a very large explosion with no smoke, flash, or noise, other than a dull thud, occurred well under the keel at the same time as a kamikaze plane impacted the ship.

The BUSHIPS report cannot conclusively identify the source of this large explosion, postulating that it might have been an "influence" torpedo, or more likely a very large bomb that passed through the ship, out the bottom, and detonated a significant distance below the keel. The damage was severe, hogging the keel by more than 50 inches and flooding both engine rooms and the aft fireroom.

According to the BUSHIPS report, at 0920, a kamikaze of unconfirmed type passed through *Hugh W. Hadley's* rigging, carrying away wires and antenna, and crashing close aboard to port (this is listed in accounts as a "kamikaze hit," although a "near-miss shoot-down" may be more

accurate). A few minutes later, a kamikaze, originally reported as a "Baka bomb" (Ohka), hit the starboard side at the waterline at the after fireroom. The plane's bomb went through the ship, resulting in "extremely severe flexural vibrations running through the ship for 20 seconds." The three after engineering spaces flooded to the waterline immediately, and the ship lost headway, taking on a five degree list and starting to settle by the stern. Then, a third kamikaze, approaching from astern, dropped a small bomb that hit the aft port quad 40mm gun (mount 44) and then crashed into the superstructure aft of the No. 2 stack, starting an intense fire in officers' country. (In other accounts, the crew of mount 44 fired on the plane until the bitter end, with the mount 44's gun captain's last words being, "We'll get the SOB.")

Shock, fragment damage, and smoke rendered the ship's 5-inch and 40mm batteries entirely inoperable. As flooding spread to shaft alley and the machine shop, the list increased to seven degrees. Concerned that the ship might capsize, the commanding officer gave a "prepare to abandon ship order." (From the safety of Washington, DC, the BUSHIPS report assessed that the ship might very well have sunk, but there was minimal risk that it would capsize, given the nature of the damage.)

Fortunately, at this point, the CAP cavalry arrived and shot down many Japanese aircraft while *Hugh W. Hadley* was in an extremely vulnerable state and dead in the water with a fire raging amidships setting off munitions, listing to starboard with the fantail awash, and the TORPEX explosives at risk of detonating.

Commander Mullaney gave orders to hoist all available colors saying, "If this ship is going down, she's going with all flags flying." Mullaney also ordered most of the crew and the wounded over the side into life rafts, while 50 officers and men remained on board to make an attempt to save



the ship. Torpedoes, depth charges, and unexploded ammunition were jettisoned (there wasn't much ammunition left: Hadley had fired 801 rounds of 5-inch, 8,950 rounds of 40mm, and 5,990 rounds of 20mm ammunition). Topside weight was also discarded from the starboard side to try to correct the list. The forward boilers were secured so that they didn't explode.

Initially, the Japanese aircraft focused on the two destroyers while the LSM(R) and three LCS(L)s provided what anti-aircraft support they could (the LCS(L)s had radar-directed fire control, but the LSM(R) did not). However, soon the amphibious vessels were fighting for their lives, too.

*LCS(L)-82* shot down three aircraft and assisted in downing two more. At 0837, *LCS(L)-82* fired on and hit a Jill torpedo bomber heading for the *Evans*. The Jill's flight profile became erratic before it dropped a torpedo that missed *Evans* and crashed into the sea (this is probably the same aircraft recounted above).

At 0845, *LCS(L)-82* assisted *LCS(L)-84* in shooting down a Tony on the port side. Then, an Oscar came in from the starboard bow and gunners on *LCS(L)-82* hit it repeatedly. As a plane passed overhead at 1,000 feet, it broke apart and debris fell toward *LCS(L)-82*. The skipper, Lieutenant Peter Beierl, adroitly maneuvered the vessel so the wings and engine fell in its wake. At 0940, a Val being pursued by CAP fighters passed astern and *LCS(L)-82* gunners hit it, causing it to narrowly miss *Evans*, although some errant "friendly fire" hit *Evans'* forecastle and started a fire. *LCS(L)-82* then went alongside *Evans* to assist.

*LCS(L)-83* shot down three Zeros and a Tojo (army fighter) between 0900 and 0939, while *LCS(L)-84* shot down a Zero diving on *LCS(L)-83*.

Despite *LSM(R)-193's* less-than-optimum anti-aircraft capability, it too gave a good account of

itself. At 0845, a Kate torpedo bomber dove on *Evans*, but missed and aimed for *LSM(R)-193* instead. It was shot down by 5-inch and 40mm gunfire. At 0859, *LSM(R)-193* shot down another Kate and then, at 0912, shot down a Hamp (a variant of a Zero). The vessel shot down a fourth plane and assisted in shooting down another plane that was headed for *Hugh W. Hadley*. *LSM(R)-193* subsequently went alongside *Hugh W. Hadley* to assist in fighting the fire and tending to the wounded.

When the Japanese attacks finally ended, *LCS(L)-82* and *LCS(L)-84* were assisting the crippled *Evans* alongside while *LSM(R)-193* and *LCS(L)-83* were with the equally wounded *Hugh W. Hadley*. The combined efforts brought the fires and flooding on both destroyers under control. The destroyer *Wadsworth* (DD-516), fast transport *Barber* (DE-161/APD-57), and fleet tug *ATR-114* soon arrived to assist with rescue and towing. *Evans* was towed to Kerama Retto for emergency repairs and then across the Pacific to San Francisco, where it was decommissioned and later sold for scrap. *Hugh W. Hadley* was also towed to Kerama Retto and spent time in the floating drydock *ARD-28* before it too was towed across the Pacific to Hunters Point, California, where it was determined to be damaged beyond repair.

*Evans'* casualties included 30 men killed and 29 wounded. *Hugh W. Hadley's* losses were 30 killed and 68 wounded. The amphibious vessels also suffered a number of wounded.

Given the volume of fire from all the ships and the chaos of battle, it is difficult to confirm which ship shot down which airplanes, and in many cases the credit would have to be shared. In most accounts, *Evans* is credited with shooting down 14 or 15 Japanese aircraft and assisting with a number of others. The number usually cited for *Hugh W. Hadley* is 23 Japanese aircraft destroyed, although that number includes the three that crashed into it. Other accounts give a number of

19 or 20. Regardless, *Hugh W. Hadley's* tally represents the "all-time" U.S. Navy record for aircraft downed by a ship in a single engagement.

Both the *Hugh W. Hadley* and the *Evans* were awarded Presidential Unit Citations and their skippers, Commander Baron Mullaney and Commander Robert Archer, were each awarded a Navy Cross. The gunnery officer on *Hugh W. Hadley*, Lieutenant Patrick McGann, was also awarded a Navy Cross. The crew of *Hugh W. Hadley* also received seven (or eight) Silver Stars, eight Bronze Stars, and several other awards. Crewmen on *Evans* probably received similar awards, although records remain elusive. The four amphibious vessels were awarded Naval Unit Commendations, and the skipper of *LSM(R)-193*, Lieutenant Donald Boynton, was awarded a Silver Star. The skipper of *LCS(L)-82*, Lieutenant Peter Beierl, was awarded a Bronze Star, and so probably were the other *LCS(L)* skippers, whose names I can't find.

As any good skipper would, Commander Mullaney of *Hugh W. Hadley* gave full credit to his crew, writing:

No Captain of a man of war ever had a crew who fought more valiantly against such overwhelming odds. Who can measure the degree of courage of men who stand up to their guns in the face of diving planes that destroy them? Who can measure the loyalty of a crew who risked death to save the ship from sinking when all seemed lost? I desire to record that the history of the U.S. Navy was enhanced on 11 May 1945. I am proud to record that know of no record of a Destroyer's crew fighting for one hour and 25 minutes against overwhelming enemy aircraft attacks and destroying 23 planes. My crew accomplished their mission and displayed outstanding fighting abilities.

As the Director of Naval History, I can second Commander Mullaney's motion.

The Navy Cross citation for Commander Mullaney reads:

*The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Navy Cross to Captain (then Commander) Baron Joseph Mullaney, United States Navy, for extraordinary heroism and distinguished service in the line of his profession as Commanding Officer of Destroyer USS HUGH W. HADLEY (DD-774), Radar Picket Ship, during an attack on that vessel by more than one hundred enemy Japanese planes off Okinawa, Ryukyu Islands on the morning of 11 May 1945. Fighting his ship against waves of hostile suicide and dive-bombing planes attacking from all directions, Captain Mullaney skillfully directed his men in delivering gunfire to shoot down nineteen enemy aircraft and, when a bomb and three kamikazes finally crashed on board and left the ship in flames with three of the engineering spaces flooded, persevered in controlling the damage until HADLEY could be towed safely to port. Captain Mullaney's leadership and professional skill in maintaining an effective fighting unit under the most hazardous conditions reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Naval Service.*

Commander Mullaney retired as a rear admiral.

The Presidential Unit Citation for *USS Hugh W. Hadley* states:

*The President of the United States takes pleasure in presenting the Presidential Unit Citation to the United States Ship USS HUGH W. HADLEY (DD-774) for service as set forth in the following citation; For extraordinary heroism un action as Fighter Direction Ship on Radar Picket Station Number 15 during an attack by*

*approximately 100 enemy Japanese planes, forty miles northwest of the Okinawa Transport Area on 11 May 1945. Fighting valiantly against waves of hostile suicide and dive-bombing planes plunging toward her in all directions, the USS HUGH HADLEY sent up relentless barrages of anti-aircraft fire during one of the most furious air-sea battles of the war. Repeatedly finding her targets, she destroyed twenty planes, skillfully directed her Combat Air patrol in shooting down at least 40 others and, by her vigilance and superb battle readiness avoided damage herself until subjected to a coordinated attack by ten Japanese planes. Assisting in the destruction of all ten of these, she was crashed by one bomb and three suicide planes with devastating effect. With all engineering spaces flooded and with a fire raging amidships, the gallant officers and men of the HUGH W. HADLEY fought desperately against insurmountable odds and, by their indomitable determination, fortitude and skill, brought the damage under control, enabling their ship to be towed to port and saved. Her brilliant performance in the action reflects the highest credit upon the HUGH W. HADLEY and the United States Naval Service.*

The Navy Cross citation for Commander Robert J. Archer, commanding officer of USS Evans reads:

*The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Navy Cross to Captain (then Commander) Robert John Archer, for extraordinary heroism and distinguished service in the line of his profession as Commanding Officer of the Destroyer USS EVANS (DD-552) in action against enemy Japanese forces while assigned to Radar Picket duty off Okinawa on 11 May 1945. When his ship was subjected to attacks by an*

*overwhelming force of enemy aircraft for one- and one-half hours, Captain Archer directed the gunfire of his batteries in shooting down fifteen enemy planes and assisting in the destruction of four others. Although the EVANS was severely damaged by hits from four suicide planes and in sinking condition, he led his crew in determined efforts to save the ship and bring her safe to port. His professional ability, courage and devotion to duty upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.*

*Sources include: Desperate Sunset: Japan's Kamikazes Against Allied Ships, by Mike Yeo: Bloomsbury Press, New York, 2019; History of U.S. Naval Operations in World War II, Vol. V, The Struggle for Guadalcanal, and Vol. XIV, Victory in the Pacific, by Rear Admiral Samuel Eliot Morison: Little Brown, Boston, Massachusetts, 1961; Guadalcanal: The Definitive Account of the Landmark Battle, by Richard Frank: Random House, New York, 1990; Kamikaze Attacks of World War II: A Complete History of Japanese Suicide Strikes on American Ships by Aircraft and Other Means, by Robin L. Rielly: McFarland and Co., Inc., Publishers, North Carolina, 2010; Neptune's Inferno, by James D. Hornfischer: Random House Publishing Group, New York, 2011; NHHHC Dictionary of American Fighting Ships (DANFS); U.S. Navy Bureau of Ships "Final Damage Report on Hugh H. Hadley"; and somewhat to my surprise, the most comprehensive account on French is in Swimming World Magazine ([www.swimmingworldmagazine.com](http://www.swimmingworldmagazine.com)) in "Memorial Day: The Story of Charles Jackson French—A Hero for Our Time," 25 May 2023, by Bruce Wigo.*