

Archives Branch  
Naval History and Heritage Command  
805 Kidder Breese Street, SE  
Washington Navy Yard, DC 20374-5060

Processor: Roy Grossnick (Updated January 2013).

# The Sullivan Brothers Papers

## COLL/706

**Creator:** Artificial Collection of data collected on the Sullivan Brothers from WW-II

**Extent:** 1 box  
.3 cubic feet

**Date Range:** 1948 and 1992

**Classification:** Unclassified

**Access:** Open

### Scope and Content Notes

This fragmentary collection of papers relate to the five Sullivan brothers, who were lost in action following the battle of Guadalcanal November 13, 1942.

The collection consists of newspaper clippings of the Waterloo, Iowa newspaper, applications to Gold Star Mothers, and a photocopy of commemorative stamps issued in their honor. Also included is a brief fact sheet outlining the events of the tragedy and a ship named in their memory.

### The Five Sullivans Biography

On the morning of Nov. 13, 1942, a Japanese submarine fired the fatal blow on the USS Juneau in the Battle of Guadalcanal. Of the speculated 140 who survived the sinking, only 10 were rescued. Among those who were lost in the tragedy were five from Waterloo, Iowa: The Five Sullivan Brothers. The loss of George, 28; Francis, 27; Joseph, 24; Madison, 23; and Albert, 20; has been called the biggest blow to any one family in U.S. wartime history.

They had all talked about joining the Navy. When their buddy, Bill Ball of Fredericksburg, Iowa, was killed on the USS Arizona during the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the five brothers decided to enlist together to avenge his death. It was also for this reason that the five brothers were adamant about serving together. During wartime, the accepted policy was to separate family members. But the brothers persisted, and their request was finally approved.

George, the eldest, summarized the brothers' philosophy: "If the worst comes to worst, why we'll all have gone down together." Unfortunately, that came to pass.

Surviving the brothers were their parents, their only sister, Genevieve, and the youngest brother's wife and son, Mrs. Katherine Sullivan and Jimmy. Commitment to the Navy and to the war cause lived on with the remaining Sullivans. Mr. and Mrs. Sullivan set forth on a nationwide tour of the shipyards and war plants supporting the Navy cause and praising the workers to inspire their continued efforts. Genevieve did her part by joining the Naval service as a WAVE (Women Accepted for Voluntary Emergency Service). Little Jimmy Sullivan went on to serve, too. When he turned 17, he enlisted in the Navy, just like his father.

### **The USS The Sullivans**

The Navy honored the service and sacrifice of the five Sullivan brothers April 4, 1943, in San Francisco when Mrs. Sullivan christened the destroyer named for the famous brothers: USS The Sullivans. The destroyer went on to earn 9 battle stars in the war.

Under the command of Cmdr. Kenneth Gentry, the USS The Sullivans was commissioned Sept. 30, 1943. It arrived at its first duty location, Pearl Harbor, Dec. 28, 1943. For the next 18 months, the vessel was assigned such duties as plane guard for fast carriers, shore bombardment and anti-kamikaze picket duty at Okinawa.

The ship was considered to be lucky as it survived a devastating typhoon Dec. 18, 1944, that cost the Third Fleet three destroyers.

The USS The Sullivans saw her last combat action of World War II May 14, 1945, as she screened the USS Enterprise from air attack. Her crew is credited for knocking out one of four Japanese aircraft lost during the attack.

The ship was sent to Mare Island, Calif., for a refit in 1945 and decommissioned and placed in reserves from January 1946 to May 1951.

The ship returned to duty during the Korean war and continued service until January 1965 when she was decommissioned for the last time.

The ship is now on display in Buffalo, N.Y.

### **Box and Folder Listing**

#### **Box 1**

1. Applications to American Gold Star Mothers, 4 Mar 1948
2. Newspaper clippings, Oct/Nov 1992
3. Photocopy, stamps issued *in* honor of Sullivan Brothers, 21 Sep 1948
4. Video tape: 50th Commemorative Event, 13 Nov 1992