



Mission: History

Studiorum Historiam Praemium Est

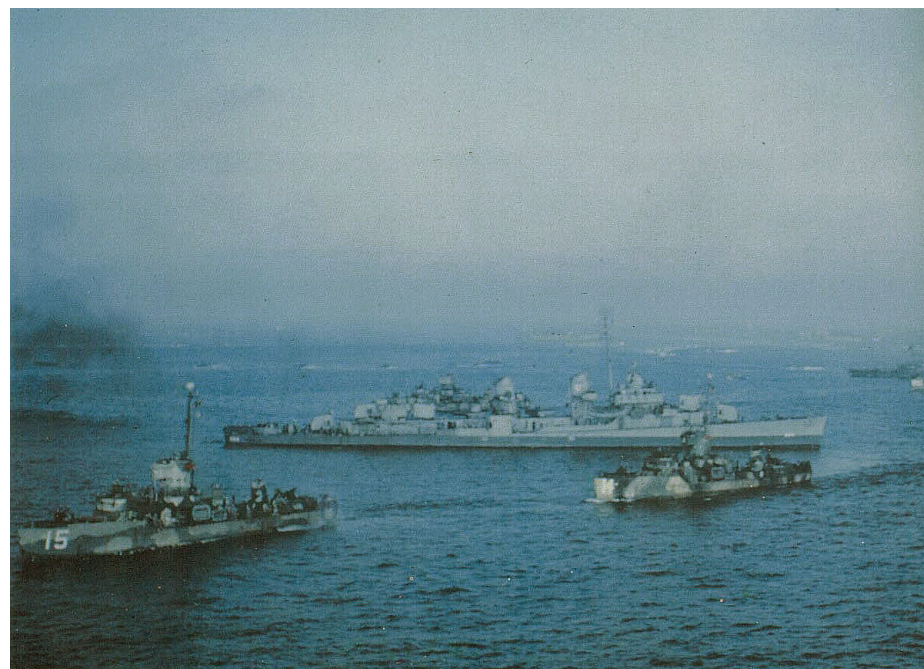


3 April 2000

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Volume 2, Number 4

1945: The Deadliest Duty



SMALL BOYS AND SMALLER BOYS form an anti-submarine screen in the transport area. Here, a FLETCHER class destroyer and two LCS(L)s patrol the transport area while Okinawa is shrouded in the fog of battle. In their grim humor, destroyermen came to call the smaller craft "pall bearers."

1941: Niblack is First U.S. Navy Vessel To Take World War II Offensive Action

Before the second world war, Iceland was a free and sovereign state, but was nominally under the King of Denmark and its foreign relations were handled by Denmark.

In the spring of 1939, long before Hitler invaded Poland, Denmark accepted the German chancellor's offer of a non-aggression pact, the only Scandinavian nation to do so.

On 9 April 1940, German forces occupied Denmark, brushing aside token resistance, and within two hours the

Danish government accepted German occupation of their country. Denmark, despite maintaining until late 1943 that it was neutral, was a de facto ally of Hitler.

Icelanders weren't the only ones watching their foreign policy fall under the thumb of the Germans. Six weeks after German troops marched into Copenhagen, British troops landed in Iceland, to pre-empt a takeover by Hitler.

A glance at any map of the North Atlantic shows that if Hitler had Iceland there would have been no convoys to

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Destroyermen Suffer Stiffest Okinawa Cost

**Kamikazes Kill 1,800,
13 Destroyers are Lost**

Most histories of the second world war in the Pacific and the few written on the April 1945 invasion of Okinawa focus on the landing of Marine Corps and Army forces and the action of those troops ashore, and with some justification, since Okinawa was Japanese real estate, and the fight on land was a long and bloody sample of what would happen if the Jap homeland were invaded.

Where the U.S. Navy is mentioned, it is usually in connection with shore bombardment, attacks on carriers and the sinking of the Jap super-battleship *Yamato* as she made her suicidal run.

Securing Okinawa cost around 12,000 American lives, and about 5,000 of them were sailors, most of them victims of Japan's sacrificial kamikazes. It was the most expensive operation in the Navy's history.

If the Navy's role, other than that of the battleships and aircraft carriers, has been reported too lightly, that of its destroyers has been virtually ignored. Of the 5,000 Navy dead at Okinawa, some 1,800 were destroyermen.

For the 1 April 1945 invasion of Okinawa, the largest armada in history was assembled—1,450 American ships manned by more than a half-million

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Okinawa Ships Within Easy One-Way Kamikaze Range - Destroyers on Lonely Picket Duty Were Tempting Targets

One-Half of Destroyers Committed at Okinawa Were Sunk or Damaged

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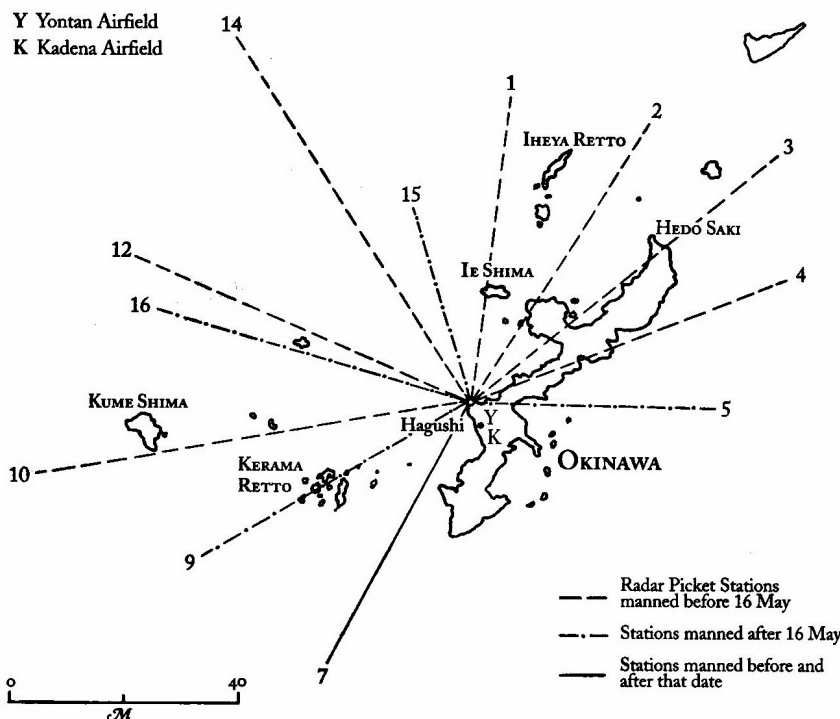
bluejackets. There were 18 battleships, 40 aircraft carriers, too many cruisers to count, submarines, minesweepers, patrol craft, landing craft and the gunboats created by arming landing craft and calling them landing craft support (large and small). All these classes suffered in the operation, but none suffered like the 148 destroyers and destroyer escorts that were there to protect the others.

Eleven destroyers and two destroyer escorts were sunk, 42 received major damage, 16 received minor damage and three more got something in between. That is just about half of the 'small boys' committed.

Okinawa was known to be the most heavily defended of the Ryuku Islands, but the strength of its defenses was badly underestimated. The island is only 350 nautical miles south of the southernmost Japanese home island of Kyushu and was considered an excellent base from which to bomb Japan. It is only 330 nautical miles north of Formosa and 400 from mainland China. All three distances are within easy range of kamikaze aircraft, whose mission requires one-way passage only.

In addition to their usual duty of screening larger ships, destroyers were employed as radar pickets at stations ranging from 20 to about 95 miles from the landing beaches. There was also an outer and an inner anti-submarine screen, and other destroyers were used in combination with landing craft to patrol the transport area. Twenty-three destroyers were assigned fire support roles at the invasion beaches.

For the first five days, Jap air attacks concentrated on the transport area and the radar pickets, and were relatively light. Relatively light, that is, when compared to what followed. To an individual ship, an attack by suicidal pilots intent on personally delivering 2,500-pound bombs and spraying its decks with flam-



RADAR PICKET STATIONS were at first manned by single destroyers. After it became apparent that the pickets were a favorite target of Jap Kamikaze's, a second destroyer or ship with similar anti-aircraft capability was added. Eventually, armed landing craft were added, but the sinkings went on. The landing craft became known as "pall bearers." Chart from *Great American Naval Battles* edited by Jack Sweetman.

ing gasoline from wrecked airplanes cannot be considered light.

"Floating chrysanthemums," the Japs called it, which may have made a difference to those who floated off to meet their ancestors after meeting a fiery death as they splattered their airplanes against the superstructure of U.S. ships or exploding along with the *Baka* glide bombs they were steering or drowning in the bowels of *Yamato*.

They came on 6 April, hundreds and hundreds of aircraft. Post-war Japanese records revealed that 699 airplanes attacked the U.S. fleet that day, and 355 of them were kamikazes. As they approached Okinawa, many were shot down by American carrier planes, but most got through. Some went for the heavy ships and some for the transport area, but the lonely destroyer pickets, accompanied only by an LCS(L) or two, bore the brunt of the attack.

Plane after plane was shot into the water by the destroyers' 20-mm Oerlik-

ons, 40-mm Bofors and 5-inch/38s, but many got to the ships. Seven destroyers and a destroyer escort were hit by a pilot bent on dying for his god-emperor and two more were sent to the bottom. And it was just the beginning.

USS *Bush* Sunk

USS *Bush* (DD-529), Cdr. R. E. Westholm, had been placed on radar picket station No. 1, but had been relieved on 2 April by USS *Pritchett* (DD-561). When *Pritchett* was damaged by a kamikaze the following day, *Bush* returned to the station.

On 6 April, she fought off kamikazes from early morning until mid-afternoon, when a lone Jap suicide pilot skimmed in on her starboard side, just off the water. Despite repeated hits from the destroyer's guns, the plane kept coming, crashing into the ship between her stacks. Flaming gasoline spewed over *Bush's* decks and a bomb exploded in the forward engine room with sufficient

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355 Suicidal Jap Kamikazes Attack on 6 April — Bush and Colhoun Sunk; 9 Other DDs Damaged

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force to send a two-ton blower high enough to knock off the radar antenna before it crashed down on the port wing of the bridge. Watertight integrity was maintained and the fires were brought under control, as USS *Colhoun* (DD-801), Cdr. G. R. Wilson, drew alongside to offer assistance.

At about 1700, another kamikaze attack of 16 planes took on the two ships. Ten were splashed. Two hit *Bush*. The first of these nearly broke the destroyer in half and the second finished her off. Eighty-seven officers and men were killed and 42 wounded. Among those who died was Cdr. J. S. Willis, commander of DesDiv 48.

USS *Colhoun* Sunk

When 15 kamikazes attacked the stricken *Bush* and *Colhoun* at 1700 on 6 April, *Colhoun* was hit immediately. Then she was hit three more times. The first Jap crashed into her superstructure, bathing the ship in flame, the second hit on the bow, opening the forecastle, and numbers three and four hit *Colhoun* in the side. She was doomed, but her captain didn't know it. He backed the ship into the wind to blow the fires forward and damage control parties went to work. Wilson ordered all but a skeleton

crew to be taken off by *LCS-84*.

USS *Cassin Young* (DD-793) arrived and was told to search for survivors of *Bush*. It took five hours for *Colhoun* to die, and in that time 295 of her crew, including 21 wounded, were saved. One officer and 34 bluejackets perished.

USS *Mannert L. Abele* Sunk

On 12 April 1945, President Franklin D. Roosevelt died, and the Japs sought to make capital of a possible distraction by sending more than 200 kamikazes along with bombers carrying the Baka bomb—a glider-bomb with a human navigation device. Seven destroyers and destroyer escorts were hit, and among the first was USS *Mannert L. Abele* (DD-733), Cdr. A. E. Parker. At about 1445, a single kamikaze got through the ship's hail of anti-aircraft fire and crashed into her starboard side, sending a 2,500-pound bomb into the after engine room. Less than a minute later, a Baka bomb slammed into the ship a little forward of the first hit, blowing up the forward fireroom and breaking the ship's back. *Abele's* gunners had got two attacking kamikazes during the ship's three-minute combat life.

Theodore Roscoe, in his *United States Destroyer Operations in World War II*, describes what those three minutes were

like for Lt. George L. Way, one of *Abele's* officers:

Blown overside by the Baka blast, Way caught a line and clambered back on board the sinking ship. One minute gone. He spent the next sixty seconds rounding up all able hands forward, and setting them to work cutting loose and launching life rafts. Two minutes gone. A fraction of the third minute he spent opening the hatch above the passageway to the plotting room—an exit for the men in that cubicle. Then he flung himself at the port hatch of the forward engine room. A dog was jammed. Somewhere Way snatched a crowbar—a hammer—something. Pounding and wrenching, he succeeded in breaking off the dog. Time was ticking; the main deck was awash. Way swung open the hatch as wavelets lapped and splashed at the combing. Out of the prisoned darkness below came pale, grease-smeared men—ten who had been trapped—ten who were released from death. Time was up. But three minutes were enough for Lieutenant George L. Way.

Seventy-three of *Abele's* crew were lost in the sinking, and it would have been worse but for the efforts of Way.

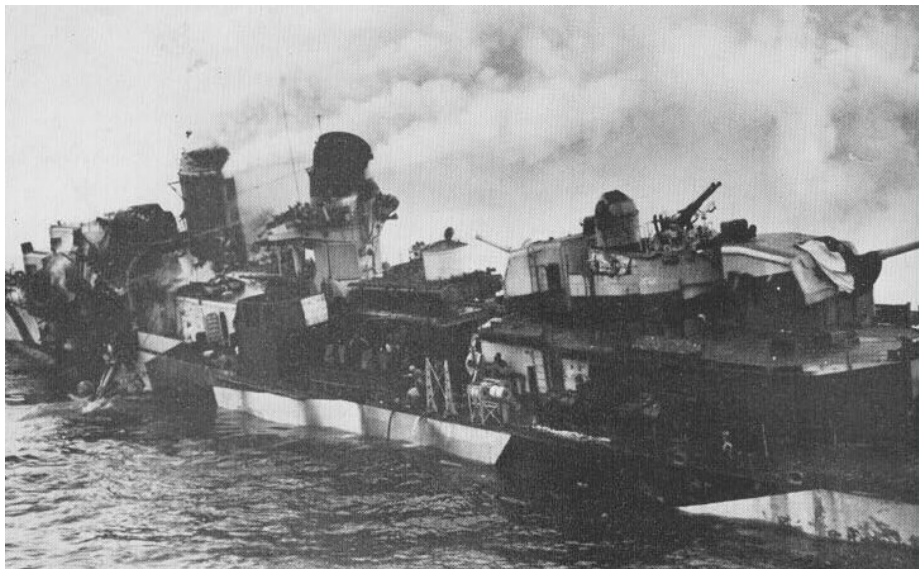
USS *Pringle* Sunk

By 16 April, each picket station had a fighter cover of two airplanes and a companion destroyer or other ship with comparable anti-aircraft firepower for support. USS *Pringle* (DD-477), Lt. Cdr. J. L. Kelley was on picket station No. 14, along with destroyer-minelayer USS *Hobson* (DMS-26) and two landing craft. At about 0900, *Pringle's* radar picked up an inbound kamikaze. Forewarned, the ship's gunners splashed the Jap. But three more showed up and, though two were downed, the third got in.

The kamikaze hit *Pringle* abaft her forward stack, and sent its bomb load into the ship's interior. Both stacks were blown from their foundations, the superstructure was wrecked from the bridge to the No. 3 5-inch gun mount and the ship's back was broken.

Within five minutes, *Pringle* broke in two and sank. *Hobson* and the *LCS* (L)s picked up some 258 survivors, about half suffering from burns, fractures and other injuries. Sixty-two sailormen went to the bottom with their ship.

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EIGHT HUNDRED MEN lost their lives in ships that survived. USS *Hazelwood* (DD-531) was one of those, losing 46 men including her captain, Cdr. V. P. Douw, on 29 April. Another 26 were wounded. With her bridge demolished and all on it killed, command was assumed by a young reserve jay-gee who, according to R.Adm. Mahlon S. Tisdale, a veteran destroyer commander himself, "handled her like a Farragut."

Niblack's Ashcans May Have Scared Off Kraut Sub

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England or the northern ports of Russia.

By the end of March 1941, a number of agreements had been reached between U.S. Navy leaders and their British counterparts. "Short-of-war" support by the U.S. Navy, commanded by Rear Admiral A. L. Bristol Jr., consisted of three destroyer squadrons, some Navy aircraft and accompanying tenders. USS *Niblack* (DD-424), a *Benson* class destroyer commissioned only 14 months earlier, was one of nine ships making up Destroyer Squadron 7.



THE BENSON CLASS *Niblack* was a lucky ship. She was on hand when *Reuben James* was sunk in October 1941 and was still unscathed when she provided fire support during Operation Anvil, the invasion of Southern France.

Karl Haushofer, a Nazi political strategist, had written that "Whoever possesses Iceland holds a pistol pointed at England, America and Canada." President Franklin D. Roosevelt had looked at the map and he knew that was true. After Hitler declared on 1 March 1941 that Iceland and its surrounding waters were a "war zone," the president ordered Admiral Harold R. Stark, Chief of Naval Operations, to conduct a reconnaissance of Iceland, and Lt. Cdr. E. R. Durgin, *Niblack's* skipper, got the job.

Niblack sailed from the U.S. in early April, flying the pennant of Cdr. D. L. Ryan, ComDesDiv 13. As she closed Iceland at the end of an uneventful voyage on 10 April, *Niblack* came upon three lifeboats filled with survivors from a torpedoed Netherlands freighter. As the last of the Dutch sailors was being helped over the side, *Niblack's* sonar picked up a submarine contact, with the range closing.

1945: Destroyer Escorts Sink 7 U-boats Against 1 Loss in Operation Teardrop

After Gen. George S. Patton's Third Army crossed the Rhine in March 1945, many Americans a continent removed from the bitter fighting in the Pacific, thought the war was just about over. To combat this complacency, Adm. Jonas Ingram, Cinclant, held a press conference to announce that a desperate Third Reich might launch buzz-bombs at U.S. cities from submarines.

It was pure hyperbole, but it worked. And it turned out that German Navy chief Grsadm. Karl Doenitz did have something planned for the western shore of the Atlantic with his U-boats, but not buzz-bombs. Part of his plan, called *Seewolf*, was for six snorkel-equipped subs to disrupt shipping off the U.S. East Coast. The chief of staff of the U.S. Tenth Fleet was R. Adm. Allan R. McCann, an old submariner who knew what *Seewolf* was up to.

McCann set up a plan called Operation Teardrop to keep the U-boats away and during the month of April, seven U-boats were sunk against the loss of one destroyer escort.

On 5 April, *U-857* announced its presence in the Gulf of Maine by torpedoing an empty American tanker. The sub then tried to hide by lying on the bottom off Cape Cod. On 7 April, USS *Gustafson* (DE-182), using repeated hedgehog attacks, destroyed the pigboat where she lay.

On 16 April, USS *Frost* (DE-144) and USS *Stanton* (DE-247) were in the North

Durgin sounded battle stations and, as the destroyer's crew rushed to their positions, Ryan ordered *Niblack* to attack with depth charges. A pattern of ashcans was dropped, apparently giving the U-boat commander pause, because the sub withdrew.

This short engagement was, so far as can be ascertained, the first action of World War II between U.S. and German armed forces. Post war records, however, suggest that it may have been a very one-sided affair. Action reports by U-boat commanders fail to show a German submarine having suffered a depth charge attack in waters around Iceland in April 1941.

Atlantic as part of McCann's anti-*Seewolf* barrier. At night, in heavy seas and fog so dense it made star shells useless, the two ships alternately saw a sub at snorkel depth and heard a submerged boat. They attacked with hedgehogs and heard a thunderous explosion. When they made another contact 40 minutes later, they thought they had missed their sub and it was getting away, so they attacked again. The two ships got credit for *U-1235* and *U-880*.

During the midwatch of 19 April, USS *Buckley* (DE-51) and the new USS *Reuben James* (DE-153) were steaming off Sable Island near Nova Scotia when they made a sound contact on a sub. They fired no fewer than 24 hedgehog patterns, and finished *U-879*.

At about 2200 on 21 April, one of McCann's Operation Teardrop groups was relieved and was heading off station when USS *Carter* (DE-112) got a sound contact on what turned out to be a snorkel sub, *U-518*. *Carter* figured the German knew where she was so she coached USS *Neal A. Scott* (DE-769) in for an attack. Then *Carter* took a depth reading on the sub and found it to be only 150 feet down. One hedgehog pattern scratched *U-518*.

On 24 April, USS *Frederick C. Davis* (DE-136), a part of one of McCann's barrier groups, was investigating a sighting by a pilot and had made a good sonar contact at 0829. "Fightin' Freddy" was a tough ship and had put in time at the Anzio beachhead. Her gunners had shot down 13 enemy aircraft in the Mediterranean. The German sub heard Fightin' Freddy's sonar, and then Freddy lost contact. At 0835, a tremendous explosion shook the ship. *U-546* had torpedoed her from the point-blank range of 650 yards. Only 63 bluejackets and three officers out of a total of 179 men and 13 officers were saved.

Fightin' Freddy hadn't been alone on the Atlantic that morning. No fewer than eight destroyer escorts spent almost 12 hours running down the pigboat that did in their consort. USS *Pillsbury* (DE-133), USS *Flaherty* (DE-135), US *Chatelain* (DE-149), USS *Neunzer* (DE-150), USS *Hubbard* (DE-211), USS

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1942: USS *Roper* First U.S. Vessel to Kill U-boat; German Sub Sunk in Night Action off Virginia Capes

USS *Roper* (DD-147), a Wickes class flush-decker, built by Wm. Cramp & Sons and commissioned in 1919, was the flagship of DesDiv 54, Cdr. S. C. Norton, early in 1942, and her captain was Lt. Cdr. H. W. Howe. Twenty-six of her sisters were among the four-pipers transferred to Britain in 1940.

Roper was also the first U.S. Navy vessel to sink a German U-boat.

The sinking of USS *Jacob Jones* (DD-130), also a part of DesDiv 54, by a U-boat on 28 February 1942 had shocked the officers and men of the division. She had been steaming at a sedate 15 knots off the Delaware Capes when three German torpedoes sent her to the bottom. Only 11 men of a complement of around 150 survived, and not an officer among them. The sinking sent a message that the three mile limit didn't keep enemy submarines out.

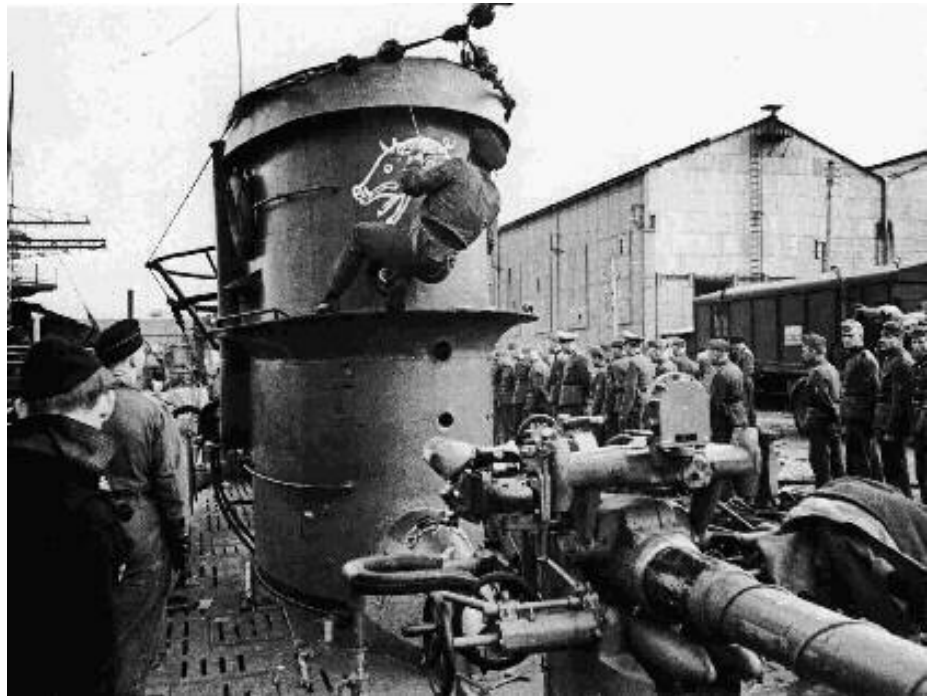
Roper was among the first U.S. destroyers fitted with an early version of radar. On the night of 13-14 April, she was steaming south from Norfolk and had just put Wimble Shoal light on her starboard quarter when six minutes after midnight her radar operator reported a



ONE THAT DIDN'T GET AWAY, USS *Roper* stayed home while 26 of her WICKES class sisters were among the old destroyers transferred to Britain under Lend-Lease. She stayed home, went to the Key West Sound School, got the latest sonar and radar equipment and learned how to use it

"blip" on his screen at a range of 2,700 yards. Howe rang up 20 knots and took off after the target.

As the range to the target dropped, the bearing changed constantly, suggesting



A REAL PIGBOAT, the German submarine *U-85* is shown in drydock at the French port of St.-Nazaire, where she is having her trademark boar painted on her conning tower as two members of her crew watch the artist. The artist is the story. He is Lothar-Guenther Buchheim, then a marine artist and sometime journalist. After the war, he became a screenwriter, and gained fame as the writer of the story for the Wolfgang Petersen movie *Das Boot*, a well-received film about *U-96*.

that whatever it was, it was zigzagging. At about 2,100 yards, the wake of a small vessel was seen. Howe was cautious—in coastal waters it could be anything. The range continued to drop, but no ship was seen at the head of the wake. When *Roper* had closed to 700 yards, a torpedo passed close aboard and Howe knew what he was chasing.

But Howe was determined not to shoot until he saw what he was chasing, and it wasn't until the range was a mere 300 hundred yards that he ordered the target illuminated with *Roper's* searchlight. What he saw was the German submarine *U-85*, Oberleutnant Eberhard Greger. Built at the Flender-Werke in Lübeck, the type VII-B sub had been commissioned just 10 months earlier but had already sunk three allied ships.

The moment *Roper's* searchlight caught the sub, the ship's main battery, a 3-inch gun, spat fire and her machine guns kept the Germans from manning the sub's deck gun. An early round from the three-incher made a direct hit on the submarine's hull, just below the conning

tower. *U-85* began to settle and Howe though she was submerging. Not knowing some of the German crew had abandoned ship and were bobbing in the dark water, he depth-charged the sub on sound contact.

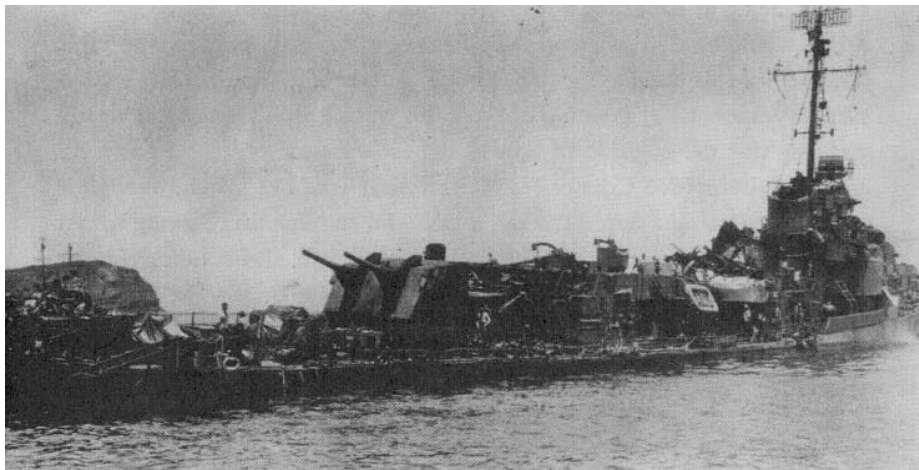
Later that morning, the bodies of 29 crewmen of *U-85* were recovered. They had evidently been in the water, hidden by darkness, during the depth charge attack, and were killed by concussion.

Both Norton, as commander of DesDiv 54, and Howe were awarded the Navy Cross for the action.

Today, *U-85* lies upright on a hard, sandy white ocean floor, 120 feet beneath the surface and about 15 miles due east of Nags Head, North Carolina, where she is visited regularly by scuba divers.

On the submarine's conning tower is painted a cartoon of a boar — the ship's trademark, but this boar has a rose in its teeth. The hometown of *U-85's* captain was called "Lieberose," and when the community sponsored the boat in late 1941, the boar was given its rose.

April Turned to May, and Still the Kamikazes Came; and the Destroyermen Fought On



DESTROYERS WEREN'T THE ONLY SHIPS HURT. USS *Aaron Ward* (DM-34), on picket duty with USS *Little* (DD-803), survived the attack, but was knocked out of the war.

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USS *Little* Sunk

April's thirty days had passed and the battle for Okinawa raged on. On 3 May, USS *Little* (DD-803), Cdr. Madison Hall Jr., was on radar picket duty in company with the minelayer USS *Aaron Ward* (DM-34), an LSM and two LCS(L)s. In the late afternoon, *Little's* radar picked up a flock of bogeys—too many to count, too many to deal with.

As the kamikazes bored in, the ships' gunners splashed two of them, which was four not enough.

One after another, the four Japs crashed their bomb-laden planes into *Little*, wrecking her superstructure and holing her hull. No order to abandon ship was needed—it was all over in two minutes. *Little's* consorts closed in to pick up survivors, 280 of them. *Little* took 30 of her crew with her.

USS *Luce* Sunk

On 4 May, the kamikazes got two destroyers, and USS *Luce* (DD-522), Cdr. J. W. Waterhouse, was one of them. With combat air patrol (C.A.P.) protecting the destroyers on picket duty, it fell to some ships to provide fighter-director control. That was *Luce's* job at 0740, when radar picked up a covey of kamikazes. She vectored the carrier fighters to intercept and they took care of most of the intruders. Most, but not all.

Two suicidal Japs got through *Luce's* curtain of anti-aircraft fire, one hitting her on the starboard side abreast of the forward stack and the other crashing into her port quarter. The destroyer's super-

structure was ablaze from burning gasoline, her frames were buckled and her engineering spaces were flooded.

Luce held steady for a few minutes, but when she started sinking, she sank fast. Her consorts fished 186 of her crew from the water, 57 severely injured. But 149 of her bluejackets were lost.

USS *Morrison* Sunk

Also on 4 May, USS *Morrison* (DD-560), Cdr. J. R. Hansen, was fighter-control ship on picket station No. 1, in company with the destroyer USS *Ingram* (DD-694), three LCI(L)s and an LSM. When raids began at 0715, she vectored C.A.P. fighters to intercept, just like *Luce*, and was just as unlucky. Fighters got the first three kamikazes, but a fourth bored in, with three Corsairs after it. Repeatedly hit, its pilot probably dead, the Jap plane skimmed over the number 2 gun, glanced off the bridge and splashed ten yards off *Morrison's* stern.

A second kamikaze was shot into the water by the ship's gunners and a third splashed 50 feet to starboard. A fourth bounced off the bridge, leaving a wing, and splashed 25 yards away. A fifth narrowly missed the after stack, and hit the water, and it was not yet 0830. But now *Morrison's* luck faded. Two kamikazes came at her from straight overhead. The first crashed at the base of the forward stack, its bomb exploding in the No. 1 boiler room. The second banged off the No. 3 gun and onto the main deck, the impact ripping open *Morrison's* hull and allowing the sea to pour into the after engine room. Finally, seven ancient

twin-float biplanes came at the destroyer, and two got through.

Morrison was done for, so, at 0840, Hansen ordered her abandoned. Of her complement of 331, only 179 survived, 108 of them were wounded, while 152 were killed or missing.

USS *Oberrender* Lost

USS *Oberrender* (DE-344), Lt. Cdr. Samuel Spencer, was on anti-submarine patrol off the western coast of Okinawa on 9 May when she was done in, but it took more than a kamikaze to finish her off. At 1840, Spencer called all hands to general quarters because of Jap aircraft in the vicinity. At 0852, gliding out of the setting sun, a single plane was spotted at 9,000 yards.

Oberrender's gunners took the intruder under fire, hitting it frequently. At about 2,000 yards, the plane's port wing began flapping and finally fell off at 250 yards. The plane veered a bit, but not enough to miss the ship, crashing onto her superstructure but causing only light damage. The loose wing hit just below the after stack doing little damage.

But then a terrific blast shook the ship. What is believed to have been a 500-pound bomb with a delayed-action fuse had penetrated the main deck and exploded in the forward engine room, killing eight. *Oberrender* was towed to Karema Retto, where Navy bean counters finished her off. Judging the ship was not worth the cost of repairs, they struck *Oberrender* from the Navy list.

The Wreck of the *Longshaw*

USS *Longshaw* (DD-559), Lt. Cdr. C. W. Becker, was not sunk by kamikazes and, in fact, was not sunk at all, but blown off a reef by Japanese shore batteries. How she happened to be on a reef is told by a United Press story that ran in U.S. newspapers in July of 1945.

Washington, July 13. (U.P.)—Lt. Raymond L. Bly, senior surviving officer of the destroyer *Longshaw*, which was sunk by Jap shore batteries after running aground off Okinawa, said today that loss of the vessel resulted from battle fatigue.

The 25-year-old officer, of 6101 Delphi St., Los Angeles, said:

"For 30 days we had been at general quarters for 90 per cent of the time. Every man aboard was dead tired. The ship ran onto a reef about a mile offshore at dawn on May 18. The crew had been

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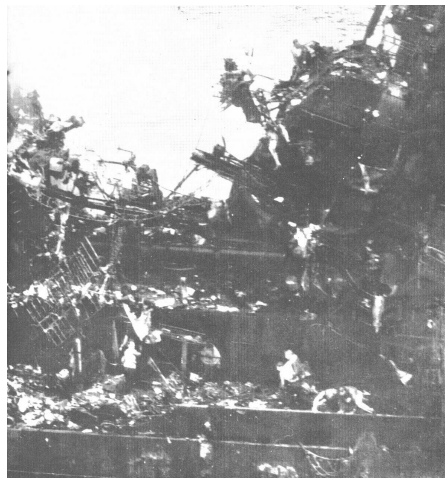
USS Longshaw Runs Aground in Front of Jap Shore Battery, Gets Pounded to Death

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at general quarters until midnight.

"If we had been on our toes it never would have happened," he said.

"But we were all so dog tired we relaxed for just a few minutes--the wrong minutes."



STUCK FAST on a reef in front of an enemy shore battery, *Longshaw* was pounded to bits. Fire from U.S. ships completed her destruction.

On 14 May, *Longshaw* was called on by forces ashore for fire support and provided it, steadily, until 17 May, when she put into Karema Retto for fuel and more ammo. The stop at Karema Retto was under general quarters. She then returned to her station and fired star shells throughout the night to illuminate Jap positions ashore. In the morning, she was to return to using high explosive rounds against gun emplacements.

At 0719, *Longshaw* ground to a halt. She had ridden up on a reef, right in front of a Jap shore battery. Becker tried to back his ship off, lightening ship by jettisoning everything not bolted down, but she was stuck fast. A companion destroyer, USS *Picking* (DD-685), tried to pull her off but her tow cable parted. The fleet tug *Arikara* tried, and was just taking up slack in her cable when, at 1100, the Jap battery opened up.

The first salvo was long, the second short and the rest on target. An early round found her forward magazine and blew off her bow back to the bridge. Mortally wounded, Becker ordered his ship abandoned. Ten other officers and 75 sailors lost their lives.

USS Drexler Sunk

On 28 May, USS *Drexler* (DD-741), Cdr. R. L. Wilson, was on picket duty at

station No. 15, in company with USS *Lowry* (DD-770). Shortly before 0700, the two SUMNER class ships were steaming in column when they turned right to bring a radar target on beam. The target turned out to be a covey of high-quality kamikaze pilots in fast airplanes. The kamikazes broke into groups to attack different targets and at least five concentrated on *Drexler*.

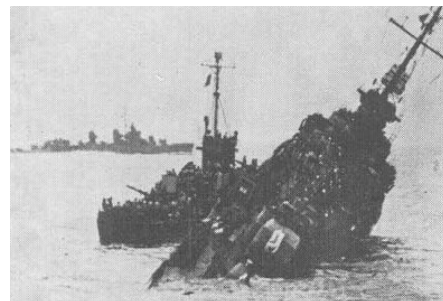
The first was shot out of the sky by a C.A.P. Corsair. A second appeared coming in on the starboard bow and *Drexler* poured 5-inch fire at it, right over *Lowry*. The Jap missed *Lowry* and appeared headed for the water but the pilot was able to wrest it around and crash into *Drexler's* topsides. Flaming gasoline spewed over her superstructure, but the fires were quickly put out. About thirty seconds after that hit, another kamikaze, diving on *Lowry*, was blown into the water by *Drexler's* guns. At about 0703, a fourth suicidal Jap dove at *Drexler* and was driven off line by Corsairs, but the pilot whipped around and crashed into the ship's superstructure, near the boat davits.

This last kamikaze, a modern, twin-engined Mitsubishi Ki-67, code-named "Frances" by the Allies, was carrying at least two large bombs, and a terrific explosion wracked *Drexler*. Fire shot hundreds of feet into the air and parts of the ship were blown in every direction. In less than a minute, she rolled over and sank, taking 158 bluejackets and eight officers with her.

USS William D. Porter Sunk

A typhoon gave the Navy all it could handle during the first week of June 1945, damaging at least 22 ships, but the kamikazes were back on 10 June, and they got USS *William D. Porter* (DD-579), Cdr. C. M. Keyes. She was the luckiest of the unlucky 13 "small boys" lost at Okinawa.

Porter was a veteran ship, if a ship commissioned two years earlier can be so called, and her crew considered themselves old hands. She was on radar picket duty at station No. 15 on 10 June, with four landing craft consorts when she was surprised by a single kamikaze that dove on her through a 1,500-foot overcast. *Porter's* gunners had perhaps three seconds to get their bearings and



THE LAST TO LEAVE the sinking *William D. Porter* was her captain, Cdr. C. M. Keyes. No lives were lost in the sinking of the luckiest unlucky destroyer at Okinawa.

shoot. That was enough to drive the Jap off the ship, but he crashed close aboard and the explosion opened *Porter's* after plates like a sardine tin—and the ship was not buttoned up aft.

Moving alongside, *Porter's* consorts joined the struggle to keep her afloat, but the flooding could not be controlled. With his decks awash and stern settling rapidly, Keyes ordered his ship abandoned. The 61 wounded in the blast were gently handed across to the waiting ships and the able bodied had time to transfer with care. *Porter's* crew came through the loss of their ship without a single fatality.

USS Twiggs Sunk

As forces ashore pushed Jap defenders to the extreme southern tip of Okinawa, destroyers were called on to provide fire support from close inshore. So it was that on the night of 16 June USS *Twiggs* (DD-591), Cdr. George Philip, was lying off Itoman, hurling 5-inch high explosive at an enemy that was fighting nearly to the last man.

At 2030, occupied with answering fire call from ashore, *Twiggs* failed to detect a kamikaze until it was only 1,000 yards off her port beam. The plane dropped a torpedo and then crashed into her aft of the number two funnel. The torpedo exploded the forward magazine, bending her bow upwards at a right angle, and the plane's fuel turned *Twiggs's* topsides into an inferno. Other ships, including the destroyer USS *Putnam* (DD-757), attempted to come to *Twiggs's* aid, but exploding antiaircraft ammo kept them away. When the after magazine blew up, *Twiggs* plunged to the bottom.

Of the 188 survivors fished out of the

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Due to be Relieved in an Hour, *Callaghan* Was the Unluckiest Unlucky Ship

(Continued from page 7)

water, almost half were injured. *Twiggs* took 152 with her, including her skipper.

USS *Underhill* Sunk

Japanese resistance on Okinawa ended on 21 June 1945 in a flurry of banzai charges and the surrender of about 7,500 defenders (an estimated 107,500 Japs had been killed). Admiral William F. Halsey took the fleet north to the Japanese home islands. But there remained shipping to and from Okinawa, and the danger of kamikaze attacks. The destroyers kept at their radar picket duty.

The kamikazes did continue to come. On 22 June, the attack of some 45 suicide planes managed to sink one landing ship and damage four other vessels. But there was another way for a Jap to die for his emperor. In what Samuel Eliot Morison called "Parthian shots," in as neat an allusion as one is likely to find, kaitens got USS *Underhill* (DE-682), Lt. Cdr. R. M. Newcomb, on 24 July, as she and a few patrol craft (PCs) were escorting a small convoy from Okinawa to Leyte.

Kaitens were undersea versions of the airborne Baka bomb. They were one-man submarines; little more than torpedoes guided by humans. Six kaitens could be carried by a single I-boat—a conventional Jap submarine. One of the last of those was *I-53*, which sortied after Okinawa was secured.

Underhill's convoy had just got east of Luzon when the DE spotted a mine at 1415. She advised her convoy to change course and attempted to sink the mine with gunfire after the other ships had cleared. The mine failed to detonate, but then *Underhill* picked up a sound contact on a submarine and sent a PC to investigate. The PC confirmed the contact at 1451 and Newcomb attacked with depth charges.

Shortly after, a periscope was sighted and Newcomb said he was going to ram. No one knows what happened next, except there was a terrific explosion that sent flames and parts of *Underhill* hundreds of feet in the air. Everything forward of the number one stack had disappeared—forecastle, bridge and everything in between.

The after section remained afloat long enough for the PCs to take off 116 of *Underhill's* crew, but 102 men and 10

officers, including the captain, died with the ship.

USS *Callaghan* Sunk

The last ship sunk by the last kamikaze attack at Okinawa was USS *Callaghan* (DD-792), Cdr. C. M. Bertholf. As 28 July became 29 July, she was on radar picket station No. 9, in company with the destroyers *Pritchett* and USS *Cassin Young* (DD-793) and three LCSs. *Callaghan* was flagship of Capt. A. E. Jarrell, ComDesRon 55, who was on board.

Callaghan was only two years old, but was just about worn out from 18 months of solid duty. She was to be relieved by the destroyer USS *Laws* (DD-558) in an hour, and then it would be home to the States for a refit and some rest for her tired crew.

At 0028, as the midwatch settled in, bogeys were reported and the ship was called to general quarters. Tired eyes scanned the horizon under a bright three-quarter moon and sighted a slow, low-flying plane beginning a kamikaze run at about 2,000 yards. It was an old, float-equipped biplane, all wood and fabric. Proximity fuses wouldn't work. *Callaghan's* gunners would have to blow it out of the sky with a direct hit. They failed to do so.

At 0041, the flimsy kamikaze crashed into the ship near the No. 3 gun upper handling room, but there was nothing flimsy about the bomb it carried. The handling room exploded, but that would have been manageable. The bomb exploded in the after engine room and opened *Callaghan's* sides to the sea. That was not manageable.

At 0050, Bertholf ordered all hands except a salvage party to abandon ship, but the damage and fire were too much for the few key men remaining on board. At 0153, he and Jarrell stepped over to an LCS that had closed to help out. At 0235, *Callaghan* went down by the stern. One officer and 46 sailors were lost with the ship.

Callaghan was the thirteenth, and last, destroyer lost during operations around Okinawa.

Acknowledgments

Mission: History is indebted to many sources for the foregoing. Principal among them are:

Burns, Ross (Ed.): *War in the Pacific: 1937-1945*.

Morison, Samuel Eliot: *U.S. Naval Operations in World War II*, Vol. XIV.

Parkin, Robert Sinclair: *Blood on the Sea: American Destroyers Lost in World War II*.

Reilly, John C. Jr.: *U.S. Navy Destroyers of World War II*.

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Eight Angry Destroyer Escorts Avenge Fightin' Freddy's Loss

(Continued from page 4)

Keith (DE-241), USS *Janssen* (DE-396) and USS *Varian* (DE-798) were bent on revenge.

U-546 was tough to track and tough to kill, but after about 10 hours of depth-charging, she was driven to the surface when her pressure hull was ruptured. The first thing she did on the surface was fire a torpedo at *Flaherty*, and *Flaherty* fired two right back. All missed. Four ships fired away at the sub with their 3-inch guns until 1845, when *U-546* put her nose in the air and sank.

U-548 had sunk a freighter off Cape Henry on 14 April and a tanker off the Delaware Capes four days later. On 29 April, near midnight, it was sighted while preparing to attack a convoy. USS *Natchez* (PF-2), a frigate of the screen, drove it off. USS *Thomas* (DE-102), USS *Bostwick* (DE-103) and USS *Coffman* (DE-191) dispatched *U-548* after she tried every trick for three hours.

How to Get in Touch

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Submissions are not encouraged because of constraints on the time available for editing. If such are sent, they should be sent as e-mail attachments in Microsoft Word 6.0 or as type-written copy, double-spaced, accompanied by a 3½-inch diskette containing the submission in Microsoft Word 6.0 for Windows.

Quite welcome, however, are suggestions of events for coverage. Please offer suggestions two months ahead of the anniversary of an event. Include, if appropriate, brief personal reminiscences of those events.