

# USS BRISTOL DD857 VETERANS ASSOCIATION SPRING 2019

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## ARLINGTON CEMETERY

### Jeopardy Question:

On Jeopardy the other night, the

1. How many steps does the guard take during his walk across the tomb of the steps: It alludes to the twenty-one gun salute which is the highest honor given any military or foreign dignitary.
2. How long does he hesitate after his about face to begin his return walk and why? 21 seconds for the same reason as answer number one. 1
3. Why are his gloves wet? His gloves are moistened to prevent his losing his grip on the rifle.
4. Does he carry his rifle on the same shoulder all the time and ,if not, why not? He carries the rifle on the shoulder away from the tomb. After his march across the path, he executes an about face and moves the rifle to the outside shoulder.
5. How often are the guards changed?Guards are changed every thirty minutes, twenty-four hours a day, 365 days a year.
6. What are the physical traits of the guard limited to? For a person to apply for guard duty at the tomb, he must be between 5' 10' and 6' 2' tall and his waist size cannot exceed 30.They must commit 2 years of life to guard the tomb, live in a barracks under the tomb, and cannot drink any alcohol on or off duty for the rest of their lives. They cannot swear in public for the rest of their lives and cannot disgrace the uniform or the tomb in any way. After two years, the guard

is given a wreath pin that is worn on their lapel signifying they served as guard of the tomb. There are only 400 presently worn.The guard must obey these rules for the rest of their lives or give up the wreath pinEvery guard spends five hours a day getting his uniforms ready for guard duty.

**ETERNAL REST GRANT THEM  
O LORD AND LET  
PERPETUAL LIGHT SHINE  
UPON THEM.**

In 2003 as Hurricane Isabelle was approaching Washington,DC, our US Senate/House took 2 days off with anticipation of the storm. On the ABC evening news, it was reported that because of the dangers from the hurricane, the military members assigned the duty of guarding the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier were given permission to suspend the assignment. They respectfully declined the offer, "No way, Sir!" Soaked to the skin, marching in the pelting rain of a tropical storm, they said that guarding the Tomb was not just an assignment,it was the highest honor that can be afforded to a service person. The tomb has been patrolled continuously, 24/7, since 1930.

God Bless and keep them.

I'd be very proud if this email reached as many as possible. We can be very proud of our men and women in the service no matter where they serve.

## USO Rallies Around Service Members During Typhoon Relief

Tech. Sgt. Christopher Ruano, Guam National Guard

*By Danielle DeSimone*

When the fifth-strongest tropical storm in [recorded history](#) made landfall in a U.S. Commonwealth, the U.S. Armed Forces were ready to help – and so was the USO.

On Oct. 24, 2018, Typhoon Yutu hit the U.S. Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands of Saipan and Tinian, where 52,000 U.S. citizens and nationals currently live. The tropical storm left catastrophic damage in its wake. Most homes and businesses were destroyed from either the storm itself or from flooding, trees were torn up by their roots, roads impassable and there were no utilities – electricity, water and internet were completely wiped out.

As soon as the storm passed, service members from the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard and the Guam National Guard were immediately deployed to the islands to begin relief and recovery efforts.

Photo credit 9th Mission Support Command

The destruction left in the wake of Typhoon Yutu on the southern end of the island of Saipan.

However, conditions were tough. On Saipan, more than 500 service members bedded down in an abandoned hotel, while in Tinian,

many units were in tents. Water and electricity was scarce throughout the entire island, and there were no flights or ocean cargo ships going to either island to deliver goods. Without internet, residents and service members alike were cut off from their friends and family as they continued relief efforts.

In response to the military mobilization to Saipan and Tinian, the [USO Pacific](#) team mobilized as well. Just over one week after Typhoon Yutu made landfall, [USO Guam](#) was able to arrange flights, cargo assistance and ground transportation that was otherwise not available to other organizations. USO shipments arrived, including [USO Care Packages](#), snacks, water, coolers, microwaves and entertainment equipment. The USO also worked around the clock to ensure their on-site team would have access to internet on the island. By Nov. 10, USO staff and supplies were at the ready, and a temporary USO lounge was opened in an abandoned hotel on Saipan.

This temporary USO lounge served as a site of relief and relaxation from the deployed service members on the island. Aside from having a clean, dry space to spend downtime in, service members also had access to board games, television, coffee, water, snacks and Wi-Fi so that they could remain connected to family and friends at home.

The USO is committed to keeping service members connected to home in other ways as well. While units continued in their relief efforts

throughout the month of November, the USO also provided service members with a full Thanksgiving meal on Tinian, along with fun games with prizes and giveaways.

The Northern Mariana Islands continue to recover from Typhoon Yutu, but service members began leaving in mid-December and made it home just in time for the holidays.

## DON'T WASH THAT COFFEE MUG!

[November 25, 2013](#)  
[153 Comments](#)  
[Featured](#), [History](#), [Newschief](#), [coffee](#), [coffee mess](#), [funny](#), [navy](#), [navy chief](#)



The obsession began over seven years ago. In 2006, I began at the Hampton Roads Naval Museum as a wide-eyed intern, ready to take on the new and fascinating world of naval history. I thought the coffee mess at work was reserved for staff and volunteers only. I did not feel comfortable partaking in the delicious brew until somebody told me I could. When I finally got the green light, I happily brought my coffee mug in the next day, eager to drink from the well all working class souls go to each morning.

This was my first experience with “Navy coffee.” It was hot and strong. Very strong. The thickness of it closely resembled crude oil. It tasted both wonderful and terrible at the same time. Your mind can trick you into believing anything. When a supreme pot of joe is brewed, many of the volunteers would call it “Signal Bridge Coffee,” recalling

the nostalgia of long nights and many cups consumed.

After that first morning of coffee, I went to the break room to wash my cup and let it dry for the next day's angry fix. As I washed out my cup, I felt the sting of glaring eyes from behind my back. I'm sure whoever it was, they could sense my hesitation. I turned around to see GMC Dana Martin, the museum's active duty OIC. He had a puzzled, concerned look on his face. Chief Martin was grizzled and salty. He was by far one of the saltiest sailors I have ever met. He grabbed my arm washing the cup. My hesitation grew to fear. He leaned in close and told me to "never wash it again," staring back down at my cup and back to me. I looked at him, puzzled with fascination and disbelief. Although I drink my coffee black, my mind struggled to find reason in the practice.

"I don't understand," I told him. "I need to clean my cup." I was merely doing what I was taught. Bills should be paid on time. Five minutes early is five minutes late. Coffee mugs should be washed out after use. Simple, right? Wrong. I held my breath and found out just how wrong I really was.

He leaned in again, this time more relaxed (and less confrontational).

"I know you are just starting out here, but I want to let you in on a little secret." He was almost whispering. "If you intend to stay here at the museum, you can impress the Navy guys with your mug." He went on to explain to me the significance of an unwashed or "seasoned" coffee mug, particularly in the Navy Chief community.

"And keep it as tarry black as possible," he added. "Sometimes it's the only way you can drink this swill. But you will grow to love it and depend on the taste." I would never think I would believe him. Boy, was I wrong.

Old coffee in a cup signifies seniority and stature in the military, particularly on deployment. As one

blogger noted, "You may not be able to embrace your loved ones while you are gone, but at least you can still taste the same coffee you drank the day you left."

To many in the military, this is nothing new. Ask anybody who served or is currently serving in the military, and they will likely give you a story about an experience involving the practice of "seasoning" their cup. Navy Chiefs, however, are considered by many to be the most Spartan of stalwarts to the unwashed coffee mug. I spoke to some retired CPOs who counted four or five deployments on a single unwashed cup. The August 1949 edition of *All Hands Magazine* declared that coffee was the "Lifeblood of the U.S. Navy." The article goes on to discuss why many sailors take their coffee so seriously.

The article opens with this paragraph:

**S**AILORS can nonchalantly polish their fingernails on their lapels – if they had lapels – when the conversation turns to coffee brewing. Sensitive-palate coffee quaffers admit that when it comes to preparing the delicious beverage, U. S. Navy men have no peers.

The 1945 *Cookbook of the United States Navy* lists several reasons why a clean mug and pot of coffee is essential to a flavorful experience.

All parts of the coffee mess had to be "scrupulously clean," according to the cook book. Sailors today might read those guidelines and laugh at the rules and regulations.



Several recent articles about the practice surfaced on the internet on message boards and military news blogs. One blogger from the *Military Times* ([Broadside Blog](#)) wrote about it this past August.

"There are only a few things you need to know about Navy coffee, and most of it involves the cup," the blogger writes. "You do not wash a Navy coffee cup. Ever."

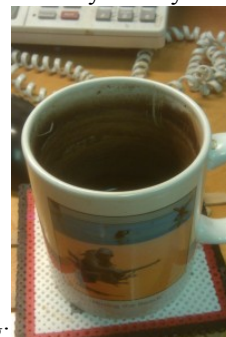
I took Chief Martin's advice, but not at first. For the first few weeks following our confrontation, I washed my cup out after he left for the day. But I got lazy after a while.

I started noticing dark brown rings inside my cup. My mug started to look like the inside of a tree, and I started to like it. The mug was white, so it was easy to measure my progress.

The rings grew larger and darker until the entire inside was jet black. Although I was never in the military, I felt a swelling of pride at my Frankenstein creation. Unfortunately, that mug did not survive. My latest and greatest creation came about in 2009. It has not been washed or cleaned since its purchase. I don't know if my peers understand it. My wife surely doesn't. I have a similar mug at home that she avoids looking at, and, on rare occasions, will clean when I am not looking.

Here is my (meager) contribution to this fine naval tradition. I warn you, if you are unfamiliar with the practice, you might be shocked.

Behold: My four year "seasoned"



mug:

**DRIVER'S SEAT FOR  
JAN. 23 2019**

Guideposts, Mrs. Epworth and Ensign Muldoon

Most columnists soon learn that what they write has all the impact of a pebble tossed into a pond. A few ripples, and then oblivion. But occasionally surprises occur.

In the summer of 1951 I underwent one of my sporadically religious impulses. I submitted a description of it to Guideposts, a magazine founded by minister Normn Vincent Peale. To my surprise, they published it. End of story? Not quite.

The article appeared in October, as my ship crossed the Pacific en route to the Korean war. By the time we reached Yokosuka, Japan, I had received two fan-mail responses. One was from a gushing middle-aged clubwoman (let's call her Mrs. Epworth) who lived in Harrisburg, Pa.. Her announced mission: to one day meet me in person, just to thank me for finding God, saying so, etc. More about her (below).

The second letter was from Ian, a New Yorker who worked as a publicity man for one of the Hollywood film studios. He accompanied his compliments with a dozen black-and-white glossy photos of movie stars, mostly glamorous women.

My first mistake was not ducking the overtures of Mrs. Epworth. My second goof was showing the starlet photos to my buddies in the radio

shack. They slobbered over the pictures, as could be expected of young sailors about to spend a frigid winter guarding the bleak perimeters of Korea.

One day the pictures caught the attention of Ensign Muldoon, a good-natured, easy-going officer. His eyes lit up. "Where did you get these?" I told him. He said, "Could I borrow these for a few days?" I replied, "Sure."

In the following weeks I received more importuning letters from Mrs. Epworth, who looked forward to our meeting one day. And Ens. Muldoon did not return the pix of the movie tootsies. I learned that he had taped the photos all over his stateroom in the officers quarters.

I could have asked him to relinquish the pictures, but I didn't. Muldoon was a likeable guy. But as time passed, resentment set in. Big mistake.

My ship made a liberty call in Sasebo. I went ashore, ignored my neglible religious promptings, and got drunk. An hour later, as I boarded my ship, I had a marvelous idea: "By god, I'll go get those pictures back from Muldoon."

U.S. Navy regulations state: "Plastered enlisted personnel should not invade officers' quarters without very good cause." I knocked on Ens. Muldoon's door. He responded. "Hello, Driver. What's up?" It took him 0.4 of a second to figure that out. He invited me in while he calmly removed the

glamour photos from his bulkheads (Navy for "walls.") He said, "Sorry I was slow in getting these back to you."

I could have faced a captain's mast for my intrusion. It didn't come. Muldoon stayed silent. A good guy, Muldoon was.

On the other hand, Mrs. Epworth was a pain where you can't put a plaster. I was discharged, and went home to Harrisburg. Somehow Mrs. E. had learned where I lived. Her "We must meet!" entreaties continued despite my evasions.

One Sunday morning I was at home with my father. Uninvited, Mrs. Epworth -- her husband in tow -- entered our driveway in a shiny black Lincoln Continental. As she rolled down her window I took charge, with words largely to this effect:

"M'am, I'm here with my father. He is a good man, but painfully shy when suddenly facing complete strangers. So am I. If I ask you in, we all will experience an hour of social awkwardness you couldn't even dream of. So let's avoid it. And, please, no more letters." The Epworths departed.

What's the point of this column? Avoid submitting your thoughts to religious publications. Once you do, God only knows what may happen.

Reader, this concludes today's pebble in your pond. Let the ripples roll. *Contributed by Robert Driver*  
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## The Battle Off Samar

### Wilfred P. Deac

Wednesday, October 25, 1944 —a gloomy overcast punctuated by rain squalls gave the predawn sky a dirty yellow-gray hue. Six small United States carriers and seven escort ships moved through the somber seas east of the Philippine island of Samar. From the gently swaying flight decks of the carriers, white-starred planes took oil on routine early-morning missions.

On the bridge of the flagship, U.S.S. Fanshaw Bay, Rear Admiral Clifton A. F. Sprague watched the Grumman aircraft rise into the northeasterly wind toward the broken ceiling of clouds. The day had all the earmarks of being another long, tiresome succession of reconnaissance, antisubmarine, and ground-support missions. Sprague, a forty-eight-year-old veteran, scanned his little Meet, called Tatty 3 (its radio call sign). Merchant-ship hulls turned into baby Hattops to meet wartime needs, the thin-skinned escort carriers—designated CVE's—were not even half the size of conventional aircraft carriers. Old hands claimed the CVE stood for “Combustible, Vulnerable, Expendable.” Three destroyer« and four destroyer escorts ringed the flotilla of CVE's like watchful guard dogs. Somewhere to the south. Sprague knew, two other carrier groups, Taffies 1 and 2, were on similar missions in support of the American G.I.'s who had gone ashore at Leyte Gulf five days

earlier. Together the three TafRes made up Estoit Carrier Task Group 77.4 of the United States Seventh Fleet.

The first warning of a break in the morning routine came shortly after six thirty as the ships' crews sat clown to breakfast. Radio equipment in the Fanshaw Bay's Combat Information Center picked up Japanese voices. Since the nearest enemy ships were supposedly over a hundred miles away, the American radiomen reasoned that the enemy chatter must be coming from one of the nearby Japanese-held islands. With the exception of the beachhead on Leyte and a few islands in the adjacent gulf, all of the Philippine archipelago was in Japanese hands.

Eleven minutes later, n message Hashed in from an American scout plane. The unbelievable words were hurriedly relayed to the bridge: “Enemy surface force ... twenty miles northwest of your task group and closing at go knots.

Admiral Sprague, at this moment, was trying to make sense of two other odd reports. His lookouts had just seen antiaircraft fire on the northern horixon, and his radar had picked up an unidentified something in the same direction. Surely, Sprague was thinking, the cause of all the unexpected commotion must be Admiral William Halsey's Third Fleet, the closest large naval unit to Tally 3. The pilot's message stopped him short.

“Check that identification!” ordered Sprague, hoping with a growing feeling—of doubt thai some

innotent mistake had been made by the scout plane. But confirmation came from another source—a lookout on one of Sprague's other carriers, the Kitkitu Buy. Scanning the hori/on beneath the gradually clearing cumulus cloud canopy, the seaman could make out pagoclalike masts: Japanese battleships and cruisers.

Admiral Sprague's voice boomed into the squawk box: “Come to course 090 degrees ... launch all planes as soon as possible ... speed 16.”

The little carriers swung due east, far enough into the wind to launch aircraft without bringing them closer to the enemy. Planes were soon soaring into the damp sky armed with whatever bombs and bullets they had when the alarm sounded. Gun crews settled expectantly behind the breeches of the carriers' 5-inch guns—the biggest they had.

At 11:58 A.M., bright flashes lit the hori/on seventeen miles north of the flotilla. Sixty seconds later, Japanese range-marker shells rattled into the sea to throw lowering geysers of colored water into the air behind the American carriers. The Rattle off Samar had begun.

The Battle oft Samar was a direct result of Japanese Higli Command plans. As the American l'orces advanced relentlessly across the Southern Pacific: during the final months of World War II, four Sho (Conquer) plans were devised to blunt U.S. thrusts against the F.mphe's inner defenses. At best, these were little more than delaying

tactics which might postpone the end of the war and give Japan a better bargaining position at the peace table. Sho No. 1 was designed to counter any United States move against the Philippine Islands, and by the fall of 1944, with the Americans moving northwestward, it appeared that the time for putting it into effect had arrived.

In mid-October the Imperial Japanese Navy began to move. Powerful naval forces steamed eastward from the Lingga Archipelago near Singapore, and southward from the home islands. On October 18, while the Japanese fleets were still at sea, the word flashed (Vom Combined Fleet commander Admiral Soenu Toyoda in Tokyo: "Execute Sho Plan No. 1!" American landings had begun in Leyte Gulf, in the eastcentral Philippines.

Two U.S. fleets were covering the invasion beaches—the Third Fleet, under Admiral William F. Halsey, composed mainly of fast new battleships and big carriers; and the Seventh Fleet, commanded by Vice Admiral Thomas C. Kinkaid. made up mostly of pre-Pearl Harbor battlewagons and cruisers. The Third Fleet was acting the role of roving watchdog, while the Seventh was directly overseeing the landing of Sixth Army G.I.'s on Leyte Island.

Sho Plan No. 1 was to be a three-pronged maneuver supported by land-based aircraft. A Northern Force under Vice Admiral Jisaburo Ozawa would steam southward from Japan and attempt to decoy away the

protecting American Third Fleet. This Japanese force was made up of four regular carriers, two converted battleship-carriers, and smaller screening vessels. The battleship-carriers—the Ise and the Hyuga — were merely old battleships with their two main aft turrets replaced by small flight decks. Designed to compensate for Japan's shortage of aircraft carriers, the hybrid ships would never have a chance to prove themselves. There were not enough airplanes available in the fall of 1944 to give the Ise and the Hyuga even one of the twenty-four each was supposed to carry; and Ozawa's other carriers were decidedly short of planes, too.

The second prong of Sho No. 1 was to swing in against the Americans in Leyte Gulf from the southwest, through Surigao Strait. The melange of battleships, cruisers, and destroyers in this Southern Force—seventeen ships in all—were commanded by Vice Admirals Kiyohide Shima and Shoji Nishimura.

The third prong, the Center Force, was the most potent of the Nipponese units, and was to deliver the knockout blow. Sailing from Lingga Roads during the early morning hours of October 18, it would stop at North Borneo for refueling and final preparations. Then, following a devious path through the Sibuyan Sea and San Bernardino Strait north of Leyte, it would swing around and enter Leyte Gulf through "the back door"—from the east. In this key Center Force, under Vice Admiral Takeo Kurita, were the world's two largest

warships, the Yamato and the Musashi . Each displaced 68,000 tons and carried 18.1-inch guns, as compared to 45,000 tons and 16-inch guns for the largest U.S. warship. Also in this formidable fleet were the battleships Haruna , Kongo , and Nagato , twelve cruisers, and fifteen destroyers.

Once inside Leyte Gulf, Shima's and Nishimura's Southern Force and Kurita's Center Force were to pool their firepower to disrupt the American invasion. Whatever lay in the gulf or blocked its approaches, warships and cargo vessels alike, was to be wiped out. The importance of Ozawa's Northern Force as a decoy to draw off the powerful U.S. Third Fleet was emphasized by the marked Japanese inferiority in aircraft and by the total number of Meet units involved—64 Nipponese vessels against a 16 American and 2 Australian warships.

In undertaking Sho Plan No. 1, the Japanese were placed in the unenviable position of the frantic poker player who, reduced to a few chips after a losing streak, plays his hand all or nothing. Admiral Kurita said to his officers before the battle: "I know many of you are strongly opposed to this assignment. But the war situation is far more critical than any of you can possibly know. Would it not be a shame to have the fleet remain intact while our nation perishes? ... You must all remember there are such things as miracles. What man can say there is no chance for our fleet to turn the tide of war in a decisive battle?"

First blow in the Battle for Leyte Gulf was struck by the U.S. submarine Darter against the Center Force as Kurita's ships steamed northeast along Palawan, the daggerlike island jutting southwest from the middle of the Philippine archipelago. The sub's torpedoes slammed into two of the enemy cruisers just as the first light of October 23 was streaking the eastern sky. The force flagship, the heavy cruiser Atago, shuddered and sank in less than twenty minutes, sending Admiral Kurita and his staff for an unscheduled swim before they were rescued by a destroyer. The cruiser Takao, also hit, belched fire and smoke. The task force swung to starboard into the path of a second U.S. submarine. Torpedoes from the Dace scrubbed the cruiser Maya from the scene in four minutes. Kurita, shifting his command post to the huge Yamato, was badly shaken up. The enemy hadn't even been sighted, and already five valuable warships (counting two destroyers detached to escort the damaged Takao to Borneo) were eliminated from the battle to come.

The sun shone down from clear skies on whitecapped water and mountainous islands as the Center Force moved into the Sibuyan Sea northwest of Leyte on Tuesday, October 24. Within twenty-four hours, if all went well, Kurita's ships would be steaming into Leyte Gulf from the east. But their bad luck had not left them yet. Their antiaircraft batteries, nervously anticipating American air strikes, cut loose at a flight of fighter planes soon after dawn. It was a mistake,

and a costly one for the Center Force. The planes were landbased Japanese Zeros ordered to provide air cover for Kurita. Faced with heavy antiaircraft fire from the very warships they were to protect, the fighters understandably returned to their island base. Then, at 8:10 that morning, an American scout plane sighted the Japanese armada. Two hours and sixteen minutes later, single-engined bombers and fighters from the carriers of Admiral Halsey's Third Fleet pounced on the Center Force. Dodging the pink and purple bursts of antiaircraft fire, American Helldivers and Avengers pressed one attack after another against the wildly weaving ships. At the cost of eighteen dive bombers and torpedo planes, they sank the gargantuan Musashi, badly damaged a heavy cruiser, and slightly hurt the other battleships. Kurita wavered—lie actually had his fleet reverse course for several hours—but in the end he rallied and carried on toward San Bernardino Strait.

Admiral Halsey was very much pleased by his carrier pilots' reports of their successes over the Sibuyan Sea. Unfortunately, these reports were somewhat exaggerated, and led him to the optimistic conclusion that Kurita's Center Force "could no longer be considered a serious menace." Meanwhile Admiral Ozawa's decoy Northern Force had been cruising the waters of the Philippine Sea off Luzon, hoping to be spotted by Halsey's search planes. About 4 P.M. on October 24, one of the searchers made the contact, and by 8:30 that evening the whole U.S. Third Fleet was off in

enthusiastic pursuit of the Japanese bait—sixty-five warships against seventeen.

It was a questionable action, and led to one of the hottest controversies about naval tactics in World War II. Halsey had enough ships and planes to handle both Ozawa and Kurita; but as it was, nobody was left to guard the exit of the San Bernardino Strait. Through that exit Kurita's still very menacing force was steadily plowing in order to turn southward off the eastern coast of Samar and come in to Leyte Gulf on October 25—its role in Sho No. 1.

Steaming at twenty knots through the narrow strait between Luzon and Samar islands, Kurita's Center Force debouched into the Philippine Sea at thirty-five minutes past midnight. In addition to the battleships Yamato, Haruna, Kongo, and Nagato, there were the heavy cruisers Chikuma, Chokai, Haguro, Kumano, Suzuya, and Tone, the smaller-gunned light cruisers Noshiro and Yahagi, and eleven destroyers.

Prepared to have to fight their way through to Leyte Gulf, the Japanese sailors were pleasantly surprised when dawn revealed nothing on the southern horizon but open water. Well beyond that horizon, below Leyte Gulf, Admiral Kinkaid's Seventh Fleet had turned southward to encounter the Japanese Southern Force under Admirals Shima and Nishimura in a triumphant fight, later to be known as the Battle of Surigao Strait. Nothing but the three light Taffy forces now stood between the U.S. invasion troops on Leyte and possible disaster. Of the

three, only Taffy 3 lay directly in Kurita's path as his Center Force swept south.

This was the astonishing situation when, just after dawn on October 25, Admiral Kurita's twenty-three warships, three hours north of Leyte Gulf, ran into Admiral Clifton Sprague's small group—the 10,000-ton black-and-gray camouflaged escort carriers Fanshaw Bay, St. Lo, White Plains, Kalinin Bay, Kitkun Bay, and Gambier Bay; the 2,050-ton destroyers Heermann, Hoel, and Johnston; and the 1,275-ton destroyer escorts Dennis, John C. Butler, Raymond, and Samuel B. Roberts.

Kurita, thinking he must have stumbled onto Halsey's Third Fleet, abruptly ordered his ships into pursuit formation. Since the Center Force had been in the process of switching over from its tight night formation to a dispersed daytime deployment, the new order spread confusion through the Japanese fleet. The result was a fierce but surprisingly unco-ordinated attack on the American ships.

At 6:58 A.M., a salvo of 1,000-pound shells, each some fifty per cent heavier than the largest U.S. warship projectile, spun out of the Yamato's huge gun barrels. It was the first time the superbattleship had fired its 18.1-inch batteries at another ship. The Haruna's 14-inch guns joined in three minutes later.

At 7:01 A.M. Admiral Sprague ordered the transmission of an urgent plea for help. The request was immediately picked up, and

planes from Taffies 1 and 2 were ordered to the assistance of Taffy 3. Glancing away from the enemy, Sprague noted with pride that his little fleet was following orders with the precision of a well-trained team. Straddled by the red, yellow, blue, and green splashes of marker shells, Taffy 3 was laying heavy smoke screens, the white clouds pouring from chemical generators contrasting sharply with the oily black smoke from the ships' funnels.

Launching her planes as rapidly as possible, the White Plains trembled violently as the mere concussion of the big enemy shells caused minor damage. Water spray from a shellburst that threw a geyser high above the carrier rained over the ship's bridge. One plane preparing to take off from the flight deck was bounced forward by the concussion of explosions pummeling the sea. Its spinning propeller bit a chunk out of the wing of another fighter. The St. Lo, ebony clouds pouring from her four small exhaust stacks, was also buffeted by the Japanese barrage.

Although the enemy ships had closed to within fifteen miles of their prey, they were still beyond the range of the puny U.S. 5-inch guns. If only he could keep his ships swinging in a wide circle around to the southwest without being overtaken or cut off, Sprague thought, he could hope to lead the Japanese fleet into the guns of the now-alerted battleships of the Seventh Fleet. Then, even though Kinkaid's ships were not in top shape for battle after their heavy night action in Surigao Strait against

the Japanese Southern Force, the Americans would have some chance of stopping the enemy.

Deployed in a formation of two concentric circles—the six carriers forming the inner circle—the U.S. flotilla was rapidly being overtaken by the speedier enemy ships. Then, at 7:06 A.M., Taffy 3 dipped its nose into a welcome rain squall. Hindered by ineffective radar, enemy fire fell off in volume and accuracy. During the fifteen-minute respite afforded by the rain, Sprague made a decision. He would order a torpedo attack by his destroyers.

In the meantime, the first desperate strikes by the U.S. carrier planes had been made on the pursuing enemy. Dropping the small bombs and depth charges with which they had been loaded in expectation of routine missions, the Navy planes harassed the Japanese ships for twenty minutes. Bombs soon gone, they strafed with machine-gun fire. And even when their ammunition was exhausted, the pilots continued to buzz the enemy, hoping to bluff the Japanese ships off course and give Taffy 3 a chance to escape. Only when their fuel ran low did they leave. Unable to land on their own carriers because the ships were heading downwind, the Taffy 3 planes were forced to rearm and refuel at an airstrip on the Leyte beachhead to the west, and on the flattops of Taffy 2 to the southeast. Joined by other Wildcat fighters and Avenger torpedo bombers from Taffy 2, they soon returned to the attack.



First blood for the airmen was drawn when a bomb pierced the deck of the heavy cruiser Suzuya . Shuddering under the detonation, the 14,000-ton warship slowed to twenty knots and fell behind the Japanese formation. The bold American planes, delaying the pursuers by forcing them into time-consuming evasive maneuvers, also inflicted minor damage on a few of the other Japanese ships.

The two-funnelled Johnston , which had already opened fire with her five 5-inch guns, was the first destroyer to respond to Sprague's order for a torpedo attack. As the helmsman swung the wheel hard to port, the outgunned Johnston sliced bravely through the gray sea at twenty-five knots toward the Japanese heavy cruiser Kumano . At 9,000 yards the destroyer heeled steeply over, her ten torpedoes splashing into the sea. One of the missiles reached the sleek cruiser, blowing off its bow in a thunderous eruption of flame, smoke, and debris. Its blunted nose dipping deep into the low swells, the limping Kumano dropped astern and joined its damaged sister ship Suzuya . The battle was already over for the two badly hit cruisers.

Then luck ran out for the plucky Johnston . As she turned about, three 14-inch and three 6-inch shells slammed into her thin hull. "Like a puppy being smacked by a truck," as one of her officers put it, the ship dipped into the boiling sea and bobbed back up, her steering gear severely damaged, and many men dead and wounded both above and below decks. Commander Ernest E.

Evans, who had a very short time to live, emerged from the salvo with half of his clothes blown off and minus two fingers of his left hand.

The destroyers Heerman and Hoel swept past the stricken ship toward the enemy. Although smoking and slowed to sixteen or seventeen knots, the Johnston swung awkwardly in behind the other destroyers to support them with her guns. Further back, the slower destroyer escorts formed a second attack wave. It was the story of David and Goliath in a terrifying modern context.

With guns banging and torpedoes knifing toward the Japanese ships, the Heermann and the Hoel won much-needed time for the fleeing escort carriers. But while the Heermann received reparable damage as she darted nimbly in and out of the Japanese salvos, the Hoel was less fortunate.

The first hit smashed high on the Hoel's forward superstructure, sending hot pieces of steel whistling through her radar antennas and falling on her decks. Seeking out her target through blotting rain and clouds of black and white smoke, the destroyer dashed to within 9,000 yards of the giant Kongo and released a spread of five torpedoes. Not sixty seconds later, one of the battleship's 14-inch projectiles screeched into the Hoel's side behind the funnels. Detonating in the after engine room, it hammered one of the ship's two engines into junk. A second 14-incher plowed into the ship's tail, knocking out guns, damaging the electric steering

gear, and bouncing men limply off bulkheads.

Steaming on one engine and maneuvering on emergency steering apparatus, with three of her 5-inch cannons out of commission, the Hoel made another run on the enemy. The target this time was the heavy cruiser Haguro . The destroyer's five remaining torpedoes swooshed from their tubes. Then, as one of her officers later stated, the Hoel tried to "get the hell out of there." But this was easier said than done.

Barely able to keep ahead of the onrushing enemy, much less get out of the line of fire, the Hoel absorbed over forty hits as she fought back with her two remaining guns. The big battleships passing to port and the heavy cruisers steaming by to starboard deluged the quivering destroyer with heavy shells. Flames erupted from the Hoel's aft section, explosions shredded her superstructure, and an inferno raged inside her hull. And still the dying ship's remaining guns fired stubbornly at the thundering enemy. Then, punched full of holes, the ship finally gave up the uneven struggle. She was dead in the water, her stern almost submerged and her forward magazine ablaze, when the "abandon ship" order was given. Only a handful of the warship's crew was able to respond. At 8:55 A.M. , an hour and a half after she was first hit, the Hoel rolled over and sank to the bottom of the Philippine Sea. Of her crew of more than 300, 253 went down with her. Fifteen of her wounded later died.

The first torpedo run was over. Despite the destruction of the Hoel, the skipper of the shell-peppered Heermann calmly radioed a modest report to Admiral Sprague: "Exercise completed."

At a quarter of eight, meanwhile, the destroyer escorts had sailed in under the cover of rain and smoke. Intended primarily for antisubmarine patrols, the lightweight escorts were no match for some of the world's most powerful ships. Yet, running to within 4,000 yards of the enemy with their 5-inch guns blazing, the American escorts managed to throw the Japanese off stride.

Dashing ahead of the pack, the little Roberts traded blows with the enemy heavies for forty-five minutes before she was hit. At 8:51, a heavy shell thumped into the water alongside the veering ship and plowed into her side, opening a hole below the waterline. One hit followed another, turning her into a shambles. That the heroic escort managed to go on fighting for three-quarters of an hour is an amazing tribute to her captain and crew. Answering the 14- and 8-inch shells of the Japanese cruisers with her inadequate 5-inchers, the Roberts was raked at point-blank range.

At approximately 9 A.M., minutes after the Hoel went down, two or three 14-inch shells from the Kongo slammed into the Roberts' port side. Like some gigantic can opener, the monstrous explosion tore a jagged hole over thirty feet long and seven to ten feet high in the escort's hull. The area aft of the tossing ship's

funnel became what one survivor called an "inert mass of battered metal."

One gun crew, courageously ignoring flame and smoke, continued firing its weapon by hand after the ammunition hoist went out of action. Suddenly, one of the charges ignited in the hot breech before the 5-inch gun could be fired. Demolishing the cannon, the blast sent the gun crew tumbling in all directions like so many rag dolls. The first man to enter the gun mount after the shattering detonation found the gun captain, his body blown open, holding a cannon shell in his scorched hands. He was begging for help to get the fifty-four-pound projectile into the cannon. Minutes later, he was dead.

In all, the Roberts—the runt that fought like a champion—fired 608 shells from its 5-inch guns before the end came. She had inflicted serious damage on an enemy cruiser and had incurred almost two dozen Japanese hits. Five minutes after ten that morning, the second of the "little boys" went down off Samar. Killed in the action were 3 of her 8 officers and 86 of her 170 men.

Their torpedoes expended, the surviving escort ships fought their way back to cover the carriers. To the manmade maelstrom nature added her own effects, giving the scene an eerie quality. One moment the sun's rays would clearly illuminate the opposing forces. A few seconds later, the whole tableau would be obscured by a curtain of rain or drifting smoke. And between the clouds and the sea was the incessant lightning and thunder of

gunfire. Narrowly avoiding collisions as they zigzagged to escape the enemy shells, Admiral Sprague's flotilla churned southward.

The Japanese pursuit had by now assumed a rough pattern. In an attempt to box in the carriers, which could barely reach eighteen knots, the swift Nipponese heavy cruisers raced across the wakes of the Americans to close in from the east at almost thirty knots. The Japanese destroyers and light cruisers, kept to the rear until now, pushed down along the starboard side of the baby flattops. And, at a greater distance, the Nagato and the huge Yamato were doing their best to aim straight down the back of the U.S. formation. In the meantime, the battleships Haruna and Kongo swung wide to outcruise the cruisers to the east.

For almost two and a half hours—between 6:58 and approximately 9:20—the little American carriers were under constant fire from Kurita's Center Force. Only the Yamato and the Nagato, badgered by the U.S. destroyers into performing wild, evasive maneuvers that ultimately steered them out of range, were denied the honor of remaining in the slugfest. Admiral Kurita, aboard the Yamato, was thus out of touch with the action, a development that was to produce unhappy consequences for the Japanese.

As the battle unfolded, Admiral Sprague saw that the greatest immediate danger to his group were the four enemy heavy cruisers

Chikuma , Chokai , Haguro , and Tone . Closer than the other Japanese ships, they were rapidly moving in from the northeast—their 14-inch shells striking into, and in many cases through, the thin-hulled carriers. Sprague told his planes and ships to concentrate on them.

Although smoke screens and maneuvering threw Japanese marksmanship off, Admiral Sprague's flagship, the Fanshaw Bay , received four direct hits and two near misses which killed three of her crew and wounded others. The White Plains , the Kitkun Bay, and the St. Lo got off lightly; but the Kalinin Bay took more than a dozen heavy projectiles, miraculously remaining afloat.

Shrewd guesswork and clever steering by her skipper saved the Gambier Bay , steaming on the exposed left rear corner of the U.S. formation, for a full twenty-five minutes. Then, at 8:10 A.M. , a shell from a Japanese cruiser hit the aft end of the carrier's flight deck. Fire broke out in the ship's hangar as the projectile sheared through the upper deck. More heavy-caliber shots slashed in. A gaping hole was torn in the Gambier Bay 's forward port engine room, flooding it with cascading water. Less than half an hour after first being struck, the escort carrier slowed to eleven knots and dropped back. The heavy cruisers Chikuma , Chokai , and Haguro , the light cruiser Noshiro, and a Nipponese destroyer poured salvo after salvo into the blazing carrier's hull. Steering and power aboard the Gambier Bay were shot out, the after engine room was

flooded, and men cursed and died at their posts. Efforts by the destroyers Johnston and Heermann to draw attention away from the dying CVE failed.

By 8:45 A.M. , the carrier was entirely without headway and was settling. Five minutes later, the 750 living of the Gambier Bay 's 854-man crew began going over the side. Still the enemy shells came, killing some men in the water. Seven minutes after 9 A.M. , their ship turned turtle and sank. Fighting the suction of the plunging 10,000-ton flattop, the survivors struggled to keep afloat until help came. It would come—almost forty hours later.

Meanwhile Taffy 3 aircraft pounced like hawks on the enemy cruisers. Bomb bursts erupted on the ships as the Japanese paid for their lack of air power. The Chokai , mortally wounded by the sea-and-air blows it received, turned away. Moments later, struck by a torpedo dropped by one of the American bombers, the Chikuma also pulled out of the battle. But the Haguro and the Tone , the remaining enemy heavy cruisers on the port side of the American formation, pressed closer.

Pounding in behind the cruisers for the kill, the closest of the Japanese battleships—the Haruna —suddenly veered to the southeast. The big ship's observers could see, about twenty miles away, the northernmost ships of Admiral Felix B. Stump's Taffy 2. With the Imperial Navy's penchant for dividing its forces, the Haruna swung her heavy two-gun turrets toward the new target. Although the 14,000-ton leviathan

lobbed 14-inch shells at the Taffy 2 ships for almost half an hour, it failed to score a hit.

Nipponese destroyers were now also closing in on Taffy 3. Led by the light cruiser Yahagi , four of them streaked in from the west for a torpedo attack on the crippled Johnston . Her decks littered with wreckage tinted by blood and the dye of enemy marker shells, the Johnston challenged the Japanese attack with her two operational guns. Trading blows with five undamaged ships, the limping destroyer scored a number of hits on the 6,000-ton Yahagi . A U.S. plane joined the fray with chattering 50-caliber machine guns. Twenty minutes after starting their attack, the enemy ships released their torpedoes and turned about. But the Japanese had been tricked into releasing their missiles prematurely. Losing their aim and speed because of the extreme range, the torpedoes failed to score.

Now the cruisers Haguro and Tone swept by on the opposite side of the Johnston . The American destroyer rolled under the rain of shells for another thirty minutes. Fires raged through the beaten ship, cremating the wounded and dead huddled in the wreckage, trapping the living in the steel coffin of her hull. Her ammunition blew up in a series of blasts, adding to the carnage. Her engines gone, her communication system obliterated, the wallowing destroyer still barked pugnaciously at the enemy with her remaining cannon. Then, at 9:45 A.M. , Commander Evans ordered the

surviving crewmen off the doomed ship.

Like Indians in a western movie, the Japanese destroyers steamed around the settling Johnston in a circle until the riddled vessel turned over and sank at 10:10 A.M.

The survivors in the water watched their blazing ship disappear. One of them reported that as it went down a Japanese destroyer captain saluted. Most, swimming or clinging to life rafts and debris, were numbed and shocked. One moment they had been going about their daily routine; the next they were racing to their battle stations. And then, after hours of brain-pounding battle that demanded automatic response, they had been cast into a tropical sea shadowed by the haze of gunsmoke and burning ships. There was now only the slapping of waves and the gasping of hoarse voices. A torpedoman, with a casualness produced by shock, remarked to a fellow survivor that they'd gotten off all torpedoes.

In a sea alive with activity, the fate of the Johnston's crew was to be a harsh one. Only 141 of her crew of 327 would be saved—49 were killed during the action, 45 died of their wounds after abandoning ship, and 92 (including Commander Evans) perished while awaiting rescue. Sharks got at least one man; the others succumbed to exposure.

As the battle raged, the ultimate weaknesses of the Japanese attack finally made themselves felt. Hampered by a combination of rain squalls, smoke screens, stubborn

American resistance, poor communications, lack of coordination, and, above all, the lack of air strength, the enemy attack fell apart. The Yamato and the Nagato had let themselves wander off; the Haruna was in pursuit of Taffy 2.

Expecting at any moment to be swimming for his life, Clifton Sprague had been grimly sizing up the situation as the enemy salvos boomed into the midst of Taffy 3. His ships had arced into their southwesterly course as ordered. Ahead and a bit to the right he could make out the dark outline of Samar some thirty miles away. Then, at 9:25, as he concentrated on evading the torpedoes launched minutes before by the Yahagi and her destroyers, the skipper of Taffy 3 was treated to the sweetest words he could ever hope to hear.

"Goddamit, boys, they're getting away!" called out a signalman on the bridge of the Fanshaw Bay.

Unable to keep in touch with his fleet because of bad radio communication, Admiral Kurita had launched the Yamato's two reconnaissance planes less than an hour apart to survey the situation. Both were shot down some fifteen minutes after they were catapulted from the stern of the battleship. Unaware that his ships were finally closing in on their prey—with victory off Samar still possible—the confused Japanese admiral had decided to regroup his fleet before a fuel shortage and the relentless American air attacks put it out of action. At 9:11 A.M. Kurita had

ordered all his units to take a northerly course.

Despite the blows dealt to Kurita's ships, there was precious little to keep his fleet from blasting its way through Taffy 3 to Leyte Gulf. Far to the north, off Cape Engaño, too distant to do any good, Halsey's Third Fleet was only now reluctantly giving up its chase of Ozawa's Northern Force and turning about in answer to urgent messages from Admiral Kinkaid and Pacific Fleet Headquarters at Pearl Harbor. To the south, Kinkaid's Seventh Fleet was on the other side of Leyte Gulf. Its ships, low on fuel and ammunition, were still busy with mopping up what remained of the Japanese southern thrust.

Yet it takes no great stretch of the imagination to understand the indecision and uncertainty that marked Takeo Kurita's actions at this point in the battle. He had been forced to swim for his life when the Atago was sunk on the twenty-third. The Center Force had been under repeated air assault since it first entered the Sibuyan Sea. He had received no news of Ozawa's success in decoying Halsey, and was still under the impression that Taffy 3 was part of the U.S. Third Fleet. Discouraged by reports of the Surigao Strait action, he felt his ships were alone. Fatigued, his nerves strained, Kurita decided to disregard the order that called for his charging into Leyte Gulf. Instead, as a face-saving gesture, the Center Force would shift to a new target.

Earlier in the day, an American task force had been reported in the Philippine Sea to the northeast. Kurita would attack it. Several hours spent in search of the phantom U.S. force proved fruitless. Assisted in his decision by the nagging persuasion of U.S. Navy planes that continued to peck at his ships, the Center Force commander finally called off the hunt and ordered his fleet to head back where it came from.

Suffering the final indignity of being mistakenly attacked by two Japanese land-based aircraft, the Center Force slipped westward through San Bernardino Strait a few hours later. Fast warships from Halsey's Third Fleet reached the strait soon afterward, too late to catch Kurita but in time to bag one lagging Japanese destroyer.

But despite Kurita's departure, the ordeal of Taffy 3 was not quite over.

At 10:50 A.M., soon after Admiral Sprague ordered Taffy 3's pilots to return to their carriers, five Japanese planes had roared in just over the wave-tops. Soaring upward, they climbed a mile above the carriers and suddenly dived down. The Divine Wind—the newly organized Kamikaze suicide corps—was about to wreak its vengeance on Taffy 3.

A single-engined Zero fighter crashed on the port side of the Kitkun Bay and bounced into the sea. Its bomb, however, exploded and damaged the carrier. Tensely watching from the Fanshaw Bay, Clifton Sprague saw the ship's 40- and 60-millimeter anti-aircraft fire

chew apart two of the diving suicide planes. They fell into the ocean. The White Plains sent streams of tracer bullets into the remaining Kamikazes. One of the enemy exploded a few yards behind the flattop, injuring eleven Americans and spraying the deck with debris and pieces of the pilot. The other plane, its engine sputtering, swerved toward the St. Lo. With a grinding of metal and a shower of sparks, the Zero tore into the carrier. A ball of fire sent clouds of smoke boiling heavenward. One explosion followed the other as bombs and torpedoes stored inside the St. Lo were set off. Torn apart and burning from stem to stern, the little ship that had survived the Yamato's great shells sank in less than twenty minutes. She was the first major victim of the Divine Wind. Of her more than 800 men, 754 were saved by Taffy 3.

There was more to come. At 11:10 A.M. Admiral Sprague's little fleet was attacked by enemy torpedo planes. Two were immediately shot down by U.S. interceptors near the Kitkun Bay. A third exploded almost on top of the carrier and showered the ship with flaming aircraft parts. The Kalinin Bay was severely damaged by planes making suicide runs. One smashed into her flight deck, the other caught her on the starboard side in the after exhaust pipe. Only the Fanshaw Bay escaped unscathed.

By 11:30 A.M. the attacks had ended. Admiral Sprague's battered flotilla headed into Leyte Gulf for a much-needed rest. In an over-all battle where American naval forces

far outnumbered the Japanese, Taffy 3 had been overwhelmed by almost 2-to-1 odds and immeasurably greater fire power—yet Clifton Sprague and his men had made a fighting retreat and convinced Admiral Kurita that he was engaged with a full-fledged fleet.

Having dispatched the surviving Taffy 3 escort ships to pick up crewmen of the stricken St. Lo, Admiral Sprague asked Seventh Fleet Headquarters to handle the rescue of the survivors of the Gambier Bay, Johnston, Roberts, and Hoel. Unfortunately, poor coordination, a sudden flurry of Japanese suicide plane attacks, and erroneous position reports radioed in by aircraft delayed these rescue operations for almost two days.

Finally, at 10:29 on the light of October 26, a seven-ship detail personally ordered out by Admiral Kinkaid obtained results. Guided by flares fired high above the rough black sea, the vessels under Lieutenant Commander J. A. Baxter picked up more than 700 survivors from the Gambier Bay. Suffering from exposure, hunger, and fatigue, the carrier survivors had clung to life rafts for some thirty-nine hours and drifted almost to the coast of Samar before being sighted. Many had drowned. With the coming of dawn, survivors from the Johnston, Roberts, and Hoel were found.

The last raft, containing fifteen men from the Johnston, was spotted at 9:30 A.M. on the twenty-seventh—forty-eight hours after the sinking of the destroyer. By early the following morning, the 1,150 survivors of the

Taffy 3 ships sunk by the Center Force had been transferred from Baxter’s seven vessels to hospital ships and transports in Leyte Gulf.

The over-all Battle for Leyte Gulf, spread across a total area twice the size of Texas, was the greatest sea fight in history. Every element of naval warfare, from submarine to aircraft, was involved. And when it was over, the Imperial Japanese Navy had ceased to exist as a fighting unit. The United States and her allies had undisputed control of the Pacific Ocean.

Between October 23 and 26, Japan’s Sho Plan No. 1 cost her three battleships, four carriers, ten cruisers, and almost a dozen other fighting ships. Scores of aircraft and some 10,000 Japanese seamen were also lost by the Empire. The U.S. losses added up to 2,800 lives, about two hundred aircraft, and six warships. Taffy 3, bearing the brunt of the punishment, had lost the escort carriers Gambier Bay and St. Lo , the destroyers Johnston and Hoel , the destroyer escort Samuel B. Roberts , 128 planes, and 1,583 men killed and missing.

“In no engagement of its entire history,” Samuel Eliot Morison has written, “has the United States Navy shown more gallantry, guts and gumption than in those two morning hours between 0730 and 0930 off Samar.”

Rear Admiral Clifton Sprague had his own observation on the battle: “The failure of the enemy ... to completely wipe out all vessels of this task unit can be attributed to our

successful smoke screen, our torpedo counterattack, continuous harassment of enemy by bomb, torpedo and strafing air attacks, timely maneuvers, and the definite partiality of Almighty God.”

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**Inside The Absolutely Wild**

**Ride Of The USS Chopper**



*Michael Ballaban*  
*6/07/14 2:00pm*  
*Filed to: Boatlopnik*



Sometimes when a submarine goes wildly out of control, it sinks to the bottom. Sometimes when a sub goes wildly out of control, it go straight to the surface. When the USS *Chopper* lost control, it did both. At tremendous speed. Terrifyingly.

You'd be forgiven if you hadn't heard of the *Chopper*. It was one of 122 *Balao*-class diesel-electric submarines, which were a significant fighting component of United States naval power during World War II. Unfortunately for

the *Chopper*, however, it was completed too late to actually see any action, and was quickly outclassed in the post-war era by nuclear-powered subs with new, innovative teardrop-shaped hulls.

For much of its life, the boat served as a simulated target for other ships before finally being struck from the Naval Register in 1971.

A notable, popular, and public submarine is also a submarine that isn't very good at its job, so information about much of the *Chopper's* Cold War operations is scarce. It engaged in a few patrols in the Mediterranean, the Philippines, off the coast of China, and in the Caribbean, but mostly thanks to the fact that the Cold War never really turned hot, there are no unusual stories of unusual happenings.

Except for one incident, off the coast of Cuba, in 1969, which led to its eventual decommissioning. Mostly because no one would ever want to get in it again, I imagine.

At 1:40 in the afternoon on February 11th of 1969, *Chopper* was participating in a training exercise with the destroyer *USS Hopkins* off the coast of Cuba. Everything seemed relatively normal, for a submarine. It was traveling at about eight knots, almost horizontal in the water with a one-degree down angle, and was cruising below the surface at 150 feet.

As I said, fairly standard stuff for a submarine.

Two minutes later, everything went haywire. For reasons that were immediately unknown to

the crew, the sub lost electrical power. Completely.

And for some reason, the dive planes at the rear of the sub immediately reverted a full-dive configuration. The sub was headed towards the bottom, and the crew was deaf, blind, and powerless to stop it.

The crew attempted to regain control within the first five seconds, according to this US Navy [report](#) into the incident. Unfortunately for them, their wild ride was just beginning.

Within 15 seconds of the loss of power, the *Chopper* was pointed downwards at a 15-degree angle. The helmsman in the conning tower desperately tried to call for help from the maneuvering room in the forward section of the submarine, but couldn't get through on the sound-powered phone.

The commanding officer immediately leapt to his feet in the Officer's Mess, and tried his best to make it to the control room. That simple task was becoming increasingly difficult, as the boat continued to pitch downwards like a drunken college student falling over a slight curb.

And if you think I'm joking about how difficult it was just to walk, just watch this video of a modern submarine, operating under normal conditions, at just 29 degrees:

Those submariners aren't standing like they're in Michael Jackson's *Moonwalker* just for fun.

By 15 seconds after the loss of power in the USS *Chopper*, the

submarine was stuck at a 45-degree down angle, making it easier to walk on the walls than it is to walk on the floors.

The officer on deck ordered a full emergency blow of the submarine's ballast tanks, desperate to get to the surface. And still, nothing happened. The *Chopper* was operating as if it had a mind of its own, and all it wanted to do was head straight for the bottom like a rocket.

30 seconds after that, the submarine sat, suspended in the water, nearly vertical. Anyone trying to move from one place to another was thrown from their feet. It became impossible to walk normally. Anything not strapped down or bolted to the floor went flying down the corridors. Chaos reigned.

To make matters worse, the *Balao*-class submarines were only rated to dive to a maximum of 400 feet. The *Chopper* sat in the water with its stern at 720 feet below the surface. The front of the boat was at over 1,000 feet below the surface.

About a minute after first losing electrical power, the sub stopped. It sat there, still at a horrifically vertical angle and pointed downwards, but it was no longer plunging towards the bottom and the inevitable crushing depths of the ocean.

And just as suddenly as everything all went to hell and seemed to fix itself, everything went to hell again.

Instead of being pointed straight down towards the bottom, the *Chopper* was now pointed nearly straight up, at an 83-degree angle. Everything that had

happened a minute ago was now happening again, except in reverse. Everything that had gone flying through the corridors as now flying again, smacking people on the head, until it finally came to a rest at the back of the submarine.

The submarine wasn't so much as a submarine, as it was a rocket headed for the sky. Filled with cork.

It broke through the surface of the water, and came crashing down, propelled with so much momentum that it actually fell 200 feet below the waterline again, before finally bobbing up to the surface one last time where it came to rest.

Various parts of the sub were flooded and otherwise destroyed, but the crew managed to get the *Chopper* back to port under its own power.

And that was the last time the USS *Chopper* ever saw service. It had suffered so much structural damage that the Navy immediately decommissioned her.

The Navy later learned that the loss of power was caused by battery voltage fluctuations induced by different propulsion orders, but the damage was done.

No submariner has since gone for a wild ride like that one.

*Charlie Weaver contributed to this article. Thanks again Charlie.*

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## Humor in Uniform

A doctor that had been seeing an 80-year-old woman for most of her life finally retired. At her next checkup, the new doctor told her to bring a list of all the medicines that had been prescribed for her. As the doctor was looking through these his eyes grew wide as he realized Grandma had a prescription for birth control pills.

"Mrs. Smith, do you realize these are birth control pills?"

"Yes, they help me sleep at night."

"Mrs. Smith, I assure you there is absolutely nothing in these that could possibly help you sleep!"

She reached out and patted the young doctor's knee and said, "Yes, dear, I know that. But every morning, I grind one up and mix it in the glass of orange juice that my 16-year-old Granddaughter drinks. And believe me it definitely helps me sleep at night"

You gotta love Grandmas!

Students in an advanced Biology class were taking their mid-term exam. The last question was, 'Name seven advantages of Mother's Milk.'

The question was worth 70 points or none at all. One student was hard put to think of seven advantages He wrote:

- 1) It is perfect formula for the child.
- 2) It provides immunity against several diseases.
- 3) It is always the right temperature.
- 4) It is inexpensive.
- 5) It bonds the child to mother and vice versa.
- 6) It is always available as needed. And then the student was stuck. Finally, in desperation, just before the bell rang indicating the end of the test he wrote:
- 7) It comes in two attractive containers and it's high enough off the ground where the cat can't get it. He got an A+.

A woman and her 12-year-old son were riding in a taxi in Detroit. It was raining and all the prostitutes were standing under awnings.

"Mom," said the boy, "what are all those women doing?"

"They're waiting for their husbands to get off work," she replied.

The taxi driver turns around and says, "Geez lady, why don't you tell him the truth? They're hookers, boy! They have sex with men for money."

The little boy's eyes get wide and he says, "Is that true Mom?"

His mother, glaring hard at the driver, answers "Yes."

After a few minutes the kid asks, "Mom, if those women have babies, what happens to them?"

She said, "Most of them become taxi drivers."

An elderly, but hardy cattleman from Texas once told a young female neighbor that if she wanted to live a long life, the secret was to sprinkle a pinch of gunpowder on her oatmeal each morning. She did this religiously and lived to the ripe old age of 103. She left behind 14 children, 30 grandchildren, 21 great-grandchildren, five great-great-grandchildren and a 40 foot HOLE where the crematorium used to be.

*This piece contributed by Don Tanner*

## Pocket Taser Stun Gun, a great gift for the wife.

A guy who purchased his lovely wife a pocket Taser for their anniversary submitted this:

Last weekend I saw something at Larry's Pistol & Pawn Shop that sparked my interest. The occasion was our 15th anniversary and I was looking for a little something extra for my wife Julie. What I came across was a 100,000-volt, pocket/purse-sized taser.

The effects of the taser were supposed to be short lived, with no long-term adverse safety affect on your assailant, allowing her adequate time to retreat to safety. .

WAY TOO COOL! Long story short, I bought the device and brought it home.

I loaded two AAA batteries in the darn thing and pushed the button.

Nothing! I was disappointed.I learned, however, that if I pushed the button AND pressed it against a metal surface at the same time; I'd get the blue arc of electricity darting back and forth between the prongs.

AWESOME!!! Unfortunately, I have yet to explain to Julie what that burn spot is on the face of her microwave.

Okay, so I was home alone with this new toy, thinking to myself that it couldn't be all that bad with only two triple-A batteries, right?

There I sat in my recliner, my cat Gracie looking on intently (trusting little soul) while I was reading the directions and thinking that I really needed to try this thing out on a flesh & blood moving target.

I must admit I thought about zapping Gracie (for a fraction of a second) and thought better of it. She is such a sweet cat. But, if I was going to give this thing to my wife to protect herself against a mugger, I did want some assurance that it would work as advertised. Am I wrong?



So, there I sat in a pair of shorts and a tank top with my reading glasses perched delicately on the bridge of my nose, directions in one hand, and taser in another.

The directions said that a one-second burst would shock and disorient your assailant; a two-second burst was supposed to cause muscle spasms and a major loss of bodily control; a three-second burst would purportedly make your assailant flop on the ground like a fish out of water. Any burst longer than three seconds would be wasting the batteries. All the while I'm looking at this little device measuring about 5' long, less than 3/4 inch in circumference; pretty cute really and (loaded with two itsy, bitsy triple-A batteries) thinking to myself, 'no possible way!'

What happened next is almost beyond description, but I'll do my best.

I'm sitting there alone, Gracie looking on with her head cocked to one side as if to say, 'don't do it,' reasoning that a one second burst from such a tiny little ole thing couldn't hurt all that bad. I decided to give myself a one second burst just for the heck of it. I touched the prongs to my naked thigh, pushed the button, and . . .

HOLY MOTHER OF GOD . . .  
W E A P O N S O F M A S S  
D E S T R U C T I O N . . .

WHAT THE HELL!!!

I'm pretty sure Jessie Ventura ran in through the side door, picked me up in the recliner, then body slammed us both on the carpet, over and over and over again. I vaguely recall waking up on my side in the fetal position, with tears in my eyes, body soaking wet, both nipples on fire, testicles nowhere to be found, with my left arm tucked under my body in the oddest position, and tingling in my legs.

The cat was making meowing sounds I had never heard before, clinging to a picture frame hanging above the fireplace, obviously in an attempt to avoid getting slammed by my body flopping all over the living room.

Note: If you ever feel compelled to 'mug' yourself with a taser, one note of caution: there is no such thing as a one second burst when you zap yourself! You will not let go of that thing until it is dislodged from your hand by a violent thrashing about on the floor. A three second burst would be considered conservative.

THAT HURT LIKE HELL!!!

A minute or so later (I can't be sure, as time was a relative thing at that point), I collected my wits (what little I had left), sat up and surveyed the landscape. My bent reading glasses were on the mantel of the fireplace. The recliner was upside down and

about 8 feet or so from where it originally was. My triceps, right thigh and both nipples were still twitching. My face felt like it had been shot up with Novocain, and my bottom lip weighed 88 lbs. I had no control over the drooling.

Apparently I pooped myself, but was too numb to know for sure and my sense of smell was gone. I saw a faint smoke cloud above my head which believe came from my hair. I'm still looking for my nuts and I'm offering a significant reward for their safe return!!

P. S. My wife loved the gift, and now regularly threatens me with it!

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**'If you think Education is difficult, try being stupid.'**

A male patient is lying in bed in the hospital, wearing an oxygen mask over his mouth and nose. A young student nurse appears and gives him a partial sponge bath. "Nurse," he mumbles from behind the mask, "are my testicles black?"

Embarrassed, the young nurse replies, "I don't know, Sir. I'm only here to wash your upper body and feet."

He struggles to ask again, "Nurse, please check for me. Are my testicles black?"

Concerned that he might elevate his blood pressure and heart rate from worrying about his testicles, she overcomes her embarrassment and pulls back the covers.

She raises his gown, holds his manhood in one hand and his testicles gently in the other.

She looks very closely and says, "There's nothing wrong with them, Sir. They look fine."

The man slowly pulls off his oxygen mask, smiles at her, and says very slowly, "Thank you very much. That was wonderful. Now listen very, very closely:

Are - my - test - results - back?"

*Contributed by "Charlie" Weaver....*

**IRS and the Rabbi**

The IRS sends their auditor (a nasty little man) to audit a synagogue.

The auditor is doing all the checks, and then turns to the Rabbi and says, "I noticed that you buy a lot of candles."

"Yes," answered the Rabbi. "Well, Rabbi, what do you do with the candle drippings?" he asked.

"A good question," noted the Rabbi. "We actually

save them up. When we have enough, we send them back to the candle maker and every now and then, they send us a free box of candles."

"Oh," replied the auditor somewhat disappointed that his question actually had a practical answer. So he thought he'd try another question, in his obnoxious way... "Rabbi, what about all these matzo purchases? What do you do with the crumbs from the matzo?"

"Ah, yes," replied the Rabbi calmly, "we actually collect up the crumbs, we send them in a box back to the manufacturer and every now and then, they send a free box of matzo balls."

"Oh," replied the auditor, thinking hard how to fluster the Rabbi. "Well, Rabbi," he went on, "what do you do with all the foreskins from the circumcisions?" "Yes, here too, we do not waste," answered the Rabbi. "What we do is save up all the foreskins, and when we have enough we actually send them to the IRS"

"To the IRS?" questioned the auditor in disbelief.

"Ah, yes," replied the Rabbi, "directly to The IRS ...And about once a year, they send us a little prick like you."

*Contributed by "Charlie" Weaver*

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Having already downed a few Tequila Shooters, she turned around, faced him, looked him straight in the eye and said, 'Listen here, good looking, I screw anybody, anytime, anywhere, your place, my place, in the car, front door, back door, on the ground, standing up, sitting down, naked or with clothes on, dirty, clean . . . it doesn't matter to me. I've been doing it ever since I was a teen, and I just love it.'

Eyes now wide with interest, he responded : 'No kidding. I'm a Navy Diver too.

Where are you stationed?  
*Contributed by "Charlie" Weaver*  
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U.S. Naval Undersea Museum

What does a \$60 million French ocean liner have to do with training Navy divers? More than you might think!

In December 1941, the U.S. seized and converted the French liner Normandie to a transport ship. Two months later, #OnThisDay in 1942, the newly renamed USS Lafayette caught fire and capsized at a New York City pier. The ensuing salvage operation was the largest ever attempted by the U.S. Navy at the time.

Supervisor of Salvage Cmdr. William Sullivan made the best of a bad situation by establishing a salvage training school at Pier 88. Within a year, more than 430 men gained first-hand salvage experience. More than half also qualified as salvors or second class divers.



*These articles have been provided by "Charlie" Weaver*

**An amazing story of bravery!**



*The following piece contributed by "Charlie" Weaver*



February 17, 2017

On this day, February 17, 1945 (age 24)

Owen Francis Patrick Hammerberg sacrificed himself to rescue two trapped divers during salvage operations of the post Pearl Harbor Attack. His Medal of Honor citation reads:

"For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty as a diver engaged in rescue operations at West Loch, Pearl Harbor, 17 February 1945. Aware of the danger when 2 fellow divers were hopelessly trapped in a cave-in of steel wreckage while tunneling with jet nozzles under an LST sunk in 40 feet (12 m) of water and 20 feet (6.1 m) of mud. Hammerberg unhesitatingly went overboard in a valiant attempt to effect their rescue despite the certain hazard of additional cave-ins and the risk of fouling his lifeline on jagged pieces of steel imbedded in the shifting mud. Washing a passage through the original excavation, he reached the first of the trapped men, freed him from the wreckage and, working desperately in pitch-black darkness, finally effected his release from fouled lines, thereby enabling him to reach the surface. Wearied but undaunted after several hours of arduous labor, Hammerberg resolved to continue his struggle to wash through the oozing submarine, subterranean mud in a determined effort to save the second diver. Venturing still farther under the buried hulk, he held tenaciously to his purpose, reaching a place immediately above the other man just as another cave-in occurred and a heavy piece of steel pinned him

crosswise over his shipmate in a position which protected the man beneath from further injury while placing the full brunt of terrific pressure on himself. Although he succumbed in agony 18 hours after he had gone to the aid of his fellow divers, Hammerberg, by his cool judgment, unfaltering professional skill and consistent disregard of all personal danger in the face of tremendous odds, had contributed effectively to the saving of his 2 comrades. His heroic spirit of self-sacrifice throughout enhanced and sustained the highest traditions of the U.S. Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life in the service of his country."

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**Then and Now**

US Troops relaxing before DDay, Tourquay, England



When we were young and feeling our oats  
We joined the navy and went on those boats  
That sank on purpose sliding into the sea.  
Nobody knew where we were going to be  
Except for a few who charted the way  
To a far off coastline or a secret bay.  
The rest of us did what we're trained

to do  
and trusted each other - but prayed a lot too.  
In a sewer pipe coffin we just did our jobs  
pulling sticks, cycling vents or adjusting some knobs.  
When all hell broke loose we knew what was best  
because we had dolphins affixed to our chest.  
But although we knew every valve on the boat that made it submerge or caused it to float  
it wasn't dolphins or qualcards or years worth of studies that would save us... but rather our crewmates... our buddies.  
Many stood by us then, but they stand here no more.  
On Eternal Patrol they have left their last shore.  
Husbands and fathers and grandfathers too  
who sailed with us, challenged us under the blue.  
Forever a mate, forever our friend  
we're bonded as shipmates beyond our lives end.  
We pray for them now as we prayed with them then:  
May you rest in peace always, my brothers - AMEN.

When asked what I did to make life worthwhile in my lifetime...I can respond with a great deal of pride and satisfaction, "I served a career in the United States Navy Submarine Force."

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**Harry Reisen Journal**

Harry Reisen's granddaughter is a friend of Maureen Molnar's son, Brian



ENLISTMENT RECORD  
Date entered into service January 15, 1943  
Place Grand Central Palace, New York City, N.Y.  
Registration Number  
Branch of service United States Army Air Force  
Where sent after induction Port Dix, New Jersey  
January 23 to January 28  
To what outfit assigned United States Army Air Force, Technical Training Command  
COMPANY, REGIMENT, DIVISION OR CORRESPONDING UNIT IN OTHER BRANCHES  
Nature of service Air Force Ground Crew Member  
Rank Corporal serial number 32720516  
Other Information Basic Training - Miami Beach, Florida (Jan. 30 to Feb. 28) Radio School - Scott Field, Illinois (Feb. 28 to April 4) Truax Field, Wisconsin (April 6 to August 20) Armeror's School - Lowry Field, Colorado (August 22 to Sept. 19) Buckley Field, Colorado (Sept. 19 to Nov. 1)



To be continued next newsletter

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**From: Georgina Haynes**

Sent: Sunday, February 24, 2019 8:53 AM

To: Tony Molnar

Subject: Re: Burial at sea - Hickman

Hello and Happy New Year to you! I had told you that when I had my display for Mr. Kenneth Hickman that I would be sure and share some photographs from the event with you. The event was held on Saturday February 23, 2019 from 12 noon until 4pm at the Stephenson County Farm Bureau in Freeport, Illinois, Kenneth Hickman's hometown. The family members of Kenneth Hickman in attendance were his sister, Jacqueline, her husband, their son and his wife. Many others were in attendance as well. And "Thanks again" for your help!.....it is greatly appreciated!

Take Care....

Georgina!

Pete Zingarella supplied the photos of the Burial at Sea Ceremony on Bristol. See the newsletter spread in photo top. *Ed Lynch*



Are you a Purple Heart Medal Recipient? Do you need to file an initial claim with VA? If so, here is good news starting April 1, 2019.

Purple Heart Initial Disability Claims Will Move Faster

VA Secretary Robert Wilkie announced that on April, it will provide priority disability benefits claims processing for the initial claims from discharged combat veterans who have been awarded the Purple Heart Medal. Secretary Wilkie announced the decision at a hearing before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies.

The Veterans Benefits Administration will amend its priority processing categories to include initial claims received from Purple Heart recipients on or after April 1, 2019. The move follows existing department rules which give priority classification to Purple Heart veterans who request [medical appointments at VA hospitals](#). Those veterans are also exempt from all co-payments for their medical care.

According to The Military Order of the Purple Heart more than 35,000 Iraq War veterans and more than 22,000 Afghanistan War veterans have received the medal, one of the best known military honors in the country. The Purple Heart award is the oldest U.S. military decoration and is awarded to U.S. service members for wounds suffered at the hands of the enemy. General George Washington awarded the first purple-colored heart-shaped badges to soldiers who fought in the Continental Army during the American Revolution

VA's current caseload of initial benefits claims include more than 83,000 that have been pending for more than 125 days, the department's target timeframe for rendering a decision. The policy change will not affect supplemental claims or veterans' appeals.

**H.R. 299, Navy Blue Water Vietnam Veteran Act of 2019, Reintroduced**

TREA continues to strongly support and is pleased to report that after meeting with House and Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs officials, that Congress will pass the bill.

Buoyed by an appeals court ruling, House and Senate leaders began another push for a "Blue Water Navy" bill on [Agent Orange](#) benefits that failed last year following opposition from the [Department of Veterans Affairs](#). Sen. Johnny Isakson, chairman of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, said he has enough votes in the Senate to pass the bill. He hopes to overcome two Senators who last year [blocked a Senate vote on the previous bill](#), which had passed 382-0 in the House.

Isakson and Phil Roe, the House committee ranking member were joined by Rep. Mark Takano, chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, and Sen. Jon Tester, ranking member of the Senate committee, in urging VA Secretary Robert Wilkie not to appeal a January ruling by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit in favor of [extending Agent Orange health care and benefits](#) to offshore sailors.



*Maureen Molnar sent the following photo from an establishment in Colorado Springs, Co*

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*Email received from Marty Walsh:*

*Received my copy of 2018's Bristol Reunion Book today and thank Duane for producing a quality publication. Duane takes the time during the reunion to photograph as many good scenes as he can and then picks the best for inclusion in the reunion book. This year Don Singer contributed some great photo's, which Duane also used in making up another fine reunion book.*

*M. W.*  
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