

# USS BRISTOL DD857

## VETERANS ASSOCIATION

### SUMMER 2020

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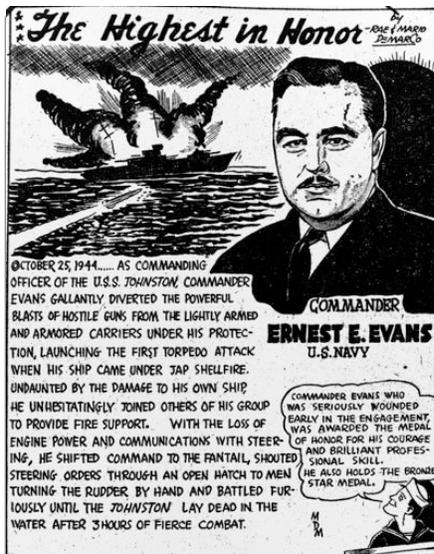
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#### The Battle off Samar: The Sacrifice of "Taffy 3" 25 October 1944

#### Overview

On 15 October 1944, the Japanese Imperial Navy's First Mobile Fleet launched Operation Shō, a last-ditch attempt to engage Allied naval forces off [Leyte](#) in the central Philippines decisively. Following the 24 October Battle of the Sibuyan Sea, the powerful Japanese First Diversion Attack Force ("Center Force") appeared to be retiring westward.

However, the task force ultimately resumed its eastward passage, broke out of the San Bernardino Strait north of Samar early the following day, and headed southward toward Leyte Gulf. The Japanese Northern Force, a carrier task force, had drawn Admiral William F. Halsey's U.S. Third Fleet to the north. The heavy forces of Vice Admiral Thomas C. Kinkaid's U.S. Seventh Fleet were engaged to the south of Leyte Gulf. This left only three Seventh Fleet escort carrier (CVE) task units on the northern flank of the Leyte operational area, where they had been providing close air support and an ASW screen for the amphibious landings. Just after sunrise on 25 October, Rear Admiral Clifton A. F. Sprague's TG 77.4.3—call sign "Taffy 3"—the northwesterly-most task unit, made up of six small escort carriers, three destroyers, and four destroyer escorts, was stunned to confront four Japanese battleships (among them Yamato with her 18-inch

main guns), six heavy cruisers, two light cruisers, and 11 destroyers.

**Taffy 3 was comprised of the following ships:**

**Escort Carriers**

[Fanshaw Bay \(CVE-70\)](#)

[Gambier Bay \(CVE-73\)](#)

[Kalinin Bay \(CVE-68\)](#)

[Kitkun Bay \(CVE-71\)](#)

[St. Lo \(CVE-63\)](#)

[White Plains \(CVE-66\)](#)

**Destroyers**

[Heermann \(DD-532\)](#)

[Hoel \(DD-533\)](#)

[Johnston \(DD-557\)](#)

**Destroyer Escorts**

[Dennis \(DE-405\)](#)

[John C. Butler \(DE-339\)](#)

[Raymond \(DE-341\)](#)

[Samuel B. Roberts \(DE-413\)](#)

**The Battle**

**Initial Contact**

Following its San Bernardino Strait passage, the Japanese Center Force was still in its nighttime search disposition. At 0623, shortly after sunrise and before the task force had fully shifted to its circular daytime anti-aircraft formation, Yamato made radar contact with U.S. ASW patrol aircraft. Additional air

contacts followed and were fired on until 0650, when the Japanese sighted what appeared to them to be a large U.S. task force of carriers and cruisers on the eastern horizon, thought to be part of the U.S. Third Fleet (this was actually Taffy 3). Center Force's commander, Vice Admiral Takeo Kurita, immediately ordered his ships to move into a pursuit formation. Due to still-ongoing shift from nighttime to daylight antiaircraft dispositions, this order inadvertently led to confusion. It would have the effect of committing the Japanese ships in a piecemeal fashion and dispersing their overwhelming firepower during the upcoming battle.

Taffy 3's first contact with Kurita's force was a visual sighting of antiaircraft fire to the northwest, immediately followed by a surface search radar "hit" and intercepted Japanese voice transmissions. Shortly after, Kurita ordered his forces to engage and Yamato, followed by other Japanese ships, opened fire. Later, Taffy 3 personnel were to remark on the brightly colored geysers thrown up by the salvos of near-misses that were caused by the spotting dye added to Japanese shells. By this time, Sprague had his

carriers come about and initially followed a southeasterly course. His destroyers generated a smoke screen and, Johnston in the lead, began firing at their pursuers. At this point, Taffy 3's sister task units, Taffy 1 and Taffy 2 (TG 77.4.1 and TG 77.4.2) were approximately 25 nautical miles to the southeast and had adopted a southeasterly course. Although its escorts were bound to protect the slow, unarmored escort carriers, Taffy 2, commanded by Rear Admiral Felix B. Stump, was able to support Taffy 3 with its aircraft as the battle progressed. Taffy 1, commanded by Rear Admiral Thomas L. Sprague, also launched some aircraft, but would be faced with other challenges as the day progressed.

Sprague also launched fighters and bombers, which, although armed for their original close air support and ASW missions, could at least harass Taffy 3's pursuers. Sprague also began to change course toward the south; developments would ultimately force him toward the southwest. (Thus, the overall track of the Battle off Samar would come to resemble an inverted fishhook.)



USS Gambier Bay (CVE-73) and two destroyer escorts making smoke at the start of the battle off Samar, 25 October 1944. Japanese ships are faintly visible on the horizon beyond the smoke screen (80-G-288144).



USS Heerman (DD-532) and a destroyer escort lay a smoke screen to protect Taffy 3 from attacking Japanese surface ships at the beginning of the Battle off Samar, 25 October 1944. Photographed from USS White Plains (CVE-66) (80-G-288885).

### U.S. Torpedo Attacks

At 0716, and again at 0742, Sprague ordered his screen to carry out torpedo attacks. The three destroyers, Johnston (in the lead), Heerman, and Hoel carried out the first. Johnston managed to damage the heavy cruiser Kumano with a

torpedo hit, but was heavily damaged by 6- and 14-inch shells. Hoel fired at, and missed, the battleship Kongo, and was also hit multiple times. For a time, she was boxed in by Japanese battleships and cruisers, all of which fired at her. Heerman entered the fray just before Sprague's second attack order. Heerman launched torpedoes at the Japanese heavy cruiser Haguru, but she evaded them and fired multiple salvos at the destroyer, which all missed. Moving beyond the Japanese cruiser division, Heerman came upon the battleships Kongo, Yamato, and Nagato, firing her remaining torpedoes and 5-inch guns at Kongo. The destroyer then quickly came about and moved to a screening station on the starboard flank of the carriers. Despite the intensity of Japanese fire, the only damage aboard had been caused by shell fragments. The determined, aggressive attacks of the three U.S. destroyers, coupled with the ongoing air attacks on his ships, tended to confirm Kurita's erroneous assessment that he was facing a strong carrier task force. The second U.S. torpedo attack would only strengthen this impression.

Sprague ordered his screen to make a second torpedo attack shortly after and his destroyer escorts also engaged. Samuel B. Roberts joined Heerman and the badly damaged Hoel; Dennis, John C. Butler, and Raymond followed, attacking individually. The hard-hit Johnston was also back in action. They faced not only a Japanese cruiser division, but also most of the Japanese destroyers. U.S. and Japanese ships zig-zagged, and exchanged intensive gunfire and torpedoes in the melee-like conditions. Johnston was still able to lay such a heavy fire on the Japanese cruisers Haguro and Tone that these reported her as a "heavy cruiser." By 0820, the U.S. escorts had rejoined the escort carriers, laid smoke, and proceeded on the task unit's southwesterly course. Shortly after, at 0830, Hoel went dead in the water. Listing to port, with all of her engineering spaces flooded and her No. 1 magazine on fire, Hoel began settling by the stern and her crew abandoned ship.



Splashes from Japanese shells near USS White Plains (CVE-66), during the Japanese Center Force's pursuit of TG 77.4.3 (80-G-288886).



Crewman of USS White Plains (CVE-66) watch as Japanese shells fall near other ships of Taffy 3 (80-G-288889).

### The U.S. Escort Carriers in Action

Even before Sprague had ordered the initial torpedo attack, the escort carriers found themselves under heavy fire from their pursuers. After the brief rain squall and the U.S. air attacks, Japanese battleships and heavy cruisers were gaining on the carriers from astern and enemy destroyers were approaching from starboard. Moreover, a Japanese heavy cruiser division had managed to overhaul the carrier formation's port flank, intending to cross its "T" and cut it off. This pushed Sprague toward the southwest and forced him to launch aircraft

with the added disadvantage of a following wind. The U.S. aircraft were ordered to target the heavy cruiser division to port of the carriers. Taffy 2, to the southeast, also launched aircraft at Kurita's force. Center Force would remain under relatively uncoordinated, but heavy, U.S. air attack throughout the engagement.

With its course turning toward the southwest, the escort carriers were taken under Japanese fire from the north and east. As the range was reduced, the carriers began firing the single 5-inch guns under their fantails at their pursuers. Although this fire had little effect on the Japanese, Kalinin Bay and White Plains were actually able to score hits on the Japanese heavy cruisers. (Significantly, a chance White Plains hit on Chokai caused enough damage aboard the latter for her to fall out of formation and later fall prey to aircraft from Kitkun Bay.) More smoke was laid, but given the course and wind direction, this did little to hide the carriers. All were hit by Japanese shells, but the enemy's gunnery during this phase was not good and the full effect of their armor-piercing shells was wasted on the unarmored U.S. vessels.

However, Gambier Bay, on the exposed port flank of the formation, began receiving Japanese hits—including from Kongo—at 0810, which started fires on her flight and hangar decks. She then received hits below the waterline in her forward port engine room, which flooded. This reduced the escort carrier's speed and she dropped behind the formation. Johnston attempted to draw fire away from Gambier Bay, but the Japanese concentrated on the carrier. Gambier Bay was dead in the water and sinking by 0840 and ordered abandoned ten minutes later.



USS Kitkun Bay (CVE-71) prepares to launch FM-2 Wildcat fighters during the action. In the center distance, Japanese shells are splashing near USS White Plains (CVE-66) (80-G-287497).



USS Gambier Bay (CVE-73) straddled by Japanese shells and falling behind the rest of her task group, during the battle off Samar, 25 October 1944. Note Japanese cruiser, barely visible on the horizon at the right (80-G-287505).

### **Kurita Presses the Attack**

As the task unit proceeded toward the southwest, Samuel B. Roberts, Heerman, and Johnston continued to engage the pursuing Japanese heavy cruisers. Shortly before Hoel sank, Sprague ordered John C. Butler and Dennis to take up station on the escort carriers' starboard quarter (where they were joined by Raymond), interposing them between the carriers and the Japanese. At this point, with the exception of John C. Butler, the escorts had expended all of their torpedoes. Given the dispositions of the two forces, it was also questionable if an advantageous firing position was even still possible. The destroyers and destroyer escorts had to resort to darting attacks at the Japanese cruisers while firing their guns, zig-zagging back and forth between the carriers and the enemy. Smoke screens partially shielded Sprague's carriers, but the escorts were hit hard, yet remained underway and able to fight.

Around 0850, Samuel B. Roberts received her first serious hit, which entered her hull under the waterline and knocked out her No. 1 fireroom. More Japanese hits followed. A massive explosion caused by several 14-inch shells tore an over 30 feet-long gash on the destroyer escort's port side, obliterated the No. 2 engine room, ruptured fuel tanks, and started fires. All power and communications were lost, and Samuel B. Roberts was abandoned at 0910. Her commanding officer, [Lieutenant Commander Robert W. Copeland, USNR](#), was awarded the Navy Cross.

At 0845, just before Samuel B. Roberts' waterline hit, the Japanese light cruiser Yahagi and several destroyers launched a torpedo attack on the Taffy 3, which was repulsed by Johnston's furious fire and strafing by U.S. aircraft. However, Johnston, limping on one engine, was hit several times more as the Japanese destroyers concentrated their fire on her. Her other engine knocked out, her topsides in shambles, with no power or communications, Johnston was dead in the water at 0945 and was ordered abandoned five minutes later. Johnston's commanding officer, [Commander Ernest E.](#)

[Evans](#), did not survive her sinking, but was awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously. The Japanese destroyer squadron's attack was to be the enemy's last offensive action.

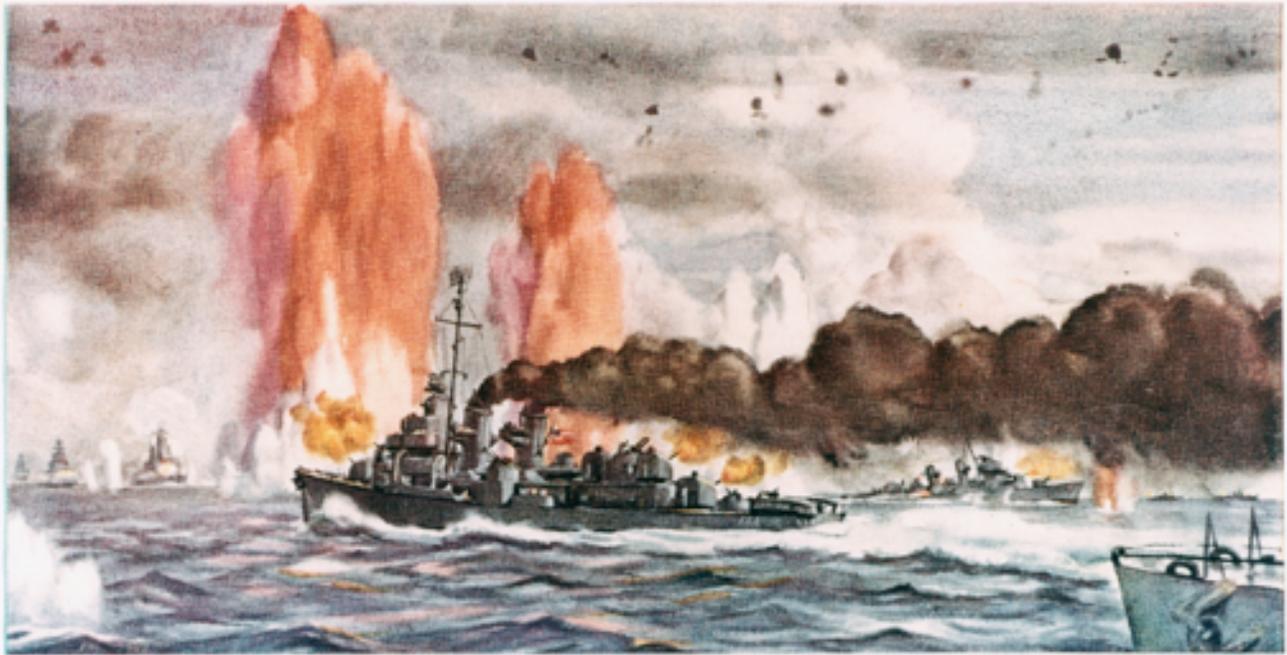


A Japanese heavy cruiser dead in the water (possibly Chikuma), with a destroyer standing by, during the Battle off Samar, 25 October 1944. A TBM Avenger from one of the American escort carriers is in the foreground. Note the extensive oil slick around the sinking cruiser (80-G-287538).



Explosion aboard USS St. Lo (CVE-63) after she was hit by a kamikaze off Samar, 25 October 1944 (80-G-270516).

### **Japanese Withdrawal**



Taffy 3 might not have survived if Kurita's ships had not been under air attack during the entire Samar engagement. As noted above, Rear Admiral Stump's TG 77.4.2 (Taffy 2), was particularly engaged in this facet of the battle, augmenting Taffy 3 aircraft over the dispersed Center Force. Earlier that morning, just after the Japanese force had been sighted by Taffy 3, Stump had his available TBM Avengers re-armed with torpedoes or 500-pound bombs capable of damaging capital ships. As Taffy 3 was being pursued, Stump closed the distance to Sprague's task unit and was able to launch three strikes during the battle's roughly 90-minute duration. (At one point, Taffy 2 sighted

Japanese ships, which, temporarily diverted from their pursuit of Sprague, fired on Taffy 2's destroyers.) Rather than targeting specific vessels, Stump ordered his air group to attempt to cripple as many Japanese ships as possible. Taffy 2 and Taffy 3 aircraft contributed to the sinking of the heavy cruisers Chokai, Chikuma, and Suzuya, all of which had received some degree of damage from surface action. Additionally, aircraft damaged most of the other Japanese combatants and, combined with Sprague's smoke screens, adversely effected Japanese gunnery and Kurita's command and control of his dispersed force. After his last remaining scout aircraft was shot down shortly after 0900,

and unaware of the proximity of his weakened and outnumbered opponent, Kurita decided to break off the surface action. Center Force, still under air attack, began to retrace its course toward the northwest.

The U.S. task units were not to have a long respite. Already at 0740 that morning, Taffy 1, in the process of launching aircraft in support of Taffy 3, had been attacked by six land-based Japanese planes from the recently constituted "Special Attack Air Corps," the first official kamikaze unit. [USS Santee \(CVE-29\)](#) was hit by one, which caused flight and hangar deck fires. Other Taffy 1 escort carriers experienced near misses. The kamikaze attacks—an as-yet-unfamiliar enemy tactic—

halted or slowed flight operations until after 1000.

Land-based kamikaze aircraft attacked Taffy 3 just before 1100. Kitkun Bay, Fanshaw Bay, and White Plains shot down or drove off their attackers. However, one Japanese plane, already damaged by White Plains antiaircraft fire, dove into St. Lo. The aircraft, a Mitsubishi A6M Zero (or Zeke), crashed through St. Lo's flight deck into her hangar deck. The explosions of ready ordnance blew off the ship's flight deck and elevator; fires raged. St. Lo sank in less than 30 minutes after the attack. Follow-on kamikaze targeted the other carriers. One hit Kalinen Bay's flight deck, but the resulting fires could be extinguished. Her after stack was also hit. By 1130, the Japanese air attacks ceased and the task unit was able to concentrate on assessing damage and searching for survivors from Hoel, Gambier Bay, Samuel B. Roberts, Johnston, and St. Lo.

The initiative, aggressiveness, and outright heroism demonstrated by Taffy 3, combined with determined U.S. naval air attacks, limited Japanese situational awareness, and pure dumb luck of the Americans had

stymied Vice Admiral Kurita's intent to destroy U.S. landing forces in the Leyte Gulf. Along with the defeats in the Sibuyan Sea, the Surigao Strait, and off Cape Engaño, the Samar engagement blunted or destroyed much of the Japanese navy's remaining offensive capabilities and turned its surviving surface forces into a "fleet in being"—a concern for Allied commanders, but never again the threat it had still posed into early 1944.

—Carsten Fries, NHHC Communication and Outreach Division, August 2019

**Watercolor by Commander Dwight C. Shepler, USNR, depicting an episode during the torpedo attacks by the TG 77.4.3 ("Taffy 3") destroyer screen. Ships present are (left to right): Japanese battleships Nagato, Haruna, and Yamato, with salvo (Japanese shells contained dye for spotting purposes) from Yamato landing in left center; USS Heerman (DD-532), USS Hoel (DD-533) sinking; Japanese cruisers Tone and Chikuma (NH 79033 KN).**

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**The battle of Cape Engano (25 October 1944)** was a one-sided American victory that saw [Admiral Halsey's](#) 3rd Fleet sink four Japanese aircraft carriers, but at the same time exposing the invasion shipping in Leyte Gulf to a possible Japanese attack.

The Japanese had long realised that an American conquest of the Philippines would cut their empire in half, isolating their main sources of fuel in the south. Accordingly they decided to fight the 'decisive battle' of the war in the Philippines, using just about every available naval unit. [Admiral Ozawa's](#) Main Force was to sail from Japan, where new naval aviators had been training, and approach the American fleet from the north. In the final version of the plan his role was to draw the powerful American 3rd Fleet away from the invasion fleet, leaving them vulnerable to an attack by other Japanese forces approaching from the west.



[Zuiho at Cape Engano, 25 October 1944](#)

Admiral Ozawa started the battle with four carriers, two battleships that had been converted to carry some aircraft, three cruisers and eight destroyers. The four carriers were something of a mixed bag. The best of them was the [Zuikaku](#), a veteran of

the attack on Pearl Harbor and one of the best Japanese carriers of the war. The other three were less impressive. [Zuiho](#) was a light carrier produced during 1940 by converting a submarine support ship. [Chitose](#) and [Chiyoda](#) were sister ships produced by modifying seaplane carriers. Work on the conversions began in the aftermath of the battle of Midway and they arrived in service in late 1943-early 1944.

The two battleships were the [Ise](#) and [Hyuga](#), both of [First World War](#) vintage. After Midway their rear turrets had been removed and a short flight deck installed. Neither ship was carrying any aircraft at [Leyte Gulf](#).

Halsey's 3rd Fleet contained fifteen fleet carriers, seven modern fast battleships, twenty one cruisers and fifty eight destroyers. His orders were to protect the landing fleets at Leyte Gulf but also to seek out a chance to defeat and destroy the Japanese fleet.

On 24 October the Americans detected all of the incoming Japanese fleets (although Ozawa's carriers weren't found until quite late in the day). Halsey launched a series of air strikes on the most powerful of the surface fleets,

[Admiral Kurita's](#) I Striking Force. This contained the [Musashi](#) and [Yamato](#), the two most powerful battleships in the world, but during the day the [Musashi](#) was sunk by repeated air attacks. Kurita briefly turned back to avoid further attacks while passing through the narrow San Bernardino Straits. This, combined with a belief that Kurita had suffered more damage than he had, convinced Halsey that the Japanese battleships no longer represented a serious threat and could be dealt with by the old battleships and escort carriers of [Admiral Kinkaid's](#) 7th Fleet. In contrast four Japanese aircraft carriers posed a potentially very serious threat to the invasion fleet, and so at 20.00 Halsey ordered his entire fleet to move north.

At this point the American command structure broke down. Halsey created a new Task Force 34, under Admiral Lee. This force, of four battleships and a large number of cruisers, might be used to engage Kurita if he passed through the San Bernardino Strait. As Halsey didn't expect this to happen Lee's ships were taken north with him. Unfortunately Kinkaid heard this message and assumed that Task Force 34 was being left

behind to watch Kurita. Kinkaid thus felt free to move his six old battleships south to deal with Nishimura's fleet heading for the [Surigao Strait](#). Kinkaid was not the only person to make this assumption - Admiral Nimitz back on Hawaii also believed that Task Force 34 was watching the San Bernardino Strait.



[Admiral Ozawa](#)  
[being transferred from](#)  
[Zuikaku to Oyodo](#)

At 2.2am [Admiral Mitscher's](#) scout plans find the Japanese carriers. The first of a series of air strikes went in at about 8am. The few Japanese aircraft left were quickly destroyed and in this first attack the light carrier [Chitose](#) was sunk and the fleet carrier [Zuikaku](#) hit by a torpedo. The second attack was unopposed and the [Chiyoda](#) was badly damaged. At about the same time Halsey received the first in a series of messages from Kinkaid requesting urgent help. Kurita's powerful battleships had indeed emerged from the San Bernardino Strait and turned

south to head for Leyte Gulk. Instead they ran into six of Kinkaid's escort carriers and a desperate running battle began ([Battle of Samar](#)). Over the next two hours Kinkaid sent two more increasingly urgent requests for help, but Halsey refused to be budged. He was dealing with the most dangerous Japanese fleet and Kinkaid would have to cope by himself (to be fair to Halsey by the time the second and third messages arrived Kurita had withdrawn from combat with the escort carriers, but it was still at large).



[Zuiho making forced draft, Leyte Gulf](#)

At around 10am Halsey received a message from Nimitz, 'Where is repeat where is Task Force thirty-four'. Unfortunately some padding added to increase security was erroneously left in the final message, so Halsey read ' Where is repeat where is Task Force thirty-four rr The World Wonders'. Halsey was furious, but he did finally send one of his three

carrier task groups south to try and help Kinkaid.

The remaining carriers launched a third strike on the Japanese carriers at 1.10pm. This time *Zuikaku* and *Zuiho* were both set on fire. *Zuiho* managed to keep going, but *Zuikaku* was doomed and at 2.07 she sank. The fourth and final American strike finished off the *Zuiho*. The last Japanese carrier, *Chiyoda*, was already dead in the water and sank later. The two converted battleships managed to escape, but the Japanese carrier force had been eliminated. Further south Kinkaid's carriers had escaped total destruction through their own efforts, and Kurita had retreated back through the San Bernardino Strait.

Halsey's conduct of the battle has remained controversial. Afterwards he wrote 'At that moment Ozawa was exactly 42 miles from the muzzles of my 16in guns. ... I turned my back on the opportunity I had dreamed of since my days as a cadet', a revealing statement that suggests that Halsey was so focused on the chance of engaging in a major gun battle that he ignored the danger to his south.

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### **The battle of the Surigao Straits (25 October 1944)**

was the last clash between battleships and saw a force of older American battleships crush a Japanese squadron attempting to break into Leyte Gulf.

The battle was fought as part of the wider [battle of Leyte Gulf \(23-26 October 1944\)](#), a Japanese attempt to destroy the vast American fleet supporting the amphibious landings on Leyte. Four separate Japanese forces were involved in the plan. A carrier force was to approach from the north in an attempt to draw the main American carriers and fast battleships away from Leyte Gulf. The remaining three forces were to cut through the Philippines and emerge to the north and south of the vulnerable American shipping in the gulf. A central force was to emerge from the San Bernadino Strait while a southern force came out of the Surigao Strait, between Leyte and Mindanao.

Two separate Japanese forces were involved in this southern attack. The most powerful was Vice Admiral Shoji Nishimura's Southern (or 'C') Force, which contained two battleships, one heavy cruiser and four destroyers. The

second force, the 'Second Attack Force', consisted of three cruisers and four destroyers under Vice Admiral Kiyohide Shima. These two forces were approaching the Philippines from different directions - Nishimura from the west and Shima from the north. They didn't come close to each other until they reached Mindanao, and they never really coordinated their activities. The battle would be fought entirely by Nishimura. Nishimura's two battleships were the *Fuso* and the *Yamashiro*, launched in 1914 and 1915 respectively and armed with twelve 14in guns. They were thus of a similar age, or slightly older, than the six 'old' battleships of the American force.

The Japanese would face part of [Admiral Kinkaid's](#) 7th Fleet. Kinkaid's main task was to support the landings on Leyte, and his fleet contained 16 escort carriers, 6 battleships, 11 cruisers and 86 destroyers. By the end of 24 October the Americans had discovered the three Japanese fleets that were to attack through the Philippines. [Admiral Kurita's](#) Centre Force had suffered from two days of submarine and air attack (Battle of the Sibuyan Sea, 23-24 October). Late in the afternoon of 24 October he

had temporarily turned back to avoid passing through the narrow San Bernardino Strait and the Americans hoped that he was retreating. Even when they learnt that he had turned back towards the east they didn't believe he posed a threat. Further south Nishimura had been discovered heading for the Surigao Strait. Kinkaid believed that Halsey was watching Kurita and so he sent his strongest forces south to deal with Nishimura.

The Surigao Strait was defended by [Admiral Oldendorf's](#) fire support group of six 'old' battleships. The [Tennessee](#), [California](#) and [West Virginia](#) were the most effective of these ships, having been largely rebuilt and given gun radar. [Maryland](#), [Pennsylvania](#) and [Mississippi](#) hadn't undergone such extensive modifications and played a less significant part in the fighting. Oldendorf also had eight cruisers, twenty eight destroyers and a large number of PT boats at his disposal. The only weakness in his position was that his battleships had been equipped with high explosive shells for the shore bombardment and only a small number of the armour piercing shelled needed against battleships. On the evening of 24 October

Oldendorf placed his battleships across the exit from the strait, with his cruisers on the flanks and the destroyers ready to make torpedo attacks on the advancing Japanese. The PT boats were sent down the straits to find the Japanese.

The PT boats discovered Nishimura's squadron at 10.36pm on 24 October and began to harass the Japanese. This didn't stop Nishimura, and his squadron soon entered the straits. Next came the American destroyers and they achieved a dramatic success. Just before 3am on 25 October five destroyers launched a torpedo attack and struck the *Fuso*. She caught fire and just after 3.30 sank. Two Japanese destroyers were also sunk and a third too badly damaged to continue. This left Nishimura with the battleship *Yamashiro*, which had also been hit by torpedoes, the cruiser *Mogami* and the destroyer *Shigure*.

The Japanese ships were picked up on American radar at 3.02am (at a range of 44,000 yards). The cruisers opened fire from the flanks at 3.51 and the battleships followed a few minutes later. The more modernised ships were able to open fire at a range of just over 20,000

yards and played the main part in the battle. *Tennessee* fired 69 14in shells during the battle, *California* fired 63 14in shells and *West Virginia* fired 93 16in shells. Of the less modernised ships the *Maryland* did best, firing 48 16in shells, taking her range from the *West Virginia's* fire. The *Mississippi* only fired a single salvo while the *Pennsylvania* was masked by the other American ships and didn't fire.



[Yamashiro being bombed at Leyte](#)

The two heavier Japanese ships took a terrible beating. Just after 4am the cruiser turned to flee, followed by the *Yamashiro*. It was too late for the battleship and at 4.19 she capsized and sank. The destroyer *Shigure* hadn't suffered to the same extent, and managed to make her escape. The *Mogami* was badly damaged and on fire but she managed to limp away to join Admiral Shima's force. By now Shima had found the remains of the *Fuso*, which had split in half, convincing

him that it was between different sunken ships. He decided that there was no point in sacrificing his own much weaker force and decided to retreat. As his fleet turned the cruiser *Nachi* collided with the *Mogami*, although both ships survived.

Oldendorf sent his cruisers and destroyers into the straits to pursue the *Mogami* and *Shigure*. This force opened fire on the *Mogami* but was forced to turn back before they could sink her. The *Mogami* was finally sunk by American aircraft soon after the surface ships retired.

The reason for this retreat, which probably saved the survivors of Shima's force from destruction, was that Oldendorf had now learnt that Kurita's battleships had emerged from the San Bernardino Strait and were now attacking the 7th Fleet's escort carriers ([Battle of Samar](#)). With [Halsey](#) off to the north chasing aircraft carriers this meant Oldendorf's battleships were urgently needed and they turned north ready for a second, potentially much more difficult battle. They were saved from this desperate battle by Kurita himself, who believed that he was actually facing fleet carriers. After a two hour

battle he withdrew, briefly attempted to head towards Leyte Gulf and then gave up and headed back into the San Bernardino Strait. The crisis had passed and the Japanese plan had ended in failure.

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### Lessons from Clara Barton – Angel of the Battlefield



As I write this piece, the day is April 12, 2020. On this exact day in 1912, Clara Barton – known as “Angel of the Battlefield” – died, age 90. These 108 years later, she has lessons for us.

Clara Barton was a teacher, nurse during the Civil War, founder of the American Red Cross, creator of an organization dedicated to finding those missing in action. She grew up in Massachusetts – a state now racked by 22,860 coronavirus cases, 600 deaths. Most of life, she worked in Washington DC – today facing 1875 coronavirus cases, 50 deaths. She lived in Maryland, currently wrestling 7694 cases, 206 deaths. What

would the legendary nurse make of this moment in American history?

First, Barton – who nursed veterans on the front lines in nine major Civil War battles, including Harpers Ferry, Antietam and Fredericksburg – would honor all the nurses and medical professionals today on the front lines, tending the sick at personal risk.

While total nurses registered and retired approach four million, roughly 250,000 are advanced practice nurses, including nurse practitioners, clinical nurse specialists and anesthesiologists. Nurses on this battlefield outnumber doctors ten to three. As in Barton's days, much falls to them.

Second, Barton would remind us that fear has no place in our vocabulary. As Barton offered during the American Civil War, having survived a bullet through her sleeve: "I may be compelled to face danger, but never fear it ..." As a matter of record, she regularly arrived in the "clutch," delivering critical supplies, selflessly administering them to the point of exhaustion, earning her battlefield name.

Humble, she fought fear in others, not just administering medicine, but administering

hope. Her father had served under General Anthony Wayne in the Revolution. On his deathbed, they spoke of Christian faith, and directions faith might point her. Her motivation never flagged; she lived to serve others.

From what else did she draw stamina, courage, and strength? Experience. In her earliest days, one of her brothers fell from a roof and sustained major head injuries. Doctors gave up on him. She did not. By all accounts, her resolve, compassion, and never-say-never attitude saved him. He recovered, later becoming a senior officer in the Union Army.

Third then, she might appeal to our personal experience in overcoming long odds. Somewhere, sometime, somehow in each of our lives – perhaps hidden in a recess of our own minds – she might ask if we have not, against odds, prevailed. If once, then once again. She was not one to weigh odds, once she knew success was possible.

Again, with grit of a girl who rose from humble beginnings, she wrote: "You must never so much think whether you like it or not, whether it is bearable or not; you must never think of anything except the need, and how to meet it." That is

what nurses, doctors and hospital personnel are doing today. In them, she would recognize herself.

Fourth, fortifying those facing inordinate risk, and those wrestling uncertainty by reference to faith, hope and experience, she might add: Action changes everything. A person of action, she was on the front lines by intention, not by accident.

Nursing to thousands, she saved countless lives. She did not stop at war's end. She went to Andersonville – a sprawling confederate prison camp. Those she could not save, she buried. She spent 1865 identifying and burying 13,000 men. Over the next four years, she and a small group she led buried another 20,000, giving each a grave marker – patiently writing to 41,000 relatives. No soul was without value; she honored their sacrifice with unbroken service.

So, what might Clara Barton's closing counsel be? What might an American paragon of service, courage, patriotism and purpose suggest? What might a woman of faith, resolve and action, who died 108 years ago today, make of our unfamiliar moment?

She would probably note this is hardly America’s darkest day, far from it. She would probably encourage us to do our part, keep plugging, look forward and not over our shoulder, not askance at our neighbor. And she would probably remind us of what we know: Faith, hope, experience and action all matter. Then, she would point to those on the frontlines, and call them Angels of the Battlefield.

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### Eugene J. Bullard

by: [Dominick Pisano](#)  
Emeritus Scholars



Eugene Jacques Bullard is considered to be the first African-American military pilot to fly in combat, and the only African-American pilot in World War I. Ironically, he never flew for the United States.

Born October 9, 1895, in Columbus, Georgia, to

William Bullard, a former slave, and Josephine Bullard, Eugene’s early youth was unhappy. He made several unsuccessful attempts to run away from home, one of which resulted in his being returned home and beaten by his father. In 1906, at the age of 11, Bullard ran away for good, and for the next six years, he wandered the South in search of freedom.

In 1912 he stowed away on the *Marta Russ*, a German freighter bound for Hamburg, and ended up in Aberdeen, Scotland. From there he made his way to London, where he worked as a boxer and slapstick performer in Belle Davis’s Freedman Pickaninnies, an African American entertainment troupe. In 1913, Bullard went to France for a boxing match. Settling in Paris, he became so comfortable with French customs that he decided to make a home there. He later wrote, “... it seemed to me that French democracy influenced the minds of both black and white Americans there and helped us all act like brothers.”

After World War I had begun in the summer of 1914, Bullard enlisted in the French Foreign Legion. While serving with the 170<sup>th</sup> Infantry

Regiment, Bullard fought in the the Battle of Verdun (February to December 1916), where he was wounded seriously. He was taken from the battlefield and sent to Lyon to recuperate. While on leave in Paris, Bullard bet a friend \$2,000 that despite his color he could enlist in the French flying service. Bullard’s determination paid off, and in November 1916 he entered the *Aéronautique Militaire*.

Bullard began flight training at Tours in 1916 and received his wings in May 1917. He was first assigned to Escadrille Spa 93, and then to Escadrille Spa 85 in September 1917, where he remained until he left the *Aéronautique Militaire*. In November 1917, Bullard claimed two aerial victories, a Fokker Triplane and a Pfalz D.III, but neither could be confirmed. (Some accounts say that one victory was confirmed.) During his flying days, Bullard is said to have had an insignia on his Spad 7 C.1 that portrayed a heart with a dagger running through it and the slogan “All Blood Runs Red.” Reportedly, Bullard flew with a mascot, a Rhesus Monkey named “Jimmy.”



Eugene Bullard with his Rhesus monkey, Jimmy

After the United States entered the war in 1917, Bullard attempted to join the U.S. Air Service, but he was not accepted, ostensibly because he was an enlisted man, and the Air Service required pilots to be officers and hold at least the rank of First Lieutenant. In actuality, he was rejected because of the racial prejudice that existed in the American military during that time. Bullard returned to the *Aéronautique Militaire*, but he was summarily removed after an apparent confrontation with a French officer. He returned to the 170<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment until his discharge in October 1919.

After the war Bullard remained in France, where he

worked in a nightclub called Zelli's in the Montmartre district of Paris, owned a nightclub (Le Grand Duc) and an American-style bar (L'Escadrille), operated an athletic club, and married a French woman, Marcelle de Straumann. During this time Bullard rubbed elbows with notables like Langston Hughes, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Josephine Baker.

By the late 1930s, however, the clouds of war began to change Bullard's life dramatically. Even before World War II officially began in 1939, Bullard became involved in espionage activities against French fifth columnists who supported the Nazis. When war came he enlisted as a machine gunner in the 51<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment, and was severely wounded by an exploding artillery shell.

Fearing capture by the Nazis, he made his way to Spain, Portugal, and eventually the United States, settling in the Harlem district of New York City.

After his arrival in New York, Bullard worked as a security guard and longshoreman. In the post-World War II years, Bullard took up the cause of civil rights. In the summer of 1949, he was involved in an altercation with the police and

a racist mob at a Paul Robeson concert in Peekskill, New York, in which he was beaten by police. Another incident involved a bus driver who ordered Bullard to sit the back of his bus. These events left Bullard deeply disillusioned with the United States, and he returned to France, but was unable to resume his former life there.

During his lifetime, the French showered Bullard with honors, and in 1954, he was one of three men chosen to relight the everlasting flame at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Paris. In October 1959 he was made a knight of the Legion of Honor, the highest ranking order and decoration bestowed by France. It was the fifteenth decoration given to him by the French government.

In the epilogue to his well-researched book, *Eugene Bullard, Black Expatriate in Jazz-Age Paris* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 2000), Craig Lloyd points out the poignancy of Bullard's situation in the United States: "The contrast between Eugene Bullard's unrewarding years of toil and trouble early and late in life in the United States and his quarter-century of much-heralded achievement in France illustrates

dramatically ... the crippling disabilities imposed on the descendants of Americans of African ancestry ... .”

In 1992, the McDonnell Douglas Corporation donated to the National Air and Space Museum a bronze portrait head of Bullard, created by Eddie Dixon, an African American sculptor. This work is displayed in the museum’s [Legend, Memory and the Great War in the Air](#) gallery.



Bronze sculpture of Eugene Jacques Bullard, currently on view at the National Mall Building

Postscript: On September 14, 1994, Bullard was posthumously commissioned a second lieutenant in the U.S. Air Force. A display case in

the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force in Dayton, Ohio, honors him.

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### Tin Can Navy

--- by Lieutenant George W Campbell, USN, USS Zane

“Sail ho!” the lookout shouted. “Ship two points on the starboard bow, sir.”

“Can you make her out?” the flotilla commander called through the gloom of the destroyer’s bridge.

“Yes, sir. It look like a....”

The lookout’s eyes strained in the darkness. Then he saw the Southern Cross, followed it down to the splotch barely visible against the horizon.

“It’s a battleship, Commodore. There’s one... two... a whole flock of ‘em, sir!”

The flotilla commander quickly scanned the sea with his binoculars. “Humph! Battle ships.... That’s the enemy... Get this message off to the flotilla,” he began. “Enemy battleships on southerly course. Attack with torpedoes.”

In less than a minute the radio rooms of twenty-three other destroyers forming the scouting line crackled with the commodore’s command.

On every destroyer bridge captains prepared for battle.

They called their crews by clanging gongs and howlers that reverberated in living quarters, fire rooms and engine rooms. Husky-throated bos’n mates stood at hatchways and bellowed: “General quarters. All hands hit the deck. Man your battle stations on the double.”

Men turned from their bunks, yawned sleepily and then grabbed at pieces of clothing, dressing while they ran. It was discipline; discipline born of high regard for duty.

Like a pack of hungry sharks, the destroyers turned to file in for the attack. Not a single light showed on them or the enemy. Captains half-leaned out of bridge windows watching the phosphorescent wake of the ship ahead to keep position. They were less than 500 yards apart, their sharp bows slashing the tropical sea at thirty knots. Steady nerves and a sure seaman’s eye helped.

Choppy Caribbean swells rose to curl aboard the plunging fo’c’sles, half-burying them in gurgling foam. But the destroyers held their course and speed, buided by men whose faces were set, whose eyes were glued to the long, lumbering column of battleships steaming quietly to the south’ard. Such tactics are dangerous at best. But this was training for war and on

every bridge the watchword was Vigilance. Vigilance to avoid collision with any shadowy bulk looming suddenly in the blackness.

In spite of the spray thrown bridge-high, the attacking ships drew nearer to their prey undetected. On bridges and at torpedo tubes men stood silently ready, grimly they fingered the firing keys that would send torpedoes streaking for the targets.

Closer --- nearer to dead-sure ranges the flotilla commander led his ships. Then, within a few seconds, the large hulks of the battleships changed from blurred splotches to well-defined silhouettes. A little closer... less than a mile... only a few seconds more...

“Fire torpedoes!”

The great moment arrived. Along the port side of each destroyer torpedo tubes in nests of three were trained out. Sitting on the top of each nest was torpedoman. One of them chuckled as he squinted through his sights. He suddenly remembered that the seat under him was exactly like the one on the corn planter at home. Even the wheel in his hand felt strangely familiar. It turned the torpedo tubes just as it did the old threshing machine.

“Fire one!”

Click! The firing key pressed home --- a skyrocket-sounding swish sent a torpedo leaping from its tube into the sea.

“Fire two... three... 4... 5... 6!”

Twenty-four firing ships. 144 torpedoes churning the murky sea at express-train speed toward eight battleships. The ponderous ships were caught like flies in a spider web. Zigzag as they might, there was always an oncoming torpedo in the way.

Once the destroyers had launched their deadly “fish”, as the bluejackets call them, they threw their helms hard over. Then they heeled dizzily as they turned away, for that is the essence of a torpedo attack. Get in, shoot, and get out with all possible speed.

Just as the fourth ship in the column turned, another craft rose from the night. Totally unexpected, it lay directly in retreating destroyer’s path. It was only a matter of seconds before the destroyer would knife her like a great spear.

The destroyers skipper automatically leaped to the engine-room annunciators. “All engines, emergency full astern!”

In the engine rooms sweating machinists’ mates grabbed the throttles of the singing turbines. They spun the wheels to reverse while men

on the bridge braced themselves and waited. The crash seemed inevitable. But a moment later the destroyer shuddered from stem to stern like a horse pulled to its haunches. The stern squatted deeper and deeper into the water. But it was enough. The next instant the bow glided sickeningly through the wake of the spectral ship. And so the destroyer escaped to continue its retreat into the cloak of night – to live another day – to launch another night torpedo attack... Early this year when about 150 U.S. Navy ships, 600 airplanes and 60,000 officers and enlisted men fought Fleet Problem 20 in the Caribbean, nearly 100 destroyers took part in the battles, launching uncounted night torpedo attacks. For it is in just such tactics that the destroyer proves itself to be an extremely difficult weapon to combat. There is really no sure defense against these vessels engaged in launching night attacks, except to sight them and sink before they can get in close enough to do any harm. And while it is true that these little hornets of the sea are vulnerable to heavy shellfire, it is too much to expect any force to defend itself 100 per cent against damage by them.

Destroyers play many roles. They are not only most worthy opponents against battleships, light and heavy cruisers and other destroyers, but they are the natural enemies of submarines. Possessing high speed (Modern destroyers are capable of speeds in excess of forty knots) great maneuvering qualities and armed with depth bombs, destroyers make the lives of submarines very short ones. During the World War it was our splendid destroyer force that convoyed troop ships to Europe carrying 2,000,000 soldiers. Without these little ships we could never have gained control of the Atlantic, threatened so long by German U-boats.

For a number of years after the War the United States did not build a single destroyer. We made the old-timers from the war do, but in following that program of economy we now find ourselves outranked by other nations. We have only about fifty modern destroyers, with approximately as many more that are either on the builders' ways or appropriated for. In view of the indispensable service rendered our country by destroyers in the last war, the time is long past when we can afford to neglect building up our fleet in this category.

Men of our fleet have nicknamed the modern destroyer a "Gold Plater". The origin is due to the vessel's excellent equipment, which is the last word in every respect. But as far as memory goes back destroyers as a whole have been called "Tin Cans". Just who fathered the term no one is sure. Perhaps it came naturally, from the way the ships are constructed. They are long, narrow of beam and lightly put together. The sides are very thin – and without armor plating of any description – and are fastened to ribs not much thicker than those used in the frame of an automobile.

Guns, fire-control gadgets, boilers and turbines possessing more horsepower than those of a battleship, torpedo tubes and depth charges are crammed in and on the ship. What space is left is given over to officers and the crew. A man serving on board such craft has little more room than a sardine in a tin, so perhaps that has something to do with the nickname. But regardless of its origination, there is one thing of which you may be sure. Destroyer sailors resent hearing anyone but themselves call their vessels "Tin Cans". They have a pride in the staunch little ships that the heaviest seas can't break.

Sometime you may be at sea. You'll wrap yourself in heavy robes and stretch out in a deck chair to enjoy the voyage. While you are munching sweets and taking life easy, you'll see a mere speck come tearing over the horizon. In a few minutes the speck will grow into a ship.

There'll be a rake to her masts, a bone in her teeth and a saucy way about her that will immediately tell you she is a destroyer. If there is a swell or a chop to the sea, or a high wind, you'll do well to see more of her than her masts and smokestacks. She'll roll and pitch until it will make you sick to watch her. As one oldtimer said to me a long time ago when I asked about destroyer duty: "They're a tough line of boats. Plenty hard. Roll? Why, mister, they even roll in dry dock!"

Since that long-ago conversation I have learned the old-timer exaggerated a bit – but not too much, for destroyers do have a way of rolling. From personal experience I know they roll even in good weather. The least wind, or even a moderate sea on their quarter, will cause them to protest violently by shaking their masts from side to side.

Various stories have been told about terrific rolling. Some old destroyer hands claim to

have rolled sixty degrees to a side. That's quite a nip-over. However, there are recorded instances where the ship went to fifty-two degrees. Anything over forty degrees seems like the end of everything, so we won't quibble with lads who swear to sixty or more.

Besides rolling, destroyers have a way of pitching that is a movement all their own. If head seas are encountered, a ship of this class will pitch like a wild horse. Accompanying the tossing will be a quivering motion akin to that of a tuning fork. The fo'c'sle will be under water a greater part of the time. Seas will climb aboard to break and thunder against the bulkhead of the bridge. And occasionally a particularly vicious wave will outdo all the rest. That happened recently on a trip we made off the Oregon coast. As we headed north we ran into high winds that whipped the sea into a witch's cauldron. For hours we pounded into the angry froth and held our course. The long, mountain-crested waves were, for the most part, in series of threes. Our ship, the Zane, would struggle up one great crest, slide over and then bury her bow rail-deep in the second one. Each time we plunged under, sheets of water came hurtling to the height of

the bridge. Even with the windows closed and metal windshields half-covering them for protection, water managed to slush through and drench the deck. When the distance between waves was long enough we would ride to the crest of the third great wave. But as the watch dragged by the waves came closer together.

Along about daylight I stood at the doorway of the captain's emergency cabin to report weather conditions. Just as I said: "They're breaking a little higher," a nasty one, worse than all the rest, struck with full force. When it broke, a deluge of water leaped completely over the bridge top and fell like a sheet between me and the door. Never was a weather report so vividly illustrated.

What goes one do when a ship rolls and pitches so wildly? The best answer is: Hang on! Emergency life lines are rigged in from the ship's regular rail and all hands pull and slide along as best they can from one hatch to another, not a few bruises are picked up.

In heavy weather eating becomes quite a problem. Then the ship is laboring in very heavy seas it is impossible to cook. Pots sail across the range and fly out the galley doorway to fetch up

against the bulkhead. Then all hands subsist on sandwiches and coffee. But if it is at all possible to keep utensils over a fire we eat at table. However, that doesn't mean that we dine in solid comforts as you would on an ocean liner. There's a great difference.

Wooden sideboards called "Fiddle Boards" cover our table and mark it off into squares. (FOR OFFICERS ONLY, NOT ENLISTED MEN). Within the squares the usual tableware is placed. Your plate might go for a stroll but eventually a slat will stop it. Then, if you are patient, the next roll or pitch, will bring it back to you. It would be the same with our chairs, but we provide for that by securing them to the table legs with a stout piece of manila line. (For enlisted men, one bench is used for 5 or 6 men.) Thus, when you come to be seated, your politeness is limited to stepping table-high and then easing yourself down while the sliding is good.

One question always asked of destroyer sailors is: "Do you get seasick?" The truth is, only in rare instances do men go to sea in destroyers and always evade seasickness. There are men who claim never to have been laid up. They are to be envied, for I have seen the hardiest old sale

grow green around the gills. Recently a grizzled member of our deck force and I were discussing this question during some bad weather. Suddenly he broke off the conversation and went to the rail. When he came back he said rather sheepishly, "It's gotta happen to every guy once."

Aside from seasickness, sleeping is the most difficult thing we have to work out. There is really no way to beat the game when the ship is in one of her pitching tantrums. You can try putting a strangle hold on the springs and mattress but after several hours of such maneuvering your strength gives out and then you ride the best way you ca. Mostly it's a bounce.

After one hard night of such pitching I greeted the new day more exhausted than when I turned in. When I mentioned it to our chief machinist's mate he said: "You got nothing on me, sir. It was sure tough in the chief's quarters last night. I spend half the night pounding the rivets up through the overhead."

That is the thing that strikes one about destroyer sailors. No matter how rough the going, they can always see the humorous side, even if they have to turn the joke on themselves.

But with all its attendant hardships, there is something about destroyer life that holds the men in its service. For one thing, the small crew makes for an air of intimacy. Everybody on board knows everybody else. And due to the limited man power (the average crew is 115 men) the great amount of work requires close co-operation. The way of a shirker is short and it isn't long before he is headed elsewhere.

Once a man gets the destroyer fever, it's hard to get him to serve on any other type of ship. One time when we were having some heavy weather, I happened to see the battleship Arizona steaming several miles away. We were pitching as usual while she rode as steady as some great fortesss ashore.

"There goes my first ship," I said.

A thick-chested gunners' mate heard my remark and took it up. "You wouldn't want to be in battleships, would you, sir?" He looks at me reproachfully. "I was in the battlewagons once. Just six months. But that's enough for me. They're too big. Too many guys climbin' over you. You don't know nobody aboard them pig-iron buckets. When I went to the fights one night and cheered the wrong guy. He was off'n another

ship, but how was I to know it in all that mob?"

"You said it," piped up a torpedoman. "That's the cream-puff Navy with all the comforts of home. I'll take this dungaree outfit for mine." Dungarees! That explains a lot. For some reason the men would prefer to wear a dungaree shirt and trousers rather than dress in the conventional blue woolen uniform. And while a destroyer crew doesn't go around dirty, there is a vast difference between the dress of the battleship sailors at sea and that of the little-ship men. The very nature of their service and work requires destroyer sailormen to dress informally – and they enjoy it, often to their skipper's discomfort.

Men of the destroyer fleet take their hats off to no one. Not even submarine sailors rate with them.

"Sure, subs are tough, I know. I done a hitch on one once. But for real seagoin' and standin' up and takin' it, they can't beat tin cans." It was a sturdy bosun's mate who spoke.

"Yeah, and when we go places, we really go," an idling fireman said. "All the skipper's gotta do is give us the bell. When we put fires under them kettles we can

raise enough steam to show our heels to anybody.”

In former days the deep-water seamen of our country sailed clipper ships all over the world. It was an era of skillful daring and great speeds. Clipper captains and crews were of sturdy stock and they drove their ships under full sail while other rig took in a reef. Come storm or Davy Jones’s locker, the clippers sailed on. In their eventual passing they left a heritage for which we have just cause to be proud. And while we no longer depend on sailing hips I like to think of our destroyer navy as carrying on the great clipper traditions, for they are worthy ones to keep alive.

In many respects the clipper ship and a destroyer are similar. The clipper was sharp of bow, long and narrow. Sailing at great speeds, she outran all other ships of her time. Destroyers also have a sharp bow, and with their beam of slightly more than thirty feet and a length of 340 feet or less, they possess a gracefulness the clippers had. But if the clipper was the swallow of her age the modern destroyer is the hornet of our time.

If we compare a modern destroyer’s tonnage of 1,500 tons and 44,000 horsepower with a battleship’s 35,000 tons and 28,000 horsepower it is

understood why the destroyer can breast the seas at forty knots while battleships lumber along at 21.

But speed is not the destroyer’s sole stock in trade. They have a striking power that is respected by all classes of ships. In addition to all the mechanical placed in a destroyer by her builders, she has something else. I can best illustrate it by saying that I once served in the Navy’s airship fleet. That duty had it thrills, moments of great action and hours of storm. But now that I am again serving the surface fleet I’m glad I’m in a destroyer. There’s something about her – it’s her cockiness that I like. Even when I see my men on shore I can always spot them a long way off. There is a cockiness about them, too – a swagger that tells. It’s an honest swagger – a gait that comes from going down to the sea in little ships.

The next time you are at sea, watch for us. But when we come rolling from under the horizon don’t call us “Tin Cans” – that’s our privilege!

NOTE: The opinions expressed herein are the private opinions of the writer and are not to be construed as expressing or reflecting the opinion of the Navy

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## The Ship the Japs Couldn’t Sink



**The second USS *Laffey* (DD 724)** was laid down 28 June 1943 by [Bath Iron Works](#), Bath, Maine; launched 21 November; sponsored by Miss Beatrice F. Laffey, daughter of Seaman Laffey; and commissioned 8 February 1944, Comdr. F. J. Becton in command.

Upon completion of underway training, *Laffey* visited Washington Navy Yard for 1 day and departed 28 February 1944, arriving Bermuda 4 March. She returned briefly to Norfolk where she served as school ship, then headed for New York to join the screen of a convoy escort for England 14 May. Refueling at Greenock, Scotland, the ship continued on to Plymouth, England, arriving 27 May.

*Laffey* immediately prepared for the invasion of

France. On 3 June she headed for the Normandy beaches escorting tugs, landing craft, and two Dutch gunboats. The group arrived in the assault area, off "Utah" beach, Baie de la Siene, France, at dawn on D-Day, 6 June. On the 6th and 7th *Laffey* screened to seaward; and on the 8th and 9th, she bombarded gun emplacements with good results. Leaving the screen temporarily, the ship raced to Plymouth to replenish and returned to the coast of Normandy the next day. On 12 June *Laffey* pur

sued enemy "E" boats which had torpedoed destroyer *Nelson*. The destroyer broke up their tight formation and prevented further attacks.

Screening duties completed, the ship returned to England, arriving at Portsmouth 22 June where she tied up alongside *Nevada*. On 25 June she got underway with the battleship to join Bombardment Group 2 shelling the formidable defenses at Cherbourg, France. Upon reaching the bombardment area, the group was taken under fire by shore batteries; and destroyers [Barton](#) and [O'Brien](#) were hit. *Laffey* was hit above the

waterline by a ricocheting shell that failed to explode and did little damage.

Late that day the bombardment group retired and headed for England, arriving at Belfast 1 July 1944. She sailed with Destroyer Division 119 three days later for home, arriving at Boston 9 July. After a month of overhaul, the destroyer got underway to test her newly installed electronic equipment. Two weeks later, *Laffey* set course for Norfolk, arriving 25 August.

Next day the destroyer departed for Hawaii via the Panama Canal and San Diego, California, arriving Pearl Harbor 18 September. On 23 October after extensive training, *Laffey* departed for the war zone, via Eniwetok, mooring at Ulithi 5 November. The same day she joined the screen of Task Force 38, then conducting airstrikes against enemy shipping, aircraft, and airfields in the Philippines. On 11 November the destroyer spotted a parachute, left the screen, and rescued a badly wounded Japanese pilot who was transferred to carrier *Enterprise* (CV 6) during refueling operations the next day. *Laffey* returned to Ulithi

22 November and on the 27th set course for Leyte Gulf with ships of Destroyer Squadron 60. Operating with the 7th Fleet, the destroyer screened the big ships against submarine and air attacks, covered the landings at Ormoc Bay 7 December, silenced a shore battery, and shelled enemy troop concentrations.

After a short upkeep in San Pedro Bay, Leyte, 8 December, *Laffey* with ships of Close Support Group 77.3 departed 12 December for Mindoro, where she supported the landings 15 December. After the beachhead had been established, *Laffey* escorted empty landing craft back to Leyte, arriving at San Pedro Bay 17 December. Ten days later *Laffey* joined Task Group 77.3 for patrol duty off Mindoro. After returning briefly to San Pedro Bay, she joined the Seventh Fleet, and, during the month of January 1945, screened amphibious ships landing troops in the Lingayen Gulf area of Luzon. Retiring to the Caroline Islands, the destroyer arrived Ulithi 27 January. During February the ship supported Task Force 58, conducting diversionary airstrikes at Tokyo and direct air support of marines landing on Iwo Jima. Late in February *Laffey* carried vital intelligence

information to Admiral Nimitz at Guam, arriving 1 March.

The next day, the destroyer arrived Ulithi for intensive training with battleships of Task Force 54. On 21 March, she sortied with the task force for the Okinawa invasion. *Laffey* helped capture Kerama Retto, bombarded shore establishments, harassed the enemy with fire at night, and screened heavy units. Assigned to a radar picket station 30 miles north of Okinawa, *Laffey* arrived 14 April and almost immediately joined in repulsing an air attack which cost the enemy 13 airplanes. The next day the enemy launched another severe air attack with some 50 planes. About half of the Japanese raiders broke through the screen to *Laffey*. The game destroyer splashed nine and friendly aircraft destroyed others. But, when the attack was over, the ship was badly damaged by four bombs and five kamakaze hits. The gallant destroyer suffered 103 casualties: 32 dead and 71 wounded.

*Laffey* was taken under tow and anchored off Okinawa 17 April. Temporary repairs were rushed and the destroyer sailed for Saipan arriving 27

April. Four days later she got underway for the west coast via Eniwetok and Hawaii arriving at Seattle, 24 May. She entered drydock at Todd Shipyard Corp. for repairs until 6 September, then sailed for San Diego, arriving 9 September.

Two days later the ship got underway for exercises but collided with *PC-815* in a thick fog. She rescued all but one of the PC's crew before returning to San Diego for repairs.

On 5 October she sailed for Pearl Harbor, arriving 11 October. *Laffey* operated in Hawaiian waters until 21 May 1946 when she participated in the atomic bomb tests at Bikini, actively engaged in collecting scientific data. Upon completion of the tests she sailed for the west coast via Pearl Harbor arriving San Diego 22 August for operations along the west coast.

In February 1947 *Laffey* made a cruise to Guam and Kwajalein and returned to Pearl Harbor 11 March. The ship operated in Hawaiian waters until departing for Australia 1 May. She returned to San Diego 17 June, decommissioned 30 June

1947, and entered the Pacific Reserve Fleet.

*Laffey* was recommissioned 26 January 1951, Comdr. Charles Holovak in command. After shakedown out of San Diego, the destroyer headed for the east coast arriving at Norfolk in February for overhaul followed by refresher training at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. In mid-January 1952, she sailed for Korea, arriving in March. The ship operated with Task Force 77 screening carriers *Antietam* (CV 36) and *Valley Forge* (CV 45) until May, when Abe joined a bombardment and blockade group in Wonson Harbor engaging several enemy shore batteries. After brief refit at Yokosuka 30 May, the ship returned to Korea where it rejoined Task Force 77. On 22 June *Laffey* sailed for the East Coast, transiting the Suez Canal and arriving Norfolk 19 August.

The destroyer operated in the Caribbean with a hunterkiller group until February 1954, departing on a world cruise which included a tour off Korea until 29 June. *Laffey* departed the Far East bound for the east coast via the Suez Canal arriving Norfolk 25 August 1954. Operating out of

Norfolk, the destroyer participated in fleet exercises and plane guard duties, and on 7 October rescued four passengers from *Able Lady*, a schooner which had sunk in a storm off the Virginia Capes.

During the first part of 1955, *Laffey* participated in extensive antisubmarine exercises, visiting Halifax, Nova Scotia, New York City, Miami, and ports in the Caribbean. During 1956 she operated with ASW carriers in Floridian and Caribbean waters.

On 7 November 1956 the destroyer departed Norfolk and headed for the Mediterranean at the height of the Suez crisis. Upon arrival she joined the 6th Fleet which was patrolling the Israeli-Egyptian border showing the U.S. flag and expressing our interest in the peaceful outcome of the crisis. When international tensions eased, *Laffey* returned to Norfolk 20 February 1957, and resumed operations along the Atlantic coast departing 3 September for NATO operations off Scotland. She then headed for the Mediterranean and rejoined the Sixth Fleet. *Laffey* returned to Norfolk 22 December 1957. In June 1958 she made a cruise to the

Caribbean for a major exercise.

Returning to Norfolk, the next month she resumed regular operations until 7 August 1959 when she deployed with Destroyer Squadron 32 for the Mediterranean. *Laffey* transited the Suez Canal 14 December, stopped at Massaua, Eritrea, and continued on the Aramco loading port of Ras Tanura, Saudi Arabia, where she spent Christmas. The destroyer operated in the Persian Gulf until late January when it transited the Suez Canal and headed for home, arriving Norfolk 26 February 1960. *Laffey* then operated out of Norfolk, making a Caribbean cruise; and, in mid-August, the ship participated in a large naval NATO exercise. In October the ship visited Antwerp, Belgium, returning Norfolk 20 October, but headed back to the Mediterranean in January 1961.

While there she assisted SS *Dara*, a British freighter in distress. The destroyer sailed for home in mid-August and arrived at Norfolk on the 28th. *Laffey* set out in September on a vigorous underway training program designed to blend the crew into an effective fighting

team and continued this training until February 1963, when she assumed the duties of service ship for the Norfolk Test and Evaluation Detachment. Between October 1963 and June 1964 *Laffey* operated with a hunter-killer group along the eastern seaboard and on 12 June made a midshipmen cruise to the Mediterranean, arriving in Palma, Majorca, 23 June. Two days later the task group departed for a surveillance mission observing Soviet naval forces training in the Mediterranean. *Laffey* visited Mediterranean ports of Naples, Italy; Theoule, France; Rota and Valencia, Spain, returning to Norfolk 3 September. *Laffey* continued to make regular Mediterranean cruises with the mighty Sixth Fleet, and participated in numerous operational and training exercises in the Atlantic and Caribbean. Into 1968 she was making further vital contributions to the Navy's readiness and ability to keep the peace and thwart the threat of aggression.

*Laffey* received five battle stars for World War II service and two battle stars for Korean service.

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**Department. The Veterans of Foreign Wars Unmet Needs Program offers grants up to \$1,500 to eligible Veterans, service members and military families.**

Since 2004, the VFW has provided more than \$5 million supporting Veterans and military families who face an unexpected financial hardship related to their military service. The VFW program can directly pay eligible expenses with no obligation of repayment. VFW also provides referrals to other organizations should additional assistance be required.

After five combat tours in the Marine Corps, Sergeant Dustin Ellison was suffering from the post-war effects of a traumatic brain injury (TBI) and severe PTSD.

“I thought [Dustin’s discharge date] would be the happiest day since he came home from service... I was wrong,” explained Heather Boyd, Dustin’s sister. “It was 100 [times] harder after war. It breaks my heart to watch my

brother go through life like a ghost carrying guilt from serving for his country.”

Heather hoped Dustin’s struggles would end after being accepted into a 12-week program specifically designed to treat military-related TBI and PTSD. But when the severity of his condition and medical complications requiring surgery unexpectedly extended Dustin’s treatment, Heather feared her brother would leave the program if he was unable to keep up on his bills.

After learning about the VFW’s Unmet Needs program during a wounded warrior PTSD focus group, Heather reached out to VFW for help. An Unmet Needs grant came through just in time.

“I personally had depleted the money in my bank account... this was not only a relief for myself, but it allowed him the opportunity to focus on treatment and not stress about his lack of income,” said Heather.

Receiving an Unmet Needs grant provided the

assistance Dustin needed to stay current on his bills. More importantly, it provided him the freedom to focus on his health – culminating with his graduation in January.

Heather explained that while Dustin still has work to do and will likely face daily struggles for the rest of his life, thanks to the VFW Unmet Needs program, he’s functioning better than ever.

**VFW Unmet Needs Eligibility**

Applicants must be the service member, Veteran, or eligible dependent listed under the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS).

The financial hardship must be due to one of the following:

- Currently on active duty, whose financial hardship is a result of a current deployment, military pay error, or a

discharge for medical reasons.

- Discharged on or after Sept. 11, 2001, whose financial hardship is a direct result of military service connected injuries and/or illnesses.
- Discharged prior to Sept. 11, 2001, on a fixed income that must include VA compensation for a service connected injury/illness and facing an unexpected financial hardship.

The financial hardship cannot be caused by:

- Civil, legal or domestic issues, misconduct, or any issues that are a result of spousal separation or divorce.
- Financial mismanagement by self or others, or due to bankruptcy.

All grants are paid directly to the creditor and applicants must provide the most current bills due.

Expenses Eligible for payment:

Household expenses – mortgage, rent, repairs, insurance.

Vehicle expenses – payments, insurance, repairs (major repairs for vehicles over ten years old will not be considered).

Utilities.

Food and clothing.

Children’s clothing, diapers, formula, school or childcare expenses.

Medical bills, prescriptions & eyeglasses – the patient’s portion for necessary or emergency medical care only.

Ineligible Expenses:

Credit cards, military charge cards or retail store cards.

Cable, Internet, or secondary phones.

Cosmetic or investigational medical procedures & expenses.

Taxes – property or otherwise.

Furniture, electronic equipment or vehicle rentals.

Any other expenses not determined to be a basic life need.

The eligible and ineligible expense lists are not all

inclusive. Each case will be carefully reviewed. Upon approval, payments will be made directly to the creditor. All applications are individually reviewed and the VFW reserves the right to make exceptions on a case-by-case basis. For more information, contact Unmet Needs at 1-866-789-6333.

**How to apply**

The application is provided online only. To apply, click [here](#) to start your application. The process can take up to 20 business days while a caseworker reviews the application and supporting documents. Include the most recent bills due and the assigned caseworker will reach out to the creditor to verify all expenses. Payments will be mailed directly to the creditor after research is complete.

*The sharing of any non-VA information does not constitute an endorsement of products and services on part of the VA.*

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## Eligible Veterans can get free Portal



[Posted on Wednesday, April 15, 2020 3:00 pm](#) Posted in [#VetResources](#), [Technology](#), [Top Stories](#) by [Adam Stump](#) [20 comments](#) [70k views](#)

Eligible Veterans can now receive free Portal from Facebook video calling devices thanks to a partnership with Facebook and the American Red Cross Military Veteran Caregiver Network.

The devices help Veterans connect with their Caregivers, families and friends to reduce isolation and improve social connectivity.

Facebook donated over 7,400 Portal video calling devices for Veterans and

their Caregiver or family member. Veterans and families in [VA's Office of Caregiver Support](#) program, [VA's Geriatric Services and Extended Care](#) program, or individuals identified as at-risk for suicide by a VA provider are eligible to receive Portals through this program.

“Veterans, families and caregivers will benefit through an increased support system,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “Our goal is for Veterans to feel less isolated through more communication. We believe this technology will help Veterans who might otherwise be unreachable.”

The President’s Roadmap to Empower Veterans and End a National Tragedy of Suicide, or [PREVENTS](#), office initiated the partnership.

“As a proud supporter of the military and Veteran community, Facebook is committed to providing Veterans with meaningful

ways to connect with the people they care about,” said Payton Itheme, Military and Veteran Policy Lead at Facebook. “We hope that by using these Portal video calling devices Veterans and their caregivers will be able to feel less isolated and more present with their friends and family no matter where they are.”



### About the devices

Portal from Facebook is a home video communications device that makes it easier for people to connect with each other. The Portal video-calling devices have a Smart Camera that keeps up with the action so people can move and talk hands-free. If someone enters the room, the camera automatically widens to keep everyone in view. Portal’s Smart Sound enhances the voice of

whoever is speaking while minimizing unwanted background noises.

Veterans and their caregivers can use Portal to makes video calls to their contacts on Messenger and WhatsApp. This allows them to easily video call with friends and family even if they don't have Portal. WhatsApp calls are end-to-end encrypted. Messenger calls encrypt in-transit. Users can completely disable the camera and microphone with a single tap. They can also block the camera lens with the camera cover provided.

The devices also have Alexa built-in. This allows users to listen to music, set a timer, add items to a shopping list and more. When not on a call, Portal can display Facebook photos and videos. Users can also choose to upload photos through the Portal app.

The devices do not come with Internet service provided. Both the Veteran

and the Caregiver or family member must have a 2.4GHz or 5GHz WIFI capability. This can include a cell phone with hotspot connectivity. Facebook will provide free [help desk services](#) and technical assistance for Veterans and their Caregiver or families. Users must have a Facebook or WhatsApp account to use the devices.

### Getting a device

The American Red Cross Military Veterans Caregiver Network website will host the link to request a pair of free Portals by Facebook. The American Red Cross will store and ship the Portals on behalf of VA. Veterans, Caregivers and families can request the Portals through the Military and Veteran Caregiver Network at <https://www.redcross.org/get-help/military-families/services-for-veterans/military-veteran-caregiver-network/request-your-va-facebook-portal.html>. **Use Google Chrome for the best experience.**

“The American Red Cross Military and Veteran Caregiver Network is honored to play a role in the distribution of these Portals by Facebook in partnership with VA,” said Melissa Comeau, American Red Cross Military Veteran Caregiver Network. “This partnership is committed to meeting the needs of military and Veteran caregivers who are experiencing social isolation and is achieved through a shared appreciation for the use of technology to bring support.”

Once Veterans apply through the link, VA will validate that the Veterans are in one of the VA programs. Once the Red Cross receives confirmation of eligibility from VA, the portal shipping process starts. The process can take from four to six weeks.

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## Robert Smalls: The Slave Who Stole a Confederate Warship and Became a Congressman

To save his family—and himself—Robert Smalls had to do something drastic. His bravery made him a folk hero.

### Mental Floss

- Lucas Reilly



Robert Smalls circa 1870-1880. Photo from Mathew Brady, Library of Congress / Wikimedia Commons / Public Domain.

It was the spring of 1862, and Robert Smalls—a 23-year-old enslaved man living in Charleston, South Carolina—was desperate to buy the freedom of his wife and children. The asking price was \$800.

He had money saved up. Since the age of 12, Smalls had worked odd jobs in Charleston: lamplighter, rigger, waiter, stevedore foreman. At around age 15, he had found work on the city's docks and joined the crew of the ship *CSS Planter*. For

every \$15 he earned, Smalls was allowed to keep \$1. The rest of the money went to his owner.

Smalls tried earning extra cash on the side, buying candy and tobacco and reselling it at a higher price. But it was hardly enough. When he asked to buy the freedom of his wife and children, he barely had \$100 to his name. He knew, at that rate, the task could take him decades. Smalls had to think of something new—something drastic.



The *CSS Planter*. Photo from the New York Public Library Digital Collections / Public Domain.

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**An unwitting bystander** might have mistaken Robert Smalls and his wife Hannah Jones for freed slaves. The couple had met when Robert was 16, working at a hotel where Hannah was employed as a maid. They married, had two children, and lived in a private apartment above a horse stable in Charleston. Each day, Robert walked alone to the docks and wharves of Charleston, eventually finding himself work on the *CSS Planter*.

But appearances of freedom were an illusion. Smalls and Jones had to give nearly all of their income to his owner. Worse yet, the couple was constantly burdened with worry. Smalls knew that his wife and children could be stripped from his life on his owner's whim. He knew the only way to keep his family together was to buy them.

Born in 1839 behind John McKee's house, Smalls had grown up as the family's household favorite (potentially because McKee, or McKee's son, was his secret father). Whatever the reason, Smalls did relatively limited housework, was allowed inside his owner's house, and was permitted to play with the local white children.

Smalls's mother watched her son being coddled and was afraid he'd grow up without knowing about the horrors of slavery, so when Smalls was 10, she dragged her son into the fields. He picked cotton, rice, and tobacco. He slept on dirt floors. He watched slaves in town be tied to a whipping post and lashed. The experience changed him.

Smalls began to rebel. He protested slavery and started appearing more frequently in jail. Eventually, his mother

grew concerned for his safety and asked McKee if Smalls could be sent to Charleston to work. Their owner agreed. It was in Charleston that Smalls would discover the woman who became his wife, as well as a talent for sailing.

By the spring of 1862, Smalls was working aboard the *CSS Planter*, an old cotton steamer-turned-warship. It was the midst of the Civil War, and Smalls helped steer the boat, plant sea mines, and deliver ammunition and supplies to Confederate outposts along the coast. Whenever Smalls looked out toward sea, he saw a blockade of Union ships bobbing on the horizon.

The captain of the *CSS Planter*, C.J. Relyea—known for wearing a trademark wide-brimmed straw hat—had a crew comprised of multiple slaves. One day, another enslaved crew member grabbed the captain's hat while he was away and planted it on Smalls's head. "Boy, you look just like the captain," [he said](#).

Smalls looked out at the ocean, past Fort Sumter and toward the fleet of Union ships in the distance.

He had an idea.

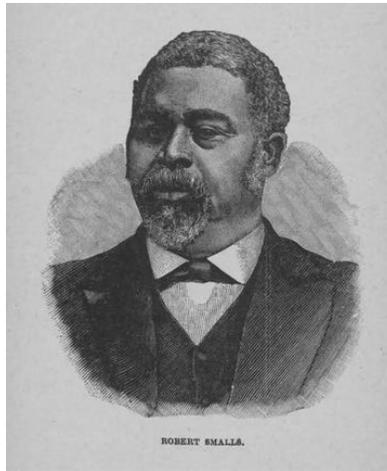


Photo from the New York Public Library Digital Collections / Public Domain.

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## In Memoriam



### Joe Smith

Joe Walter Smith, 89, of Granite City, Illinois passed away at 6:36 p.m. on Sunday, May 3, 2020 at his home. He was born June 4, 1930 in Moore County, Tennessee, a son of the late Buan B. "B.B." and Marjorie Lee (Hill) Smith. He married Delores Jean (McDermott) Smith on May 15, 1954 at the First Baptist Church in Collinsville and she passed away on February 17,

2012. He retired from Bell Telephone after many years of dedicated service as an installer and repairman. The United States Navy veteran proudly served his country during the Korean War and was a recipient of the Navy Good Conduct Medal, China Service Medal, Navy Occupational Service Medal and other recognitions. Joe was a faithful member of Unity Baptist Church in Granite City where he had served as a Deacon, Trustee, Senior Adult Sunday school teacher and enjoyed being active with the orchestra and choir. He enjoyed attending his Navy ship reunions and attending the H.O.P.E. Luncheons. He also enjoyed photography and traveling and always telling a joke. He will be remembered for the love and special times shared with his family and friends. He is survived by a daughter and son-in-law, Nancy and Kevin Myers of Granite City; two sons and daughters-in-law, Randy and Yonnie Smith of Collinsville and Brian and Margo Smith of Blue Springs, Missouri; two granddaughters, Rachel Smith of Collinsville and Jill Smith of Lees Summit, Missouri; a sister, Emma Reed of Houston, Texas; other extended family and friends. In addition to his beloved wife and parents, he was preceded in death by a daughter, Lisa Smith; a son, David Smith; a brother, Buan Smith Jr. and a sister, Mary Gilbert. Memorials may be made to Unity Baptist Church Building Fund and may be accepted at the funeral home. Irwin Chapel of Granite City in charge of arrangements. [www.irwinchapel.com](http://www.irwinchapel.com) Service: Joe deserves a beautiful tribute. However during these uncertain times, a private family graveside service.

