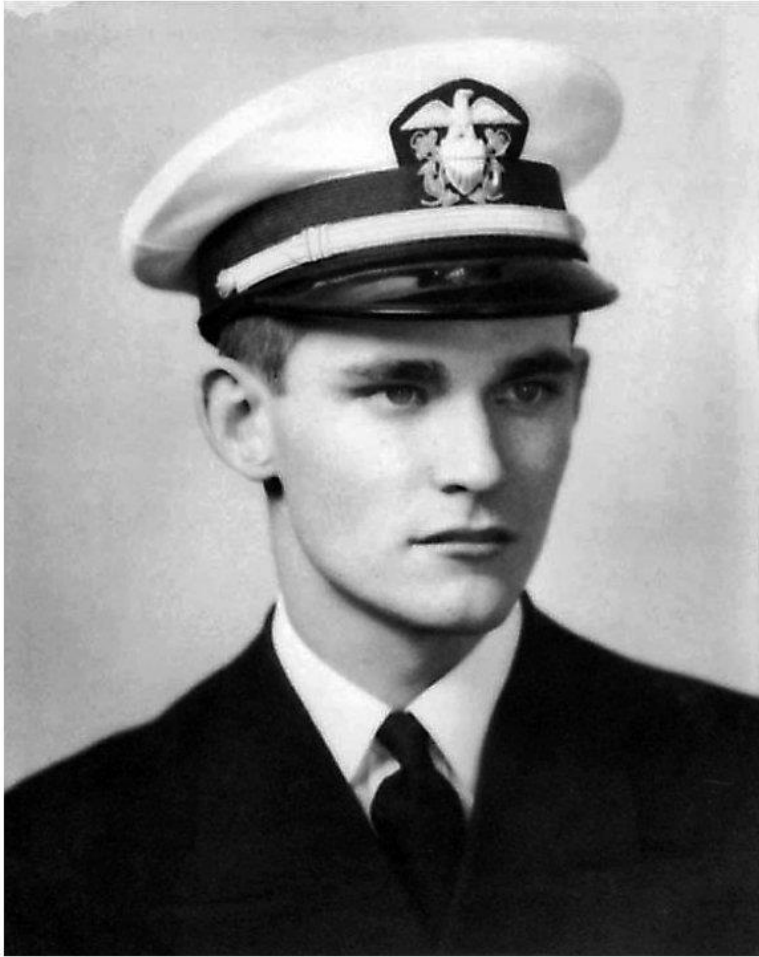


Hello everyone and welcome to DE Classified, a podcast showcasing the history of Destroyer Escorts. Each month a member of the USS SLATER's education crew will highlight a specific Destroyer Escort and share the stories of the sailors who served aboard these Trim but Deadly ships.

My name is John Epp, and I am the Curator at the Destroyer Escort Historical Museum aboard USS SLATER in Albany, NY. As part of our ongoing series to tell the stories of destroyer escorts, this month we are going to highlight the U.S. Navy ship that has held the record for most submarines sunk since World War II: USS ENGLAND (DE-635)

Before we can start telling the history of the ENGLAND, we need to first learn about her namesake: John Charles England. Born on 11 December 1920 in Harris, Missouri, John Charles graduated from the Pasadena Junior College in 1940 after his family moved to California when he was a child. During his college years, he acquired an interest in the dramatic arts and was a member of various drama clubs and acted in numerous plays. As a member of the Players Guild, he participated in their annual fall presentation of "Bachelor Born" and as a member of the national honorary dramatics fraternity, Delta Psi Omega, he acted in their annual spring production of "Outward Bound."



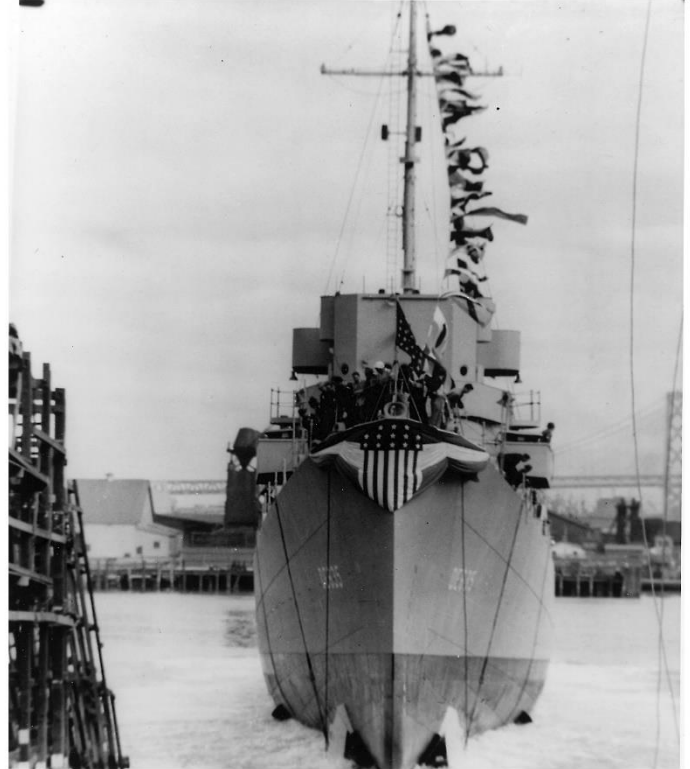
Following his graduation, John Charles enlisted in the U.S. Naval Reserve as an Apprentice Seaman on 6 September 1940. From 25 November to 21 December, he underwent active-duty training aboard the USS NEW YORK (BB-34). He then attended Midshipman School in New York City and was appointed Midshipman, United States Naval Reserve on 6 March 1941. On 6 June, he was commissioned Ensign and three months later, he

reported for duty on USS OKLAHOMA (BB-37). It was during his service aboard the battleship that Ensign England lost his life. On 7 December 1941, OKLAHOMA capsized after being struck by numerous torpedoes. England survived the initial attack and made it safely topside. But after learning of sailors still trapped inside the radio room, he made three trips guiding the men to safety. He never returned from the fourth.

In recognition of his sacrifice, one of the Navy's brand-new destroyer escorts was christened USS ENGLAND (DE-635) on 26 September 1943 at the Bethlehem Steel Company Shipyard in San Francisco, California. His mother, Mrs. Thelma England was the sponsor. After

the commissioning on 10 December, Commander Walton Barclay Pendleton assumed command of the ship.

Most of the following information has been gathered from the Naval History and Heritage Command website, NavSource, and an autobiography written by the ENGLAND's Executive Officer (and future Commanding officer) titled *Antisubmarine Warrior in the Pacific*. I **highly recommend** picking up a copy. Following her shakedown cruise, the ENGLAND sailed for Espiritu Santo and began convoy duty to and from Guadalcanal as part of Escort Division 40. She also escorted a convoy to Noumea and the Marshall Islands. On the 18<sup>th</sup> of May 1944, the ENGLAND and two fellow destroyer escorts, USS *GEORGE* (DE-697) and USS *RABY* (DE-698) left Port Purvis to intercept the Japanese submarine *I-16*.



At this point in the war, the United States Pacific Fleet was hopping from one island to the next, inching ever closer to the Japanese mainland. With the defeat of the Japanese forces in the Marshall Islands, naval strategists on both sides began to devise their next steps in the war. American commanders chose the Marianas islands as their next target and set an invasion date of 15 June. On the other side, Admiral Mineichi Koga, commander in chief of the Combined Fleet, predicted an invasion of the Philippines was the main target and planned for a trap to be sprung as the Americans entered the Philippine Sea.

Unfortunately for Koga, on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March, while enroute to the Philippine Islands from the Palau Islands, his Kawanishi H8K flying boat encountered a typhoon and crashed. Vice Admiral Shigeru Fukudome survived the crash and was taken prisoner by Filipino guerillas. Koga's battle plans were also recovered and given to the Allies. Koga was posthumously promoted to Marshal Admiral and buried just outside Tokyo. His successor inherited Koga's plans called Operation A-Go and began setting things into motion.

Admiral Naburo Owada, commander of the Japanese submarine force, ordered Squadron 7, headquartered at Saipan, to be the first line of contact against the American invasion force. In his war diary, Owada wrote: "In the A-Go operation, the greater part of Submarine Squadron 7 will be concentrated in the area south of the Caroline Islands and will engage in patrols, reconnaissance, and surprise attack against enemy task forces and invasion forces. At the same time, an element will be employed to continue operational transport for the southeast area and northern New Guinea." These latter locations just so happened to be in the general vicinity of the ENGLAND's area of operation.

*I-16*, mentioned earlier, would be the ENGLAND's first target. Commanded by Yoshitaka Takeuchi, *I-16* was already a battle-hardened boat by the time she ran into the ENGLAND. Her first major assignment was in the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. Equipped to carry a miniature submarine, *I-16* successfully launched its *No. 16* miniature, but it never returned. At 2241, *I-16* received the first of two radio transmissions from *No. 16*. The first message declared the air raid as a success and the second, received at 0051 the next morning, indicated the submarine was in distress and unable to navigate. That was the last anyone heard of *No. 16*.

*I-16* saw more success during the summer of 1942. On 6 June, she sank the Yugoslavian cargo ship *Susak*. Two days later, the Greek cargo ship *Aghios Georgios IV* became *I-16*'s second victim. Only four days later, another Yugoslavian cargo ship was torpedoed and on the first of July, the Swedish cargo ship *Eknaren* was torpedoed. In all, *I-16* sunk four ships totaling over 17,000 tons and the loss of 14 lives.

Fast forward to the spring of 1944 and *I-16* was operating out of Truk Lagoon, 1,100 miles northeast of New Guinea. Acting as a cargo submarine, Takeuchi and *I-16* were ordered to deliver rice to the forces on Bougainville. Takeuchi radioed the headquarters of Squadron 7 confirming an arrival date of 22 May at approximately 2000. That message was intercepted by the Fleet Radio Unit Pacific (FRUPAC), a U.S. Navy signals intelligence and cryptographic unit in Hawaii. After deciphering, it was passed on to Commander Hamilton Haines of Escort Division 39 who in turn ordered the destroyer escorts GEORGE and RABY, along with ENGLAND to intercept. Haines, himself, maintained control of the operation while on GEORGE.

In his book *Antisubmarine Warrior in the Pacific; Six Subs Sunk in Twelve Days*, John Williamson, the Executive Officer of ENGLAND, explains how a typical Escort Division consists of six destroyer escorts. At the time, Haines only had two at his disposal, the GEORGE, and the RABY. After learning about the lack of escorts available to hunt down *I-16*, Admiral William "Bull" Halsey sent an urgent order to ENGLAND: "On or about 1700, 18 May, get under way in company with USS GEORGE (DE-697) and USS RABY (DE-698) with OTC to be Com Cort Div 39 embarked in GEORGE. Proceed to position 15°10'S and 158°10'E. Japanese submarine believed heading to supply beleaguered forces at Buin. He is believed to be

approaching this point from the north and should arrive that area by about 1400, 20 May. Good hunting.”

Right on schedule, the three-ship fleet departed Purvis Bay, sailed west of Florida Island, cruised through the Indispensable Strait between Guadalcanal and Malaita Island and into open sea. A scouting line was established with GEORGE at center, RABY four thousand yards abeam to port, and ENGLAND four thousand yards abeam to starboard. The goal was to arrive twenty-four hours earlier than *I-16* to actively hunt down the submarine, rather than be surprised themselves. But Takeuchi must have pushed his boat hard, thus reaching the target destination a little early. At 1325 on 19 May, while steering 297°, Soundman Roger Bernhardt announced, “Contact! Bearing 305 degrees, range 1,800 yards.” The officer of the deck, R.D. Webb, believed it to be a school of fish, something that happened more often than not. But the soundman was positive this contact was a true submarine based on clear and sharp echoes. When the contact came to 1,400 yards, the captain and executive officer were both alerted and a tbs (talk between ships) message was sent to the OTC on GEORGE.

ENGLAND did not immediately go to general quarters but instead continued under a war-cruising condition. But her antisubmarine weapons—hedgehogs and depth charges—were prepped. At a range of 700 yards, all twenty-four hedgehogs had been loaded and ENGLAND’s crew waited for the order to fire. A dry run was ordered to positively identify the target once and for all as a submarine and as ENGLAND closed to within 400 yards, the target turned hard to port and increased speed. That was all the confirmation needed. RABY and GEORGE began circling the area at a range of 2,000 yards to always keep the submarine in contact. At 1337 ENGLAND went in for the kill. After four minutes of closing the distance, the order to fire

hedgehogs was given at 1341. Seconds felt like minutes as they passed and the crew on the flying bridge waited for the sound shack to report a hit. But nothing came.

So, a second salvo was ordered. This time, a single hit was recorded at a depth of 130 feet and knowing they had an actual enemy within their sights, ENGLAND went to general quarters. No immediate debris was seen on the surface, indicating the hit may have caused only minor damage. 150 feet below ENGLAND, Takeuchi was still in control of his submarine. He changed course again and positioned himself within the destroyer escort's own wake and disappeared for a few minutes. At 1410, contact was regained, and a third attack was launched but like the first, this one too missed. A fourth hedgehog attack also missed, but a fifth attack at 1433 scored multiple hits! Cheers erupted from the ship's crew; after an hour of defeat, their hard work had finally paid off. But their excitement was broken up after a couple minutes when the ship was rocked by what felt like a torpedo. ENGLAND's stern lifted a foot out of the water, men were thrown off their feet and the deck plates in the engine room came loose. A quick damage check revealed no obvious torpedo hit. Later inquiry to the crews of the GEORGE and RABY revealed they too had felt something. It was concluded that *I-16's* torpedoes must have exploded.

After a few minutes, debris appeared on the surface and an oil slick appeared shortly after. Sharks began to circle, looking for their next meal. Captain Pendleton needed to recover some of the debris to prove his kill to the Navy. So, he sent out the motor whaleboat into the shark infested seas. One of those tasked with the mission of engineer Glenn Wagner. He later told his XO that the motor whaleboat crew were genuinely worried the sharks would attack them.

Once things calmed down, a new realization came to mind: What if this wasn't *I-16*, but a different submarine that happened to be in the area? The coordinates of the attack weren't precisely the ones that had been intercepted in the radio message of a few days prior. *I-16* wasn't

due to arrive at those coordinates for another 24-hours. So to be safe, the three destroyer escorts returned the following morning and searched the presumed path that *I-16* would have been scheduled to take. Nothing else was seen or heard, thus they confirmed *I-16* had indeed been sunk and had just arrived a day earlier than planned.

The next day, on the 20<sup>th</sup> of May, Admiral Toyoda began the preparations for 'Operation A-Go.' Admiral Owada, commander of Submarine Squadron 7, had already started the preparations days earlier. He had ordered Captain Ryonosuka Kato, the commander of Submarine Division 51, to leave Saipan in *RO-105* and with him, take *RO-104*, -109, -112, and -116. In a separate message, Owada ordered *RO-108* and -106 to leave Truk and rendezvous at a designated scouting line between Manus and Truk by the 21<sup>st</sup> of May. All seven of these were the latest and greatest in Japan's submarine arsenal.

On the 21<sup>st</sup>, Admiral Owada issued his orders for his submarines; unfortunately, this too was intercepted and sent along to the ENGLAND. It read: "Submarines at Saipan will take station in the NA scouting line from position 01°30'N, 150°30'E, to position 00°30'S, 148°30'E, and submarines at Truk will do likewise but in accordance with separate orders. Orders of deployment starting from north: *RO-106*, -104, -105, -116, -109, -112, and -108. Deployment distance 30 miles. Direction of search for enemy 135°."

Commander Haines of Escort Division 39 ordered his three-ship armada to begin hunting at the northeastern edge of the line and work their way southwest. And so, they went! On the afternoon of 21 May, they were spotted by a low-flying Japanese "Betty" bomber and a torpedo plane, about seven miles east of them. At this point, The Escort Division was within range of island-based aircraft and could have easily been attacked, but no such attack occurred. At 0351 on the morning of 22 May, GEORGE reported a radar contact eight miles away bearing 303°.



ENGLAND went to General Quarters and also picked the contact up on radar. GEORGE and RABY went in for the attack. GEORGE kept the target on her port side and at a range of 15,000 yards, increased speed to 20 knots. Once she got within 4,000 yards of the target, she turned hard to starboard and turned on her port-side searchlight. The bridge of a Japanese submarine was immediately illuminated. Before GEORGE could unleash her deck guns or torpedoes, the submarine crash dove under water. GEORGE turned back to port and prepared for a hedgehog attack. At 0414, she fired a salvo, but missed and lost contact.

Haines turned over the operation to Pendleton on ENGLAND who still had contact with the submarine, having intentionally been positioned to intercept any escaping submarine. At 0425, ENGLAND made contact at a range of about 2,500 yards. At 1443, ENGLAND's first hedgehog salvo missed a little to the left. She turned back around and came in for a second attack. Unlike her first kill, this one wouldn't require five attempts. On this second run, three or more hits were heard and felt at a depth of 275 feet. They waited five minutes for debris and when it seemed as if the submarine had managed to continue its escape, ENGLAND began maneuvering for another attack. But, just prior to engaging for a third time, an explosion like the one felt a few days prior after hitting *I-16* was felt. The time was 0505 and the sound recorder indicated the submarine was disintegrating below them.

The next morning as the sun began to rise over the horizon, ENGLAND was eight miles away on GEORGE's starboard beam and RABY eight miles on GEORGE's port beam. ENGLAND's crew were getting ready for their morning General Quarters drill when RABY piped in over the radio: "We have a radar contact bearing 085 degrees, range eight thousand yards." Commander Haines ordered RABY to attack while GEORGE and ENGLAND closed the gap. At 6,000 yards, the submarine dove and RABY lost radar contact but at 0610 sound contact

was made. RABY made four hedgehog runs but all four missed. The submarine maneuvered expertly as her skipper tried to shake its tail. Commander Haines called off RABY and sent in GEORGE for an attack. But GEORGE missed at 0707 with a single hedgehog salvo and lost sound contact. As both GEORGE and RABY circled the area, listening, ENGLAND arrived on scene. Three minutes later, GEORGE regained sound contact and went in for four more hedgehog attacks, all missing their mark. Exacerbated, Haines ordered GEORGE to peel off and gave ENGLAND a chance.

Her first hedgehog run missed. As she went in for a second attack, her sonar operators began having difficulty discerning the echoes from their own sound gear from that of GEORGE and RABY who continued running active sonar while they circled the area. Lt. Williamson, the Executive Officer of ENGLAND, ordered his radio operator to send a message that both ships cease their active sonar. Commander Thorwall, the OTC (Officer in tactical command), disagreed with the order. Williamson, despite being the subordinate, sent the order again. Captain Pendleton stepped in and ordered Thorwall to stop interfering or he would have to be sent to his quarters. Thorwall protested and threatened to have both the men court-martialed. Regardless, at 0834 ENGLAND was able to make another attack and this time score between ten to twelve hits at three hundred feet. She had just achieved her third kill, *RO-104*.

On the morning of 24 May, GEORGE, RABY, and ENGLAND were sailing towards the southwest portion of the Japanese picket line. At 0120, GEORGE reported a radar contact at 14,000 yards. The distance was closed to 9,000 yards as all three ships increased their speeds to 20 knots. The submarine spotted the incoming attackers and crash dove. ENGLAND was still eight miles away because of the patrol pattern so she did not reach the contact area until 0147. No sooner had she arrived when sound contact was made at a range of 1,750 yards. Captain

Pendleton allowed Lt. Williamson to conn the ship as she went in for her fourth kill. But the submarine began evasive maneuvers and made it difficult to get an accurate firing solution. ENGLAND was unable to make an attack and the submarine slipped below the ship and under her wake, making it even more difficult for John Prock, one of the ship's soundmen, to get an accurate reading.

A second run ran into the same problems but a depth of 28 fathoms (168 feet) was obtained. As ENGLAND turned away to reposition, the submarine did the same but came right towards her. Through some trickery, ENGLAND continued to ping the submarine as if it were at 1,000 yards. Though, at this point the sub was at 700 yards and the skipper fell for it. At 0214, ENGLAND fired a hedgehog salvo and it sounded like the submarine had stopped in her tracks. Within seconds, three to five hedgehogs detonated 180 feet below. Confirmation was not obtained until the next morning when small oil slicks and deck planking were seen. The whaleboat was once again sent out to retrieve evidence of the kill. Pieces of a chronometer and a sextant indicated one of the hedgehogs may have struck the conning tower where the commanding officer may have been located. *RO-116* had become ENGLAND's fourth kill.

Later that morning, at 0944, sound contact was made on a fifth target. This one proved challenging and neither hedgehog or depth charges from any of the three tin cans proved successful and they left the area. A Navy patrol plane came across the remains of a whale on the 28<sup>th</sup> of May. Based on ocean current patterns, this whale was most likely the victim of ENGLAND's depth charges.

On the 26th, the hunter-killer group consisting of the escort carrier USS HOGGATT BAY (CVE-75), the destroyers USS MCCORD (DD-534), USS HAZELWOOD (DD-531), USS HEERMANN (DD-532), and HOEL (DD-533) arrived in the area and the three destroyer escorts

joined them. ENGLAND rendezvoused with HOGGATT BAY and provided a detailed account of the previous days' events. Because of the radio silence, no one in the hunter-killer group was aware of ENGLAND's triumphs. When this was completed, Escort Division 39 broke off from the group and began steaming for Manus to be resupplied. Port Seeadler was the destination and located there was USS SPANGLER (DE-696) with a fresh load of hedgehogs.

To reach Port Seeadler, the three ships would need to cross into General MacArthur's area of operations. Remember that line the Japanese submarines were supposed to sit along going from northeast to southwest? The southwestern portion crossed the imaginary line between General MacArthur's area and Admiral Halsey's. ENGLAND and her fellow destroyer escorts had been ordered not to chase into MacArthur's side. Instead of bee-lining it to Manus, it was decided the three ships would follow the southwestern picket line and then veer west towards the island. This way, if they happen to come across another Japanese submarine, they will get another opportunity.

Later that evening, GEORGE, RABY, and ENGLAND set up a nighttime scouting line on a base course of 220 degrees, with eight miles between each ship. At 2303, RABY's radar showed a contact 14,000 yards bearing 180 degrees. Only a minute later, ENGLAND too picked up the radar contact at 12,000 yards and bearing 243 degrees. Echo-ranging was discontinued in hopes of sneaking up on the surfaced submarine and launching a torpedo attack. Unfortunately, just as she got into torpedo firing range, the submarine noticed the destroyer escort bearing down and dove. Sonar quickly picked up the fleeing sub only a few minutes later, 1,700 yards away. At 2323, ENGLAND launched a hedgehog attack. With this spread gone, she only had enough hedgehogs remaining for one more attack. Luckily, the last set was not needed because within seconds, five or six of them exploded at a depth of 250 feet. Shortly after, more explosions were

felt as the submarine broke up and sank to the ocean floor. In less than 20 minutes, ENGLAND had recorded her fifth submarine sunk. GEORGE and RABY joined ENGLAND in sweeping the area for evidence to collect. Later, it would be determined that this had been *RO-108*, under the command of Kanichi Kohari.

After spending a day in Seeadler Harbor, the three escorts were joined by SPANGLER, and they returned to sea. On the 30<sup>th</sup>, the HAZELWOOD, part of the HOGGATT BAY hunter-killer group, picked up a radar contact at 0156, range 10,000 yards. She charged in for a depth charge attack and radioed for assistance from the three destroyer escorts. GEORGE and RABY were closest and proceeded to render assistance while ENGLAND and SPANGLER stayed on their patrol line. Once the two destroyer escorts arrived on scene, HAZELWOOD withdrew to her screening station with HOGGATT BAY. For over 24-hours, GEORGE and RABY played a cat and mouse game with the Japanese submarine. Each ship fired over half their hedgehog magazine plus depth charges, but no dice. At one point, both ships started to doubt a submarine was even in the area! Maybe they were attacking an inversion layer, an uncharted reef, or maybe even a ghost! To know once and for all, GEORGE sailed for the last location the sub had been heard. According to their fathometer, the water was 2,700 fathoms deep! That's over 3 miles of water directly below the men of GEORGE. A line with a heavy piece of lead was dropped over the side with markings indicating depth. At 50 fathoms (300 feet), a clear thud was heard. The sub was sitting directly below GEORGE trying to be quiet and conserve as much of her batteries as possible. Just imagine being the crew of a submarine 300 feet below the surface and you hear a tapping on the outside of your hull!

Unfortunately for GEORGE and RABY, despite the confirmation of an enemy sub below them, they continued to strike out. This Japanese skipper knew what he was doing. In the pre-

dawn hours of the 31<sup>st</sup>, Lt. Williamson radioed an offer of assistance. But her sister ships wanted no part in helping give ENGLAND another kill; they smelled blood in the water, and they wanted to finish what they had started. According to Williamson, he received the following reply: “We’re not telling you where we are! We have a damaged sub, and we’re going to sink him. Don’t come near us.”

The sub finally surfaced but in between GEORGE and RABY. Neither ship could fire their deck guns at the target without risking hitting the other de. A signalman on RABY turned on their 24-inch searchlight and trained it on the target. But a slip of the hand caused the light to aim skyward and ENGLAND, 30 miles away, saw the beam of light as if Batman himself was being summoned. She steamed towards it.

Before either GEORGE or RABY could clear their line of fire, the sub submerged. Commander Haines decided it wasn’t worth it to continue attacking in the dark, especially since their hedgehogs were getting dangerously low. It was decided to wait until sunrise to resume the offensive, meanwhile sonar contact was remained. ENGLAND and SPANGLER arrived on scene just before sunrise and were ordered to wait 5,000 yards away. After more misses by GEORGE and RABY, SPANGLER was given a shot, but she too missed with her hedgehogs. At 0729, 30 hours after the battle began, Haines radioed ENGLAND: “OK, ENGLAND, it’s your turn.”

Before the order had even left Haines’s mouth, ENGLAND was 2,000 yards away from the sound contact and charged in. Her first salvo of hedgehogs flew from their cradle on her foc’s’le and sank. Within seconds, six to ten charges exploded at 200 hundred feet. Haines radioed ENGLAND and asked how they always do it? Captain Pendleton jokingly told Williamson to tell him that the crew of the ENGLAND always removes the safety pins from the

hedgehogs prior to firing! Five minutes after the hedgehogs exploded, another large explosion was heard and felt as the submarine's torpedoes went off. Like the other five times, ENGLAND's whaleboat was lowered, and its crew retrieved evidence of their kill. RO-105 was later identified as the submarine sunk by ENGLAND on the 31<sup>st</sup> of May. Commanded by Lieutenant Junichi Knoue, RO-105 also had one of the Japanese Navy's most experienced submariners on board. Captain Ryonosuka Kato, commander of Submarine Division 51, fought to the bitter end and out maneuvered two experienced destroyer escorts for nearly two days. Unfortunately for RO-105 and the other five submarines sent out two weeks prior, USS ENGLAND had their ticket and to this day, maintains the most submarine kills by a single ship.

In August, Commander Pendleton left the ship and for the remainder of 1944 and through the end of April 1945, ENGLAND continued escort duties throughout the Western Pacific. During this time, the Japanese launched the kamikaze: a dangerous weapon that not only caused physical damage but kept sailors up at night as they tried to sleep below deck. By May 1945, ENGLAND was operating off the coast of Okinawa. The main battle had been won by the Allied forces, but pockets of fierce resistance still held out in the hundreds of caves that littered the island. ENGLAND departed Nakagusuku Wan, an inlet in the southeast coast of Okinawa, on 4 May to provide an antiaircraft screen around the transport ships. The only enemy plane they spotted that day was a lone plane that dove through the antiaircraft fire and purposely crashed into the light cruiser BIRMINGHAM. On the 6<sup>th</sup>, ENGLAND was off Kerama Retto when they recovered the body of a Japanese pilot out of the water. Maps and photographs of planes were taken off the deceased and transferred to the intelligence officer aboard the *Mount McKinley*-class amphibious force command ship USS ELDORADO (AGC-11).

On the morning of 9 May, ENGLAND was on a screening station between Kerama Retto and Tonachi Shima. A Japanese air raid was discovered to be approaching ENGLAND's area just before dusk and the ship immediately went to general quarters. At 1853, three planes were spotted on the air search radar bearing 26 degrees true at about seven miles. In the pilot house of ENGLAND, flank speed (23.7 knots) was rung up and she steamed towards the action.

About two minutes later, the planes had changed their course and were now bearing 260 degrees true. The first plane to be identified was a VAL (Aichi D3A Type 99 Carrier Bomber). At this point, ENGLAND was on a course of 200 degrees and the bomber was bearing 060 degrees relative on the ship with an angle of 30 degrees. At this angle, the pilot still maintains good control over his aircraft and can maneuver relatively easy, making it difficult for a ship to turn out of its path. The goal of any ship was to of course shoot down an enemy plane. But it was also important to get into a position that forced the enemy to dive on your ship at a steep angle, thus reducing a pilot's ability to maneuver.

As the plane flew closer, the clear blue skies made it easy to track him. ENGLAND's three 3"/50 caliber deck guns opened fire at 1855, followed by her quad 1.1"/75 caliber gun. When the plane got within range, all 20-millimeter guns began firing and ENGLAND began evasive maneuvers at flank speed. Captain Williamson ordered left full rudder to bring the plane in line with the starboard quarter. On the plane's entire approach, it looked like he was aiming for the bridge. This was a logical choice for kamikaze pilots since most of the ship's command would be stationed there.

The evasive maneuvers did not work; the VAL's port wing clipped the forward whaleboat davit and crashed into the superstructure at frame 55, right above the main deck.

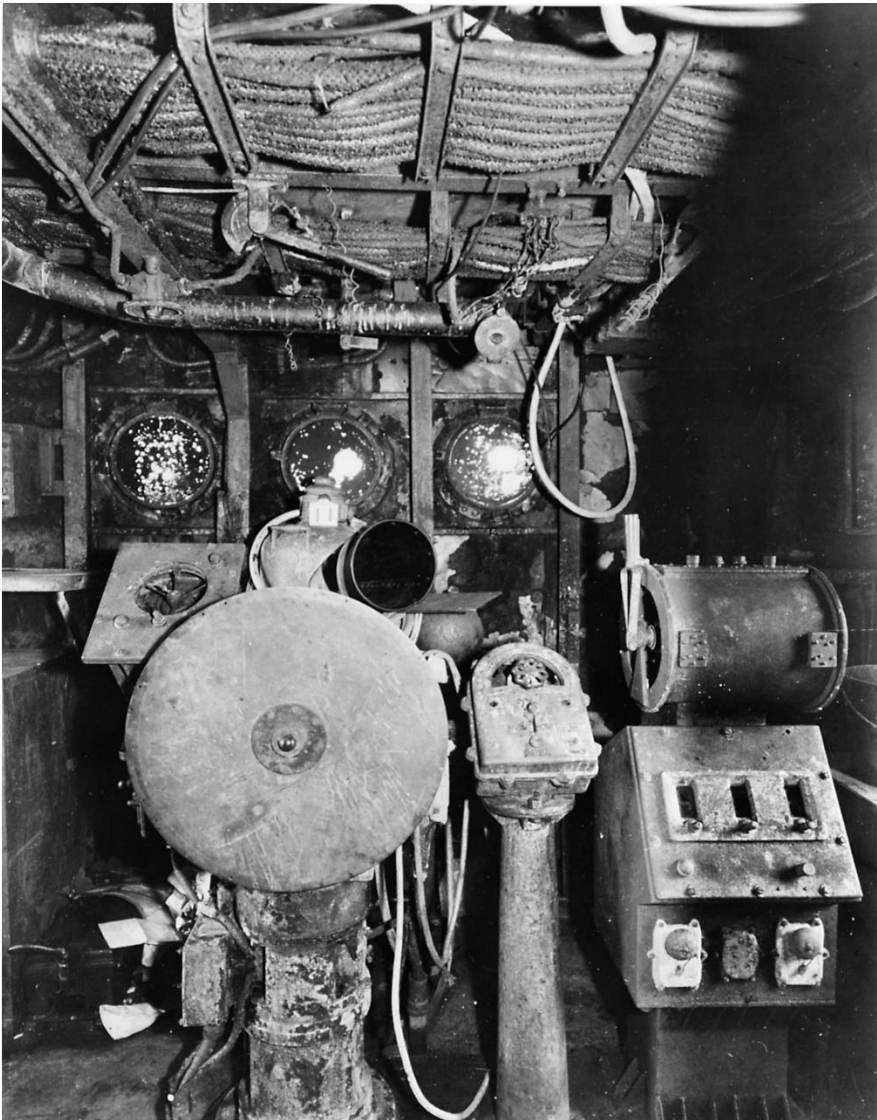


Shortly after, the other two enemy planes were shot down by Marine F4U Corsairs before they could inflict more damage on the ENGLAND.

Captain Williamson, in his book, describes how they were able to get a good look at the VAL just prior to it crashing into his ship. Two Japanese aviators could be seen inside. In the forward compartment, it looked like one was slumped over his controls while the second in the rear compartment seemed to be flying the plane. One of the wheels had been shot off and the engine was burning and smoking.

When the plane hit the ship, its five-hundred-pound bomb penetrated the wardroom's forward bulkhead, bounced four feet into the air, and detonated just off the centerline to port directly below the pilothouse and gun number two. Nearly all the ship's phone circuits went dead, and the flying bridge lost all communications. Flames and smoke engulfed the bridge and Captain Williamson ordered the men to evacuate. Those inside the combat information center jumped into the water with their wounded comrades. Williamson believes that was probably the

only way those men survived. Others on the bridge climbed down the side and lowered



*I* Damage to the pilot house

themselves to the main deck as the fire hoses were turned on to them to cool them off.

Williamson— still on the flying bridge—climbed on top of the sound shack and down at his ship. The 20-millimeter guns had been destroyed; their gunners lay dead in their straps and the loaders on the ground beside them. He realized that he also had

to escape the flying bridge as the flames began to gut the superstructure. Instead of climbing down either side to the main deck like others, he chose a different route. The number two 3-inch had been aiming as far starboard as it could when the plane hit. The barrel was then in a position which allowed him to slide down it to the gun platform. Careful to not fall into the smoke-filled hole behind the gun, Williamson discovered a wounded sailor by the name of Bricker, a gunner's mate. He was a large man, so Williamson was

unable to lift him down to the men on the number one gun. He ordered Ralph Norman to get a stretcher for Bricker.

After delegating the task of rescuing Bricker to others, Williamson climbed down to the number one gun and got a better picture of the situation. Smoke and flames were engulfing not only the rooms of the superstructure, but the staterooms of the other officers and the galley. To prevent the fire from spreading to a magazine, he ordered men to begin throwing the hedgehogs and 3-inch shells from the ready ammunition lockers overboard. He made his way aft to the after steering compartment and ordered a reduction in speed to two-thirds. At this point, ENGLAND was still sailing at flank speed with a left full rudder. The damage control parties would have a much easier time knocking down the flames if the ship wasn't turning hard to port.

Twelve minutes after the kamikaze, a friendly minesweeper, USS VIGILANCE (AM-324) came astern to render assistance. Firefighting parties boarded ENGLAND to help extinguish the flames and the wounded were transferred. At the same time, a whaleboat from the minelayer destroyer GHERARDI (DMS-30) also arrived with firefighting parties and a doctor. Other ships arrived on scene to help with the fires as well. Shortly after sunset, ENGLAND was towed back to Kerama Retto by the ocean-going tug USS GEAR (ARS-34). They arrived in port at 0130 and the men of ENGLAND went to sleep as the crew of GEAR continued to put out any smoldering fires. Most of the officers slept in the chief's quarters and Captain Williamson slept on GEAR.

The next day, work began on accounting for those killed, missing in action, or wounded. The final tally was thirty-seven dead and forty wounded. The men that jumped overboard had been rescued by another ship. Among the dead were Lt. Knight, the communications officer and chief boatswain's mate Frank Manlove. Knight had been on his way to his battle station in the

radio room when the plane hit. Manlove would not have been on ENGLAND if he had taken up the captain's offer of returning to the states for his mother's funeral. He had chosen not to go because he would have been assigned to a new ship and he preferred to stay with the ship and crew he had come to love.

In his book, Williamson applauds the work of his damage control parties. Repair party number 2 had gotten water on the fire only twelve seconds after the crash. Their valiant efforts not only saved the ship from further fire damage but possibly from other aircraft since the flames would have been visible for many miles in the waning daylight. Any and all available hoses from all ships in the vicinity had turned on to the fire, which was so hot, water five inches deep that had accumulated in the pilot house was seen boiling.

Some repairs were completed at Kerama Retto before ENGLAND departed for Leyte Gulf on 22 May for more major repairs before traveling back to the states. In company with the battleship USS COLORADO (BB-45) and the destroyer escort USS BEBAS (DE-10), ENGLAND arrived at San Pedro Bay on 25 May. The destroyer tender USS DIXIE (AD-14) repaired much of the large holes in ENGLAND with steel plates from a captured Japanese ship. According to Williamson, the repair officer from DIXIE recommended he not take the ship through any storms because he did not believe the bridge would stay on the ship if she rolled more than 40 degrees. He had obviously never sailed on a destroyer escort before!

After these repairs were completed, ENGLAND began the long trek to Philadelphia on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June. It would have been easier to sail for the west coast of the United States, but most of those ports were filled with ships damaged at Okinawa. She arrived at Pearl Harbor for three days on 16 June. While there, the captain spent some time with a sailor badly burned in the attack. He desperately wanted to return to the states on the ENGLAND, but his injuries were too

severe. For a long time, Captain Williamson believed the young man eventually succumbed to his wounds. But years later at an ENGLAND reunion, the now old man made an appearance, fully recovered minus some scars.

After Pearl Harbor, ENGLAND arrived at San Diego where she refueled and unloaded her remaining ammunition. Some of the guys hoped to see a welcoming party gathering to cheer them on as they entered port. After all, they had just set the record for most submarine kills by a single ship! But when they pulled up to the pier, not a single soul was seen. Williamson had to have his own men to handle the lines. Upon reporting to the commander of the San Diego Naval Base, he was surprised to learn that no one had known the ENGLAND was even coming into San Diego! Despite orders of the contrary, Williamson was ordered to proceed to the Panama Canal alone since there were no available ships to sail with.

In the early morning hours of 1 July, Williamson was woken from his sleep with news that the barometer had dropped significantly and that winds were increasing. After getting up from his cot, he looked over the information and began to worry that a hurricane was off his starboard side. By 0545, wind speeds were clocking in at 50 knots and the seas were churning. Speed was reduced to 12 knots. Empty fuel tanks were filled with water for extra ballast and all hands were ordered to don their life jackets. Unfortunately for ENGLAND, all her radio equipment had been destroyed in the attack two months prior. The only radio they had on hand was one that had a range of only one hundred miles. All alone in a damaged destroyer escort in the middle of a hurricane without a long-range radio could have been disastrous. Fortunately, an aircraft carrier was within their range and echoed what Williamson had already chosen: Sail west out to sea and outrun the hurricane, at which point she could turn back towards the canal.

When the winds began to subside, it was believed that the hurricane had passed behind them. Williamson ordered a course change to the southwest to begin an arc towards Panama. But the hurricane had different plans in mind. Instead of continuing up the west coast, it turned westward to sea and the ENGLAND. The eye of the hurricane was now on a collision course with the tiny warship. 90 mile per hour winds began battering the wounded tin can. To prevent heavy rolling, Williamson maneuvered his ship, so the winds were astern. Eventually, she entered the eye of the hurricane and the winds dropped to near 0. The seas continued to churn but now in all directions, causing ENGLAND to roll upwards of 50 degrees. Remember what that repair officer from DIXIE had said? Avoid rolling more than 40 degrees because he did not think the damaged superstructure would remain attached to the ship.

But ENGLAND made it out! With the hurricane now behind them, a new threat emerged: fuel. All the extra course changes they had made consumed a lot of fuel and it wasn't known if ENGLAND would have enough to reach Balboa. Williamson looked over the ports on his emergency fuel list and saw the village of Manzanillo was within range. They arrived on the morning of 4 July to a port that had probably never seen a ship as large as the destroyer escort. In fact, Williamson wasn't sure the rickety old dock would be strong enough for his mooring lines! But they made do and moored without incident. The goal was to refuel and then leave right after. But the Mayor of Manzanillo insisted the crew of ENGLAND stay the day and the town would put on a 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebration. Williamson reluctantly agreed and they stayed the night. ENGLAND departed the following morning at 0700.

She arrived at the Panama Canal on the ninth and began the trek through the many locks the following day. By that evening, ENGLAND had transited the canal. On the 16<sup>th</sup>, ENGLAND arrived at the Philadelphia Navy Yard. After a memorial service for those lost on the 9<sup>th</sup> of May

attack, yard workers began repairing ENGLAND and converting her into an APD (high-speed transport). These plans were halted when the atomic bombs were dropped on Japan and World War II finally ended. With the need for another APD gone, the decision was made to scrap ENGLAND.



*2*Post war, USS ENGLAND (DE-635) was moored at the Philadelphia *moth ball fleet* prior to scrapping.

For decades after the war, Williamson battled internally with himself as to if he made the correct decisions that day. In the end, he realized he did everything right based on the information he had at that point. With the end of the war official, he was offered a position as commander of antisubmarine training for the Atlantic Fleet. He turned it down to return to civilian life and the Naval Reserves.

Thank you for listening to DE-Classified. This podcast is brought to you by the Destroyer Escort Historical Museum aboard USS SLATER. You can find a transcript of this episode, accompanying photos and bibliography at [usslater.org/de-classified](http://usslater.org/de-classified). My name is John Epp, and we'll see you next month when we DE-Classify USS STAFFORD.

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