

## The Coast Guard Manned USS MOSLEY DE-231

Hello and welcome to *DE Classified*. A podcast showcasing the history of Destroyer Escorts. Each month a member of 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. I'm Shanna Schuster, the visitor engagement and program manager aboard USS SLATER and today we are going to DE classify USS MOSLEY.

USS MOSLEY DE-321 stands as an exemplar of the courage and determination of destroyer escorts crewed by the Coast Guard during World War II. Harried from both air and sea, she performed admirably and contributed to the ultimate downfall of the *Luftwaffe* and *Kriegsmarine*. Whether in an escort division protecting convoys or in a hunter killer group taking the fight to the enemy, she proved herself a formidable opponent.

The Coast Guard's involvement with DEs was a natural progression of wartime policy. The Coast Guard was to operate under the direction of the Navy in a time of war. FDR had taken the extraordinary step in November of 1941, before American entry into the war, of putting the Coast Guard directly under command of the Navy. Coast Guard crews had manned a variety of warships by the time destroyer escort construction began, so it was only logical to draw on this pool of manpower during the autumn of 1943. In all, 30 destroyer escorts were manned by Coast Guard crews.

MOSLEY was one such DE. She was named for Walter Harold Mosley, born in Waco, Texas, on 17 January 1916. Mosley faced off against the Japanese repeatedly in the early months of the United States' involvement in the war. He was present during the attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, as a member of Patrol Squadron 22 at Ford Field. He was later sent to the Pacific, assigned to the destroyer-seaplane tender WILLIAM B. PRESTON AVD-7 to fly patrols over the Java Sea as copilot in a PBY-5 Catalina. On 19 February at 0920, he and pilot Thomas H. Moorner were attacked by nine Japanese fighters. Moorner, however, managed to land the plane with an injured Mosley's help.

SS FLORENCE D later picked up the pair. Unfortunately their respite was short lived, as FLORENCE D was attacked by Japanese bombers. Survivors made for Bathurst Island, escaping

on lifeboats. HMAS WARRNAMBOOL rescued Moorer, Mosley, and some of the men of the FLORENCE D.

Having escaped the Japanese on three occasions now, Mosley was assigned to fly search patrols out of Midway as the co-pilot of a PBY-5A. His luck, so often tested, was not to last. His aircraft was shot down 19 February 1942, by two Japanese seaplanes. He was posthumously awarded the Silver Star.

The ship that came to bear his name was laid down in Orange, Texas, by the Consolidated Steel Corporation, on 6 April 1943. She was launched on 26 June 1943, and commissioned on 30 October 1943, with Lt. Commander James A. Alger, USCG, in command. Lt. Alger remained in command until Lt. Cmdr. Ernest Packwood MacBryde relieved him. According to some records, this occurred in May of 1944, but statements by a former crew member suggest Lt. Cmdr. MacBryde was in command during April of that same year.

Lt. Cmdr. MacBryde was a Tampa native. He took to command with a natural ease, being descended from generations of Scottish sea captains. Prior to World War II, he joined the Coast Guard. When the war broke out, he received his commission in the Navy. In the words of Francis Canulla, Seaman First Class aboard MOSLEY, he was “intelligent, effective, and capable... I don’t think there was any fear aboard that ship about what was going to happen as long as he was there.”

After shakedown off Bermuda, this confident ship began her first convoy in American waters, and ran from Norfolk to various ports in the Gulf of Mexico. From 31 January to 18 March 1944, she screened for a convoy that sailed between the U.S. and North Africa. Taking a break for ASW (Anti-Submarine Warfare) training at Block Island, she then returned to convoy duty.

On 4 April 1944, it was off to the Mediterranean once more, with UGS-38, a 10-column convoy consisting of 85 merchant ships protected by Escort Division 21. This division consisted of a mix of Navy and Coast Guard DEs. Joining them in the Mediterranean were three British submarines, as well as HMS SUSTAIN, a British minesweeper, and HNMS HEEMSKERCK, a Dutch anti-air cruiser. The convoy contained supplies ultimately bound for the beachheads of Italy. On 20 April, off the Algerian coast near Cape Bengut, MOSLEY and her convoy came under heavy attack by German aircraft. Three successive waves would take a heavy toll.

The Germans had timed their attack with precision. As the sun set, their aircraft proved harder to spot against a darkened shore while ships, often lit up by their own gunfire, proved easier targets. As a result, guidelines were established that set strict rules on when and how ships could open fire. DEs couldn't utilize their larger guns after a certain time, and could only open up with smaller machine-gun fire if they believed that the aircraft had sighted their ship. General Quarters was habitually sounded 75 minutes before and after sunrise and sunset, as a precaution.

Before the sun began to set, Francis Canulla can recall taking sun on the upper deck of MOSLEY and sighting what he thought was sky-writing. "This was before jet trails. We knew nothing about jet trails, so everybody started looking. Within 10 minutes, Commander MacBryde related to us that that was not skywriting, it was a German reconnaissance plane." The convoy was now known to the Germans.

So it was that 25-30 German bombers and torpedo planes made their approach as the sun began to set, the first of them detected at 2053. The first two waves consisted of Ju 88s and He 111s. The Junker was a versatile twin-engine aircraft, ideal for nighttime combat, given its ease of maneuverability. The Heinkel had a reputation as a durable workhorse. The aircraft made their approach from low altitude to avoid detection until the last possible moment.

The first wave opened the attack at 2103, and was made up of nine Ju-88s. They hit the liberty ships SS PAUL HAMILTON and SS SAMITE. The former was loaded with explosives and personnel, mostly of the U.S. Army Air Corps. Also aboard were merchant mariners and armed guard, as part of her crew. As a result, when hit, PAUL HAMILTON went up in a tremendous explosion, resulting in the instantaneous loss of 580 lives.

According to Francis Canulla "It was like lighting a book of matches, how the flames would consume." Art Green, a photographer's mate second class aboard USS MENGES DE-320, estimated the flame from the explosion shot up 2,500 feet into the air. The attackers of the PAUL HAMILTON had made their approach completely unharassed, possibly due to confusion with IFF, given the close proximity of British aircraft flying nearby as well. Some of the ships in the convoy fired during the approach, and HEEMSKERCK took a few shots after the attackers had already done their damage.

During this first phase of the attack, MOSLEY laid a smoke screen, attempting to provide some cover to other ships in the convoy. Her determined AA fire splashed one Ju 88 and damaged a second bomber. USS NEWELL DE-322 also splashed an aircraft.

The second wave was a two-pronged assault made up of seven more Ju-88s that resulted in two more connections with merchant ships. Aircraft hit SS STEPHEN T AUSTIN, and dealt a fatal blow to SS ROYAL STAR.

Francis Canulla shared his recollection of the approaching Heinkels:

“I was on the starboard side on the 20mm gun and I saw the planes coming around the end of the mountain, and I thought they were British patrol planes because that’s all you would see the moment you pass Gibraltar. I looked at that and I reported the planes, by the time things got squared away they had come across the bow of our ship about half a mile. They started on the LANSDALE, and they did a job on that, and then into the convoy they went.”

The third wave consisted of five He 111s. USS LOWE DE-325 and USCGC TANEY WPG-37, flagships of the task force commander, scrambled to narrowly avoid torpedoes. MENGES and FECHTELER DE-157 each splashed a plane, while FESSENDEN DE-142 damaged several others. USS LANSDALE DD-426 splashed one, and probably brought down two more.

Unfortunately, one of the attackers managed to get a fish in the water, connecting with the forward fire room of the LANSDALE, and forcing her skipper to abandon ship. USS CHASE DE-158, MENGES and NEWELL came to the rescue of her survivors. Swimmers from MENGES went out multiple times to pull in 132 survivors. Included were two German prisoners, badly injured but alive, who according to Green’s account were in a rather dejected mood, with one saying in English, “Germany was beaten.” It was hoped that ROYAL STAR could be saved, but she sank before she could be towed into port.

According to Green, the convoy made for Italy under the protection of Canadian corvettes. On 11 May, the XV Army Group under General Alexander opened a massive offensive to strike at enemy forces south of Rome. MOSLEY herself made for Bizerte, Tunisia, arriving on 22 April. She then began the return trip with GUS-38. This was to be another eventful convoy.

The large Convoy GUS-38, on way with Task Force 66, had among it twelve DEs including the MOSLEY, a large Coast Guard cutter, and the British AA cruiser DELHI. On 1 May 1944, the convoy entered the narrow neck of the Mediterranean on the southeast coast of Spain. The Nazi enemy was ready and waiting in this dangerous stretch and on 3 May a U-boat's torpedo struck the stern of the MENGES DE-320, who was out on patrol, 3,000 yards astern from the convoy. The stern was demolished. Two DEs were tasked to hunt down the enemy submarine that struck the MENGES. The USS PRIDE DE-323 and USS JOSEPH E. CAMPBELL DE-70 worked together to comb the water, and sank the German sub U-371 twenty-six hours after she struck the MENGES. The MENGES was towed to New York and the forward section was welded to the aft section of the HOLDER DE-401. The name of the repaired vessel remained with the aft end of the ship. The "new" MENGES and the MOSLEY would meet again just 10 months later.

Even with U-371 gone, Convoy GUS-38 wasn't safe. The following day, on 5 May, the USS CHASE reported a surface radar contact 16 miles ahead of the convoy, moving at 18 knots. They followed it until it was 13 miles ahead of the convoy, which is precisely when it disappeared from the radar. There was no mistaking this. It was a submarine. Not long after losing radar contact, there was an explosion heard by all escorts, though no one was certain of the direction. One minute later, there was a second explosion. The USS FECHTELER DE-157 was struck by a single torpedo at 0345. The DE was dead in the water from the devastating explosion, which occurred amidships. The crew was thrown to the deck, even those on the bridge, who were the furthest from the explosion. The captain, Lieutenant C.B. Gill, immediately ordered the lifeboat, rafts, and nets were readied. He did not however, give the order to abandon ship until after the repair parties had reported back from the forward and aft parts of the ship that there was no hope of salvaging. Unhurt men dove to the rescue of their wounded shipmates through compartments flooded with water and oil.

MOSLEY was among the ships helping to search for the enemy sub that caused such destruction. George D. Simon TM 3/C, on the MOSLEY, wrote in an article, "FECHTELER survivors should know, that the guys on the bridge, asked the Captain for permission to tie lines to themselves and try to retrieve some men in the water." The MOSLEY had orders to continue searching for the sub. Around 0500 the FECHTELER wreckage exploded and sank. Simon went on in his article "There was a tremendous explosion, which about knocked everybody off of their

feet. The Captain, never looking aft, said ‘is that us?’ Luckily, it wasn’t.” Later that day, the culprit U-967 was found and sank. MOSLEY was reunited with the convoy at the Straits of Gibraltar, and by 22 May, they had reached New York via Norfolk. UGS 38/ GUS 38 had paid a very heavy price. Among other ships, four escorts were torpedoed, two of which sank.

The LOWE DE-325, MENGES DE-320, PRIDE DE-323, and MOSLEY DE-321 made history by forming the first hunter killer group manned by Coast Guardsmen. Their first target was a Nazi submarine that had been reported 100 miles east of Halifax, Nova Scotia. On 18 March 1945, the LOWE made sound contact with a sub at 1027. Canulla reports “For a good part of the day, it was depth charges, hedgehogs, and the grit of the captain—and the German submarine was destroyed.” U-boat U-866 was confirmed exterminated by an underwater explosion at 1622.

By 10 April, the MOSLEY was joined at sea with a hunter killer group focused around the MISSION BAY CVE-59. The group began barrier patrols along the 30<sup>th</sup> meridian line west, in the North Atlantic. MISSION BAY and her escorts made up the northern half of the First Barrier Force, which formed two lines of defense against German snorkel submarines. This menacing group of subs was named “Seawolf.” Francis Canulla recalls:

“A ten-mile square was positioned, with DEs at the corners. The planes crossed the square repeatedly, looking down for the U-boats on surface or just below. When spotted, their positions were given to the DEs, which crisscrossed the spot, dropped their charges, and the sub was destroyed!”

On the night of 15 and 16 April, escorts positioned on the southern half of the barrier patrol performed their duty efficiently, and sank U-1235 and U-880. The war diary of the MOSLEY on 16 April 0200 read, “Lots of fun going on in southern part of barrier.”

Late on 21 April, the MOSLEY made radar contact with a surfaced sub. The submarine dove quickly, but MOSLEY kept contact. That contact disappeared at a range of 9,100 yards, and she closed in for attack. She fired her hedgehogs to no avail. The MOSLEY, now accompanied by the LOWE and the J.R.Y. BLAKELY DE-140, continued with hedgehog attacks throughout the night attempting to take out the deep running sub. Shortly after 0200 on 22 April, soundmen picked up underwater explosions that were presumed to be evasive tactics of U-805.

Nevertheless, the sub was defeated.

When the 33<sup>rd</sup> President of the United States, Harry S. Truman, announced the German surrender on 8 May 1945, the MOSLEY was out on barrier patrol 300 miles south of Cape Race, Newfoundland. By 14 May, she had returned to New York City, where she stayed until 16 June. From there she ventured onto Port Everglades, Florida, where she was overhauled with new equipment in preparation for the South Pacific. Then MOSLEY began duty with the Atlantic Fleet's Anti-Submarine Development Detachment by 25 June. It is here that she carried out ASW tests and development exercises with submarines and other escort ships until 7 September.

After completing overhaul, MOSLEY traveled to Green Cove Springs, FL where she was decommissioned and entered into the Atlantic Reserve Fleet on 15 March 1946. She remained there until 1969, when she transferred to the Atlantic Inactive Fleet at Orange, Texas.

Regrettably, the MOSLEY was sold for scrap on 1 July 1973, but the stories of her heroics will not be forgotten.

The MOSLEY's example of courage, determination, and tactical excellence is evident in the fact that she earned two battle stars for her World War II service. The fact that she was one of the first DEs in a hunter killer group manned by Coast Guardsmen only adds to her great history. She played a considerable part in the crumbling of the *Luftwaffe* and *Kriegsmarine*. She battled enemies from the sea and skies, and proved Destroyer Escorts unbeatable in convoy protection.

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 a bibliography at [USSslater.org/DE Classified](http://USSslater.org/DE%20Classified). I'm Shanna Shuster and I hope you join us next month to DE Classify another destroyer escort.