

## USS Bronstein (DE-189) Script

Ben Richard Bronstein (1915-1942) was born in Manchester, NH to Russian-Jewish immigrants Max and Dinah Bronstein. Dr. Bronstein graduated from UNH, then proceeded to graduate from Tufts Medical School in 1940. Dr. Bronstein was appointed Assistant Surgeon, Medical Corps with the rank of lieutenant (jg) on 4 October 1941. He served aboard USS Jacob Jones (DD 130). *Jacob Jones* was the sixth Wickes-class flush-deck when she was launched at New York Shipbuilding in Camden, New Jersey-this was the same shipyard that completed the first *Jacob Jones*, which had the unfortunate distinction of being the only U.S Navy destroyer lost in the First World War. *Jacob Jones* was laid down 21 February 1918 and commissioned on 20 October 1, 1919. She operated briefly in the Atlantic, then joined the fleet in the Pacific in January 1920. She would patrol along the west coast until June 1922, when she was decommissioned.

In May of 1930, *Jacob Jones* was one of 60 mothballed four-stackers returned to service to replace vessels recently discovered to be obsolete. Now, it is worth a brief dive into the specifics of a *Wickes*-class destroyer which were produced by the US Navy from 1917-1919. Together with the preceding Caldwell-class and the subsequent Clemson class, they were known as the “flush-deck” destroyers. These destroyers were built with the need for high speed, economical cruising, performance in heavy seas, high fuel capacity, oil fuel, reduction geared steam turbines with cruising turbines, and increased fuel capacity, which led to larger the larger hull size. Due to increased tensions with Germany President Woodrow Wilson passed The Naval Appropriation Act of 1916, also known as “The Big Navy Act”, with the intentions of enhancing the United States Navy into a force capable of protecting both coasts. This act decreed the creation of six *Lexington*-class battlecruisers, ten *Omaha*-class scout cruisers, and fifty *Wickes*-class destroyers. However, under the direction of the USN General Board to combat the submarine threat there were 267 *Wickes* and *Clemson* class destroyers completed.

The Wickes class found that her tapered stern was ideal for depth charge deployment unfortunately, she was found to be of short range (should be noted underway replenishment was created during ww2) and had a large turn radius making her less effective against submerged threats. *Jacob Jones* herself was armed with 4x4 inch/50 cal guns, 2x3inch/23 cal guns and 12x21 inch torpedo tubes.

**27 February 1942:** USS *Jacob Jones* recognized the burning wreckage of the torpedoed oil tanker SS R.P *Resor* off the Delaware Capes. The *Wickes*-class destroyer, which dated back to 1919, sailed to perform search and rescue; the 4-stacker circled the wreck for two hours to no avail. Shortly after, she would continue her southward course, a full moon lit the night sky. On the dawn of 28 February 1942, the undetected Type VIIC submarine U-578 was participating in Operation Paukenschlag (Drumbeat), the purpose of Drumbeat was simple. Kriegsmarine wanted to see how close their wolf-packs could sail to the eastern seaboard of the United States. At first light, U-578 fired a spread of torpedoes into the portside of the pre-war destroyer. Dr. Ben Richard Bronstein was lost with the ship. He was 26, his body was never recovered. This was the first ship named in his honor.



### **USS Bronstein**

USS *Bronstein* (DE-189) was a cannon class destroyer escort. She was laid down on 26 August 1943 at the Federal Shipbuilding and Drydock Co., in Port Newark, New Jersey. She was launched and christened 14 November 1943, sponsored by Mrs. Dinah Bronstein-Kurz, mother of Dr. Bronstein. The vessel was commissioned on 13 December 1943, Lt. Sheldon Hoard Kinney (1918-2004) in command.

Following shakedown training performed off Bermuda Jan. 1944, *Bronstein* sailed for Norfolk, VA, joining her assigned task group (TG) 21.16, a hunter-killer group composed around *Bogue*-class USS *Block Island* (CVE-21). *Bronstein* was joined by fellow tin cans USS *Corry*

(DD-463), USS *Thomas* (DE-102), USS *Bostwick* (DE-103), and USS *Breeman* (DE-104). TG 21.16 departed Norfolk for anti-submarine duty on 16 February 1944. At first, the TG was tasked with conducting a vain search for a Japanese submarine reported between Bermuda and the Azores, but they would soon turn their attention to a wolf-pack with about 8-9 submarines. USS *Thomas* was the first to establish surface radar contact, then *Bostwick* joined in the search to accurately identify the contact.

Meanwhile, detached by USS *Block Island*, *Bronstein* sailed to search for a second reported contact. Upon firing a star shell, the illumination revealed U-709 on the surface preparing to attack *Thomas* and *Bostwick*. Initially, *Bronstein's* radar operator reported "It can't be a submarine; its pip is larger than a DE's" meaning that they were approaching a submarine high out of the water. Once again, star shells were loaded into *Bronstein's* 3-inch guns to further silhouette the enemies.

According to Lieutenant Sheldon Kinney "We fired an illuminating spread and saw the sub preparing to make attacks on *Thomas* and *Bostwick*, who were well within range. How our gunner officer, Lieutenant Richard Roe, ever did it, I'll never know. At over 3,000 yards, he smacked the conning tower of U-441, on the first salvo from our 3-inch guns!"

Once spotted the *Bronstein* opened fire with her 3-inch batteries, 20mm's, and twin 40mm forcing the U-boat to submerge after registering several hits. The DE's joined together and launched multiple patterns of depth charges. U-709 was finally sunk the following morning by USS *Thomas*. Shortly after, *Block Island* signaled to *Bronstein* to return to assigned station, however, *Bronstein* sonarmen picked up another contact approx. 1900 yards from the carrier. The U-boat was situated almost directly underneath *Bronstein*, the escort carrier in her sights, when Lt. Kinney ordered depth charges dropped. *Bronstein* laid a pattern of 18 depth charges. One of these explosions must have detonated a torpedo fired from the U-boat as *Bronstein's* electrical system was knocked out, halting the diesel electric engines. The floundering DE was never attacked while she was dead in the water. Lt. Kinney claims, "it was a fatal error on the part of the skipper of U-603, because as soon as we were underway again, we made contact and sank him" German war records confirm this kill.

After this eventful three week journey the hunter killer group TG 21.16 put into Casablanca on 8 March for repair and refueling. Their next assignment was to sail to the Cape Verde Island where there were reports of submarine activity. The task group would depart the Moroccan coast on 11 March. 5 days later, aircraft from *Block Island* spotted and attacked a U-boat which hastily submerged followed up by several faint contacts. The *Gleaves*-class destroyer *Corry* (DD-463) was dispatched to the target area approximately 23 miles away and would search until sunrise. The action report from *Bronstein* states

“Frequent countermarches were necessary in order to recover or launch aircraft, and little progress was made in the direction of the contact. Flying operations were conducted throughout the night. It was later learned that aircraft had killed two men on the U-boat and put her periscope out of commission. By the time *Corry* reached her position she had again submerged.”

*Bronstein* was then ordered to assist *Corry* in her search and the two vessels joined by a spaced of 2,500 yards off *Corry*'s port beam conducted what is known as a box search. Sailing in a square route from the center location trying to locate the submerge threat. Next, an aircraft spotted oil slicks which the pilot soon marked by flares, requesting the tin-cans investigate. *Bronstein* would eventually establish sonar contact and quickly closed the gap. The nature of the echo established this was in fact a submarine. *Bronstein* would fire full hedgehog patterns once again losing contact with the submerged threat. Next, faint propeller noises were heard by the *Bronstein*'s hydrophone regaining contact on her starboard quarter, *Bronstein* circling slowly overheard dropped a pattern of 18 depth charges, the blast from the depth charge racked the submarines crew to their knees...Oil became visible on the water's surface.

Unfortunately, depth charges create vicious turbulence underneath the water distorting the ability of the sonar crew to establish a hit. This is called the depth charge disturbance area which could allow a submerged enemy to slip away therefore, no further depth charges were dropped. At 1131 *Corry* advanced to continue her search, gaining sound contact while *Bronstein* circled the area. *Corry* unleashed two more unsuccessful depth charge attacks and subsequently lost contact once again. In the eloquent words of Lewis M. Andrews Jr., “this went on for one anxious hour, but patience and perseverance together were the name of the game in antisubmarine warfare.” At 1315, with battle stations manned for over three hours, *Corry*

dropped a full pattern of depth charges with *Bronstein* off her starboard quarter. Three minutes later, 1318 the German U-boat broke through the water revealing her sleek steel bow and the *Bronstein* opened fire with all available guns scoring hits with her main 3-inch battery, continuing to fire salvos at the gun captains will. According to Captain Kinney, both vessels were “consistently on target” surrounding the conning tower in a plume of smoke. The Oerlikon’s rattled and the Bofors bellowed as the U-boat floundered dead in the water, the conning tower slowly slipping into the sea. These were the final throes of U-801.

Thirty-seven prisoners were taken aboard the *Bronstein* one who appeared to be the captain produced the bent wheel of a coding machine, which was then transferred to *Block Island*. Interestingly, this would upgrade the after-action reports of all three ships to be classified as top secret instead of confidential. The prisoners were then transferred to *Corry* and then to *Block Island* with *Bronstein* rejoining the jeep carrier in her ASW cruise. For actions on 29 February, 1 March, 16-17 March 1944, Lt. Sheldon Kinney received the Navy Cross, and the *Bronstein* was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation for what the Navy later called “the most concentrated and successful antisubmarine action by a U.S Navy ship during World War II.”

Lt. Sheldon Kinney would later serve on USS *Ludlow* and USS *Taylor* in the Korean War and would be the first skipper in charge of a guided missile frigate USS *Mitscher*. During the Vietnam war, Kinney commanded USS *Mississinewa*, and then naval gunfire support ships in Operation Sea Dragon in Vietnam. He would serve as Commandant of Midshipmen of the U.S Naval Academy from 1963-1967. He retired from the Navy in 1972 after 38 years of service and became President of SUNY Maritime College. He would permanently retire in 1982.

The *Bronstein* served as valiantly as any destroyer escort ever had. Her decorations speak for themselves as well as her three credited sinkings of U-709 along with DE’s *Thomas* and *Bostwick* and later the same day U-603. Later, on 17 March together with USS *Corry* sunk U-801, *Bronstein* would receive four battle stars. These decorations and accomplishments, the Tin Can Sailor would say, “were just apart of the job”, part of a rigorous life at sea that bonded these boys together through the harrowing swells of the North Atlantic. A bond that would last a lifetime through recollected sea stories and shared experiences. But *Cannon*-class sisters *Bronstein* and *Breeman* (DE-104) had a story all their own to tell and well, this is not your typical sea story.

On the dawn of the war the Polish National Bank (Bank Polski) had gold resources with an approximate value of 463 million zlotys (approx. 87 million 1939 USD), with a weight of 79.5 metric tons. These stores were in the Bank Polski vaults in Warsaw, and in different branches around the country as well as abroad. The German invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939 forced the Polish government to evacuate their gold stores while Panzer forces were massing outside of Warsaw. The Nazi's knew the golds' location and Hitler wanted the gold to exchange for natural resources for their quickly expanding "lebensraum".

Polish Finance Minister Ignace Matuszewski and Director of the Bank Zygmunt Karpinski joined the flow of refugees leaving Warsaw. On the evening of 13 September, the gold was secretly brought to a pre-arranged assembly point located at a railway station in Sniatyn, near the border of Romania. Children and women sat atop the gold stores as to not arouse suspicion. Unfortunately, a squadron of Luftwaffe fighters attacked killing several men and losing a small amount of gold bullion to aerial bombs.

From there the gold was transported to the Port of Constanta in the Black Sea. However, the Romanian situation was exceedingly complex due to their declaration of formal neutrality by the Crown Council 6 September 1939. This agreement with Germany would seal the Romanian borders on 15 September. The Tanker *Eocene*, transporting Bank Polski's gold had been ordered seized by the Romanian government under German direction however, she had already left Romanian waters just out of their reach.

On the same day, with help from the British Consul, Anthony Kendall, the gold departed for Turkey. Arriving in Istanbul on 20 September then loaded into freight wagons to be transported to Syria and then onto Lebanon, arriving in French controlled Beirut on the eve of 23 September. The Parisian authorities agreed to accept the gold and would store the precious metal in a branch of the Banque de France (The Poles chose the Nevers branch in central France). French cruisers loaded and shipped the cargo to the south of France, the first batch leaving 23 September, the last left for France on 2 October. The cargo would arrive in the Port of Toulon and later Nevers on 29 September and 7 October respectively. It would be deposited into the Banque de France's branch under supervision of employees of Bank Polski.

However, security of the gold could not be guaranteed by the spring of 1940. The rapid German onslaught would seize Belgium, Netherlands, and France in rapid succession.

Henceforth on 30 May 1940, Ministry of Treasury, Henryk Strasburger began demanding the Polish gold be transported to the United States. However, the day after the French surrender the gold escaped Lorient her escorting ships both hitting mines but the vessel holding the gold luckily, steered clear. Fascinatingly, on the first day at sea the captain of the French vessel received three successive dispatches demanding the ship return to Lorient. Though the coding of the messages was correct, the language phrasing was more German than French so, the ship proceeded to Casablanca. But Casablanca was not the destination. From there the gold proceeded to Dakar in French controlled Africa and then a dark jungle hiding place deep in French Sahara.

All this information about the transportation of Polish gold was kept confidential throughout the war. Meaning that *Block Island* and her five escort ships, operating off the Cape Verde Islands were in the dark when, on 20 February 1944 orders were received the detach to DE's *Bronstein* and *Breeman* and send them to Dakar with an unknown assignment. Since the Germans knew the approximate location of the gold dispatching small sub hunters would be ideal to not attract attention.

On 25 March orders from Vice Admiral William A. Glassford were received by Lt. Cmdr. E.N.W Hunter of *Breeman* and then given to Lt. Sheldon Kinney of *Bronstein*. The destroyer escorts were ordered with loading a cargo of gold from Mr. Stephan Michalski, director of Bank Polski, and then proceed to Manhattan without delay. When the two DE's reached Dakar, the gold had been brought to the harbor from the interior and secured in a French fort.

When everyone had cleared out of the French Naval base except for assigned personnel French army trucks began of unloading the gold from the guarded fort. The trucks were under guard by a Senegalese sentry with fixed bayonets. On board the destroyer escorts space was being created in the mostly empty depth charge magazines which had been expended sub hunting the month prior. The weight needed to be accounted for in terms of ballast of the vessel so many munitions had to be moved or unloaded. The Trucks were unloaded, and ironbound boxes sealed with BP carrying the gold ingots tightly packed in sawdust were numbered and checked as they were loaded on the ships.

According to First Class Sonarman Clinton L. Gantt Sr., the Senegalese sailors were of a much stronger build than the U.S sailors, who instead of lifting the gold boxes needed to rely on a block and tackle method to load the cargo. Sonarman 1C Gantt recalls old western movies

portraying stagecoach robbers throwing crates of gold, “Let me assure you that the weight of gold negates this comedy...You can forget about the action in the movies!” The gold was placed under lock and key and an officer was assigned to guard the entry to the magazine. This security was upheld throughout the entire 18 knot voyage. On the third day of the journey to New York City *Bronstein* gained contact with a possible submarine. A depth charge pattern was deployed and speed was increased to full, and they sailed ahead, sending reports of the contact to a hunter killer group. *Bronstein* could not risk a torpedo with the contents of her voyage.

When the ship arrived in the Brooklyn Naval Yard the crews were ordered to strict shipboard isolation. To supervise the offloading there were units of Marines, FBI, NYPD, and Navy intelligence. Sonarman Gantt recalled the scene to Lewis M. Andrews Jr., “Only the Captain was allowed off the ship...Next morning an army of Brinks trucks and yard security appeared. Cranes unloaded the cargo.” (Tempest, 100). Armored trucks from the Federal Reserve drove 65 million dollars’ worth of gold to the New York branch vaults under Liberty Street in lower Manhattan that day in early April 1944. Recollecting in 1956 for Rear Admiral Samuel Elliot Morrison Lt. Sheldon H. Kinney, “That was the closest I’ll ever come to being a multi-millionaire.”

The end of *Bronstein*’s war service saw her guiding Mediterranean bound convoys across the Atlantic and participating in a hunter-killer group formed around USS *Card* (CVE-11). This hunter-killer task force designated TG.21.10 was in pursuit of a U-boat reported to be operating in the vicinity of Newfoundland. Eventually DE’s *Baker* and *Thomas* would sink U-233 on 5 July. From there the TG set course for Boston to repair the damage to *Thomas* in ramming the sub and to land the prisoners. The TG would leave Boston to patrol the West Indies on 10 July 44. The *Bronstein* would search for more submarines and be used as a screening vessel in pilot qualification flights but in the end of 1944, she entered the Boston Navy Yard to repair one of her main engines. She would participate in Navy Day in 1944 and then proceed from New York to Green Cove Springs, Florida. *Bronstein* was decommissioned on 17 June 1946 but on 3 May 1952 she was transferred to Uruguay and recommissioned ROU *Artigas*. She would be scrapped in 1988.

After the Second World War the US Navy began experimentation in a newer generation of vessels designed for ASW. Originally laid down as ocean escorts the *Bronstein*-class frigates



would be redesignated in the 30 June 1975 USN 1975 ship reclassification changing the hull designation from DE to FF. This class comprised the second generation of DE's post ww2, complete with a new hull design, larger low frequency active and passive sonar known as AN/SQS-26AX sonar system. This entirely new design incorporated improvements found in the Fleet Rehabilitation and Modernization (FRAM) program which was specifically designed to extend the life of vessels used in The Second World War. Unfortunately, the weight of the new ASW equipment made the Bronstein class too slow to operate with the ASW task forces for which they were designed. There were only two ships of the *Bronstein*-class built, USS Bronstein (FF-1037) and USS McCloy (FF-1038). McCloy would make her name in the late 1980's setting the record for biggest military drug bust capturing 49.5 tons of marijuana. After U.S Service both vessels would be sold to the Mexican Navy.