

DE Classified
USS Tomich (DE-242)

Hello 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 Giordano Romano, I am an intern and tour guide aboard the USS Slater Historical Museum in Albany, NY. I am a recent graduate of the UAlbany Public History Master's program and my area of study is Military History. On today's podcast episode we are going to DE classify USS Tomich.

Petar Herceg-Tonić, anglicized as Peter Tomich, was born on June 3rd, 1893. He hailed from the settlement of Prolog near the city of Ljubuški located in Bosnia and Herzegovina, at the time part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Very little is known about his early life other than his birthplace and that he was a Herzegovinian Croat. In 1913, around the age of 20, Tomich along with his cousin Ivan Tonić immigrated to the United States. On June 6th, 1917, he enlisted in the United States Army at Fort Slocum, New Rochelle, New York as the country prepared for its entry into the First World War. While on active duty, Tomich was naturalized as a US Citizen on October 19th, 1918 at Charlotte, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina. Tomich remained in the Army for the duration of the war until 1919 when just ten days after being discharged he joined the United States Navy.

He began his service aboard USS Litchfield (DD-336), a Clemson-class destroyer. By 1920, Tomich saw service aboard USS Rochester (ACR-2/CA-2), an armored cruiser whose predecessor was the ill-fated USS Maine that sank in Havana Harbor in 1898. Tomich would continue serving in the United States Navy for over twenty years eventually serving aboard the Florida-class dreadnought battleship USS Utah (BB-31/AG-16). By 1941, Tomich had become a

chief watertender where his duty was to make sure the boilers on board were always maintained and in working order so as to prevent any possible disaster.

However, on December 7th, 1941, disaster struck. While the ship lay in Pearl Harbor off Ford Island with most of the US Pacific Fleet, over 350 Imperial Japanese planes conducted their attack upon them. Planes began to drop bombs, torpedoes and strafe the various ships in the harbor. Damage to ships, planes and buildings on the base was extremely considerable.

Prior to the attack, Japanese commanders had given orders to their pilots to make sure they identified which ships to hit. This included the aircraft carriers, which luckily weren't present that day. They knew that by this point in its history, USS *Utah* was an old, non-combat vessel and orders were dispatched to not attack her. Japanese commanders considered the *Utah* "unworthy" and a "waste" of their firepower and ordnance.

Regardless, of whatever orders were issued to the Japanese pilots, USS *Utah* was one of the first ships to be hit. Flight leaders were able to identify *Utah* as she was moored where the aircraft carriers usually were and was initially rejected as a target. But her fate was sealed, when trigger happy pilots in six Nakajima B5N torpedo bombers led by Lieutenant Nakajima Tatsumi broke off formation and made their attack run. Six Type 91 torpedoes were launched with two striking *Utah* and a third that missed but hit the cruiser USS *Raleigh* (CL-7) right next to her.

During the attack, Peter Tomich was down below deck in the boiler room. When the ship was struck he took it upon himself to secure the boilers as water rushed in. If the boilers were not secured then the ensuing rush of water would've caused them to rupture and explode leading to even more damage and casualties. Peter Tomich, ever mindful of his crew, ran to warn them of the impending doom and ordered everyone to evacuate topside.

Horrible noises began to sound as *Utah* began to slowly turn on her side and capsize. Knowing that any chance of escape was slowly vanishing, Chief Tomich yelled to his crew, “Get out, get topside! Go...the ship is turning over! You have to escape now!” With Tomich continuing to shout at them, the crew quickly made a break for the ladders. As they did so, he continued to work. Moving from valve to valve setting gauges, releasing steam where necessary, stabilizing and securing the boilers that otherwise would’ve caused a massive inferno. *Utah* continued to roll on her side, yet Tomich remained at his post.

Utah eventually capsized but did not explode as Tomich became trapped inside, choosing to remain on the sinking ship. A ship he called *home*. The remains of Tomich and 53 other sailors killed when *Utah* sank are still entombed as a war grave today in Pearl Harbor.

For his actions and his “distinguishable conduct and extraordinary courage” Peter Tomich was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor. In addition to this citation, Tomich would also have a ship named in his honor, a destroyer escort.

USS Tomich (DE-242) was laid down on September 15th, 1942 by the Brown Shipbuilding Company in Houston, Texas. She would then be launched on December 28th of the same year, being sponsored by Mrs. O. L. Hammonds. Usually next of kin would be the sponsors of these ships, however, there were some issues in finding Tomich’s which will be discussed later in the episode. The destroyer escort was then commissioned on July 27th, 1943 with command given to Lieutenant Commander H. A. Hull, as one of 85 Edsall-class destroyer escorts. She would join a number of fellow destroyer escorts as part of Escort Division (CortDiv) 7 of the US Atlantic fleet.

As an Edsall-class, *Tomich* had a displacement of 1253 tons standard and 1590 tons with a full load. She had a length of 306’, a beam of 36.58’ and a draft of 10.42’ with a full load. Her

propulsion consisted of four Fairbanks Morse diesel engines and four diesel-generators giving the ship a total of 6000 horsepower along with two screws. Her top speed was 21 knots or about 24 miles per hour. She had a range of about 9100 miles while traveling at a consistent speed of 12 knots. Her complement included 8 officers and 201 enlisted personnel.

As for her armament, *Tomich* was equipped with three single barrel 3-inch/50 caliber guns as her main batteries. She was also outfitted with one twin-barreled 40mm Bofors anti-aircraft gun and eight single barreled 20mm Oerlikon anti-aircraft guns for further protection. She also carried three 21-inch torpedo tubes on a single mount. Towards her aft she held eight depth charge projectors and two depth charge racks with a one hedgehog projector on her bow.

Following her commissioning, *Tomich* got underway from Galveston, Texas on August 12th, 1943 reaching her destination of New Orleans, Louisiana the following day. The destroyer escort departed the waters of Louisiana on August 19th bound for the island of Bermuda and the start of four weeks of shakedown training for her crew. Prior to making landfall in Bermuda, a hurricane was encountered and the ship had to brace the storm that caused wind to kick up to 75 knots and delayed them from entering St. George Harbor for a short time. She remained at Bermuda after completing her training to restock and refuel before departing on September 23rd alongside fellow destroyer escort USS Farquhar (DE-139). Both ships in company were tasked with escorting USS Merrimack (AO-37), a Kennebec-class fleet oiler, to Norfolk, Virginia. After completing this escort, she sailed for Charleston, South Carolina for her next availability.

On October 9th, *Tomich* was underway for Guantanamo Bay, Cuba to engage in refresher training. She reached Cuba three days later and remained there for a further five days before setting off once again. She would then rendezvous with USAT George Washington to escort the Army transport ship to Kingston, Jamaica. After a short stay in Jamaica, the vessel was then sent

back to Guantanamo on October 17th, where upon arrival she was sent back out to sea on a search and rescue mission.

USS Dorado (SS-248), a Gato-class submarine, had been reported as missing after failing to arrive in the Panama Canal Zone on October 14th. USS Tomich searched for eight days but sadly was unable to locate the missing submarine and her crew as no floating debris or even signs of a sinking were found. USS Dorado was later declared sunk with all hands lost, possibly due to a mine set by U-214 off Panama.

After returning to Guantanamo Bay, *Tomich* was ordered to rendezvous with USS Pike (SS-173) and escort her northward towards Norfolk, Virginia. She was eventually released from this duty on the 30th and proceeded back to Cuba before being turned around again and ending up in Norfolk on November 5th. She remained in port for eight days before finally setting off on her first Atlantic convoy.

On November 13th, USS Tomich was underway as an escort for Task Force 63 of UGS Convoy 24, destination Casablanca, French Morocco. Luckily, no enemy activity was encountered during the convoy and the destroyer escort anchored in Casablanca Bay on December 2nd.

She then departed Casablanca on December 7th, now escorting GUS-24 back to the United States. Same as the initial eastbound convoy, no ships were lost or damaged and *Tomich* was secured to Pier "K" in the Brooklyn Navy Yard on Christmas Day. The ship entered a ten-day availability and also underwent repairs that kept her out of action until the next year. During her time in New York, Captain H. A. Hull was relieved of command with Lieut. Cmdr. C. B. Brown as the new commanding officer of the destroyer escort.

On January 4th 1944, DE-242 had a special visit from Admiral Monroe Kelly. Along with his aide, Admiral Kelly came aboard to present the captain and crew of USS Tomich with the Medal of Honor citation, dated March 4th, 1942, which was awarded to the ship's namesake for his heroism at Pearl Harbor. His next of kin could not be located and thus the Navy felt that it would be wise to have the medal on board the ship named after him. The citation was hung in a passageway forward of the galley and behind the small armory locker so as to allow all crewmembers to appreciate the bravery and heroism of their ship's namesake. For the remainder of her service, USS Tomich would sail with her namesake's citation aboard as a morale booster for her crew and as a reminder of those who made the ultimate sacrifice.

The very next day the ship departed Brooklyn Navy Yard for Fort Pond Bay. Here the crew of the Tomich would undergo gunnery and anti-submarine warfare (ASW) training. After completion they set off from Montauk, Long Island on January 10th to proceed in company with other units of CortDiv 7 heading for Norfolk.

Three days later, USS Tomich departed Norfolk as part of Task Force 63 to escort convoy UGS-30 towards Casablanca. Similar to her first UG convoy, this too was uneventful as the ship sailed into Casablanca. She would make a brief independent run to Gibraltar where she was moored alongside the famous British battleship HMS Warspite. During her one day stay, the officers and enlisted of the destroyer escort were treated with extreme hospitality by the crew of the British warship.

Tomich departed the British base on February 4th and rendezvoused with convoy GUS-29 one day later to escort them back home. While on the way back, she was detached from the convoy screen and headed for the Azores. At Porto Delgado, São Miguel Island she assembled

with cargo ships SS Phoenix Banning and SS Abraham Baldwin. She then escorted both these two ships back to convoy GUS-29 and resumed ocean escort duties until the 17th.

One day later Tomich once again received orders for independent duty. This time she was tasked with escorting USS Mattaponi (AO-41) and SS Sangara to Bermuda. When her task was completed she made her way back north towards the Brooklyn Navy Yard to meet up with the rest of GUS-29 arriving on February 22nd as the return convoy was beginning to end.

On March 5th, Tomich was back underway for deperming at Bayonne, New Jersey and then to Fort Pond Bay off Montauk Point for training. Joining her for the training period would be three fellow destroyer escorts; USS Sellstrom (DE-255), USS Savage (DE-386) and USS Ramsden (DE-382). Training took several days before completion when Tomich, along with Ramsden, set sail for Norfolk and arrived on March 11th. Both DEs would act as escorts for Task Group 64 and UGS Convoy 36 enroute to Bizerte, Tunisia.

Tomich, along with 26 other ships were escorting a total of 123 merchants. Some of these ships carried fuel, medical supplies, food and other necessities while others were troopships bringing thousands of soldiers to fight in North Africa and Europe. The convoy departed on March 13th from Hampton Roads on its harrowing journey.

The convoy and task group made it to the Straits of Gibraltar on March 30th. However, in the evening of March 31st, Tomich picked up a sonar contact and her crew went to general quarters to chase down the echo. She dropped two 13-charge patterns and remained at general quarters for the rest of the night. She was joined in her anti-submarine patrol by the British sloop HMS Black Swan.

By 0401 at the start of the morning watch, Tomich had rejoined the screen and just as the ship returned her lookouts spotted enemy aircraft off her port bow. German Junkers Ju-88, twin-

engined torpedo bombers and Dornier Do-217 medium bombers made an attack run on various ships in the convoy. Tomich's crew acted quickly as her captain began to make the ship zig-zag independently to dodge any torpedoes and bombs that may come their way. Her anti-aircraft crews opened up firing 3-inch, 40 and 20 mm rounds at the incoming enemy planes.

At 0417, a flaming Dornier 217 was observed falling into the sea as a result of anti-aircraft fire and crashed between the Tomich and Ramsden due to accuracy from both crews. The German planes after suffering several casualties retreated out of sight and the convoy continued its journey at 0430. The only notable damage was aboard the Liberty ship SS Jared Ingersoll. She had taken a torpedo hit in her number one hold on her port bow and as fire broke out some of her crew abandoned ship. Luckily, the ship was salvageable and eventually towed into Algiers the rest of the way.

Lieutenant Commander Charles B. Brown, captain of USS Tomich, along with Lt. Cmdr. Sherman T. Baketel of USS Ramsden are both mentioned with creditable performances in commanding their ships during the attack.

Part of the convoy continued on to Bizerte escorted by Tomich where they arrived on April 3rd. Tomich remained in port until April 11th when she departed with convoy GUS-36 to return to the United States. However, two days later she was ordered to turn around and head for Oran, Algeria for inspection on her starboard shaft due to an abnormal vibration that had been reported.

After inspection was completed she rejoined the convoy on the 14th. On April 30th, Tomich was detached once again along with the Chesapeake section of the convoy. She was relieved of escort duties on May 1st near Norfolk and departed for New York arriving in the Brooklyn Navy Yard one day later.

She remained in New York for her next availability which came on May 13th. Along with Escort Division 23, she made her way to Casco Bay to undergo refresher training for the next five days. After training was completed she steamed for Norfolk arriving on May 20th and prepared for her next convoy.

Tomich left Norfolk on May 22nd attached to Task Force 64 to escort convoy UGS-43 to Bizerte. Unlike the previous convoy, there was no enemy activity detected while en route to North Africa. On June 11th, she was detached from the convoy to transfer an emergency appendicitis case to U.S. Naval Hospital in Algiers. She returned to the convoy and was later detached again to travel independently to Bizerte.

The return convoy GUS-43 departed North Africa on June 20th. Eight days later Tomich was given orders to detach and relieve USS Solar (DE-221). The Solar had been escorting USS Carib (AT-82) who was towing USS Menges (DE-320) which had suffered a torpedo hit from U-371 over a month prior. Tomich escorted both ships to the Azores and despite adverse weather conditions was able to reach Horta Harbor with both ships on July 1st. She detached from them the same day and rejoined convoy GUS-43. She eventually reached Brooklyn Navy Yard on July 10th and began to refuel and refit for further service.

On July 21st, USS Tomich steamed towards Casco Bay for further training. During this time, Tomich was installed with four new Army type single barreled 40mm anti-aircraft guns to increase protection against enemy aircraft attack. She then departed Casco Bay with fellow destroyer escorts USS Jenks (DE-665), USS Solar (DE-221), USS Fowler (DE-222) and USS Wiseman (DE-667) and all steamed their way to Norfolk.

All five DEs arrived on August 1st and were underway the very next day to escort convoy UGS-50, once again towards Bizerte. No enemy activity was encountered during this

convoy and all ships were able to make it safely to their destinations. Tomich arrived in Bizerte and remained in port for six days.

On August 29th, she helped escort GUS-50 back to the states and did so successfully without loss. She would remain in yard availability starting on September 18th. During her long stay she made a coastal run from New York to Boston through the Cape Cod Canal arriving on October 5th.

She left the South Boston Navy Yard on October 7th to escort the Boston section of convoy CU-42 while in company with USS Carter (DE-112). They rendezvoused at the position of Latitude 42° 23' N and Longitude 70° 42' W where both ships were relieved by USS Kirkpatrick (DE-318) and USS Oswald (DE-767) who were returning the Dutch cargo ship MS Bantam. Tomich and Carter then escorted the Bantam back to Massachusetts Bay before steaming back towards Casco Bay for further training.

On October 10th after one full day of training, USS Tomich arrived at Quonset Point, Rhode Island. Here she would undergo special radar and anti-submarine warfare tests. She was joined by the submarine USS Barracuda (SS-163) and several planes from Quonset Point to conduct these tests which reportedly were quite successful. She finished her exercises and returned to Casco Bay on October 13th to rejoin Escort Division 7. Further training was conducted from the 14th onward until Tomich and CortDiv 7 made their way to Norfolk on November 4th.

On November 7th, USS Tomich and the rest of CortDiv 7 joined by the escort carrier USS Core (CVE-13) got underway to head for Bermuda. Along the way the division would practice anti-submarine "hunter-killer" training. The division arrived on November 10th and

spent the rest of the month drilling hard. After completion in early December, Tomich arrived back in New York for a brief resting period.

She departed New York on December 12th and joined CortDiv 7 towards Bermuda again for further hunter-killer training alongside USS Core. She would be detached on December 17th to proceed back to New York for repairs on her radar systems. She remained there until December 29th when she sailed for Fort Pond Bay to complete her training exercises.

After this extensive training period was completed she departed alongside USS Otterstetter (DE-244) and USS Sloat (DE-245) on January 7th, 1945 and proceeded to Brooklyn Navy Yard for her next availability. During her availability, Tomich was equipped with High Frequency Radio Direction Finder gear to be utilized while part of a hunter-killer group.

This new piece of equipment, commonly referred to as “huff duff”, was developed to intercept transmissions from German U-boats. Because the Nazi war strategy in the Battle of the Atlantic required U-boat crews to stay in almost constant contact with their naval bases, this left them vulnerable to Allied exploitation. If a huff duff machine was able to intercept a transmission they could determine the direction or line of position of that U-boat. If two Allied ships intercepted the same transmission then it was possible to plot a fix on the U-boat’s position. This allowed for two further options: 1. Reroute any Allied convoy that may be heading towards that position so as to avoid possible danger, and 2. Send a hunter killer group in the direction of the transmission’s frequency, locate and attack that U-boat. The use of this equipment onboard various destroyer escorts was extremely strategic to the Allied war effort by crippling the U-boat fleet.

In the afternoon of January 19th, Tomich was underway to Norfolk to rejoin CortDiv 7. The ships departed Hampton Roads on January 25th as part of Task Group 22.4 with USS Core

to conduct an eastward sweep to search for a westbound German U-boat attempting to return to Europe. However, during these sweeps no contact was ever made but the unit kept patrolling in the area despite adverse weather conditions hampering their efforts.

On February 11th, one of the Core's planes spotted a contact and Tomich was moved into the area to conduct a search. After several days, the search was ended as the enemy was able to evade and slip away from the various search parties sent after it. The task group continued conducting operations until the 20th as winds reaching up to 115 knots put a halt to any efforts. One day later, after exhausting so much of their fuel for both ships and planes, the task group steamed towards Argentia, Newfoundland arriving on the 27th to refuel and leaving the same day.

USS Tomich, along with the rest of CortDiv 7, escorted USS Core back to Norfolk and then proceeded to Brooklyn Navy Yard. For most of March and into early April, Tomich would take part in another eastbound sweep to hunt for German U-boats up and down the east coast of Canada and the United States. All of these sweeps would come up empty handed though.

For most of April, Tomich had returned to Bermuda to practice more anti-submarine warfare and patrolled in waters around the area as well. On April 16th, while en route to rendezvous for another patrol Torpedoman's Mate 3rd Class Howard William Marsteller was reported as having fallen overboard. All ships of CortDiv 7 and planes from USS Core immediately sprung into action to search for the missing sailor. Sadly, after searching for an hour in the open waters, the operation was halted and Marsteller was never found. Howard William Marsteller, originally from Youngstown, Ohio had enlisted in the US Navy on March 3rd, 1943 out of Cleveland and he was part of the original crew that was present when USS Tomich was

commissioned. He would be the only sailor of USS Tomich's crew that died during World War II. He was 21 years old.

This incident is evidence of the fact that the mission these sailors performed was always a dangerous task. Even when there is no enemy nearby, accidents still occur and sometimes they end in tragedy.

USS Tomich would detach from her barrier patrol on May 9th and return to New York two days later. She would then travel to Boston for the remainder of her availability. On June 12th, 1945, her captain, Lt. Cmdr. Charles B. Brown would be relieved of duty and handed over command to Lt. Reed Whitney. While in port she also received a new update. As her three torpedo tubes were taken off back in July 1944 to install single mount 40mm, these single mounts were now being replaced with two twin mounted 40mm guns. As for the original twin 40mm she had since her commissioning, these would now be upgraded to the Navy type quad barrel 40mm. In addition, a Mark 26 Radar and a Mark 52 gun director were installed atop the flying bridge forward of the mast in order to compose a fire control plot for better accuracy.

These new installations were for good reason though. As of May 7th, the war in Europe had ended with Nazi Germany's surrender but the Empire of Japan had not yet given up. Tomich's next destination was the Pacific.

She got underway from Boston on June 28th accompanied by two of her sister ships, USS Richard B. Ward (DE-243) and USS Keith (DE-241). They headed for Guantanamo Bay for refresher training to get up to speed with the new equipment now on board. They arrived on July 3rd and on this same day, Tomich was given the honor of welcoming aboard Lt. Cmdr. G. R. Atterbury who shifted his flag from the Otterstetter to the Tomich. Thus she was now the command ship of CortDiv 7 as they steamed towards the Pacific. The unit commenced their

entering of the Panama Canal zone on July 18th and proceeded to San Diego, arriving on July 26th.

CortDiv 7 reached their next stop at Pearl Harbor on August 7th and the very next day, Lt. Cmdr. Atterbury transferred his flag to USS Moore (DE-240). The ships departed for Saipan, Marianas Islands and arrived on August 30th. USS Tomich was then ordered to sail independently towards the island of Iwo Jima on September 1st, one day before the Japanese had formally surrendered in Tokyo Bay, thus ending the Second World War.

Despite the war's end, Tomich's crew still had orders and patrolled around Iwo Jima until September 4th. She then proceeded towards Air Sea Rescue Station at 31° 30' N, 140° 20' E where she relieved USS Helm (DD-388) on September 5th. She remained on duty until relieved on September 10th and returned to Iwo Jima for replenishments. On September 15th, 1945, she remained anchored in Iwo Jima's harbor having traveled a total of approximately 140,000 miles since her entry into the US Navy. By this point, Lt. (j.g.) Olin Merrill David and Lt. (j.g.) M. R. Hatch, Jr. were the only two commissioned officers still serving aboard Tomich since her commissioning date.

For the remainder of 1945, Tomich remained in the waters around Iwo Jima, Okinawa and Saipan. In January 1946, she received orders to head for China and made port in the city of Tsingtao on the 13th. She spent the remainder of the month in port awaiting orders to head for either the city of Shanghai or Tianjin. The ship and her crew would eventually depart for the former.

She arrived in Shanghai on February 2nd where she moored on the Whangpoo River amongst a single column of other ships that extended for miles. For two weeks she would remain

here to wait for spare parts from supply ships and to be relieved by ships coming from Pearl Harbor.

On the 15th of February, after receiving her awaited spare parts Tomich was then tasked to wait for and then escort the Baltimore, later Albany-class heavy cruiser USS Chicago (CA-136) back to Shanghai. Their relief arriving from Pearl Harbor was now put on hold until the middle of March, so for now Tomich was back to her escorting duties. However, before the ships left Shanghai ports, they received a bit of a surprise. Just before departing, the leader of the Republic of China, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek and his wife were passing through Shanghai's waters bolstering support as the second phase of the Chinese Civil War had started just six months prior. According to the diary of Tomich's Chief Engineering Officer Lt. Neal Dyste, Chiang Kai-shek's wife, Soong Mei-ling, broke usual formalities waved to the US servicemen as they went by on their motor launch. After this, the DE set off with USS Chicago.

They arrived in Shanghai on February 22nd finishing their escort assignment just as they were given another one. This time she would escort the heavy cruiser USS Columbus (CA-74) back to Tsingtao so she could also begin her occupation duties. This escort assignment was completed on February 26th and for the next week, Tomich would undergo repairs to both her boilers and distilling plant.

After repairs were completed she headed out to sea and was underway towards Okinawa. Here she picked up mail and multiple passengers to bring back to Shanghai. While en route she encountered rough seas and it was reported that many sailors became quite seasick during the short journey.

She was back in Shanghai on March 12th, where trouble had been brewing. Tensions were mounting over continued foreign presence within the city. We have to understand that until

August 1945, Shanghai had been under Japanese occupation since its fall in 1937. Its citizens weren't all that excited to trade one foreign power for another despite American support for the Republic of China. Riots had broken out between Chinese citizens and American servicemen and it took a lot of time for cooler heads to prevail.

After the incident had subsided, word was quickly spreading that the DE would soon be returning to the United States after completing her occupation duty. But until that date was official, USS Tomich would travel with USS Chicago to the Japanese island of Kyushu for further occupation duty maneuvers on March 25th. She returned to Shanghai six days later as the confirmation date of April 10th was looming in the minds of the crew. Many pondered if they'd head to San Pedro in Los Angeles, San Diego, or bypass both and head through the Panama Canal towards the East Coast.

Regardless, April 10th was the set date and USS Tomich departed China for good. On the morning of April 21st, she steamed into Pearl Harbor which was mostly deserted. Very few ships were in Hawaiian waters compared to the previous year because many had been redesignated for the upcoming atomic bomb tests that were to occur in July.

A day and a half were spent searching for spare parts to keep the ship running smoothly which apparently had become quite a struggle for the crew during those waning months. After leaving Pearl Harbor on April 23rd, it was decided that San Pedro and the entire West Coast would be bypassed. Tomich would have to pass through the Panama Canal as her destination was Charleston, South Carolina. However, before she even crossed the canal, an emergency arose. On May 1st, the ship was forced to divert to Balboa in Panama City because one of the crew had appendicitis.

During the journey, Tomich was also bringing back a number of passengers from China, one of whom happened to be a doctor. Luckily, the ship arrived on May 8th and the operation was performed in the wardroom which acted as the ship's operating room. Two days were spent in Balboa before the DE finally passed through the Panama Canal and continued her homeward voyage.

On May 16th, USS Tomich arrived in Charleston, limping her way in due to engine trouble that couldn't be easily repaired while at sea. She docked in the Charleston Navy Yard as part of ComCortDiv 32. On May 21st, she entered dry dock and remained there for two days where she received a fresh coat of paint and some work to repair her engines. She remained in Charleston through late August until she was to be moved once again. She then proceeded to Mayport, Florida and arrived there on September 4th. She began to go through inactivation procedures to prepare her to be mothballed.

On September 20th, 1946, USS Tomich was decommissioned and placed in reserve at Green Cove Springs, Florida. She would remain in this reserve fleet for almost 25 years until being moved to Norfolk as part of the Atlantic Reserve Fleet. Tomich would be at the Inactive Ship Facility in Norfolk until berthing congestion compelled the Navy to propose transferring her. In the late afternoon of June 1st, 1970, salvage vessel USS Hoist (ARS-40) towed both USS Tomich and fellow Edsall-class DE USS Swasey, into the Gulf of Mexico.

On June 12th, these ships would arrive at the Inactive Ship Facility in Orange, Texas who accepted custody of the two escort vessels to be berthed there. Tomich would remain there for over two years before the Navy finally made a decision on what to do with her. Seeing as newly made ships were becoming more modernized and that there was little need for aging warships in

the US Fleet, it was decided to have Tomich stricken from the Naval Vessel Register on November 1st, 1972 along with five other ships.

On December 13th, 1973, Tomich was acquired by Andy International, Inc., Ship Dismantling Facility, Brownsville, Texas. Less than a year later, Tomich was then taken in tow by the tug Texan of the Bludco Barge and Towing Co. for her final voyage. USS Tomich (DE-242) was scrapped on March 7th, 1974, a fate in which many destroyer escorts came to face at the end of their service.

Now usually this is the part of the episode where it typically ends. But although the story of USS Tomich is completed, we have to go back for a bit and continue another, unique tale.

I previously mentioned that the namesake of USS Tomich, Peter Tomich, received the Medal of Honor for his actions in preventing the boilers from exploding aboard the USS Utah at Pearl Harbor. This same medal was presented to the crew during the war and kept aboard the ship for them to admire. However, when the conflict ended the medal had to be moved once again.

In 1947, after the ship had been mothballed, then-Governor of Utah Herbert B. Maw proclaimed Peter Tomich to be an honorary citizen of the state and thus guardianship of his medal was handed over to the State of Utah. This is very unique because usually medals would be passed down to the next of kin. Tomich had immigrated to the United States with his cousin John in 1913, but the US government couldn't locate him as when they went to the address provided in Tomich's records, John wasn't there.

In 1989, the US Navy built a new structure at the Senior Enlisted Academy in Newport, Rhode Island. They named it Tomich Hall to pay tribute to its namesake and his Medal of Honor was then brought to Newport to be displayed there for the time being.

In 1997, the president of the Congressional Medal of Honor Society, Paul Bucha learned about Tomich's unique story and decided to take action. Bucha himself was of Croatian descent and had also received the Medal of Honor in 1970 for actions performed during his service in the Vietnam War. He took it upon himself to write a letter to Rear Admiral James Robert Lunney of the New York Naval Militia. He told him how Tomich's Medal of Honor was unclaimed, the only one as such in the 20th century. Admiral Lunney by this point was preparing for a visit to Croatia and decided to investigate.

He received substantial help, initially from Adam S. Eterovich of the Croatian Genealogical Society, to provide any background information on the Tomich family. Lunney also received support from journalist Vjekoslav Krsnik and Lunney's friend Zvonimir Mihanovic who helped arrange for his further travels.

After many long years and a painstaking amount of extensive research, Lunney made his way to Prolog, Tomich's hometown and was able to find exactly who he was looking for. It was here that they met Srecko Herceg-Tonic, Peter's great-nephew and his cousin John's grandson. Srecko himself was Lieutenant Colonel and a decorated war hero after serving in the Croatian Armed Forces during their war for independence just a few years prior. As Lunney didn't speak Croatian he found even further assistance from his friend and interpreter Juliana Velcic who was able to translate the story about what happened to Peter and his citation.

On May 18th, 2006, Rear Admiral Lunney, aboard USS Enterprise (CVN-65), arrived in the city of Split, Croatia. With him, he carried Peter Tomich's Medal of Honor. In a short speech, he recalled his early years in the US Navy and how he saw the capsized USS Utah while passing through Pearl Harbor. He discussed the extensive efforts made by so many individuals to make this day possible. Admiral Henry G. "Harry" Ulrich III, Commander, United States Naval Forces

Europe presented Peter Tomich's Medal of Honor to Srecko Herceg-Tonic. Sixty-four years after President Franklin D. Roosevelt had awarded the citation to Peter Tomich, it was now in the hands of his next of kin. For all the effort, time and enthusiasm Admiral Lunney had put into his investigation, he too was decorated with the Order of the Croatian Trefoil by Croatian President Stjepan Mesic in 2007. Admiral Lunney passed away March 10th, 2022, leaving behind a remarkable naval career.

USS Tomich is sadly no longer afloat, having been scrapped like so many other destroyer escorts after World War II. Peter Tomich's family, from what we know, still reside in Croatia today and still retain ownership of their ancestor's Medal of Honor. As for Peter Tomich, he is still aboard USS Utah in Pearl Harbor. He is still in her boiler room. And he is still manning his post.

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 usslater.org/de-classified. I am Giordano Romano, and I hope you join us next month where we'll have a special podcast about U-505.

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