

**E. Andrew Wilde, Jr., Editor**

**The U.S.S. *Fiske* (DE-143) in World War II:  
Documents and Photographs**

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The USS Fiske (DE-143) In World War II

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E. A. Wilde, Jr.  
January, 2001



## The USS Fiske (DE-143) In World War II

### Glossary

#### Aldis lamp

A portable, hand-held signal lamp.

#### A.S.A.P. (Anti-Submarine Attack Plotter)

A display showing ownship's and contact's positions, enabling the operator to determine the correct attack course.

#### bathythermograph, or "BT"

A device which plots water temperatures at various depths in order to determine the effective sonar range.

#### BDI (Bearing Deviation Indicator)

A feature of the QCS (searchlight-type) sonar which assisted the operator in maintaining contact with a maneuvering target.

#### bilge keel

Longitudinal fins, located where the sides of a ship meet the bottom, that reduce rolling.

#### chemical recorder (see "TRR")

#### CIC (Combat Information Center)

The area equipped to collect and display tactical information. The General Quarters station for the ship's Evaluator, normally the Executive Officer.

#### Condition Affirm/Able

The material condition providing the greatest watertight integrity. All doors, hatches and fittings marked X, Y and Z must be closed.

#### conn

Control of a ship's movement. The officer in control has the conn.

#### degaussing

Reducing a ship's magnetic field electrically to protect it against magnetic mines and torpedoes.

#### doppler

The change in pitch of the sound reflected back by a sonar contact from the pitch of the sound transmitted caused by the contact's relative motion. A down doppler indicated that the contact was moving away from the attacking ship.

#### DRT (Dead Reckoning Tracer)

A plotting device used to record the ship's track by continuously integrating course (from the gyro compass) and speed (from the pitometer log).

#### FXR (Foxer gear)

A noise-making device towed astern to foil acoustic torpedoes.

#### handy billy

A small portable gasoline-powered water pump.

Hedgehog/7.2" Projector

A spigot mortar which fired 24 antisubmarine contact-fuzed projectiles in a circular pattern about 200 yards ahead of the ship. These projectiles were 7.2" in diameter and each contained 30 lbs. of TNT.

K-gun

Depth charge launching device used to propel a depth charge laterally away from the side of a ship. The range of these projectors was 50-150 yards, depending on the weight of the depth charge and the size of the impulse charge used.

Pillenwarfer

A decoy device released by U-boats to lure attacking surface ships away from their position.

7.2" Projector (see "Hedgehog")

SL radar

S-band surface-search radar with a range of about 13 miles.

sonobuoy

A small, expendable sound receiver-transmitter dropped from an aircraft to detect submarine noises and transmit them back to the plane.

tactical diameter

Perpendicular distance between the path of a ship on the original course and the path of the ship when steadied on a new course after having turned 180 degrees with a constant rudder angle.

T.B.S. (Talk-Between-Ships)

The short-range radiotelephone circuit on the bridge used for tactical communications.

TRR (Tactical Range Recorder)

The plotter used to record a sonar contact's range and to determine the firing time for antisubmarine weapons.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Any man who may be asked what he did to make his life worthwhile can respond with a good deal of pride and satisfaction, "I served in the United States Navy."*

- President John F. Kennedy, addressing the new class of midshipmen at the United States Naval Academy on August 1, 1963.*





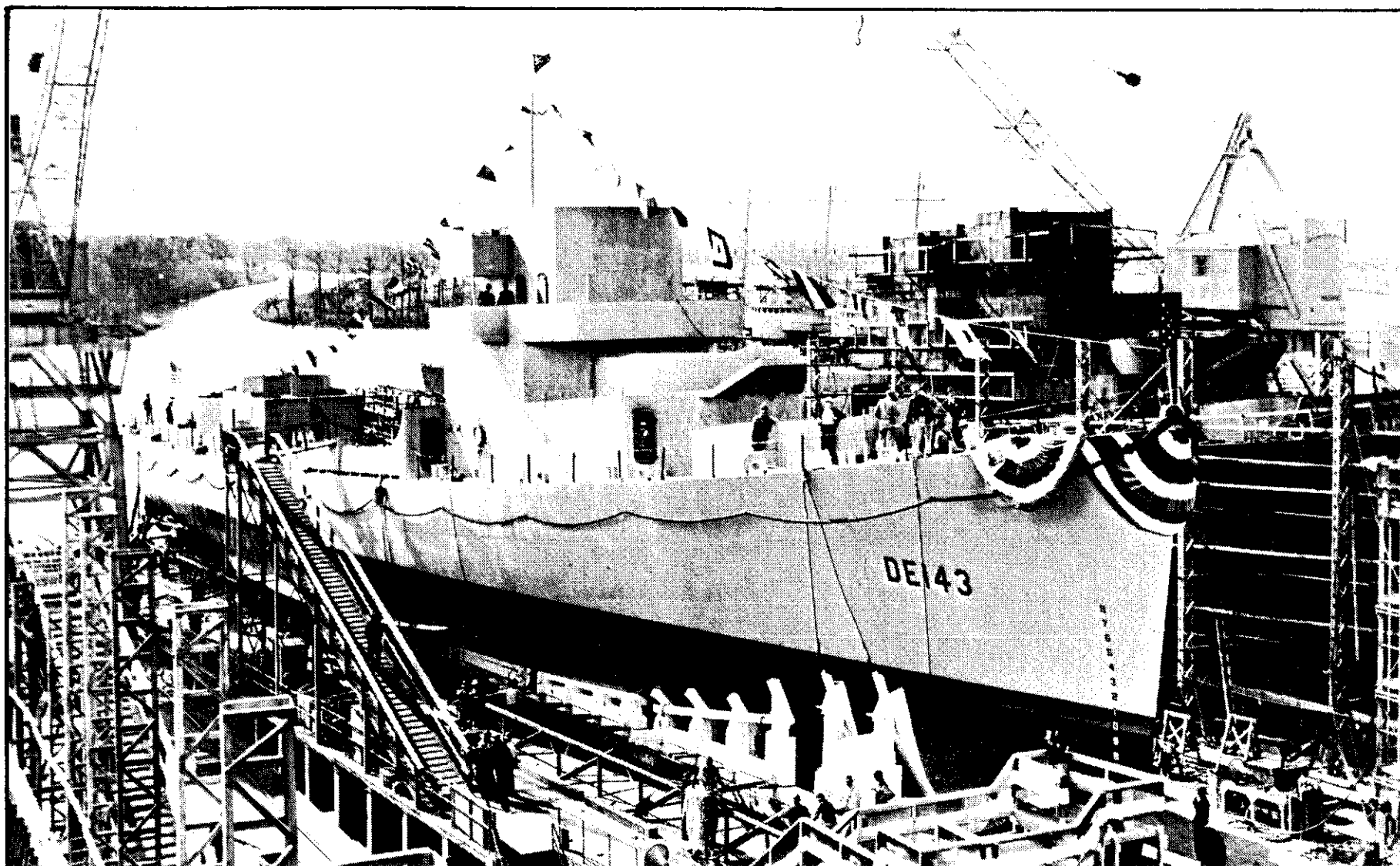
***Fiske \****

Bradley Allen Fiske, born 13 June 1854 in Lyons, New York, was a member of the Naval Academy class of 1874. In addition to serving with distinction at sea and ashore, Fiske advanced the Navy with electrical and ordnance inventions of great significance. One of the earliest to understand the revolutionary possibilities of naval aviation, he wrote a number of books of important effect in gaining a wider understanding of the modern Navy by the public. Rear Admiral Fiske died in New York City 6 April 1942.

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\* Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships, Vol 2. Washington: U.S. Naval Historical Center, 1963.





The long hull (FMR-type) Edsall-class destroyer escort USS Flske (DE-143) on the ways ready for launching at Consolidated Steel's yard in Orange, Texas, on March 14, 1943. Four 1,500 H.P. Fairbanks-Morse diesel engines driving her twin screws through a reverse gear drive gave the ship a rated speed of 21 knots, and twin rudders gave her a tactical diameter of only 300 yards at 20 knots. Other characteristics:

Length overall:	306'0"	Displacement (standard):	1,200 tons
Beam:	36'10"	Shaft Horsepower:	6,000
Draft:	11 ft.	Range (at 12 knots):	10,800 miles

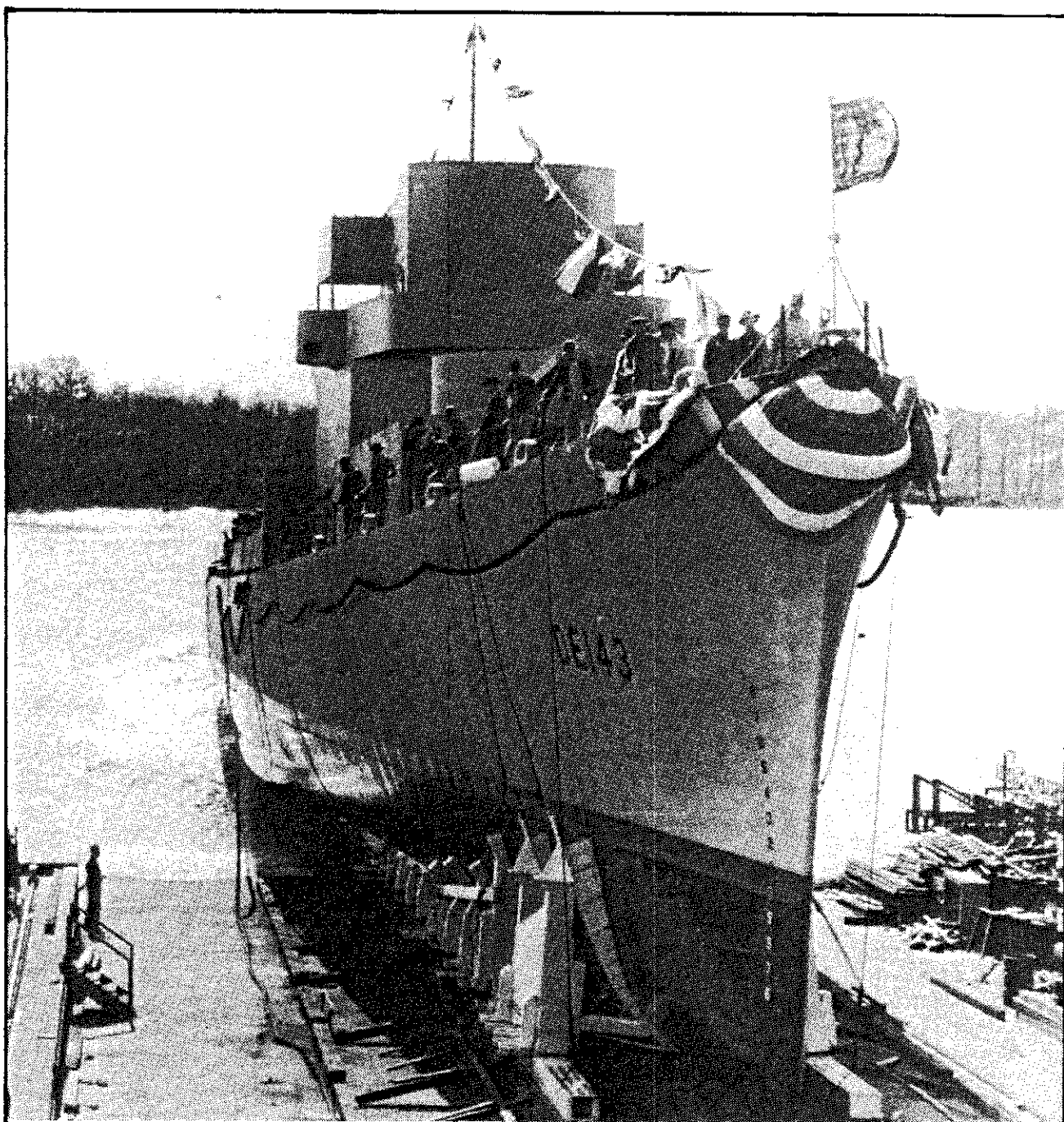
(Official U.S. Navy Photograph.)





*The Fiske's sponsor, Mrs. H. G. Chalkley (with flowers), and her party prior to the launching at Consolidated Steel's yard in Orange, Texas, on March 14, 1943. During World War II this yard completed 93 destroyer escorts, including 47 Edsall-class vessels. (Official U.S. Navy Photograph.)*



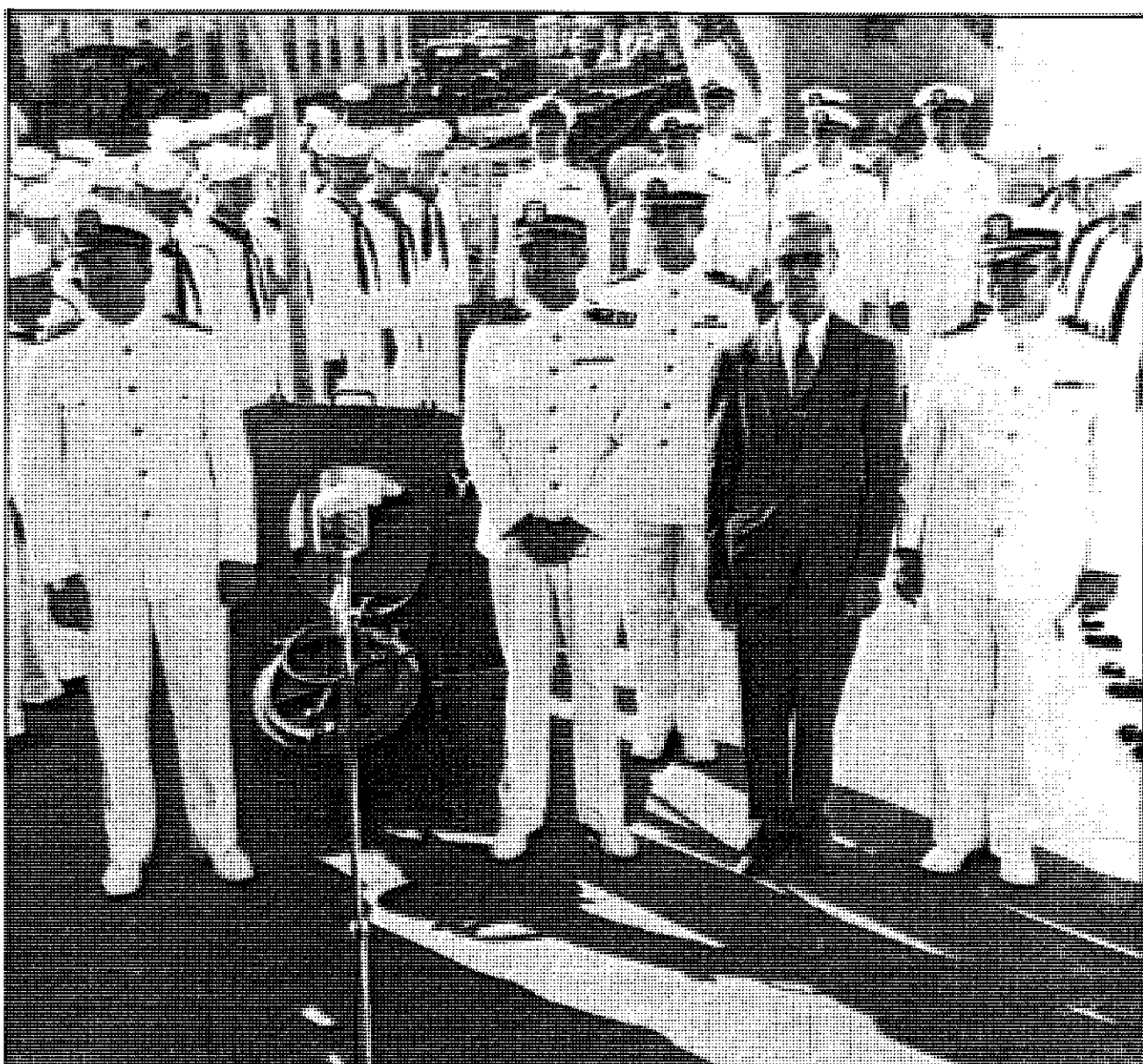


*The destroyer escort USS Fiske (DE-143) was fully dressed for her launching at Orange, Texas, on 14 March 1943, with signal flags displayed from bow to stern over her mast and the colors at her masthead. Her keel had been laid down on 4 January 1943, and she was commissioned on 25 August 1943.*

*(Photograph courtesy of Robert R. White.)*







Looking aft at the Elkay's commissioning ceremony held on the fantail of Orange, Texas, on August 25, 1942. The ship's first commanding officer, Lt. Comdr. Robert R. Walker, USN, is in the center. He was relieved by the officer behind him, Lieut. John A. Comly, USNR, on January 20, 1944. (Photograph courtesy of Robert R. White.)



*U.S.S. Fiske (DE-143)\**

(DE-143: dp. 1,200; l. 306'; b. 36'7"; dr. 8'7"; s. 21 k.; cpl. 186; a. 3 3", 3 21" tt., 8 dcp., 1 dcp. (hh.), 2 dct.; cl. *Edsall*)

The first *Fiske* (DE-143) was launched 14 March 1943 by Consolidated Steel Corp., Orange, Tex.; sponsored by Mrs. H. G. Chalkley; and commissioned 25 August 1943, Lieutenant Commander R. P. Walker in command.

*Fiske* began her service as a convoy escort with a voyage from Norfolk to Coco Solo, C.Z., to New York between 12 and 25 November 1943. On 3 December, the escort ship cleared Norfolk on the first of three convoy assignments from Norfolk and New York to Casablanca. During the third of these, on 20 April 1944, her convoy came under attack by German torpedo bombers in the western Mediterranean, but none of the enemy planes came within range of *Fiske*.

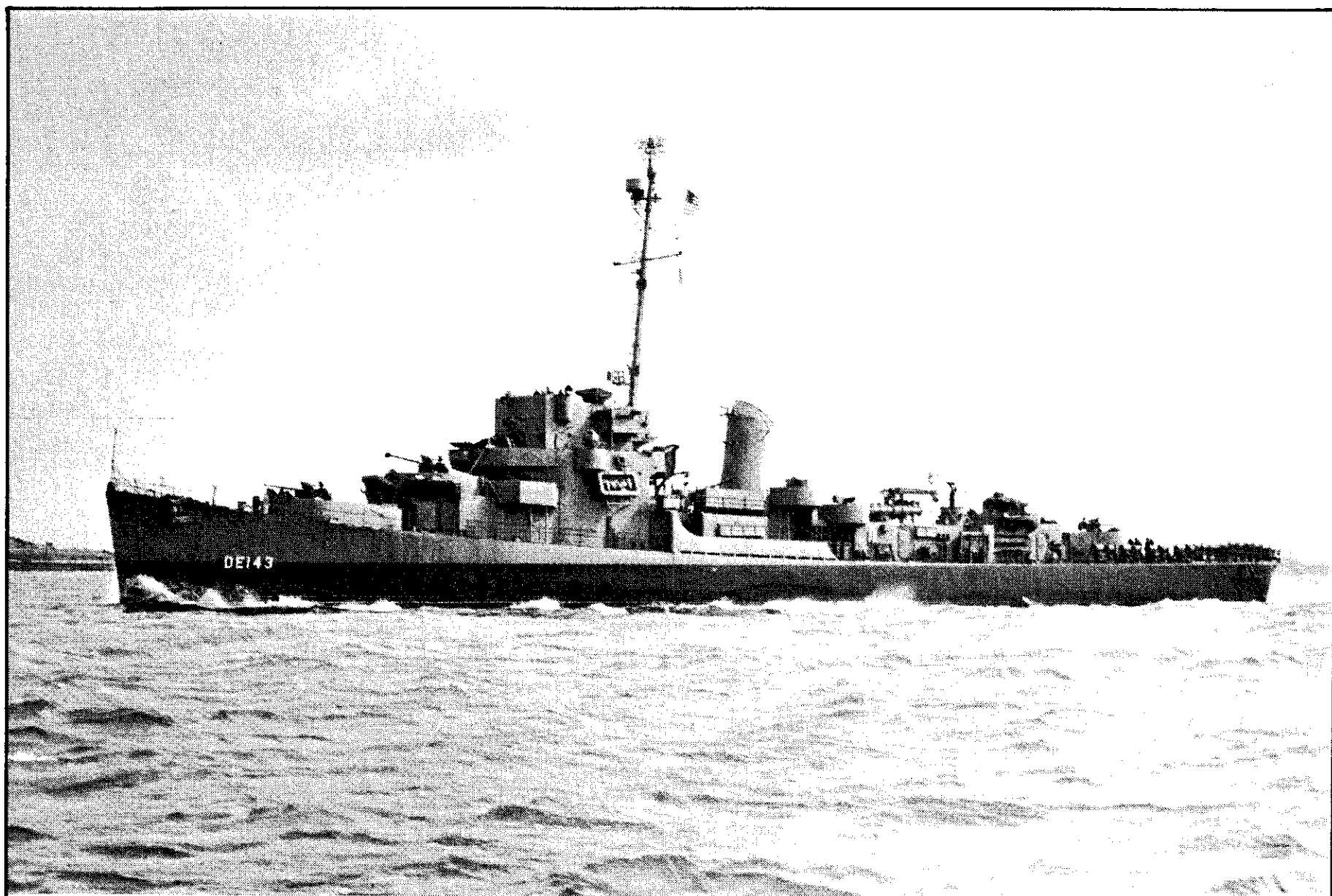
Completing her Casablanca runs with her return to New York 21 May 1944, *Fiske* joined the hunter-killer group formed around *Wake Island* (CVE-65) at Norfolk 10 June. Five days later her group sailed to patrol across the Atlantic, putting into Casablanca to replenish 20 to 24 July. On 2 August, during a special hunt for submarines known to be transmitting weather information from stations in the central Atlantic, *Fiske* and *Douglas L. Howard* (DE-138) were detached from the task group to investigate a visual contact both had made. The contact, surfaced *U-804*, quickly dived, but the two escorts picked it up on sonar, and began their attack approach. Suddenly, *Fiske* was torpedoed on her starboard side amidships, and within 10 minutes, she broke in two and had to be abandoned. Thirty of her men were killed and 50 badly wounded by the explosion, but all who survived it were rescued by *Farquhar* (DE-139).

*Fiske* received one battle star for World War II service.

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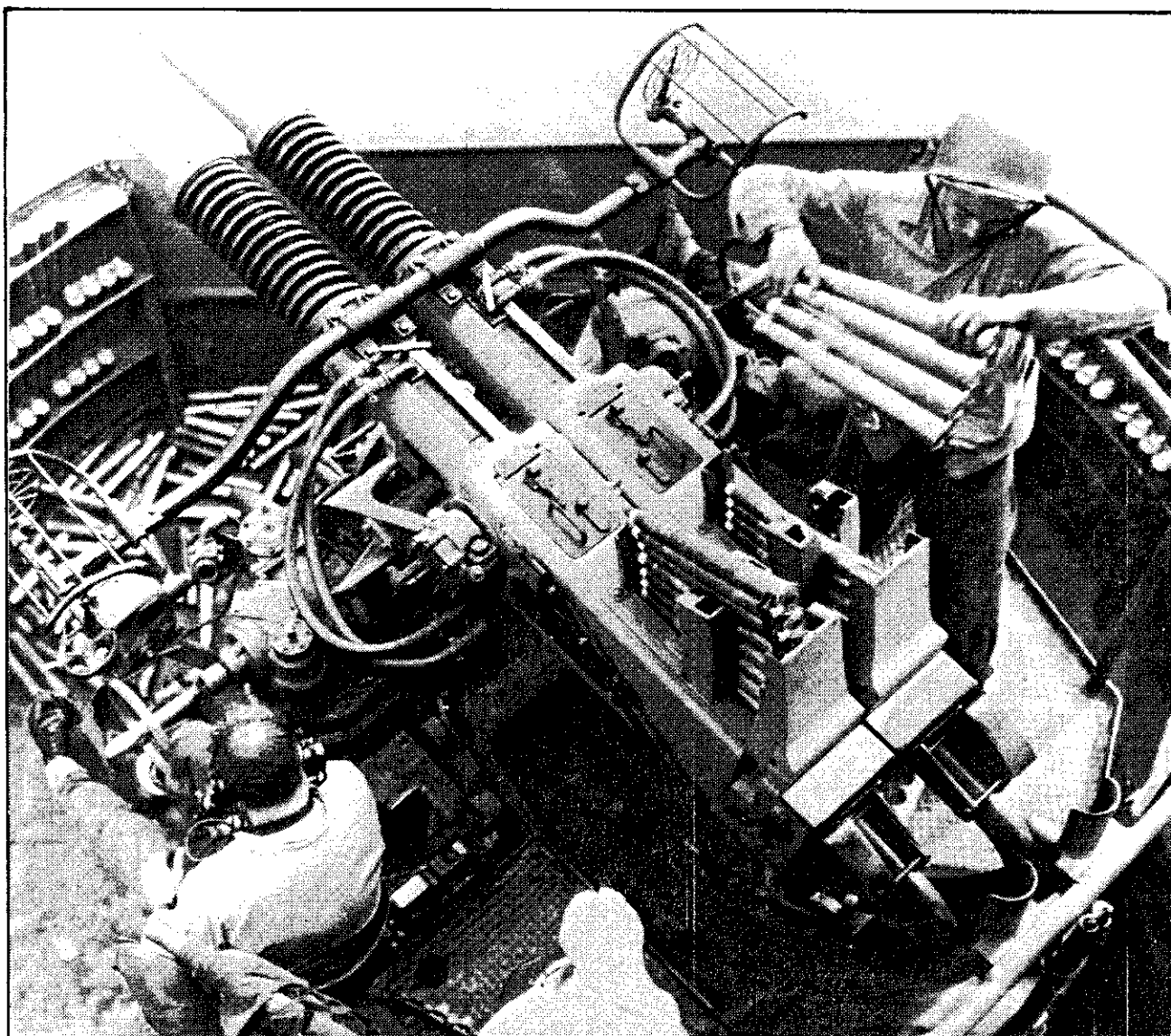
\* *Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships*, Vol. 2. Washington: U.S. Naval Historical Center, 1963.





*The USS Fiske (DE-143) in New York Harbor on October 20, 1943. She was armed with three 3-in./50 dual-purpose guns, a twin 40-mm. Bofors mount on the after end of her deckhouse, eight (later, ten) 20-mm.'s and a triple 21-inch torpedo launcher amidships. For use against submarines she had depth charges (two stern tracks and eight "K-guns") and a Hedgehog mount abaft Gun No. 1. (Naval Historical Center)*

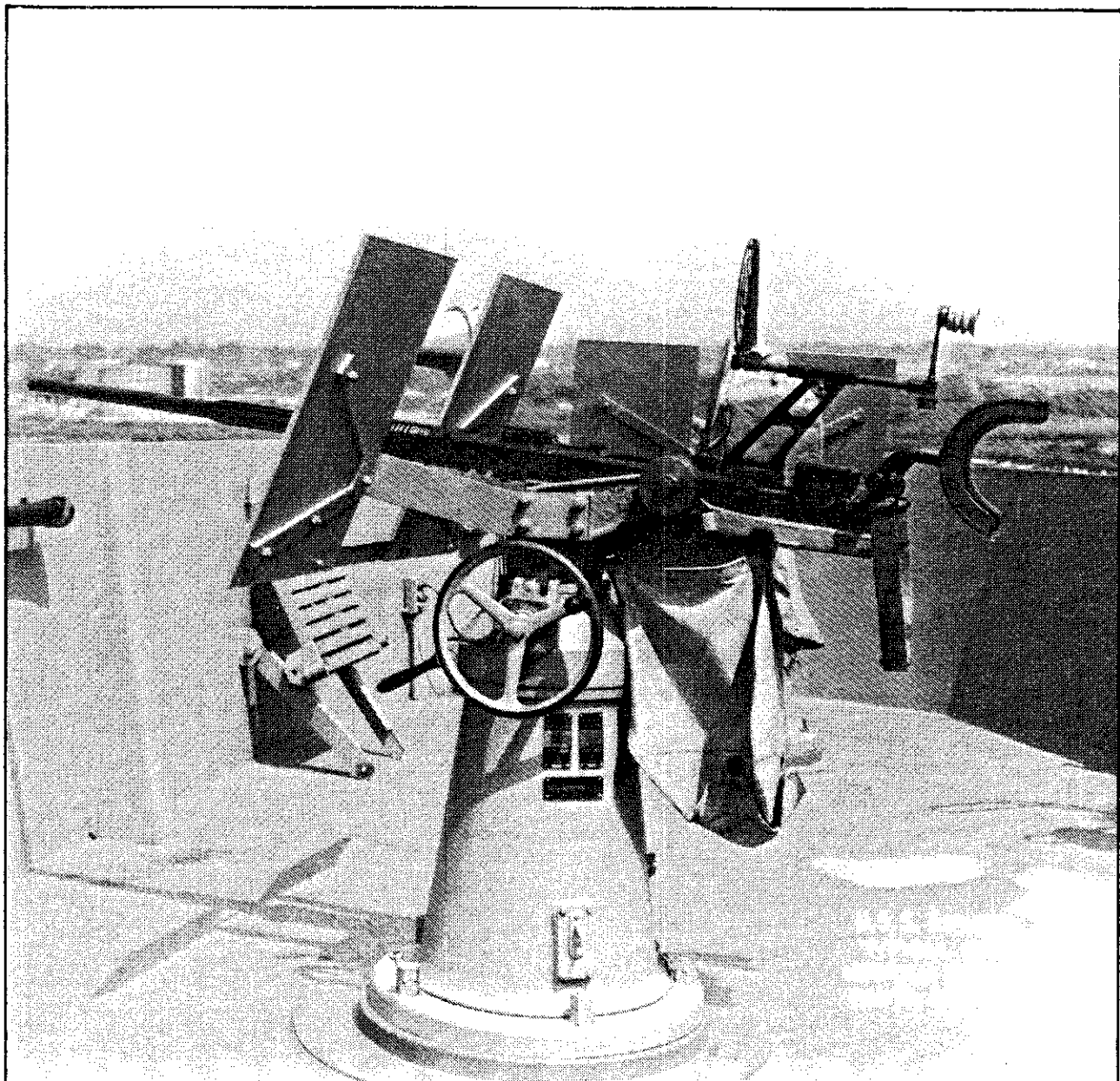




*The 40-mm Bofors gun fired a two-pound explosive shell with an effective range of about 2,800 yards. It was primarily an antiaircraft weapon, but destroyers also used their 40-mm's against enemy strongpoints when they provided close-in gunfire support during landings. The gun crew for a twin mount consisted of a pointer, a trainer, a gun captain and four loaders (two for each barrel). The Bofors was capable of firing about 160 rounds/barrel/minute, but the number of rounds actually fired depended on the ability of the loaders to provide an uninterrupted supply of ammunition. (Official U.S. Navy photograph.)*

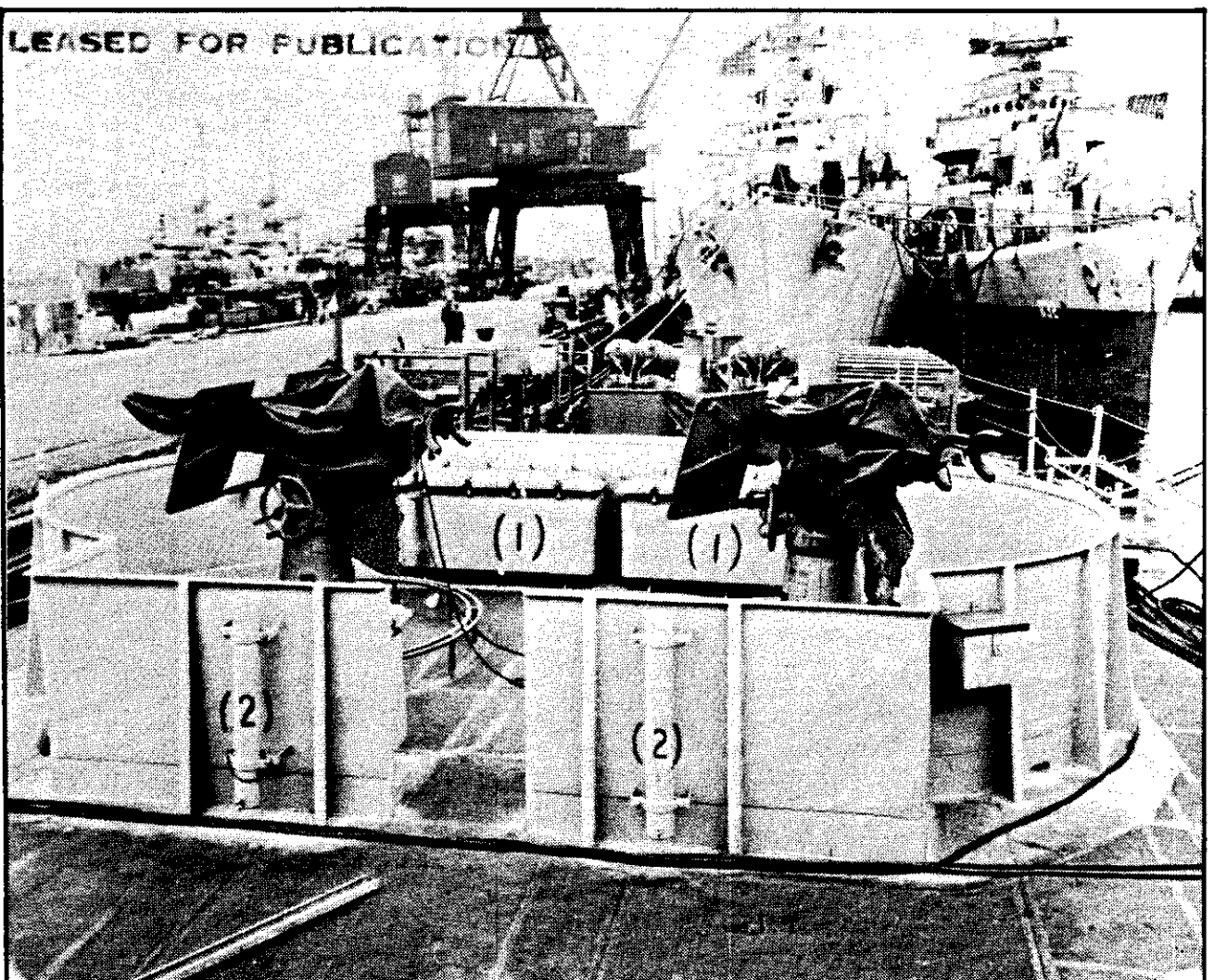






*In 1941 the 20-mm Oerlikon air-cooled machine gun began to replace the .50-cal. water-cooled machine gun as the Navy's standard light antiaircraft weapon. (It was also called a machine cannon because it fired explosive shells.) This early Mark 4 version with an open-ring sight required a four-man crew: the gunner, a trunnion operator (to adjust the height of the gun carriage) and two loaders. When fitted with the Mark 14 gyroscopic sight, introduced in 1943, a range setter was also required to enter range data. The Oerlikon had an effective range of 1,600 yards and fired at a rate of 450 rounds/minute. (Official USN Photo.)*

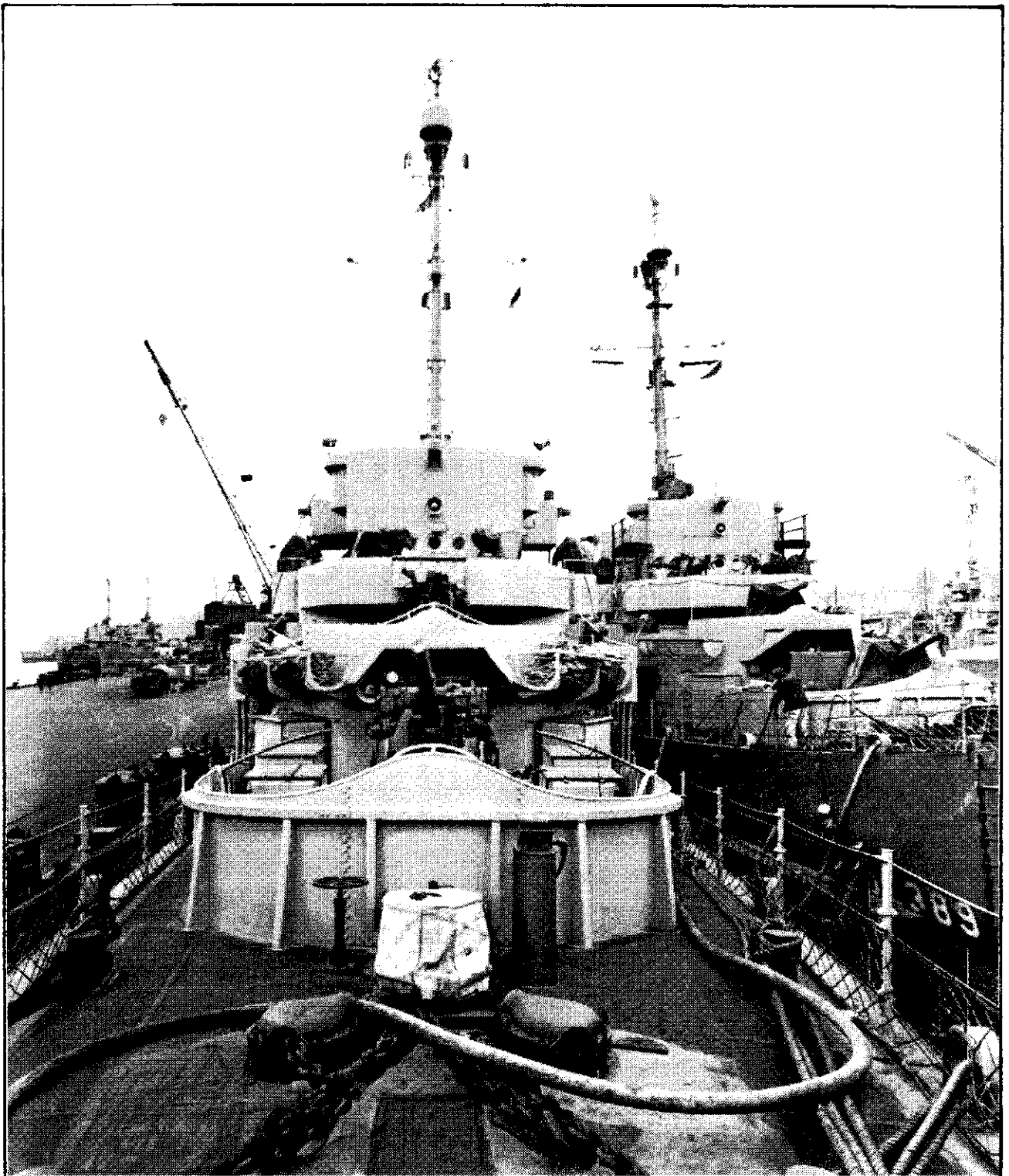




(New York, 3/29/44) Looking aft at the two 20-mm. Oerlikon machine cannons mounted on the Fiske's fantail (Nos. 9 & 10) during her availability at the Brooklyn Navy Yard in late March 1944. The containers marked with (1)'s in this view are ready service ammunition lockers provided to hold a supply of 60-round drum magazines, while the vertical cylinders marked with (2)'s are "dip pots" which could be filled with water and used to cool overheated gun barrels. The tanks for the Fiske's two smoke generators can be seen on the stern between the depth charge tracks. When compressed air was mixed with the chemicals in these tanks it produced a dense white smoke, really a sort of artificial chemical fog, which could conceal friendly ships from the enemy.

(Official U.S. Navy Photograph.)





(New York, 3/29/44) Looking aft from the *Fiske's* bow showing her anchor windlass (covered), her two forward 3-inch/50 guns, two 20-mm's in sponsons below the bridge and the bridge superstructure. The large dome on the ship's foremast is the protective cover for the SL surface-search radar's antenna. This S-band radar had a range of about 13 miles. (Official U.S. Navy Photograph.)



U.S.S. Fiske (DE-143)

The New York Times, August 13, 1944<sup>1</sup>

## **DESTROYER ESCORT IS SUNK IN ATLANTIC**

WASHINGTON, Aug. 12 (AP)—The destroyer escort Fiske was sunk by an enemy torpedo recently in the Atlantic, the Navy announced today.

The announcement gave no indication where the Fiske had been hit by the torpedo, launched from a U-boat. The next of kin of all the casualties aboard the vessel, which was commanded by Lieut. John A. Comly, 27 years old, have been notified, the Navy said. Lieutenant Comly is listed as a survivor.

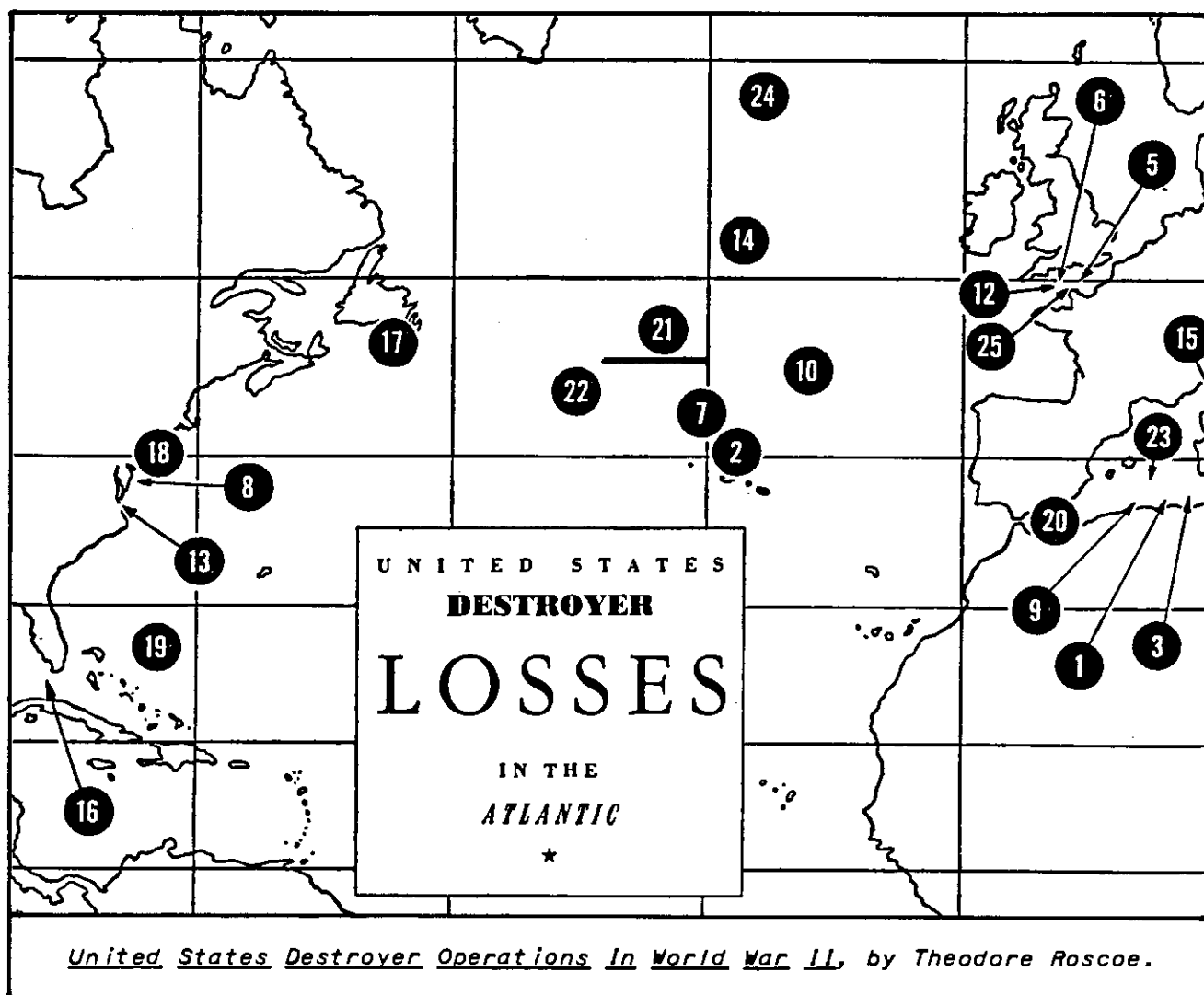
The Navy gave no indication of the number of casualties among the approximately 150 men aboard the Fiske. The Fiske was built by the Consolidated Steel Corporation at Orange, Tex., and was commissioned on Aug. 25, 1943.

The sinking of the Fiske raises to 175 the number of American warships lost since the war started. This includes 134 sunk, thirty-two listed as overdue and presumed lost and nine destroyed to prevent capture.

<sup>1</sup> Courtesy of survivor Robert R. White







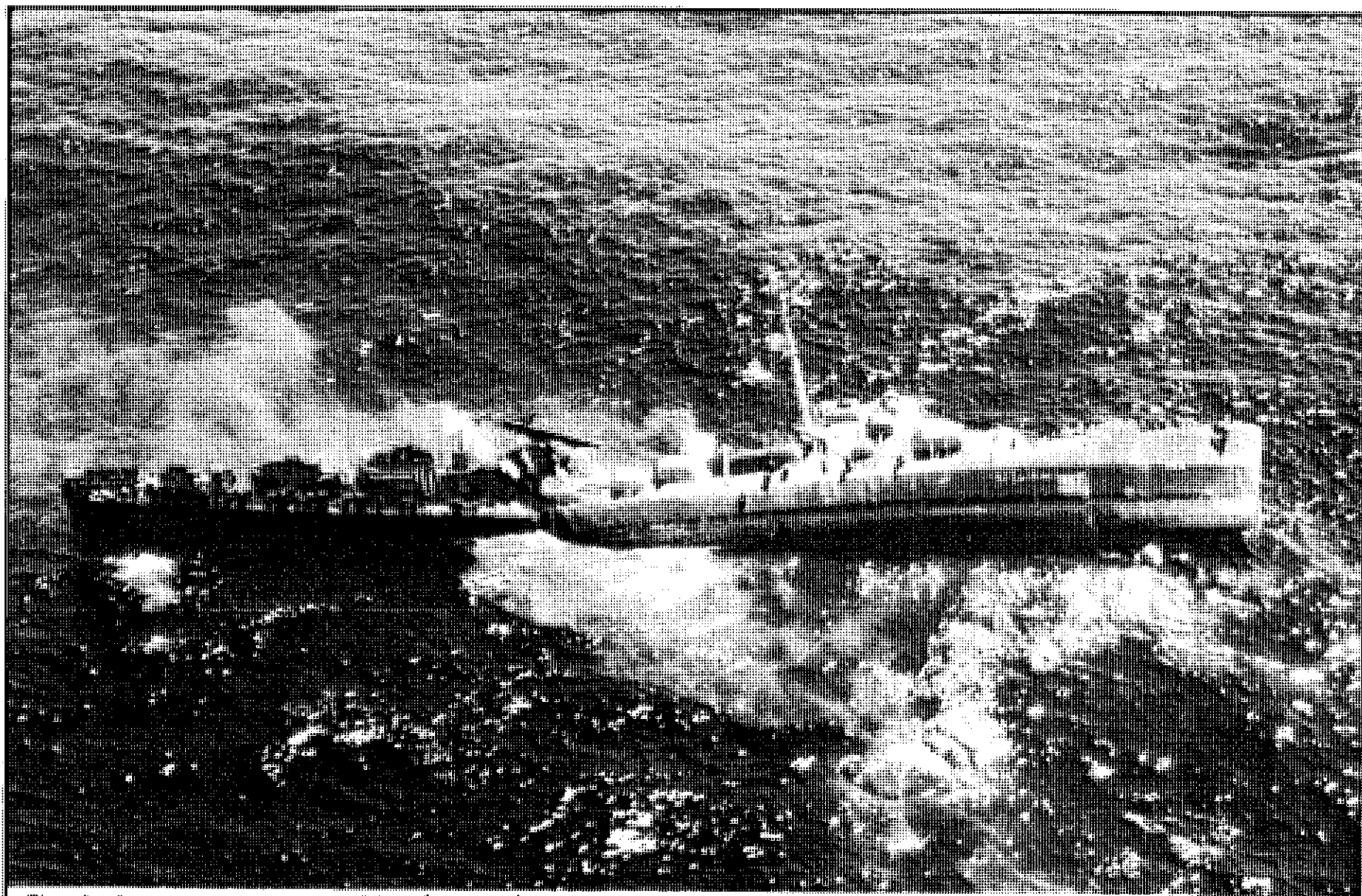
When the USS Fiske (DE-143) was torpedoed and sunk about 750 miles east of Newfoundland (No. 21, above) on August 2, 1944, she was attached to Task Group 22.6, an antisubmarine hunter-killer group formed around the escort carrier USS Wake Island (CVE-65) (C.O./CTG Capt. James R. Tague, USN). Other destroyer escorts in this task group were: Douglas L. Howard (DE-138), Farquhar (DE-139), Hill (DE-141) and J. R. Y. Blakely (DE-140). Cdr. J. H. Forshe, USNR, (ComCortDiv 9) was Screen Commander in the Douglas L. Howard.

The Fiske's survivors still don't agree on which side the torpedo hit, but the ship's commanding officer and the Bureau of Ships have concluded that the torpedo struck the starboard side and then exploded in the center of the after engineering spaces.

Germany's U-804, a large Type IXc submarine, was credited with sinking the Fiske. This U-boat was later sunk by Royal Air Force Mosquito bombers off northern Denmark on April 9, 1945.

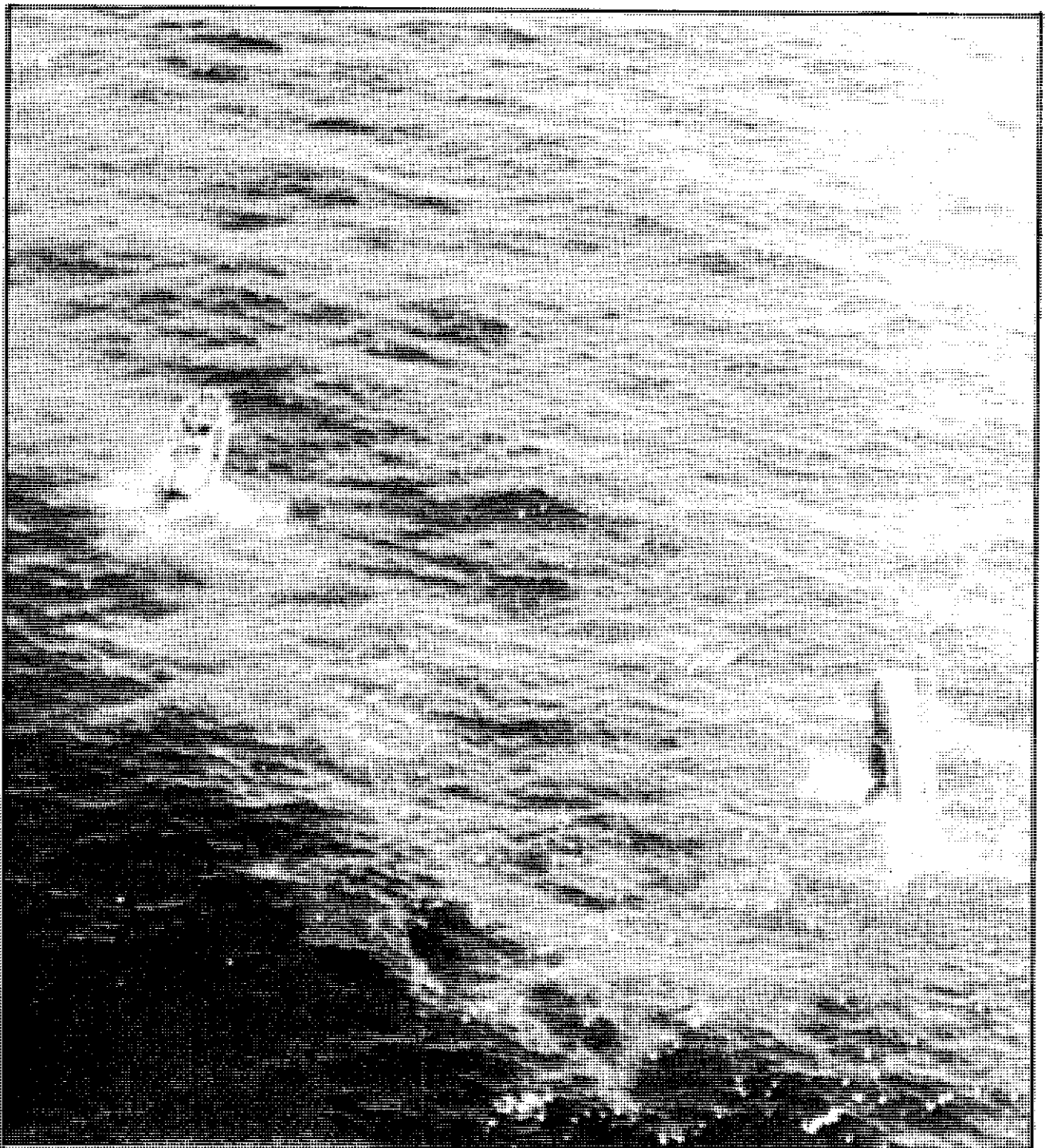
E. A. Wilde, Jr.  
December, 2000





The destroyer escort USS Fluke (DE-143) shortly after she was torpedoed while attacking a U-boat in the North Atlantic on August 2, 1944. The explosion broke the ship's back and split the torpedo tube mount, allowing two of the torpedoes to fall out on deck. The vessel is breaking in two, and the crew can be seen beginning to abandon ship. Casualties were 33 killed, 65 wounded. (Official U.S. Navy Photograph)





After the Eise broke in two on August 2, 1944, the bow (at right) remained afloat for about an hour until it suddenly went under. The stern had to be sunk by gunfire four hours after the ship was torpedoed. (U.S. Navy Photo)



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ACTION REPORT

USS FISKE

DE 143

NO SERIAL

8 AUGUST 1944

ANTI-SUBMARINE ACTION BY SURFACE SHIP - REPORT OF

ACTION REPORT COVERING THE LOSS OF FISKE  
ON 2 AUGUST - A UNIT OF TASK GROUP 22.6  
IN LAT 47-11N LONG 33-29W - SURVIVORS RE-  
SCUED BY FARQUHAR - FORWARDS ASW-1 FORM  
REPORTS.

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Fleet Post Office  
New York, N.Y.  
8 August 1944.

From: Commanding Officer.  
To: The Commander In Chief, United States Fleet.  
Via: (1) Commander, Escort Division Nine (9).  
(2) Commander, Task Group 22.6 (Commanding Officer, U.S.S. WAKE ISLAND).  
(3) Commander, Destroyers, U. S. Atlantic Fleet.  
(4) Commander In Chief, U. S. Atlantic Fleet.  
Subject: Report of Action and Loss of U.S.S. FISKE (DE-143) 2 August 1944.  
Reference: (a) U.S.Navy Regulations, Arts. 712, 874(6), 948.  
(b) CinCLant Confidential letter 13CL-43 (Revised).  
(c) U.S.Navy Regulations Art. 908 (1) (2) (3).  
Enclosure: (A) ASW Form 2 (Revised 1942).  
(B) Position, Disposition and Ship track chart.

1. In compliance with references (a) and (b) this report of action and subsequent loss of the U.S.S. FISKE (DE-143) on 2 August 1944 is respectively submitted. The report required to the Secretary of the Navy will be made. The provisions of reference (c) have been complied with.

2. The U.S.S. FISKE, attached to Destroyer Escort Division Nine, Destroyers, U.S. Atlantic Fleet, was operating in company with Task Group 22.6, comprised of U.S.S. WAKE ISLAND (Commander, Task Group) and Destroyers Escort Division Nine, less U.S.S. FESSENDEN (DE-142). Commander Escort Division Nine in U.S.S. HOWARD (DE-138). The Task group's employment was that of carrier-escort anti submarine warfare.

3. On 2 August 1944 Task Group 22.6 was proceeding to operate against a German submarine reported about area 48°00'N 33°00'W. This U-boat was presumably a weather reporter as its position had been ascertained from broadcasts (weather) in a report received earlier on 2 August 1944. Another U-boat had reported west bound about area 46°00'N 30°30'W.

4. Times used herein are set down from times recorded in the logs of the U.S.S. FARQUHAR and times recalled by the Commanding Officer (FISKE). They are believed to be accurate within a minute and all times used are zone plus one (NAN). Courses and speeds are believed to be sufficiently accurate to present a true plot of the action in Enclosure (B) from 1210 on. The track of the U.S.S. HOWARD may be in error up to 1210, but is believed to be sufficiently accurate from that time on to present also a true plot of the action. Sonar

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U.S.S. FISKE (DE-143)

8 August 1944

Subject: Report of Action and Loss of U.S.S. FISKE  
(DE-143) 2 August 1944.

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contact range and Submarine movement are accurate.

5. About 1157, the U.S.S. HOWARD reported smoke and undistinguishable object bearing 270°T, distance 9 miles. This same sighting was made by the FISKE. At the time of initial contact, The Task Group was on base course 310°T, speed 15 knots, zigzagging in accordance with plan 6(USF 10A). It was on the 330°T (1-47) leg of the zigzag at time of contact. Escorts were disposed in screen 54(USF 10A) as follows: U.S.S. FARQUHAR #1; U.S.S. FISKE #2; U.S.S. J.R.Y. BLAKELY#3; U.S.S. D.L.HOWARD #4. The U.S.S. HILL with defective Sonar gear was in station. 2180 from guide. First contact was by sighting of a white puff of smoke such as is given off by a deisel motor when subjected to sudden load. It was then picked up by SL Radar at a distance of about 9 miles bearing about 270°T. This sighting was not definitely ascertained to be a submarine at the time but it was felt reasonably sure to be such as only a few pips were obtained by SL Radar when it disappeared. Visual contact was maintained for approximately three minutes. To the best of my knowledge, the above agreed with observations and reports of the U.S.S. HOWARD.

6. At 1157 the U.S.S. HOWARD reported that it was proceeding to investigate the contact and ordered the FISKE to accompany. It appeared that the HOWARD came to course 275°T and flank speed of 20-21 knots and ordered FISKE to steer 285°T and make best speed. At that time number one main engine had developed trouble in timing-Servo motor and could not make required RPM's for flank speed, but with emergency full load on other three engines, FISKE made about 20 knots which enabled it to keep up with the HOWARD on way to the contact. Course of 285°T was opening the interval between the two ships gradually and placed the HOWARD a few degrees forward of FISKE's beam. About 1210 DRT plot was compared with HOWARD's and reported in close agreement. FISKE was ordered to steer 275°T. The interval had opened to 3950 yards and remained about the same until Sonar contact was made at 1232.

7. About 1218 speed was reduced to 15 knots. The HOWARD reported that it believed the contact point would be passed just between us if we continued on present course. I believe that agreed with FISKE's plot. About 1223 HOWARD reported contact point to be 1 3/4 miles ahead. (If that report was actual range to spot, HOWARD's DR contact on enclosure (B) is correct. If 1 3/4 miles was distance to run before point abeam, HOWARD's DR point should be advanced 900 yards on 275°T.) At 1224 FISKE had DR contact point bearing 255°T, 2 miles. At 1228 HOWARD reported contact point between two ships but at 1229



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FISKE had contact point bearing 235°T, 2000 yards. By this time material condition "AFFIRM" had been set in all parts of the ship except mess halls. The FXR gear had not been streamed, but was readied to the extent that it was only necessary to release the brake to put it into operation.

8. The sonar range of the day by bathythermograph was long 200/17 MIKE. At 1232 Sonar reported a very weak echo bearing 183° range 2500 yards Enclosure (A). Material condition "AFFIRM" was reported set throughout the ship. It was reported set immediately to the HOWARD that the FISKE was coming left to investigate a contact which was just about midway between the ships. At that time the HOWARD was bearing about 185°T-190°T, 3900 yards. As the sound range recorder had been in "standby" position, it was only necessary to switch it to "run" position to get an actual range of 2000 yards. It is believed that this should be used for the actual contact range rather than the 2500 yards read from the range indicator by the operator.

9. By 1223, FISKE was on approach course of 180°T conning on outer bearings with use of BDI. By this time sonar contact was definitely established as a submarine and report as such was made to the HOWARD, which, it is believed, slowed and turned right coming to a course of about 000°T. No interference from HOWARD's Sonar gear (20 kcs - FISKE 24 kcs). Prepared to make a depth charge attack taking into consideration the sound range of the day, initial sonar contact range and length of time of contact after sighting. 7.2" projectors were also manned ready for firing in event type of attack was changed.

10. When range had been closed to about 1500 yards, the HOWARD was assured that target was a submarine and that no ruses such as "Pillenwarfers" were apparent. The echo had a definite metallic ring with a moderate to marked down doppler. Target movement had been very slight, 3° to right at 1300 yards. With range about 1200 yards, it was reported to HOWARD that attack appeared to be a stern chase and that target was moving toward HOWARD, which was bearing about 015° Relative and about 2500 yards distant. The last recorded Sonar range was 1075 yards. There had been no change in doppler or range rate and target seemed to be moving slightly right. CIC reported original sonar contact about 500 yards south of DR contact and plotted sub on course of 180°T-185°T with no irregularities to plot. At 1235, several seconds after a sonar range of 1075 yards, the FISKE was jolted by a terrific underwater explosion amidships. No torpedo propeller had been heard on Sonar gear. No one had seen any wakes.



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Degaussing was off. There were no known defects to propellers. Due to type of attack FXR gear was not streamed as it was believed it would have the effect of drawing a torpedo into the ship fired from a submarine dead ahead.

11. The cause of this explosion was apparently a torpedo, but the possibility of a mine should not be overlooked. The immediate effect of the explosion was to force the ship down by both bow and stern and to raise it amidships, then settling to be awash amidships with reduced free board fore and aft and a port list of about 20 degrees slowing righting to about 15 degrees. Water was taken over by the stern sufficiently to cause men stationed there to float free of the deck; forward, small amounts of water were reported taken over. All communications and power throughout the ship were lost. The locus of the explosion was about frame 99 which was at the bulkhead between Engineering spaces B-3 and B-4. The remaining force expended itself chiefly between frames 83 and 128 with the following results: Ship's back broken; Compartments B-3 and B-4 completely blown out port and starboard and flooded; port side main deck torn and holding by few shreds of plating; starboard main deck badly buckled and tearing loose; port and starboard bulkheads to deck house blown out; deck forward of torpedo tubes blown out and 20MM platforms 5, 6, 7 and 8 crumpled; torpedo tubes split and inclined downward to port 15 degrees with two torpedoes on deck (no hot runs experienced); ruptured after bulkhead to compartment B-2 with flooding; splitting of bottom and flooding at least under compartment C-305M; numerous personnel casualties.

12. Immediate concern was with an attempt to keep the ship afloat. Emergency sound powered phones were ordered rigged, depth charges set on safe and 7.2 projectors secured. There were no subsequent depth charge explosions. About 1240 there was a muffled explosion forward which occurred in the vicinity of the paint locker or 7.2 projector magazine (frames 18-35). This was not of the jolting nature of a torpedo but due to some internal explosion for which there was no apparent reason. Material condition "AFFIRM" had been still well set forward, but the force of the initial explosion had blown off several hatches in the stern section and probably sprung others. This second explosion was believed to have blown off the hatch to one of the above spaces. There was a blinding flash in that area followed by dense smoke making it nearly impossible for personnel to make an investigation. It was later revealed that there were two holes about four feet square approximately five feet above the keel and a few frames aft of the Sonar dome. There were no fires at any other place on board.





8 August 1944

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Subject: Report of Action and Loss of U.S.S. FISKE  
DE-143 2 August 1944.

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13. The number of casualties was not known but word was received on the bridge that there were a great many aft. It was believed best to put over nesses and life rafts with swimmers to tow them away from the ship. The forward section had listed to about 25 degrees and was quickly breaking loose from the after section, which had settled considerably and was down by the forward end but had little or no list. By 1245 the ship broke in two sections and the order to abandon ship was given making sure that wounded and unjured men were gotten safely to rafts which were well clear of the ship by this time. Abandoning ship was all extremely orderly process, a fact which was most gratifying to the Commanding Officer to know that eleven months of highly organized training and discipline were still producing results at the very end.

14. The forward section, once loose from the after half, continued to increase its list to port and settle by the after end very rapidly. When the list had increased to about 60°, the Commanding Officer left the bridge and took a position on starboard side of the Hull. There were no signs of the fire forward. The stern section was down farther by its forward part, the torpedo tubes being just clear of the water. It was still on an even keel, and felt then it might have been a mistake to abandon that section so soon. To the very best of my knowledge there was no man left above on that section and only Lieutenant Bilderback, the Chief Engineer, and BILBEE, MoMM2c on the forward half, which was rapidly increasing its list to about 80 degrees. Shortly after the above mentioned officer and enlisted man abandoned ship, the Commanding Officer left at about 1254, nineteen minutes after the first explosion.

15. Within two minutes after the Commanding Officer abandoned ship, the bow section assumed a vertical position and settled bow up to about frame 35. Within 5 minutes, the stern section capsized and remained afloat at an angle of about 25 degrees gradually reaching the vertical, and remaining afloat with screws awash until sunk by gun fire from HOWARD about 1645. The bow section sank at 1342.

16. All survivors were rescued by 1620 by the U.S.S. FARQUHAR (DE-139). The officers and men of the U.S.S. FISKE performed throughout in a manner which was in keeping with the highest traditions of the naval service and do reflect much credit thereon. Special mention is due Ensign Eugene L. Swearingen, SC, USNR and ANDREU, RmM3c, USNR for the excellent work they did in caring for the many wounded on the stern section of the ship and in seeing to it that those men were gotten safely from the ship to rafts.



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Report of Action and Loss of U.S.S. FISKE  
(DE-143) 2 August 1944.

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Credit is also due Lieutenant Commander D. E. WALTER, DE-V(G), USNR, Commanding Officer, U.S.S. FARQUHAR for the efficiency of his ship in the rescuing and handling of survivors and for the untiring efforts of the officers and men under his command in connection with the above. Special credit and praise is due Lieutenant (jg) Frank R. KEITH, MC, USNR, for his excellent treatment of and care for the sixty wounded or injured personnel among whom there were over twenty fractures, many had lacerations and other undetermined injuries. Through his untiring efforts, the Commanding Officer believes that many men may now be listed as injured instead of dead and practically all will be soon fit to serve the navy again.

17. As a result of this action, it is suggested that (1) all men below decks be required to wear steel helmets at battle stations. (2) That all men with battle stations be provided with kapok life jackets in place of or in addition to life belts, and that they be constantly instructed in the necessity for wearing kapok jackets properly. (3) That men stationed on weather decks below superstructure deck be instructed to try to stand on ball of feet with knees bent or in some other satisfactory manner that will tend to reduce leg fractures. (4) That up to date muster rolls be kept at various places throughout the ship such as in water tight containers on life rafts and nets. (5) That additional life nets made of kapok jackets between two cargo nets be available for use. (6) That straps that can be easily fastened to a man in the water be available by which to bring injured personnel on board.

J. A. COMLY.

cc: ComInCh USFLEET (Advanced copy)  
ComCortDiv 9  
CTG, 22.6  
ComDesLant



FIRST ENDORSEMENT

S-E-C-R-E-T

DECLASSIFIED

COMMANDER ESCORT DIVISION NINE  
U.S.S. DOUGLAS L. HOWARD (DE-138)  
c/o Fleet Post Office,  
New York, N. Y.  
27 August 1944.

From: Commander Escort Division NINE.  
To: Commander In Chief, United States Fleet.

1. Forwarded.

2. Credit for small loss of life is due to the splendid organization and discipline of both the U.S.S. FISKE and U.S.S. FARQUHAR and the able handling of both ships by their respective Commanding Officers. I concur in the commendation of Lt(jg) Frank R. Keith, USN for his untiring efforts in the face of an almost overwhelming situation. It is difficult to single out others, of which I am sure there were many, for special commendation as no opportunity has or will be presented for me to make a thorough investigation. I believe a letter of commendation to the U.S.S. FARQUHAR as a unit would be in order as I believe every man aboard is deserving of praise.

3. Of the recommendations contained in para. 17 I concur with 1,4,5, and 6. #2 would be desirable in warm weather but impractical at other times. In the case of #3 men should be instructed that standing in the manner suggested would reduce injuries and to assume such a position if forewarned of being torpedoed, a not very likely situation.

4. The Commanding Officer of the U.S.S. FARQUHAR has made the following recommendations in a separate report but which are repeated here as they are considered very pertinent.

- (a) More than 60 survivors kits be placed aboard each D.E.
- (b) That deck plates in Engine Rooms be checked and properly secured.
- (c) That 12 qualified, trained swimmers be available for rescue work. Each with a harness and line attached and attended by men on deck.
- (d) That each ship have many heaving lines available. (FARQUHAR expended 25).

  
J. H. FORSHEW

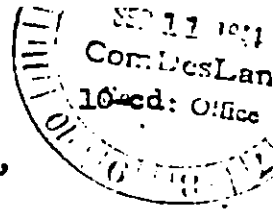


File No.  
CVE 65/A16-3

U. S. S. WAKE ISLAND (CVE 65)

Serial 00160

Care of Fleet Post Office,  
New York, N.Y.  
3 September 1944



S-E-C-R-E-T

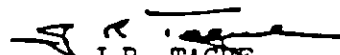
DECLASSIFIED

SECOND ENDORSEMENT to  
CO USS FISKE secret ltr  
no file no serial dated  
8 August 1944

From: Commander Task Group 22.6 (Commanding Officer,  
U.S.S. WAKE ISLAND).  
To : The Commander-in-Chief, United States Fleet.  
Via : (1) Commander Destroyers, U.S. Atlantic Fleet.  
(2) Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Atlantic Fleet.  
Subject: Report of Action and Loss of U.S.S. FISKE (DE-143)  
2 August 1944.

1. Forwarded.

2. I concur in the recommendation for a commendation for Lieutenant (junior grade) Frank R. KEITH, MC, U.S. Naval Reserve. The untiring efforts of Doctor Keith and his assistants was brought to my attention when the FARQUHAR was called alongside the WAKE ISLAND to transfer medical supplies. The number of seriously injured, including numerous bad fractures, created an extremely serious situation which Doctor Keith handled in a most commendatory manner.

  
J.R. TAGUE





Refer to A16-3(3)/FF13-6  
Serial

UNITED STATES FLEET  
DESTROYERS, ATLANTIC FLEET

00112

DECL **SECRET**

Care of Fleet Post Office,  
New York, N. Y.,

15 SEP 1944

THIRD ENDORSEMENT to:  
CO FISKE secret ltr.  
No file no serial dated  
8 August 1944.

From: Commander Destroyers, U.S. Atlantic Fleet.  
To: Commander in Chief, United States Fleet.  
  
Via: Commander in Chief, United States Atlantic Fleet.  
  
Subject: Report of Action and Loss of U.S.S. FISKE (DE-143),  
2 August 1944.  
  
Reference: (d) FTP 223, Article 1433.  
(e) CinCLant Secret Dispatch 032358/39 of June 1944.

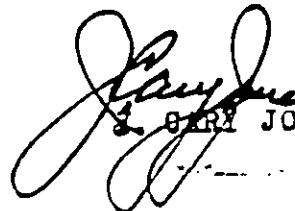
1. Insufficient evidence is present in this one report to assume that the U.S.S. FISKE was hit by a torpedo fired from other than the submarine under attack.

2. References (d) and (e) outline methods of attack. It is recommended that reference (d) be amplified to cover a single ship attacking an enemy submarine whose depth is not known, so that the attacking ship drops one charge from the stern rack immediately upon sonar contact. This procedure is covered in reference (d), but has not been interpreted to apply to such cases as the FISKE's.

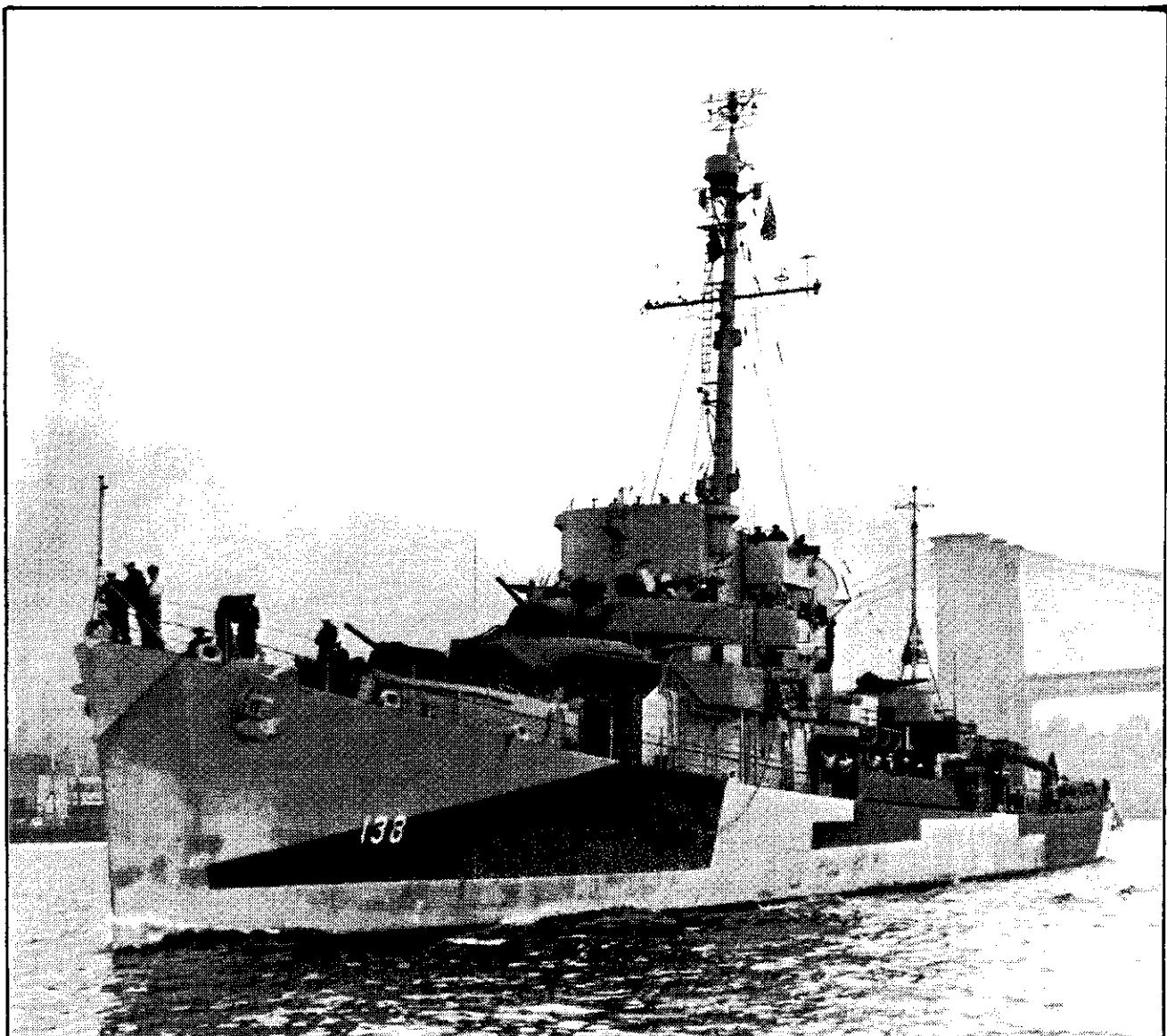
3. Recommendations contained in paragraph 17 are commented on as follows:

- (1) Not concurred in.
- (2) Covered by allowance.
- (3) Impractical. Repair parties should lie down.
- (4) Concurred in.
- (5) Considered unnecessary.
- (6) Covered by Rescue Survivor Bill.

Transmission by Registered Guard  
Mail or U. S. Registered Mail is  
authorized in accordance with Article  
26(15) (e) and (f), U.S. Navy Regula-  
tions.

  
J. B. JONES





The destroyer escort USS Douglas L. Howard (DE-138) in New York's East River (Brooklyn Bridge astern) on 1 September 1944. The Howard and the Fiske were detached from their task group on 2 August 1944 to attack a submarine sighted 9 miles away. After the Fiske was torpedoed the Howard continued the attack and then circled the rescue area while the USS Farquhar (DE-139) picked up the Fiske's survivors. (Official U.S. Navy Photograph.)



D E N T I A L

PAGE 254

DECK LOG—REMARKS SHEET

UNITED STATES SHIP

U.S.S. DOUGLAS L. HOWARD (DE-138)

Wednesday, 2 August

(Day) (Date) (Month)

1944

0000-0400

Steaming on course 005T, 005 pgc, 022 psc; speed 15 knots, 259 RPM; escorting USS WAKE ISLAND (CVE-65), in company with other units of Task Group 22.6. Formation zig-zagging according to plan. 0116 Formation ceased zig-zagging. 0137 Formation c/c to 265T, 265 pgc, 278 psc to launch aircraft. 0214 Completed flight operations; formation c/c to 000T, 000 pgc, 019 psc; formation commenced zig-zagging according to plan.

*Thomas H. Calhoun*  
Thomas H. Calhoun,  
Lieut. (jg) USNR.

0400-0800

Steaming as before. 0536 Formation c/c to 245T, 245 pgc, 257 psc to recover aircraft. 0545 Completed flight operations and resumed base course. 0619 Formation c/c to 240T, 240 pgc, 252 psc to launch aircraft. 0626 Completed flight operations and resumed base course.

*W. T. Holmes*  
W. T. Holmes,  
Lieut., USNR.

0800-1200

Steaming as before. 1009 Formation c/c to 265T, 265 pgc, 278 psc to recover aircraft. ~~C/c to 15 knots.~~ 1017 Completed flight operations. 1019 Formation resumed base course. 1020 Made daily inspection of magazines and smokeless powder samples. Condition normal. 1045 Left station in screen to investigate sound contact. 1048 Fired Mk X projector. Results negative. Steaming on various courses and speeds to regain contact. 1130 Contact classified as non-submarine; set course to rejoin formation. 1157 Sighted submarine at conning tower depth bearing 285T, distant 9 miles. 1158 c/c to 285T, 285 pgc, 295 psc; c/s to 20 knots, 360 RPM, to close submarine, in company with U.S.S. FISKE (DE-143). *J.N.M.*

*F. W. Roberts*  
F. W. Roberts,  
Lieut. (jg) USNR.

1200-1600

Steaming as before. 1225 Went to General Quarters. 1231 U.S.S. FISKE torpedoed, Latitude 47 14N; Longitude 32 32W. 1235 Got sound contact; commenced attack. 1240 Fired depth charges. 1252 Regained contact and proceeded to attack. 1255 Fired Mk X projector, results negative. 1256 Fired depth charge pattern; continued searching area endeavoring to regain contact. 1330 U.S.S. FARQUHAR (DE-139) joined company and commenced rescuing survivors from U.S.S. FISKE.

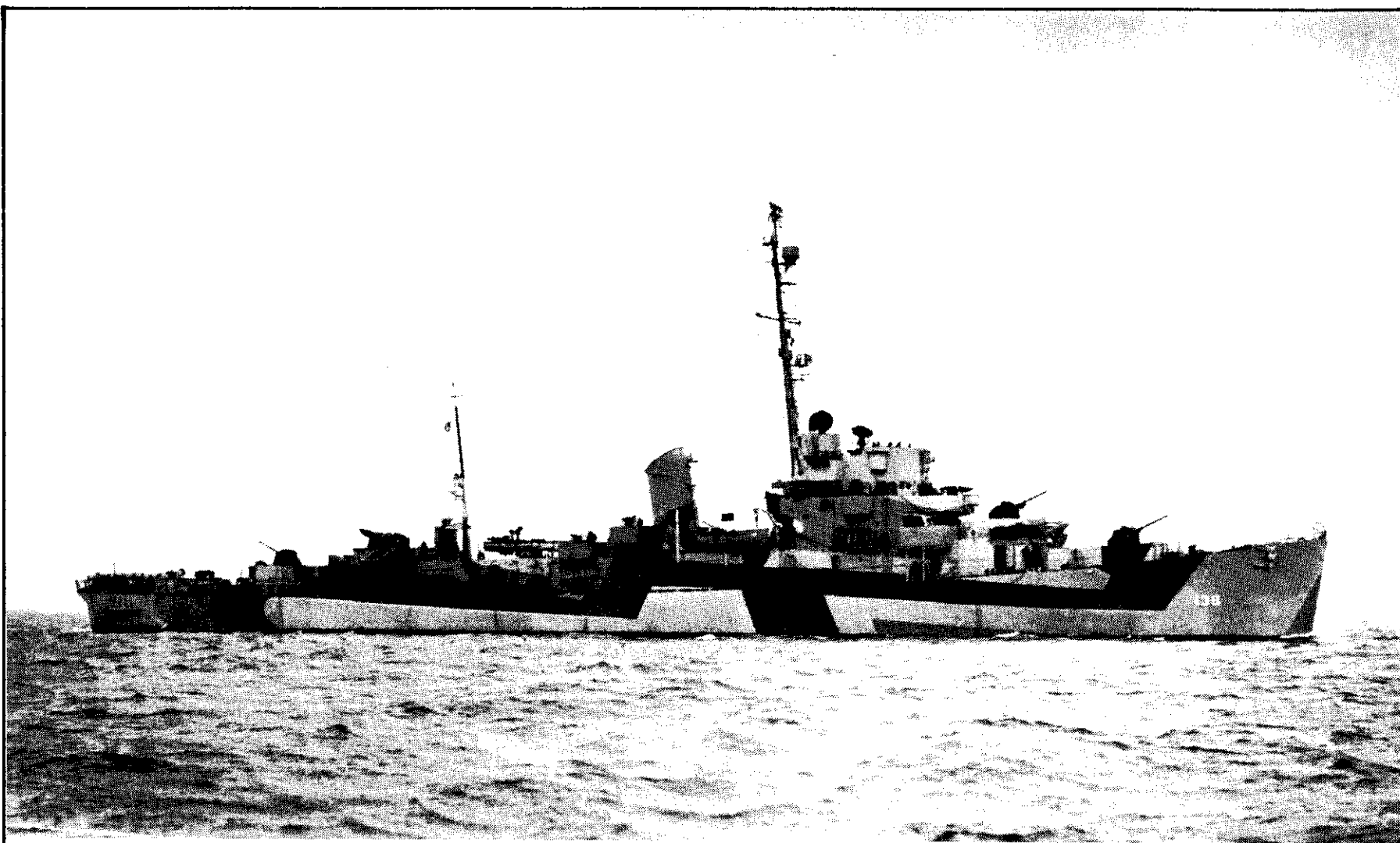
*A. S. Hemphill*  
A. S. Hemphill,  
Lieut. (jg) USNR.

1600-2000

Steaming as before. 1644 Commenced firing at stern of U.S.S. FISKE, which was still afloat. 51 Rounds 3" - 50 Cal. ammunition expended. No casualties. 1700 Commenced retiring search plan in company with U.S.S. FARQUHAR. 1734 Upon orders of CTG 22.6, commenced steaming on base course 118T, 118 pgc, 236 psc, speed 20 knots, 360 RPM to rejoin U.S.S. WAKE ISLAND. Commenced zig-zagging according to plan. 1914 Rejoined Task Group 22.6 and took station in screen; base course 220T, 220 pgc, 238 psc, speed 16 knots, 265 RPM, zig-zagging according to plan. 1926 Formation c/c 180T, 180 pgc, 206 psc.

*W. T. Holmes*  
W. T. Holmes,  
Lieut., USNR.





(USS Douglas L. Howard (DE-138), New York, 9/1/44) This view of the Fiske's sister ship shows the stub mainmast (aft of torpedo tubes) stepped on many Atlantic-based escort vessels to carry the HF/DF antenna for "Huff-Duff," the high-frequency direction-finder gear that could locate radio transmissions from surfaced U-boats. Also shown are the ship's three dual-purpose (air and surface targets) 3-inch/50 Mk. 22 guns (two forward, one aft). These guns fired fixed-case ammunition with a 13-lb. projectile. Their maximum range at 45 degrees elevation was about 7 miles. (Official U.S. Navy Photograph.)

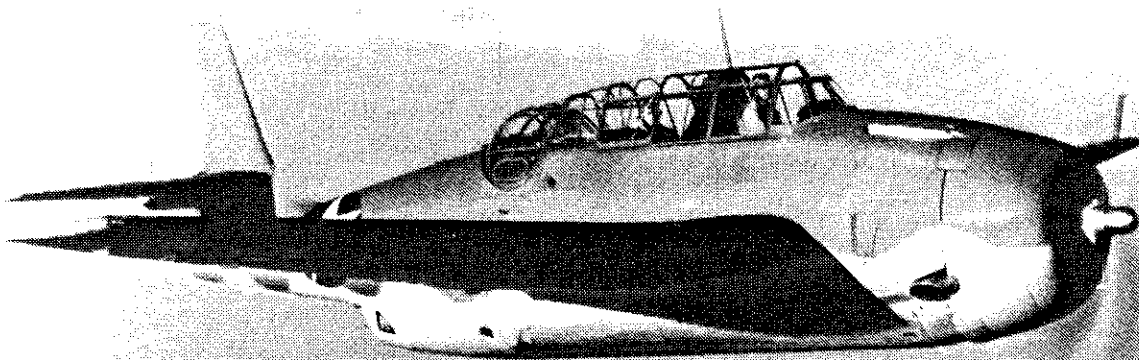






The Fluke's stern is shown here with depth charges still in their tracks and with her screws awash. The waterline cuts across the splinter shield around the two 20-mm's on her fantail. This section finally had to be sunk by gunfire (31 rounds of 3-inch ammunition) from a sister ship, the USS Douglas L. Howard (DE-135).  
(Official U.S. Navy Photograph.)





The dramatic photographs of the Fiske after she was torpedoed were taken from a TBM Avenger (General Motors' duplicate of Grumman's TBF) embarked on the escort carrier USS Wake Island (CVE-65). The TBF-1 Avenger shown above had a crew of three (pilot, gunner, bombardier), internal bays for a torpedo or a 2000-lb. bomb and a power-operated turret with a .50-cal. machine gun. Alternative loads were four 500-lb. bombs or four 325-lb. depth bombs. The TBF-1 was also armed with a fixed .30-cal. gun on the cowl's right side and a .30-cal. ventral gun behind the bomb bay.

Wingspan:	54'2"	Engine:	Wright R-2600-8
Length:	40'	Horsepower:	1700 at takeoff
Height:	16'5"		1450 at 12,000 ft.

Gross Weight:	13,667 lbs.	Top Speed:	271 mph at 12,000 ft.
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(Photograph: U.S. Naval Institute Collection)





The escort carrier USS Wake Island (CVE-65) underway on 9 November 1944, finished in a Measure 33/10 camouflage scheme. These Casablanca-class carriers displaced 6,730 tons (standard), were 498'10" long and had a rated speed of 19 knots. Two elevators and one catapult were installed in the 105-foot wide flight decks. Composite Squadron VC-5B (Lt. Cdr. Richard K. Gould, USN), with 9 FM-2 Wildcat fighters and 12 TBM-1C Avenger torpedo bombers, embarked on the Wake Island after she departed Norfolk in June, 1944. Fifty escort carriers of this class were completed within a year (7/8/43 to 7/8/44) at the Kaiser Shipyard, Vancouver, Washington. Five were sunk during the war. (Official U.S. Navy Photograph.)



CVE65/A12-1/A9-4  
Serial 00165

U.S.S. WAKE ISLAND  
Care of Fleet Post Office  
New York, New York  
1 September 1944

DECLASSIFIED  
Authority UNO 968/133  
By SA NARA Date 7/2/82

**SECRET**

From: The Commanding Officer.  
To: The Commander-in-Chief, United States Fleet.

Subject: War Diary for August 1944.

Reference: (a) CominCh ltr Serial 7152 of 23 October 1943.

1. In accordance with reference (a), the following is submitted:

1 August, Z.D. Plus 1

At sea engaged in anti-submarine warfare in obedience to CincLant's secret orders of 3 June 1944; searching for westbound U-Boat in vicinity 43-30N 31-30W in obedience to CincLant's secret orders of 27 July 1944. TG 22.6 constituted as follows: U.S.S. WAKE ISLAND (CVE65), CAPTAIN J. R. TAGUE, U.S.N., commanding; CORDIV 9 less FESSENDEN — ComCortDiv Nine in D. L. HOWARD (DEL38), FARQUHAR (DEL39), BLAKELY (DEL40), HILL (DEL41), FISKE (DEL43). Flew four standard searches, forward and beam areas, plus CAP. Hours flown, 67:28; total to date (this cruise), 2315:23. Positions:

0800	42-52N	30-50W
1200	43-25N	31-13W
2000	44-15N	32-03W

2 August, Z.D. Plus 1

Steaming in operating area, searching for U-Boat plotted westbound on latitude 46N. At 0144, 0539 and 1121 launched three-section four hour searches, plus CAP on first search. HOWARD and FISKE had sound contact (non-sub) at 1045 and investigated, rejoining screen at 1148. At 1158 ComScreen in HOWARD sighted conning tower bearing 270(T), distant 8 miles. TG changed course to 090(T) and detached HOWARD and FISKE to investigate. All planes in air were recalled and a killer TEM catapulted at 1209. At 1235, while making a run with HOWARD on a sound contact, FISKE was hit amidships, starboard side, and broken in two. There were indications torpedo was fired by a second sub. First report of casualties gave four dead, twenty-six missing, fifty-five seriously injured. FARQUHAR was detached to support HOWARD and later picked up survivors. At least two more torpedoes were fired at HOWARD. At 1335 HILL reported sighting two small black objects abeam to starboard, distant 3 miles, which disappeared: Position 26 miles from FISKE torpedoing. At 1534 BLAKELY, on port bow, had sound contact at a position 43 miles from FISKE torpedoing and delivered four attacks with undetermined results. At 1849 heavy fog and rain stopped flight operations. At 2041 FARQUHAR came alongside for transfer of medical supplies, having rejoined screen with HOWARD at 1935. Hours flown, 76:39; total to date, 2392:02. Positions:

0800	46-31N	32-13W
1200	47-13N	32-16W
2000	47-14N	32-19W

**FILMED**

- 1 -

1944 SEP 13 15 50  
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF  
FLAG OFFICE  
RECEIVED







The Fiske's rescue ship, the destroyer escort USS Farquhar (DE-139), is shown here approaching an escort carrier in October, 1944. After the Fiske was torpedoed on August 2, 1944, the Farquhar (Lt. Cdr. D. E. Walter, USNR) first conducted a sonar search of the area and then began rescuing survivors. In the next 2-1/2 hours the Farquhar remained dead in the water while she picked up 182 survivors and 4 bodies. Two of the survivors died on board from their wounds, and many others were seriously injured. All survivors were weak and chilled. About half of them had to be bodily hauled aboard. (U.S. Navy Photograph.)



~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

ACTION REPORT

USS FARQUHAR

DE 139

SERIAL-47

18 AUGUST 1944

ANTI-SUBMARINE ACTION BY SURFACE SHIP - REPORT OF

ACTION REPORT COVERING THE RESCUE OF  
SURVIVORS OF FISKE ON 2 AUGUST IN LAT.  
47-11N LONG. 33-29W - A UNIT OF TASK  
GROUP 22.6.

83943

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New York, N. Y.

Authority NND 9  
By RST NARA D

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

18 August 1944

From: The Commanding Officer.  
To: Commander in Chief, U. S. Fleet.  
Via: Commander Escort Division NINE.  
Commander Task Group 22.6.

Subject: Rescue of Survivors of USS FISKE (DE-143) -  
Report of.

Reference: (a) Art. 712(2), U. S. Navy Regulations.

1. In compliance with reference (a) subject report is submitted herewith:

TACTICAL SITUATION

1. On 2 August 1944, Task Group 22.6 was proceeding on a base course 210°(T). Screen five four was formed on the USS WAKE ISLAND. The USS HILL (DE-141) was astern of the carrier at Plane Guard Station.

2. At 1158 Commander Escort Division NINE in USS DOUGLAS L. HOWARD (DE-138) reported sighting an object on the horizon bearing 270°(T) and at 1159 requested permission for him and USS FISKE (DE-143) to investigate the object. Permission was granted by CTG 22.6. USS HOWARD and USS FISKE departed from the screen on course 275°(T). The USS J.R.Y. BLAKELY (DE-140) and USS FARQUHAR (DE-139) formed screen five two on the carrier.

3. At 1209 flight quarters was held on course 300°(T), (one TBF was launched) and at 1212 flight quarters was secured and the remainder of task group changed base course to 090°(T) which left USS FARQUHAR astern the carrier about 2000 yards.

4. At about 1236 TBS conversation and plane's report indicated the USS FISKE had been torpedoed. USS FARQUHAR requested permission from CTG 22.6 to proceed to the scene. Permission was granted and USS FARQUHAR reversed base course to 270°(T). At the time the FARQUHAR departed for the scene of the attack, word was passed over the public address system that USS FISKE had been torpedoed and all hands were ordered to General Quarters stations. The Captain took the conn and ordered all engines ahead flank. FIR gear had been previously streamed upon the initial sighting.



S. FARQUHAR (DE-139)

DECLASSIFIED

Authority. NND 91

By R.T. NARA D3

Serial 47

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New York, N.Y.

18 August 1944.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

Subject: Rescue of Survivors of USS FISKE (DE-143) -  
Report of.

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5. As soon as all stations were reported manned and condition "able" set, word was passed to the First Lieutenant and repair parties to prepare to pick up survivors. The Executive Officer left the flying bridge to take charge of the rescue operations on deck.

#### SEARCH OPERATIONS

1. Upon reaching a point four miles from the wreck of the USS FISKE, USS FARQUHAR began a zigzag plan consisting of 10 degree change of course at one minute intervals (maximum deviation from base course, 30 degrees). In compliance with orders from ComSortDivNINE on USS HOWARD the area south of USS FISKE was searched for approximately forty minutes before USS FARQUHAR proceeded to effect rescue operations. USS FARQUHAR on arriving at area where the FISKE survivors were was placed in such a position that the stern and bow of the FISKE afforded protection from torpedo attack for about 120 degrees on the port side. All engines were stopped. FZR gear was recovered immediately. USS HOWARD circled the area at a range of about 3000 yards. Word was passed to repair parties to commence picking up survivors. Ship immediately switched to listening watch on sound gear, switching to echo ranging whenever suspicious noises were heard on the sound gear. No contacts were made.

#### RESCUE PREPARATIONS

1. At General Quarters all repair parties went to their stations. Condition "able" was set and reported to the bridge. Two men were assigned to the Chief Boatswain Mate from each party to assist in breaking out rescue gear during approach to the scene, and the remainder stood by stations. A few minutes before ship arrived at the scene all members of repair parties, except telephone talkers, who remained at phones, were mustered on the starboard side for final instructions. All men were then sent to their respective rescue stations to complete preparations and to standby for survivors.





Serial 47

Fleet Post Office,  
New York, N. Y.

18 August 1944.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~Subject: Rescue of Survivors of USS FISKE (DE-143) -  
Report of.

2. Gear was assembled for rescue operations in accordance with DESLANT LETTER X-60 of 17 February 1944.

3. Division Medical Officer, Chief Pharmacist Mate and two other pharmacist mates broke out all necessary emergency first aid supplies. Sterilizer from C-206 was brought to wardroom and operating light rigged over wardroom table.

#### RESCUE OPERATIONS

1. The first groups on two life rafts and one floater net were brought on board from port side. Two or three men broke away from the rafts and swam to the side of the ship. After that, however, men waited on rafts to be picked up in turn. Discipline among survivors was excellent and most of them were very calm and collected. Very few were capable of climbing up the cargo nets or ladders unaided. About fifty percent of the men came aboard with only assistance of our men standing on outside of the rails and on the ladders. All of the others had to be bodily hauled aboard by means of heave lines around their bodies and under their arms. This latter group slowed down rescue operations considerably, as swimmers put over the side had to secure the hauling lines. A great number were severely injured of course, which made it necessary to be even more cautious about handling.

2. On deck, repair parties and others assisting in rescue work were hampered with slippery decks caused by oil from survivor's clothing, making it very difficult to maintain a footing. Also as stretchers filled up and no more injured could be taken in the wardroom, they had to be left lying on the deck, making it even more difficult for rescue work. Sand was scattered over the deck to make better footing.

3. Two or three other groups were next taken aboard on the starboard side. Many of these were in-



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18 August 1944

Subject: Rescue of Survivors of USS FISKE (DE-143) -  
Report of.

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jured. Men on the floater nets were particularly difficult to rescue as they were fouled up in the nets and many had to be cut out free.

4. The first drowned person brought aboard was on the port side. Artificial respiration was administered immediately and continued until the man was pronounced dead by the Medical Officer. A Negro Steward's Mate was brought aboard next and was dead, apparently from head injuries. The fourth dead man was taken aboard on the starboard side during the latter stages of the operation. Previously one body came down the port side but sank out of sight under the ship and was never located again. This man did not have on a life belt or jacket.

5. To the best of our knowledge, men were rescued from four life rafts, two floater nets, one rubber raft and one 40MM ammunition case. Only a few men were rescued alive who were isolated from the groups and depending on belts and jackets alone.

#### CARE OF SURVIVORS

1. All survivors were chilled and weak. Those who were able went aft to take off their clothes, then to showers where rugs were available to wipe off the oil. After a hot shower they were given clothes in the Machine Shop and sent below to after crews quarters to lie down. As soon as soup was ready they were fed in the mess hall. The less severely injured men were assisted through this operation by members of the crew. Severely injured men were placed in stretchers and taken to the wardroom until it was filled. Then they were left on deck for emergency treatment and taken below aft and put to bed;

2. The shower room and machine room were overcrowded, primarily because we were not able to give it immediate attention and because only sixty survivor kits were available. Many men had to wait some time before clothing could be obtained from our crew members.



Authority NND 967133  
By RS NARA Date 10/20REF ID: A9/L21  
Serial 47Fleet Post Office,  
New York, N. Y.~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

18 August 1944

Subject: Rescue of Survivors of USS FISK (DE-143) -  
Report of.

3. Many survivors came back on decks and it was almost impossible to make them go below and keep out of the way. We should have been more firm in this respect.

4. Berthing arrangements at the best were not good, but most of our men gave up their bunks for survivors. About 15 folding canvas cots and 8 or 10 extra mattresses were available and put in use in the after compartments.

5. Feeding the survivors was well handled. Extra mess cooks and cooks were made available by the FISK to relieve the situation.

#### CONCLUSIONS

As a result of this operation the following remarks and suggestions are listed:

1. The survivors were very calm and collected. There was no hysteria.
2. It is suggested that sand be placed on the deck near location where survivors will be brought aboard.
3. A number of serious lacerations were observed on personnel from the USS FISK caused by engine room deck plates not being secured. It is suggested that all ships secure their engine room deck plates.
4. Since arrival in port the commanding officer has read over the new DESLANT LETTER X-60 (Revision No. 2) and heartily recommends the procedure outlined. A number of things that could have been improved are adequately taken care of in this letter.



Serial 17

U. S. S. PERSONAL

Fleet Post Office,  
New York, N.Y.

18 August 1944

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

Subject: Rescue of Survivors of USS MINK (DE -143) -  
Report of.

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5. Commanding officer suggests that more than 60 survivor kits be placed on board.
6. As a matter of interest there were only three men picked up who were not on life rafts or nets. A floating 40MM ammunition case (can) saved the life of two men. It was understood that these cans had been placed on deck near the 40MM gun due to lack of storage facilities.
7. The Division Medical Officer and Pharmacist's Mates from this ship and USS FISKE did a praise-worthy job in treatment of all casualties.
8. It is recommended that all ships have at least 12 qualified and trained swimmers available.
9. All survivors brought aboard ship should not be allowed to participate in rescue operations. In many cases survivors felt it their duty to help out but actually were too tired.
10. It is recommended that the 300 foot telephone line be connected at Repair Two and used by the First Lieutenant to make reports to the bridge as the rescue operations proceed.
11. It is recommended that many heaving lines be available as more than 25 were expended during this operation.
12. Many men were tangled in floater nets when they came alongside and had to be cut free. Men should be instructed not to climb on to floater nets but to hang onto them.
13. Cargo nets alongside the ship should extend at least four or five feet below the water line.
14. It will be noted with interest that at least 50% of the survivors had to be bodily lifted aboard ship. In a period of about 2 1/2 hours 186 survivors





Serial 47

Fleet Post Office,  
New York, N. Y.

18 August 1944

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~Subject: Rescue of survivors of USS FISKE (DE-143) -  
Report of.

OFF

AUG 21

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were picked up. This was an average of about  
3 per minute.

15. It is recommended that a Signalman be detailed  
to a General quarters station aft -- either fan-  
tail ZONE's or depth charge s.

D. L. WALTER

cc: Cominch (Advance Copy)  
CinCLant  
ComDeslant



*U.S.S. Fiske (DE-143)*

*List Of Officers, 8/2/44<sup>1</sup>*

	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Branch</u>	<u>File #</u>	<u>Primary Duty</u>
COMLY, John Alfred	LT	USNR	96657	Commanding Officer
STOUT, William Jewell	LT	USNR	144178	Executive Officer
BILDERBACK, Arthur Haskel	LT	USN	168303	Engineering Off.
*RENTFRO, Robert Byron, Jr.	LT	USNR	230469	1st Lieutenant
**DICKINSON, William L.	LTjg	USNR	137741	Ass't. Engineering
CAUSEY, Enoch McLain	LTjg	USNR	149339	Communications
MITCHELL, Robert Harold	LTjg	USNR	224106	A.S.W. Officer
TURNER, John Hatcher	ENS	USNR	257395	Gunnery (acting)
COOK, George Wilson Manning	ENS	USNR	296973	Recognition Off.
SWEARINGEN, Eugene Laurel	ENS	USNR	307629	Supply/Disbursing
GEIERMANN, William Joseph	ENS	USNR	332695	Ass't. Gunnery
RIDGWAY, Claude Herman	ENS	USN	364272	Ass't. Engineering (Damage Control)

\* \* \* \* \*

Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Source: The List Of Officers for June, 1944, included in the ship's Deck Log at the National Archives, the list of officers rescued by USS Farquhar (DE-138) and officers' firsthand accounts (courtesy of survivor Robert R. White).

\* Wounded (\*\* Killed) when the ship was sunk by a German torpedo on 8/2/44 according to a machine-generated casualty report at the National Archives prepared by the Bureau of Naval Personnel after the war.

E. A. Wilde, Jr.  
August, 2000



U.S.S. Fiske (DE-143)

Muster Roll Of The Crew, 8/2/44<sup>1</sup>

**ALSTON, Herbert (n)	575-37-04	StM1c
ANDERSON, Hames Ernest, Jr.	659-42-69	S2c
ANDREU, Clifford Harley	267-97-35	PhM3c
**ASKEW, Theodore (n)	811-79-99	StM2c
BARSAMIAN, Harry (n)	700-81-34	S2c
BEACH, Archie LaBruce	269-21-48	S1c
BELA, Jack Mason	865-80-51	SoM2c
BENNETT, Bruce Donald	865-83-75	RdM3c
**BEST, Jack Lyon	657-75-90	S2c
BILBEE, Francis Marion	627-49-25	MoMM2c
BLACKMAN, Johnie Preston	654-34-03	SC3c
**BRADSHAW, George Thomas	803-63-48	S2c
*BRADY, John Edward, Jr.	579-08-72	S2c
BRAYNE, Francis Thomas	808-47-39	S2c
*BRIGGS, Robert William	907-01-34	S2c
*BROATMAN, Saul (n)	707-75-40	RM3c
BRODIE, George (n)	402-78-52	CPHM
BUNTON, Clyde Junior	839-21-21	S1c
BURK, Orile Claud	337-20-76	CGM
*BURKE, Charles (n)	573-09-24	GM3c
*BURKE, James Francis	816-80-44	S2c
**BUSTO, David (n)	831-12-44	F2c
CALTABIANO, Peter Alfred <sup>2</sup>	806-56-32	S2c
**CAMPILLO, Edward (n)	817-48-80	TM3c
*CAPASSO, Joseph Clyde	609-63-16	S2c
*CAPUTO, Victor Joseph	816-80-45	S2c
CAVEY, Glen Francis	758-87-29	S2c
CHURCH, Charles Frank	905-88-76	S2c
CICIONE, Samuel Junior	251-48-41	S2c
*CLARKE, David William, Jr.	927-46-63	S2c
COHEN, Solomon (n)	406-68-11	Y1c
COOK, Charles Hylan	225-28-75	SM3c
**COMMONS, Julian Joseph	627-31-31	QM2c
COOK, Ramon Henri	851-48-78	S1c
*CORNELL, Horace Edgar, Jr.	311-49-91	PhM1c
*COWDEN, Allan Raymond	283-25-37	MoMM2c
*CRUM, Johnie (n)	846-20-90	StM1c
*DAVIS, John Christopher	827-13-18	SK3c
DILLARD, Joe Samuel	837-48-90	SK3c
DeSTASI, Michael (n)	710-58-64	S1c
DONOHUE, Leonard James	356-91-83	SoM1c
*DOWDLE, Charles Norman	931-92-17	S2c
**DRISKELL, Marvin Henry	269-13-07	TM2c
*DRUMMOND, Jack Fowler	721-83-65	SC2c
**EARNEST, Robert Lewis	970-03-33	S2c



*EHLERT, Lorin Joseph	639-93-93	EM3c
*EISENSTEIN, Hyman (n)	816-10-65	SKD3c
**ENGELMAN, Bertram Marion	336-96-37	CRM
**ESHLEMAN, Kenneth Wents	820-74-24	Y3c
**ESSEX, William Gayle	640-93-72	FC2c
FAIR, Lloyd Miller	244-61-24	GM2c
*FAUST, Jack Velpo	838-75-25	S2c
*FEEZELL, James Caldwell	966-55-59	S2c
FELL, Richard Francis	202-52-64	SM3c
*FLEXER, John William	269-20-77	S1c
*FRANCE, Stephen Robert, Jr.	708-19-86	S1c
FRANK, Charles Joseph	224-51-83	Cox
FREY, Allen Elmer	422-58-78	S2c
FRITZINGER, Franklin Howard	826-41-49	S1c
*GALE, William Arnold	862-13-40	S2c
GAMBLE, Frank Jameson, Jr.	857-43-26	S1c
**GARNER, Harold Edward	264-50-34	EM2c
GREEN, Clyde Irvn	726-54-21	S1c
GUGLER, Richard George	860-73-24	S2c
*HANSEN, Gilbert Alexander	887-23-30	S1c
HANSON, Ralph Allen	826-26-91	F1c
HARDY, Billy Joe	837-49-39	F1c
HARTMAN, Donald Martin	225-29-73	MoMM1c
*HAYES, Horace (n)	864-47-23	StM1c
*HENDRICKS, Willis Franklin	835-26-15	F1c
**HIGAREDA, Lupe (n)	852-45-54	S2c
HOLLIER, Francis Horton	645-68-57	RM3c
HORNER, Thomas Onesimus	832-78-01	S1c
*HRAGYIL, Frank John	706-63-46	S1c
HUDEK, John Lawrence	856-94-54	M1c
**HUDSON, Carroll Adrian	826-73-87	MoMM2c
HUSTEDDE, Marcell John	338-14-08	EM3c
INGRAM, Wilbert (n)	646-36-80	BM2c
IRON, Raymond Ellis	658-06-08	Y2c
JAGODOWSKI, John Casimer	709-14-57	RM3c
*JOHNSON, Lloyd George	621-44-22	TM2c
JOHNSON, Robert Franklin, Jr.	256-52-30	S1c
JONES, Harry Paul	338-12-21	S2c
*KILGUS, Frankie Leroy	262-79-29	S1c
**KNECHT, Judson Lewis	850-93-80	MoMM1c
KOKOSZKA, Edward Anthony	758-53-87	MoMM3c
KOWALCZYK, John Paul	856-79-15	S1c
KRASS, Charles Anthony	852-46-68	S2c
*KRAVITZ, Herbert (n)	706-91-19	GM2c
KREILING, William Howard	855-21-44	S1c





*KRUMENACKER, Norman Augustus, Jr.	653-54-11	RM3c
KUDINGER, Robert Roland	860-89-18	F2c
LAGNESE, Edward William	652-16-01	Y1c
LANIER, Henry Dwight	833-97-54	F1c
*LANZETTA, Anthony Patrick	244-99-69	GM3c
**LEPPLA, Chauncey William	621-55-37	F1c
LEWIS, William Carl	807-90-58	F1c
LINKENHOGGER, Jesse Seymour	659-52-38	RdM3c
LOYD, Grimes Albert	555-79-92	GM3c
*LUCKE, Robert Blair	633-88-76	MoMM1c
*MADIGAN, John Edward	607-12-54	Cox
MAKI, Alan Wadsworth	861-59-69	SoM2c
*MARGARELLA, Laurence (n)	610-87-92	SM2c
MARQUIS, Donald Ray	554-73-25	RT1c
*MARTENSON, Harding William	329-25-13	MoMM1c
MASTEN, Francis Everett	871-70-03	FCR3c
*MAYFIELD, Walter (n)	842-71-42	StM2c
Mc CALEB, Thomas Alvin	834-69-52	MoMM3c
*Mc DOWELL, Morris Fredrick	613-28-26	S2c
*MESICK, Ralph Lyle	890-21-12	RdM3c
*MEYERS, Arthur Edward, Jr.	855-19-97	S1c
MILHAM, Lloyd Earl	621-76-90	SoM2c
*MIRRA, Gesuelle Joseph	710-69-66	MoMM3c
MONTELLO, Arnes (n)	238-92-66	MoMM3c
MOSHER, Harry James	312-93-14	S1c
*MURADIAN, Murad (n)	814-11-10	S1c
MUSARRA, Joseph Francis	223-93-26	BM1c
*NEWMAN, Harold Carl	710-78-50	SoM2c
NICHOLS, Jack Edward	564-68-47	S2c
NOLAN, Frank Augustine	710-69-27	MoMM3c
*O'NEILL, Robert Leroy	855-27-40	S1c
O'NEILL, Robert Melvin	730-91-09	RM3c
OSTRICH, Robert Eugene	896-25-77	S2c
OTT, Edwin Martin	710-69-29	MoMM3c
*PACE, Earl Clinton	321-37-69	EM1c
**PARKER, Harry James	573-05-91	S1c
*PATTON, Joseph Floyd	627-77-77	Bkr3c
PAULL, Frederick Stanley	802-30-60	S1c
*PAWLENTY, Edward Frank	870-98-89	S1c
*PAWLOSKI, Stanley Jerome, Jr.	245-52-70	MoMM3c
PESEK, Paul Eldon	871-75-57	RdM3c
PETAGO, William Olan	630-92-68	S1c
PIOCH, Raymond Joseph	956-29-11	S1c
*PLETTNER, Bert (n)	723-00-28	S1c
*POLAND, Noel Edward	279-14-79	CMoMM



PRESCOTT, Ben Rubenstein	637-18-39	CM2c
**PUMPHREY, Robert Glyne	291-48-90	CMoMM
RACZUK, Michael (n)	245-53-76	F2c
RAGAN, Stuart Hamilton	708-14-26	S1c
*RAIRIGH, Harold Russel	856-78-89	S1c
**RIBBENTROP, Walter Archie	208-83-48	MoMM3c
RICHERSON, Columbus C'lusters	840-44-61	StM1c
RICKMAN, Herman Lee	829-85-80	GM3c
*RIVERS, Phillip Amos	666-66-15	S2c
RIZZO, John Joseph	807-52-72	Y2c
*ROBERTSON, James (n)	860-83-40	S1c
ROLLINS, Sam Lee, Jr.	878-19-60	RdM2c
*ROSTAN, Humbert Henry	829-84-29	GM3c
**ROZMAN, Frank (n)	821-41-76	MoMM3c
**RUTKO, Edward (n)	823-63-78	F1c
*SAMPLE, Bruce Clair	653-59-78	MoMM3c
SARCINELLA, Joseph Gerard	822-12-58	F1c
*SCHEINBERG, Leonard Rooth	811-65-53	F1c
*SCHULZ, Theodore Emmanuel	805-22-88	MoMM3c
*SCHWEIBERGER, Frank Robert	382-43-06	SF3c
*SEMANIE, Anthony Joseph	312-98-19	SoM2c
SETTLE, Carlton Brooks	836-29-67	Bkr3c
**SHAW Harold Wayne	620-12-67	MoMM2c
SHOOK, Arthur Quentin	829-77-47	S1c
SIMON, Ralph Wilburn	306-20-58	SC3c
SLATER, Ralph Henry	381-60-52	EM2c
*SMELTZ, Jack Everett	830-16-01	S1c
SMITH, Kenneth Rivers	556-90-17	S1c
SMITH, Lucien Charles, Jr.	556-84-42	S1c
SMOOT, Arthur David	834-80-78	S1c
**SNYDER, William Morris	243-25-30	CBM
*SPERA, John Anthony	817-31-94	S1c
STEARLINGS, Melvin Winfield	826-52-03	S1c
STEWART, James Earl	312-27-63	RM2c
STILLINGS, Elmer Orlando,	606-16-18	Cox
STINSON, Leo Francis	245-22-29	S2c
STIPE, Henry Everett, Jr.	893-38-53	S1c
STONER, Ray Parsons	821-20-68	QM3c
STROM, Edwin George	757-61-83	SC3c
SUSSKIND, Thomas Henry	710-94-69	SoM2c
**SUTTON, Huston Garland	636-67-01	MoMM3c
TINNELL, James Danial	287-62-11	GM3c
TRAHAN, Leo "M"	360-07-08	CMoMM
TUCKER, Elmer Lois	640-10-32	SK1c
**UTZ, Lawrence Russell	826-49-64	S1c



VARTANIAN, Charles (n)	204-49-91	RM3c
**VASSLOWSKI, Charles (n)	223-02-10	MoMM1c
VAUGHAN, Jack David	605-63-45	S1c
*VESPER, Harold Eugene	285-21-69	F1c
*VICTORINE, Robert Laurence	834-86-20	FC3c
**WALDEN, Warren Caldwell	845-39-59	F1c
*WALLACE, Lewis Brooks	845-39-98	F1c
WATKINS, Arthur (n), Jr.	338-32-01	S2c
WEBB, Bernard Harrison	832-77-32	F1c
WEBSTER, Donald Elwood	377-72-74	MoMM3c
*WELLS, Richard Daniel	573-21-80	S1c
WEST, Walter Irby	269-22-15	S1c
**WHEELER, Alfred Llewellyn	709-53-23	F2c
WHITE, Robert Randolph	708-48-96	F1c
WILSON, Coy Cannady, Jr.	829-93-03	S1c
WILSON, Dickerson Wilburn	637-59-87	QM2c
WINSTON, Frank Dee	256-51-90	S2c
*WOOD, Conrad Horace George	225-05-24	Cox
YATES, Conley Leo	656-07-72	SC1c
**YATES, Junior Harrison	756-48-84	S1c
*YOUNG, Raymond Archibald	666-08-21	SF1c
**ZASTROW, Melvin Herman	805-26-77	MoMM3c

\* \* \* \* \*

1 Source: The ship's muster roll for 6/30/44 updated by a Report Of Changes sheet dated 7/24/44 on microfilm at the National Archives.

2 CALTABIANO, P. A., Seaman 2nd Class, was actually aboard the USS Farquhar (DE-139) on 8/2/44. He had been transferred to that vessel on 7/30/44 for medical treatment, so he was not one of the 171 enlisted survivors rescued by the Farquhar on 8/2/44.

\* Wounded (\*\* Killed) when the Fiske was sunk in the Atlantic by a U-boat on 8/2/44 according to a machine-generated casualty report at the National Archives prepared by the Bureau of Naval Personnel after the war. Four bodies were recovered by the Farquhar. Two of the 171 enlisted men rescued by that vessel died on board of wounds, so there remained 180 survivors (11 officers; 169 enlisted) plus CALTABIANO, P. A. (Note 2 above).

Summary of Casualties:

	<u>Killed</u>	<u>Wounded</u>	<u>Not Wounded</u>	<u>Complement on 8/2/44</u>
Officers	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>12</u>
Enlisted	<u>32</u>	<u>64</u>	<u>106</u>	<u>202</u>
TOTALS	<u>33</u>	<u>65</u>	<u>116</u>	<u>214</u>

E. A. Wilde, Jr.  
November, 2000



**Casualties Aboard A Torpedoed Destroyer Escort<sup>1</sup>**

by George W. Brodie, Chief Hospital Corpsman

Approximately 1215, after the crew had just gone to General Quarters, we were torpedoed in the Atlantic by a Nazi submarine, on August 2, 1944. The resulting casualties and the steps taken to treat these casualties may be of interest to medical personnel serving aboard small craft.

We did not have a doctor aboard. The Hospital Corps personnel aboard this vessel consisted of a Chief Hospital Corpsman, one First Class Hospital Corpsman and one Third Class Hospital Corpsman.

My battle station as Chief Hospital Corpsman was in the mess hall, at which place I was when the torpedo hit us a little aft of amidships on the Port side. Immediately upon the impact of the explosion, I was thrown to the deck of the mess hall, all lights went out, there was complete darkness and the ship lurched over toward the port side, which seemed to me to be approximately 45 degrees. I immediately made my way in the darkness to the starboard ladder leading up the main deck. Fortunately, there was not time to close this hatch; consequently, I had no trouble getting out on the deck. The ship was breaking in half rapidly (the period the ship did stay together was varied with different estimates of survivors, my estimate is approximately 15 minutes) there was a certain death like quietness prevalent on deck. I noticed the men who did not seem injured walking around stunned. My first reaction was to reach for my knife which I always kept attached to my life belt and cut the line on the forward life raft starboard side. However, this raft did not do the expected thing and hit the water. I believe the failure was due to dried paint which kept the raft secured to its rack until someone later yanked it loose with the line secured to the raft, and it eventually hit the water. With the aid of a fireman from the crew I set up an emergency dressing station forward on the main deck starboard forecastle. My materials were acquired quickly from the First Aid box at the number one gun mount. Two injured seamen were helped by their shipmates to my improvised dressing station. One suffered from a back injury, the other suffered a leg injury. Under the existing conditions the exact degree of injury was impossible to ascertain, but first aid measures were instituted as follows: Both men seemed to be in great pain, each were given the contents of a morphine syrette and made comfortable. The man with the leg injury also had a deep laceration on one of his legs. A sulfanilamide dressing was applied to this. All this time the ship was leaning more to port. This constituted the danger of the ship capsizing and taking most of the crew under with it. At this time, the Captain ordered abandon ship, which the able-bodied members of the crew did with surprising calm. I got the aid of a few crew members and my two charges were put into the water. Although they were incapacitated they were helped by various crew members and eventually were saved and later hospitalized.

The Hospital Corpsman Third Class and the Hospital Corpsman First Class (who sustained a head laceration himself) were both in the aft part of the ship taking care of casualties there, which were more numerous than up forward. Mention should be made at this point of the gallant and professional way in which C.H. Andreu, Hospital Corpsman Third Class, and H.E. Cornell, Hospital Corpsman First Class, U.S. Navy, handled themselves. Although Cornell had a nasty laceration on the top of his head (which later, aboard the rescue ship, required six sutures) he worked untiringly to aid others.

The time in the water until the time we were picked up by another destroyer escort varied from one hour and a half to five hours (in my case, approximately two hours). The water was very cold. The men's teeth were chattering and their color was almost blue from the cold. At the raft I was hanging on to there were about twenty men. One man with a possible fracture of the leg was helped onto the raft,

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<sup>1</sup> Retyped, unedited, as it appeared in the July 1982 issue of **DESANEWS**, published by the Destroyer Escort Sailors Association. Courtesy of Robert White.

the rest of us hung on via the hand lines. Generally, the men's mental attitude after the first half hour in the water, until the time we were picked up, was one of despondency, which seemed to me obvious under the conditions.

Fortunately, the ship that picked us up carried a doctor in addition to the same Hospital Corps complement that my ship carried. Among the casualties there were about eighteen possible leg fractures of all degrees, in addition arm fractures, head lacerations and many who had lacerations about different parts of the body. For the first eighteen hours aboard the rescue ship all the Corpsmen worked ceaselessly without sleep, food or drink until all the emergency treatment that could be given to the casualties that was possible was done. After that period the Corpsmen worked in two shifts of six hours on and six hours off. The supply of splints of all types were soon exhausted and the doctor called in the ship's carpenter who got to work and made improvised splints which served excellently in the emergency. The supply of morphine and material was soon used up. A seabag full of medical supplies was dropped to us from a plane based on a flattop operating in the area. The casualties were kept aboard three days until an East Coast port could be made where 55 of the worse cases were hospitalized. Four bodies were picked up out of the water, and these were buried at sea that same night (August 2, 1944). Two badly injured men died during the first night aboard the rescue ship, and they were also buried at sea the following morning. In all, 35 men were lost, i.e. killed and missing.

CONCLUSION - Weekly first aid lectures have proved invaluable. Lectures on the proper way to abandon ship and aids for survivors on a life raft should be continuously disseminated to the crew.

The cylinder-type life belt worked fine when it was needed and proved very dependable. About half of the crew had the kapok life jackets.

Every man aboard ship should at all times carry a good sharp knife, preferably of the sheath type.

Azchloramid solution for cleansing and debribing wounds antiseptically was found to be excellent.

Of course, once again the morphine syrette proved its worth.

The battle dressing packages (large and small) were invaluable in the emergency.

\* \* \* \* \*



## Sub Sinks Ship Of Phila. Officer

*Inquirer Washington Bureau*

WASHINGTON, Aug. 12—The Navy announced today that the 300-foot destroyer escort Fiske, commanded by Lieutenant John A. Comly, of Philadelphia, had been sunk in the Atlantic by an enemy submarine.

The 27-year-old skipper of the Fiske, who rose from the rank of ordinary seaman in a period of less than four years, to commander of an escort vessel, was listed as a survivor. His wife, Mrs. Jane M. Comly, lives at Meeting House lane and Presport rd., Merion Park.

Lieutenant Comly was born in Philadelphia on Feb. 21, 1917, and was graduated from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania in 1938. After he received his



LIEUT. COMLY

degree, he worked for Stern and Co., Philadelphia department store, and in September, 1940, he enlisted in the Navy as a seaman.

### WON QUICK PROMOTION

Nine months later he was commissioned an ensign after completing his training at Northwestern University. He was assigned to the destroyer Downes, and was at Pearl Harbor when the Japanese attacked. The Downes was sunk in that attack.

In June, 1942, Ensign Comly was promoted to lieutenant (j. g.) and was made a full lieutenant on Dec. 1, 1942. From Aug. 25, 1943, when the Fiske was commissioned, until early this year, Lieutenant Comly was executive officer on the destroyer escort. He was then made skipper.

He holds the American Defense Service Medal, Fleet Class, and the European - African - Middle East Area campaign ribbons.

### SHIP BUILT IN TEXAS

The Fiske, with a complement of more than 150 men, was authorized by act of Congress on Feb. 6, 1942. The keel was laid on Jan. 4, 1943, at the yards of the Consolidated Steel Corp., Orange, Tex.

The vessel was named in honor of the late Rear Admiral Bradley Allan Fiske, who is credited with inventing the aerial torpedo, radio-guided torpedo planes and the electric range-finder.

Lieutenant Comly is the son of Mrs. Philip Wunderle, of 118 Cedar ave., Jenkintown, Pa. He married the former Jane Marie Moriarty, daughter of Major and Mrs. Charles Albert Moriarty, on March 27, 1943.

\* Courtesy of survivor Robert R. White



**RESTRICTED**  
**DECLASSIFIED** ED

Narrative by: Lieutenant John A. Comly, USNR  
USS FISKE

Lieutenant Comly, Commanding Officer of the USS FISKE, (DE 143) gives a detailed account of the war record of the ship from the time of its commissioning on 25 August 1943 until it was sunk by a submarine north of the Azores on 2 August 1944. The FISKE and the USS HOWARD were making an attack on the sub when the former was torpedoed.

Copy No. 1 of three copies.  
Film No. 276  
Recorded: 31 August 1944

Rough Transcript  
Meitzen, 10/9/44  
Smooth Transcript  
Stagias, 2/20/46

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**RESTRICTED**

Narrative by: Lieutenant John A. Comly, USNR  
USS FISKE;

Commander P. T. Wright:

This afternoon we have with us the Commanding Officer of the DE 143, the USS FISKE. The next voice that you hear will be that of Lieutenant J. A. Comly, Captain of the FISKE. Captain Comly:

Lieutenant Comly:

The USS FISKE, was commissioned on August 25th, 1943, in Orange, Texas. At the time of commissioning we had a complement of 176 men, 12 officers and then followed that period of the shakedown cruise of approximately one month, in order to train these men and officers for the future work which they were going to have to do at sea, and the duties to which the ship was assigned. This training was based on experiences of ships which had been in active duties and engagements months and years previous to our commissioning and its purpose was to make these men and officers efficient as a unit so that the ship would function efficiently according to the standards of wartime needs.

After the shakedown period the FISKE was employed as school ship, Norfolk, Virginia, for a period of three weeks. This period, served not only as time for training of other crews of destroyer escorts which had not yet gone into commission but also allowed us time to perfect our own organization. Immediately following this extra training period we were assigned our first operational duty of an escort taking a fast supply and transport ships to Panama.

This was an uneventful trip but afforded us the opportunity of having officers and men go to sea for a little longer than 8 - 9 days at a time and also allowed us to judge both men and officers in regards to what we could expect from them.

After returning from Panama the USS FISKE was assigned to convoy duty on a run from Norfolk to Casablanca, French Morocco. This trip to Casablanca was also an uneventful voyage. Through it however, the ship became a more efficient fighting unit. We were able to discover many small weaknesses in organization, operations, which could be corrected and put into good use at future times. The second



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operational trip of this nature was also to Casablanca. Again it was an uneventful trip, convoys had become very well organized by this time. Escorts had also become organized, each ship knew what was expected of it. All in all it made for very successful operations.

Our third trip across the Atlantic was made into new water, namely the Mediterranean, going as far as Bizerte. It had been reported that air attacks in this area could be expected from German torpedo planes at most any time after entering the Mediterranean Sea. This seemed to appeal to the majority of the crew who were very much interested in seeing a little bit of action with the enemy as is only quite natural for every man going to sea. As expected this attack came. It came shortly after sunset at the dusk period when it is extremely difficult to pick up low flying planes without the aid of binnoculars. The crew was ready, all the escorts were ready, the entire convoy was ready. During this time the FISKE was stationed on the starboard beam of the convoy which was a position that we felt would certainly be exposed to attack. There had been a few earlier warnings of enemy aircraft in the vicinity but nothing had been proven definitely. At the time we were reasonably close to land, two to three miles, when the attack developed.

## ONE ESCORT LOST ASTERN

During subsequent minutes planes seemed to have concentrated on coming through the center of the leading escorts and in on the port bow and deep on the starboard quarter. At no time was the FISKE able to detect any planes visually, nor were they able to pick up any by radar. This, of course, was a tremendous disappointment to the crew and even though we had emerged from the attack without any damage they felt that they would have liked to have had their chance. The convoy itself did not fare quite so well. I believe that there were approximately six merchantmen damaged, several of which sunk and one escort, which was also sunk.

We continued on to Bizerte, returning by the same route and expecting additional air attacks before passing out of the Mediterranean, none was experienced however.

There was another form of action that took place in which the FISKE itself was not personally engaged but gave us some insight into first hand submarine warfare which might be used by the Germans against us some other time. One escort was lost astern after investigating radar contacts. In going after it, they proceeded independently, gradually closing the distance on this target to a few thousand yards at which time it disappeared. After the disappearance of this target only a few minutes elapsed before this escort was torpedoed.





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It was quite sometime before the escort commander was aware of this fact and it seems to bring out the necessity for sending out at least two escorts on operations of that type. It would prove not only an asset in making contact with the submarine if that was what it should be, but it should also provide additional safety and add to the efficiency of the operation of the two ships concerned.

Proceeding on for a few days in the Mediterranean a similar incident was experienced, this time a radar target became a visual target at night, dead ahead of the convoy and in plain view of an escort. After what seemed like several minutes of deliberation they decided to maneuver the convoy in such a way as to avoid any possible attack but this did not come quite soon enough, for another escort was lost without any warning whatsoever.

During this time the FISKE was not in any station adjacent to either ship which had been lost but it certainly served as a tremendous incentive for all hands on board to do an even better job than they had been doing before and again it indicated the type of thing which we might run up against at any time. The rest of the return trip to the United States was most uneventful.

Our next assignment as an operational unit of the fleet was that of a combined destroyer escort--and aircraft carrier killer group in the Atlantic. At this time we rejoined our division which was Destroyer Escort Division 9 and operated with them as a unit in conjunction with the WAKE ISLAND. These carrier-escort groups were designed for the purpose of going after particular submarines designated by the Commander-in-chief and operating against them within certain areas, or operating against them until they had been sunk. The escorts were not completely informed as to the operations. We knew what our particular and combined job was. We knew how to go about it but as far as the details of operation, where we were going, how long we were going to chase any particular enemy submarine, was only a matter of conjecture.

The first part of this carrier-escort operation lasted five weeks, during which time the escorts actively participated in one contact and assisted the aircraft in several others. During the assistance that we rendered aircraft after their sighting, there were no contacts made by any escort or any real evidence picked up of damage done to submarines.

The first actual contact reported was that by the USS D.L. HOWARD when she reported to the task group commander that a periscope had been sighted very close abeam to her starboard side. This sighting was between the FISKE and the HOWARD and as Commanding Officer of the



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FISKE, we immediately came to their assistance to enable the successful attack to be made. However, at no time were we able to detect either visually, or by sonar gear the presence of any submarines, nor were we able to verify in any way the original contact of the HOWARD. After making one emergency attack, the HOWARD went into a regular regain contact, at which time we on the FISKE endeavored to maintain a station which would cut off all possibility of a submarine if there should have been one, from reaching the carrier. During this operation it was not entirely clear exactly what movements were to be expected due to measures which had been taken on the part of the HOWARD. We believe that any effort on the part of a submarine to get away, had there been one, would have been definitely cut off by the ships concerned.

## OPERATED WITH THE HOWARD

For two days following this sighting, the HOWARD and the FISKE operated as a combined unit in carrying out search plans and in serving the purpose of a holding down unit to enable aircraft to thoroughly search the area and prevent any U-Boat from surfacing and getting away during darkened hours.

The net result of this operation produced no kill. It produced not even a positive attack and there is some doubt in my mind as to whether or not there had been a sighting at any time.

Proceeding on with our operations, the next contact that was had was by aircraft, which immediately launched an attack followed by a sonar bouy pattern. The escorts were entirely unfamiliar with the exact procedures that the aircraft used in laying their patterns and as a result we were not able to determine exactly where it was being laid, in what direction and exactly what the results were showing. I believe that at the present time this matter is being cleared up so future escorts will have a complete knowledge of all aircraft operating procedures.

These tactics were conducted for a period of about one day during which time we felt certain that aircraft must have had contact and yet again as time progressed we felt certain they must not have had contact. It was definitely established that the Mark IV FXR gear which is used by destroyer escorts and also by the carrier as a counter measure against acoustic torpedoes, interfered with the aircraft sonar bouy patterns up to a distance of 25 miles and I believe that it was also established that under certain conditions fast moving escorts could possibly interfere with this pattern without their FXR gears streamed.

It was later brought out in this connection that after a visual sighting by aircraft and an attack followed by a sonar bouy pattern that results always seem to be negative but after laying a sonar bouy pattern on a suspected contact not as a result of any visual sighting



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that the results were invariably positive, which brings out an interesting point to the extent of, "Do the submarines know the uses to which we have put the sonar bouys and do they know how they are employed?" This day's operation was concluded with no results as far as successful operation against the submarine was concerned.

Several weeks later after a short stay in port the task group was proceeding to operate against westbound submarines north of the Azores Islands. On August 2nd, the FISKE was operating in station No. 2, the HOWARD in station No. 4, in the anti-submarine screen, the HILL another escort in our group had been disabled as far as its operation was concerned due to defective sound gear. About 1100 this day the HOWARD reported that she was going to investigate a sonar contact and we went along to render assistance to her. This sonar contact was definitely established as non-submarine but it was felt as always, best to investigate any possibility, particularly when you are in the immediate vicinity of reported enemy U-Boats.

After returning to our station in the screen the HOWARD and the FISKE simultaneously reported that they had sighted an object on the horizon which definitely appeared to be a submarine. The suspicion of a submarine was increased by a large puff of white smoke which was sighted directly above it. This smoke had the characteristics of the white smoke which is put out by diesel engines when put under a sudden load after having been idling for some time or not in use. This smoke actually was the first sighting we had, the object appearing like the submarine came within sight a few seconds afterwards.

It was only with some amount of coaxing that the SL radar was able to pick it up and reported a distance of approximately 9 miles with a bearing of 270 true. At the time the task group was on a base course of 210 zig-zagging in accordance with plan 6 USF 10-A and we were on the 330 degree true leg of that plan. The time was approximately 1156 at this sighting and it put the relative position of the submarine a little forward of our beam.

The HOWARD, having the division commander on board, reported to the task group commander that she was going out to investigate this contact because the division commander felt certain that it was something worth looking into, and that he was taking the FISKE along with him. Within a minute, I believe that I can say that all hands felt certain that we were finally getting right on top of just what we had been looking for for the last six weeks.

#### HAD ENGINE CASUALTY

In proceeding out to the spot of contact we were steering course



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and using speeds directed by the division commander. The initial course being 285 at a speed of 20 knots. Twenty knots was a little bit more than we could make at the time due to an engine casualty which we had experienced several days before. This engine casualty prevented one of our main engines from developing full power when a load was put upon it and after several days' work it could not be definitely laid down to any one cause, although we believed it to be a result of a defective timing servo motor.

After having proceeded for approximately 15 minutes we changed course to 275, which change, I believe, was ordered in order to bring the original spot of contact directly between the HOWARD and the FISKE. I also believe that up to this time the HOWARD had been steering on a course of approximately 275 in order to open the distance between the two escorts to approximately 4,000 yards, which distance remained between the two ships until we reached the original spot of contact. The sound range of the day was particularly good, giving possibilities of making sonar contact between 2,000 and 3,000 yards. In view of this long range it may have been feasible to approach the original spot with an interval between ships of 4,000 and again it may have been better to approach with an interval between ships which would assure contact of anything passing between us.

After changing course to 275, speed was shortly reduced to 15 knots, which is the regular search speed for escort vessels. During this time the FXR gear of the FISKE had not been streamed but to allow for emergency streaming it had been put outside the stern chock so it would require only a matter of seconds to put it into operation. Past experience had not definitely proven but had strongly indicated that the use of FXR gear with the sound gear on board would in all probability create enough interference to overcome any contact which may have been made on the beam of a vessel at a distance over 1,500 yards. In numerous instances the FXR gear had caused interference with sonar operation as far forward as 20 degrees forward of either beam. Occasionally it had caused interference even when trained dead ahead. Interference on FXR gear from another ship is extremely noticeable up to 4,000 yards. I personally believe that such interference, while it would not prevent a ship from making a run on a submarine once it had established contact, I do believe that the interference would be sufficient to prevent you from picking up a very weak echo at a long range.

The HOWARD and the FISKE continued on a course of 275 and after carefully checking our DRT with that of the HOWARD we determined that the original spot of contact by visual and radar should pass approximately between the two ships with our spot being approximately a mile further along the course than that of the HOWARD. As a precautionary measure Condition Material Condition Baker had been





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thoroughly checked and Materiel Condition Affirmed had been set in the majority of the ships.

Continuing on at the search speed of 15 knots on a steady course the FISKE reported to the division commander in the HOWARD that we were coming left to investigate a possible sonar contact. Strangely enough I learned afterwards that this sonar contact which we were proceeding to investigate was at a spot approximately 300 to 500 yards distance from the original DR that we had established on this submarine by visual and radar. The range to the original sonar contact was reported as being 2,500 yards by the stack operator. This range, I believe, is slightly in excess of the true range, for the sound range recorder, having been warmed up previously, was switched on immediately and gave a range of 2,000 yards.

#### CONVINCED CONTACT WAS SUB

There was no doubt in my mind or in that of the operator or the ASW officer as to whether or not the contact which we were investigating was a submarine. The echo after about the third one was distinctly metallic noise, clear, with a good ring, sharp and a definite down dobber. Several times before we had investigated fish contacts, of course. Occasionally they do give very good echoes but they are nothing to compare with this one which we were then proceeding to investigate. The crew was at general quarters, Condition Affirm had been completely set throughout the ship, I reported to the division commander that the echo was an extremely good one. It had been picked up on a true bearing of approximately 183 which would have placed it on our port beam relatively.

The FISKE prepared to make a depth charge attack, considering the time which had elapsed between the original sighting and the sonar contact. The sonar contact was made at 1232, the original sighting had been made at 1156 or 1157. We came immediately to an approach course and utilizing new equipment which we had aboard, EDI and the attack plotter in conjunction with the DRT, we came to a course of 177 and followed center bearings on the submarine from that point in. As the range closed the dobber remained the same being as the range closed, moderate down and marked down dobber. Range rate was approximately 12 knots which indicated a submarine speed of about 3 knots.

The attack was then reported to the USS HOWARD which had turned right and was headed approximately north and I also believe it had slowed speed in order to assist in the attack. This attack was reported as being a stern chase. Actually I believe that it was either a deep quarter or a stern chase. The entire crew was well aware of the fact that we were making a run. The hedgehogs had been manned, were prepared for firing in the event that we should wish



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to change the type of attack. I mentioned before that at the time we were preparing to make a depth charge attack and we had set a medium pattern for a 13 charge DE depth charge pattern.

About this time I was interrogated by the HOWARD asking whether or not it was possible that I was falling for some ruse. I reported that I did not think so. I would like to point out here that it is extremely difficult for an officer to be making an attack on a submarine and trying to coordinate all the information that he is receiving from the stack, from the attack plotter, the sound range recorder and from the DRT and formulate that in his mind so that the most perfect attack possible can be made and at the same time be responsible for conversations that occur on TBS and also pass replies. I think that with the TBS setup on most ships today that they are conveniently enough located so that the conning officer can give out information to other ships in the vicinity as he feels he has the opportunity to do. At no time during the attack should he be subjected to the necessity of listening to incoming TBS conversation and be required to give replies. It is a tremendous interference with the successful run.

The attack continued and I have previously said that I had reported the attack to be a stern chase to me and in addition to that, the HOWARD was informed that the submarine was headed toward them. Relatively speaking, the HOWARD was approximately 20 to 25 degrees on my starboard bow and I was conning on the center bearing of the submarine which was dead ahead and headed approximately in the direction of the HOWARD. This was the last report I was able to make. Following the range reported, of 1075 yards, I noticed that the HOWARD had closed in to a range of approximately 2,000 to 2,500 yards on the same relative bearing as before. Within a very few seconds after this last reported range the FISKE was rocked by a terrific explosion amidships which caused the following damage:

First of all, all communications were lost with all parts of the ship. The explosion was due to an enemy torpedo which I am thoroughly convinced was fired from a second submarine and not due to the one which we were attacking. It was my impression and also the impression of the great majority of officers and men on board that we were hit on the port side. I now believe that is an error and that we were hit on the starboard side.

The reason for this initial belief was due to the fact that an immediate list was taken to port, thereby setting up in your mind the preimminent possibility of being torpedoed on that side. No one aboard had seen any torpedo wake whatsoever. No one had reported anything unusual during the run, the sonar operator, the ASW officer and myself heard no torpedo noises whatsoever on the sonar gear which



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I definitely believe would have been heard had a torpedo been fired by the U-Boat we were attacking.

## COMPARTMENTS BLOWN APART

I do not believe that the torpedo which hit us was an acoustic torpedo. We were hit at frame 99 which is the bulkhead separating engineering space at B3 and B4. These two compartments were completely blown out, both port and starboard, with the hull itself in such a position that you could not tell if the main force of the explosion had occurred from the inside or from the outside, but since it appeared to be equal both port and starboard I feel certain that the main force of the explosion must have come from approximately the center of these compartments. There naturally was a complete loss of all machinery in those spaces and in addition to that the loss of all lives concerned. The two forward engineering spaces were also badly damaged, all equipment with the exception of No. 1 main engine ceased functioning immediately, generators jammed, bulkheads were ruptured, the hull was ruptured and the compartments were immediately beginning to flood. It was very fortunate that no personnel were lost in these spaces.

The next most serious damage occurred on the topside in the vicinity of the torpedo tube mount. Here the bulkheads of the deck-house were entirely blown out from the vicinity of the machine shop up to the muffler space which is an area of about 15 to 20 feet. It caused the torpedo tube mount itself to split, allowing two of the torpedoes to fall out on deck and fortunately neither of them took a hot run. It severed the deck itself, crumbled the 20mm mounts of which there were four located immediately forward of the torpedoes and immediately abaft the stack. It blew off the 40mm gun, which is located abaft the torpedo mount. While it did not blow it overboard, it definitely raised it considerably from its foundation, allowing it to flop back in an approximate position.

Hatches, scuttles, manholes in the after part of the ship were sprung, several of which were completely blown off. There was one in particular which was located in the after living compartment and was considerably abaft the main part of the explosion, this hatch led to the depth charge locker and the repair parties in checking that part of the ship and in reporting to topside fell down in the locker up to their knees in water. This led me to believe that the hull of the ship itself must have been split in order to allow that much water to accumulate in that compartment. The forward part of the ship itself seemed to be in reasonably good condition from the reports received from the repair parties.

Personnel casualties were very high. Immediate concern of course, was with whether or not the ship could be saved and whether or not it could, what measures could be taken in an attempt toward



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those ends. It was reported to me by the chief engineer that the entire midsection of the ship had been blown out, the back was completely broken and it would only be a matter of a few minutes in his opinion before we were in two distinct sections. I silently agreed with his opinions.

There comes a minute when it becomes necessary to decide whether or not it is best to abandon ship and perhaps unnecessarily risk the lives of your entire crew or whether or not you will definitely abandon in preference to instituting last minute measures of saving your ship even though you believe that it would be useless. In order to facilitate an orderly abandoning and care for the wounded, we had all the life rafts, nets put over with swimmers to take them clear of the area.

Wounded men were treated as quickly as they could be, many could not be treated at all. As soon as that had been accomplished they were ordered put in the water and either taken to rafts or had to get there under their own power. Between five and ten minutes after the initial explosion there was another explosion in the forward section of the ship which was later determined as being in the vicinity of the paint locker or the 7.2 projector magazine, for when the ship sank in the vertical position, two holes in the hull were definitely noticeable abaft and above the sound dome. The immediate results of this explosion were to severely rock that section of the ship and to put out a tremendous amount of smoke which prevented men from thoroughly investigating below to determine its cause or to take counter measures against it.

#### SHIP SPLIT INTO TWO SECTIONS

At this time the ship definitely split into two sections and a list to port began increasing at such a rapid rate it was necessary to order all hands to abandon ship. In abandoning I was very pleasantly surprised by the absolutely lack of any confusion, the absolute lack of any panic on the part of any individual. Each man knew exactly what was expected of him and performed accordingly. All the wounded were diligently looked after. All of them were put on rafts.

After the two sections separated, the forward end immediately began to settle by the stern end of it, and increased its list to port until this list reached about 90 degrees. At this time it became necessary for me to leave the ship but only after all other survivors were clear. Within a minute or two after leaving, the bow sank by the stern as far as the number one gun, leaving that section in a vertical position and remained there for approximately two hours before going under all of a sudden.

The stern section remained upright, being slightly down by the forward section for approximately five minutes after abandoning,





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after which it capsized and settled in a vertical position with the screws slightly awash. This section finally had to be sunk by gunfire from the HOWARD some hours later.

All the rafts which we had available, the nets, were brought together to keep men from getting separated and it was shortly thereafter that the USS FARQUEAR came on the scene as a rescuing ship. The casualties sustained as a result of this action are, in my opinion, very high. One man was killed, 26 more missing and six men classified as dead and were buried at sea. These men who are missing, have been since, reclassified as deceased and to this number we must add the total of injured which came to approximately 52 men hospitalized. Of the injuries, the greatest numbers are fractures of legs and arms and also fractured skulls. It is quite an amazing thing to witness men who are suffering from compound fractures of the arm or leg, or both, some with fractures in the leg coupled with head injuries, exerting all their power, staying afloat anywhere from an hour to three hours in order that they can survive to go back and get their crack at the enemy once more.

It is suggested that as far as personnel casualties are concerned that all men be required to wear steel helmets whether or not they are stationed on topside, for it is felt that a good many head injuries could have been prevented had this been done.

It is also felt necessary for men to be more thoroughly instructed in the use of kapok life jackets. Of course, this is a subject which you can try to impress on men day after day and some will pay attention and others will not but I have seen too many men struggling in the water due to physical exhaustion when there would have been no need for it whatsoever had their life jacket been put on properly. As soon as they were adjusted they experienced no more difficulty. Also in connection with life jackets I feel that it is absolutely essential to enforce a regulation for all men to carry lights which are issued for that purpose. A night rescue without lights would certainly result in a great many deaths which would not have occurred otherwise.

Another suggestion is that additional life nets be available for use on board and these can be made by taking two cargo nets and placing kapok life jackets between them. We had one such contrivance aboard and it resulted in saving the lives of 15 men.

Another thing which is of importance is the checking of rigging on the life rafts themselves. In some instances, of which I know, your lines on these rafts are so continually exposed to the weather that when the time comes for actual use, they have become in such a weakened condition that they will withstand no strength or pressure whatsoever.



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Finally when it comes to the abandoning of ship, the rescuing of survivors, I think it would be extremely helpful if men could be taught not only how to abandon ship by being put on some high spot and being shown how to jump in the water but what to do after they get in the water, how to conserve their energy; how to conserve their strength; how to keep warm; and perhaps most important of all when they approach the rescue vessel, how to control themselves from what naturally runs through their minds, "how can I get on there as quick as I can." Teach them to be patient, see that the wounded get on first. Make sure that it is an orderly precedure because if it isn't, there are going to be men who are going to be injured unnecessarily, there are going to be men who are going to be drowned unnecessarily and there are going to be those who are going to suffer severely from shock. And I feel that with a little additional training along these lines a great many casualties to personnel in the future can be avoided.

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*"They fought together as brothers in arms; they died together and now they sleep side by side. To them we have a solemn obligation - the obligation to insure that their sacrifice will help make this a better and safer world in which to live."*

*- Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, USN, at The Surrender on board the U.S.S. Missouri (BB-63) in Tokyo Bay, 2 September 1945.*



U.S.S. Fiske (DE-143)  
Appendix - Survivors' Firsthand Accounts<sup>1</sup>

Name, Duties/Rating, General Quarters Station:

Officers:

Lt.	Arthur H. <u>Bilderback</u> , USN	Chief Engineer	Fwd. Control
LTjg	Enoch M. <u>Causey</u> , USNR	Communications	Sound Room
LTjg	Robert H. <u>Mitchell</u> , USNR	ASW Officer	Sound Room
Ens.	John H. <u>Turner</u> , USNR	Gunnery Officer	Bridge
Ens.	Claude H. <u>Ridgway</u> , USN	Damage Control	Repair 1
Ens.	William J. <u>Geiermann</u> , USNR	Ass't. Gunnery	Mount #2
Ens.	George W. M. <u>Cook</u> , USNR	Recognition Off.	Bridge
Ens.	Eugene L. <u>Swearingen</u> , USNR	Supply/Disbursmt.	Fantail

\* \* \* \* \*

Enlisted:

TRAHAN, Leo M., CMoMM, USN	Fwd. Engine Room
DONOHUE, Leonard J., SoM1c, USN	Sound Room (Bridge)
HUDEC, John L., M1c, USNR	Repair III, aft
MUSARRA, Joseph F., BM1c, USN	Repair III, aft
YOUNG, Raymond A., SF1c, USNR	Repair II, midships
JOHNSON, Lloyd G., TM2c, USNR	#5 "K"-gun (stbd.)
KRAVITZ, Herbert, GM2c, USNR	Twin 40-mm mount
SCHWEIBERGER, Frank R., SF3c, USN	Repair II, midships
VARTANIAN, Charles, RM3c, USN	Charthouse
SPERA, John A., S1c, USNR	40-mm director

\* \* \* \* \*

<sup>1</sup> Written to assist the ship's commanding officer, Lt. John A. Comly, USNR, in writing his action report of 8/8/44. After he retired he gave these accounts to survivor Robert White, who fortunately allowed me to include them in my booklet. I have retyped the enlisted accounts, unedited.

E. A. Wilde, Jr.  
November, 2000





# SINKING OF THE U.S.S. FISKE (DE-143)

I went to my battle station in B-2 as soon as the general alarm was sounded. #1-2-3-4 main engines were on the line. #2 S.S. generator was supplying light and power. The CMOMM in charge of the regular 12-16 steaming watch told me #3 S.S. Generator was running and being brought up to speed. Then he left. Every man was at his station in less than a minute because we knew we would be going to G.O. in a very short time, as word had got around of a submarine sighted. I gave the order to secure the evaporators and boilers and split the electric load. I was standing directly behind the electricians mate, who was waiting for the signal light from the after distribution board for him to take control.

I felt myself lifted completely from the deck and thrown about. I knew then we had been hit. I grasped the hand rails and waited for the ship to stop bouncing. I was showered with coffee grounds which was located beside me. As soon as I got my wits about me there were no lights - steam was escaping from the boilers. I reached for my flash light and searched the control room as best I could. I yelled for the men, three of them were close beside me. ~~THEN~~ I heard some one groaning and flashed my light behind me - Poland CMOMM was wedged head-first below some of the upper gratings that had come loose. He was bleeding badly about the head. I told Bilbee MoMM2c. to run for a Pharmasits Mate if he could find one. Hardy F2c. was still by me I ask him to help me get Poland topside. I reached up and put the control lever in stop position. The throttle-man and evaporator man must have left the control room as soon as Bilbee opened port side hatch - the boiler man, and the three auxiliary men left by the starboard passageway hatch as they told me latter. As near as I can remember Slater the electrician mate went with Bilbee for help. Hardy and I helped Poland to the port hatch and then Bilbee and Vesper Flc. helped us get him out. I then went back below to check if everyone for sure was out before I went topside.

There was no flash or fire in B-2 but I distinctly remember hearing water coming in.

As soon as I reached topside I faintly remember closing the port hatch. All of my men from B-1 & B-2 were on the port side outside the galley. I gave orders for all to stay where they were. Then I climbed to the bridge and reported to the captain about B-3 & B-4 which were blown completely out from all appearances. He asked me if she would stay afloat. I told him I didn't think so as her back was broken. He then said to get word aft for some one to take charge - I could see from the ladder where I had climbed up to the bridge that Lt. Rentfro, 1st. Lieut. and in charge of repair two was lying out on deck by #4 life raft.

I left the bridge and ran aft on the starboard side to see how the situation was. I asked Lt. Rentfro if he was hurt very bad - he told me it was his leg more than anything

else that hurt. I told someone to make Lt. Rentrro as comfortable as possible. I told everyone aft to keep their wits about them that no doubt we would abandon ship. I told Musarra SK1c. to get all rafts and nets over and put all injured men on them first. I went forward on the starboard side. I passed long enough to look the damage over.

The area at frame 99 and the machine shop was completely demolished both bulkheads of the deck house in that area were blown out. Smoke was coming from the vicinity of B-4 but I'm sure there was no fire as both B-3 and B-4 were flooded. The torpedo tubes were torn loose from the mount from all appearances. The torpedoes were out of two of the tubes. The whole deck area around the machine shop and aft to scout frame 104 was buckled and almost awash. I remember seeing them remove Davis SK3c. from the 40MM gun mount.

As soon as I arrived back to my men I told them we would have to leave and to bandage Poland head. One of the fireman went into B-1 and brought up the first aid kit. I then went to the starboard side to direct getting of rafts and nets over. We were able to get two of the rubber boats over before she started to capsize. By this time everyone was clear of the portside - Poland and Lucke KM11c, the worst injured, were in the water - Bilbee and I took time to inflate Poland's life belt for him. Bilbee and I tried to get the third rubber boat over but she began to settle too fast. The captain came by me then and told me to leave so the three of us slid down the side to the bilge-keel where there were a few men. One man was a bit bewildered so I helped him inflate his life belt and told him to jump.

The captain, Bilbee and I remained on the bilge keel until we were sure the rafts aft were free and clear. I yelled for some one to cast the painter loose of #3 raft but I don't recall who it was. I told Bilbee to remove his shoes because he would have no use for them where he was going. As we were sure everyone was free and clear aft we hit the water. We got clear as fast as possible as the forward section was breaking loose and started to settle aft. In a very short time a matter of seconds the forward end settled to a vertical and remained that way until we were picked-up. My watch stopped at 1254 which was the time I went into the water.

I swam toward one of the rafts - enroute I found a first aid box and floated on it for a while - my life belt was inflated. Most of the rafts got in one group and waited until we were rescued. Most everyone was in good spirits and kept singing all of the time. The stern section stayed afloat until everyone was picked-up. It had to be sunk by shell fire from another DE.

*A. H. Hilderback*  
A. H. HILDERBACK,  
Lieutenant, USN.  
Engineering Officer.

## SINKING OF THE U.S.S. FISKE(DE-143)

Shortly after 1200 on August 2, 1944 the submarine alarm was sounded. In response I reported immediately to the bridge and was informed by Mr. Mitchell the O.O.D. that a submarine had been sighted on the horizon and had shortly thereafter disappeared. This sighting had been confirmed by radar, with target disappearing at a distance of 9 miles. Fiske and Howard were proceeding to conduct A.S.W. search. The Captain sent me back and finish my lunch so that I would be ready to relieve O.O.D. as quickly as possible.

At about 1220 I returned to the bridge. In the meantime the Captain had taken the Conn. The Captain directed me to stand by and sent Mr. Gierman my Jr. O.O.D. down to gun two. General Quarters was sounded shortly after my arrival on bridge.

At about 1225 sound contact was made on the port beam about 2000 yards distant. The Howard was immediately informed by T.B.S. Mr. Mitchell and I entered the sound room and found that the chemical recorder had been warmed up. Mr. Mitchell immediately took over on the recorder and Newman SM2c. and I began operating the A.S.A.P. Immediately upon contact the Captain headed for point of contact. At about 1700 yards definite down doppler was detected, range range rate 13 knots. I glanced at traces on recorder and noticed very clear pronounced traces. We proceeded with attack run. About 1230 with contact about 1050 yards distant a heavy underwater explosion took place. The ship developed an immediate list to port and was dead in the water by the time I recovered from shock of the explosion and reached the bridge I stood on the bridge and tried to observe the outward apparent condition of the ship. From my observation I judge that the explosion took place in the immediate vicinity of compartment B-4, and that the ship was quickly breaking into. Word was passed by mouth and gesture to the fantail to set all depth charges on safe. The port list was steadily increasing. I saw no fire but quite a bit of smoke and steam amidship.

At about 1234 a lighter explosion took place forward in the vicinity of the forward magazines. Word was passed to the bridge by mouth that a magazine had exploded. No fire was observed.

At about 1245 the Captain ordered all personnel off the bridge and shortly thereafter gave the order to abandon ship. As soon as the bridge was clear of all enlisted personnel I went down the ladder to the signal bridge and down the starboard ladder to the main deck. Mr. Cook and Mr. Mitchell followed me.

At about 1250 I jumped over the starboard side and began swimming for the nearest raft about 100 yards distant. After swimming for a few minutes I tried and floated on my back to rest. I could see the ship quite plainly.

At 1255 I saw Mr. Bilderback and the Captain jump just before the ship broke in half. The forward section rooled over to port and up ended with the bow straight up in the air.

After a few minutes rest I swam to a raft upon inquiry I found that no injured men were on my raft. I gave orders that no one was to get in the raft except one man to paddle. The raft was a ten man raft and there were about 12 men holding to it. I encouraged the men to try to swim the raft out of the danger zone in case of exploding depth charges and we slowly opened the distance. As we proceeded several more men swam to our raft until there was not room for all to hold on and several of us who were rested just swam in the water close to the raft. I was several yards from the raft when the Farquhar came close enough for me to reach it. Someone threw me a line and I was hauled in to a ladder and taken aboard still having enough strength to climb the ladder without aid. I would estimate the time of rescue at 1430.

Before leaving the raft I observed two holes in the hull of the bow in the vicinity of Gun 2 which had apparently been caused by the explosion forward.

ENOCH McLAIN CAUSEY,  
Lieut.(jg)., U.S.N.R.

## SINKING OF THE U.S.S. FISKE (DE-143)

At about 1145 2 August a puff of smoke was reported on the horizon bearing about 340° (R). Shortly afterward a dark object was sighted to southward of smoke, which was picked up by SL Radar (Dist. 9 Mi.) and disappeared in about 5 minutes. These were reported to C.T.G. 22.6 by DE-138. At about 1200 DE-138 and DE-143 were detached to investigate.

Almost immediately upon arrival at DR location of Radar contact sonar contact was obtained at 2000 yards which was immediately classified as submarine and a D/C attack was commenced. Range was close to 1075 yards at which time the explosion occurred. (Time 1230).

The immediate effect of the explosion was a sudden jolt and list of about 30 degrees to port. Ship appeared to be broken at about center of torpedo tubes. Ship seemed to partially right itself until list was about 10-15 degrees to port. At about 1245 Chief Engineer reported ships back broken and in his opinion little chance was had to save her. Following this, list to port increased to 40-50 degrees at which time all personnel were ordered to main deck by CO and preparations were made to abandon ship. Shortly afterward ship was abandoned. From water it appeared that most personnel had made it either to a raft or were close by, leaving few isolated swimmers. Moral was excellent on raft which I was with.

After an unknown time the Farquhar arrived and conducted rescue operations.

Battle Station - Sound Hot

Analysis of Sonar Contact:

BDI center bearings were good, echo had definite metallic ring, doppler down (moderate), range rate (12-13). Trace aspect showed either deep quarter or stern target. Target was about 10-15° wide at 1800 yards.

R. H. MITCHELL,  
Lt. (jg)., USNR.



## SINKING OF THE U.S.S. FISKE (DE-143)

On 2 August 1944, as J.O.O.D., about 1155 the port bridge lookout sighted smoke on the horizon bearing about 290°(T). A few moments later an object the shape and size of a submarine conning tower also was sighted on the horizon and I took a bearing on it and found it to be at 280°(T). This object was clearly visible to the O.O.D., and to myself. Radar by this time had the object at 9 miles range. The O.O.D. was just about to report it by T.B.S. when the U.S.S. HOWARD reported the sighting of the same object. About this time the Captain sounded the Chemical alarm. I directed to go below and eat lunch. The Captain and O.O.D. at the Conn.

I ate hurriedly with most of the other officers. (The Executive Officer had his dinner at his battle station in C.I.C.

At about 1223 General Quarters was sounded. I arrived at my battle station one minute after the sounding of the general alarm. I was the regular assistant Gunnery Officer and the acting Gunnery Officer and my battle station was on the flying bridge. When I arrived at my battle station the FISKE had a sound contact and was investigating it. A medium pattern was ordered set on the depth charges and the charges electrical circuit was made full ready for firing.

Word was passed to men the Hedgehogs. While the Hedgehogs were being manned a deep muffled explosion shook the ship. I was thrown against something, bruising my left leg slightly. My first thought was that a Hedgehog had exploded. Looking back off the bridge toward the torpedo deck, the ship was a mass of misalignment, we had evidently been torpedoed. Someone on the bridge asked if the depth charges were on safe and then we noticed that telephone communication with the fantail was broken. We tried to yell to the fantail to set the depth charges on safe. We also attempted to call them by signalling. Subsequent questioning of survivors proved that the depth charges were not on safe prior to the ships sinking.

The Chief Engineer reported to the flying bridge to the Captain that all engines had been stopped and that the ship's back was broken and that there was no chance of saving the ship.

No one on the bridge seemed to be hurt much. One man's forehead was slightly cut.

I asked the Captain for permission to go to the fantail and see that the depth charges were set on safe, but his realizing that I would never be able to get there, permission was refused. I inflated my life belt and directed all near me to inflate life belts.

A second explosion occurred shortly after the first explosion, and smoke was seen issuing from the 402M area. I believed this to have been in that area.

The first explosion seemed to me to have occurred on the starboard side.

As soon as it appeared that the ship was going to sink the Captain ordered some of the men on the forecastle to start going over the side. Soon the Captain ordered all unnecessary personnel to leave the bridge. I and most of the other officers on the bridge proceeded to abandon ship at this time. The forward part of the had begun to take a decided port list by this time, and I believe the ship was breaking in two at this time.

When I reached the signal bridge on my way to abandon ship, the ship was at a 45° list to port. I paused at the ladder and proceeded to climb down the ladder and jump into the water.

I swam about 120 feet and reached a rubber life raft. The raft was soon covered with men and the edges crowded with those clinging to the side.

Those of us on the side of the raft toward the ship began kicking to propel the raft away from the ship.

There were three officers at raft, Ens. COOK, Lt.(jg) MITCHELL, and myself. Mr. COOK ordered all men in the water to hold their hand over their rectum to guard against the effect of a possible depth charge explosion if the stern should sink. There was no hysteria at the raft, but every one was cold. Although the raft appeared covered with men it had adequate bouyancy.

We could see the ship at about 400 yards, broken in two pieces, the forepart floating with the main deck line at 85° from the horizontal. The stern was low in the water with a forward list. Both parts of the ship were sinking very slowly. I could see one man still walking around on the fantail.

At a distance the HOWARD was dropping depth charges, but I felt no pressure from the explosions.

The depth charges of the FISKE did not explode as the fantail sank.

As we approached the FARQUHAR which had come close to our raft they threw us lines which our men swam out to grasp. The FARQUHAR men pulled our raft to them by the lines. As we drew within 20 feet of the ship I left the raft and climbed aboard by means of a sea ladder.

J. H. TURNER,  
Ensign, USNR.



SINKING OF THE U.S.S. FISKE (DE-143)

I was in the Decoding room working on a message when General Quarters sounded. I secured the Decoding room and went to my General Quarters station which was Repair I. I arrived at the starboard hatch leading to the after mess hall in time to help lower it and put dogs in place. Could not locate dog wrench so I went over to port hatch looking for dog wrench when I felt a violent blow to the ship seemingly coming from starboard side. Shock threw me down but did not hurt me. I went out on deck on starboard side and it looked to me as if ship were breaking apart just aft of midships.

Went back to hatch to after mess hall and passed word down that ship was apparently breaking up and to secure everything and get out. I went out on deck on starboard side of forward deck house then felt sharp blow like concussion of an explosion in bottom of ship apparently paint locker exploded. Captain called for a report on condition of ship forward but could not give him any as I had not been below.

I entered starboard hatch to Wardroom and C.P.O. quarters and opened flood valve to magazines. I then realized there was no pressure on fire main, but did not think of Handibilly's I opened escape hatch leading to C.P.O. quarters but there was too much smoke coming out to see anything I went about halfway down ladder and called but didn't hear anybody and couldn't see for smoke but did not see any flames.

I went back on deck and helped lower liferaft and life netting. I was among the first thirty men to leave the starboard forecandle area after word was passed to abandon ship. I swam for life net, reached it and inflated life belt. Helped put as many badly injured aboard net as possible and Executive Officer and Chief Pharmacist Mate Brodie had the men sing. We also kicked our feet some to keep raft from getting too close to ship. From raft I could see forecandle section had rolled over on its port side and was about torn loose from after section of ship. My next look at ship the bow section was up in a vertical position and bridge was submerged but fantail was still afloat. As the bow was up in the air I could see what looked like two holes just aft of the sound dome which made it more apparent that the paint locker had exploded. I was kept busy keeping myself and the injured near me attached to the raft as the water had chilled us till it was hard to keep a grip on the lines of netting. The next thing I remember the net was alongside the PARQUHAR and the men were being helped aboard. I took a fairly severe beating as for a moment or two I was caught in the netting and could not reach the lines or ladder that were hanging over the side and was submerged three or four times. I reached for a ladder and my arm was caught by somebody that had come down the ladder and I was dragged aboard. The next thing I remember I was lying on the wardroom table stripped with a blanket around me.

*B. H. Ridgway Ens. U.S.N.*  
C. H. RIDGWAY, Ens., U.S.N.

# SINKING OF THE U.S.S. FISKE(DE-143)

I arrived at my battle station - Gun #2 just as G.Q. was sounding. I could see that almost immediately the hedgehogs were manned. After what seems like a very few minutes there was an explosion aft, from where I was I could not tell whether it was on the starboard or portside. Although we were shaken up considerably there were no casualties on either gun #1 or #2. After a few minutes there was another explosion almost directly below gun #2, but it did not seem to be as intense as the first one. Mr. Ridgway opened the forward door and smoke began to come out. Fair went down from gun #2 and turned on the sprinkling system. I don't know whether this was before or after the second explosion. About that time the order came to throw the rafts and nets overboard and swimmers went over to draw them away from the ship. The rafts and nets on both sides forward got clear of the ship. Just before the word came to abandon ship the hedgehogs were set on safe as an added precaution. At the order "abandon ship" there was no hesitation at all - just as I cleared the ship - the bow began to rise slowly. I swam for the nearest net - about 50 yards away. When I reached it and looked back the bow was in an upright position. After a few minutes I swam to another net that was not as crowded as the first, and stayed there till picked up. Everything was very orderly and I saw no cases of panic whatsoever.

W. J. GEIERMANN,  
Ensign, U.S.N.R.

SINKING OF THE U.S.S. FISKE (DE-143)

At approximately 1205, 2 August 1944, while the majority of the ship's officers were at lunch in the Wardroom, the submarine contact buzzer sounded. The Executive Officer, Mr. Stout; and the G.Q. O-D., Mr. Causey, left immediately for their respective attack team stations in CIC, and on the bridge. The Captain was already on the bridge; as were the A.S.W. officer Mr. Mitchell, who was duty O.D.; and the Gunnery Officer, Mr. Turner, duty Jr. O.D. Other ship's officers remained at lunch in the Wardroom.

Within about five minutes thereafter, Mr. Causey and Mr. Turner returned to the Wardroom. These officers stated a submarine had been sighted at a radar range of nine miles. The Fiske in company with the U.S.S. Howard (DE-138), had been detailed to proceed on the last sighted bearing of the submarine for an attack. Those of us in the Wardroom proceeded to eat in haste, in expectation of G.Q. At this time the Captain rang the Wardroom on the sound powered phone, and when I answered, he requested lunch be sent topside for himself, Mr. Stout, and Mr. Mitchell.

At approximately 1220, General Quarters was sounded. I proceeded immediately to my battle station on the bridge, as Recognition officer. The Captain had the conn. Mr. Mitchell was in the Sound Hut on the Recorder. Mr. Causey was standing by the Recorder and Asap in the Sound Hut. Mr. Turner was on the after section of the bridge receiving reports as his guns, depth charges, etcetera were manned and ready.

My first act upon reaching my station was to sweep the horizon with my glasses. My analysis of the situation was as follows: Our wake indicated we were almost around on a sharp 90° turn to port. The Howard, which had evidently been on our port beam at the beginning of this turn was finally dead ahead, but I would not be sure of the range, perhaps two and one-half to four miles. I saw no flares in the air, nor other vessels on the horizon at this time.

I had now been on the bridge perhaps one to two minutes and the 90° turn being completed we were making what was evidently a perfect sound attack on a submarine. I was too far aft on the bridge to hear sound echoes myself, but from the reaction of the Captain and the word passed by the A.S.W. officer it was apparent we had a quite positive sound contact.

I recall hearing ranges called from about 1800 to just over 1000 yards. Just prior to hearing the last range called, the bridge talker to CIC announced "Appears to be a stern chase. Immediately thereafter the talker in communication with guns and lookouts announced, "Smoke bearing 270°." I swept my binoculars out on the port beam and positively saw smoke on the horizon which appeared to be such as would come from a ship's funnels.

No part of a vessel was visible above the horizon, however.

I left my position immediately forward of the range-finder, intending to approach the Captain and make sure he was aware of the smoke just sighted. It was at this instant that I recall hearing a range of approximately 1000 yards to the submarine called. Before I could move the ten feet forward to the Captain, there was a loud explosion a little aft of amidship, and the ship took a sharp list to starboard, throwing all of us on the bridge off-balance, but few off their feet. The time of the explosion I would place at 1220 to 1225, based on the length of time I had been on the bridge. I did not look at my watch, however, nor at the Ship's Clock, at the moment.

Immediately after the explosion, the ship settled back on an even keel, and then began to list to port, this list increasing gradually through the next ten minutes or so that we remained on the bridge.

After the explosion, the ship, (which I would say was making 15 knots when hit), became dead in the water in 100 to 200 yards. All power appeared to be out. The water about 800 to 900 yards ahead of us, and about 10° off the port bow appeared to me at this moment to carry an unusual swirl, which did not conform to the pattern of the waves. I did not see anything in the water however.

Within ten minutes of the explosion a number of things occurred, of which I am uncertain as to the chronological order. They were namely: The talker on the repair party phones on the bridge announced someone was calling over his line very faintly for help, but he could not determine from where. A second muffle explosion came from up forward, somewhere under the forecastle, and apparently in a magazine. The captain ordered all magazines flooded. Smoke arose forward, and eventually came up the ladder to the bridge. The ship aft of the 40MM director appeared to be sliced almost clear of us, and on a more even keel. We all shout from the bridge to the fantail to put the depth charges on safe, which was accomplished. I saw two men at some distance off the starboard quarter in the water, one of whom was swimming, but the other appeared lifeless. The Captain was delating possibilities of keeping the ship afloat when the Chief Engineer, Mr. Bilderback, came up the port exterior ladder to the bridge. Mr. Bilderback stated, to the best of my recollection, that we had been hit in the after motor-room, compartment B-4, at about frame 99. He stated the main drive was ruptured and the ship's back broken. He had cleared the forward engineering spaces of personnel, but stated anyone in B-4 was gone. He also indicated other engineering spaces with the possible exception of B-1, were flooding.

The ship being in a sinking condition, the Captain next made preparations to abandon ship. He ordered all life rafts cut loose and detailed swimmers to get in the water and pull them clear of the ship.

All power being off, the senior signalman sent a message to the Howard, now off our port beam, stating our condition, by semaphore. I am unaware whether it was received on the Howard or not, as she was at some distance for semaphore. An attempt was being made to signal by Aldis Lamp when the order came to abandon ship.

In my estimation, the order to abandon ship came a little over ten minutes after the ship was hit, or at approximately 1235. Up to this time, no man, to my knowledge, not blown off or ordered to man the life rafts, had left the ship. The crew morale throughout was excellent.

We went into the water in order, from the main deck up, the officers on the bridge being the last to leave the forward half of the ship. I recall that as we went down the starboard side, we had a good 45° list to port, which began to increase quite rapidly.

Once in the water, I swam to the nearest raft, about 100 yars on the starboard beam. In the next few minutes, the Gunnery and A.S.W. officers joined me, or may have been there before me. We permitted a few of the injured and weaker men on the raft, and about twenty of us remained in the water, pulling the raft clear of the ship.

When I next looked back, the forward half of the ship had separated from that aft. The engine room weight had evidently pulled the amidship section under, as the bow protruded, pointed to the sky. The after section of the ship was lower in the water but still on a more or less even keel. A few men were still leaving it and its rafts were not as far out as ours. The Howard and another DE were patrolling at some distance, and I thought I saw, and also felt the Howard dropping depth charges. TBF Avenger was patrolling over us.

In about one and one-half hours, the U.S.S. FARQUHAR (DE-139) came upon us picking up survivors. Much difficulty was experienced in boarding her due to our weakened condition, although her own survivors gave the utmost possible assistance.

About eight of us managed to climb into one of two or three rubber rafts put over the port side of the Farquhar. This raft, due to the sea alongside, shortly overturned and the undertow took us down for quite sometime. I came to the surface to see one of our enlisted men with a rope around his neck, slowly choking to death. I was able to signal faintly to a Farquhar man in a raft near us who managed to cut the rope while holding another of our men above water who had passed out. This man there fore pulled all three of us into his raft and had us hoisted aboard ship. He was one of many Farquhar men who in my estimation preformed over and above the line of duty.

In my own estimate, the U.S.S. FISKE (DE-143) was hit on the port side by either, (1) a torpedo from a second submarine out to port; or (2) a mine set loose by the submarine we were tracking. It does not seem likely that the submarine we were attacking could have launched a torpedo to hit us, as we were hit, while on the course and bearing indicated by our sound equipment.

George W. M. Cook,  
Ensign, D-V(G).., USNR.

## SINKING OF THE U.S.S. FISKE (DE-143)

We had just finished the noon meal and there was a certain amount of expectant waiting because we heard that we were going after a sub.

In a few minutes General Quarters was sounded. It was exactly like many other times that we had been called to General Quarters. Each man had a certain job to do and he set about the task. My job was on the fan-tail.

The word was passed to set a shallow pattern, to remove caps and pull the pins. This was done in a matter of seconds. The men on each K-gun were tense, ready to fire their gun by hand if it failed to fire at the proper time.

I was checking the pattern on the guns and was beside the number five K-gun when the explosion came. I was blown off my feet and back past the number 7 K-gun. Heavy waves of water picked me up and washed me aft until I struck the shield around the 20MM guns. The water was deep enough that in a horizontal position my body floated and did not touch the deck.

The deck cleared of water and I looked to see the condition of the ship. It looked like the upper deck was holding the ship together.

I could see that many of the men were hurt but there was no sign of panic. I was amazed that I did not feel more emotion. The men remained calm, obeyed orders and showed greater concern for others than they did for their own well being.

I went forward and found Drummond, SC2c. lying on the deck with a broken leg and cuts on his face. His life belt had come unfastened and he could not move. I put his life belt around him and fastened it. I assured him that we would get him off the ship.

Someone reported that Johnson was badly hurt. I went to him and found that he had a broken leg. He was smiling and said that he was O.K. I checked to see that he had a lifebelt and told him that we would help him if we had to abandon ship.

The earphones were not working and we were never able to contact the bridge. However, word was passed by mouth to set the Depth Charges on safe. I ordered the charges set on safe and ordered Chief Gunner's Mate Burk to check all the charges.

Someone reported that Lt. Rentfro had a broken leg. I went to him. I told him that I would send some men to help him. I noticed Alston StMle. hanging by one foot above the deck. He was dead beyond any doubt.

I found Andreu PhM3c., who incidentally was doing a great job helping the injured, and ordered him to help Lt. Rentfro.

I told all men to check their life belts and to leave their clothes on if they had to jump as it would keep them warm.

Chief Bunk reported that all charges had been set on safe and that he had checked them.

The ship had almost split in half by this time. The bow was listing more than the stern and it appeared that they were abandoning ship. We were never able to get word to abandon ship but anyone with judgment could tell it was time.

I sent two men around to help Lt. Rentfro off the ship. They come back and said that he was off.

I ordered the men to check the lifebelts on all injured men and get them off the ship.

All hatches were secured, all Depth Charges on safe, and all injured off the ship before the order was given to abandon ship. During all this time it was impossible to get to the forward half of the ship.

I jumped overboard and grabbed Drummond who was unable to swim and pulled him out to a raft. With help we got most of the injured on the raft.

We started swimming away from the ship and sang songs to keep our thoughts off of our injuries. There was no panic.

I tried to put the bodily injured on the raft. Soon we saw a DE coming to pick us up. We were praying that she wouldn't be torpedoed as she tried to help us.

All the lines and ladders were in use. I saw a need for more ladders on a ship. I sent a man to get a line that had fallen short. I ordered part of the men to climb the ladder.

We could not make the men on deck hear us so I told the men I would get more lines to get the injured aboard. I thought that I could climb the ladder but I could not without help. Someone helped me up and asked if I was alright. I told him I was but to get lines to the injured in the raft.

An officer said they would get the men and ordered me back on the fan-tail. My watch had stopped at 1:32 P.M.

E. L. SWEARINGER,  
Ensign, (SC) ., USNR.



**TRAHAN, Leo M., CMoMM, USN: (Forward Engine Room)**

I went to my General Quarters station in the Forward Engine Room. It was a port hit. I left the engine room to go topside to take a look as to the extent of damage. It looked like the ship had been hit on the port side directly at the after engine room. There was only two or three inches of water line at the break. She was listing to port. I went to the hatch leading to the forward engine room and hollered for everyone to get out of there. I then went to the rail and the second explosion knocked me over the side. It felt like another torpedo hit at the port side. In the water I swam around the ship and noticed casualties and also that the ship had broken in two right aft of the stack.

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**DONOHUE, Leonard J., SoMlc, USN: (Sound Room)**

I went on the bridge about 12 o'clock and they sounded the chemical alarm for an alert. We started out for a contact. We got to point of original contact. We did not get any contact there at all. The 138 (USS Douglas L. Howard (DE-138)) suggested we keep going on the same course. We continued about 10 minutes and got a faint echo about 2500 yds. The 138 was on the same bearing as the echo at 4000 yards. We headed for the contact. We went 2000 yards. Echoes were strong and no doubt of it not being a sub. We got in to 1000 yds., the last range recorded. The ship was hit and things shook up a lot. All power seemed to go off simultaneously. No communications were established that I noticed. Immediately after we were hit we had a port list. On the bridge they began trying to find out everything that had happened. After a while the chief engineer came to the bridge and said ship's back was broken and could not be saved. It must have been about 5 minutes after the first hit when there was another explosion forward. I believe it was near or in the hedgehog magazine. By word of mouth we found out there was a fire below. The magazines were flooded immediately. There were two holes in the starboard side, I noticed, in the vicinity of hedgehog magazine. I left the ship via the signal bridge, boat deck, and then because of the list, walked down the starboard side and jumped in the water.

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**HUDEK, John L., Mlc, USNR: (Repair III)**

My battle station was Repair 3, near the laundry below 9 & 10 20MM guns. All the ventilation was shut off and I was closing off the salt water overboard discharge when we were hit. Lights went out. I was in the laundry and finally came out and undogged the hatch to C203L. Entered this compartment and dogged back the hatch again. The hatch to the depth charge magazine was blown off. The ladder to main deck was ruptured at its base and was hanging from the main deck hatch. I went up this ladder and out thru the scuttle to the fantail. I was helping to check depth charges on fantail to get them on safe. #4 life net was fouled by the explosion over one of the K guns and we got it loose. I heard an explosion forward which sounded like a blast. Then I got on a life raft on starboard side of the ship. The upper decks seemed to be holding the ship together before it broke in two.

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**MUSARRA, Joseph F., BM1c, USN: (Repair III)**

Went to GQ in charge of Repair 3 - as soon as arrived we set condition Affirm. I was checking Z fittings of the laundry. Then the fish hit us. The lights went out. All communications out. 9 men with me. The explosion threw us all to the deck. We suffered minor casualties. The hatch dogged down over depth charge magazine was blown off by the concussion. I had all my men get topside. I noticed the forward part of the ship seemed to be moving in a different direction from the stern and giving appearance of snaking thru the water. We let go the life rafts and nets. One was jammed and we cut it down. Next we started the wounded overboard, so they could get on rafts. The forward part completely rolled over on its side to port. It was about 15 to 20 minutes from the hit to the time the ship broke and the forward part capsized. The stern then listed to port. Then there were about 2 or 3 men left aboard at this time and we abandoned and swam for a raft. After we got on the raft the stern turned vertical.

\*\*\*\*\*

**YOUNG, Raymond A., SF1c, USNR; (Repair II)**

I went to Repair 2. It hit about 5 minutes of one it seemed to me. I was knocked on the deck and hurt. She began to settle right then. I got out on the weather deck near the after passageway - Rentfro was officer in charge and was hurt badly. All the repair party was pretty well battered up. I believe there was only one torpedo which hit on port side. I stayed on for about 20-25 minutes. We checked below deck to C203. It was too dark to see anything there. We returned to topside in about 2-3 minutes. The deck by after steering was split fore and aft about 4 to 5 inches. We just helped get the wounded off and then went over the side - The ship split in about 10 to 15 minutes. The forward part of the ship rolled to port and it broke loose. The forward part stayed horizontal for about 15 minutes before settling and getting in an upright position.

\*\*\*\*\*

**JOHNSON, Lloyd G., TM2c, USNR: (#5 "K"-gun)**

My battle station was K-gun #5, starboard side. I had reached down to pick up a firing string and we were hit on the port side. I was thrown against the 9 & 10 20MM gun shield and then on over to a portside K-gun. Everything I could see which was around the fantail seemed to be all messed up and some of the main deck plating around the #3 gun appeared to have buckled and wrinkled up some. Port side life rafts were down. I do not know if they were taken down or knocked down. I can just barely remember seeing the ship break in two. The torpedoes came out when the ship broke and were laying on deck. They were on safe.

\*\*\*\*\*

**KRAVITZ, Herbert, GM2c, USNR: (Twin 40-mm mount)**

My battle station was 40MM gun wearing phones. They told the 1st & 2nd section to man battle stations while 3rd section went below to eat. Then the word was passed over the phones there was a radar contact on the horizon. We started to go full speed toward the contact. They say some of the fellows on the bridge saw the target, on the horizon then it disappeared. Soon as we got to the place they sounded GQ for all hands. They slowed down speed at this point.



**KRAVITZ, Herbert, GM2c, USNR: (Continued)**

The next thing we were hit on the starboard side. Soon as we were hit I saw water in front of my eyes then black. I hit the deck by my gun. My phones were still on. I looked for my life belt but couldn't find it and put on a life ring attached to the shield. The PhM came up and helped me put it on. I noticed the torpedo tubes were torn open and were pointing in the air. From the water level of the main deck there was a big hole to the tubes. The forward and after parts of the ship were connected by the port side. It took the ship 20 minutes to break in two. I got in the water on the port side and noticed the deck around the torpedo tubes and superstructure to the boat deck was crumpled up. When the ship cracked in two the bow went up in the water, and midships settled.

\*\*\*\*\*

**SCHWEIBERGER, Frank R., SF3c, USN: (Repair II)**

I went to my battle station at Repair two amidships first platform deck. I was on main deck at after passage when the ship was hit. Repair party was all at station before the hit. We were just completing setting condition Affirm, then got hit on port side. I was knocked unconscious. We got out of passageway to port side main deck. I was helpless and could not get to my feet at all. Condition Affirm must have been set very well in after part of the ship, the way the stern stayed up. The hit was in the after 2 engine spaces. The forward part of the ship listed to port while we were in the water, and the mast threatened us so we swam out away from the ship. While we were swimming away from the ship we could feel depth charges going off from the other ship. When the ship parted there was a good space between the two parts of the ship. There was a lot of oil slick where the ship parted and I swam thru there to get to a raft. The after part of the ship did not go up vertical until after we got on the raft.

\*\*\*\*\*

**VARTANIAN, Charles, RM3c, USN: (Charthouse)**

I was on the VHF in the charthouse. When we were hit all power was dead. As my apparatus was dead I left the charthouse and went to signal bridge. I could not say which side had been hit but it was at the tubes. I then went to the boat deck and helped splint a broken leg. Then I started to enter radio shack passage and the ship started listing to port. Before I had come off the signal bridge. It might have been the hedgehog or something else. I left the ship when the forward part listed to port, from the starboard side. I noticed the torpedoes rolled out of their casings and dropped into the water where the ship was split.

\*\*\*\*\*

**SPERA, John A., Slc, USNR: (40-mm director)**

I went to my battle station at 40 MM director. I was standing in front of the director when we were hit. The ship parted and broke in half. The torpedo tubes were broken in half. I landed on the other side of the director. Torpedo tubes were sticking up in the air. I think the ship was hit in the port side. A man on 40MM gun helped me down the side to main deck. I sat down and waited until the rafts and nets were over and wounded overboard. They threw us overboard to paddle to a raft. It broke in half I would say in 5 minutes after it was hit.

\*\*\*\*\*



The USS Fiske (DE-143) In World War II

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<u>Description</u>	<u>Source Code/Ident. No.</u>	
On the ways, Orange, Texas, 3/14/43	RWP	N-10766A
Sponsor's party at launching, 3/14/43	NA	19-N50658
Launching, Orange, Texas, 3/14/43	PC	- - - - -
Commissioning ceremony, 8/25/43	PC	- - - - -
Port beam, u/way, N.Y. Harbor, 10/20/43	NHF	NH 53909
Twin 40-mm Bofors mount	RWP	N-6569A
20-mm Mk. 4 Oerlikon machine cannon	NA	19-N-31965
Fantail 20-mm's, N.Y. Navy Yd., 3/29/44	NA	19-N-65723
Bridge from foc'sle, 3/29/44	NA	19-N-65725
Torpedoed, crew abandoning ship, 8/2/44	NA	80-G-270257
After breaking in two, 8/2/44	RWP	N-10765A
USS <u>Douglas L. Howard</u> (DE-138), port bow	NA	19-N-71831
USS <u>Douglas L. Howard</u> , stbd. beam	NA	19-N-80874
Stern section afloat, 8/2/44	RWP	N-10766
TBF-1 Avenger torpedo bomber	USNI	Order with photocopy
USS <u>Wake Island</u> (CVE-65), aerial, 10/44	RWP	N-996
USS <u>Farquhar</u> (DE-139), port bow, 10/44	NA	80-G-364589

\* \* \* \* \*

Key to Sources:

NA Archives II  
8601 Adelphi Road  
College Park, MD 20740-6001  
Still Picture ref.: (301) 713-6625, Ext. 234  
(Request addresses/price lists of private vendors)

NHF Naval Historical Foundation Photo Service  
Washington Navy Yard  
1306 Dahlgren Ave., SE  
Washington, DC 20374-5055  
(202) 433-2765

PC Private collection, Robert R. White (survivor)

RWP Real War Photos, P.O. Box 728, Hammond, IN 46325

USNI U.S. Naval Institute Photo Service  
Beach Hall  
291 Wood Road, Annapolis, MD 21402-5034  
(410) 268-6110; FAX: (410) 269-7940

E. A. Wilde, Jr.  
January 2001





# The U.S.S. Fiske (DE-143) In World War II

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### Deck Logs:

- USS Douglas L. Howard (DE-138), 2 August 1944
- USS Farquhar (DE-139), 2 August 1944
- USS Fiske (DE-143), 20 January 1944, 1 June 1944

### Action Reports:

- USS Farquhar, Serial 47, 18 August 1944
- USS Fiske, secret letter (no file or serial no.), 8 August 1944

### Miscellaneous:

- Article, "Casualties Aboard A Torpedoed Destroyer Escort," DESANEWS (Destroyer Escort Sailors Association), July 1982
- Casualties summary, Fiske, 8/2/44; machine-generated report prepared by BuPers c. 1946, in the "Battle Books" at the National Archives.
- Conversations: Robert R. White, survivor  
Capt. Richard K. Gould, USN (Ret.), on 8/2/44 Sqd. Cdr. VC-58, embarked on the USS Wake Island (CVE-65).
- Oral history transcript, Lt. John A. Comly, USNR, Operational Archives, Naval Historical Center, Washington Navy Yard. Recorded 8/31/44.
- Personnel Diary (Muster Rolls), USS Fiske, on microfilm at the National Archives.
- Report, C.O. Fiske to ComDesLant, dtd. 4/2/44, listing alterations completed during yard availability, New York, 3/20-30/44.
- War Diary, USS Wake Island, 2 August 1944
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E. A. Wilde, Jr.  
January 2001



### About The Editor

E. Andrew Wilde, Jr., Commander, USNR (Ret.), received his commission through the NROTC Program at Dartmouth College in 1950. Following graduation he saw action off Korea aboard the USS Douglas H. Fox (DD-779) when this destroyer dueled with numerous North Korean shore batteries in the Sea of Japan. Many of the photographs he took during this period have been donated to the Naval Historical Foundation, and two of them appeared in the coffee-table book, The Navy, published by the Foundation in 2000. After completing three years of active duty he began a civilian career in public accounting and later in management positions at Raytheon Company in Waltham, Massachusetts.

In 1993 he developed a strong interest in naval history and began editing a series of illustrated ships' histories primarily of U.S. destroyers sunk in World War II. Primary source documents such as action reports, ships' war diaries, medal citations and muster rolls are included in these histories as well as many firsthand accounts. His booklets are not for sale, but he sends complimentary copies to the survivors and to the families of crewmembers killed on these vessels.

Commander Wilde is a life member of the Naval Historical Foundation and the U.S. Naval Institute.



Historical Compilations by the Editor:

(Destroyer/Destroyer Escort Hulls in World War II)

<u>United States Ship</u>	<u>Date Sunk/ (Damaged)</u>	<u>Area</u>	<u>Killed/ Wounded<sup>1</sup></u>
<u>Aaron Ward</u> (DD-483)	04/07/43	Guadalcanal	42/139*
<u>Barton</u> (DD-599)	11/13/42	Guadalcanal	164/32
<u>Borie</u> (DD-215)	11/01/43	North Atlantic	27/00
<u>Colhoun</u> (APD-2)	08/30/42	Tulagi	51/18
<u>Corry</u> (DD-463)	06/06/44	Normandy	24/55
<u>Cushing</u> (DD-376)	11/13/42	Guadalcanal	72/67
<u>DeHaven</u> (DD-469)	02/01/43	Guadalcanal	168/40
<u>Douglas H. Fox</u> (DD-779)	(05/17/45)	Okinawa	10/36
<u>Drexler</u> (DD-741)	05/28/45	Okinawa	158/54
<u>Duncan</u> (DD-485)	10/12/42	Guadalcanal	48/35
<u>Emmons</u> (DMS-22)	04/06/45	Okinawa	60/78
<u>Fiske</u> (DE-143)	08/02/44	North Atlantic	33/65
<u>Glennon</u> (DD-620)	06/10/44	Normandy	25/49*
<u>Halligan</u> (DD-584)	03/26/45	Okinawa	160/43
<u>Hammann</u> (DD-412)	06/06/42	Midway	84/63
<u>Laffey</u> (DD-459)	11/13/42	Guadalcanal	59/114
<u>Lansdale</u> (DD-426)	04/20/44	Mediterranean	49/76
<u>McFarland</u> (AVD-14)	(10/16/42)	Guadalcanal	12/13
<u>Meredith</u> (DD-726)	06/09/44	Normandy	35/28
<u>Monssen</u> (DD-436)	11/13/42	Guadalcanal	145/37
<u>Perry</u> (DMS-17)	09/13/44	Angaur/Peleliu	8/17
<u>Preston</u> (DD-379)	11/15/42	Guadalcanal	117/26
<u>Spence</u> (DD-512)	12/18/44	Luzon, P.I.	315/24
<u>Strong</u> (DD-467)	07/05/43	Cent. Solomons	45/61
<u>Walke</u> (DD-416)	11/15/42	Guadalcanal	82/48

\* \* \* \* \*

Notes:

\* Total for two engagements with the enemy

<sup>1</sup> Including those presumed dead more than a year subsequent to the date they were reported missing either due to enemy action or by drowning.

E. Andrew Wilde, Jr.  
Commander, USNR (Ret.)  
June, 2005



Locations Where Historical Comoilations by the Editor  
Are Available For Researchers

<sup>1</sup> Air Zoo, Guadalcanal Campaign Collection, Potage, Michigan  
ECU Manuscript Collection, Joyner Library, Greenville, NC  
Louisiana Naval War Memorial Library, Baton Rouge, Louisiana

<sup>2</sup> Maine Maritime Museum Library, Bath, Maine  
Mariners' Museum Research Library, Newport News, Virginia  
Mystic Seaport's G. W. Blunt White Library, Mystic, Connecticut

National Archives II Library, College Park, Maryland  
<sup>3</sup> National D-Day Museum Library Collection, New Orleans, LA  
National Museum of Pacific War, War Studies, Fredericksberg, TX

Naval Historical Center, Navy Dept. Library, Washington Navy Yard  
\_\_\_\_\_, Operational Archives Branch, Washington Navy Yard  
\_\_\_\_\_, Ships' Histories Branch, Washington Navy Yard

Naval War College, Naval Historical Collection, Newport, RI  
N.Y. Public Library, 42nd & 5th Ave., Room 315, New York, N.Y.  
<sup>2</sup> Portland Public Library, Portland Room, Portland, Maine

<sup>4</sup> Tin Can Sailors, Inc., Research Library, Somerset, Massachusetts  
US Naval Academy, Nimitz Library Special Collections, Annapolis  
U.S. Naval Institute, History Division, Beach Hall, Annapolis, MD

U.S. Navy Memorial's Research Library, Washington, D.C.  
USS Slater (DE-766) Library, Albany, New York

\* \* \* \* \*

Notes:

1 Only ships which participated in the Guadalcanal Campaign:  
Aaron Ward, Barton, Colhoun, Cushing, DeHaven, Duncan, Laffey,  
McFarland, Monssen, Preston, Walke.

2 Only Bath-built ships: DeHaven, Drexler, Emmons, Meredith,  
Spence, Strong


3 Only ships sunk off the Normandy Beachhead: Corry, Glennon,  
Meredith

4 By appointment only: (508) 677-0515

E. A. Wilde, Jr.  
June, 2006







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Dummies (Bookselling) -- Specimens.  
World War, 1939-1945 -- Campaigns -- Atlantic Ocean.  
Anti-submarine warfare -- Atlantic Ocean.  
World War, 1939-1945 -- Naval operations, American.  
World War, 1939-1945 -- Personal narratives, American.  
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