



H-Gram 067: USS *Edsall*'s Last Stand

9 February 2022

Overview

Because I covered the 75th anniversary of World War II fairly thoroughly in past H-grams, my intent for the 80th anniversary will be to reference the previous H-grams (which are online) while highlighting specific acts of valor (such as this H-gram) or cover some major events I previously didn't get around to writing about. These include the New Guinea campaign and some European/Atlantic Theater actions. In some cases, such as in the case of the H-gram covering the Pearl Harbor attack, I may make some significant updates/revisions that I will highlight. I will also continue coverage related to the 70th anniversary of the Korean War, the 50th anniversary of Vietnam, and the "Battles You've Never Heard Of" series.

This H-gram covers the heroic, but little-known story of Lieutenant Joshua Nix and the fight by solitary World War I-vintage destroyer Edsall (DD-219) against two Japanese battleships,



Still from a Japanese propaganda film showing the final moments of USS Edsall (DD-219), under Japanese attack on 1 March 1942 in the Indian Ocean.

two heavy cruisers, a light cruiser, eight destroyers, and four aircraft carriers south of Java on 1 March 1942.

80th Anniversary of World War II: Edsall's Last Stand

In previous H-grams, I have quoted naval historian Rear Admiral Samuel Eliot Morison's statement that the Battle off Samar in October 1944 represented the most gallant action in U.S. naval history, particularly the solo charge by Commander Ernest Evans and Johnston (DD-557) against an overwhelming Japanese force. Although I agree with Morison (and one of my goals as director of Naval History is to have a destroyer named after Ernest Evans), I have also said that there are many contenders for the title "most gallant." The story of Edsall and her commanding officer, Lieutenant

Joshua Nix, is one of them. (I didn't do near enough justice to this action in H-Gram 003).

In the last week of February 1942, the Allied defense of the Dutch East Indies collapsed in an utter rout after the disastrous defeat of combined Dutch, British, Australian, and U.S. forces in the Battle of the Java Sea in the face of a relentless onslaught by the Imperial Japanese Navy. Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King would later describe the ill-starred campaign as a magnificent display of incredibly bad strategy. However futile, the defeat was also chock full of some of the most incredible displays of courage in the face of overwhelming odds in the annals of the U.S. Navy, with many such acts no doubt known but to God. There were no Medals of Honor or Navy Crosses for the crew of Edsall, nor was any ship ever named after her commanding officer, because their acts of valor were known only to the Japanese.

In the pre-dawn hours of 1 March 1942, Edsall and her sister Whipple (DD-217), both deemed unfit for combat service due to previous damage, completed the transfer to oiler Pecos (AO-6) of 485 survivors from the seaplane tender (and former first U.S. aircraft carrier) Langley (AV-3), scuttled two days earlier after being crippled by Japanese navy land-based bombers. Edsall received orders to take 31 U.S. Army Air Forces pilots, rescued from Langley, to Java, even though their 32 P-40 fighters had gone down with Langley and Java was being evacuated. Nevertheless, Edsall obeyed her nonsensical orders, set a course north toward Java, and was never seen again—except by the Japanese.

Later that day, Pecos was sighted and subjected to relentless attack by Japanese carrier aircraft, and finally sunk despite a

spirited defense that embarrassed the best dive-bomber pilots in the Japanese navy. Whipple responded to Pecos' distress calls, ultimately rescuing 232 survivors after nightfall, but was forced to leave the area due to repeated submarine contacts, leaving almost 500 survivors to perish in what was one of the great tragedies of the war.

Edsall had reversed course and was probably responding to Pecos' distress calls when she was sighted by a Japanese aircraft only 16 miles from the Japanese carrier force (Kido Butai) of Akagi, Kaga, Hiryu, and Soryu. The plane misidentified the Edsall as a "Marblehead-type" light cruiser "pursuing" the Japanese carriers. Reportedly blowing his temper that an enemy "cruiser" was that close to his force without having been previously detected, Vice Admiral Chiuchi Nagumo ordered both his fast battleships, Hiei and Kirishima, and both his heavy cruisers, Tone and Chikuma, to dispatch the enemy cruiser as his carriers continued recovery of aircraft from the Pecos strikes.

Edsall didn't have a prayer. With her speed and maneuverability impaired by the premature explosion of a depth charge under her fantail in a previous attack on a submarine contact, the destroyer had no hope of escape from the battleships and cruisers. Her antiquated 4-inch guns couldn't even penetrate Japanese destroyer armor, let alone that of battleships and cruisers. Edsall's anti-aircraft armament was pitifully out of date. She carried less than a full load of torpedoes (9 in 12 tubes, and by design only 6 tubes could fire in each direction). Although torpedoes were Edsall's most potent weapon, attempting a daylight torpedo attack against faster ships, with torpedoes that could not out-range even

the secondary armament of those ships, could only end one way.

No one knows what went through the mind of Lieutenant Nix as he assessed the situation. However, as a product of the U.S. Naval Academy in the interwar years, he was thoroughly indoctrinated with the spirit of John Paul Jones and steeped in the mantra of the dying Captain James Lawrence: "Don't give up the ship." Alone in the Indian Ocean against insurmountable odds, with no prospect of help and unable to run, Nix's options were to strike his colors, scuttle and abandon his ship, or to go down fighting. The evidence shows that for his honor and the honor of the U.S. Navy, he chose to fight to the end.

Japanese heavy cruiser Chikuma opened fire with her 8-inch guns at maximum range (21,000 yards), as the battleships circled around to cut off any avenue for escape before they too opened fire at maximum range with their 14-inch guns.

Edsall responded with a smoke screen described by the Japanese as very skillfully laid (it took Tone almost 40 minutes to actually find Edsall and open fire). For well over an hour, Nix put on a display of ship handling for which even the Japanese expressed admiration. Repeatedly and unpredictably altering course and speed, from flank to zero and in between, Edsall thwarted Japanese aim time and time again, as dozens and then hundreds of Japanese shells missed. The longer range at which the Japanese fought gave Nix enough time between gun flash and impact to take evasive action. The Japanese shells very accurately hit where they were aimed, and where they expected Edsall to be, except Edsall wasn't there.

Interspersed with additional smoke screens, Edsall's bobbing, weaving, and jinking was described by a Japanese account as like "a Japanese dancing mouse," meant as a compliment to her nimble, manic, and unpredictable actions. Eventually, the Japanese figured out that they were up against a destroyer and not a light cruiser. This only added to the mounting frustration of the Japanese commanders (the commander of the battleships was Rear Admiral Gunichi Mikawa, future victor in the devastating U.S. defeat in the Battle of Savo Island). Here, however, the powerful Japanese force that had run amok across the Pacific, steamrolling all opposition, was being stymied and thoroughly embarrassed by one elderly destroyer.

At a point, the Japanese battleship and cruiser commanders ordered their force to "charge" and close the range. Lieutenant Nix responded by charging the Japanese. Shortly after, Edsall turned and opened fire with her 4-inch guns, but all rounds fell short. However, the Japanese were then shocked as a spread of torpedoes narrowly missed Chikuma, causing them to be a bit more circumspect.

Finally as dusk was approaching and over 1,200 rounds fired for at most two hits—neither of which seemed to affect Edsall—Admiral Nagumo decided that enough was enough and ordered his carriers to launch aircraft despite the fading light. Kaga, Hiryu, and Soryu launched a total of 26 Val dive-bombers that set upon Edsall. For about 20 minutes, Nix managed to make most of the dive-bombers miss. However, several direct hits and multiple near misses were more than the old ship could take.

As fires began to rage and the ship began to settle, and before losing all steerage way, Nix defiantly pointed his bow at the Japanese ships. He then supervised an orderly abandon ship before apparently returning to the bridge where he was not seen again (according to Japanese observers).

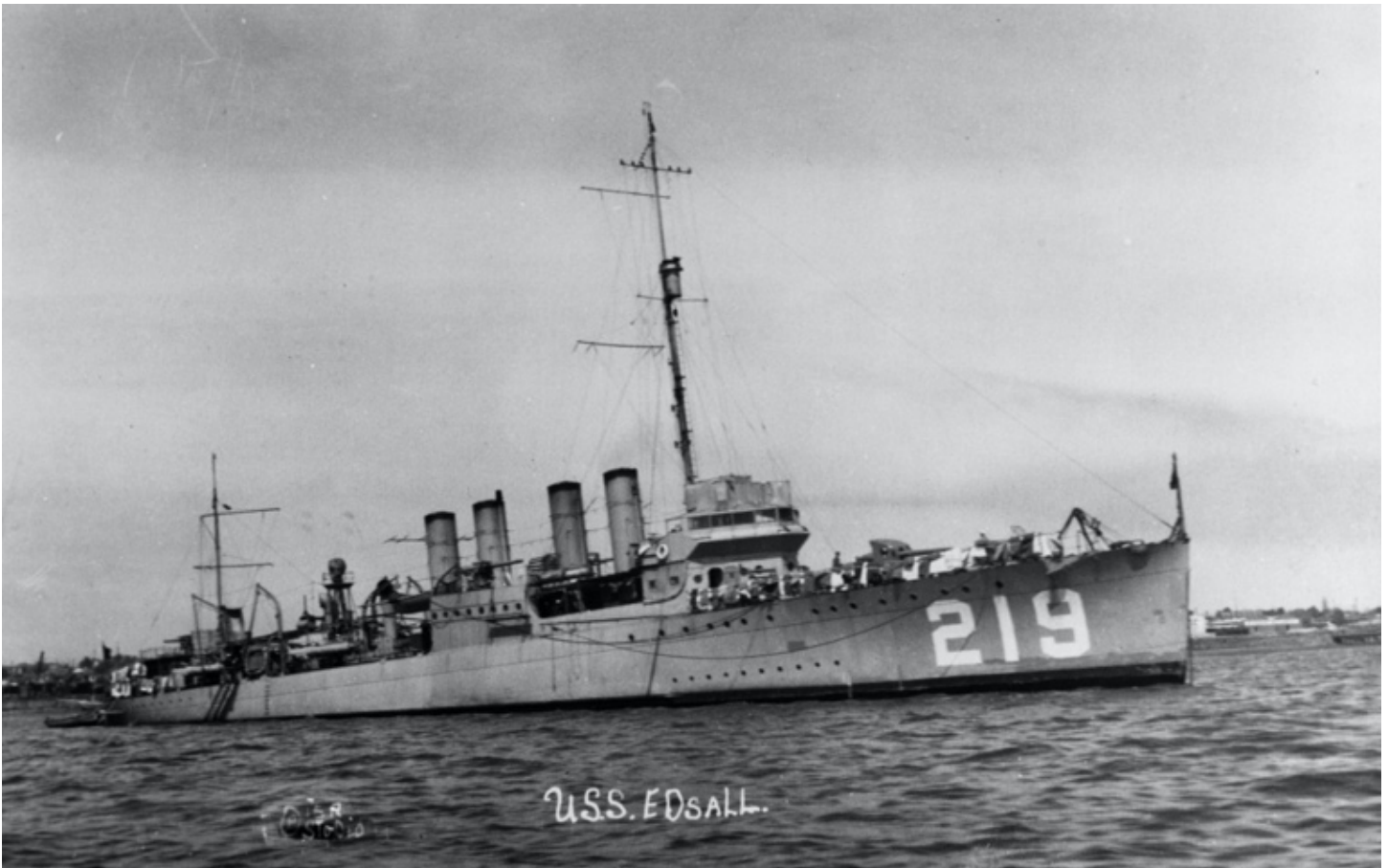
With Edsall immobile, abandoned, and already sinking, Kirishima and Chikuma closed in for the kill with a final fusillade of shellfire from two directions. In the end, it took 1,335 14-inch, 8-inch, 6-inch, and 5-inch shells, 26 550-pound bombs, and over an hour and a half to put Edsall under. A still from a film of Edsall's last moments was used in Japanese propaganda, with the destroyer misidentified as HMS Pope, and misidentified in many subsequent accounts as USS Pope (DD-225—a sister ship lost the same day south of Borneo). In the film and still, Edsall is literally being blown out of the water.

Chikuma picked up about eight survivors from Edsall. Many others were left behind. Edsall had sent a radio report stating she had been surprised by two Japanese battleships, but only one ship heard it, a Dutch cargo ship subsequently sunk. The message was only reported after the Dutch ship's master was rescued days later. It wouldn't have made any difference. There was no one to come to Edsall's aid, as the Kido Butai, a separate battleship force, and other cruiser forces swept the seas around the Dutch East Indies clear of any Allied warships or merchant shipping. These included heavy cruisers USS Houston (CA-30) and HMS Exeter, light cruiser HMAS Perth, U.S. destroyers Pope and Pillsbury (DD-227), gunboat USS Asheville (PG-21), and other Allied destroyers and ships. (Every one of the ships above has their

own unique story of incredible valor to rival this one.)

Lieutenant Nix and his crew were subsequently declared missing in action due to enemy action as of 1 March 1942. No word of the fate of any was heard during the war, and all were declared presumed dead in November 1945. During war crimes trials in 1946, the remains of six Edsall enlisted crewmen, and possibly five of the USAAF pilots who had been aboard Edsall were located in mass graves near Kendari II Airfield, Celebes, Indonesia (formerly Dutch East Indies). All had been executed by beheading, determined years later to have occurred on 24 March 1942. Japanese accounts suggest that Nix chose to go down with his ship.

For more details on the last months of USS Edsall, please see attachment H-067-1. For more on the valor of the U.S. Asiatic Fleet, please see H-Gram 003.



USS *Edsall* (DD-219), 1920–1942 (NH 69331).

H-Gram 067-1: The Dancing Mouse: USS *Edsall*'s Last Stand, 1 March 1942

H-Gram 067, Attachment 1
Samuel J. Cox, Director NHHC
February 2022

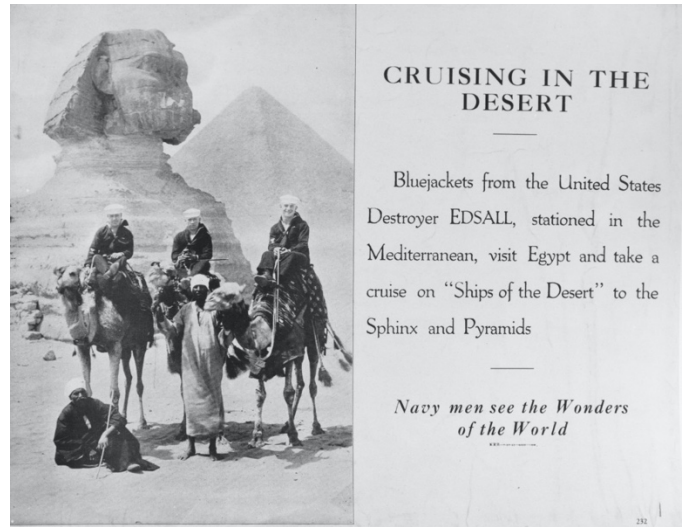
USS *Edsall* (DD-219) was one of 156 *Clemson*-class “flush deck” (or “four-piper”) destroyers authorized in 1917 and designed as battle fleet escorts to counter the German torpedo boat threat in World War I. It was the largest shipbuilding program in U.S. Navy history until the *Fletcher*-class destroyers in World

War II. However, none of the *Clemson*-class destroyers were completed in time to participate in the war for which they were built. *Edsall* was laid down in September 1919 and commissioned on 26 November 1920.

Edsall was named after Seaman Norman Eckley Edsall, of the protected cruiser *Philadelphia* (C-4), who was killed in an ambush by Samoan warriors on 1 April 1899 while attempting to carry badly wounded Lieutenant Philip Van Horne Lansdale to safety. Ensign John R. Monaghan refused to leave Lansdale, and both were killed by pursuing Samoan natives. Edsall, Lansdale and Monaghan would have multiple ships named in their honor. (I will cover the Battle of Vailele, Samoa, in the third installment of “Battles You’ve Never Heard Of” later this spring.)

Edsall was 1,190 tons and 314 feet in length. She had two geared turbines with twin shafts and screws, capable of a very respectable 35 knots. She was armed with four single 4-inch/50-caliber guns (one forward, one amidships starboard, one amidships port, and one aft). She had one 3-inch/23-caliber anti-aircraft gun. She had four triple-tube 21-inch torpedo mounts (two mounts per side) with 12 Mark 8 torpedoes (no reloads). Due to experience countering German U-boats during the war, the design was modified during construction to include two depth charge tracks on the stern, and a Y-gun depth charge projector forward of the after deck house, but she was still optimized to defend battleships. Her anti-aircraft armament would be increased with the addition of .50-caliber and .30-caliber machine guns over time. Her armament in 1941 was essentially the same as in 1920.

Despite missing the Great War, *Edsall* had an eventful early career. She deployed to the Mediterranean and the Black Sea in 1922 just as the civil war between the Communists and White Russians raged. During this deployment, war broke out between Greece and Turkey as the Turks expelled the Anatolian Greeks from the west coast of Turkey (where they had lived since before Homer's times). In September 1922, *Edsall* evacuated 607 Greek refugees to Salonika, Greece, after they were evicted from Izmir, Turkey. *Edsall* acted as flagship for U.S. Navy forces protecting American lives and property on the coast of Turkey and evacuating additional Greek refugees. During the deployment, *Edsall* conducted show-the-flag port visits to Turkey, Bulgaria, Russia, Greece, Egypt, Palestine Mandate, Syria, Tunisia, Dalmatia, and Italy, before arriving in Boston for overhaul in July 1924.



Recruiting poster: "Cruising in the Desert," showing crewmembers of US *Edsall* (DD-219) aboard camels with a guide in view of the sphinx and a pyramid during *Edsall*'s Mediterranean deployment, 1922-1924 (NH76782).

In January 1925, *Edsall* departed the east coast of the United States for service in the Asiatic Fleet, arriving in Shanghai in June 1925. *Edsall* remained in the Asiatic Fleet for the remainder of her career. In late 1941, *Edsall* was one of 13 destroyers assigned to the fleet, all aged *Clemson*-class. Along with the heavy cruiser *Houston* (CA-30), and elderly light cruiser *Marblehead* (CL-12), these 13 destroyers represented the surface combatant capability of the U.S. Navy in the Far East on the eve of war with Japan.

Lieutenant Joshua James Nix assumed command of *Edsall* on 13 October 1941, having first been assigned as the executive officer on the ship in October 1940. Lieutenant Nix was a 1930 U.S. Naval Academy graduate, 304th in a class of 405. His academy nickname was "Nickth" on account of his lisp. He was married the same day that he graduated and would have two sons (Walter was USNA '54). The Class of 1930 would lose 42 members during the war.

Ensign Nix completed his required sea duty on battleship *New York* (BB-34) before heading to Naval Air Station Pensacola for flight training. However, he did not get his wings. In May 1932, he was assigned to *Clemson*-class destroyer *Fox* (DD-234). In December 1933, he was assigned to the even older *Wickes*-class destroyer USS *Lea* (DD-118). In 1935, he reported to the elderly light cruiser *Omaha* (CL-4), before becoming an ordnance instructor at the Naval Academy in 1937. Promoted to lieutenant in June 1938, he was assigned the next year to the Asiatic Fleet destroyer tender, *Black Hawk* (AD-9). Although his career to that point had not been especially remarkable, he was believed to be the youngest destroyer skipper at the time when he assumed command of *Edsall*.

As the threat of war with Japan increased in 1941, Commander in Chief, U.S. Asiatic Fleet, Admiral Thomas C. Hart (USNA '97) ordered all dependents back to the States. This met with some defiance by spouses, which Hart quelled by threatening to restrict all officers to their ships indefinitely. This would be the last time that Lieutenant Nix would see his family.

On 25 November 1941, Admiral Hart issued his "Defensive Deployment Order," two days before the "War Warning" message from Washington. Hart's order directed the fleet's surface ships to depart the Philippines for locations further south (and out of Japanese land-based aircraft range). The order directed Destroyer Division Five Seven (DESDIV 57) to proceed south to Balikpapan, Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia). DESDIV 57 included *Edsall*, *Whipple* (DD-217), *John D. Edwards* (DD-216), and *Alden* (DD-211). The executive

officer of *Alden* was Lieutenant Ernest Evans (USNA '31).



Admiral Thomas C. Hart, c. 1939. Photo by Harris & Ewing, Washington, DC (NH 95164).

Although not stated in the order, Hart had already reached agreement with his British counterpart in Singapore that upon the outbreak of hostilities, DESDIV 57 would proceed to Singapore to provide enhanced anti-submarine protection for the arrival of Force Z, the British battleship HMS *Prince of Wales* and battlecruiser HMS *Repulse*.

Hart's actions were guided by extensive intelligence that war in the Far East was imminent, much of it derived from the radio intercept site (Fleet Radio Unit - Station Cast). This station was moved from Shanghai, China, to Cavite, Philippines, near Manila, in early 1941 (before being moved to a tunnel on the fortress island of Corregidor in Manila Bay as the Japanese approached). In addition,

Admiral Hart was receiving intelligence derived from decrypted Japanese diplomatic communications (the Purple code), that Admiral Husband Kimmel in Hawaii was not.

The devastating Japanese air attacks on the Philippines on 8 December (Philippines time - 7 December in Hawaii and Washington) and the following days effectively eliminated any air cover for U.S. naval forces operating in the Far East. For the remainder of the campaign, Japanese aircraft would have virtually uncontested control of the skies across the entire region.

On 8 December, DESDIV 57 was transiting from Balikpapan, Borneo, to Batavia (now Jakarta) when they were re-routed to Singapore in accord with the previous U.S.-British agreement (which actually had not been coordinated with Washington). Upon arrival in Singapore, DESDIV 57 took on a British liaison officer and four other Royal Navy sailors. However, Force Z had already departed in an attempt to disrupt the Japanese landings ongoing on the east coast of British Malaya.

Before DESDIV 57 could rendezvous with Force Z, both *Prince of Wales* (which had survived the encounter with German battleship *Bismarck* earlier in 1941 that sank battlecruiser HMS *Hood*) and *Repulse* were sunk by Japanese land-based Navy torpedo bombers. In many ways, this was a bigger shock than Pearl Harbor in that the new (commissioned January 1941) and modern *Prince of Wales* was the first battleship in history to be sunk by aircraft at sea in wartime conditions.

DESDIV 57 encountered Force Z's few escorts heading the opposite direction with survivors of the two British capital ships, but DESDIV 57

proceeded to the battle area anyway to search for more survivors, but found none. While returning to Singapore, *Edsall* intercepted and captured a Japanese fishing trawler towing four small boats. *Edsall* escorted the trawler (*Kofuku Maru* in some accounts, *Shofu Fu Maru* in others) to Singapore.[1]



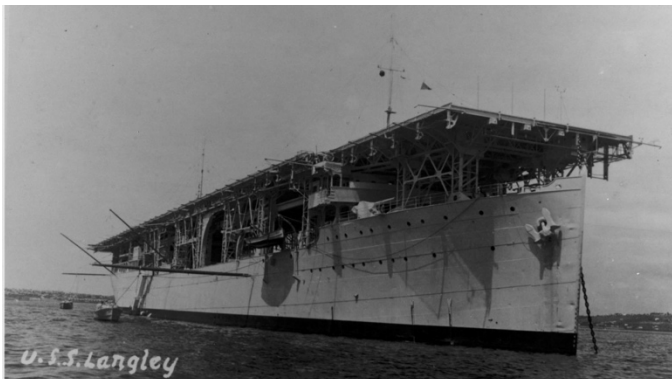
Loss of HMS *Prince of Wales* and HMS *Repulse*, 10 December 1941. Photograph taken from a Japanese aircraft, with *Prince of Wales* at far left and *Repulse* beyond her. A Royal Navy destroyer, either *Express* or *Electra*, is maneuvering in the foreground. This photograph was likely taken after the first torpedo attack, during which *Prince of Wales* sustained heavy torpedo damage (80-G-413520).

On 14 December 1941, DESDIV 57 departed Singapore for Batavia. Over the next month, *Edsall* escorted convoys between Australia and Java as increasing numbers of Japanese submarines arrived in the area, including at least two large mine-laying submarines (the Japanese had four such submarines).

On 20 January 1942, *Edsall* and *Alden* were escorting oiler *Trinity* (AO-13) to Darwin, Australia. At 0526, *Trinity* was narrowly missed by a torpedo fired by Japanese submarine *I-123*, about 40 miles west of Darwin. Japanese records indicate one torpedo fired, but *Trinity* lookouts reported three, although the sub only had two torpedo tubes. *Edsall* and *Alden* commenced the search for the submarine,

with *Alden* gaining brief sonar contact and dropping several depth charges with inconclusive results.

As *Edsall* and *Alden* escorted *Trinity* into the port of Darwin, three Australian corvettes were dispatched from Darwin to pursue the contact. At 1335, *I-123*'s sister mine-laying submarine, *I-124*, fired a torpedo at HMAS *Deloraine*, missing astern by 10 feet due to *Deloraine*'s evasive action. At 1338, *Deloraine* gained ASDIC (Anti-Submarine Detection Investigation Committee) contact on the sub and dropped six depth charges. Ten minutes later, *Deloraine* made a second depth-charge attack, causing the submarine to briefly broach the surface. A well-aimed depth charge from *Deloraine*'s port thrower hit 10 feet from the submarine's periscope as it went back under. Shortly thereafter, a bomb from an OS2U Kingfisher floatplane off seaplane tender *Langley* (AV-3, formerly the first U.S. aircraft carrier, CV-1) detonated about the same distance from the periscope. Oil and debris came to the surface as the target became stationary in 150 feet of water. *Deloraine* continued dropping depth charges until all were expended.



USS *Langley* (CV-1) in her original configuration as the Navy's first aircraft carrier, c. 1920s (NH 86968).

Commencing at 1710, HMAS *Lithgow* made seven attacks on the contact, expending all 40 depth charges. At 1748, HMAS *Katoomba* joined in with more depth charges, and even tried to hook the submarine with a grapnel. In the meantime, *Edsall* and *Alden* were ordered back to sea to continue the prosecution. At 1859, *Edsall* dropped five depth charges on a submarine contact, and at 1955, *Alden* conducted another depth-charge attack.

Edsall and *Alden* would be given partial credit for assisting in the sinking of *I-124*, but the submarine was probably done for well before the U.S. ships arrived. The Australians claimed three submarines sunk, but it was actually multiple attacks on the same submarine.

On 26 February, 16 U.S. divers from submarine tender *Holland* (AS-3) arrived aboard boom vessel HMAS *Kookaburra*. The fourth and fifth dives located a large Japanese submarine, mostly intact, with perforations around the sail and a blown hatch. There were no survivors from the approximately 80-man crew.

Some accounts claim incorrectly that the sinking of *I-124* was the first blood drawn on the Japanese submarine force. *I-124* was the first sunk by the Australians, but it was the fourth, with the first being *I-70*, sunk by *Enterprise* (CV-6) dive-bombers off Oahu on 9 December 1941. Other accounts also incorrectly claim that codebooks and other documents were recovered off *I-124*, which aided subsequent Allied code-breaking efforts. However, no divers ever penetrated *I-124*'s hull.[2]

On 23 January, *Edsall* attacked another submarine contact in the shallow water of the Howard Channel near Darwin and a depth

charge prematurely detonated under her stern in only 48 feet of water. The force of the explosion damaged one shaft and screw, and her rudder, rendering her incapable of maximum speed and impeding her maneuverability. She was deemed unfit for combat duty, relegated to escort duty, which prevented her participation in other battles, including the disastrous Battle of the Java Sea in late February.

On 3 February, *Edsall* was ordered to operate out of Tjilatjap, the largest port on the south coast of Java, along with her sister ship *Whipple* (DD-217). *Whipple* had previously collided with the Dutch light cruiser *De Ruyter* and had been fitted with a temporary "soft bow," rendering her also unfit for combat duty. For the next weeks, *Edsall*, *Whipple*, and the elderly (commissioned 1920) gunboat *Asheville* (PG-21) escorted ships in and out of Tjilatjap.

On 17 February, four carriers of the *Kido Butai* (Japanese carrier strike force) arrived at Staring Bay, Celebes Island, Dutch East Indies, under the command of Vice Admiral Chuichi Nagumo, who had led the Pearl Harbor strike force. The same night, carriers *Akagi*, *Kaga*, *Hiryu*, and *Soryu*, heavy cruisers *Tone* and *Chikuma*, and escorts departed Staring Bay for a high-speed transit toward Australia.

On the morning of 19 February, the *Kido Butai* launched a devastating surprise strike on the Australian port of Darwin with 81 Kate torpedo bombers (configured as high-altitude horizontal bombers), 72 Val dive bombers, and 36 Zeke fighters (more commonly known as "Zero") led by Commander Mitsuo Fuchida, who had led the strike on Pearl Harbor. The carrier attack was

followed up by 54 Nell and Betty twin-engine land-based bombers from Kendari, Celebes.



Ensign Philip M. Joyce, 7 November 1941, killed in action while serving in USS *Peary* (DD-226) (NH 102449).

When the attack on Darwin was over, 11 Allied ships were sunk, including destroyer *Peary* (DD-226), which went down with her guns blazing to the last (her story is also one of incredible valor), and 13 other ships were damaged, including seaplane tender *William B. Preston* (AVD-7). The strike missed catching heavy cruiser *Houston* in port by a matter of hours. Thirty Allied aircraft were destroyed and the PBY Catalina flown by future Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Thomas Moorer (USNA '33) was shot down.

The *Kido Butai* returned to Staring Bay and was joined by the battleship force under Vice Admiral Nobutake Kondo, which included Battleship Division 3 (*Hiei*, *Kirishima*, *Kongo*, and *Haruna*) and Cruiser Division 4 (heavy



USS *Houston* (CA-30) seen through the sight of an Australian 4-inch gun on the beach at Darwin, Australia, on 18 February 1942 (NH 94458).

cruisers *Atago*, *Maya*, and *Takao*). *Hiei* and *Kirishima* detached from Kondo's force to reprise their Pearl Harbor role as escorts for the *Kido Butai*. The two groups then proceeded into the Indian Ocean, operating independently, with intent to support the main Japanese invasion of Java (scheduled for 25 February) by blocking the escape route from the Dutch East Indies to Australia. Nagumo's force consisted of the four carriers, fast battleships *Hiei* and *Kirishima*, the two heavy cruisers of Cruiser Division 8 (*Chikuma* and *Tone*), the light cruiser *Abukuma*, and eight destroyers, along with six tankers.

On 26 February, *Edsall* and *Whipple* departed Tjilatjap to rendezvous and escort seaplane tender *Langley*, which was carrying a cargo of 32 P-40E Warhawk fighters, along with 33 U.S. Army Air Force (USAAF) pilots and 12 crew chiefs of the 13th Pursuit Squadron (Provisional). As the Japanese had already shot down or destroyed almost every Allied aircraft in the Dutch East Indies, achieving total dominance of the air, *Langley's* mission was one of great desperation. The commander of DESDIV 57, Commander Edwin M. Crouch (USNA '21) was embarked on *Whipple*, which was

commanded by Lieutenant Commander Eugene S. Karpe (USNA '26).

Tjilatjap was the only port on the south coast of Java that could take *Langley*. However, Tjilatjap had no airfield, so getting the P-40s out of the port was going to be a challenge in itself. Worse yet, through a tragedy of multiple errors and garbled communications, *Langley* would be making her final approach to Tjilatjap in broad daylight with no air cover, defended only by her own inadequate anti-aircraft weaponry and the equally inadequate weapons of *Edsall* and *Whipple*.

On 27 February, *Langley* was attacked by 16 Mitsubishi G4M Betty twin-engine bombers, escorted by 15 A6M Zero fighters, launching from the just-captured Den Pasar Airfield on Bali. The bombers conducted their attacks from above any effective anti-aircraft fire from *Langley*, *Whipple*, or *Edsall*. As the first nine aircraft commenced their attack in a "V" formation, the skipper of *Langley*, Commander Robert P. McConnell (who had joined the U.S. Naval Reserve in 1920), skillfully maneuvered the ship to avoid the rain of bombs. However, seven of the bombs were near misses, two within 100 feet, parting seams in the old ship's hull. *Langley* was already in serious trouble as the source of flooding could not be immediately located.

As the Japanese bombers commenced a second attack, McConnell again maneuvered to avoid, but this time the Japanese withheld their bombs, watching (and learning) from McConnell's actions. As a result, during the third attack, McConnell's maneuver was about a second too late and *Langley* was hit by five bombs and three near misses in what may have been the most accurate ship attack by horizontal bombing in the entire war.[3]

The bomb hits were devastating, despite causing amazingly few casualties. Already top-heavy with the load of Army fighters, *Langley* quickly took on a serious list as the planes all caught fire. The shock throughout the ship broke fire mains and caused other damage that severely hampered any damage control efforts. Wallowing dead in the water in broad daylight, sinking and in danger of capsizing due to the list, with every prospect of additional air attacks, and no prospect of a tug, Commander McConnell gave the order to abandon ship.

Edsall rescued 177 men from *Langley*, while *Whipple* picked up 308. Despite the severe damage, *Langley's* casualties were six killed (or seven, or eight, depending on account) and five missing. However, after being abandoned, *Langley* refused to sink. At 1428, at the request of Commander McConnell, *Whipple* fired nine 4-inch rounds into *Langley* to hasten the sinking, with no apparent effect. At 1432, *Whipple* then fired one of her few torpedoes into *Langley's* starboard quarter, with intent to detonate the after magazine. Unlike the Navy's newer torpedoes, *Whipple's* Mark 8 actually exploded on contact, but the magazine did not explode and still *Langley* refused to sink. *Whipple* then fired another torpedo into *Langley's* port side, which set off a massive fire, but otherwise only succeeded in partially correcting *Langley's* list.

Increasingly concerned that the essentially defenseless destroyers, overloaded with survivors, were at great risk of follow-on air attacks (and with *Langley's* precious cargo of fighters destroyed by fire), McConnell and Crouch agreed to leave *Langley* behind and reverse course away from Tjilatjap. At 1446, *Whipple* and *Edsall* departed the scene, each

crammed with survivors. This sequence of events would lead to later recriminations that not enough was done to save *Langley*.



Survivors of *Langley* (AV-3) on board *Whipple* (DD-217), south of Java, 27 February 1942 (NH 92477).



Sailors aboard *Whipple* watch the sinking of *Langley*, south of Java, 27 February 1942. USS *Edsall* (DD-219) is standing by off *Langley's* port side (NH 92472).

Recommendations for an investigation were subsequently quashed by Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Ernest J. King, who rejected the accusation that McConnell had not upheld the best traditions of the naval service.

As the attack on *Langley* commenced and the fight to save her continued, the Allied naval forces were engaged in a major sea battle north of Java, which would result in a disastrous lopsided defeat. The Allied commander of the force, Rear Admiral Karel Doorman, would go down with his flagship, the Dutch light cruiser *De Ruyter*, lost along with Dutch light cruiser *Java* and destroyer *Kortenaer*. British destroyers HMS *Electra* and HMS *Jupiter* were also sunk, while heavy cruiser HMS *Exeter* was badly damaged. The four U.S. destroyers involved (including *Alden*) were ordered to disengage, after being ordered to wastefully fire their torpedoes at long range, and therefore survived the battle. Ernest Evans on *Alden* would mull over the sting of this defeat, vowing later that he would never run from a fight.

In what became known as the Battle of the Java Sea (the largest surface naval engagement since Jutland in 1916), heavy cruiser *Houston* and Australian light cruiser HMAS *Perth* survived the rather inconclusive long-range daylight gunnery duel with two Japanese heavy cruisers, as well as the devastating Japanese night "Long Lance" torpedo attack that sank *De Ruyter* and *Java*. At a cost of over 2,300 Allied sailors, Doorman's force delayed the Japanese invasion of Java by one day. The Japanese lost about 36 sailors and suffered damage to one destroyer and a transport. Within the next two days, *Houston*, *Perth*, *Exeter*, and other

U.S., British, and Dutch destroyers would be on the bottom.

On 28 February, *Whipple* and *Edsall* rendezvoused with oiler USS *Pecos* (AO-6) at Flying Fish Cove at Christmas Island, 250 miles southwest of Tjilatjap, with intent to transfer *Langley's* survivors to *Pecos*. Under the command of Commander Elmer P. Abernethy (USNA '21), *Pecos* had departed Tjilatjap carrying a number of wounded men from *Houston*, *Marblehead*, and destroyer *Stewart* (DD-214) as a result of the earlier Battle of the Flores Sea and other air attacks. Before the transfer could get underway, three Japanese land-based bombers arrived overhead. Although the bombers' actual target was the phosphate mining facility on Christmas Island (which they duly bombed), the ships did not know that and hastened back to sea to the safety of a rain squall. Knowing the bombers would have reported their presence, the three ships then proceeded south in increasingly heavy seas.

In the pre-dawn hours of 1 March, the seas abated enough that the large *Pecos* could create enough of an artificial lee for the boat transfer of *Langley* survivors to take place. All survivors were transferred with the exception of 31 USAAF pilots aboard *Edsall* (two of the 33 pilots were wounded in the attack on *Langley* and were transferred to *Pecos*).

Edsall received orders from Allied command on Java to take the pilots to Tjilatlap, to marry up with 27 crated P-40 fighters due in to Tjilatjap on the *Sea Witch* (which led a charmed life). Given the ongoing complete collapse of the Allied effort to defend Java, one historian characterized this order as "one of the most monumentally stupid decisions of the war." That may be an exaggeration (with

plenty of competition), but *Edsall* commenced to carry out her orders. However, by 0830 on 1 March, the senior U.S. naval officer in the Allied Command, Rear Admiral William A. Glassford (USNA '06), issued orders for all U.S. naval forces to evacuate Java and rendezvous at a point to the south (a point that was compromised to the Japanese). As a result of the order, *Edsall* reversed course to the south.

In the meantime, *Whipple* was ordered to proceed to the Cocos Islands, southwest of Christmas Island, to escort the Norwegian tanker *Belita* (later sunk by a Japanese submarine). *Pecos* was ordered to proceed to Australia with the *Langley* survivors. Including her own crew of 15 officers and 227 enlisted, *Pecos* had about 700 personnel embarked.

Unbeknownst to the three U.S. ships, the *Kido Butai* had arrived in the vicinity of Christmas Island. At 0700, the heavy cruisers *Tone* and *Chikuma* each launched one E13A1 Jake floatplane to search the area, locating merchant ships, but no warships, as *Pecos* and the two destroyers had cleared out the day before.

Chikuma's Jake sighted the Dutch armed motor vessel *Modjokerto*, which was escaping from Tjilatjap, and vectored destroyers *Isokaze* and *Shiranuhi* to intercept. Admiral Nagumo apparently decided his ships needed some gunnery practice. Some accounts state that *Chikuma* was unable to sink *Modjokerto* with gunfire because her armor-piercing shells passed clean through, all as sailors on *Akagi* lined the rails to watch the spectacle. *Chikuma* reportedly resorted to firing a torpedo, which did the job, and which earned *Chikuma's* skipper a rebuke for wasting a torpedo on a cargo ship. However,

the war diary of Destroyer Division One gives credit to *Isokaze* for sinking *Modjokerto*. (This is just one of many discrepancies in accounts of these actions, which make it virtually impossible to state definitively what really happened.) Regardless, about 30 survivors were fished out of the water by the Japanese. By 1400, the two cruiser float planes had returned to their mother ships.

At 1000, a single aircraft with non-retractable landing gear was sighted by lookouts on *Pecos*. The presence of one single-engine aircraft of that type meant that Japanese carriers were in range, indicating that previous fragmentary reports of Japanese carriers operating south of Java were true. With his large slow oiler packed with survivors, *Pecos's* skipper Commander Abernethy knew his ship was in deep trouble, and the Japanese carrier aircraft would have all day to attack his ship. The Japanese Val dive-bomber reported the location of *Pecos* and the carriers began launching aircraft.

At about noon, the attack Commander Abernethy anticipated materialized in the form of six (or nine, depending on account) *Kaga* Val dive-bombers coming out of the sun one at a time, as if expecting easy pickings on the fat oiler. With her two 5-inch guns, 3-inch guns, and other machine guns, *Pecos* put up a ferocious defense that threw the Japanese off. Japanese accounts noted that the captain of *Pecos* was "skilled and superbly avoided our bombs." Only one bomb hit *Pecos*, killing most of the gunners at the starboard 3-inch gun mount, which was immediately remanned by other *Pecos* crewmen and kept firing. Near misses did cause significant damage, resulting in an eight-degree port list. Four of the Vals were hit, a couple badly,

although all made it back to their carriers, claiming to have sunk the *Pecos*.

Following the first attack, the list was corrected, fires brought under control and the radios fixed. An hour later, six more (or nine more) *Soryu* Vals attacked, again one at a time. Once again, *Pecos* put up an incredible volume of fire with everything she had, 5-inch and 3-inch guns, .50- and .30-caliber machine guns, Browning automatic rifles, .45-caliber pistols, and even thrown potatoes. Despite intense anti-aircraft fire that damaged most of the Vals and caused several to drop their bombs early, the ship's impaired mobility from previous damage aided the dive-bombers in obtaining four direct hits and damaging near misses, killing many sailors on *Pecos*.

Although sailors remanned the guns as fast as gunners were killed, an unauthorized shout of "abandon ship" resulted in about two boats, several life rafts, and about 100 personnel going over the side. One of the boats came down on the spinning starboard propeller, out of the water due to the resumed even greater list, which ripped the full boat and people in it to shreds. None of those who prematurely abandoned ship survived.

Although badly damaged, once again the crew of *Pecos* put out the fires, corrected much of the list, and brought the radios online again. At about 1445, *Pecos*' number was up as 18 dive-bombers from *Akagi* and *Hiryu* arrived overhead. So many of the gunners on *Pecos* had been killed or wounded that the guns were mostly manned by untrained volunteers. *Hiryu*'s dive-bombers attacked first, this time all at once. Untrained or not, the volume of anti-aircraft fire put up by *Pecos*' gunners unnerved what

were arguably the best dive-bomber pilots in the Japanese navy (if not the world) and all bombs missed.

Then it was *Akagi*'s nine dive-bombers' turn, and like *Hiryu*'s planes, they came down in a single swarm, and all bombs missed. However, the eighth bomb was a very damaging near miss, resulting in uncontrollable flooding. At this point, Abernethy knew his ship was doomed, and at 1530 he finally gave the order to abandon ship, as he "calmly directed abandoning operations under a hail of fire from enemy fliers who kept circling the ship and strafing helpless survivors clinging to life rafts and floating debris," according to his Navy Cross citation.

Three Vals strafed survivors in the water. One of the Vals still had its bomb, but was hit and driven off by fire from a .50-caliber machine gun manned by *Pecos*' executive officer, Lieutenant Lawrence McPeak (USNA '24), who was awarded a posthumous Silver Star for his action. The plane dropped its bomb harmlessly 300 yards away.

As the attack was ongoing, *Pecos* radioed distress signals and position reports, with the last transmission going out at 1538. *Pecos* sank at about 1548, and her crew (minus those killed in the bombings) went into the water, as the survivors of *Langley* went into the water a second time. *Whipple* definitely received the distress signals and changed course to come to the aid of *Pecos* despite her inadequate anti-aircraft weaponry. Lieutenant Commander Karpe was aware of the attacks as they were ongoing, but correctly decided to time *Whipple*'s arrival for after sunset, otherwise his ship would most likely meet the same fate.

Whether *Edsall* heard the distress calls is unknown, although she probably did. The troopship *Mount Vernon* (AP-22), about 100 miles away, heard the calls. As *Pecos*' crew and other survivors of *Langley* were drifting in the water in the hours prior to sunset, they could clearly hear the sounds of a major sea battle. At this point, the *Kido Butai* was between *Edsall* and the *Pecos* survivors.

Whipple began picking up survivors of *Pecos* and *Langley* at about 1915, eventually bringing 232 on board, including Commander Abernethy of *Pecos* and Commander McConnell of *Langley*, as well as the two wounded Army pilots transferred from *Edsall*. The rescue effort was interrupted about 2148 by sonar contact on a submarine, probably valid as survivors reported seeing a conning tower. *Whipple* dropped two depth charges, which never does swimmers in the water any good. *Whipple* attempted to resume rescues at 2152, but was interrupted again by a submarine contact, this time dropping four depth charges. At this point, the senior officers conferred and reluctantly agreed that it was too dangerous for *Whipple* to remain.

At about 2200, *Whipple* departed the area, leaving about 500 survivors still in the water. Tragically, a subsequent search the next day by a flying boat failed to find any survivors. None of those left behind by *Whipple*, many in plain sight, survived. Lieutenant Commander Karpe would be criticized for not rescuing more survivors, but the decision was made and jointly concurred with by the more senior officers, Crouch, McConnell, and Abernethy.[4]

Earlier on 1 March, at 1550, a plane from *Akagi*, possibly returning from bombing *Pecos*, reported sighting a light cruiser of "Marblehead type" about 16 miles behind the Japanese carriers, and reportedly pursuing the *Kido Butai*. The Japanese had a bit of a fixation with *Marblehead*, which had survived severe damage from two direct hits and a near miss from Japanese bombs on 4 February. The Japanese reported sighting her multiple times after she was long gone from the region. As of 1 March, *Marblehead* was preparing to depart Trincomalee, Ceylon, on her epic journey under her own power (with no rudder) back to the United States, in one of the most incredible damage-control feats of all time.

The contact was obviously not the *Marblehead* (or any of her sisters, which were nowhere near the Far East). The contact was, in fact, the *Edsall*. As both *Marblehead* and *Edsall* had four stacks, it was hardly the most outrageous misidentification of the war. *Edsall* was definitely not in pursuit of the *Kido Butai*; more likely, she was trying to reach *Pecos*' last reported position, which was about 24-35 miles from where *Edsall* was spotted, about 225 miles south southeast of Christmas Island. Vice Admiral Nagumo was reportedly incensed that an enemy cruiser could have gotten to within 16 miles of his forces without being previously sighted. At 1552, Nagumo ordered Battleship Division Three and Cruiser Division Eight to intercept the "cruiser." Rear Admiral Gunichi Mikawa (future victor in the Battle of Savo Island) assumed tactical command of the surface action, embarked in battleship *Hiei*, with *Kirishima* in trail. Rear Admiral Hiroaki Abe (CRUDIV 8, embarked in heavy cruiser *Tone*) assumed a secondary role. *Chikuma* initially took station to port of the battleship column with *Tone* to starboard.

At 1602, *Chikuma* sighted *Edsall* and commenced firing with her 8-inch main battery at extreme range of 21,000 yards at 1603. About five minutes later, Rear Admiral Abe ordered his cruisers to charge.

With her speed and maneuverability impaired by the damage from the previous premature depth-charge detonation, *Edsall* had no chance of outrunning the Japanese cruisers or the battleships (which were converted battlecruisers, and so faster than other battleships, which is why they were the battleships of choice to escort the carriers). *Edsall's* vintage 4-inch guns were incapable of penetrating the armor of Japanese destroyers, much less heavy cruisers and battleships. *Edsall's* torpedoes had shorter range than the numerous secondary armament guns on the Japanese battleships and cruisers. Although she had 12 torpedo tubes, *Edsall* only had nine torpedoes.

In short, Lieutenant Nix's position was hopeless from the moment *Edsall* was sighted. As a last gesture of defiance, like the famous cartoon of the little mouse flipping the bird at a huge screaming eagle, Lieutenant Nix chose to make a fight of it. Inculcated in the Naval Academy "Don't Give up the Ship" mentality, the thought of striking his colors or scuttling the ship without a fight probably did not cross his mind. If it did, he ignored it.

Edsall sent a contact report stating she had been surprised by two Japanese battleships. The *Edsall's* radio may have been jammed by the Japanese (they had the capability). Regardless, no Allied ships or stations heard the report. The master of the Dutch merchant ship *Siantar*, about 99 miles away, reported

receiving *Edsall's* report, but only after he was rescued several days later after his ship had been sunk. It would not really have mattered. The only Allied warship near enough to come to *Edsall's* aid was *Whipple*, and she would have met the same fate. Not even *Houston* could have stood up to the battleships, and she was already on the bottom of Sunda Strait. The sea battle that survivors of the sinking of *Pecos* reported hearing were Japanese guns firing on *Edsall*.

When the Japanese commenced firing, *Edsall* commenced laying a smoke screen that the Japanese described as skillfully laid. *Edsall* then commenced evasive maneuvers, constantly changing course and speed, from flank to zero and in between. Her radical and unpredictable maneuvers, interspersed with additional smoke screens, repeatedly thwarted Japanese aim, all the more remarkable given *Edsall's* impaired maneuverability. Japanese reports expressed admiration for *Edsall's* ship handling.

The battleships maneuvered to the east to cut off any avenue of escape for *Edsall*. At 1616, *Hiei* opened fire with her 14-inch main battery at a range of almost 27,900 yards, achieving a straddle, but little else. At 1619, *Hiei* commenced launching all five of her floatplanes to provide gunfire spotting, which would prove equally ineffective. It took almost 40 minutes for *Tone* to actually find *Edsall* in the smoke before she could open fire. As dozens and then hundreds of Japanese rounds missed their mark, the Japanese commanders became increasingly frustrated. About this time, the Japanese finally realized they were up against a destroyer and not a light cruiser.

At 1620, Rear Admiral Mikawa gave the order "all forces charge." At 1639, Mikawa ordered all forces to flank speed. As the range closed, *Edsall* charged the Japanese, jinking and weaving, opening fire with her 4-inch guns. The rounds from *Edsall's* guns fell short, but the Japanese were startled to see torpedoes from *Edsall* narrowly miss *Chikuma*.

By 1650, the Japanese cruisers and battleships had fired over 1,000 rounds of 14-inch and 8-inch shells, with no direct hits to show for it. Completely fed up, Vice Admiral Nagumo ordered the carriers to launch dive-bombers. At 1655, the surface ships checked fire. At 1657, the carriers commenced launching 26 Val dive-bombers. *Kaga* launched eight Vals, while *Hiryu* and *Soryu* launched nine each, all armed with a 550-pound bomb. Between 1657 and 1720, the dive bombers pounded *Edsall*. Lieutenant Nix still managed to avoid most of the bombs, but several direct hits and many near misses were more than the old ship could take.

With fires raging and the ship settling and losing way, Lieutenant Nix pointed the bow of *Edsall* at the Japanese surface ships in his last act of defiance. Japanese observers on *Chikuma* watched as an officer they believed to be the commanding officer supervised an orderly abandonment of the ship by the crew. The officer then returned to *Edsall's* bridge, and was not seen again.

At 1718, with *Edsall* dead in the water, *Kirishima* opened fire with her 14-inch guns, switching to her secondary battery four minutes later. *Chikuma* opened fire on *Edsall* from the opposite side. Under the last barrage of gunfire, *Edsall* finally went down by the stern at 1731, leaving a large number of survivors in the water. In the course of the

battle, the two Japanese heavy cruisers fired 844 8-inch rounds and 62 5-inch rounds. The two battleships fired 297 14-inch rounds and 132 6-inch rounds. Of the 1,335 rounds fired, one from *Tone* may have been a direct hit; however, even that is suspect, as it had no apparent effect.

Accounts of this battle, all derived from Japanese sources, sometimes many years after the fact, are contradictory in time and sequence of events. (I use the times from combinedfleet.com tabular record of movement [TROM] for Japanese ships.) Regardless of the times, it was approaching dusk when the carriers launched and light was fading as *Edsall* sank. This is consistent with *Pecos* survivors reporting that the distant gunfire occurred during a two-hour period before sunset. The fact that *Whipple* was able to rescue any *Pecos/Langley* survivors after sunset was probably due to the sacrifice of *Edsall*, which diverted the *Kido Butai's* attention.

The abysmal gunnery performance was not because the Japanese were poorly trained or had bad equipment, although the excessive ranges for much of the engagement had something to do with it, allowing Lieutenant Nix enough time between the flashes of guns and impact to take evasive actions. Significant credit must go to Nix and his extraordinary ship handling. According to a Japanese observer, *Edsall* performed like a "Japanese dancing mouse" (a popular domesticated pet in Japan, also known as "waltzing mice" or "whirler" for its manic and bizarre movements). If it were not for the unpredictable speed and course changes, the Japanese would have put *Edsall* under a lot sooner.

A Japanese cameraman, probably on *Tone*, filmed about 90 seconds of *Edsall*, after she was abandoned and immobile, being literally blown out of the water by probably a 14-inch shell from *Kirishima*. A still taken from the film was used in Japanese propaganda, but misidentified as a British destroyer, "HMS *Pope*" (there was no such ship). *Pope* (DD-225) is an indistinguishable sister of *Edsall* and was sunk the same day in the Java Sea south of Borneo. However, the circumstances of the loss of *Pope* (equally heroic) were different than *Edsall*. The famous photo is definitely *Edsall* (see [H-003-6](#)).

Chikuma reported picking up a (Japanese for "handful") of survivors of *Edsall*, believed to be about eight. *Tone* may have picked up one or two survivors, but that is uncertain. Many other survivors of *Edsall*'s 185-man crew were observed in the water, but were left behind, officially due to a "submarine alert." (At that point in the war, some Japanese ships would rescue enemy survivors, but later in 1942, there was pretty much "no quarter" at sea, by both side.) The *Edsall* survivors were treated decently while aboard *Chikuma*.

The *Kido Butai* returned to Staring Bay, Celebes, on 11 March, at which point about 36 prisoners of war were turned over to the Japanese Special Naval Landing Force at Kendari, and then turned over to the *Tokkeitai* (Imperial Japanese Navy military police force).

Lieutenant Nix and his crew were subsequently listed as missing in action as of 1 March 1942, presumably due to enemy action. After the war, no *Edsall* crewmen were located in Japanese prisoner-of-war camps, and the Navy Department declared the entire crew "presumed dead" on 25 November 1945, as of 1 March 1942. In keeping with

U.S. Navy tradition for ships lost in battle, the name *Edsall* was quickly recycled. Commissioned in April 1943, destroyer escort USS *Edsall* (DE-129) was the lead ship of a class of 85 vessels, optimized for convoy escort and anti-submarine warfare.

During the war crimes trial convened in Java by the Allies after the end of the war, an eyewitness led Allied investigators to the Japanese execution grounds near Kendari II airfield, on Celebes Island, locating 34 decapitated bodies in two mass graves. Most of the bodies were Javanese, Chinese, and Dutch merchant sailors from the *Modjokerto*, sunk the same day as *Edsall*. However, five remains of a group of ten were identified as *Edsall* crewmen based on dog tags. The other five were unidentified but were probably USAAF pilots who had been aboard *Edsall* when she was sunk. A sixth *Edsall* crewman, also decapitated, was identified in a separate burial area. Based on his dog tag, this crewman was Fireman Second Class Loren Stanford Myers. Although not known until many years after the war, the *Modjokerto* and *Edsall* crewmen had been executed by beheading at Kendari II on 24 March 1942.

All the U.S. remains located at Kendari II were reburied at the U.S. Military Cemetery at Barrackpore, India, on 12 November 1946. They were subsequently disinterred and reburied on 20 December 1949 at the Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery, St. Louis, Missouri, except for Fireman Myers, who was reburied at the National Cemetery of the Pacific (Punchbowl) on Oahu, Hawaii, at the request of his family.

Some accounts state Lieutenant Nix was posthumously promoted to lieutenant commander, but there is no documentary

confirmation of this, although he would have been at the top of the lieutenant list by the end of the war. He was awarded a Legion of Merit while in missing-in-action status for his actions in command of *Edsall* prior to her loss. No ship was ever named in his honor.

Edsall was awarded two battle stars for her wartime service. However, because there were no living U.S. witnesses to *Edsall's* last fight, there are no Medals of Honor, Navy Crosses or Presidential Unit Citations for what was one of the most gallant and valorous actions in the history of the U.S. Navy. Nevertheless, we have a duty to remember their courage in the face of overwhelming odds.

For more on the valor of the Asiatic Fleet, please see H-Gram 003.

Note: Normally I don't specifically identify Naval Academy graduates in H-grams. My point in doing so here is that during the darkest days of World War II, the officers on ships were almost entirely Naval Academy graduates, who bought time and held the line, with extraordinary courage and great cost. With their lives, they brought great credit to the institution. Their sacrifice enabled a nation that was not ready for war to recover and persevere. The career enlisted Sailors, who endured years of low pay and hardship in the interwar years, were just as important in holding the line. The influx of massive numbers of reservists, volunteers and draftees after the war started played an absolutely critical role in the offensives that won the war.

Notes

[1] Renamed motor vessel (MV) *Krait*, the trawler would serve as the mother ship for a daring commando raid on Singapore in September 1943 (Operation Jaywick) by Australia's Z Special Unit, which sank or damaged seven Japanese merchant ships. Today, *Krait* is a museum ship in Australia.

[2] The saga of *I-124's* wreck after the war is a story in itself, and one reason why I have a dim view of the salvage industry, but it is now protected by Australia as a war grave.

[3] The Japanese bombers were Navy, not Army, which accounts in part for their superior accuracy.

[4] Crouch would be a passenger on USS *Indianapolis* (CA-35) when she was torpedoed and sunk by Japanese submarine *I-58* in July 1945 and was lost at sea. Karpe would be killed in 1952 as he was finishing his tour as a naval attaché to Romania when he was thrown from a train in a tunnel near Salzburg, Austria, possibly by members of a foreign intelligence service (presumably Soviet bloc).

Bibliography

Cox, Jeffrey R. *Rising Sun, Falling Skies: The Disastrous Java Sea Campaign of World War II*. Oxford, UK: Osprey Publishing, 2015.

Hoyt, Edwin P. *The Lonely Ships: The Life and Death of the U.S. Asiatic Fleet*. New York, NY: Jove Books, 1976.

Kehn, Donald, Jr. *A Blue Sea of Blood: Deciphering the Mysterious Fate of the USS Edsall*. Minneapolis, MN: Zenith Press, 2008.

Kehn, Donald, Jr. *In the Highest Degree Tragic: The Sacrifice of the U.S. Asiatic Fleet during World War II*. Lincoln, NE: Potomac Books, 2017.

Messimer, Dwight. *Pawns of War: The Loss of USS Langley and the USS Pecos*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1983.

Stille, Mark. *Java Sea 1942: Japan's Conquest of the Netherlands East Indies*. Oxford, UK: Osprey, 2019.

Winslow, Walter G. *The Fleet the Gods Forgot: The Asiatic Fleet in World War II*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1982.