



# The Story of the *USS Indianapolis*

By Captain Lawrence B. Brennan, U.S. Navy (Ret.)

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## USS INDIANAPOLIS (CA 35) THE LAST U.S. NAVY SHIP SUNK DURING WORLD WAR II – BUILT IN NEW JERSEY<sup>1</sup>, Part 1

By: Captain Lawrence B. Brennan, U.S. Navy (Retired)<sup>2</sup>

*“Should Indianapolis ever take a torpedo hit in the right place, she would capsize and sink in short order.”*

Admiral Raymond A. Spruance, U.S. Navy to Captain Charles B. McVay, III, U.S. Navy discussing the metacentric height of USS *Indianapolis*.<sup>3</sup>

The last U.S. warship lost in combat during World War II was USS *Indianapolis* (CA 35), which suffered the greatest loss of life for a U.S. Navy warship sunk while underway. The loss of *Indianapolis* was the result of being sighted, while illuminated by the moon, by a Japanese submarine that torpedoed *Indianapolis* on a well-traveled convoy route from Guam to Leyte. The cruiser failed to observe her attacker visually or by radar. Tragically, when torpedoed, no distress message was received, or *Indianapolis* was unable to transmit one due to extensive damage.

The New Jersey-built heavy cruiser was in commission nearly 13 years, including the entire presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt; *Indianapolis* served briefly during the end of the Hoover administration and the beginning of Truman’s first term. She was commissioned on 15 November 1932, precisely a week after the 1932 Presidential Election and approximately 100 days before FDR was inaugurated, and was sunk on 30 July 1945, about 100 days after his death. FDR was elected on 8 November 1932, a week before *Indianapolis* was commissioned; he was inaugurated for the first time on 4 March 1933 and died on 12 April 1945, about two and a half months after his fourth inauguration on 20 January 1945.<sup>4</sup>

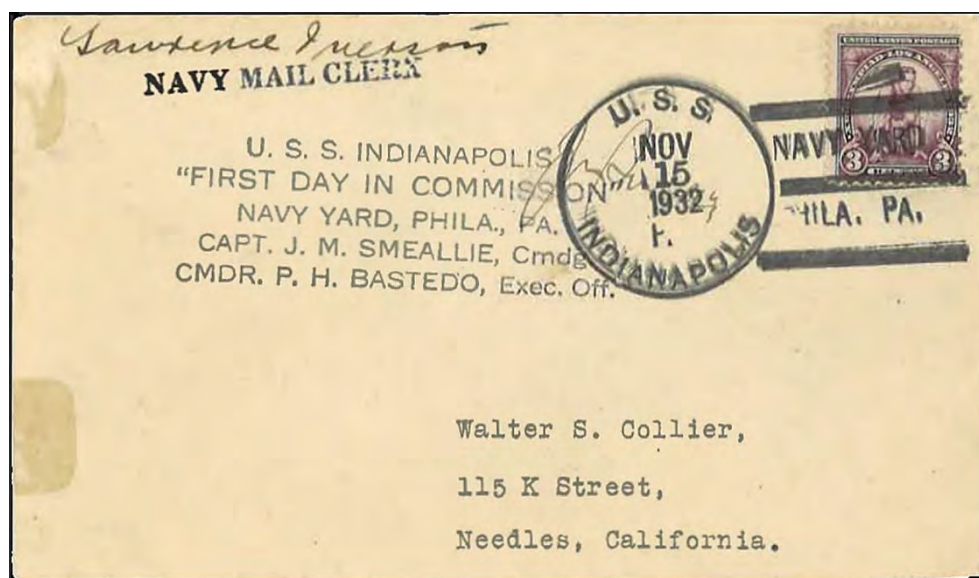
*Indianapolis*, named after the capital city of Indiana, was the second of two ships in the *Portland* class; the third class of “treaty cruisers”<sup>5</sup> constructed after the Washington Naval Treaty of 1922, following the two vessels of *Pensacola*-class ordered in 1926 and the six of *Northampton*-class ordered in 1927.<sup>6</sup> Ordered during fiscal year 1930, *Indianapolis* originally was designated as a light cruiser (CL 35) but was re-designated a heavy cruiser (CA 35) on 1 July 1931, prior to christening, in accordance with the London Naval Treaty.

*Indianapolis* was laid down by New York Shipbuilding Corporation, Camden, New Jersey on 31 March 1930; she was launched on 7 November 1931 and commissioned on 15 November 1932. She was the second ship named for Indianapolis, Indiana, following the cargo ship of the same name in 1918.

Her first Commanding Officer was Captain John M. Smeallie, U.S. Navy;<sup>7</sup> Rear Admiral Lucius A. Bostwick, U.S. Navy, Commandant Fourth Naval District, read the orders placing the ship in commission. As a commissioning gift the State of Indiana presented *Indianapolis* with the silver service from the old battleship USS *Indiana* (BB 1). The punch bowl bore an indentation from the fragment of a Spanish shell that hit *Indiana* during the Battle of Santiago in 1898.<sup>8</sup>

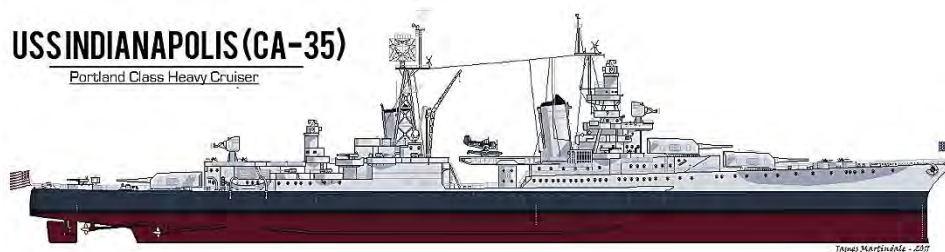


**Fig. 1: Rear Admiral Lucius A. Bostwick, left, commandant of the Fourth Naval District, who turned over the speedy cruiser to the command of Captain John M. Smeallie, at right, on Commissioning Day, 15 November 1932.**



*Fig. 2: First day in Commission cover for USS Indianapolis, sent with a Locy Type 3 (B-BBT) hand postmark with the location, Navy Yard, Phila. PA, in the killer bars of the cancel. The USCS Postmark Catalog reflects that the ship's postal cancels were not received until 7 December 1932, so the FDCs were backdated.*

*Indianapolis* was designed to be 610' 3" in length overall, a beam of 66', with a deep draft of 24' and a standard displacement of 9,800 tons. The ship had two distinctive raked funnels, tilted slightly aft, a tripod foremast, and a small tower and pole mast aft. In 1943, light tripods were added forward of the second funnel and a prominent director was installed aft.



*Fig. 3: Silhouette of the USS Indianapolis, one of two Portland -class heavy cruisers.<sup>9</sup>*

The ship had four shafts, four Parsons geared turbines, and eight Yarrow boilers developing 107,000 shaft horsepower which gave a maximum speed slightly in excess of 32 knots. She was designed for a range of 10,000 nautical miles at 15 knots. She rolled badly until fitted with a bilge keel.

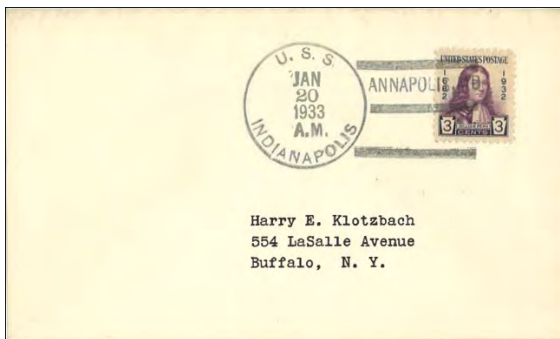
The cruiser had nine Mark 9 8"/55 caliber guns in three triple mounts, a superfiring pair forward and one aft. The secondary battery had eight 5"/25 caliber guns. In 1945, she received 24 Bofors 40mm guns, arrayed in six quad mounts in addition to twelve Oerlikon 20 mm cannon.

The two *Portland*-class cruisers were originally ordered with 1" armor foredeck and side protection, but during construction they were given heavy belt armor around the magazines. Armor on the bulkheads, the decks and gunhouses was also increased.

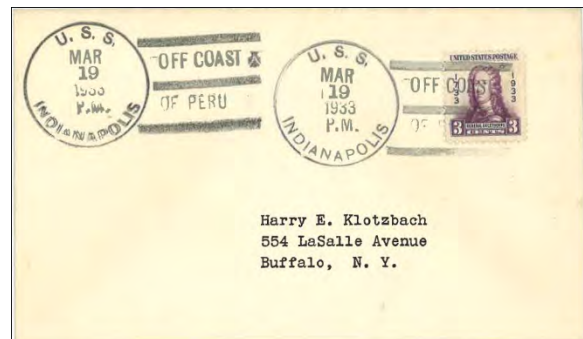


Both *Portland*-class cruisers were outfitted as fleet flagships, which meant space for an admiral and his staff. The class also had an aircraft catapult amidships and carried up to four aircraft. The total crew varied, with a regular complement of 807; the wartime complement of 952, was increased to 1,229 when the cruiser was a fleet flagship. The initial flag spaces were designed to accommodate a division commander's staff of four or five officers plus men. Fifth Fleet staff consisted of 32 men crammed into limited space. Admiral Spruance used overcrowding to defeat arguments to expand his staff which "remained small and efficient."<sup>10</sup>

Following commissioning, *Indianapolis* departed on the 10 January 1933 for Guantanamo Bay, Cuba and her shakedown cruise. On 23 February, in company with USS *Babbitt* (DD 128), she headed for the Panama Canal, conducting training and calling at Gonaives Bay, Haiti. Transiting the Canal, she exercised in the Pacific, visited Tongoy Bay, Chile and passed through to the Atlantic Ocean before returning to Philadelphia for post-shakedown repairs and modifications.

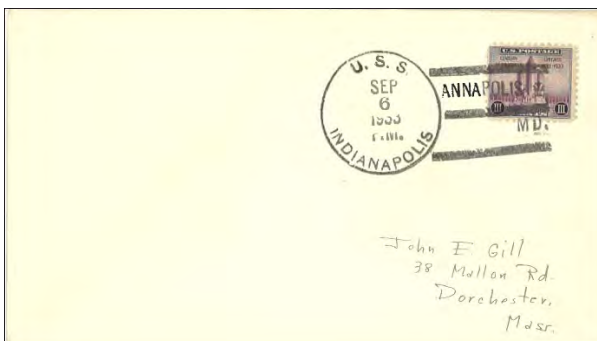


**Fig. 4: Locy Type 3(B-BBT) dated 20 January 1933 with the location, Annapolis, MD in the killer bars.**



**Fig. 5: Locy Type 3(B-BBT) dated 19 March 1933 with the location, Off Coast of Peru, in the killer bars.**

Next, *Indianapolis* steamed to Provincetown, Massachusetts, Eastport, and Bar Harbor, Maine to pick up President Roosevelt at his Campobello Island summer home on 1 July 1933. She took the President to Annapolis, arriving 3 July, where Mr. Roosevelt hosted half a dozen Cabinet members. After the President disembarked, *Indianapolis* departed, on 4 July, for the Philadelphia Navy Yard.

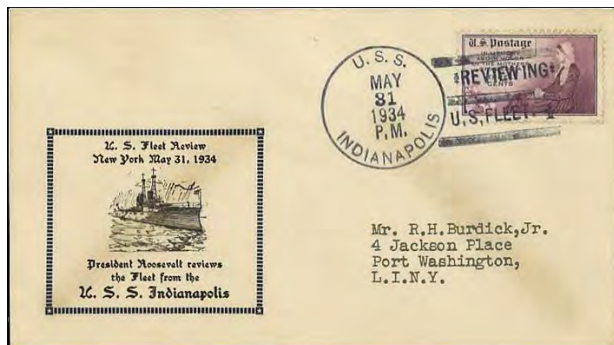


**Fig. 6: Locy Type 3(B-BBT) dated 6 September 1933 with the location, Annapolis/MD. in the killer bars.**

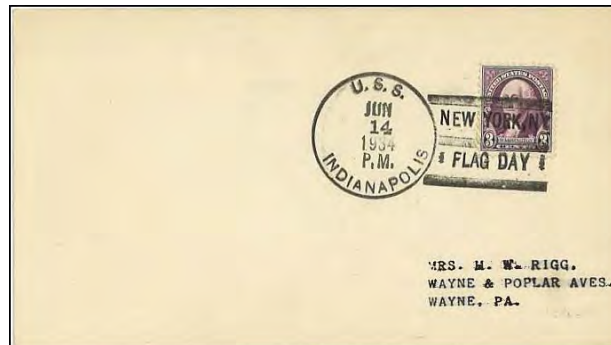
On 6 September 1933, Secretary of the Navy, Claude A. Swanson, embarked for an inspection tour of Pacific bases, visiting the Canal Zone, Hawaii and the fleet at San Pedro and San Diego, California, departing on 27 October, Navy Day. On 1 November 1933, *Indianapolis* became flagship of Scouting Force and maneuvered off Long Beach, California. The ship then headed for the Atlantic, departing on the 9 April 1934 and arriving in New York on 29 May. There, she

again embarked the Commander-in-Chief for a Presidential Review of the U.S. Fleet in the Hudson River on 31 May, 1934. She returned to Long Beach on 9 November 1934. *Indianapolis* remained flagship of Scouting Force until 1941.

## INDIANAPOLIS (CA 35) LAST SHIP SUNK IN WWII, Part 1 ~ Capt. Lawrence B. Brennan



**Fig. 7:** Locy Type 3(B-BBT) dated 31 May 1934 with "Reviewing/U.S. Fleet" in the killer bars.



**Fig. 8:** Locy Type 3(B-BBT) dated 14 June 1934 with "New York/Flag Day" in the killer bars.

Captain W.S. McClintic, USN, relieved Captain Smeallie in December 1934.

**Fig. 9:** Captain W.S. McClintic, USN  
View taken circa 1935 while  
commanding Indianapolis. Note life  
ring.<sup>11</sup>



During 1935 *Indianapolis* participated in fleet war games and exercises in the Pacific traveling as far west as Midway Island and as far north as Alaska. In March 1936 Captain H. K. Hewitt, U.S. Navy<sup>12</sup> relieved Captain McClintic.

Following the completion of Fleet Problem XVIII off Panama, *Indianapolis* called at Hampton Roads and Annapolis prior to her arrival at the New York Navy Yard on 10 June 1936 for a scheduled overhaul.





**Fig. 11:** Captain Hewitt shaking hands with President Roosevelt while saluting with his left hand during the South American cruise. The old style dress blue uniform was required and worn until World War II.

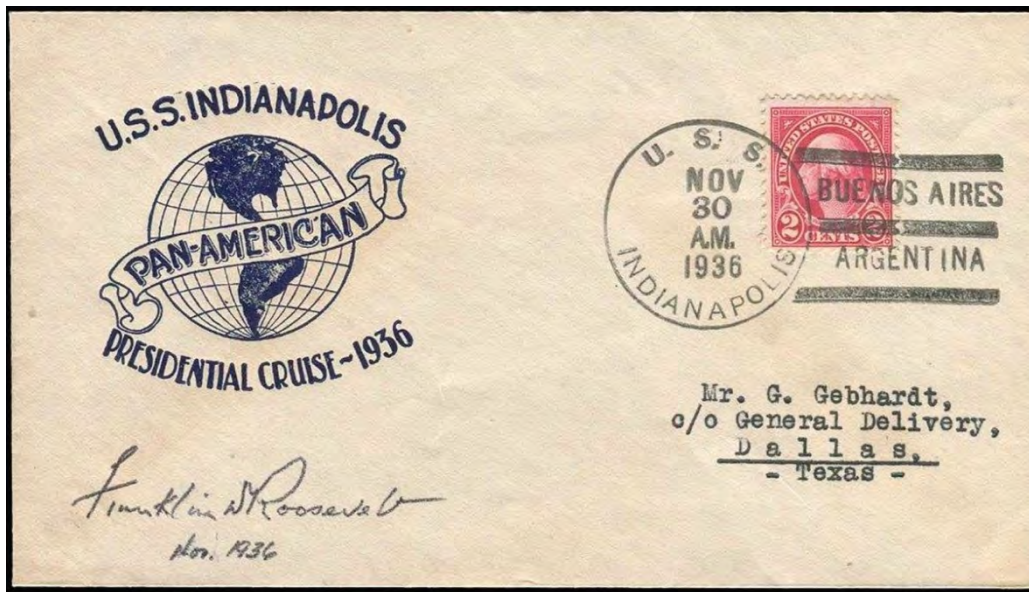


**Fig. 10:** FDR aboard the USS Indianapolis during the 1936 South American "Good Neighbor Tour" cruise.

The highlight of *Indianapolis'* peacetime career was her Presidential cruise to South America in 1936; this was the third time Mr. Roosevelt was embarked. On 18 November, she again embarked President Roosevelt at Charleston, South Carolina, for a Good Neighbor Tour, including the Pan American Conference in Buenos Aires. This was the first time that a serving President of the United States had visited outside North America. It was the third crossing of the equator for *Indianapolis*. When King Neptune arrived to initiate pollywogs, the shellback certificates were signed by the President. She called at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Buenos Aires, Argentina, and Montevideo, Uruguay for state visits before returning to Charleston and disembarking FDR's party on 15 December.



**Fig. 12:** A series of covers from Indianapolis on her cruise carrying FDR to and from South America. All with Type 3(B-BBT) postmarks and locations in the killer bars.



**Fig. 13:** An Indianapolis cover, with a Locy Type 3(B-BBT) cancel dated 30 Nov. 1936, with Buenos Aires/Argentina in the killer bars. It bears Franklin D. Roosevelt's signature at lower left, with a Nov. 1936 handwritten date.



*Indianapolis* returned to Long Beach early in 1937. Captain T.C. Kinkaid, U.S. Navy,<sup>13</sup> relieved Captain Hewitt as commanding officer in June. Through the remainder of that year she went through normal peacetime exercises and war games, including a tour of the Hawaiian Islands. The following year, 1938, saw *Indianapolis* repeating much the same routine. As flagship for Vice Admiral Adolphus Andrews, U. S. Navy,<sup>14</sup> Commander, Scouting Force, she exercised off the West Coast and returned to Hawaii. Following her summer cruise, *Indianapolis* was engaged in gunnery practice on the firing range off Clemente Island.

**Fig. 14:** Admiral Thomas C. Kinkaid, USN, Commander Seventh Fleet.

Photograph U.S. Navy History & Heritage Center #:NH 80-G-K-2749

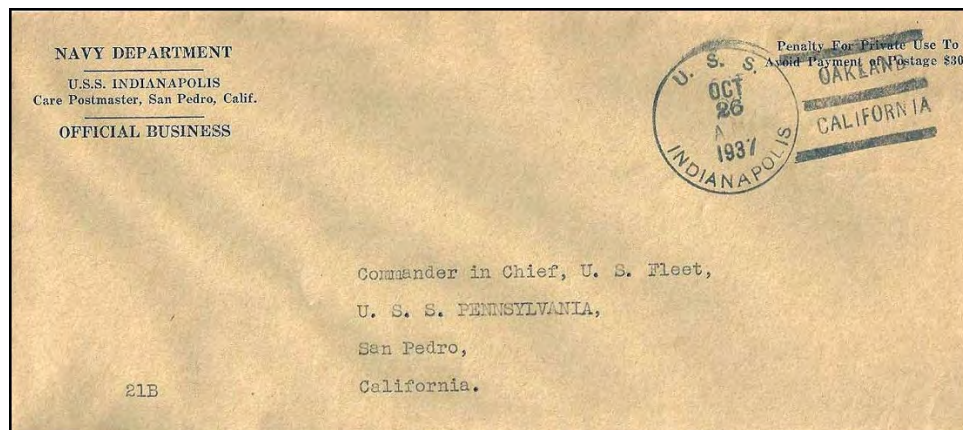


Illustration Jon Burdett at the Naval Cover Museum.<sup>15</sup>

**Fig.15:** A USS Indianapolis cover bearing a Locy Type 3 (A-BTB) postmark with printed return address of San Pedro California, sent from Oakland, CA the day before Navy Day, 27 October 1937.



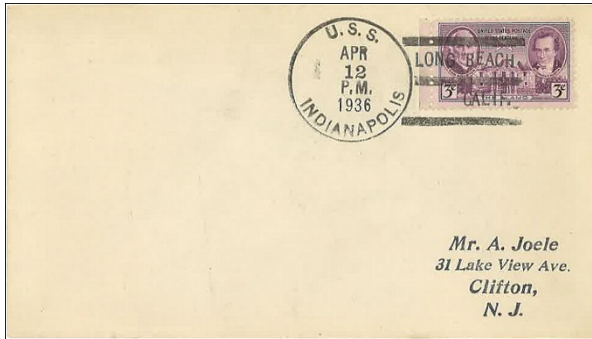


Fig. 16: Locy Type 3(B-BBT) dated 13 April 1936 with the location, Long Beach/Calif., in the killer bars.



Fig. 17: Locy Type 3(B-BBT) dated 17 July 1937 with the location, Portland/ Oregon, in the killer bars.

Captain Kinkaid was relieved by Captain J. F. Shaforth, U.S. Navy<sup>16</sup> in September 1938. Both 1939 and 1940 followed a similar pattern – with *Indianapolis* spending additional time operating out of Pearl Harbor. *Indianapolis* returned to Mare Island Navy Yard in November 1939. At the time she entered dry dock, her logs showed she had steamed a total of 215,140 nautical miles since her commissioning in 1932.

Fig. 18: A variety of Indianapolis cancels – 2 different Mail Order Business Locy Type 9w (1937 & 1940), a parcel post cancel from 1937 Locy Type 9x, and a machine cancel Locy Type 7 from 1939.



As a deterrent to Japanese aggression, in April 1940, the U.S. Fleet, with *Indianapolis*, was deployed from the West Coast to Pearl Harbor. On 1 February 1941 the U.S. Fleet was reformed into three Fleets: Pacific Fleet, Atlantic Fleet, and Asiatic Fleet. Under this new organization Vice Admiral Wilson Brown, U.S. Navy, Commander, Scouting Force, also became Commander Task Force 11, embarked in *Indianapolis*. Task Force 11 consisted of USS *Lexington* (CV 2), eight cruisers, nine destroyers, six amphibious assault ships (converted destroyers), and 13 mine vessels.

On 7 December 1941, *Indianapolis* was conducting a mock bombardment at Johnston Atoll. *Indianapolis* was absorbed into Task Force 12 and futilely searched for the Japanese carriers. She returned to Pearl Harbor on 13 December and joined Task Force 11. That Task Force steamed to the South Pacific, to 350 nautical miles south of Rabaul, New Britain, escorting *Lexington*. Late in the afternoon of 20 February 1942, the U.S. ships were attacked by 18 Japanese aircraft. Aircraft from *Lexington* shot down 16 bandits and the other two were destroyed by anti-aircraft fire from the ships.

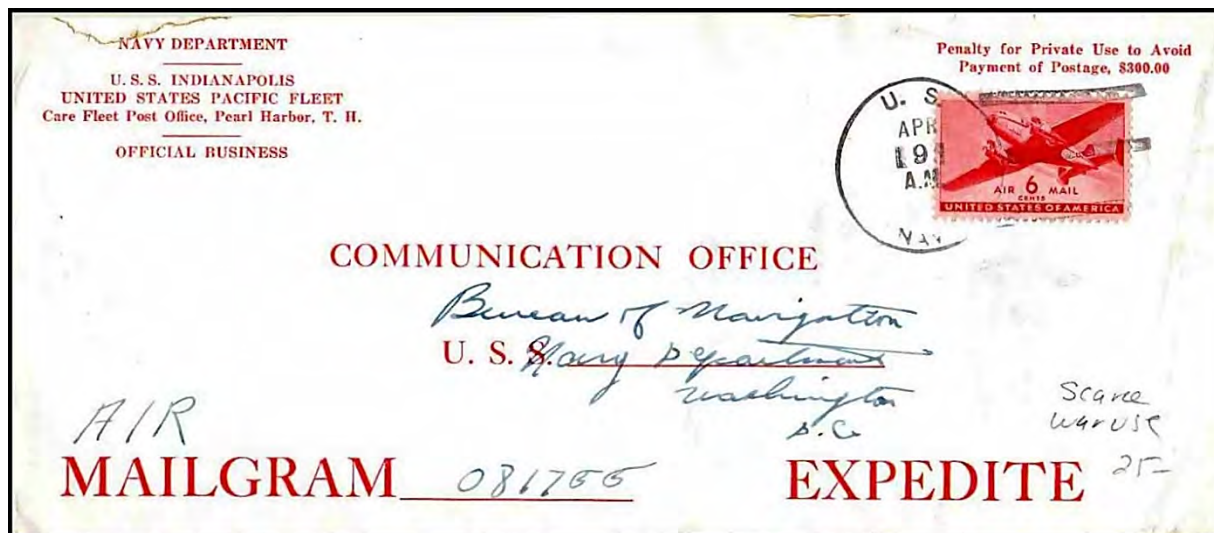


Illustration Greg Cieselski at the Naval Cover Museum<sup>17</sup>

**Fig. 19:** An early wartime use of an Indianapolis Mailgram cover, showing Pearl Harbor as her return address. This cover bears a Locy Type 3z postmark dated 9 April 194[2?], and was addressed to the Bureau of Navigation, Washington, DC by air mail. Mailgrams were an intermediate form of administrative communications between a Navy Message and ordinary air mail.

On 10 March 1942, the task force, reinforced by another force centered on USS *Yorktown* (CV 5), attacked Lae and Salamaua, New Guinea, where the Japanese were marshaling amphibious forces. Attacking from the south through the Owen Stanley mountain range, the U.S. air strikes inflicted heavy damage on Japanese warships and transports. *Indianapolis* returned to Mare Island Shipyard for a refit before escorting a convoy to Australia.

### Battle of the Aleutian Islands

Following the pivotal battles of Coral Sea and Midway, which she missed, *Indianapolis* headed for the North Pacific before the Battle of the Aleutian Islands. On 7 August, *Indianapolis* and the task force attacked Kiska Island, a Japanese staging area. Although fog hindered observation, *Indianapolis* and other ships fired their main batteries into the bay. Floatplanes reported Japanese ships sunk in the harbor and damage to shore installations. After 15 minutes, Japanese shore batteries returned fire before being destroyed by the ships' main guns. Japanese submarines approaching the force were depth-charged by U.S. destroyers. Japanese seaplanes made an ineffective bombing attack. U.S. forces later occupied Adak Island, providing a naval base further from the Dutch Harbor on Unalaska Island. In January 1943, *Indianapolis* supported a landing and occupation on Amchitka.

On the evening of 19 February 1943, *Indianapolis* led two destroyers southwest of Attu Island, searching for Japanese ships trying to reinforce Kiska and Attu. She intercepted the cargo ship, SS *Akagane Maru*, which tried to reply to the radio challenge but *Akagane Maru* was sunk with all hands. Through mid-1943, *Indianapolis* remained near the Aleutian Islands escorting U.S. convoys and providing shore bombardments supporting amphibious assaults. In May, the Allies recaptured Attu, then turned to Kiska, thought to be the final Japanese holdout in the Aleutians.



Fig. 20: At Adak Harbor in the Aleutians, as part of the US Fleet.

### Operation Galvanic & South Pacific

After refitting at Mare Island, *Indianapolis* sailed to Hawaii to become flagship for Commander, Fifth Fleet, Vice Admiral Raymond A. Spruance, U.S. Navy.<sup>18</sup> She sortied from Pearl Harbor on 10 November with the main body of the Southern Attack Force for Operation *Galvanic*, the invasion of the Gilbert Islands. On 19 November, *Indianapolis* bombarded Tarawa and Makin and provided fire-support for the landings. She shot down an enemy plane and shelled enemy strongpoints for three days. The conquest of the Marshall Islands followed victory in the Gilberts. *Indianapolis* was again Fifth Fleet flagship.



Fig. 21: Another wartime usage, sent registered airmail with a Passed by Naval Censor mark and mute cancel on the face and a Locy Type 9v postmark dated 13 December 1943 hand cancel. (See inset of back stamp).





*Fig. 22: The three senior officers (King, Nimitz, and Spruance aboard USS Indianapolis, 18 Jul 1944) demonstrate Navy's interpretation of the word "uniform." N.B. the three different covers (hats) and belts worn by the flag officers. They have no ties or blouses. Only Fleet Admiral King is wearing his warfare device, the gold wings of a naval aviator. Fleet Admiral Nimitz is not wearing his gold dolphins showing that he qualified in submarines. Admiral Spruance would not have worn a warfare device since surface warfare officers did not wear "water wings" until late in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.*

Photograph U.S. Navy History & Heritage Center #:NH 62778



*Fig. 23: Indianapolis in 1944 dazzle camouflage pattern.*

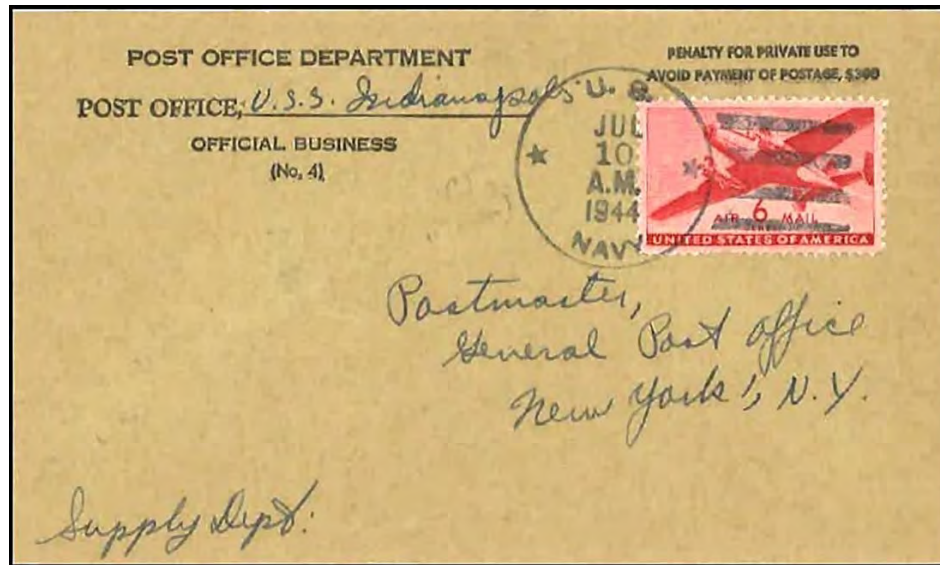
The cruiser met other ships at Tarawa, and on D-Day minus one, 31 January 1944, she was one of the cruisers which bombarded Kwajalein Atoll. The shelling continued on D-Day. The ship entered Kwajalein Lagoon on 4 February, and remained until resistance ceased.

In March and April, *Indianapolis*, still Fifth Fleet flagship, attacked the Western Carolines. Carrier planes struck at the Palau Islands on 30–31 March sinking three destroyers, 17 freighters, five oilers, and damaging 17 other ships. Airfields were bombed and surrounding water mined. Yap and Ulithi also were struck on the 31st and Woleai on 1 April. Japanese planes were driven off. *Indianapolis* shot down her second plane, a torpedo bomber, and the Japanese lost 160 planes, including 46 on the ground. These attacks prevented Japanese forces in the Carolines from interfering with the U.S. landings on New Guinea.

### **The Marianas & Battle of the Philippine Sea**

In June, Fifth Fleet participated in the assault on the Marianas Islands. Raids on Saipan began with carrier-based aircraft on 11 June, followed by surface bombardment, in which *Indianapolis* had a major role, from 13 June. On D-Day, 15 June, Admiral Spruance learned that Japanese battleships, carriers, cruisers, and destroyers were headed south to relieve threatened garrisons in the Marianas. Since amphibious operations at Saipan had to be protected, Fifth Fleet steamed in a limited area near the landing beaches. Consequently, a fast carrier force was sent to meet this threat while another force attacked Japanese air bases on Iwo Jima and Chichi Jima.

A combined U.S. fleet fought the Japanese on 19 June in the Battle of the Philippine Sea. Japanese carrier planes, which hoped to refuel and rearm the airfields of Guam and Tinian, were met by carrier planes and the guns of the escorts. During the “Marianas Turkey Shoot,” the U.S. Navy reportedly destroyed 426 Japanese planes while losing 29. *Indianapolis* shot down one torpedo plane. With Japanese air opposition wiped out, the U.S. carrier aircraft sank *Hiyō*, two destroyers, one tanker, and damaged others. Two other carriers, *Taihō* and *Shōkaku*, were sunk by submarines.



**Fig. 24:** A 1944 official mail airmail cover addressed to Postmaster, New York, with only the ship's handwritten name in the return address bearing a Locy Type 2z\* postmark.

*Indianapolis* returned to Saipan on 23 June to resume fire support and six days later moved to Tinian to attack shore installations. Meanwhile, Guam had been taken, and *Indianapolis* was the first ship to enter Apra Harbor since early in the war. The ship operated in the Marianas for the next few weeks, then moved to the Western Carolines where further landings were planned. From 12 to 29 September, she bombarded the Peleliu, prior to and after the landings. She then sailed to Manus Island in the Admiralty Islands where she operated for ten days before returning to the Mare Island.

### **At Iwo Jima**

Next, *Indianapolis* joined Vice Admiral Marc A. Mitscher's<sup>19</sup> fast carrier task force on 14 February 1945. Two days later, the Task Force 58 launched strikes on Tokyo to cover the landings on Iwo Jima, scheduled for 19 February. This was the first carrier attack on Japan since the Doolittle Raid. Fifth Fleet achieved complete tactical surprise by approaching the Japanese coast under cover of bad weather. The attacks were pressed home for two days. The U.S. Navy lost 49 carrier aircraft while claiming 499 enemy planes, a 10:1 kill/loss ratio. Fifth Fleet also sank a carrier, nine coastal ships, a destroyer, two destroyer escorts, and a cargo ship. They destroyed hangars, shops, aircraft installations, factories, and other industrial targets.



Illustration from Navy Naval History and Heritage Command NH 104376-KN

**Fig. 25: Cruisers *Pensacola*, *Salt Lake City*, *Indianapolis*, and an unidentified *Cleveland*-class cruiser bombarding Iwo Jima, 19 February 1945.<sup>20</sup>**

*Indianapolis* returned to Admiral Mitscher's Task Force 58 in time to strike Tokyo again on 25 February and Hachijō off the southern coast of Honshū the following day. Although weather was bad, the U.S. force destroyed 158 planes and sank five small ships while pounding ground installations and destroying trains. Immediately after the strikes, the Task Force steamed to Bonin to support the landings on Iwo Jima. *Indianapolis* remained there until 1 March, supporting the landings.

Navophilatelists would be interested in the attempt to forward news correspondents' press copy of the strikes on Tokyo,

*...using an untried contraption that would allow airborne pickup from ships at sea. Two helium-filled balloons, tethered by a long line to the Indianapolis, would hoist the mailbag aloft, where presumably it would be snagged and retrieved by an Air Force bomber flying low overhead. Spruance grumbled about the unnecessary rush to deliver information to the newspapers and resented distracting his ships for the convenience of newsmen.*

*At high noon [on D-1 at Iwo Jima] the balloons soared aloft, their heavy burden swaying and bouncing precariously beneath them in the turbulent air. The bomber roared overhead and hooked the bag, but the bag fell loose and tumbled into the water astern.<sup>21</sup>*

### **Kamikaze Attack**

The next target for the U.S. forces was Okinawa in the Ryukyu Islands, which were in range of aircraft from the Japanese mainland. The fast carrier force attacked the airfields in southern Japan. They departed from Ulithi on 14 March. On 18 March, Task Force 58 launched an attack from a position 100 nautical miles southeast of Kyūshū attacking airfields on Kyūshū as well as the Japanese fleet in Kobe and Kure. The Japanese located Task Force 58 on 21 March, sending 48 planes to attack the ships. Twenty-four U.S. Navy fighters shot down all the Japanese aircraft.

Pre-invasion bombardment of Okinawa began on 24 March. *Indianapolis* spent seven days firing 8" shells at the landing areas. Enemy aircraft repeatedly attacked; *Indianapolis* shot down six planes and damaged two others. On 31 March, lookouts spotted a Japanese fighter as it emerged from the morning twilight in a vertical dive. The ship's 20 mm guns opened fire, but within 15 seconds, the plane was over the ship. Tracers converged on it, causing it to swerve, but the enemy pilot managed to release his bomb from a height of 25', crashing his plane into the sea near the port stern. The armor piercing bomb plummeted through the main deck, the mess deck, down through the berthing compartment, through fuel tanks and the evaporator space before exiting below the keel and detonating below the hull, damaging the port shafts and screws. Nine men were killed in action. The ship's bulkheads prevented progressive flooding.

The ship's Senior Medical Officer gave a detailed account of the kamikaze attack.

*On the first of April off Ie Shima, near Okinawa, a kamikaze hit us. Because of the kamikaze threat, the admiral had sent all the old destroyers, LCIs, and LCTs out on the periphery. And they all had orders to fire on any Japanese plane they saw regardless of the type or whether it was attacking. From breaking the Japanese code, they had information that kamikaze pilots had orders to dive on the first ship that fired on them. So, some of those destroyers had six or eight kamikazes hitting them. This was the seventh one that had dove on us. I was standing on the deck when one came down and it looked like the fire of the guns was just holding it in the air. It went right down the side of the ship and crashed alongside. There was no place you could hide. There are no foxholes on a ship. When it hit the water it almost exploded. A lot of the men who were looking over the side were hit with little aluminum rivets. I spent most of the afternoon digging rivets out of their hands and faces. But they weren't seriously injured. Anyway, this last kamikaze dropped two bombs just before he hit us. The bombs went down through the mess hall and exploded going out the bottom of the ship taking off our port screws and destroying our evaporator room. Did the bomb actually go out the bottom of the ship? It went out the bottom of the ship and exploded as it went out. It was an armor-piercing bomb. The plane came down into a mess hall full of men eating breakfast. So we had 38 dead and about 40 wounded.<sup>22</sup>*

Inspection revealed that her propellers and shafts were damaged, fuel tanks ruptured, and water-distilling equipment ruined. *Indianapolis*, settling slightly by the stern and listing to port, steamed to a salvage ship for emergency repairs. After local efforts to repair failed and one of the damaged screws was dropped, *Indianapolis* was forced to return to Mare Island on the remaining shafts. When informed that the divers from the repair ship at the anchorage had dropped one of *Indianapolis*' screws to "the bottom of the harbor," Admiral Spruance calmly remarked, "that's too bad," and resumed walking her decks.<sup>23</sup> He transferred his flag to USS *New Mexico* (BB 40) and barely escaped death when she too was struck by a kamikaze while the admiral was walking on the weather deck. Initially, Admiral Spruance was reported as missing but he was found manning a fire hose, probably the most senior damage control man in naval history.<sup>24</sup>



### Secret Mission to Tinian

After major repairs and overhaul at Mare Island, California, *Indianapolis* was ordered to proceed alone at high speed to Tinian Island, via Pearl Harbor, a distance of 3,300 nautical miles, carrying parts and the enriched uranium (about half of the world's supply of Uranium-235 at the time) for *Little Boy*, the first operational atomic bomb, which would later be dropped on Hiroshima. Originally, USS *Pensacola* (CA 24) was scheduled to carry the fissionable material but due to problems with her main engines during tests, it was decided to accelerate *Indianapolis*' departure for the special mission. *Indianapolis* sailed unescorted from San Francisco to Pearl Harbor at an average speed of over 28 knots. She established a new world speed record from Farallon Light to Diamond Head. Six hours later, she was underway again unescorted and seven days later, on 26 July 1945, *Indianapolis* reached Tinian.

Following cargo discharge, she preceded to Guam where a number of the crewmen were transferred. Departing Guam on 28 July, she headed toward Leyte where her crew was to receive training with Rear Admiral Lynde B. McCormack's Task Force 95.7, before continuing on to Okinawa to join Vice Admiral Jesse B. Oldendorf's Task Force 95 which was preparing for the invasion of Japan, Operation Downfall.<sup>25</sup>



**Fig. 26: Indianapolis off Tinian, 28 July 1945, having delivered atomic bomb fissile material in record time**

The first atomic bomb, *Little Boy*, was detonated over Hiroshima on August 6, only 9 days later.<sup>26</sup>

### Sinking of *Indianapolis*

At 0014, 30 July, when near the midpoint of her voyage from Guam to Leyte, *Indianapolis* was struck on her starboard side forward by two Type 95 torpedoes from the Japanese submarine *I 58*, commanded by Lieutenant Commander Mochitsura Hashimoto, Imperial Japanese Navy.<sup>27</sup> The explosions caused massive damage to the starboard side forward and amidship causing *Indianapolis* to list and settle by the bow. Twelve minutes later, she rolled over, then her stern rose into the air, and the hull plunged towards the bottom. More than 300 of the 1,196 crewmen went down with the ship. With few lifeboats, rafts, and floater nets in the water the surviving crewmen were adrift. The number of survivors would be reduced by two-thirds during the next four days adrift alone.



Compounding the violence of the damage caused by the torpedoes forward, the brief time before sinking, and the improbability that a distress message was successfully transmitted or received, was a series of actions and inactions by U.S. Navy shore side commands that allowed the loss of Indianapolis to go unreported. Except for a fortuitous sighting by a Naval Aviator, there would have been no survivors.

In addition to the knowledge of *Indianapolis*' transit by the Commander of the Pacific Fleet's Advance Headquarters on Guam, both the Marianas Commander, whose Headquarters also was on Guam, and the Commander of the Philippine Sea Frontier, with Headquarters on Leyte, were provided information that should have led them to deduce the disappearance of a major combatant with nearly 1,200 souls.

On 31 July, when she should have arrived at Leyte, *Indianapolis* was removed from the board in the headquarters of the Marianas Commander. She was also recorded as having arrived at Leyte by the headquarters of the Commander of the Philippine Sea Frontier. Lieutenant Stuart B. Gibson, the Operations Officer under the Port Director, Tacloban, was the officer responsible for tracking the movements of *Indianapolis*. The vessel's failure to arrive on schedule was known immediately by Lieutenant Gibson, who failed to investigate and made no report.

The *Narrative of the Circumstances of the Loss of the USS Indianapolis* dated 23 February 1946 (hereinafter "*CNO's Narrative of the Loss of USS Indianapolis*"), promulgated by Fleet Admiral Nimitz, detailed the omissions of the shore side staff in observing *Indianapolis*' failure to arrive.

*Lieutenant Commander Sancho and Lieutenant Gibson were members of the Philippine Sea Frontier organization. Bearing in mind the lack of experience of these officers in naval matters, it was incumbent upon their superior officers to exercise closer personal supervision over the manner in which their duties were performed than was actually the case. At the time of the loss of the Indianapolis, the Commander, Philippine Sea Frontier, Vice Admiral James L. Kauffman, U.S.N., was absent from his command since July 1, 1945, on temporary duty status in the United States; Commodore N. C. Gillette, U.S.N., was in temporary command; and the Operations Officer of the Headquarters Staff, Captain A. M. Granum, U.S.N., was intensively occupied in diversion of shipping in typhoon areas and operations. These facts do not, however, relieve these senior officers of their responsibility connected with the failure of their subordinates to take appropriate action to ascertain the whereabouts of the overdue Indianapolis. The junior officers who were directly concerned with this failure were members of the organization which was being administered by these senior officers. For this demonstrated weakness in the organization under their control, brought on largely through their failure to give closer personal attention to the work of these inexperienced juniors, Commodore Gillette and Captain Granum have been held responsible.*

*Commander, Philippine Sea Frontier (Commodore N. C. Gillette, U.S.N., Chief of Staff, Acting) was charged with the mission of safeguarding and protecting shipping in the area under his cognizance. He maintained an Operations Board at his Headquarters at Tolosa, Leyte, on which was kept a running record of the scheduled and actual arrival and departure of vessels of all categories in the area under his cognizance. His*

*Headquarters had been given intelligence of all submarine activity in the Philippine Sea and should have been aware that the Indianapolis was overdue in Leyte, but no investigation as to her whereabouts was instituted until after her survivors were sighted.*

*The Marianas Commander, in Guam, felt no particular concern connected with the arrival of the Indianapolis in Leyte. He assumed that the Indianapolis had reached her destination. No action was taken or required to be taken by that headquarters until the survivors were sighted.*

*There remains confusion if either Indianapolis' distress message or the report of sinking of a "battleship" from I 58 were received ashore. One account suggests that at least the after action report from I 58 was received by multiple U.S. commands but ignored for fear the Japanese were again attempting to create a trap for a rescue force.*

The first sighting of the survivors from *Indianapolis* was noted in *Nimitz's Gray Book*.

2 August (Guam Date)

*At about 1100/K yesterday a search plane from PELELIU sighted 30 survivors in the water at 1130, 1330, dropped a transmitter and emergency lifeboat. Later other survivors were seen in lifeboats. Dumbo planes were sent out with emergency equipment, ships were diverted to the scene, and other ships were sent out from ULITHI. By midnight several ships were at the scene, and reported that the survivors were from INDIANAPOLIS (CA 35), sunk on the night of the 29th. The SALAMAUA [CVE 96] ASW Group made a sonar contact about 200 miles to the west. The contact was not retained, but the search is continuing.<sup>28</sup>*

The second report in *Nimitz's Gray Book* about the recovery of *Indianapolis* survivors stated:

*About 400 survivors of the INDIANAPOLIS have been recovered and search for others continues. Commanding Officer, one of survivors, says that he believes the ship was hit forward by two torpedoes or a mine at about 0045/K 30 July. This was followed by a magazine explosion and the ship sank in 15 minutes.<sup>29</sup>*

The naval establishment had no knowledge of *Indianapolis'* sinking until survivors were spotted three and a half days later. At 1025 Thursday, 2 August a PV-1 Ventura, call sign "Gambler Seventeen" from Patrol Squadron (VPB 152), flown by Lieutenant (junior grade) Wilbur "Chuck" Gwinn, USNR, spotted the sheen of oil and the men adrift while on a routine patrol flight.

Flying a routine search out of Peleliu, LTJG Gwinn moved aft to make temporary repairs on a trailing wire antenna. While making these repairs, Mr. Gwinn looked down at the sea. Again, a perfect lineup of light, this time from the sun on the sea, showed the slender oil slick. Suspecting the slick might be from an enemy submarine, Gwinn followed it. As the aircraft descended to approximately 1,000 feet, the crew saw heads floating among the oil. The pilot made several passes, dropped life rafts, sonobuoys, and transmitted urgent messages. The datum for the first group of survivors was located at coordinates 11-54N 133-47E.<sup>30</sup>

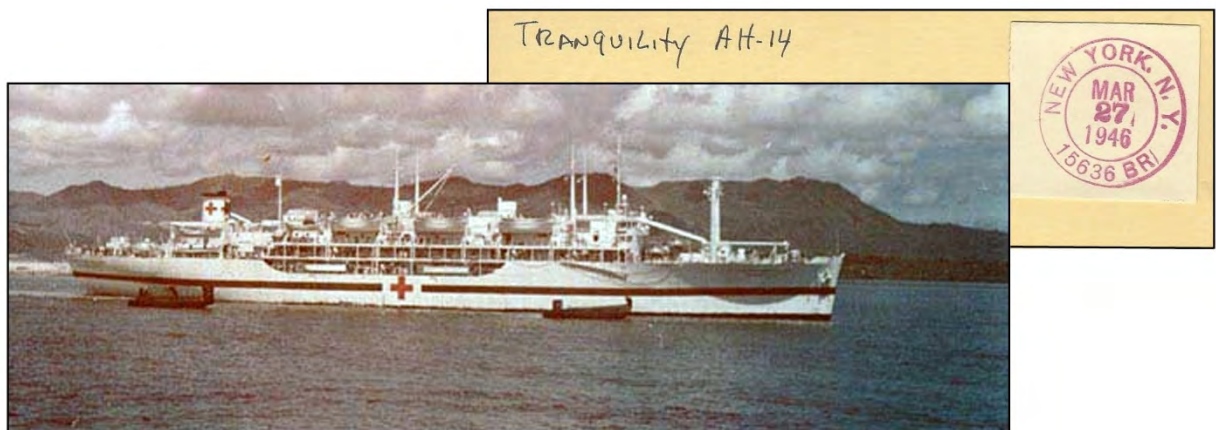
## Rescuing the Survivors

All air and surface units capable of rescue operations were dispatched to the scene. A PBY-5A Catalina flown by a 28 year old lawyer/naval aviator, Lieutenant R. Adrian Marks, USNR of Patrol Squadron (VP 23), was launched. En route, Lieutenant Marks overflew USS *Cecil J. Doyle* (DE 368) and alerted her commanding officer, future Secretary of the Navy Lieutenant Commander W. Graham Claytor, Jr., USNR of the sighting of a large number of survivors. Without seeking approval from higher authority, Commander Claytor deviated to the scene.

Arriving hours ahead of *Cecil J. Doyle*, the PBY dropped rafts and supplies. Seeing men being attacked by sharks, Lieutenant Marks in intentional violation of standing orders landed on the open sea. He taxied to pick up the stragglers and lone swimmers who were at the greatest risk of shark attack. Upon learning the men were the crew of *Indianapolis*, he radioed the news, requesting immediate assistance. When Lieutenant Marks' aircraft was full, survivors were tied to the wings with parachute cord, damaging the wings so that the plane was unflyable and had to be sunk. Fifty six men were rescued that day by this single aircraft.

Homing on Marks' PBY in darkness, *Cecil J. Doyle* was the first ship to arrive on scene but halted to avoid running into the survivors. The destroyer escort began recovering survivors from the Catalina. Disregarding the safety of his own ship, Captain Claytor pointed his largest searchlight into the night sky as a beacon. This was the first indication to most survivors that rescuers were there. Ultimately, three destroyers, three destroyer escorts, and three high speed amphibious assault ships (converted destroyer escorts) arrived. USS *Helm* (DD 388), USS *Madison* (DD 425), and USS *Ralph Talbot* (DD 390) from Ulithi, along with USS *Dufilho* (DE 423), USS *Bassett* (APD 73), USS *Register* (APD 92), and USS *Ringness* (DE 100) of the Philippine Sea Frontier reached the survivors. They continued their search until 8 August. The search for survivors and remains involved 11 aircraft and 11 ships over six days.

## The Long Road Home



**Fig. 27: USS Tranquility (AH 14), a hospital ship, transported the survivors to Guam. Shown with it is a Type 9# cancel from its branch office.**

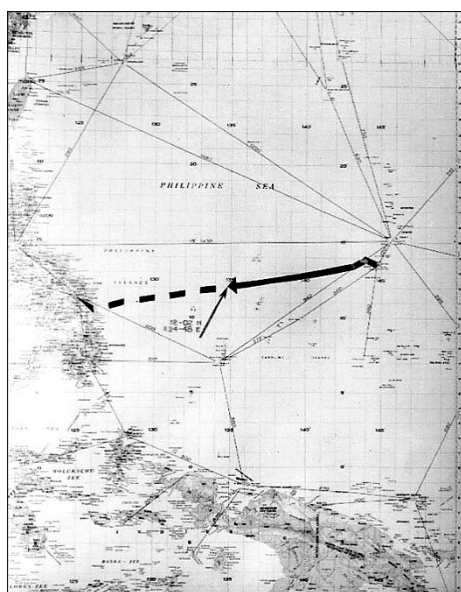
Postmark illustration courtesy Rich Hoffner.



Of the 880 who survived the sinking, only 316 men ultimately survived.<sup>31</sup> They suffered from lack of food and water, exposure, and shark attacks, while some killed themselves or other survivors in various states of delirium, and hallucinations. Most of the deaths of *Indianapolis*' survivors in the water were due to exposure, salt water poisoning and thirst, with the dead being dragged off by sharks. Assuming that between 300 and 400 officers and men were lost directly as a result of the sinking and between 150 and 200 men died on the first day primarily as the result of wounds, about 600 to 700 officers and men remained alive to endure the unendurable. More than half of those who survived the first day perished while awaiting rescue; about 43%-46% of that group, however, survived.



**Fig. 28:** *Survivors of Indianapolis on Guam, in August 1945.*

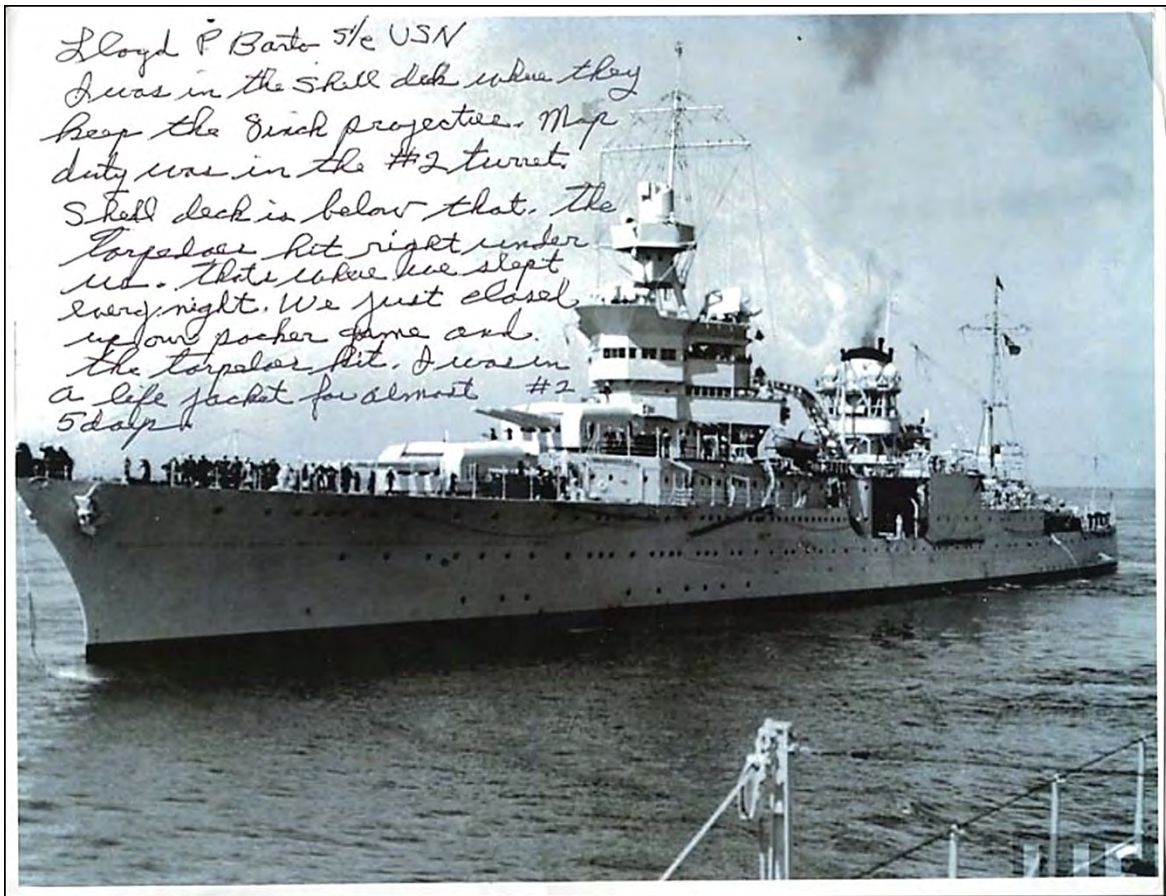


**Fig. 29:** *Indianapolis' intended route from Guam to the Philippines.*<sup>32</sup>

On August 14, President Truman announced on the radio that Japan had agreed to terms of surrender. On that same evening, the American public was informed of the tragedy of the *Indianapolis* for the first time.<sup>33</sup>

*Indianapolis* was awarded the American Defense Service Medal and Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal with ten battle stars.<sup>34</sup> Ultimately, her Commanding Officer was awarded a Bronze Star.

Upcoming in Part 2:



**Fig. 30: Photo of Indianapolis signed by survivor Lloyd Barto. The message reads "Lloyd P. Barto, s/e USN. I was in the shell deck where they keep the 8 inch projectiles. My duty was in the #2 turret. Shell deck is below that. The torpedoes hit right under us. That's where we slept every night. We just closed up our poker game and the torpedoes hit. I was in a life jacket for almost 5 days."<sup>35</sup>**

Part 2 will deal with the aftermath of the sinking of the Indianapolis, survivor stories, and court of inquiry and court martial proceedings.

**ENDNOTES:**

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<sup>2</sup> Lawrence B. Brennan is a retired U.S. Navy Captain, an adjunct professor of law at Fordham Law School, and an admiralty and maritime law litigator in New York City. He writes extensively on admiralty and maritime matters, ship casualties, naval and merchant ship history, and philately. Larry began collecting U.S. and then U.N. postage stamps and first day covers when he was in grammar school. He began collecting naval covers 50 years ago and has an accumulation of about 50,000 covers. He is a life member of the Universal Ship Cancellation Society and a member of the New Jersey Postal History Society. Captain Brennan served more than 33 years in the U.S. Navy at sea and ashore, on active duty and in the Naval Reserve. He commanded two units (Admiralty Law and Naval War College) and was the Legal Officer in USS NIMITZ (CVN 68) (1979-1981) during the Iranian Hostage Rescue Mission in 1980 and in 1981 investigated an air crash on NIMITZ's flight deck that killed 14 and seriously injured 50 crewmen resulting in the beginning of Navy's "Zero Tolerance" anti-drug program which preceded the shot down of a pair of Libyan fighters at the Gulf of Sidra by Tomcats from Fighter Squadron 41 in August 1981. He has tried more than 100 cases and supervised a greater number of prosecutions and civil trials for clients around the world. Larry has defended members of the Naval Service from the lowest enlisted pay



grade to admirals. His private practice focuses on major maritime casualties, environmental and oil pollution claims, insurance coverage disputes, international trade, governmental investigations, arbitrations, trials, and appeals. He was a trial attorney for the U.S. Department of Justice. Larry was educated at Fordham University in New York City (B.A. *magna cum laude* 1974 and J.D. 1977). He is a member of the Bar of the State of New York and various federal courts including the U.S. Supreme Court.

<sup>3</sup> Admiral Spruance was born in Baltimore, Maryland, to Alexander and Annie Hiss Spruance. He was raised in Indianapolis, Indiana. Spruance attended Indianapolis public schools and graduated from Shortridge High School. From there, he went on to graduate from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1906, and received further, hands-on education in electrical engineering a few years later. Helm, Thomas, *Ordeal By Sea: The Tragedy of the U.S.S. Indianapolis* (Signet Books, New York: 2001) p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> During Franklin Roosevelt's presidency, The XX Amendment to the Constitution of the United States advanced the presidential inauguration date from 4 March to 20 January following the popular election in November.

<sup>5</sup> *Indianapolis* was the last of seven pre-war heavy cruisers to be lost in combat during World War II. All were lost in the Pacific Ocean. The first U.S. heavy cruiser sunk was USS *Houston* which was lost on 01 March 1942 to Japanese naval gunfire and torpedoes during the Battle of Sundra Strait. *Astoria*, *Quincy*, and *Vincennes* were lost to Japanese Naval gunfire and torpedoes on 9 August 1942 during the Battle of Savo Island. *Northampton* was lost to Japanese naval torpedoes on 30 November 1942 during the Battle of Tassafaronga. *Chicago* was lost on 30 January 1943 off Rennell Island to land-based aircraft torpedoes. Six of the seven heavy cruisers which were lost were sunk within an 11 month period (March 1942-January 1943); *Indianapolis* was the only heavy cruiser lost during the last 31 months of the war.

## <sup>6</sup> THE PREWAR HEAVY CRUISER CLASSES

*Pensacola*-Class. The first CAs built after the War and under the Treaty. *Pensacola* and *Salt Lake City*. *Northampton*-Class - 1929-1930 These succeeded the *Pensacola* Class, with minor changes in basic design, the main ones being a raised upper deck, three main battery turrets, an aircraft hangar amidships, and a more prominent tripod mainmast. Ships of this class were: *Northampton*, *Chester*, *Chicago*, *Houston*, *Louisville*, and *Augusta*.

*Indianapolis*-*Portland* Class - 1931-32 Only two ships of this "class" were built. *Indianapolis* and *Portland* embodied all the latest changes and modifications to the basic *Northampton* Class. *Astoria* Class - 1933-1936 The fourth and final class of heavy cruisers built by the Navy under the Washington Treaty: *Astoria*, *New Orleans*, *Minneapolis*, *Tuscaloosa*, *San Francisco*, *Quincy*, and *Vincennes*.

<sup>7</sup> USS *Decatur* (DD 5) Ship's Officers and Crew on deck, 1907. Officers present are (seated, left to right): Ensign John M. Smeallie, USN, Ship's Engineer; Ensign Chester W. Nimitz, USN, Commanding Officer; and Midshipman Hugh Allen, USN, Executive Officer. Ensign Smeallie went on to become the commissioning Commanding Officer of USS *Indianapolis*. A few years later, Captain Nimitz assumed command of a later heavy cruiser, USS *Augusta* (CA 31). Ensign Nimitz was convicted by General Court Martial for negligently hazarding a vessel when USS *Decatur* stranded on an uncharted reef in Philippine waters. See: <http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/OnlineLibrary/photos/sh-usn/usnsh-d/dd5-d.htm>

<sup>8</sup> Some of the silver service from USS *Indiana* was on board USS *Nimitz* (CVN 68). I spent many hours in the wardroom near the silver punch bowl with the imprint from the spent Spanish shell. Interestingly, the silver punch bowl did not seem to have suffered any damage other than an indentation in the shape of the shell.

<sup>9</sup> From Mr. Jensen's U.S. History blogsite at <http://waverlyhs.weebly.com/us-history-blog-may-2015---may-2016/the-uss-indianapolis-part-one-for-8/16/2015>. Source: Doug Stanton. *In Harm's Way: The Sinking of the U.S.S. Indianapolis and the Extraordinary Story of Its Survivors* (2003)

<sup>10</sup> Buell, Thomas B., *The Quiet Warrior*, (Annapolis, MD, US Naval Institute Classics of Naval Literature Edition 1987) p. 207.

<sup>11</sup> Image NH-83717 at Navy History & Heritage Command at <http://www.history.navy.mil/search.html?q=NH-83717>

<sup>12</sup> Admiral Henry Kent Hewitt, U.S. Navy (1887 – 1972), a New Jersey native, was the commander of amphibious operations in North Africa and southern Europe through World War II. He was born in Hackensack, New Jersey and was graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1906. He was Commanding Officer, USS *Indianapolis* (1936-39). The *Spruance*-class destroyer USS *Hewitt* (DD 966) was named in his honor.

<sup>13</sup> Admiral Thomas Cassin Kinkaid, U.S. Navy (1888 – 1972), USNA 1908, Commander, Seventh Fleet during the Battle of Leyte Gulf. He was the namesake of the *Spruance*-class destroyer, USS *Kincaid* (DD 966).

<sup>14</sup> Vice Admiral Andrews was born in Galveston, Texas, (1879-1948). USNA 1901. As an Admiral, he was Commander in Chief U.S. Fleet before World War II and during the war, as a Rear Admiral and Vice Admiral, he was Commander, Eastern Sea Frontier and Commandant, Third Naval District. He was present at the loss of USS

*Lafayette* (AP 53) ex SS *Normandie*, the French Lines passenger ship which went on fire and capsized on the Hudson River at Pier 88 in mid-town New York. Admiral Andrews refused to allow the firefighters to counter flood.

<sup>15</sup> Naval Cover Museum, [http://www.navalcovermuseum.org/restored/INDIANAPOLIS\\_CA\\_35.html](http://www.navalcovermuseum.org/restored/INDIANAPOLIS_CA_35.html)

<sup>16</sup> Vice Admiral John Franklin Shaffroth, U S. Navy, 1887 1967. . He commanded USS *Indianapolis* (1938-1940) and towards the closing days of World War II he was the Battleship Division Commander during the bombardment of Japan.

<sup>17</sup> Naval Cover Museum, [http://www.navalcovermuseum.org/restored/INDIANAPOLIS\\_CA\\_35.html](http://www.navalcovermuseum.org/restored/INDIANAPOLIS_CA_35.html)

<sup>18</sup> Raymond Ames Spruance, 1886-1969. USNA Class of 1906. Commander, Cruiser Division FIVE, Command, Task Force 16 at Battle of Midway, Chief of Staff, Commander in Chief Pacific Fleet, Commander Fifth Fleet, Commander in Chief U.S. Pacific Command and Pacific Ocean Area, President, Naval War College. Two destroyers USS *Spruance* (DD 963), lead ship of the *Spruance*-class of destroyers, and USS *Spruance* (DDG 111), 61st ship of the *Arleigh Burke*-class destroyer, were named in his honor.

<sup>19</sup> Admiral Marc A. Mitscher (188x-1947 USNA 1910, pioneer Naval Aviator who was pilot of the NC-1 seaplane during the 1919 trans-Atlantic flight of the NC-4. He commanded USS *Hornet* (CV 8) during Doolittle raid 18 April 1942, and in the Battle of Midway, June 3-7, 1942, as a Rear Admiral, a rare time a flag officer commanded a U.S. Navy warship. He was the namesake for two ships: USS *Mitscher* (DLG 2/DDG 35) and USS *Mitscher* (DDG 57).

<sup>20</sup> WWII Database photo, [http://ww2db.com/image.php?image\\_id=3023](http://ww2db.com/image.php?image_id=3023), United States Navy Naval History and Heritage Command, Identification Code NH 104376-KN

<sup>21</sup> Buell, Thomas B., *The Quiet Warrior*, (Annapolis, MD, US Naval Institute Classics of Naval Literature Edition 1987) p. 359.

<sup>22</sup> U.S. Navy Medical Department Oral History Program, Oral History With Capt (Ret.) Lewis Haynes, MC, USN, Conducted By Jan K. Herman, Historian, Burned 5, 12 And 22 June 1995 Telephonic Interview/Site Interview (Newton, Ma), Office Of Medical History Bureau Of Medicine And Surgery Washington, DC.

<sup>23</sup> Buell, Thomas B., *The Quiet Warrior*, (Annapolis, MD, US Naval Institute Classics of Naval Literature Edition, 1987), p. 389.

<sup>24</sup> Buell, Thomas B., *The Quiet Warrior*, (Annapolis, MD, US Naval Institute Classics of Naval Literature Edition 1987).

<sup>25</sup> Jesse Barrett Oldendorf (1887 – 1974) , USNA 1909. Retired as Admiral. Namesake of USS *Oldendorf* (DD 972), a *Spruance*-class destroyer.

<sup>26</sup> *Indianapolis* timeline at

[http://cdn.knightlab.com/libs/timeline/latest/embed/index.html?source=0AkAZ5A1eO02gdF8yYkY0YWwzeGx\\_WVU5rejZZOUZtSmc&font=Bevan-PotanoSans&maptype=toner&lang=en&height=650](http://cdn.knightlab.com/libs/timeline/latest/embed/index.html?source=0AkAZ5A1eO02gdF8yYkY0YWwzeGx_WVU5rejZZOUZtSmc&font=Bevan-PotanoSans&maptype=toner&lang=en&height=650)

<sup>27</sup> He was promoted to Commander, Imperial Japanese Navy Reserve on x September 1945 after the signing of the Instrument of Surrender.

<sup>28</sup> *Nimitz Gray Book* entry, 2 August 1945.

<sup>29</sup> *Nimitz Gray Book* entry, 3 August 1945.

<sup>30</sup> *Nimitz Gray Book* entry, 2 August 1945.

<sup>31</sup> Some sources report 317 survivors.

<sup>32</sup> WW2 database at [http://ww2db.com/image.php?image\\_id=1464](http://ww2db.com/image.php?image_id=1464)

<sup>33</sup> *Indianapolis* timeline at

[http://cdn.knightlab.com/libs/timeline/latest/embed/index.html?source=0AkAZ5A1eO02gdF8yYkY0YWwzeGx\\_WVU5rejZZOUZtSmc&font=Bevan-PotanoSans&maptype=toner&lang=en&height=650](http://cdn.knightlab.com/libs/timeline/latest/embed/index.html?source=0AkAZ5A1eO02gdF8yYkY0YWwzeGx_WVU5rejZZOUZtSmc&font=Bevan-PotanoSans&maptype=toner&lang=en&height=650)

<sup>34</sup> February 1942 – Bougainville and Salamaua-Lae Raids; March 1943 – Aleutians Operations; November 1943 – Gilbert Islands Operations; January - February 1944 – Marshall Islands Operations, Kwajalein, Majuro and Eniwetok Atolls; March - April 1944 – Asiatic-Pacific Raids, Yap, Palau, Ulithi and Woleai; June - August 1944 – Marianas Operations, Battle of the Philippine Sea & capture of Saipan and Guam; July 1944 – Capture of Tinian Island; September 1944 – Western Caroline Operations; February 1945 – Japanese Home Islands Raids, Honshu, Nansei Shoto and the capture of Iwo Jima; and March 1945 – Okinawa Gunto Operations.

<sup>35</sup> Autographed cards.com at

[http://www.autographedcards.com/Lloyd\\_Barto\\_USS\\_Indianapolis\\_Survivor\\_WWII\\_Signed\\_Autograph\\_Photo-ITEM23014.aspx](http://www.autographedcards.com/Lloyd_Barto_USS_Indianapolis_Survivor_WWII_Signed_Autograph_Photo-ITEM23014.aspx)

USS INDIANAPOLIS (CA 35) THE LAST U.S. NAVY SHIP SUNK DURING WORLD WAR II – BUILT IN NEW JERSEY<sup>1</sup> Part II:

By: Captain Lawrence B. Brennan, U.S. Navy (Retired)<sup>2</sup>

This is the final installment concerning the sinking of the last U.S. warship lost in World War II, USS *Indianapolis*. The initial installment was published in the immediate prior edition (May 2016 *NJPH*).<sup>3</sup> This article deals with the ordeal endured by the survivors, an analysis of the causes contributing to the sinking and the massive loss of lives, the Court of Inquiry, the General Court-Martial of Captain McVay, and the following half century of criticism of the legal and administrative proceedings.

An official account, Narrative of the Circumstances of the Loss of USS *Indianapolis*, 23 February 1946 (hereinafter “Nimitz’ Narrative on the Loss of USS *Indianapolis*”), explained:

Early in the morning, at 12:15 A.M., on July 30, while the *Indianapolis* was steaming unescorted, and not zigzagging, at a speed of 17 knots through the water, under good conditions of visibility and in a moderate sea, two heavy explosions occurred against her starboard side forward, as a result of which explosions the ship capsized and sank between 12:27 and 12:30 A.M., July 30. The ship sank 12 minutes after the torpedoes hit.<sup>4</sup>

Testimony below shows there were indeed Japanese torpedoes. This event would trigger the court martial of Captain Charles B. McVay, III.

An irreconcilable inconsistency was Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King’s inability to state definitively that *Indianapolis* was sunk by submarine torpedoes. In his third and final report to the Secretary of the Navy he stated that it was merely probable that a submarine attack caused the loss of *Indianapolis*.<sup>5</sup> This Report dated 8 December 1945 was precisely one week before King was relieved by Fleet Admiral Nimitz as Chief of Naval Operations on 15 December 1945.

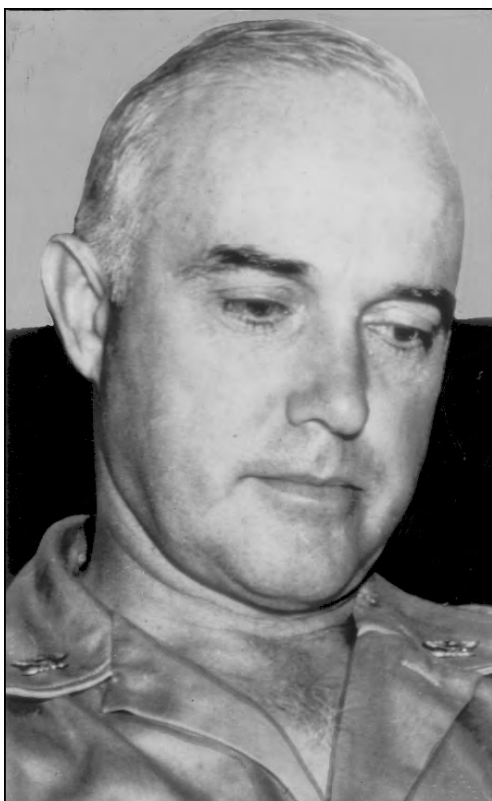
King’s report states: In the main the Japanese submarines were ineffective...we suffered very light losses, with the exception of the **sinking - with heavy loss of life - of the heavy cruiser *Indianapolis*, probably by an enemy submarine, on 30 July.**” [Emphasis added.]<sup>6</sup>

Captain McVay’s initial report, contained in *Nimitz’s Gray Book*, notes the following:<sup>7</sup>

About 400 survivors of the INDIANAPOLIS have been recovered and search for others continues. **Commanding Officer, one of survivors, says that he believes the ship was hit forward by two torpedoes or a mine** at about 0045/K 30 July. This was followed by a magazine explosion and the ship sank in 15 minutes. [Emphasis added.]<sup>8</sup>

Acting Secretary of the Navy, John L. Sullivan, created the general court for Captain McVay’s court martial by a Convening Order dated 23 November 1945. McVay’s trial opened on Monday, 3 December 1945 on charges preferred on 29 November 1945. It is unfathomable that King, who disagreed with Nimitz and urged the prosecution of Captain McVay, wrote in his ultimate report (dated 8 December 1945, and submitted while McVay’s Court Martial was in session), that it was merely probable - not certain - that a Japanese submarine caused the loss of *Indianapolis*.

Simply stated, how could a commanding officer be tried on charges and specifications when, after the court was convened, and the General Court Martial opened, the Navy’s senior officer still submitted a detailed written report that he was uncertain that a Japanese submarine had sunk *Indianapolis*? If Navy’s senior officer was uncertain that submarine torpedoes had sunk *Indianapolis* during the general court martial, how could the case have been referred to trial?<sup>9</sup>



**Fig. 31: Captain McVay on the eve of his court martial trial, Nov. 28, 1945.<sup>10</sup>**

The McVay case sparked more than half a century of criticism on military justice and led, in part, to the enactment of the Uniform Code of Military Justice<sup>11</sup> and its criminalization of “Unlawful Command Influence.” Even King’s biographer, Thomas B. Buell, acknowledged the injustice of the prosecution of McVay and the commanding officer of USS *Queenfish* (SS 393), Captain Charles E. Loughlin, U. S. Navy, which sunk a protected Japanese hospital ship, *Awa Maru*, in the Spring 1945. [Nimitz was outraged by the sentence awarded by the members of the court, a mere letter of admonition, and he then issued harsher letters of reprimand to the members.]

The trial and conviction of Captain McVay was unprecedented. No other naval officer was convicted during the 20<sup>th</sup> century for the loss of his ship during combat. Perhaps the death of President Roosevelt was a major cause of the change in policy. In addition to more than 12 years as president, FDR was the Assistant Secretary of the Navy for nearly all of Wilson’s two terms (1913-21) and approved the convictions of many of the courts martial during and soon after World War I. None of the Navy and Naval Reserve officers convicted as a result of collisions and strandings were charged with losing their ships prior to the Armistice. Some senior officers were informally punished: Commander Seligman, Executive Officer of USS *Lexington* (CV 2) in the late spring and summer of 1942 for disclosing to a reporter the fact that the US had broken the Japanese naval code, and Captain Hoover, Commanding Officer USS *Helena* (CL 50) as Senior Officer Present Afloat (SOPA) for abandoning the survivors of USS *Juneau* (CL 52) when she was fatally torpedoed, and for failing to transmit a position report to aid rescue.

Thomas Buell, a sympathetic biographer of King, in his *Master of Sea Power*, wrote that the trial of McVay was “scandalous,” “McVay was publicly disgraced,” and “[t]he *Indianapolis* tragedy was not King’s finest hour. [King] must share responsibility with Forrestal for allowing McVay’s humiliating court-martial.”<sup>12</sup> The causes of the sinking but not the loss of lives were explored in the Court of Inquiry and the General Court Martial.



**Fig. 32: Damage to Indianapolis on July 30, 1945.<sup>13</sup>**



The loss of *Indianapolis* was caused by damage from two torpedoes which struck the cruiser on her starboard side, the first near the bow and the second, nearly under the bridge, forward of amidships (see *Figure 32*), exacerbated by the intentional opening of watertight doors and fittings on the second deck and above, which resulted in progressive flooding, in turn causing a lack of buoyancy which lead to capsizing and ultimately sinking.

There was a synergy of proximate causes (causes in fact) that contributed to the sinking of the cruiser. Rarely, if ever, is a ship lost as the result of a single catastrophic fault. In this case, there were multiple faults attributable to decisions made by officers ashore, as well as the Commanding Officer and his officers, which contributed to the loss. Moreover, *Indianapolis* was unseaworthy; she was not reasonably fit for the anticipated voyage. It was well-known that she could not survive significant damage caused by torpedoes because her metacentric height was inadequate, primarily as the result of alternations and additions made since the ship was constructed. “Spruance was aware of the ship’s poor design and instability. He remarked to his staff at Iwo Jima that if *Indianapolis* ever was hit cleanly by a torpedo, she would quickly capsize and sink.”<sup>14</sup> At the Court of Inquiry, McVay testified:

Q. Is the *Indianapolis* class of cruisers reported as being a soft ship?

A. [T]hey are so tender that there are strict orders not to add any weight that cannot be fully compensated for. I have heard high ranking officers state as their opinion that they feel certain that this class of ship could hardly be expected to take more than one torpedo hit and remain afloat.<sup>15</sup>

The ship’s Medical Officer stated since *Indianapolis* was a 10,000 ton treaty cruiser, she “didn’t have to have the same watertight integrity as with the larger ships.”<sup>16</sup> Also, after her final yard period at Mare Island in the spring and summer of 1945, one of the two catapults was removed to lighten the weight of the ship above the waterline. This resulted in a three degree list surprisingly to the “lighter side” which was offset by the stowage of fuel, liquids, and consumables.<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, *Indianapolis* was unable to set watertight integrity appropriate for wartime independent steaming because the internal temperatures made the hull uninhabitable. The steps required to allow cool air to enter the living and working spaces contributed to the progressive flooding. When Spruance’s staff first reported on board, “the ship became almost uninhabitable. Ventilation was poor, and (when) *Indianapolis* buttoned up for general quarters she became unbearably hot. The ventilation fans created static that interfered with the radar, so the fans were secured and the crew sweltered. The temperature in [the Chief of Staff’s] stateroom near the smokestack rose to over a hundred degrees.”<sup>18</sup>

The most important factors leading to *Indianapolis*’ sinking were the fortuitous meeting of the vessels at a time and place where the rising moon brightly illuminated the cruiser as she steamed west south west clearly visible to the Japanese Commanding Officer of submarine *I 58* which was further to the west ahead of and north of the intended track. *Indianapolis* was steaming at a moderate speed into an ideal firing solution for the Japanese submarine, which was proceeding at or near steerage way, and a dark sky for a background with the cruiser “spotlighted” by a Commander’s moon.<sup>19</sup>

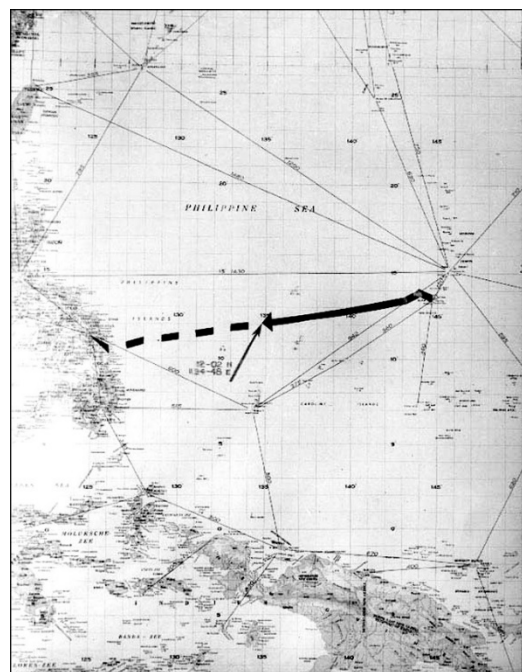


Captain McVay was convicted of a single charge and specification, negligently hazarding his vessel due to his intentional failure to zigzag. It is indisputable that, as expressly provided in the orders he received, McVay ordered the cessation of zigzagging hours prior to the torpedo attack but directed the officer of the deck to use his discretion in resuming zigzagging, as needed. The testimony of the defense submarine commanding officer expert witness, Captain Glynn Donaho, U.S. Navy, was inconsistent and self-contradictory. His redirect testimony supported a finding that zigzagging could have obstructed the submarine attack, if *Indianapolis* had altered course immediately after the torpedoes had been fired, but his direct testimony indicated it might only have required a new setup. Japanese Commander Mochitsura Hashimoto, Commanding Officer *I 58*, also testified that he would have been able to sink *Indianapolis* even if the cruiser were zigzagging.

Many of the contributing causes of the loss pre-dated the fortuitous encounter between submarine and cruiser on 29-30 July 1945.

*Indianapolis* was routed on a rhumbline course<sup>20</sup> from Tinian to her destination in the Philippines on a pre-plotted route known as Peddie Route.<sup>21</sup> This direct Peddie Route<sup>22</sup> was well-known by Japanese military strategists as being heavily traveled. Commander Hashimoto, sailed *I 58* to a spot where he could intercept ships traveling on Peddie Route. The decision to send *Indianapolis* without escort was made by the staff at Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Fleet as documented in Nimitz' Narrative on the Loss of USS *Indianapolis*.

The policy determination with regard to the escorting of vessels in the Western Pacific was the function of the Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet. This policy, which required the escorting of vessels in some areas but dispensed with escorts for some classes of vessels in others, which were less active, was largely dictated by the limited availability of escort vessels.



**Fig. 33: Map showing the Peddie Route followed by *Indianapolis*, to the point where she was sunk.**

At the time of the sailing of the *Indianapolis*, there was a shortage in this regard and escorts were, as a rule, not given combatant vessels which were capable of “taking care of themselves.” The *Indianapolis* was considered to be in this class and escort, if furnished her, would have been at the expense of other requirements of greater urgency.<sup>23</sup>

In addition to the inability to provide an escort, there was no mention of any overflight efforts focusing on the intended course of the cruiser. Nor were there any reports of instructions given to other U.S. ships which followed the same course.

V-mail letter from the USS Indianapolis

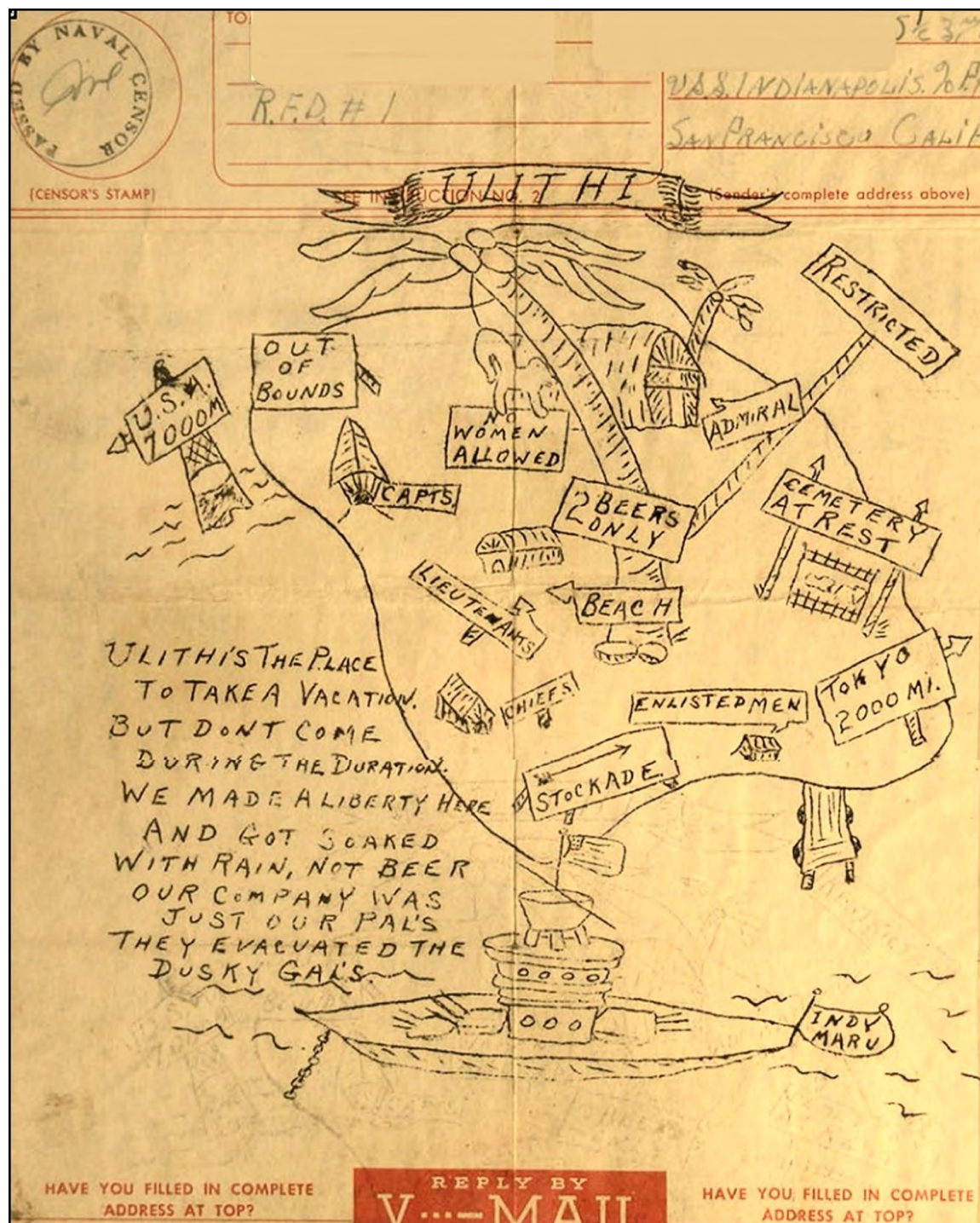


Fig. 34: Vmail letters were letter sheets, which once written, were microfilmed and sent in that form to sorting centers, where the letter was printed full-sized, put in an envelope, and mailed to the recipient. This served to cut down on the great increase during WWII of mail traveling around the world between soldiers and their families. For the full story, visit the Smithsonian exhibit at:

[http://postalmuseum.si.edu/victorymail/operating/flipbook\\_flash.html](http://postalmuseum.si.edu/victorymail/operating/flipbook_flash.html)



More troubling was *Indianapolis*' 15.7 knots average speed of advance. It was common practice, particularly in the North Atlantic, to send high speed ships steaming independently because they could "out run" enemy submarines and most escorts would be ineffectual or cause a reduction in speed. RMS *Queen Mary* and *Queen Elizabeth* were converted to troop transports and ran from New York to England unescorted because their speeds made it improbable that a U boat could intercept and line up a shot. Here, it seems that *I 58* was positioned perfectly for a shot as *Indianapolis* was illuminated by a full moon and proceeding toward *I 58* and a setup. *I 58* first observed *Indianapolis* at a range of 5.7 to 6.3 nautical miles based on the assumed height of the lookout between 25' and 30'. Actually, since *Indianapolis*' height above the surface was greater due to the masts, the range at which she was observed was greater; *Indianapolis*' air draft was about 100'. It was by happenstance that the two ships came within a range of 10 nautical miles of each other while *Indianapolis* was illuminated by a bright moon that broke through the cloud cover and while *I 58* was on the surface.

According to the statement of Commanding Officer, *I 58*, while he observed *Indianapolis* over a 27 minute period prior to firing six torpedoes, the range had closed 8,500 meters from 10,000 meters to 1,500 meters. The closing rate of the ships had been about 16 knots, using the simple estimate of the "Rule of Three."<sup>24</sup> Had *Indianapolis* been making a speed in excess of 27 knots it is questionable if *I 58* would have been able to maneuver into position and reach a firing solution in the reduced time available. At that speed, she would have advanced an additional 1,000 yards (nearly half a nautical mile) every three minutes. Her speed of advance was restricted by two considerations: fuel consumption conservation measures and the commanding officer's desire to arrive at destination after first light. McVay could have made his rendezvous point by altering speed so that the average speed of advance remained the same but proceeding at a reduced speed during the relatively safer daylight hours and steaming at higher speed when submarines enjoyed greater stealth.

*Nimitz*' Narrative on the Loss of USS *Indianapolis* reads, in pertinent part:

The route over which the *Indianapolis* was to travel, which was the only direct route between Guam and Leyte, and was the route regularly assigned vessels making passage between these islands, was considered within the acceptable risk limit for combatant vessels. Circuitous routes were available from Guam to Leyte, but no special apprehension was felt regarding the use of the direct route by the *Indianapolis* and no other route was considered.

The speed of advance of the *Indianapolis* (15.7 knots) was set by Captain McVay and was based upon his desire to arrive off the entrance to Leyte Gulf at daylight on July 31 in order to conduct antiaircraft practice prior to his entering the Gulf. To have arrived a day earlier would have required a speed of advance of about 24 knots. No special consideration was given the possibility of delaying the departure of the ship from Guam in order to enable her to proceed in company with other vessels, since the route assigned was not thought by the Port Director to be unduly hazardous. Zigzagging was, by his routing instructions, left to the discretion of Captain McVay. However, tactical orders then in force required zigzagging in conditions of good visibility, in waters where enemy submarines might be present.<sup>25</sup>

The most significant contributing cause of the sighting and sinking of *Indianapolis* was the rising of the moon. The official account of the circumstances at the time of the sinking revealed that *Indianapolis* was torpedoed "under good conditions of visibility and in a moderate sea ..."<sup>26</sup>

Modern scientists have described the sky conditions at the location where *I 58* located *Indianapolis*. They concluded that the moon was three-quarters full and bright; the moon, *Indianapolis* and the sub were aligned in a way that allowed the submarine to see the cruiser.<sup>27</sup>

*The moon is a remarkable institution. When you are using the moon to walk abroad under with your best girl in the evening, it is remarkable how little of it there is. When the Jap is using it for his planes to attack you with, it is remarkable what a large proportion of the month you have moonlight. Last night was about full moon. We had visitations off and on most of the night - not that I stayed up for them, however.*

Admiral Raymond A. Spruance, U.S. Navy to Mrs. Margaret Spruance, May-June, 1945.<sup>28</sup>

Commander Hashimoto explained, in his 1954 book, "Towards nightfall the visibility deteriorated and by about 7 P.M. it was almost nil. We decided to wait for the visibility to improve and dived to await moonrise at 10 P.M. [submarine time.]"<sup>29</sup>



**Fig. 35: Japanese Submarine  
Commander Mochitsura Hashimoto**

Hashimoto surfaced his boat 65 minutes after moonrise: *I ordered the night periscope to be raised just clear of the surface and quickly took a look round. The visibility was much better and one could almost see the horizon. The moon was already high in the eastern sky and there were few clouds in its vicinity ... I gave the order, "Surface" ... As soon as the upper deck was awash ... I myself was watching through the night scope ... At that moment the navigator [who was on the bridge] shouted, "Bearing red nine zero degrees, a possible enemy ship." I lowered the periscope and headed for the bridge, and turned my binoculars in the direction indicated by the navigator. Without doubt there was a black spot on the horizon on the rays of the moon. I ordered, "Dive."*<sup>30</sup>

In a prior, translated series of questions and answers, Hashimoto's account generally was similar but he had included essential facts:

- Q. [What] was the position of [*I 58*] relative to the dark object at that time?
- A. [My] position was established still, roughly, at ten thousand meters ... with the target bearing ninety degrees true when the target approached within a distance of ... 1500 meters, [I] fired [my] torpedoes.
- Q. How long after the sighting did you fire this salvo?
- A. About twenty-seven minutes.
- Q. During this twenty-seven minutes, what was the visibility?
- A. In the path of the moon I could see as far as the horizon. In areas other than that it was poorer. I could hardly discern the horizon.<sup>31</sup>

Two professors from Southwest Texas University and a former student published an article in the July 2002 edition of *Sky & Telescope* magazine which demonstrated that *Indianapolis* was doomed by the moon.



The scholars explained:

*[There were] three important findings about the event. First, they identified the correct phase of the moon that night, a matter that had been subject to much contradiction over the years. Second, the alignment of the Japanese submarine, the Indianapolis and the moon contributed significantly to the demise of the Indianapolis. And, third, they say that because of the alignment of the submarine, the cruiser and the moon, the Japanese were able to spot their target from a remarkable distance.*

*“The moon was 75 percent illuminated that night, and that differs from past accounts that have said, variously, that there was a crescent moon, a half moon or even a full moon,” said [Professor] Olson.*

*The researchers also learned that, in order from west to east, the Japanese submarine I 58, the Indianapolis and the moon were in almost perfect alignment. As a result, when the Japanese submarine surfaced to scout for enemy ships, a crewman almost immediately spotted the Indianapolis clearly silhouetted against the bright moonlit sky. That allowed the sub to quickly dive for cover and follow a course to intercept and fire upon the Indianapolis.*

*Using known coordinates for the Indianapolis just before it was hit, and also knowing the running speed of both vessels, Olson, Johns and Doescher were able to determine that the sub’s crew spotted the Indianapolis from a distance of 16.5 kilometers (10.3 miles), nearly 5 kilometers more than is considered likely under good visibility conditions.*

*“A sighting from that distance was possible because of the alignment of the two vessels, with the moon backlighting the Indianapolis,” said Olson.*

*Eyewitness accounts differ as to the quality of the visibility on that tragic evening. Some say visibility was poor. Others say it was poor when the moon was obscured by the clouds, but good when it was not.*

\*\*\*

*Olson agrees that visibility would change with cloud cover, but says it would also depend greatly on an individual’s point of view.*

*“The Japanese, looking to the east toward the Indianapolis, would have excellent visibility when the moon shone between the clouds, much better than normal, in fact. But the sky and ocean were bright in this one direction only. Visibility would not have been nearly that good looking westward from the Indianapolis,” Olson said.<sup>32</sup>*

There are serious questions about the lack of proper lookout in *Indianapolis*. It is beyond dispute that *I 58* had seen *Indianapolis* well in advance of the torpedoing. Certainly, *Indianapolis* was a much larger ship and her whole profile was visible. More importantly, she was spotlighted by the ascending moon that provided significant back illumination according to the attacking submarine captain. Also of great importance was that *I 58* was hunting for targets and alert to the opportunity to attack.

On the other hand, *Indianapolis* did not sight the submarine before the torpedoes struck. The cruiser was maintaining a lookout both visually and by radar. The watch was changing at midnight so there may have been some unavoidable friction and lack of attention along with the need to adjust the vision of the men assuming their lookout duties. Furthermore, the profile of the submarine was smaller than that of the heavy cruiser. The submarine may have been bow on and the main deck awash most of the time she was surfaced presenting a small radar cross section. When *I 58* was submerged it is unlikely that radar would have located any part of her, even the periscope when it was above the surface.

*Nimitz' Narrative on the Loss of USS Indianapolis* reads:

No enemy vessel was sighted either before the explosions occurred or afterward. Watches were properly stood and good lookout was kept, both visual and radar. Normal precautions were being taken against enemy submarines. The lookouts were generally experienced men and fully alert. The damage control party, though well organized, was unable to function properly due to the heavy personnel casualties forward, the rapid flooding and the intense fire which was started in the forward section of the ship..<sup>33</sup>

Importantly, *Indianapolis* was not an anti-submarine warfare (ASW) ship and her officers and men were not trained or experienced in locating and attacking submarines, particularly by radar at night. Further, on this voyage she had not embarked Fifth Fleet's Japanese language code breaker intelligence unit. This group may have provided information regarding local threats to the cruiser. Nevertheless, there are questions about the adequacy of the visual and radar lookout maintained on board *Indianapolis*. Had the lookouts found *I 58* lurking ahead of *Indianapolis'* intended course, a radical course change and acceleration may have removed the cruiser from the risk of attack by opening the range between the vessels. A hard turn to port and increasing turns to flank speed may have taken *Indianapolis* off the course to destruction.

Frequently, as appears in this tragic case, the mindset of the officers and crew were not prepared for the risk of combat. This is a common failure found in many instances where the warrior is not prepared mentally for combat. *Indianapolis* was in the safety of waters away from "the front." The staff officers ashore, her Commanding Officer, watch officers, and crew were not alert to the risk of attack. They lacked the diligence needed to fight the ship at a moment's notice.

Additionally, when the ship was repaired on the West Coast there had been a massive transfer of officers and men. The replacements, a quarter of the ship's complement [more than 250 men and 35 of 80 officers],<sup>34</sup> were not as well-trained or prepared for combat. Workups and refresher training had been delayed because of the special mission assigned to *Indianapolis*. There was no opportunity for refresher training on the West Coast or at Pearl Harbor, or Guam and Tinian.



*Fig. 36: The crew of USS Indianapolis.*<sup>35</sup>

*Nimitz' Narrative on the Loss of USS Indianapolis* revealed:

Although all preparations had been made to give the vessel a post-repair shakedown period in San Diego, California, preparatory to her rejoining the Fleet in the combat area, assignment to a mission of greater importance necessitated the postponement of this period of refresher training until a later date.

While in the Navy Yard, there had been a great number of changes among the officers attached to the vessel and a turnover in her enlisted complement in excess of 25 percent.

Every advantage was taken of opportunities to send both officers and enlisted men to schools and other instruction, while in the Navy Yard; and when reported ready for sea, the ship was well organized and the training of personnel was progressing satisfactorily.

\* \* \*

At the time of her departure from Guam, the *Indianapolis* was not at peak efficiency; but she was well organized; her personnel were well disciplined and, in the main, well versed in the performance of their routine duties. Training of personnel was continuing and her visit to Leyte was being made in order to complete her refresher training program.<sup>36</sup>

Workups and refresher training for the crew were deferred until after the ship delivered the fissionable material,<sup>37</sup> and arrived at Leyte, before proceeding to the combat zone and joining Vice Admiral Jesse B. Oldendorf's Task Force 95 off Okinawa. Simply stated, the ship and crew were not fully combat ready.

The impact of the pair of torpedoes was devastating throughout the ship, not just the forward part where there was direct impact. The ship was fatally damaged; copious quantities of water entered the hull through the massive holes and the fact that *Indianapolis* continued to steam forward increased the rate of flooding. One survivor, Woody Eugene James, wrote:

*Sunday, the 29th of July was a quiet day. The sea was runnin[g] five or six feet waves, just a beautiful day out...Had the 8:00 to 12:00 watch and just got off at midnight. A guy relieved me about a quarter to twelve. I... went to my compartment and got a blanket ... and went back up on deck. I slept under the overhang on the first turret. My battle station was inside it so in case general quarters sounded, I slept underneath it. Just got laid down good, using my shoes for a pillow as usual and the first torpedo hit. ... and started to roll out from underneath the turret and the other torpedo hit. ... about sixty-foot of the bow chopped off, completely gone. Within a minute and a half, maybe two minutes at the most, the bow is startin[g] to do down. It filled up with water that fast. Everything was open below deck and the water just flooded in and we were still under way, just scoopin[g] water. Complete chaos, total and complete chaos all over the whole ship.<sup>38</sup>*

There was an immediate electrical failure preventing communications from the bridge and throughout the ship; mechanical and sound-powered communications failed simultaneously. Also, there was no light inside the hull. Most importantly, there was no electrical power to transmit or receive radio messages. It was doubtful that the radio room in *Indianapolis* was able to transmit a SOS. This was surprising and implied that there were no batteries for the radio or that all antennae were destroyed. Moreover, it seems likely that there were no battery-powered battle lanterns for use on the bridge and in the remaining spaces below the weather deck. Since *Indianapolis* made way until she sank it is clear that the main engines, or part of the plant, continued to function. The catastrophic damage from the two torpedoes caused fatal damage to the hull and precluded both pumping of the flooded compartments to restore stability and buoyancy as well as any form of communications other than word of mouth.

Again, *Nimitz' Narrative on the Loss of USS Indianapolis* explained:

The communication set-up and provisions made for sending emergency messages were in accordance with good practice and current instructions. There is ample evidence that distress messages were keyed by radio operators and possibly were actually transmitted on at least one (500 k.c.) and possibly two frequencies. No evidence has been developed that any distress message from the ship was received by any ship, aircraft or shore station.<sup>39</sup>

During the 12 minutes between the impact of the torpedoes and the sinking, the hull was breached and possibly the bow was severed, resulting in rapid progressive flooding throughout the ship except for the fire, boiler, and engine rooms. The crew was unable to perform crucial damage control activities; probably essential damage control parties were wiped out by the initial damage. Lack of pumps, fire hoses, and dewatering gear all contributed to the expansive damage. Because of the inability of the bridge to communicate with the engine room the ship continued to steam ahead; this too contributed to the ingress of water through the damage at the bow. Additionally, the limited metacentric height made it impossible for *Indianapolis* to remain afloat with the extensive damage she suffered. Thus, she was unable to act as her own life boat while the crew abandoned ship in an orderly manner, launching life boats, life rafts, and transmitting distress signals.



The failure to have sufficient time to launch life boats, rafts, and floaters deprived the survivors of potable water, food, floating devices, and protection from the shark attacks. The ship's conditions contributed to the rapid sinking within 12 minutes and the resultant loss of nearly 75% of her complement.

Certainly, it would have been difficult to anticipate that *Indianapolis* would be sunk in shark-infested waters but, while the quantity and ferocity of sharks could not be anticipated, the presence of sharks and other predators was foreseeable. Nor could it have been foreseen that no distress signals would be received and that the men would be in the water for such an extended period of time (four days). In any event, the number of deaths attributable to shark attacks may not have been as great as reported. Rather, the lack of protection from the sun, heat, evening cold, lack of food and most importantly lack of potable water probably contributed to the loss of most of the men over the lengthy period before the survivors were located. The time the men were left in the water was long but shipwreck sailors had survived longer periods in boats and on rafts, particularly where they had minimal survival gear. The lack of potable water was most terrible and led to reports of many men drinking sea water in desperate but fatal attempts to quench their thirst.

*The survivors of the sinking were separated into several groups along a southwest to northeast axis. This separation was due in large part to the fact [that men] were abandoning the ship while she was still moving and the winds and currents were pushing those fortunate enough to be in rafts away from the "floaters" in life jackets or life belts. During the first night, an estimated 50 to 100 sailors who had been badly burned or otherwise injured, or who had no life jackets, died in the water.*<sup>40</sup>

Shoreside headquarters knew, or should have known, that *Indianapolis* had been sunk on the same day she was torpedoed. Nimitz noted:

Within 16 hours of the actual sinking of the *Indianapolis*, there was in the Advance Headquarters of the Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet an indication (from a single enemy source) to the effect that the Japanese had sunk something (the nature of which was unknown) in a position which was approximately the predicted position of the *Indianapolis* at the time. Had this information been evaluated as authentic, it is possible that the survivors of the *Indianapolis* might have been located within 24 hours of the time of the sinking of the ship and many additional lives might have been saved.<sup>41</sup>

*Nimitz' Narrative on the Loss of USS Indianapolis* further explained the failure of U.S. aircraft spotted by the crew to locate the survivors.

Aircraft patrols which daily covered a great part of the route followed by the *Indianapolis*, and which were sighted daily by the survivors, failed to sight the oil slick or the survivors for two days after the sinking. Discovery of the survivors by aircraft patrol was largely accidental. Investigation revealed that the planes were flying at altitudes which were considered the optimum for searching the area for enemy craft by search radar and visual lookout. Since, at this time and in this area, enemy craft were almost certain to be submarines this was, in effect, an anti-submarine patrol. Planes were generally flying too high to see the *Indianapolis* survivors.<sup>42</sup>

The airspace above Code Route Peddie<sup>43</sup> was heavily patrolled by both U.S. Navy and Army Air Force aircraft. Several aircraft were sighted on 30 July but none of them spotted the survivors. Shortly after midnight on 31 July, the main group of survivors, southwest of McVay's group, observed the running lights and heard the engines of an aircraft heading east toward Guam. The survivors in rafts fired Very Star flares to attract the pilot's attention. This was observed and reported by the USAAF pilot, who continued his eastward course. *Ordeal by Sea* gives the following account of this sighting:

*The plane was... piloted by Captain Richard G. LeFrancis of the Army Air Force [who] saw the pyrotechnics ...[which] looked like naval battle ... He watched the bright balls of fire jut up from the sea and made a note of the location in his logbook. When Captain LeFrancis touched down in Guam, he made a full report ... but those in authority told him to forget it. What the Navy was involved in was no concern of the Army Air Force. Captain LeFrancis nodded and bowed out. He had made his report and it had been tossed aside.*<sup>44</sup>

The survivors' accounts, decades later, demonstrate the terror and pain they endured as their desperation escalated while their shipmates died by the hundreds and hope of survival dimmed.

Radioman Third Class Arthur L. Leenerman simply stated, "When the sharks were around, I would pull my legs up as far as I could." Corporal Edgar Harrell, USMC reflected, "When you think you could die at any moment, you don't get used to *anything*." Fire Controlman Third Class Robert M. Witzig recalled, "We don't ever go swimming, but give us a drink and we'll take it!" Aviation Machinist Mate Third Class James Jarvis stated, "The nights were the hardest. It was so cold you'd start shaking, and you couldn't sleep, and you knew no one would be finding you."<sup>45</sup>

Another survivor, Seaman Lowell Dean Cox, U.S. Navy, observed:

*I never saw a life raft. I finally heard some moans and groans and yelling and swam over and got with a group of 30 men and that's where I stayed ... We figured that if we could just hold out for a couple of days they'd pick us up ... I saw one [shark] the first morning after daylight. They were big. Some of them I swear were 15ft long ... You were constantly in fear because you'd see 'em all the time. Every few minutes you'd see their fins - a dozen to two dozen fins in the water. They would come up and bump you. I was bumped a few times - you never know when they are going to attack you.*<sup>46</sup>

There were a number of great heroes who sacrificed their lives to encourage and support groups of survivors; a Chaplain and the Marine Detachment Commanding Officer were particularly heroic and sacrificed their lives for their shipmates. One survivor, Frank J. Centazzo, wrote:

*I was in the group with Father Conway. I saw him go from one small group to another getting the shipmates to join in prayer and asking them not to give up hope of being rescued. He kept working until he was exhausted. I remember on the third day late in the afternoon when he approached me and Paul McGinness. He was thrashing the water and Paul and I held him so he could rest a few hours. Later, he managed to get away from us and we never saw him again. ...*<sup>47</sup>

The ship's Senior Medical Officer, Captain Lewis L. Haynes, Medical Corps, U.S. Navy, recalled:

*All thoughts of rescue are gone, and our twisted reasoning has come to accept this as our life until the end is reached. The chaplain, a priest, is not a strong man physically, yet his courage and goodness seem to have no limit. I wonder about him, for the night is particularly difficult and most of us suffer from chills, fever and delirium. The chaplain's delirium mounts; his struggles almost too much for me. I grab the chaplain and thrust my arm through the chaplain's life jacket so that I may hold him securely through his wild thrashing. He cries a strange gibberish some of the words are Latin but in a little while he sinks into a coma. The only sound is the slap of water against us as I wait for the end. When it comes, the moon is high, golden overhead. I say a prayer and let him drift away.<sup>48</sup>*



**Fig. 37: Chaplain Thomas. M. Conway on the bridge USS Indianapolis. Conway was lost with the other members of the crew.<sup>49</sup>**



**Fig. 38: Lt. Comdr. Haynes in Peleliu Base Hospital 5 August 1945. He survived and told the story of Conway's final hours.<sup>50</sup>**

Another great hero who sacrificed his life to keep the survivors disciplined was the Commanding Officer of *Indianapolis'* Marine Detachment. Captain McVay recommended the Navy Cross, (posthumously), for Captain Edward L. Parke, USMC. The recommendation read in part:

*For extraordinary heroism in rescuing and organizing a large group of men following the sinking of the USS INDIANAPOLIS... finally collapsing himself from exhaustion. His unselfish conduct in the face of the greatest personal danger was outstanding and in keeping with the highest tradition of the Naval Service.<sup>51</sup>*

During the second day in the water (31 July 1945), many of the survivors began to show the weakening effects of thirst, exposure, and dehydration brought on by the sun, exposure, and burn injuries. Additionally, many men in the groups of survivors (primarily the "floaters" in life jackets) began to hallucinate; some, seeing their ship just below the surface, removed their life jackets and swam down to her. Others struck out on their own or in small groups for non-existent islands. Still others murdered their shipmates thought to be Japanese infiltrators. Some, who were totally exhausted, simply gave up and slipped beneath the surface. The sharks found the survivors this day. Books and articles focus on the shark attacks on the survivors. While some men were attacked and killed by sharks as they floated helplessly in the water, it is probable that most sharks attacked the remains of those who had already died.

During the third day (1 August 1945), despair, hallucinations, and deaths continued. Several aircraft passed over but heads bobbing on the surface and the small rafts were unseen. McVay and others were convinced that certainly the rescue would come this day; *Indianapolis* was sure to be missed when she did not arrive at Leyte on 31 July. The search order had probably been given but sadly they were wrong.<sup>52</sup>

At 1125 2 August, while flying a routine search mission, Lieutenant (junior grade) Wilbur C. “Chuck” Gwinn, USNR, flying a twin engine landplane, sighted an oil slick in position approximately 11-30 North, 133-30 East, approximately 250 miles north of Peleliu. He sighted a group of about 30 survivors. Dropping a life raft and radio transmitter, Gwinn radioed all search and rescue forces which ordered their ships and aircraft to the scene. Lieutenant Commander George C. Atteberry, USNR, took off from Peleliu and arrived at 1415. Atteberry and a Navy patrol seaplane, which had been en route to the Philippines, conducted a further search, both planes dropping life rafts and rescue equipment.

The first of the rescue forces to arrive was a Navy Catalina patrol seaplane which landed in the water about 1705 to support to those not in life rafts. Directed by Atteberry, the Catalina picked up a total of 58 survivors but the aircraft was so badly damaged that it could not take off. Later that afternoon, seven additional Navy aircraft, a single Army Air Force seaplane and two heavy bombers arrived, searched, and dropped life rafts and other rescue gear. All the rescued were given elementary first aid and promptly transferred to a ship.

During the night a majority of the available surface craft – four destroyers, four destroyer escorts, three fast, light transports, plus numerous patrol craft – arrived. Methodical search and rescue operations were commenced. Searchlights, flares, and star shells swept the area; by day, aircraft pointed surface ships to men and objects.

Before the search was abandoned on 8 August, the area within a 100 mile radius of the center of the survivors group had been so thoroughly searched that there was no possibility that a single individual remaining afloat had been missed.<sup>53</sup>

Before the search was abandoned another Japanese *I* boat was located by a single Destroyer Escort with a convoy of LSTs. Nimitz’ *Gray Book* recorded:

4 August (Guam Date)

Early morning of the 4<sup>th</sup> enemy SS [submarine] made two unsuccessful torpedo attacks on an OKINAWA to LEYTE convoy. An escort, EARL V. JOHNSON (DE 702) made 4 depth charge attacks, the last of which resulted in a severe delayed underwater explosion.

The loss of *Indianapolis* was bracketed by *I* boat attacks. On 23 July 1945, *I* 53 sighted a convoy of seven ships - USS *Adria* (AF 30) and six LSTs carrying the 96th Infantry Division withdrawn from Okinawa – making 10 knots towards the Philippines. The convoy was escorted by USS *Underhill* (DE 682). *Underhill* was sunk with the loss of her Commanding Officer and 111 crewmen, when she intentionally rammed a kaiten (a suicide torpedo operated by a single man, used by Japan near the end of WWII) which exploded. *Indianapolis* had been attacked and sunk by a submarine during the last offensive foray in the Pacific which was known to the intelligence officers.



Various commemorative covers have been issued for the USS *Indianapolis* across the years. A few are pictured:

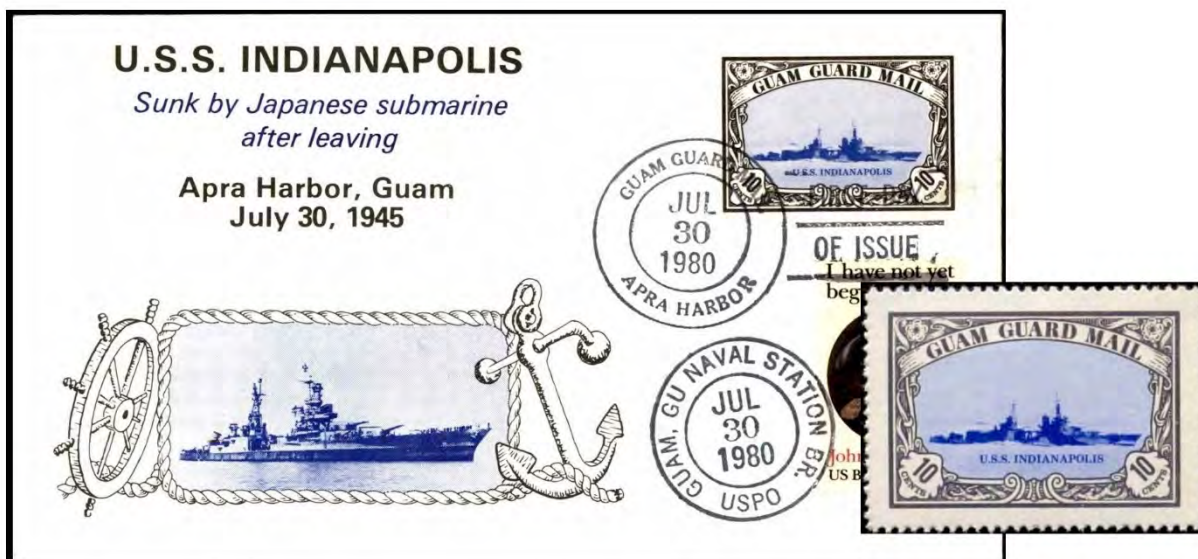


Fig. 39: Guam Guard Mail was a local post (1930-31) on the island of Guam, which distributed mail to the small towns across the island by bus. Reinstated in 1976 as a Bicentennial project by Gov. Bordallo.<sup>54</sup>



Fig. 40: Indianapolis commemorative covers from 1993, and one from 2015 showing the history of the sinking and Captain McVay on the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her loss.

### Naval Communications with Families of Those Lost at Sea:

Families were first sent a telegram indicating a crew member was missing, and a second when more information was available. The Dollins family received a “reported missing” telegram on August 12, 1945 from Vice Admiral Randall Jacobs, Chief of Navy Personnel, and a second, indicating his loss, on September 17. This was followed by a letter from Captain McVay himself, regarding the death of their brother, Radioman Paul Dollins, on September 27, 1945.

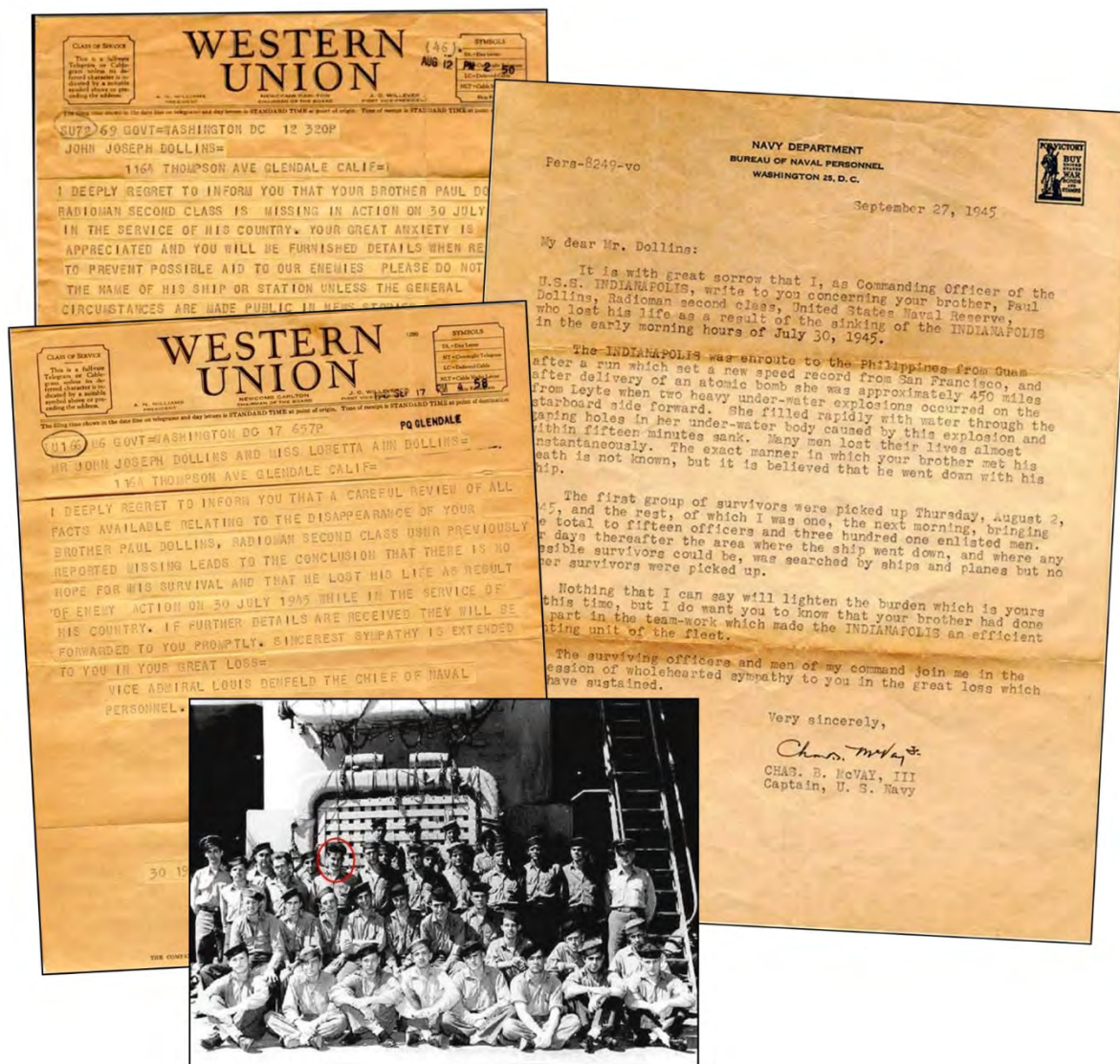
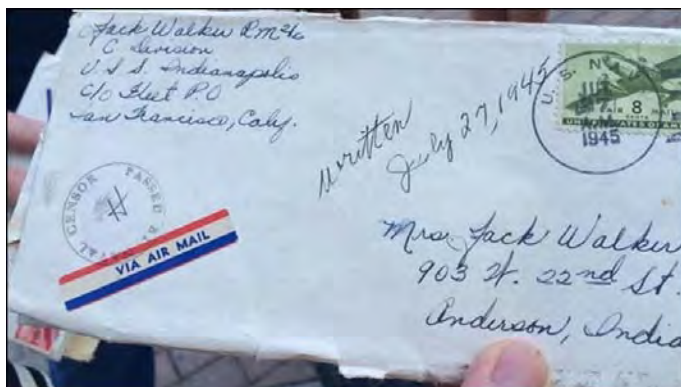


Fig. 41: Telegrams (August 12 and September 17, 1945) and letter (September 27, 1945) to the Dollins family about their brother, lost in the sinking of USS Indianapolis. Paul Dollins (shown circled in a group of Radiomen on Indianapolis) was 21 years old.<sup>55</sup>

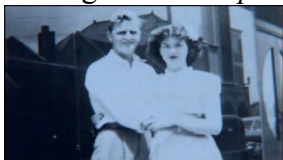


## A Love Story Remembered through Lost Letters from USS *Indianapolis*



**Fig. 42: Upon moving to a new home, Ruby Taylor came upon old love letters from Indianapolis. The postmark probably was the last day mail was sent from the ship.**

A story appeared in July 2015 on WTHR in Indianapolis, on the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the sinking of *Indianapolis*, which we reproduce here:



Indianapolis, Kevin Rader, WTHR political reporter<sup>56</sup> 7/24/2016

*Left: Ruby & Jack Walker as newlyweds.*

A lot of things can change over 70 years and a lot can stay the same.

Ruby Taylor has been surprised how people have reacted since she rediscovered some old love letters from WWII - letters from her new husband aboard the USS *Indianapolis*.

Time can get away from all of us. ... Seventy years ago, she was newlywed with a secret. A secret she wanted to share, but never got the chance. ...

Jack Walker was a radio man on the USS Indianapolis.

They were high school sweethearts. He swept home on leave from WWII and swept her off her feet and down the aisle.

"He and some buddies knew they would be drafted so they enlisted and so he didn't have to go, but he did. He was really good looking. He really was," she said. ... Ruby recently moved and rediscovered the couple's love letters.

"I wish you would find out for sure whether or not we are going to have an addition to the family," his granddaughter Andrea read from the letter her grandmother had saved. "The suspense is killing me. I don't know much about naming a girl, so I will let you attend to that. Of course, it won't be a girl, but just in case you better have a name picked out. Let me know as soon as you can."

Ruby wrote back when she learned she was pregnant, but he never got it. The ship was torpedoed July 30, 1945. It was the greatest single loss of life in the history of the U.S. Navy.

"We had no idea anything was going to happen and then when it did, we were crying because we had the letter saying he was missing in action and everyone else was celebrating because the war was over," Ruby said.

But she was in mourning.

*Ruby Walker Taylor, 2015.*

She was not alone. Friday [July 24, 2015], as America said "thank you" to Jack and Ruby, 90-year-old Leretta Beyer was there to hold her hand. She lost her husband that day 70 years ago, as well, and just wanted to be there.

Both Leretta Beyer and Ruby Taylor went on to start again and remarry, but Friday, both stood together to remember the time they shared and can never forget.



## Court of Inquiry and Court Martial

Nimitz signed the convening order for a Court of Inquiry,<sup>57</sup> “to inquire into all the circumstances connected with the sinking of the U.S.S. Indianapolis (CA-35) and the delay in reporting the loss of that ship,” on 9 August 1945. This court convened on 13 August; its members were Vice Admiral C. A. Lockwood (president), Vice Admiral G. D. Murray, Rear Admiral F. E. M. Whiting (members), and Captain W. E. Hilbert (judge advocate). The three flag officers clearly were senior to Captain McVay, the most senior party in interest, as required. Admiral Lockwood was a submarine officer, Commander, Submarine Pacific; Admiral Murray was a naval aviator who commanded USS *Enterprise* (CV 6) during the dark days of 1942; Admiral Whiting was a surface officer and the brother of an early naval aviator, Captain Kenneth E. Whiting, U.S. Navy (Retired).<sup>58</sup> VADM Murray commanded the geographic area where the sinking occurred and his Operations Officer, Captain Oliver Naquin, knew that four Japanese submarines were near the intended route of *Indianapolis* but did not convey this information to Captain McVay.

Within a week of convening, and after hearing 43 witnesses, the Court of Inquiry found “insufficient evidence” to continue further proceedings against two officers for their failure to report the non-arrival of *Indianapolis* at Leyte. The Court, however, recommended that McVay be reprimanded for failure to zigzag and further that he be tried by a general court-martial for (a) culpable inefficiency in the performance of his duty and (b) negligently endangering the lives of others.

Nimitz did not adopt the recommendations of his Court of Inquiry, and on 6 September 1945, informed the Judge Advocate General of the Navy that, “a letter of reprimand will be addressed to Captain McVay in lieu of a general court-martial.”<sup>59</sup> Nimitz’s decision was countermanded by Fleet Admiral King, who recommended to the Secretary of the Navy that McVay’s court-martial proceed.<sup>60</sup>

King and Secretary of the Navy, James V. Forrestal, agreed to refer the charges against McVay to trial by General Court Martial. The proceedings moved to Washington where McVay was transferred. As the victory celebrations for the end of the Two Ocean War concluded, millions of servicemen were returned home by Operation Magic Carpet, and as King prepared to retire, he and the OpNav Staff concluded the paper work necessary for the trial of McVay.

McVay had little time and influence on his defense. McVay and his defense counsel, Captain John P. Cady, were given notice on 29 November 1945 – four days before the trial was to proceed. The seven members of the court were: Rear Admiral W. D. Baker, President, Commodore R. S. Theiss, Commodore W. S. Popham, Captain H. L. Grosskopf, Captain J. R. Sullivan, Captain C. B. Hunt, Captain H. J. Redfield (members), and Captain T. J. Ryan, Judge Advocate. While there were more members of the General Court Martial panel, they were junior to the Court of Inquiry.

The prosecutor was the Court’s Judge Advocate, Captain Thomas John Ryan, Jr. (5 August 1901– 28 January 1970), who received the Medal of Honor for his peacetime actions while in Yokohama, Japan during the 1923 Great Kantō earthquake. He was a 1921 graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, graduating a year after McVay. During World War II, Ryan earned two Navy Crosses. He served as a destroyer flotilla commander and saw action during the Solomon Islands campaign. His last command at sea was USS *Providence*, a light cruiser. He was assigned to duty in New Orleans after the court martial and served with Captain McVay, also retiring as a Tombstone Rear Admiral.





*Fig. 43: Charles McVay III (center), shown at his court martial, with attorney Captain John P. Cady (left), and Judge Advocate, Thomas J. Ryan (right).<sup>61</sup>*

Captain McVay was denied his first choice of defense counsel, and Cady was selected for him. McVay was also denied a delay to develop his defense, and thus Cady, a line officer with no trial experience, had only four days to prepare. The Charge sheet signed by James Forrestal read:

To: Captain Thomas J. Ryan, Jr., U. S. Navy Judge Advocate, General Court Martial, Navy Yard, Washington, D. C.

Subject: Charges and specifications in case of Captain Charles B. McVay, III, U. S. Navy

1. The above named officer will be tried before the general court-martial of which you are judge advocate, upon the following charges and specifications. You will notify the president of the court accordingly, inform the accused of the date set for his trial, and summon all witnesses, both for the prosecution and the defense.

#### **CHARGE I - THROUGH NEGLIGENCE SUFFERING A VESSEL OF THE NAVY TO BE HAZARDED SPECIFICATION**

In that Charles B. McVay, III, Captain, U. S. Navy, while so serving in command of the USS INDIANAPOLIS, making passage singly, without escort, from Guam, Mariana Islands, to Leyte, Philippines Islands, through an area in which enemy submarines might be encountered, did, during good visibility after moonrise on 29 July 1945, at about 10:30 p. m., minus nine and one-half time zone, neglect and fail to exercise proper care and attention to the safety of said vessel in that he neglected and failed, then and then after, to cause a zigzag course to be steered, and he, the said McVay through said negligence, did suffer the said USS INDIANAPOLIS to be hazarded; the United States then being in a state of war.

#### **CHARGE II - CULPABLE INEFFICIENCY IN THE PERFORMANCE OF DUTY SPECIFICATION**

In that Charles B. McVay, III, Captain, U. S. Navy, while so serving in command of the USS INDIANAPOLIS, making passage singly, without escort, from Guam, Mariana Islands, to Leyte, Philippines Islands, having been informed at or about 12:10 a.m., minus nine and one-half zone time, on 30 July 1945 that said vessel was badly damaged and in sinking condition, did then and there fail to issue and see effected such timely orders as were necessary to cause said vessel to be abandoned, as it was his duty to do, by reason of which many persons on board perished with the sinking of said vessel; the United States then being in a state of war.

Of the 57 witnesses appearing at the court-martial, three were crucial to the outcome: Commander Hashimoto was asked 87 questions by the parties. He testified that his torpedoes would have sunk *Indianapolis* whether or not she was zigzagging. This opinion was reinforced in testimony by Captain Glynn R. Donaho, U.S. Navy, an acknowledged expert in submarine warfare who had earned four Navy Crosses. The final crucial witness was Captain McVay, the accused, who testified in his own defense.

Commander Hashimoto was flown to Washington and on 13 December 1945 testified about the sinking. On *voir dire*, he was examined about his understanding of the oath sworn by witnesses. The Court ruled that the proposed witness, a Japanese enemy alien, understood the oath and was competent to testify. He had been promoted to Commander a week after the signing of the Instrument of Surrender on board USS *Missouri* (BB 63) in Tokyo Bay on 2 September 1945. He testified through a translator as follows:

Q: State your name, rank and present duty.

A: Hashimoto, Mochitsura, commander, in His Imperial Japanese Majesty's Navy, Reserve; at the present, here at the disposition of this Court.

Q: How long have you been a commander?

A: I have been a commander since September ninth of this year since September sixth, correction, please; since September sixth of this year.

Q: What duties were you performing in the Japanese Navy during the night of 29 30 July, 1945?

A: Serving as captain of submarine I 58.

Q: In what position was your ship at or about 2305 on that evening?

A: In position bearing 355 degrees from Palau, distance 290 miles.

Q: If anything happened at or about 2305 zone minus nine time on that evening in question, that was of particular interest to you, tell the Court what it was, to you, Commander Hashimoto, anything which happened that was of particular interest to you, tell the Court what it was.

A: On the supposition that at that time the visibility would have improved and the moon would be out, he brought his submarine to the surface. Thereupon, under the moon, he discerned a dark object and crash-dived immediately, and then swung his ship around to head in its direction.

Q: And what from his knowledge now was the position of his ship relative to the dark object at that time?

A: His position was established still, roughly at ten thousand meters, bearing ninety degrees from true with the target bearing ninety degrees true.

\* \* \*

Q: Was the target zigzagging at the time you sighted it?

A: At the time of the sighting of the target, there was an indistinct blur, and he was unable to determine whether or not it was zigzagging.

Q: Was it zigzagging later?

A: There is no question of the fact that it made no radical changes in course. It is faintly possible that there was a minor change in course between the time of sighting and the time of attack.

Q: Would it have made any difference to you if the target had been zigzagging on this attack?

A: It would have involved no change in the method of firing the torpedoes, but some changes in maneuvering.<sup>62</sup>

The defense asked Donaho one question too many. The transcript of Donaho's testimony revealed a fatal inconsistent statement that helped the prosecution:

Q. Is it disconcerting to you as a submarine commander to have a ship, a target, to zigzag?

A. Yes, because you may be--Just before firing, a zigzag throws your calculations off and you have to get a new setup.<sup>63</sup>

McVay had admitted from soon after his rescue that he had ordered the bridge watch to cease zig zagging and that the weather and visibility had been clear. There were few material factual issues in dispute. His testimony and heroic prior record may not have avoided his conviction but had great impact on the Court which unanimously recommended clemency.

Captain McVay was found guilty of failure to zigzag but not guilty of the charge of failure to order abandon ship in a timely manner. Based on the conviction, he was sentenced by the court to lose "one hundred numbers in his temporary grade of Captain and one hundred numbers in his permanent grade of Commander." After pronouncing the sentence, the members of the court strongly recommended clemency.

*Nimitz' Narrative on the Loss of USS Indianapolis* detailed the omissions of the shore side staff in observing *Indianapolis'* failure to arrive.

Lieutenant Commander Sancho and Lieutenant Gibson were members of the Philippine Sea Frontier organization. Bearing in mind the lack of experience of these officers in naval matters, it was incumbent upon their superior officers to exercise closer personal supervision over the manner in which their duties were performed than was actually the case. At the time of the loss of the *Indianapolis*, the Commander, Philippine Sea Frontier, Vice Admiral James L. Kauffman, U.S.N., was absent from his command since July 1, 1945, on temporary duty status in the United States; Commodore N. C. Gillette, U.S.N., was in temporary command; and the Operations Officer of the Headquarters Staff, Captain A. M. Granum, U.S.N., was intensively occupied in diversion of shipping in typhoon areas and operations. These facts do not, however, relieve these senior officers of their responsibility connected with the failure of their subordinates to take appropriate action to ascertain the whereabouts of the overdue *Indianapolis*. The junior officers who were directly concerned with this failure were members of the organization which was being administered by these senior officers. For this demonstrated weakness in the organization under their control, brought on largely through their failure to give closer personal attention to the work of these inexperienced juniors, Commodore Gillette and Captain Granum have been held responsible.

\* \* \*

Commander, Philippine Sea Frontier (Commodore N. C. Gillette, U.S.N., Chief of Staff, Acting) was charged with the mission of safeguarding and protecting shipping in the area under his cognizance. He maintained an Operations Board at his Headquarters at Tolosa, Leyte, on which was kept a running record of the scheduled and actual arrival and departure of vessels of all categories in the area under his cognizance. His Headquarters had been given intelligence of all submarine activity in the Philippine Sea and should have been aware that the *Indianapolis* was overdue in Leyte, but no investigation as to her whereabouts was instituted until after her survivors were sighted.

Commander, Marianas, in Guam, felt no particular concern connected with the arrival of the *Indianapolis* in Leyte. He assumed that the *Indianapolis* had reached her destination. No action was taken or required to be taken by that headquarters until the survivors were sighted.

\* \* \*

The following disciplinary action has been taken in connection with the loss of the *Indianapolis*:

Captain Charles B. McVay, III, U.S.N., has been brought to trial by General Court Martial. He was acquitted of failure to give timely orders to abandon ship. He was found guilty of negligence in not causing a zigzag to be steered. He was sentenced to lose one hundred numbers in his temporary grade of Captain and also in his permanent grade of Commander. The Court and also the Commander in Chief, United States Fleet recommended clemency. The Secretary of the Navy has approved these recommendations, remitted the sentence, and restored Captain McVay to duty.

The Secretary of the Navy has given Commodore N.C. Gillette, U.S.N., a Letter of Reprimand, which will become part of his permanent official record.

The Secretary of the Navy has given Captain A.M. Granum, U.S.N., a Letter of Reprimand, which will become part of his permanent official record.

The Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet has given Lieutenant Commander Jules C. Sancho, U.S.N.R., a Letter of Admonition, which will become part of his permanent official record.

The Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet has given Lieutenant Stuart B. Gibson, U.S.N.R., a Letter of Reprimand, which will become part of his permanent official record.<sup>64</sup>

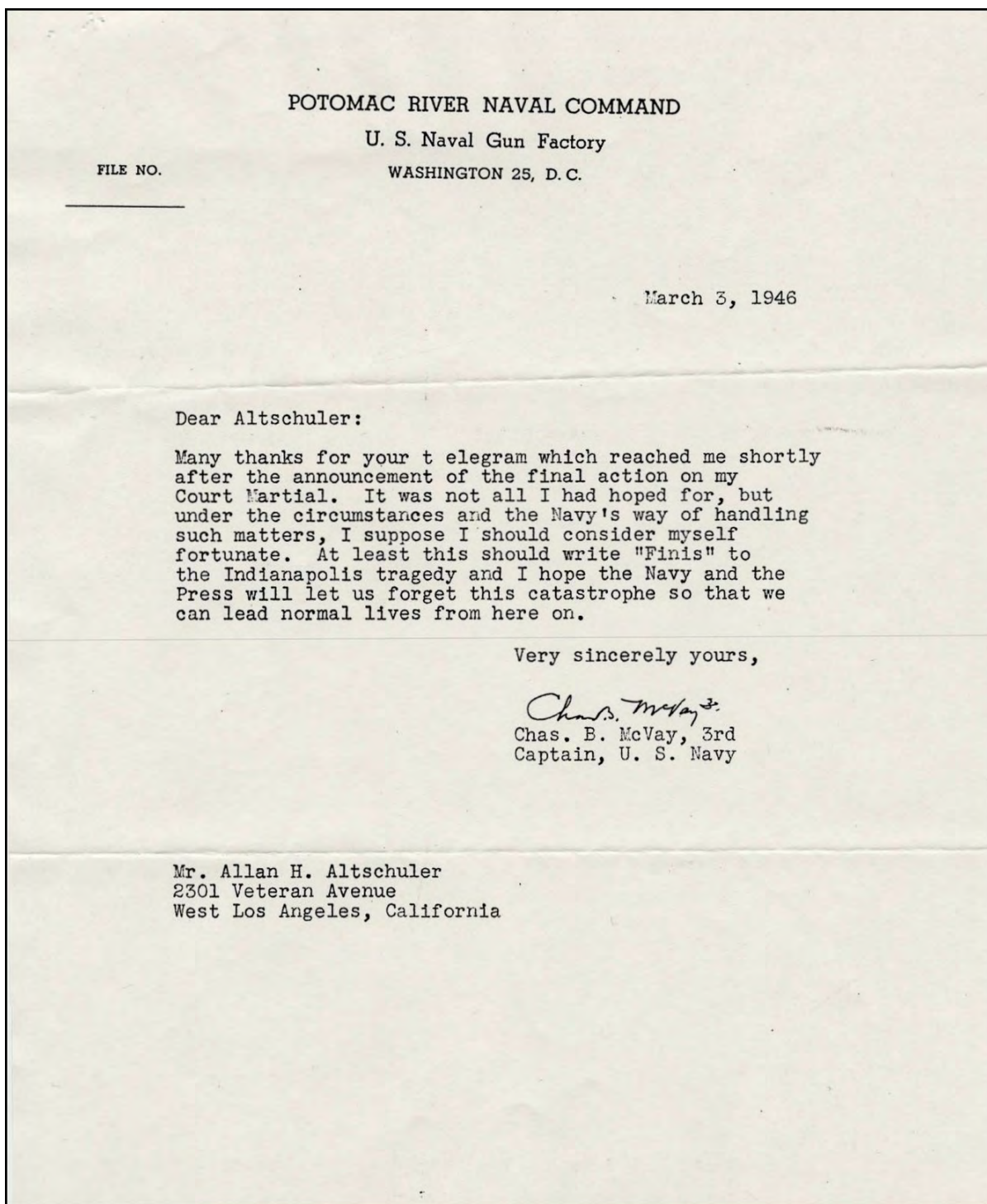
Ultimately, after a belated review, Secretary Forrestal withdrew all four letters. At the 23 February 1946 press conference, Nimitz announced to the reporters that the Secretary of the Navy “has approved these recommendations of [the members of the general court] and has remitted the sentence of Captain McVay in its entirety, releasing him from arrest and restoring him to duty.” In answer to a question, “Has there ever been a court-martialed officer in the history of the U.S. Navy who was later promoted to flag rank?” “Pointing to himself, Nimitz grinned and said, ‘Here’s one.’ ...he then told how he had run the destroyer *Decatur* aground in 1908, had been court-martialed, and had received a ‘reprimand.’”<sup>65</sup>

President Truman was no fan of the U.S. Navy or U.S. Marine Corps. His World War I experiences as an artillery officer in Europe, primarily crossing the Atlantic, were not favorable and Truman did not have the personal experience or interest in the individual senior officers as had FDR, who had known many of the naval officers for 30 years. Thus, King and Forrestal, who Truman would appoint to be the first Secretary of Defense after unification, had little concern about the Commander-in-Chief’s role in the prosecution of McVay.

New Orleans was the last duty station for both Captain McVay and Captain Ryan where they served on the Staffs of Vice Admiral Aaron Stanton “Tip” Merrill, U.S. Navy, who heroically led cruisers and destroyers in combat in the Pacific campaign. McVay was appointed Chief of Staff and Aide to the Commandant, Eighth Naval District, and Commander of the Gulf Sea Frontier, in New Orleans. In March 1946, Ryan assumed command of USS *Providence* (CL 82). That December, Ryan became the Director of the Naval Reserves, Eighth Naval District, at New Orleans. For his last tour, he served as Deputy Commander of the Military Sea Transportation Service, Gulf Area also in New Orleans. Both men became tombstone Rear Admirals. McVay committed suicide in 1968 and in 1970 Ryan died.

Early in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, thanks to the diligence of a school boy and some interested Congressmen, McVay’s conviction was set aside. The *New York Times* reported on 14 July 2001, “Fifty-six years after the sinking of the cruiser *Indianapolis* in one of the most horrific events in American naval history, the ship’s captain has won a measure of vindication.”<sup>66</sup>





*Fig. 44: A bittersweet letter written by McVay to an old friend, at the conclusion of his court martial, on March 3, 1946.<sup>67</sup>*

## ENDNOTES:

- <sup>1</sup> Copyright MMXVI by Lawrence B. Brennan, all moral and legal right reserved. May not be reproduced or republished without the prior written consent of the author.
- <sup>2</sup> Lawrence B. Brennan is a retired U.S. Navy Captain, an adjunct professor of law at Fordham Law School, and an admiralty and maritime law litigator in New York City. He was a trial attorney for the U.S. Department of Justice. He was educated at Fordham University in New York City (B.A. *magna cum laude* 1974 and J.D. 1977). He is a member of the Bar of the State of New York and various federal courts, including the U.S. Supreme Court.
- <sup>3</sup> [NJPH May 2016, Vol. 44, Whole No. 202](#), No. 2, pps. 83 -103.
- <sup>4</sup> Narrative of the Circumstances of the Loss of USS *Indianapolis*, 23 February 1946 (hereinafter “Nimitz’ Narrative on the Loss of USS *Indianapolis*”). Not surprisingly, Fleet Admiral Nimitz, who had relieved Fleet Admiral King in December 1945, was intellectually honest in his account of the loss of *Indianapolis*. This document recounts multiple contributing causes beyond the conduct on board ship. Admiral Nimitz also authored a famous letter concerning the cause of the 18 December 1944 typhoon that sunk and damaged multiple warships.
- <sup>5</sup> Admiral Ernest J. King’s official account, the *Third and Final Report Covering the Period 1 March 1945 to 1 October 1945 by Fleet Admiral King, Commander in Chief, U.S. Fleet and Chief of Naval Operations, to Secretary of the Navy, James Forrestal* (hereinafter “King’s Third and Final Report to SecNav”).
- <sup>6</sup> The Third and Final Report Covering the Period 1 March 1945 to 1 October 1945 by Fleet Admiral King, Commander in Chief, U.S. Fleet and Chief of Naval Operations, to Secretary of the Navy, James Forrestal, issued 8 December 1945 contained in *U.S. Navy at War 1941-1945, Official Reports by Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King, U.S.N.*, (Washington, D.C. Government Printing Office, Department of the Navy, 1946) at p. 191.
- <sup>7</sup> See page 98, [NJPH May 2016, Vol. 44, Whole No. 202](#).
- <sup>8</sup> Nimitz Gray Book entry, 3 August 1945.
- <sup>9</sup> The Third and Final Report Covering the Period 1 March 1945 to 1 October 1945 by Fleet Admiral King, Commander in Chief, U.S. Fleet and Chief of Naval Operations, to Secretary of the Navy, James Forrestal, issued 8 December 1945 contained in *U.S. Navy at War 1941-1945, Official Reports by Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King, U.S.N.*, (Washington, D.C. Government Printing Office, Department of the Navy, 1946) at p. 191.
- <sup>10</sup> Newspaper Photo from the *Baltimore Sun*, dated Nov. 28, 1945.
- <sup>11</sup> Uniform Code of Military Justice, was enacted by Congress in 1950 (10 U.S.C.A. §§ 801 et seq.).
- <sup>12</sup> Buell, Thomas B., *Master of Sea Power*, (Annapolis, MD, US Naval Institute Classics of Naval Literature Edition 1995) pp. 348-49.
- <sup>13</sup> Controversy Surrounding the USS *Indianapolis* Tragedy, Part II at [http://b-29s-over-korea.com/USS\\_Indianapolis\\_Tragedy/USS\\_Indianapolis\\_Tragedy03.html](http://b-29s-over-korea.com/USS_Indianapolis_Tragedy/USS_Indianapolis_Tragedy03.html)
- <sup>14</sup> Buell, Thomas B., *The Quiet Warrior*, (Annapolis, MD, US Naval Institute Classics of Naval Literature Edition 1987) p. 382.
- <sup>15</sup> USS *Indianapolis* Court of Inquiry, at 7 (Aug. 13, 1945) reprinted in Scott, Commander Roger D., JACG, USN, “Kimmel, Short, McVay: Case Studies In Executive Authority, Law And The Individual Rights Of Military Commanders”, 1998:1 *Military Law Review* at 157, originally published as “Kimmel, Short, McVay: Case Studies in Executive Authority, Law and Individual Rights of Military Commanders,” Naval War College, Newport Rhode Island, 1997. See <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a327131.pdf>
- <sup>16</sup> U.S. Navy Medical Department Oral History Program , *Oral History With Capt. (Ret.) Lewis Haynes*, Mc, USN , Conducted By Jan K. Herman, Historian, BUMED 5, 12 And 22 June 1995 Telephonic Interview/Site Interview (Newton, MA), Office Of Medical History Bureau Of Medicine and Surgery Washington, DC.
- <sup>17</sup> Stanton, Doug, *In Harm’s Way: The Sinking of the USS Indianapolis and the Extraordinary Story of its Survivors* (New York: 2001 Henry Holt and Company), p. 31.
- <sup>18</sup> Buell, Thomas B., *The Quiet Warrior*, *supra*, p. 215.
- <sup>19</sup> A term frequently used by naval aviators; perhaps a bit derogatory to senior or more aged aviators. One source explained, “A night lighting condition with clear skies and a large (late phase) moon, to provide optimum lighting condition for night flights, and especially night traps. Favored by, and planned for by, O-4s [Lt Commanders] and above to get their night [trap] requirements” - <http://steeljawscribe.com/2012/02/07/commanders-moon>
- <sup>20</sup> Rhumblin, on *Maritime Professional*, described as: “a steady course or line of bearing that appears as a straight line on a Mercator projection chart.” <http://www.maritimeprofessional.com/blogs/post/rhumb-line-13315>
- <sup>21</sup> Buell, Thomas B., *The Quiet Warrior*, (Annapolis, MD, US Naval Institute Classics of Naval Literature Edition 1987), p. 382.

- <sup>22</sup> <https://nihongonews.wordpress.com/politics/hell-is-highwater/>
- <sup>23</sup> In mid-July 2016 the U.S. Navy announced that historical research disclosed the last probable sighting of Indianapolis by a friendly warship. "Final Contact: USS *Indianapolis* (CA-35) Passes USS *LST-779*, 29 July 1945" stated that Indianapolis was last reported seen on "Sunday, 29 July 1945, [by] the tank landing ship *LST-779* [which] steamed toward Samar, Philippine Islands, along Convoy Route *Peddie*, loaded with cargo and with four pontoon barges secured to her flat sides, on a logistical assignment..." This datum may assist in efforts to locate the wreck sunk in some of the deepest water on earth. <http://www.history.navy.mil/research/library/online-reading-room/title-list-alphabetically/f/final-contact-uss-indianapolis-passes-uss-lst-779-29-jul-1945.html>
- <sup>24</sup> A ship's speed in knots times 100 equals approximately the number of yards she makes over the ground in a three minute period. (kn x 100 = yards/3 mins.) By way of illustration, if *Indianapolis* was making 16 knots she would have covered 1,600 yard in three minutes. The rule is based on the simple fact that three minutes is 1/20 of an hour and there are approximately 2,000 yards in a nautical mile; a nautical mile, however, is 2,025.372 yards while a statute mile is 1,760 yards.
- <sup>25</sup> Nimitz' Narrative on the Loss of USS *Indianapolis*.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid, Nimitz' Narrative.
- <sup>27</sup> Hageman, William, "Texas scientist believes moon played a role in historical events." *Chicago Tribune*, July 12, 2002.
- <sup>28</sup> Buell, Thomas B., *The Quiet Warrior*, *supra*, p. 389.
- <sup>29</sup> Quoted in Olson, Donald, Brandon R. Johns, and Russel L. Doescher, "Ill Met by Moonlight", *Sky & Telescope*, July 2002 pp. 32-33.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid, Olson, Donald, Brandon R. Johns, and Russel L. Doescher, pp. 32-33.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid, Olson, Donald, Brandon R. Johns, and Russel L. Doescher, p. 33.
- <sup>32</sup> [http://www.txstate.edu/news/news\\_releases/news\\_archive/2002/05/indianapolis cruiser052402.html](http://www.txstate.edu/news/news_releases/news_archive/2002/05/indianapolis cruiser052402.html)
- <sup>33</sup> Nimitz' Narrative on the Loss of USS *Indianapolis*.
- <sup>34</sup> Stanton, Doug, *In Harm's Way: The Sinking of the USS Indianapolis and the Extraordinary Story of its Survivors*, (New York: 2001 Henry Holt and Company), pp. 31-32.
- <sup>35</sup> *The Controversy Surrounding The USS Indianapolis Tragedy*, Photo: U.S. Naval Historical Center, see [http://b-29s-over-korea.com/USS\\_Indianapolis\\_Tragedy/USS\\_Indianapolis\\_Tragedy01.html](http://b-29s-over-korea.com/USS_Indianapolis_Tragedy/USS_Indianapolis_Tragedy01.html)
- <sup>36</sup> The CNO's Narrative on the Loss of USS *Indianapolis*.
- <sup>37</sup> See *NJPH*, May 2016, Vol 44, No. 2, Whole No [202](#), p.96.
- <sup>38</sup> <http://www.ussindianapolis.org/woody.htm>
- <sup>39</sup> Nimitz' Narrative on the Loss of USS *Indianapolis*.
- <sup>40</sup> <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/1988/WCR.htm>
- <sup>41</sup> Nimitz' Narrative on the Loss of USS *Indianapolis*.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid, Nimitz' Narrative
- <sup>43</sup> The code names for convoy routes in the Pacific Ocean were named after private preparatory schools.  
Peddie School was founded in 1864 as the Hightstown Female Seminary, a Baptist preparatory school. Later that year, boys were admitted. In 1872, the school took its current name in honor of philanthropist and politician Thomas B. Peddie (1808-89), who gave the school a \$25,000 gift. Peddie School remained coed until 1908, when it was decided, for social and economic reasons, to admit boys only. This standard was reversed in the early 1970s, when girls were readmitted. The school is now coeducational and nondenominational.  
Gifts from Ambassador Walter H. Annenberg '27 were used for the construction of two libraries, dormitories, and an athletic center, among other projects. The school has grown to include 57 buildings on a 280-acre campus. In 1993, Annenberg gave \$100 million to Peddie, which provided an endowed fund for financial aid, enabling students from every walk of life to receive a Peddie education. The ambassador died in 2002, just after giving the cornerstone gift for the construction of The Walter and Leonore Annenberg Science Center, which was completed in fall 2005. <http://www.peddie.org/Page/About-Us/History--Traditions>
- <sup>44</sup> <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/1988/WCR.htm>
- <sup>45</sup> <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/2015/07/150727-uss-indianapolis-reunion-survivors-sharks-jaws/>
- <sup>46</sup> BBC Worldwide Service interview of former Seaman Lowell Dean Cox, U.S. Navy  
<http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-23455951>
- <sup>47</sup> <http://kofc14700.org/news/chaplain-rejected-for-navy-cross>
- <sup>48</sup> *Saturday Evening Post* Aug. 6, 1955.
- <sup>49</sup> <http://milhomme.blogspot.com/2012/06/fr-thomas-m-conway-chaplain-uss.html>
- <sup>50</sup> Photo taken by Bureau of Aeronautics, from NARA II, College Park.



<http://www.history.navy.mil/research/histories/ship-histories/loss-of-uss-indianapolis-ca-35/rescue-operations/survivor-lt-comdr-lewis-l-haynes.html>

<sup>51</sup> Leatherneck.com: <http://www.leatherneck.com/forums/showthread.php?16009-July-30-1945-the-USS-Indianapolis>.

<sup>52</sup> <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/1988/WCR.htm>

<sup>53</sup> Nimitz' Narrative on the Loss of USS *Indianapolis*.

<sup>54</sup> For this story and the postal history of Guam, see <http://www.guampedia.com/postal-history-of-guam/>.

<sup>55</sup> Memorial page to Paul Dollins, at [http://hikertechnologies.com/1st1197/paul\\_dollins\\_CA-35.htm](http://hikertechnologies.com/1st1197/paul_dollins_CA-35.htm), part of a larger *Indianapolis – Never Forget* site at <http://ussindianapolis.us/>

<sup>56</sup> Published: 07/24/15, Updated: 04/14/16. Channel 13 WTHR in Indianapolis. This article related to the presentation of a flag to Ruby Taylor for her loss and sacrifice; this version is slightly abridged.

<sup>57</sup> Courts of Inquiry are long-standing Navy practices. The Articles for the Government of the Navy were in effect during World War II; the Uniform Code of Military Justice is a statute enacted after the War. A Court of Inquiry is similar to an Article 32 hearing under the current Uniform Code of Military Justice. Neither requires a “judge” or lawyer to act as the hearing officer but “parties in interest” are entitled to counsel and the right to participate in the proceeding. A formal hearing under Article 32 now is a required step prior to a General Court Martial.

<sup>58</sup> Brennan, Captain Lawrence B. U.S. Navy (Retired) “From the Starboard Delta: 3/16”, *Universal Ship Cancellation Society Log*, July 2011, pp. 20-27; *Naval Aviation Foundation*

<sup>59</sup> Fleet Admiral Nimitz was mindful that as an Ensign he had been convicted by General Court Martial of hazarding a vessel during his first Commanding Officer tour when USS *Decatur* (DD 5) stranded on an uncharted obstruction in Philippine Waters. Also, when a Captain in command of USS *Augusta*, reportedly his cruiser collided with a fleet oiler while engaged in underway replenishment. No formal proceedings were reported.

<sup>60</sup> <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/1988/WCR.htm>

<sup>61</sup> Eqwtv'o ctkenpicture at <http://indymaru.tripod.com/indymaru6.htm>. Photo courtesy of Scott Sanford.

<sup>62</sup> <http://www.ussindianapolis.org/pfinnstory.htm>

<sup>63</sup> Trial transcript. See Scott, Roger D., Commander, JAGC, US Navy, “Kimmel, Short, and McVay” Case Studies in Executive Authority and Individual Rights of Military Commanders,” 13 June 1997.

<http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a327131.pdf> See also <https://instructure-uploads.s3.amazonaws.com/.../McVay%20Trial.pdf?...attachment%> and also see <http://textlab.io/doc/1006545/one-question-too-many---lucas-bagnell-varga-llc--attorney>

<sup>64</sup> Nimitz' Narrative on the Loss of USS *Indianapolis*.

<sup>65</sup> Potter, E.B., *Nimitz* (U.S. Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, MD. 1976, pp. 412-13.

<sup>66</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/07/14/us/captain-once-a-scapegoat-is-absolved.html>

<sup>67</sup> <http://historyofthegoodwar.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Letter-from-McVay-to-Sailor-after-his-Court-Martial.png>

**Fig. 45: Card showing Indianapolis with 57 survivor signatures.**

**Fig. 46: A 2014 FDC showing USS Indianapolis.**

