

Introduction

Hello! Welcome to DE Classified, a podcast showcasing the history of destroyer escorts. Each month, a member of the USS *Slater's* education crew will highlight a specific destroyer escort and share the stories of the sailors who served aboard these Trim but Deadly ships. This episode will discuss the USS *Cecil J. Doyle* and her rescue of members of the USS *Indianapolis* sinking in August 1945. This episode was written by Cassidy Griffin and presented by Giordano Romano. ????

General Information

The USS *Cecil J. Doyle* (DE-368) was a John C. Butler-class destroyer escort. She was 306" long, 36'7" wide, and had a displacement of 1,350 tons. She had a draft of 13'4" and a top speed of 24 knots or 27.6 miles per hour, propelled by her 12,000 horsepower twin boilers and geared turbines. She was equipped with two 5"/38 caliber guns, four 40mm guns, ten 20mm guns, three 21" torpedo tubes, one Mk10 hedgehog projector, eight Mk6 depth charge projectors, and two Mk9 depth charge racks. Her complement was 186 men and she primarily served in the Pacific theater during the last six months of the war.

Namesake

The ship is named after Cecil John Doyle, who was born in Marshall, Minnesota on August 10, 1920. He enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve on March 26, 1941 and completed aviation training in Corpus Christi, Texas. On April 6, 1942, Doyle was appointed a Second Lieutenant, USMCR and was attached to the Marine Fighting Squadron 121 in the Solomon Islands. During the Guadalcanal Campaign, Doyle was noted for his extraordinary heroism before

being declared Missing in Action on November 7, 1942. Posthumously, he was awarded the Navy Cross and was chosen to be the namesake of a destroyer escort.

Ship's History

Doyle's destroyer escort was laid down on May 12, 1944 by the Consolidated Steel Corporation in Orange, Texas and launched on July 1, sponsored by his mother. The ship was commissioned on October 16 at the City Docks in Orange with Lt. Cmdr. Douglas S. Crocker, DE-V(G), USNR, in command. Five days later around 0805, she sailed down the Sabine River into the Gulf of Mexico. During this journey, she fired batteries on all 40mm and 20mm guns and expended 24 plaster-loaded hedgehogs during a full power run. From the Gulf of Mexico, she traveled to Galveston for her fitting out period through early November. After refueling in Texas City, she sailed for Bermuda for her shakedown cruise on November 5, 1944, where she reported to Commander Task Group 23.1.

Her time in Bermuda is notable, to say the least. She remained in Bermuda until the 16th, after which she got underway around 0634 to begin her escorting duties. However, 24 minutes after leaving the port, she experienced a casualty to her No. 1 engine. She attempted to clear the channel and drop anchor, but ended up running aground off Ireland Point, Bermuda at 0716. She damaged her starboard propeller and shaft. Around 1000, two tugs freed the ship and moved her to the anchorage in Great Sound, Bermuda. The next day, at 0725, she attempted to leave Bermuda again, this time successfully. She arrived in Boston on November 21 and moored in the navy yard for repairs before entering dry dock on the 29th.

On December 18, she was launched from dry dock with a new skipper, Lt. Cmdr. W. Graham Claytor, Jr., D-V(G), USNR. Claytor was born on March 14, 1912 in Roanoke, Virginia. He

graduated from the University of Virginia in 1933, then Harvard Law School in 1936, before moving to Washington, D.C. as an attorney. In 1940, at 28, Claytor attempted to join the navy, but was rejected as being too old. He was later able to join based on his experience in sports boating. He captained a sub-chaser, then another DE, before finally being assigned to the *Cecil J. Doyle* in 1944. Among the crew, Claytor was well-liked and considered personable. The captain also worked on beefing up the existing equipment aboard the ship with supplies from shore or other ships. In an interesting twist of fate, Claytor was related to the captain of the USS *Indianapolis*, Charles B. McVay III, through marriage.

Through Christmas 1944, *Cecil J. Doyle* continued repairs and post-shakedown availability in Boston. On December 26, she completed her dock and sea trials and on the 28th, completed another full power run and a structural depth charge practice. Then on the 29th, she, once again, was underway to Bermuda. On New Year's Eve, *Doyle* arrived in Bermuda and rejoined Commander Task Group 23.1. For the next two weeks, she completed 17 different exercises for training, including: anti-submarine attack exercises with a 1928 Italian submarine; night illumination and night screening; exercises in passing mail and towing with another DE, the *Albert T. Harris* (DE-447); fueling-at-sea exercises with the oiler, *Chiwawa* (AO-68); and shore bombardment exercises.

Nearing the end of this second shakedown, the destroyer escort was underway on January 19, 1945 with the USS *Bivin* (DE-536) for 'special aircraft rescue patrol' and was tasked with plane-guarding flights carrying Yalta-bound officials. The next day, the ship parted from *Bivin* upon reaching station at 34 degrees, 10 minutes North, 68 degrees, 15 minutes West. At station, *Doyle* steamed on various courses until relieved by the Coast Guard-manned frigate

Moberly (PF-63) on January 21 at 2250. Following more exercises with the submarine rescue vessel *Escape* (ARS-6), the DE underwent a departure inspection conducted by the Commander of the DD-DE Shakedown groups on January 25.

Five days later, *Doyle* was underway again to meet Convoy UC-53B and the British escort aircraft-carrier HMS *Ranee*. During this journey, *Doyle* encountered squalls of snow and sleet that reduced visibility to 500 yards in a storm rating an 8 on the Beaufort Wind Force Scale. An 8 is described as winds gusts from 34-40 knots or 39 to 46 mph and waves up to 18 to 25 feet high. On the last day of January, the ship made radio contact with Commander of Task Unit 61.1.2 at 0800 before detaching with *Ranee* to the Canal Zone, which she successfully crossed on February 6. After refueling in Balboa, Panama, the *Doyle* met again with the British charge on February 7 around 1700 hours and set course for San Diego.

On February 15, she departed from *Ranee* in San Diego, where she was to refuel, take on supplies, and undergo repairs, before leaving on the 19th for Oahu, Hawaii. On the way to Hawaii, the *Doyle* conducted gunnery practice before being dispatched on February 24 to search for an enemy submarine around 28°27' North, 144°46' West. The ship arrived in the area later that day around 1450. She continued her search before reporting negative results on the 25th and proceeding towards Oahu. From Oahu, the *Doyle* traveled to Pearl Harbor, arriving on February 28, then onto Eniwetok.

She arrived in the South Pacific to join the Marshalls-Gilbert Patrol and Escort Group on March 28. Here she was responsible for escorting ships to Guam and Ulithi. In April of 1945, the *Doyle* was stationed in Apra Harbor when the USS *Indianapolis* arrived for a stopover. The *Indy* had been struck by a kamikaze and was heading to San Francisco for repairs. Captain McVay

asked Captain Claytor to join him for lunch and suggested Claytor bring along the Fire Control Petty Officer. The Captain then gave Claytor portable gear to augment the ship's fire power, seeing as the *Indianapolis* was receiving a complete overhaul back in the United States.

At the end of April, the *Doyle* was transferred to the Carolines Surface Patrol and Escort Group and on May 2, she was assigned to protect the Kossol Roads anchorage, near the Palau Islands. The islands were used by the U.S. Navy as a resupply and repair base, and with this new assignment, Claytor became Commander Screen, Pelileu-Anguar. During this mission, the *Doyle* was responsible for rescuing several downed aviators and on May 27, she bombarded a Japanese garrison on Koror Island. She was also responsible for protecting the passage between Guam and Leyte, known as the Peddie convoy route. Due to the high Allied traffic, it had become a popular station for Japanese submarines. In addition to the *Doyle*, the line was patrolled by the USS *Ringness* (APD-100), *Register* (APD-92), *Bassett* (APD-73), *Dulifho* (DE-423), *French* (DE-367), *Cockrell* (DE-398), *Ralph Talbot* (DD-390), *Aylwin* (DD-355), and *Helm* (DD-388), with support from the Naval Air Force base on Peleliu. Many of these ships were still in the area in early August, when the *Indianapolis'* sinking became known.

USS *Indianapolis*

The USS *Indianapolis* was a heavy cruiser built in 1930 and was considered a ship of state, having been used for diplomatic missions since her commissioning. She was 610' long with a top speed of 32.7 knots, or 37.6 mph, propelled by 4 Parsons reduction steam turbines. For armament after her repair in San Francisco, she had nine 8-inch guns, eight 5-inch guns, two 3-pounder 47mm guns, six quad 40mm guns, and 19 single 20mm guns. She was designed to have a complement of 952 sailors, but was able to hold 1,269 during the war. She also had the ability

to carry 3 floatplanes and 2 amidship catapults, though the starboard catapult was removed in 1945. During the war, she led a fleet of bombardment ships in the Pacific. Despite her size, she only had a displacement of 9,950 long tons, just under an international agreement from 1921 limiting ships to remain under 10,000 tons displaced. This limit meant that extra protection in the form of blisters was not installed.

On March 31, 1945, the *Indianapolis* was struck by a kamikaze, forcing her to return to San Francisco for repairs. In July 1945, she was ready to return to the Pacific with Captain Charles B. McVay III in command. While in harbor, she was tasked with a secret mission from President Truman: transport the atomic cores for Fat Man and Little Boy to Tinian, near Guam. The mission was of the utmost importance and all leave was cancelled. The cargo, consisting of a large black box and two smaller black cylinders, was loaded with 2 Artillery Army officers present and had a 24-hour Marine guard. The cargo was stored in the port hanger and was almost too heavy for the on-board crane to move. The ship left California on July 15 and set the speed record for her trip to Pearl Harbor. They were not in port long, just long enough to resupply and refuel, before setting off for Tinian, arriving on July 26, breaking another record. Because of the low tide at Tinian, the *Indianapolis* was assisted by a barge that removed the cargo. The two smaller cylinders, about 24" long by 18" in diameter, weighed about 200 pounds each and were removed by hand by *Indy's* crew.

After Tinian, she was to travel to Leyte for 17 days of training in preparation for the final stages of the Pacific campaign. The ship left Guam about 0900 on July 28. Despite Guam being near the Japanese sub base on Yap Island and the USS Underhill (DE-682) being sunk in the area on the 24th, the *Indianapolis* was not provided escort protection. The ship was to travel along the

Peddie line and cross from Nimitz' command into Kinkaid's command. Once in Leyte, she was to join the USS *Idaho*. Along the way, Captain McVay requested target-towing aircraft to cross paths for a training exercise. The ship never made contact with those planes and never arrived in Leyte.

Indy's Sinking

On July 29, around midnight, the *Indy* was traveling at a modest speed, with her bulkheads open for ventilation and many men choosing to sleep topside due to the hot, humid weather. She was moving steadily, not performing any evasive maneuvers, when she was spotted through the periscope of the Japanese sub *I-58*. The sub was commanded by Lt. Cmdr. Mochitsura Hashimoto, who fired two torpedoes into the ship at 1155.

The torpedoes caused fires below deck. The ship's bow was blown off, causing her to pitch starboard with her fantail rising rapidly. Captain McVay ordered the bugler to blow "Abandon Ship" but the bugler misinterpreted the order and jumped overboard. Men who were topside attempted to cut down life rafts, but the ship's list to about 90° starboard made getting them into the water impossible. The men who managed to escape below decks were placed in lifejackets and thrown overboard; most only wearing their skivvys made up of t-shirts and shorts. With the propellers still running, the ship dived, forcing men to swim from the wreck to avoid being caught in the downward suction. Twelve minutes after impact, on Sunday July 30, the ship was sunk, carrying some 800 men with her. Her final coordinates were around 11°34' North, 133°47' East.

Thousands of gallons of bunker oil floated on the surface, covering survivors. Those without floatation devices relied on their crewmates, who worked to keep them afloat. In an

effort to not drift apart, the men hooked their jackets together and placed those without jackets in the center of the group for protection. If a floater net was available, the most injured would sit on top. But there were not enough lifejackets or floater nets for all the men in the water. Sailors removed their waterlogged shoes to prevent them from weighing them down and clothing from the deceased were given to those in skivvys in an attempt to keep them warm. Lt. Cmdr. Dr. Lewis L. Haynes, the ship's doctor, worked to provide assistance to those in the water, giving advice to those he came across. First guideline: refrain from drinking the sea water. Second guideline: check on each other overnight. Third guideline: perform roll call in the morning. Despite these precautions, many survivors were lost that first night, due to burns, injuries, or drowning. Haynes checked on unresponsive sailors, and if found deceased, would call on everyone to recite a prayer before unhooking their lifejacket.

In the morning, the sun began to beat down on the men, forcing many to improvise sun protection with torn up clothing or by covering themselves in the bunker oil that surrounded them. Despite the growing list of problems, spirits remained high that first night and into the morning, as many men believed they would be rescued by Tuesday after the *Indy* would fail to arrive at Leyte.

By the end of day two, that Tuesday, concerns began to set in. The groups of survivors started drifting apart, "eventually being spread out over 25 square miles of ocean, and from 55 to 80 miles from the spot of the sinking."¹ Tuesday also brought sharks. The sharks were attracted to the deceased bodies, and once they were gone, they began bumping into the men's

¹ Wicker, 4.

legs. When a sailor passed, they would be pushed from the group to prevent shark attacks, as larger sharks grew more aggressive as time went on. Barracudas and jelly fish also started to congregate in the area.

On day three, some sailors begin experiencing hallucinations, causing some to try to dive to the ship or swim to imaginary islands. Their kapok lifejackets, rated for 48 hours of immersion, were beginning to fail and it became difficult to keep one's mouth above the water. Sharks, in search of food, began dragging sailors under the surface. By the end of Thursday, many were resigned to their fates: no one was coming.

Even men who jumped into the water without injuries struggled with the conditions. From the hot sun to developing salt water ulcers, there was not enough medication, food, or water for all of the survivors. Severe sunburn meant that skin was blistered and could stick together. Oil caused vision problems that were compounded by the endless sun reflecting off the water. Men began blindfolding themselves with scraps of fabric to provide any relief. All wounds, whether they were ulcers or otherwise, became infected. At night, once the sun went down, the ocean became chilly, leading many to develop fevers.

Due to a clerical error, the *Indy* had an extra order of lifejackets, which saved many men during those first few nights. However, as the lifejackets became waterlogged, the men found themselves in a predicament. Either struggle to keep your head above the water while being weighed down—potentially to the point of drowning—or attempt to remain buoyant without a jacket. With the lifejackets failing, men were forced to remain awake to prevent themselves from inadvertently sinking below the surface. Around day three, men began fighting over lifejackets in an attempt to find ones not as waterlogged, to keep themselves awake, or to make up for

imaginary slights. This delirium became widespread, with an estimated 40-50% of the survivors suffering from hallucinations.

Adding to the risk of hallucinations was the ingestion of salt water, accidental or not. Sailors made themselves vomit if they ingested either salt water or bunker oil, but as time went on and the men became more thirsty, it became more and more tempting to drink the salt water around them. If a sailor gave into the temptation, they would develop hypernatremia, or high concentration of salt in the blood. The condition develops quickly, killing sailors in three to four hours. After an hour of drinking salt water, the men would begin to mumble and thrash about. They would hallucinate and many began to drink more and more water to conquer their growing thirst and stop the stomach pangs. Their tongues would begin to swell and many choked or had seizures, killing them.

There were 1,197 men aboard the *Indy* on the night of the attack. Over eight hundred men managed to abandon ship before the ship sank beneath the water. Five nights later, the number of survivors had dropped to 316 men. Because of this massive loss of life, the USS *Indianapolis* sinking is considered to be the greatest disaster in the history of the U.S. Navy.

Discovery

The sailors in the water reported that planes flew overhead consistently for the five days, but it was not until August 2 that the men were discovered. Lieutenant, junior-grade, Wilbur C. Gwinn was testing a new trailing radio aerial aboard his PV Ventura. The aerial antenna snapped due to the wind, prompting Gwinn to transfer control to his co-pilot and head aft to assist his crew. Gwinn pulled up the antenna and attached a rubber hose in the hopes of weighing the antenna down when he noticed oil on the water. Oil was usually a sign of a submarine charging

its batteries as they pump out the ballast tanks to rise to the surface. However, upon closer inspection, this was no sub. The oil was heavier and in a much greater quantity.

Gwinn retook control and descended. He was astonished to see men frantically waving their arms. Gwinn and his crew dropped all their lifejackets, an emergency raft, and a waterproof radio called a Gibson Girl. However, due to low fuel they could not stay in the area much longer. Later, Gwinn recalls that, at this time, he was not under the impression that a major U.S. ship had sunk and believed the men were from ditched B-29s returning from a raid on Japan. Still the Ventura's crew radioed that there were "ducks on the pond" as an urgent message at 1125. This message was decoded by Lt. Cmdr. George C. Atteberry who immediately made plans to relieve Gwinn and send more planes to the area.

Atteberry directed his men on Peleliu to grab supplies and prepare their PV Venturas and amphibious PBVs, also known as Catalina Flying Boats. Atteberry took off at 1225 and continued to communicate with Gwinn, who radioed there were more pockets of survivors. Lt. R. Adrian Marks was one of the men under Atteberry. His crew left Peleliu around 1242 in a PBV 'Dumbo' for the hour and 50 minute trip. After receiving more messages about more survivors, Marks made visual with Atteberry before 1600 and planned to concentrate supplies around the bigger pockets, dropping rafts, ration kits, and lifejackets. Around 1630, Marks, in a feat of bravery, decided to land his PBV on the open ocean to save more men with oversight from Atteberry. Despite fighting 12' waves and taking hull damage from the landing, Marks and his crew set out to rescue the most seriously wounded. They managed to take aboard 56 men, with some lashed to the wings to prevent them from sliding back into the water. The PBV was damage beyond repair.

Other crews and pilots over radio and in person gave information about survivors to those on Leyte in the Air Facility. Urgent messages about the number of survivors filled the air waves, and one radioman transmitted up-to-date information for 11 hours from his plane. In preparation for naval ships, aircrafts began marking water with smoke and dyes to aid rescue. Overall, up to thirty-six 26' lifeboats were dropped from the fuselages of B-17 Air-Sea Rescue Planes and, after the end of the war, Air Medals from the USAAF were awarded to these air crews, including Gwinn's and Marks', for their effort in the rescue operation.

Doyle's Rescue

During the time of the discovery, the *Cecil J. Doyle* was moving in a south-westerly course towards Peleliu. Around 1430, Lt. Cmdr. Claytor spotted a PBY on an opposite course. He messaged the plane on voice radio and discovered the pilot was Marks, his Indiana-lawyer acquaintance. Marks reported the men in the water and told Claytor he would likely receive orders to head to the site about 200 miles ahead. Despite his orders to proceed to Peleliu and a lower-than-desired fuel tank, Claytor directed the crew to make a 180-degree turn and steam at flank speed to the site, leaving an hour and a half before the ship received their official orders. Moving at 20 knots per hour, the trip would take the ship about 10 hours to complete. Claytor felt there was no time to spare and pushed the ship to its limit, ordering the boilers' safety valves to be tied down and the engines to be run at full speed, "in spite of shafts running so hot they needed to be hosed down with water to keep them from blowing their bearings."²

² Wicker, 6.

Around 2300 hours on August 2, *Doyle's* radar picked up Marks' plane floating on the ocean. Claytor set his sights to get as close to the Dumbo as possible without injuring any of the men in the water. Claytor also, in an act of bravery that could have seen him court-martialed, directed both 24" searchlights to be turned on. The port arc searchlight was to be aimed forward to guide the ship around potential survivors, while the starboard arc searchlight was to be aimed at the sky to give survivors hope. Men in the water reported seeing the ship's lights around 2315, some as far as 60 miles away. One survivor, Joe Kiselica, said, "When I first saw those beams light low and far on the horizon, I thought I had died and was going to go to leave on one of those beams. Then I realized it must be a ship. If we could just hang on for another night, we might make it. We must not sleep. We must keep our faces out of the water for one more night."³

Planes dropped parachute flares to help guide the *Cecil J. Doyle* to Marks' PBY. The ship officially arrived at the scene at 0015 on August 3, five nights after the sinking of the *Indianapolis*. The *Doyle* was the first ship there, followed shortly by the USS *Dufilho* and the USS *Bassett*. Claytor directed his men to prepare the motor whaleboat, line the rails with lookouts, and to gather food, medical supplies, and clothing for survivors. Within 15 minutes of their arrival, the motor whaleboat was in the water to begin transferring men from Marks' damaged aircraft onto the ship. Shortly thereafter, as survivors were brought aboard the ship, information about the sinking was discovered.

Lt. Cmdr. Dr. Haynes made his way to the bridge to tell the *Doyle's* crew that the *Indianapolis* was sunk four days prior. The *Doyle's* Communications Officer Lt. James A. Fife, Jr.

³ Ibid.

was tasked with sending out the first definitive message of the *Indianapolis*' fate around 0300 on August 3: "We are picking up survivors of USS *Indianapolis*, torpedoed and sunk Sunday night. Urgently request surface and air assistance... And make it secret and top priority."⁴ The message was addressed to Vice Admiral Murray, Commander, Marianas, who ordered Guam to clear the air and take off at once. Upon hearing of ship's name, Claytor was concerned about the fate of his distant relative who he had met just earlier that year, Captain McVay. Dr. Haynes said he saw McVay soon after the vessel sank but hadn't seen him since. Later in the rescue, Claytor learned McVay, one of the last men rescued, was safe and aboard the *Ringness*. Claytor was relieved.

Around the same time as that urgent message, a raft with 10 men was recovered and around 0400, a lone sailor was picked up. However, shortly thereafter, the *Doyle* picked up a sonar contact. In response, Claytor turned off the searchlights and retreated from the area in an effort to protect the men in the water. Quickly it was determined that it was not a submarine, meaning rescue operations could continue. Around 0445, the sun began to rise as the *Doyle*'s crew rescued another 6 men, before starting to pick up another 22 survivors ten minutes later. A cargo net was slung over the fantail with six crew members waiting to assist survivors onto the ship. If the survivors were unable to climb, either a wire basket or a canvas with 2 lines were used as a sling.

After over six hours of searching, the ship's motor whaleboat was hoisted out of the water and the *Doyle* proceeded slowly, searching the area for any more survivors. Claytor himself stood on a platform above the flying bridge to direct the ship. The ship continued to

⁴ Clark, 457.

search the area in the standard Navy 'expanded box' search pattern, working in tandem with the other ships that arrived on the scene. Overall, the crew rescued 37 men plus the 56 from Marks' Dumbo for a total of 93 sailors. In a separate trip, all of the supplies and crew members from Marks' plane were brought aboard before the plane was scuttled by the ship's 40mm guns around 0730.

Of the eleven ships that participated in the rescue, majority were destroyer escorts or former destroyer escorts turned high-speed transports. In addition to the *Cecil J. Doyle*, the USS *Dufilho* (DE-423), *Alvin C. Cockrell* (DE-366), *French* (DE-376), USS *Bassett* (ex-DE-672/APD-73), *Register* (ex-DE-233/APD-92), and *Ringness* (ex-DE-590/APD-100). Other ships that aided in the mission were the *Madison* (DD-425), *Ralph Talbot* (DD-390), *Aylwin* (DD-355) and the *Helm* (DD-388). With the help of aircrafts providing information about survivors and their locations, these ships rescued 316 men.

The survivors aboard the ship were treated with the utmost care. Their names were recorded before they were given baths and bunks, and provided with clean clothes and food. Every men who was not on watch attended to survivors' needs. The survivors were fragile, many suffering from sunburns, salt water ulcers, dehydration, pneumonia, infected wounds, and general inflammation of the nose and throat. Sailors struggled to move survivors without hurting them further and pharmacist-mates worked around the clock to tend to these injuries. Many survivors were unable to stand due to leg cramps and weak constitution. To clean off the bunker oil, survivors were washed with kerosene, but even after that, the oil continued to stain clothing and bedsheets. An example of this care was reported by one survivor, Paul McGinnis. During the ship's journey to Palau, crewmembers were handing out ice cream to the survivors. When it was

discovered that he was left out, a Doyle crewmember readily gave up his ice cream. "If that sailor were alive today I'd love to thank him again for that blessed ice cream."⁵

About noon on that Thursday, Doyle requested and received permission to leave for Peleliu to discharge survivors, refuel, and resupply, before returning to the area. They steamed at full speed along with the *Bassett*, *Ringness*, and *Register*, arriving around 0400 on August 4. Survivors were disembarked to await arrival of the USS *Tranquility* (AH-14). Most of the survivors spent a week in a base hospital on Samar before being taken to a Guam via a C-47 cargo plane but some of the more injured sailors remained in a submarine rest camp for two weeks before being moved to the United States.

After the survivors were discharged, the Doyle's crew spent the rest of the day cleaning and resupplying. However, there was no oiler in Peleliu. Claytor, using the signal lamp, messaged a merchant ship to "standby to receive us alongside to take on fuel."⁶ When the merchant ship refused, Claytor used the ship's forward 5"/38 caliber gun to persuade the merchant ship to receive their lines. With the ship fueled, the Doyle returned to the site of the sinking to begin the most difficult part of their mission.

Burial Detail

The Quartermaster of the *Cockrell*, George Clark, recalls, "The sea was awash with corpses to all horizons...We were ordered to retrieve corpses, determine identification if possible, and effect a burial at sea...Whatever personal items were recovered were brought to the quartermaster of the watch who recorded them in the rough deck log along with the

⁵ Wren, 98.

⁶ Wren, 86.

position the body was buried.”⁷ All the rescue ships, except for the *Bassett*, were ordered to perform burial duties for the approximately 550 bodies that remained in the area of the sinking. The mission was a difficult one, but necessary: the sea had to be cleared of debris to prevent constant spotting of the same shipwreck. Once again with assistance from aircrafts from Peleliu, the ships set off to recover and bury the bodies of their fellow sailors.

Information about the burial details were difficult to obtain, with many sailors refusing to talk about this aspect of the mission. Most information going forward comes from deck logs from the *Cecil J. Doyle* and general burial-at-sea practices. On Monday, August 6, two unidentified bodies and nine deceased crew members were recovered and buried near 11°31’ North, 132°24’ East. On the 7th, the ship widened its search with the *French* and recovered five unidentified bodies. These men were buried at 11°13’ North, 132°08’ East. The next day, she continued her search with the *French* per ComWesCarSub Area dispatch dated August 8, but did not find anymore of the deceased. The ship did recover floating debris which was either sunk or picked up, and exploded a 400-500 pound mine. Over the three days, sailors continued to fight with sharks and many sharks were killed by gunner mates when they traveled too close to the motor whaleboat.

In the motor whaleboat, 1 to 2 bodies could be recovered at a time, and up to six could be placed on the deck to be identified. Many of the deceased were missing body parts. Because so few had wallets or dog tags, identification was completed using birthmarks, tattoos, scars, and

⁷ Clark, 458.

dental records. Some were never identified but all were committed to the deep with a prayer and honor.

Sea burials are similar to most Christian burials. There is a small vigil made up of sailors, the commanding officer or a chaplain says a few words in honor of the deceased, and the sailors recite a prayer. The deceased, who were placed in weighted canvas or mattress covers, are covered by an American flag and lowered into the sea. The navigation officer marks the position of the burial for the family. One man from every department was assigned burial duty and most were around the ages of the sailors they were burying. With the *French*, the *Cecil J. Doyle* gave final rites to 21 sailors and remained in the area until all deceased crew were buried and all debris was sunk.

Ship's History Continued

After their mission tending to the crew of the USS *Indianapolis* concluded, the *Doyle* continued their efforts in the Pacific Ocean. Later in August, she helped evacuate POWs from Wakayama, Japan and sank floating mines cut loose by minesweepers off Japanese harbors. She also screened carriers, providing air cover for the landing of occupation troops. Following Japan's surrender, she suffered through two typhoons before sailing into Buckner Bay in Okinawa on August 26 for occupation duty. Through mid-November 1945, the *Doyle* cruised on courier duty between Japanese ports before being dry-docked at Yokosuka. After repairs, she sailed for San Francisco, arriving on January 13, 1946. On July 2 of that same year, the *Cecil J. Doyle* was decommissioned and placed into reserve. Exactly eleven years and five months later, she was sunk as a target during live-fire practice.

Her captain, Lt. Cmdr. Claytor continued a successful career in the Navy, rising to the position of Secretary of the Navy and Deputy Secretary of Defense from 1977 to 1981. In these positions, Claytor was noted for his progressive views in support of women's and gay rights. After 1981, Claytor became a railroad executive and lead Amtrak for eleven years. Captain Claytor died on May 14, 1994.

Aftermath

Despite seeing through the end to the *Cecil J. Doyle's* career, it does not feel appropriate to conclude without making note of everything that happened after the *Indianapolis'* sinking. Days after the survivors were discovered, the first of two atomic bombs was dropped on Hiroshima on August 6, followed by the second atomic bomb in Nagasaki on August 9. Many survivors, who finally learned about the nature of the cargo they transported to Tinian, felt conflicted about their part in these bombings. Some mentioned sadness about the massive loss of life and other felt comfort from their efforts in ending the Second World War.

The U.S. Navy, understanding the wider implications of the loss of a famed heavy cruiser, waited to announce the sinking until August 15, also known as Victory over Japan Day. With the news of Japan's surrender being plastered over newspapers across the globe, the sinking of the *Indy* was not covered extensively, mostly as a small story on the front page of a few newspapers. Despite the lack of coverage, the public was incensed about the significant loss of life at the end of the war. In addition, many questioned why the Navy did not know where the heavy cruiser was for five days.

After the sinking, due to a change in protocol for announcing ship's arrival on Leyte, Navy higher-ups were under the impression the *Indy* was still en route or safely in port. Even after an

intercepted message from I-58's Hashimoto reported the sinking of a U.S. ship of Idaho battleship class was decoded, the Navy made no movement towards investigating the matter. When Captain McVay inquired about the long delay, the Navy responded that he never sent out the SOS message despite the ship being under strict radio silence. Declassified records later showed three messages were received but not acted upon for various reasons. McVay was blamed for these lapses in communications.

As a result, the sinking was investigated and McVay was court-martialed, the only commanding officer court-martialed for losing his ship during an act of war. Despite Admiral Nimitz' recommendation that the captain should only be issued a letter of reprimand, Admiral Ernest King and Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal moved forward with the trial. The trial concerned two charges: "suffering his vessel to be hazarded by failing to zigzag" and "failure to order abandon ship in a timely manner."⁸ After a trial in December 1945 which included testimony from Commander Hashimoto, McVay was convicted of not zigzagging. The survivors of the sinking were unanimous in their belief that the conviction was unjust and, in a conversation with a survivor, Nimitz stated the entire affair was a mistake. In the years since, analysis has poked many holes into the trial.

Due to the nature of the *Indy's* secret mission and gaps in intelligence, Captain McVay was not informed about potential enemy submarines along the Peddie route, despite the route's proximity to Yap Island, a known Japanese sub base, and the sinking of the USS *Underhill* six days prior. Even with this information, by the end of July 1945, the Japanese Imperial Navy was

⁸ Toti.

struggling to maintain control around Japan and many believed the Philippines Sea would be relatively safe from enemy action. This combined with the routing order for the *Indianapolis* stating McVay has the “authority to ‘zigzag at his discretion,’” made this charge seem ill-placed, especially since McVay had ordered the ship to zigzag during the day, only stopping late at night when he believed the visibility was poor.⁹

Hashimoto’s testimony also adds another layer to this charge. While Hashimoto did acknowledge the ship was not zigzagging, he stated it would not have mattered. If the first two torpedoes missed, the sub would have fired another salvo. Even for the U.S. Navy, an enemy ship zigzagging did not guarantee protection from a submarine, something corroborated by the 4,000 ships sunk by U.S. submarines over the course of the war.

While the conviction has justification in law, something McVay acknowledged in a statement to the *New York Times* right after the sinking when he said “I was in command of the ship and I am responsible for its fate,”¹⁰ opinion has firmly agreed that the conviction was unjust. In accordance with this belief, the punishment for the charge was very light. Those in charge of the trial were “unanimous in recommending the reviewing authority exercise clemency.”¹¹ In the end, McVay was set back in line for promotion. But even this punishment did not last long, as Admiral King recommended the sentence be set aside when McVay retired in 1949. Secretary Forrestal agreed and McVay was promoted to rear admiral, as was tradition in that era. Despite support from his sailors and his earlier accolades during the war, which included a Silver Star for

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

bravery under fire, McVay was haunted by the sinking of the *Indy* and the responsibility placed on his shoulders. In November 1968, McVay took his own life.

In the years following, survivors and many others, fought to have McVay's name cleared. Involved in this effort was Commander Hashimoto, who became a Shinto priest after the war at a shrine in Kyoto. In 1999, he wrote a letter to the Senate Armed Services Committee where he reiterated that, even if the ship had been zigzagging, the *Indy's* fate would be the same. He also noted, "Our peoples have forgiven each other for that terrible war and its consequences. Perhaps it is time your peoples forgave Captain McVay for the humiliation of his unjust conviction." This letter combined with the continued push from survivors to exonerate Captain McVay resulted in a resolution being passed in Congress and signed by President Clinton in late 2000. Under the direction of the newly-appointed Secretary of the Navy George England, Captain William J. Toti, the former commanding officer of the submarine named in the *Indianapolis'* honor, the exoneration language was added into McVay's service record in May 2001.

Conclusion

The bravery exhibited by the USS *Cecil J. Doyle* and the other ships involved in the rescue efforts is indicative of the bravery shown by sailors across the U.S. Navy during World War II. Despite the tragedy of the *Indianapolis*, the rescue operations show the best of the Navy and the ships should be remembered for their dedication to saving survivors and burying the deceased. All destroyer escorts have a story, and DE Classified is committed to sharing those stories in memory of these sailors and the countless lives they saved.

Thank you for listening to DE Classified. This podcast is brought to you by the Destroyer Escort Historical Museum aboard USS Slater. You can find a transcript of this episode, accompanying photos, and a bibliography at [USS Slater.org/DE Classified](https://usslater.org/DE-Classified). ???

Sources

<https://www.usni.org/magazines/naval-history-magazine/2021/october/lessons-accountability-charles-mcvay-and-indianapolis>

<https://www.ussindianapolis.org/seeking-justice>

<https://www.history.navy.mil/research/library/research-guides/modern-biographical-files-ndl/modern-bios-c/claytor-william-graham-jr.html>

<https://www.history.navy.mil/research/histories/ship-histories/danfs/c/cecil-j-doyle.html>

“Ask *Indianapolis* Survivors What They Think About D.E. Sailors” Max E. Toy

“Destroyer Escorts at the Scene of the USS *Indianapolis* Sinking” George L. Clark

“USS Cecil J. Doyle, DE-368: The Destroyer Escort Beacon of Light That Saved Dozens of Drowning Sailors From the Sinking of USS INDIANAPOLIS” by Charles “Choppy” Wicker
We Were There by Peter L. Wren