

Hello everyone, and welcome to DE Classified, a podcast showcasing the history of Destroyer Escorts. Each month a member of 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. I'm Xavi, and today we are going to DE Classify the USS MASON.

February 18th, 1995, Naval Secretary John Dalton officially recognized the crew of the USS Mason for heroic action during convoy duty in a harrowing Atlantic tempest exactly 50 years prior. "I never did think I would live to see this day," said James W. Graham, the ship's radioman. Secretary Dalton issued citations for heroism for the entire crew five decades after they were recommended. In today's podcast episode, we're going to discuss the legacy of the USS MASON, one of two U.S. Navy ships with African-American crews during the Second World War.

African-Americans have a long legacy of serving in the American Navy. During the Civil War 30 percent of the Union Navy's enlisted personnel were African-American, making up 30,000 black sailors. One of the best documented cases is that of Captain Robert Smalls. Smalls, with six other formerly enslaved individuals, were part of the Confederate gunboat, The Planter, based in Charleston, South Carolina. These seven men revolted on The Planter, seized the ship and brought it north, flying the stars and bars instead of the Confederate Cross. Hoisting the stars and bars, they sailed out of Charleston Harbor and made their way to freedom.

Our story begins on October 14, 1943, when the keel of the USS Mason was laid down in Boston Navy Yard, sponsored by the mother of its namesake, Mrs. David Mason. She would launch one month later. Namesake Anson Newton Mason died two years earlier during the battle of the Coral Sea. Mason joined dozens of other pilots shot down while engaged with the brunt to the Japanese carrier force. Like all other destroyer escorts, the USS Mason got its name from a fallen American soldier. Each one acknowledged the sacrifice, bravery and courage given by their namesakes and informed the crew of their duty to continue the struggle.

The USS Mason was two hundred eighty-nine meters long; as an Everett class destroyer escort its beam stretched 35 meters as draft measures two and a half with a speed of about 21 knots or twenty-four miles per hour. The Mason escorted convoys to the British Isles and the Mediterranean. The foremost purpose of destroyer escorts in the Atlantic was to defend and escort convoys and merchant ships carrying war supplies and manpower to Europe. They made the landing at Normandy possible, supplied the invasion of North Africa and Italy, and even provided much needed assistance to the USSR through northern Soviet ports. DEs measured between corvettes and destroyers. They were heavily armed and hastily constructed. These were built to counter submarine and air attacks and were vital in protecting desperately needed American supplies during the Second World War. Like every other DE, the character the Mason was in its crew, not its build. And the Mason's crew was among the most unique to serve in the U.S. Navy as the only vessel manned by an African-American crew deployed on combat missions on the high seas. Before the decision was made to fit the USS Mason with a mostly African-American crew a struggle was to be had in the United States to integrate the war industry and the American military. In 1941, Asa Philip Randolph was a man on a mission. In 1963, Randolph immortalized his legacy as a civil rights icon after heading the march on Washington. Twenty-two years prior, the embryo of that stunning march against inequality in

America was already popular in Randolph's circle of labor and civil rights leaders who threatened Franklin Delano Roosevelt with a march on Washington in 1941 if the African-American community did not see the same opportunities as white people in the defense industries that were rapidly mobilizing the nation on the eve of war with the axis powers. Randolph wrote to his colleague and fellow civil rights icon Walter White, "Now I have been thinking about the Negro and national defense and have concluded that something drastic has got to be done."

In a letter stating his intention to bring tens of thousands of protesters to Capitol Hill to demand equality. Within a month, the president replied for fear of disruption of wartime industries and the potential for nationwide strikes and mass protest on June 25th, 1941. FDR signed Executive Order eight eight zero two, which read, "Now Therefore, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the statutes and the statutes, and as a prerequisite to the successful conduct of our national defense production effort, I do hereby reaffirm the policy of the United States that there shall be no discrimination in the employment of workers in defense industries or government because of race, creed, color or national origin. And I do hereby declare that it is the duty of employers and of labor organizations in furtherance of said policy, and of this order to provide for the full, equitable participation of all workers in defense industries without discrimination because of race, creed, color or national origin."

While the army had taken steps to desegregate, the US Navy refused to budge under the leadership of Secretary Knox. Randolph initially attempted to pressure Knox through the NAACP. But when that didn't work, the president himself, at the behest of First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, forced the U.S. Navy to allow African-Americans to join as enlisted men and by the Summer of 1942. It wouldn't be until 1948 that the United States military would undergo its most ambitious desegregation initiative. The groundwork, laid in 1941, ushered in a new era for the United States military. African-Americans filtered into the ranks of enlisted men in the upcoming years at a snail's pace. The plurality of African-Americans to serve in the U.S. Navy up to that point were stewards or servants of the officers. African-American stewards made up about 75,000 out of the 165,000 African-American sailors who were enlisted. Their roles were menial and meant to be demeaning. They highlighted the power structure of Jim Crow that most of them would have been familiar with since childhood. And for those enlisted men, most were kept close to home and never went overseas at all or served on combat ships. The U.S. Navy refused to prevent African-Americans from participating on the front beyond menial labor. The ethos of nonwhite inferiority remained a guiding myth in the decision to keep African-Americans away from the front lines. They could not possibly know it at the time, but the one hundred and sixty African-American men who served on the USS Mason would not only be the only black crew to man an overseas combat ship during World War Two They were also lab rats for a sick experiment to test the resolve of African-American sailors to see if they could perform the same as their white counterparts. The story of those one hundred and sixty sailors would be immortalized later in their collective biography by Mary Kelly, their biographer, who wrote *Proudly We Served* a book we will be quoting today that was also made into a YouTube documentary accessible to everyone on the platform and in the many, many news articles by Thomas W. Young, the journal and war correspondent who was on the USS Mason, detailing the crew's life and legacy as it happened. However, those stories are unfortunately rarely told. And today we're going to be going over why it's so important to understand their significance and

how it informs the unique struggle they and all African-American servicemen faced when asked to fight for a nation that marginalized and oppressed its countrymen.

The task of the USS Mason was like all other destroyer escorts in the Atlantic, escort convoys and merchant ships through dangerous waters and protect those convoys against lurking German U-boats. The task of the sailors aboard the USS Mason was to prove their humanity and the humanity of all other African-Americans who wanted to serve their country.

Both the mayor of Boston and governor of Massachusetts attended the christening of the USS Mason. But before that, the crew trained at the Great Lakes naval base, where future American sailors got their sea legs. The shore side indignities of the future crew of the Mason began in the Great Lakes. Newly recruited African-American sailors were trained in the Camp Robert Smalls, a segregated camp within the Great Lakes naval base. Despite being in the north, Jim Crow met black sailors in Illinois. Signalman Second Class Lorenzo Dafoe recounted his experiences at the Great Lakes naval training facility for Mary Kelley, the ship's historian.

“I was in uniform and couldn't get a cup of coffee” he said, because of the discrimination that existed. Civil rights activist Marjorie Stewart Joyner, who worked alongside Randolph and White and followed the USS Mason closely stated a black boy couldn't get into a rec center where there's a white boy and a white girl. Naval segregation was married to Jim Crow and fights between black and white sailors were frequent. After the crew was chosen and shipped out of Chicago, these experiences only foreshadowed what was to come. In Boston, the crew didn't fare much better. Radio Man Second Class James W. Graham remembered “American sailors in the U.S. always had some derogatory remarks” and when a member of the USS Birmingham called the Mason the “N-word ship:” the fight was on in Beantown W. Graham stated.

Before the Masons set sail for Europe, she traveled to several American ports for crew training and shakedown quartermaster second class Charles Divers remembered of the Masons stay in New Jersey at the naval base in Cape May “They wouldn't honor our meal tickets and I just couldn't believe it.” The crew stayed in Norfolk, Virginia, before shipping east on their first convoy Mission. Engineer Winfrey Roberts recalls Norfolk well and one incidence, in the naval bases cafeteria that defined his time there. “The Chow Hall in Norfolk was segregated, with black sailors in the back and white sailors in the front.” A white sailor approached him while eating one day and asked him to move further back. “I said, No, I'm not moving, buddy. I don't give a damn who you report to. I'm not moving an inch.” In ship historian Mary Pat Kelly's interview with Roberts, he describes just how angry he was. He felt that he could have started a fight right there and possibly even killed someone. “I was more or less in a daze” Roberts recalls. “I had just lost it, that's all. I went out and sat behind a hanger. I just sat there for 10 or 15 minutes. Then the cloud was lifted. That red blanket just disappeared. I felt very calm, and that was the end of that. I often think when I hear people getting into trouble through sudden outburst of temper, gee, that could have been me.” Later on, during their stay in Norfolk, Albert Watkins, another sailor on the USS Mason and company were stopped at a local shop. “We just decided to go in there to order some orange aid,” he said. “That was before some rednecks screamed, Yeah, you'll drink it outside. And the clerk said, I just can't serve you in here.” Segregation in the south was strict and ingrained. Before departing for Bermuda, the Red Cross came to distribute care packages of sweets and coffee to the ship's stationed in Norfolk- all but the USS Mason that is

who was skipped after the ship in front and behind them were served. Bermuda, a British possession, did not fare much better. The black sailors of the Mason were banned from the USO and faced extremely restrictive Liberty leave. Arnold Gordon, a member of the USS Mason, whose skin was white but part of his ancestry was African-American, recalls that "I was on liberty in Norfolk with three other sailors from the Mason and of course, I stood out for obvious reasons. I remember a car pulling up that was loaded with people and somebody yelled and cussed at me because I was an N-word lover and was with those black sailors, and we just took it in stride and laughed it off and kept going." But that was a constant type of harassment. In his interview with the ship's historian, sailor Charles Divers said they were called, "Eleanor's folly." "The whole nation was pushed by Eleanor Roosevelt. It wasn't only the Mason. There were other integrated outfits in the other services. The 99th pursuit squadron called the Tuskegee Airmen and others. But I think the powers that be that oppose integration had programmed us to fail. The USS Mason was not expected to succeed, but when we started proving them wrong and succeeding rather than eating crow, they downplayed all our accomplishments and all of our virtues."

Divers' statement remained astute and true throughout the Second World War and to some extent, even after. However, the crew of the USS Mason shared good company with famous African-American sailors like Doris Story Miller, who earned the naval cross on the first day of the war during the Battle of Pearl Harbor, where while at the side of his captain on the bridge, Miller, despite enemy's strafing and bombing and in the face of a serious fire, assisted in moving his captain, who had been mortally wounded to a place of greater safety and later manned and operated a machine gun directed at enemy Japanese attacking aircraft until ordered to leave the bridge. Divers mentioned the Tuskegee Airmen, who from April 1943 onward became the first African-American flying squadron to see combat. The first African-American tank unit to see combat was a seven hundred sixty four tank battalion, better known as the Black Panthers. They were assigned to general Patton's U.S. 3rd Army. General Patton would later state, "Everyone has their eyes on you and they're expecting great things from you. Most of all, your race is looking forward to your success. Don't let them down and damn you don't let me down. They say its patriotic to die for your country."

If you're interested in any of the people or groups that I mentioned, you can check out more on the National World War Two museums website based in New Orleans. Their website has a magnificent timeline that explores profiles, oral history and photographs of important moments during the War Two that were crucial to African-American contributors in the armed forces. Interestingly enough, the USS Mason is not included in its timeline, which alludes to Divers' point that the crew of the Mason are still seeking the commendations that they deserve and the historical significance that they earned even in the present day.

Returning to our narrative, though, shortly after departing from Boston, one of the worst accidents in American military history unfolded in Chicago Harbor, which saw a massive munitions explosion that took the lives of hundreds of mostly African-American soldiers. Segregation put those soldiers in a vulnerable position, transporting dangerous cargo under experienced and negligent officers and using shoddy equipment. The disaster caused outrage in the Black community. The next week saw hundreds of black soldiers go on strike, 50 facing court martial.

One has to wonder why the crew of the Mason were so eager to pursue their task facing discrimination, humiliation and pain at every stop. Defoe prophetically remarked “If you call yourself a man, you defend your home and country. I felt that if I can get into and make it possible to be helping to protect this place, I would also help to open doors for my son and those who would come after me.” The first convoy, escorted by the USS Mason, traveled from Virginia to Belfast, the first entry of the ship's war diary on their maiden voyage read “the USS Mason DE-529 underway in company with DEs 187, 188, 528, USS John M. Birmingham, DE 530, comprising Task Group 27.5 escorting Convoy C K three via Bermuda and resources at present and route to Bermuda to Huertas or is patrolling sector on Port Beau of Convoy.”

In addition to the ship's historian, one of the best primary sources that we have to study, the Mason is the war correspondent Thomas W. Young, a black journalist whose family owned the “Journal and Guide of Norfolk.” He was asked to make the voyage with the crew and became the first Black War correspondent to report from the from a U.S. Navy warship. His articles were reprinted by black newspapers in every city in America. One of his first articles reads “Negro Manned Vessel on duty, the first U.S. naval vessel with a predominantly black crew, the destroyer escort USS Mason, was scheduled to be placed in commission at Boston Navy Yard. The vessel will be commanded by Lieutenant Commander William Blackford of Seattle, Washington. His crew consists of one hundred forty-four Negro and white members. It is anticipated that as soon as Negro personnel can be trained, they will replace the white ratings in their specialized billets. The Mason was built at the Boston Yard and launched last November. Sponsor of the vessel was Miss David Mason, Mrs. David Mason of Scarsdale, New York, and whose sons honor the vessel was named.” Another article about the maiden voyage of the USS Mason by Thomas W. Young is titled “Mason, 22 miles from three Nazi U-boats cited by plane.” This article discusses Young's recording of some of the more tumultuous events of the Mason's maiden voyage. I'll read a bit of it now to give you an idea.

“Aboard the USS Mason at sea, you would have to sit down in front of a typewriter and listen to Dot Dash Morse code signals through earphones for four hours at a stretch to appreciate how monotonous and nerve straining the radio operator's job is on Uncle Sam's fighting ships. They go hours and days and weeks at a time without so much as comic relief from the sameness of their tasks. And yet, Mason without this stalwart radio men we would be as helpless and as futile as a deaf man in a time square traffic jam. But at one time or another comes a thrill that repays their long days of waiting. And it has happened, as might be expected to the communications section of the USS Mason during its main combat voyage. There have been two such moments during this first convoy job of the destroyer escort with a predominantly black crew. One night, during his regular four-hour watch, Merwin Peters, Radio Man Third Class of Cleveland roamed around the radio room and by chance picked up signals from a German submarine reporting to its home base in Europe. There was no doubt that the message was being sent by the enemy U-boat, and we had sound reasons for believing it was hardly more than 500 miles away at the time. Next morning, that was the principal topic of conversation throughout the ship. We knew we had a potential intruder to our convoy, partly close enough to make us uncomfortable. Another day we passed three German submarines 22 miles away, going in the opposite direction. We never knew how close we were to a real fight until the next day. And then when the danger was really passed, we all became as anxious and some of

us as nervous as kids crossing a high trestle. The U-boats were cited by an army transport plane as scheduled Transocean flight and promptly reported from radio to headquarters that information with the position of the Under Seas radars by latitude and longitude was relayed by radio to all ships at sea. Because this message was not addressed specifically to our convoy nor to ships in our general area, None of the escort vessels and our task force bothered to decode the message immediately. We had considered it routine. But next morning, when the message was decoded, we all began to wonder if those subs were following us, waiting for nightfall and the right moment to strike. We'll never know why they did not discover our presence. Nor is it simple to explain how we, with our amazing detection equipment, failed to know their whereabouts until the report of a trans-Atlantic plane was relayed to us. But an accumulation of close shaves like that enables sailors and war correspondents to live to ripe old ages.”

Before arriving in Belfast, the USS Mason stopped in the Azores in the summer of 1944. The war diary read: “Anchored in twenty fathoms of water in Port Darhodes, Azores, fueled to capacity and returned to Anchorage, standing more cruising watches, listening watch and radar, watch merchant ships of convoy anchored inshore escorts. No liberty was allowed the next day,” The diary wrote they were anchored for hours before a short patrol duty for the purpose of rounding up merchant seamen who had gotten ashore and bum boats. Divers would later recall “we pulled up into the Azores as a Portuguese possession, which in that time was neutral. They were a neutral colony, just like Argentina and South America. All ships could come in there. They had access to that port and we came in the night time the Portuguese Port Authority would meet and make sure that our depth charges were disarmed. This time we came in at night and we tied up to a buoy when daylight broke. What did we see? But a German submarine. Since the Azores were a neutral group of islands, both the Germans and the Americans and British would use its harbor and port to stop, refuel and such. The Portuguese prohibited fighting between the Americans and the Germans or the allies and the Germans, so it would be often or occasionally the case where U-boats and destroyer escorts would be in an eye shot of each other in the port in the ports of the Azores islands. Watkins, another crew member on the USS Mason, would Report to the ship's historian “It's good to be young, you don't worry. There were the German U-boats leaving port and we knew they'd be out there in the ocean looking for us. They would keep us for a certain amount of time after the U-boats left.” Divers would later recall “we had to keep our distance. They've got a very big mountain called Pico. You could see that mountain the whole day before you could even see the island, depending on how fast you were going. You could see that mountain sticking way up out of the ocean, and it would take you a whole day to get to it.” The Azores were also an island chain where the merchant mariners would often try to jump ship and Reach shore on bum boats or whatever else they had to attempt to desert the convoy. Divers recalled this experience of having to go on shore and retrieve these merchant mariners who were sick of the voyage and not interested in participating in the convoy because of the awful conditions that they experienced on merchant marine ships with a great deal of sympathy. He says “all those guys went over and went into the town and found the merchant mariners and the merchant marines said, We're not sailing no more. Of course, I don't blame them. Those guys were dying like hell. All their ships were leaking, didn't have freshwater or anything, but our guys had orders to bring them back and put them on the ship.

In a couple of weeks time. The crew of the USS Mason traveling well off the coast of France Made their way to their destination, Belfast. It would be July twenty fourth, 1944 that they would actually pull in to harbor.

Crewman Lorenzo Dafoe recalled after arriving to Ireland, there was always a question in mind of what you're going to meet overseas and how foreigners are going to get crew of African-American men. Captain Blackford warned sailors to never go out alone on foreign shores for fear of being assaulted, but the crew of the Mason were amicably greeted in Ireland. Contrary to what they thought they were going to be introduced to in Illinois, breaking the color barrier always resulted in some form of unrest, whether it meant tension between black and white servicemen, tussles with racist transport workers or the worst kind of fights, which came after the African-American sailors fawned over white women at the camp, but not in Ireland. The African-American crew of the Mason family socialized with the locals on their maiden voyage. They drank with white women and danced with them as well. Merwin Peters said it was like being liberated. "We had to travel all that distance to be exposed to human kindness."

Seaman First Class William H. Bland stated, when you got to Ireland, it was the only place he felt like an American. In his article about arriving in Ireland titled "Irish First to treat USS Mason Crew like real Americans" Thomas W. Young wrote, "If the USS Mason ever goes AWOL, it's a fairly safe bet that the search planes will locate it promptly by flying over a certain port in Northern Ireland for although the world traveling tan-yanks on the first destroyers with a predominantly black crew have been a great many famous and fabulous places There is one little spot on the Irish Sea that will always hold a top place in their esteem." That city is one which the Mason had a brief visit after helping to deliver a convoy of vital war goods to ports in the British Isles. "Why we're not citizens of New York or Chicago or Atlanta, or even of just the United States. One of the seamen said reflectively the day after they left Ireland, "We're citizens of the world." His was a mood prevailing throughout the ship. he mused, how "I had to come all the way across the ocean to a foreign country before I got to enjoy the feeling of being an American."

The crew of the USS Mason may have wished to remain in Ireland for the rest of the war However, the U.S. Navy needed them and it would be the next convoy that came with the crew's biggest test and toughest challenge. It was called the battle or the "barges or men and barges against the sea." As a task group commander would later refer to it. The taskforce Started out in Brooklyn, New York, where it received provisions and made special preparations for escorting a transatlantic convoy of mostly RV tugs and barges, accompanied by other small craft being escorted by four destroyer escorts. The convoy, just like their maiden voyage, they were destined for the United Kingdom, but this journey was going to be much different from their first. The harsh seas they would encounter provided for 31 days of hurricane conditions that the USS Mason and the rest of their convoy had to bear through. It was their job to make sure that all of the valuable human and material resources they were escorting got to the European front and they were going to do that at all costs.

Marwin Peters, a sailor on the USS Mason Stated "We're looking at seas that were 40 or 50 feet high. We had to constantly run-in circles, which is what you did when you were on convoy duty shepherding the other ships. I never really think of the danger that was there, I guess, as a kid. I

was invincible, but I wasn't vulnerable to death.” Navigating the Atlantic in October or fall in general was extremely difficult. During the first 20 days, they faced 10-foot seas and 20 mile per hour winds. Difficult, but as the ship's historian noted, normal for the North Atlantic. In October, if the weather had held, the convoy would have crossed with only a few losses and the Commander Lynn's report would have been brief and pretty matter of fact. That was the fact of life in the North Atlantic during fall. It was simply awful. However, in this case from October 10th to 23rd, the wind persisted without abating from 20 to 42 mile per hours, with gusts reported to 90 mile per hour and the seas built up to 40 to 50 feet with an average of twenty-three feet for the 14-day period. This, as often mentioned, was the battle of the barges.

Convoy 119 Featured huge barges and ships that, through the harsh conditions of the North Atlantic, could only travel around five miles an hour across the open sea. Defoe recalls you could hardly imagine that a convoy would travel slow, as we did. And that was true for all the story of escorts escorting convoys around the Atlantic and the Pacific the fastest you could go, was as slow as the slowest ship in your whole convoy and to make sure everybody got to their destination. That's what made destroyer escorts *shepherds of the sea*. September 26 the war diary records, the first capsizing in the convoy, capsized while in tow of I.t four nine two. They proceeded to pick up survivors, saving all but a few men.

Garrison records this event well with a very keen and astute memory, he said “You couldn't walk upright. The decks were very slippery. You have to time it. The ship is rolling and pitching and going up and down, and you just have to time it. If you fall overboard, you're finished. You couldn't survive. The handrails were only waist high. If the deck was slanting and you lost your balance, you were gone. That's why the captain ordered that when you came topside, you had to have your life jacket on mandatory. You must. No question. It's rough. It's dark. Total darkness. It's slippery. The ship is buckling up and down, right and left. And you really have no time and you really have to time your movements. You cannot walk erect. Sometimes you have to actually stop and think about what you were, where you were going and what you were going to do next because you didn't, you were over the side. Don't forget. Aside from mummy, these were about the largest vessels in the convoy. And when the storm started tossing us around, we could just imagine what it was doing to those tugs. Another indication of how rough it was the stragglers. Stragglers, one who can't keep up with the convoy for some reason or another, maybe engine trouble or mechanical trouble or something, and the convoy commander would have signed an escort stay with the straggler if he could fix what was wrong. I know many times we hear them say, well, ole boy, I'll see you. And that's the last we saw them. We didn't know what happened to the stragglers.”

Throughout the month of October, many ships, especially the smaller ones in the convoy, capsized and many crew were lost.” The USS Mason and her sister ships in the convoy found themselves constantly having to circle around and encircle the convoy to make sure that all the ships were in formation and getting to where they needed to go. The crew of the USS Mason not only had to assist in repairs of the ship that she was escorting They had to make sure that they weren't going to capsize. They also had to repair ships, repair damages on their own ship, as destroyer escorts tended to take on a lot of damage through harsh tempests like the one that they were going through. October 16 was the worst day of the convoy. The USS Mason found itself battered by winds of almost 100 miles an hour. The Mason's clinometer peaked at 75 degrees,

only narrowly avoiding a capsizing. Through the restless and stormy Atlantic, the USS Mason escorted a convoy of slow-moving craft going no more than five knots. The rough seas lifted the mason and smashed her into the waves repeatedly until serious damage was incurred. "We went over 70 degrees." Sailor Charles Divers remembered, "I watched the clinometer and thought, this is it. Ninety degrees is flat over. How are we going to come back from 70?" But she held. The crew knew that capsizing or even abandoning ship would most likely result in death. Still, the USS Mason needed to find a way to shepherd the convoy and fix the damages that it had taken on, the crew worked fiercely to overcome the obstacles through the heavy storm, and the crew led the faster ships to their destination and then circled back into the storm to rescue the slower vessels, all while repairing the ship's damage. It was an extremely valiant effort by the crew of the USS Mason to escort the faster ships that could reach the destination in a timely manner through the storm and then return and face a storm again to save the lives of the crews of those smaller barges and tugboats that were in danger of capsizing and sinking if it were not for the USS Mason returning and shepherding them to safety. The convoy commander's report on the day read.

Great credit for their safe arrival is due to the outstanding seaman of Lieutenant Commander Blackford commanding officer USS Mason and keeping his flock of 20 small craft together and shepherding them to safety for their valor, Admiral Lind wrote a letter to the head of naval operations and stated, as commander of Task Group, considers the performance of the USS Mason commanding officer and men outstanding. Commodore Lind recommended commendations to be given to the Mason after the war. The USS Mason, like the vast majority of DE's, was scrapped and sold for parts. The experiment, known as Eleanor's Folly for the first lady's loud support of the crew and with the crew of the USS Mason entering history books as pioneers and heroes. Stories of the crew and their travels were printed in every black newspaper across the states from 1944 to 1945.

When the USS Slater returned from Greece, the surviving crew of the Mason helped restore one of the last surviving DE's and shared the memory of the first African American crew to man a combat ship in the U.S. Navy. If you want to know more about the USS Mason, ship historian Kelly wrote [Proudly We Served](#), which consists of many of the interviews that I used to write my own podcast episode today. The book is exceptional and there's also a documentary on YouTube with the same title Proudly We Served. Either are excellent sources to learn more about the USS Mason and the legacy of the crew left behind.

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 the episode, photographs, and a bibliography at [USS SLATER.org/de-classified](http://USSSLATER.org/de-classified). I'm Xavi and I hope you join us next month when we DE Classify USS ULVERT M. MOORE.