

DE Classified

USS Gandy (DE-764)

Hello and 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. My name is Giordano Romano, I am an intern and tour guide aboard the USS Slater Historical Museum in Albany, NY. I am a recent graduate of the UAlbany Public History Master's program and my area of study is Military History. The information for this podcast was researched by my fellow intern Cassidy Griffin and on today's episode we are going to DE classify USS Gandy.

Andrew Jackson Gandy, Jr. was born on October 20th, 1924 in Chattanooga, Tennessee to Andrew Jackson Gandy, Sr. and Mary Lou Saffles. Although little is sadly known about his early life we do know that he joined the U.S. Navy in early 1942. He would eventually serve aboard USS San Francisco (CA-38), a New Orleans-class cruiser as a Seaman 2nd Class.

After dealing a clear victory at the Battle of Midway in June 1942, the Japanese onslaught in the South Pacific and their push towards Australia was checked. The U.S. went on the offensive and Marines were then landed on the island of Guadalcanal. Over the course of the next six months, Marines would battle the Japanese for control of the island which included the strategic Henderson Field while the U.S. Navy attempted to stop any potential reinforcements and supplies from reaching their enemy through the means of the Tokyo Express.

San Francisco had missed the disastrous First Battle of Savo Island and was present for but not deployed during the follow up Battle of the Eastern Solomons. She did however

participate in the victory at the Battle of Cape Esperance with Rear Admiral Norman Scott using her as his flagship. She then missed the follow up Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands in late October but returned for the Naval Battle of Guadalcanal on November 12th.

While steaming towards the island on November 12th, San Francisco and her task force came under attack by Japanese Mitsubishi G4M medium bombers, nicknamed "Betty". During the attack one of the planes was damaged by anti-aircraft fire from San Francisco's gunners. However, the same plane made a second pass and was able to release a torpedo that luckily missed the ship. Despite her anti-aircraft gunners best attempts the already damaged bomber crashed directly into the starboard side, demolishing control aft and destroying three 20mm gun mounts. It was here that Seaman 2nd Class Gandy made his stand alongside other valiant sailors who refused to leave their gun positions in the face of impending doom. He would sadly be killed when the plane made contact along with 23 other men, Frank O. Slater among them. For his actions, Andrew Jackson Gandy, Jr. would be awarded the Navy Cross and the Purple Heart, and in addition to his two commendations Gandy would have the prestige of being the namesake to a new variant of ship soon to be in service with the ever growing Navy.

USS Gandy (DE-764) was laid down on March 1st, 1943 at the Tampa Shipbuilding Company in Tampa, Florida in honor of Andrew Jackson Gandy, Jr. The ship was a Cannon-class destroyer escort, the same type of ship as USS Slater. As a Cannon-class, Gandy would have a length of 306 feet, a width of 36 feet 10 inches and a draft of 11 feet 8 inches. Her propulsion consisted of four General Motors 16-cylinder diesel electric locomotive engines, four 8-cylinder electric generators and two 3-cylinder emergency generators. Altogether the ship could produce 6000 horsepower into two screws giving it a top speed of 21 knots, about 24 miles per hour. The ship had a range of 10,800 nautical miles while traveling consistently at 12 knots.

Her armament consisted of three single mount Mk 22 3"/50 caliber guns, two forward and one aft. One twin mounted Bofors 40mm anti-aircraft gun on the aft of her O-1 deck. Eight single mount Oerlikon 20mm anti-aircraft guns all around the ship. She carried one triple mount of torpedo tubes each carrying a 21 inch Mark 15 torpedo for ship to ship combat. Forward behind her Number 1 three inch gun was a mortar projector that would fire 24 Hedgehog rounds for anti-submarine warfare. Back towards her stern she had eight depth charge projectors, four on portside and four on starboard along with two depth charge tracks all capable of using the Mk 6 and Mk 9 depth charges in naval service.

Her complement consisted of 15 officers and 201 enlisted personnel on board at any given time. Her standard displacement would sit her at 1240 long tons but with a full load she would reach 1620 long tons.

USS Gandy would eventually be launched on December 12th, 1943 and on February 7th, 1944 she was commissioned at Tampa where Miss Ruby Gandy, sister of the ship's namesake would have the privilege to christen the ship in her brother's name. Command of the DE was given to Lieutenant Commander William A. Sessions of Great Neck, Long Island. After commissioning, USS Gandy and her new crew would set off for a shakedown period to prepare for the troubles to be faced ahead.

Gandy's crew completed their shakedown training while in waters off of Bermuda throughout the month of March. When training was finished they made their way to join Escort Division (CortDiv) 22 in New York City. Her first assignment was to escort USS Yukon (AF-9), an Arctic-class stores ship, to Norfolk, Virginia. After successful escort duty she returned to New York and prepared for her first Atlantic voyage.

On April 15th, 1944, USS Gandy served as part of the escort for Convoy CU-21, destination: Northern Ireland. The convoy wasn't very large, consisting of 28 merchants and 6 destroyer escorts. Although the route would take them just off of Icelandic waters, where only a month prior on March 9th, USS Leopold (DE-319) had been split in half by a U-boat torpedo and sunk, the first destroyer escort lost in the war. Gandy was about to enter a heavyweight fight with an opponent yet to be known.

On April 16th, U-550, a Type IXC/40 U-boat, stalking the convoy noticed the SS Pan-Pennsylvania lagging a bit behind the rest of the convoy. As a tanker, she carried 140,000 barrels of 80-octane aviation fuel along with a crew of 50 men and 31 members of the Naval Armed Guard. For a U-boat, it was the perfect target in just the right time and place. At 0806 hours, U-550 fired a torpedo that struck the ship in the portside as she settled the U-boat approached closer to allow the ship to mask her presence from the escorts.

USS Gandy along with fellow DEs USS Joyce (DE-317) and USS Peterson (DE-152) all were on the scene of the sinking vessel to rescue survivors. At 0950 Joyce made a sound contact with the sub and all escorts immediately went to general quarters. Joyce was the first to deliver a depth charge attack against the hiding U-boat. At 1000, U-550 surfaced about 600 yards from the Gandy's starboard bow. Her Commanding Officer, LtCdr. Sessions ordered "Right full rudder, come to 320, open fire and stand by to ram." Two minutes later, the Gandy rammed the sub about 25 to 30 feet from its stern with the initial contact killing U-boat sailors present in the conning tower. Although not visible it was believed to have sheared off a portion of its aft section due to the force of the ramming.

During the fight, Gandy received fire from U-550's 2 cm Flak 30 anti-aircraft battery but it was quickly silenced thanks to a short burst of gunfire and German sailors swiftly began to

abandon ship. USS Joyce came alongside and started to pick up survivors from the now sinking U-boat, recovering 13 of them including the commanding officer Kapitänleutnant Klaus Hänert, engineer Hugo Renzmann and doctor Friedrich Torge. At 1034, U-550 sank stern first and two minutes later a second sound contact was made, but it was later believed to have been a muffled explosion, possibly from scuttling charges set by the crew from the U-boat before it went down. U-550's war was over, her only victory was the sinking of SS Pan Pennsylvania. However, it wouldn't be until July 23rd, 2012 that the sunken U-boat wreck was discovered 70 miles south of Nantucket, Massachusetts.

The battle was over and although not knocked out, Gandy had sustained a few hits. She reported four casualties in the aftermath: Storekeeper 3rd Class Willis Chester Taylor, Seriously Wounded by shrapnel to his left lower thorax, Seaman 2nd Class Buford Frank Lands, Wounded by shrapnel to his right cheek and left hand, Signalman 3rd Class J. K. Vincent Latham, Wounded by shrapnel in the left and right index fingers and Seaman 1st Class Weldon Winford Whisenant, Wounded by shrapnel in his right cheek and left hand.

The action had given Gandy and her crew their first baptism by fire but luckily they were able to come out of it successful and mostly unscathed. For the remainder of the convoy, they would travel safely and undisturbed as they arrived in Northern Ireland on April 26th. While in port, USS Gandy would receive repairs from her action before setting off with Convoy UC-21 to head back to the United States. The convoy departed on May 2nd and without incident returned to New York on May 12th to await further orders,

For the rest of 1944 and through to May 24th, 1945, USS Gandy would escort 9 more CU convoys safely out of New York to Northern Ireland and Liverpool, subsequently escorting the

return UC convoys back as well. None of them would suffer a loss, a lesson learned hardest from the events of CU-21, yet one that lingers in the minds of DE sailors.

With the war in Europe over, attention was shifted to the Pacific. Gandy received necessary repairs and overhaul within the New York Naval Shipyard where her triple torpedo mount would be removed and replaced with more 40mm Bofors. This was a testament to the new tactics the US Navy faced from kamikaze attacks by Japanese airplanes.

On June 8th, 1945 Gandy sailed for training in Cuban waters off Guantanamo Bay before proceeding through the Panama Canal and reaching Hawaii. She remained at Pearl Harbor until August 6th when she departed to head for the Philippines, making stops in the Marshall Islands and Caroline Islands. By the time she had made it to the Philippines, the war was coming to a close, Japan was preparing to surrender so Gandy was tasked to sail from Leyte on August 24th to escort an occupation force convoy and entered Tokyo Bay on September 1st, 1945, just one day before the war's end. After the Instrument of Surrender was signed the following day, World War II had come to an end but Gandy's duty was not yet finished.

The following day she was tasked with escorting a convoy from Okinawa to Yokohama to help prepare for the occupation of Japan. She would operate in U.S.-controlled Japanese waters for the following two and half months before departing on November 16th to serve as part of the Philippine Sea Frontier. This particular unit was a component of the United States Asiatic Fleet with the Gandy to act as weather patrol between Manila, Samar and Manicani. She would spend the rest of her occupation in Filipino waters for the rest of 1945 into 1946. On February 1st, 1946, the ship departed Samar bound for home.

After steaming across the vast Pacific ocean, Gandy would stop in Hawaii and then San Pedro, California. She then headed south to pass through the Panama Canal before reaching

Norfolk on March 26th. Like most of her kind, Gandy would be decommissioned as the Navy no longer had much use for the destroyer escort right after the war. On June 17th, 1946, USS Gandy would join dozens of other destroyer escorts down in Green Cove Springs, Florida where they would remain in a mothball fleet awaiting their final fate.

USS Gandy would be one of the lucky ones, unlike so many others that would be scrapped she was given a new opportunity. After the end of World War II, tensions began to mount between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, culminating in the start of the Cold War. Through political and military means, both superpowers had established alliances and control over various nations across post-war Europe, Asia and Africa. Many nations had been left in decrepit states because of the conflict and their militaries were in no better shape. The U.S. would act accordingly and begin to provide aid to multiple countries in the form of economic and military assistance. In this instance, the destroyer escort was given new life as a lot of these countries had lost naval power and since the United States had so many left they were willing to part with them.

USS Gandy would be one of those ships. While in reserve status for the last five years, she would be transferred to the Republic of Italy under the Mutual Defense Assistance Act on January 10th, 1951. While in service with the Italian Navy, Gandy was renamed to Altair (F-591) and re-rated as a frigate in 1957. She would finish her career sailing around the Mediterranean and the Italian peninsula for the next 20 years acting mainly as a training ship for new sailors before being decommissioned. She was stricken from the Italian Navy and sunk as a target in 1971.

USS Gandy (DE-764) sits somewhere in the Mediterranean in her final resting place. For her service in World War II she would receive one battle star. Gandy's crew were some of the

few DE sailors to experience direct combat with a U-boat but it was through such actions that they understood the purpose of their duty and the mission that was to be accomplished. Gandy and her crew displayed courage in the face of fear and acted diligently just as Andrew Jackson Gandy, Jr. had aboard San Francisco. She continued to be a part of the overall effort that would help the Allies win the Battle of the Atlantic and played a crucial role in the occupation forces in the Far East. USS Gandy is no longer afloat, but she isn't gone either. Her memory carries on through our museum at USS Slater, a fellow Cannon-class destroyer escort.

Thank you for listening to this month's edition of 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 ussslater.org/de-classified. I am Giordano Romano, and I hope you join us next month where we'll DE classify...

Bibliography

<https://www.navsource.org/archives/06/764.htm>

<https://www.history.navy.mil/research/histories/ship-histories/danfs/g/gandy.html>

USS Gandy War Diary

Archives aboard USS Slater