

Hello everyone, 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 Andrew Laager, and it is my pleasure to tell you the story of the USS Holder, a ship that would only serve one voyage, but its actions speak for its valor.

The Holder was named for Randolph Mitchell Holder. Holder was born on September 20, 1918 in Jackson Mississippi. He served aboard the USS ENTERPRISE as a ensign pilot for a torpedo bomber in squad 6. During the Battle of Midway, he and his squad attacked the Japanese fleet without fighter cover to protect them. It was during this attack that Holder would try to divert the fire of enemy planes from his squadmates and was subsequently shot down. He was awarded the Navy Cross for his efforts, and in his honor a ship was Christened in his name.

The USS Holder is a Edsall class destroyer escort, With direct drive diesel propulsion. The HOLDER had a complement of three 3'50 guns, one 40mm bofors with a twin barrel, eight 20mm Orlikons, 1 torpedo tube, 2 depth charge racks, a hedgehog mortar, and eight depth charge k-guns. She was built by the Brown Shipping Company in Houston Texas. The ship was commissioned on November 27th, 1943 with his mother Annette Holder as its sponsor. On January 18, 1944, Commander George Cook would take command of the ship, beginning the voyage of the Holder by taking it on a quick test run in the Gulf of Mexico. Afterwards, the ship would make its way to Bermuda, where it would spend February into March doing a shakedown, as for many

of the sailors Holder was their first ship. It is at this time that I will introduce Edward Anuszczyk. He was a signalman 3/c aboard HOLDER, and compiled much of the information on the ship and her story, even going as far as getting some first person accounts and creating a whole book with his information. His work was invaluable in making sure the story of HOLDER is known. He talks of the testing done by the crew, and how fresh they are in terms of the mistakes they made. In one case, two men fell overboard on a particularly harsh day in the Atlantic. They were saved, however this goes to show that this crew was still new to the sea, and had much to learn.

After the crew were acclimated to the ship, it ventured to Charleston South Carolina for drydock. There, Holder underwent maintenance so that she was prepared for the journey ahead. It would then meet up with convoy UGS-37, which was in Norfolk Virginia preparing for what would be HOLDER's first, and only, mission. The convoy would have 60 merchant ships, protected by Task Force 65, which consisted of 6 landing ships, five destroyers, two rescue tugs, two English patrol craft, the anti aircraft-cruiser HMS DELHI, and eight fellow destroyer escorts. The DE's were the STANTON (247), PRICE (332), STRICKLAND (333), HISSEM (400), STOCKDALE (399), SWAREY (248), and FORSTER (334). Before it set off, however, the command of the ship was switched from Cook to a man named Winthrop P. Buck. Buck was a lieutenant (jg), and had prior experience commanding a ship, PC 489, a submarine destroyer, as well as being an instructor at the Fleet Sound School in Key West months before his moving to the HOLDER.

And so, with a new captain and her first mission, HOLDER went east across the Atlantic, not knowing the danger that awaited her, as well as the crew. Anuszczyk would

state that there were "ships as far as the eye can see". The going in the Atlantic was as smooth as any journey across the rough sea could be. The only time there seemed to be any trouble was when the convoy came across a group of Spanish ships that got in their way. After some talks through a translator, a boy by the name of Guadalupe, they got out of the way and the convoy made its way past the Rock of Gibraltar. Once in the Mediterranean, there didn't seem to be any problems, that is, until April 11.

HOLDER had taken the lead of the convoy, with the USS FORSTER with her. Anuszczyk was on watch two times that day, one from 0800 to 1200 in the morning, and the other at 2000 to 2400 at night. On his first watch he recalled seeing what looked to him like a messerschmitt off the port side of the ship circling. After reporting to the Officer on deck, he kept an eye on the plane until it left. Later that night he had his second watch, and was witness to the battle that would result in the Holder's demise.

At 2325, a flare dropped in front of the ship. Anuszczyk reported it, and general quarters were sounded. 2 to 3 minutes later he saw 4 more drop slowly off of the starboard side of the ship. HOLDER began to create a smoke screen, but then there was the sound of an engine coming towards the ship. The anti-aircraft guns of the ship opened fire, but were too late as the dive bomber launched a torpedo. It hit HOLDER midships on the port side, just below the water line, destroying three of the engines, and catching one on fire. The explosion would result in 16 killed and 12 critically wounded. Anuszczyk himself was thrown in the air and slammed down, being knocked unconscious for nearly a half hour. Bill Crocker, a fireman first class, was ordered to check the damage done by the torpedo. Looking through a hole in the deck, he saw two of the crew lying dead in the water. Jim Dennis, a gunner's mate striker, saw the pilot as

he was firing at him. He was soon laying in the straps attached to the gun, and had suffered a concussion. Seaman 1/c Charlie Grunewald claims to have been blown as high as the stack on the ship, his proof being that he could see the inside of it.

Eventually, with the help of FORSTER and the rest of the task force, the planes were driven off. HOLDER would be the only ship damaged in the attack, and the sacrifice of both ship and crew saved countless lives in the convoy. FORSTER would take the wounded from HOLDER. After the ship was deemed unfit for continuing on, it would be towed to Algiers by one of the tugboats. Once there HOLDER was given enough repairs to make a trip back to the states. She would arrive at New York Harbor on June 9. After analysis it was determined that the costs to repair the damage done would be very high.

On July 11, the USS MENGES came into the harbor, also in need of repairs. Named after Herbert Menges, a pilot who died in the attack on Pearl Harbor, she was built in Consolidated Steel Shipyard in Orange Texas. The ship was a part of convoy GUS-38 and on May 3 was attacked by a U-boat after trying to track it down with Sonar. The damage sustained was in the aft of the ship, with the rudder and propellers being destroyed. It was brought to Bougie, Algeria, and given repairs for a journey back to the states.

It was a huge coincidence that the damage from MENGES could be easily repaired by HOLDER's stern, undamaged from the blast. After discussion, it was determined that the MENGES had a better chance of successfully being repaired compared to the HOLDER. Over the course of August 14-31, the stern of the HOLDER would be welded to the MENGES. There is debate as to whether HOLDER pushed MENGES or MENGES pulled HOLDER, but I myself am more for the former.

Menges would come out of drydock and go on a shakedown cruise from September 25 to October 20. After that it was put back on convoy duty and was eventually a part of the first hunter-killer group consisting of coast guard ships. On one such mission it was actually able to get a confirmed kill on U-866 around Nova Scotia. In a way it can be said it got revenge for the damage caused to it prior. Menges would serve through the war into 1947 when it was taken out of commission and was put into the reserves until 1971, when it was scrapped.

As for the HOLDER, she would be decommissioned on September 13, and was subsequently scrapped. Winthrop P. Buck would receive the Legion of Merit for his actions. Edward Anuszczyk would receive a Purple Heart for the injuries inflicted by the explosion. He would serve aboard the USS PANAMINT and participate in the Battle of Okinawa. While he did not actually get to meet him, he did see famous reporter Ernie Pyle leave to go ashore on the island, where he would get shot in an ambush by Japanese troops. After the war, Anuszczyk would write and keep the histories of both HOLDER and PANAMINT and would stay in touch with the crews of the HOLDER and its comrades, even participating in some reunions in the early 90s.

Overall, it could be said that the HOLDER, whilst having a short-lived career, was a ship which had a very action-packed maiden voyage, and in the end was responsible for the saving of hundreds in UGS-38. For the acts of valor by ship and crew, it's no wonder why they gave destroyer escorts the description of trim but deadly. 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,

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DE Classified Script

accompanying photos, and a bibliography at USSSlater.org/de-classified. I'm Andrew Laager, and I hope you'll join us next month when we DE Classify USS BROUGH