

Anti-Shipping Sweep — DesRon 61 — July 22-23, 1945

It was evident in the summer of 1945 that in order to bring the war against Japan to a conclusion, Japan would have to be invaded in just a few short months. Operation Olympic, the top secret plan for such an invasion, envisaged an assault on the southern Japanese island of Kyushu in November 1945, to be followed by later assaults on Honshu and other mainland Japanese territories. Operation Olympic, focusing on the most formidable Japanese naval and military resistance in all of the Pacific operations to date, predicted probable American casualties in the hundreds of thousands.

Although American submarines and aircraft had penetrated the Japanese mainland, projected Japanese resistance capabilities against surface ships was not known. Accordingly, Destroyer Squadron 61, attached to Third Fleet Carrier Group 38.1, was selected to make a recognition exploration and anti-shipping sweep into the Tokyo Bay area.

At 0600 on July 21, 1945, Destroyer Squadron 61 was detached from Group 38.1 for that exploration and sweep into the outer Tokyo Bay area, which, upon entering the lower reaches of Tokyo Bay (Sagami Nada), brought the Squadron to within 37 miles of Tokyo itself. This combat action was designed to determine the enemy's potential to repel any surface action during the upcoming invasion of the Japanese homeland, and, collaterally, to conduct any attacks on enemy shipping which circumstances might afford.

At 12:25 on July 22 a group of bogies approached the Squadron from the

northwest. The Squadron's speed was increased and its course changed to avoid detection by the bogies. A severe typhoon passed through the planned operation's area just before the Squadron entered the Sagami Nada area, producing heavy swells and thus hampering the Squadron's speed. As the Squadron sailed well into the Tokyo Bay area, it picked up by radar a group of enemy ships - a convoy apparently consisting of two large cargo vessels and two escorts. The raid's plan of action was to fire torpedoes, followed by gunfire. At 23:53, each of the nine destroyers in the Squadron loosed two torpedoes, shortly thereafter firing hundreds of 5-inch shells at the targets. Visually, numerous fires were observed, and several of the radar blips disappeared from the scopes. During this action, two of the destroyers reported counterbattery fire from the shore, but no hits were made on any of the Squadron's ships.

Quoting Secretary Melvin Laird, Secretary of Defense under President Nixon, "The men of Destroyer Squadron 61 never received the commendation they should have for this mission". Secretary Laird was an Ensign on the USS Maddox during this operation.

After the end of the war, three important concerning facts were discovered from Japanese records:

First, it was discovered that the enemy convoy attacked by the Squadron included the Enbun-Maru a 6,919 ton and the Hakutetsu-Maru 800 ton cargo ships carrying 7,264 tons of military equipment, including a disassembled aircraft factory, destined for reassembly in Korea, away from American aerial attack. They were escorted by

two gun ships

Secondly, Japanese minefield charts indicated that when the Squadron turned away to engage the enemy convoy in Sagami Nada, the Squadron was only 500 yards short of a mine field.

In addition, Japanese records indicated that the enemy had 500 kamikaze boats lining the shores of Tokyo Bay - a possible sequel to the kamikaze aircraft attacks which had cost the Navy several ships sunk or damaged and many personnel killed or wounded.

There was no damage to any of the Squadron's ships, nor were there any casualties among the Squadron's personnel.

"Commander Third Fleet notes with great satisfaction the success of this well planned and executed attack.

Commander Destroyer Squadron 61 is to be congratulated on the sound judgment, initiative and aggressive spirit displayed in 'beating the weather' to drive this attack home at the very door of the Empire.

You are unpopular with the Emperor. Well done”.

“Signed, W.F. Halsey”