

BATTLE STATIONS!

**BATTLE OF THE
BISMARCK SEA**

DES UNDER THE NORTH STAR

**USS SHAW:
THE DESTROYER THAT
REFUSED TO DIE**

WOMEN AT SEA

**THE NAVAL ARMED
GUARD IN WWII**



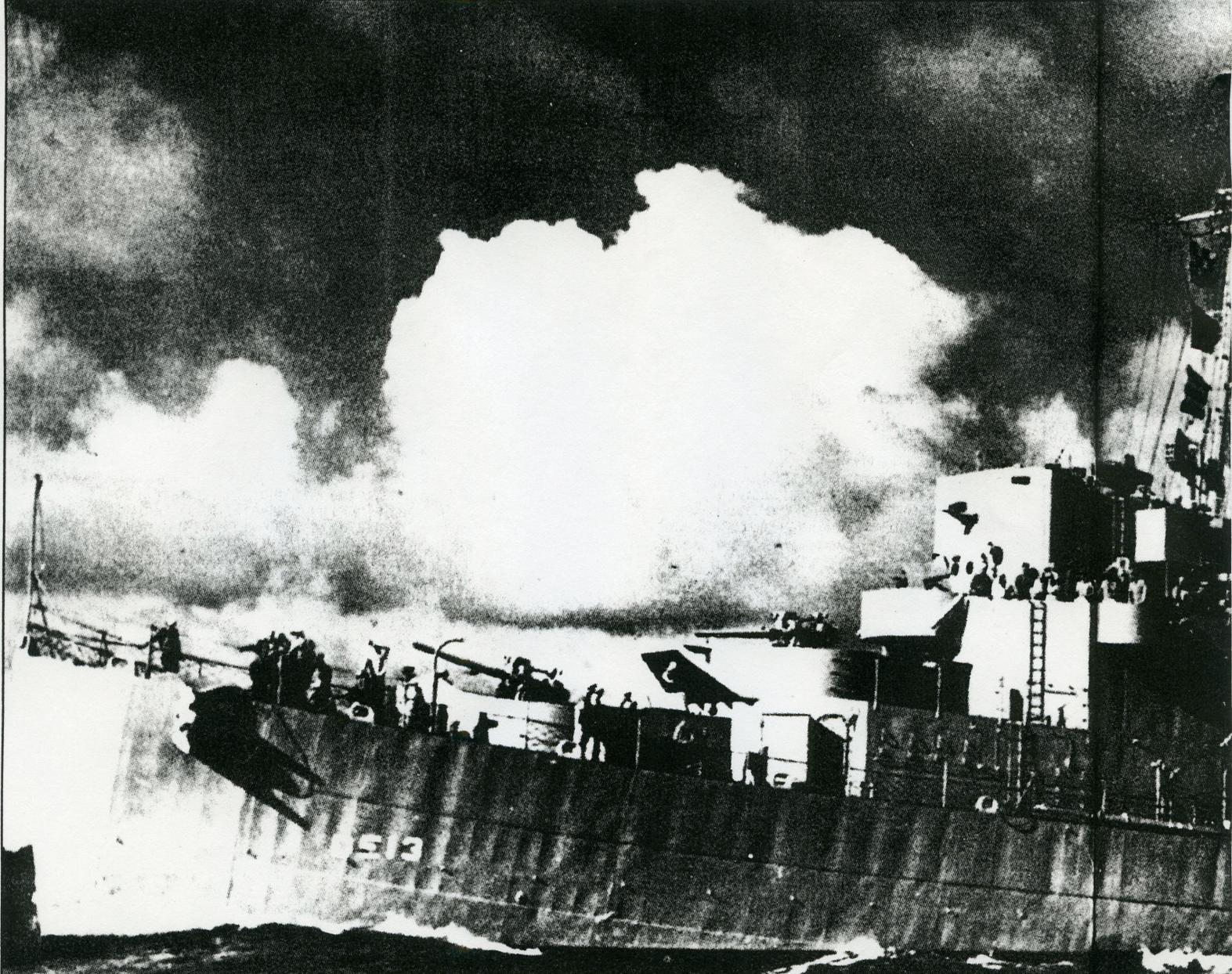
U.S. \$4.99 CANADA \$5.99



DES

Little remembered today are the often hazardous exploits of the Destroyer-Escorts that operated in the freezing waters of the North Pacific and Bering Sea. Facing dangers from above and below the sea, they fought a lonely war in a forgotten battleground.

Born of the... of the... for... Nazi U-bo... 85 ships v... it was in c... vent confu... should be... rupted for... craft and... 1942, suffi... of the ship... With 35... Battle of A... in the Paci...



THE NORTH STAR



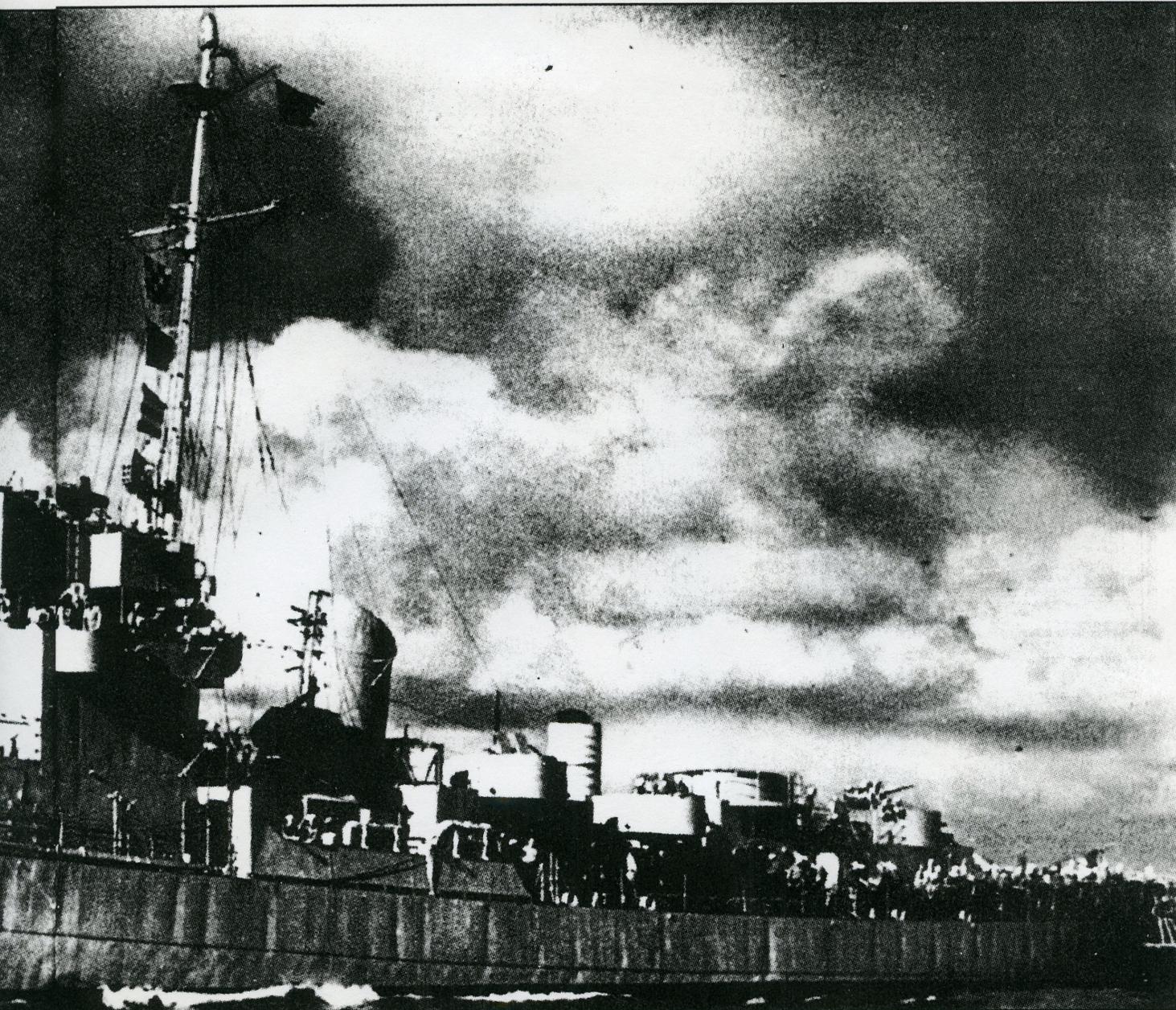
Born in February 1941 in the desperate days of lend-lease and the Battle of the Atlantic, the destroyer escort or DE originated from the demand for a new ship designed specifically to kill submarines. The height of the Nazi U-boat war passed in March 1943 when in the first 20 days of the month 85 ships were sunk, 500,000 tons of shipping destroyed, though 68 percent of it was in convoy. Yet, the need to safely escort convoys to England did not prevent confusion over the amount of effort, material, vessels and manpower that should be earmarked for the anti-U-boat campaign. Shipyard quotas were disrupted for many months while construction priority was devoted to landing craft and merchant ships. Although some destroyer escorts were produced in 1942, sufficient numbers of the vessels did not begin to appear until 1943, 421 of the ships being constructed by the war's end.

With 35 destroyer escorts to be available 30 June 1943, and the worst of the Battle of Atlantic over, the decision was made to make destroyer escorts available in the Pacific theater of operations. There was a desire to bring the scrappy little

BY KEVIN DON HUTCHINSON

(PHOTOS COURTESY NATIONAL ARCHIVES)

The first of an entirely new class of warship built in the United States to Royal Navy specifications, the destroyer-escort USS *BRENNAN* (DE-13) was slated to be delivered to the Brits as BDE *BENTINCK*. When America's need for warships became critical destroyer-escort (DE) production was vastly increased and some of the early vessels like the *BRENNAN* were diverted to the US Navy. By the war's end 564 DEs had been built in six different classifications. This censored wartime photo omits the AA guns.



★ DES

ships with their anti-submarine abilities to bear against the Japanese. Destroyer escorts first headed for the North Pacific 23 April when *DOHERTY*

(DE-14) and *AUSTIN* (DE-15) escorted Task Force 51 north for the invasion of Attu. The rest of Destroyer Escort Division 14 (Cmdr. Lee F. Sugnet) would not begin its departure from the West Coast for the North Pacific until 20 September 1943.

The North Pacific theater had been active since 3 June 1942 when, as a diversion for the Midway Operation, Japanese planes bombed Dutch Harbor, Alaska, followed by the invasion of the Aleutian Islands of Kiska and Attu on the 6th and 7th (the first invasion of the United States since the War of 1812). The Japanese were driven from the islands by 14 months of deadly and operationally unique fighting, *DOHERTY*'s and *AUSTIN*'s duty (commanded by Lt. Cmdr. A. Jackson, Jr. and H.G. Claudius USNR, respectively) proving uneventful. The hostilities culminated with the annihilation of the troops on Attu after a month of battle, and the dar-

ing rescue 29 July of the 5183-man Kiska garrison by Rear Admiral Masatomi Kimura.

With the bombardment of Matsuba Island by the fleet submarine *NARWHAL* 15 July and the first heavy bomber attack on Japan three days later, the North Pacific theater expanded into the home islands of the Kuriles.

When Destroyer Escort Division 14 (CortDiv 14) arrived in the Aleutians the six *Evarts*-class destroyer escorts *DOHERTY* (DE-14), *AUSTIN* (DE-15), *EDWARD C. DALY* (DE-17), *GILMORE* (DE-18), *DONEFF* (DE-49) and *ENGSTROM* (DE-50) were immediately assigned the escort and anti-submarine duties of the ship type. Headquartered in Sweepers Cove, Adak, destroyer escort sailors soon discovered what other North Pacific sailors had learned before them — that the major enemy in the North Pacific was the weather. It was said that the Aleutians had three types of weather: bad, terrible and worse.

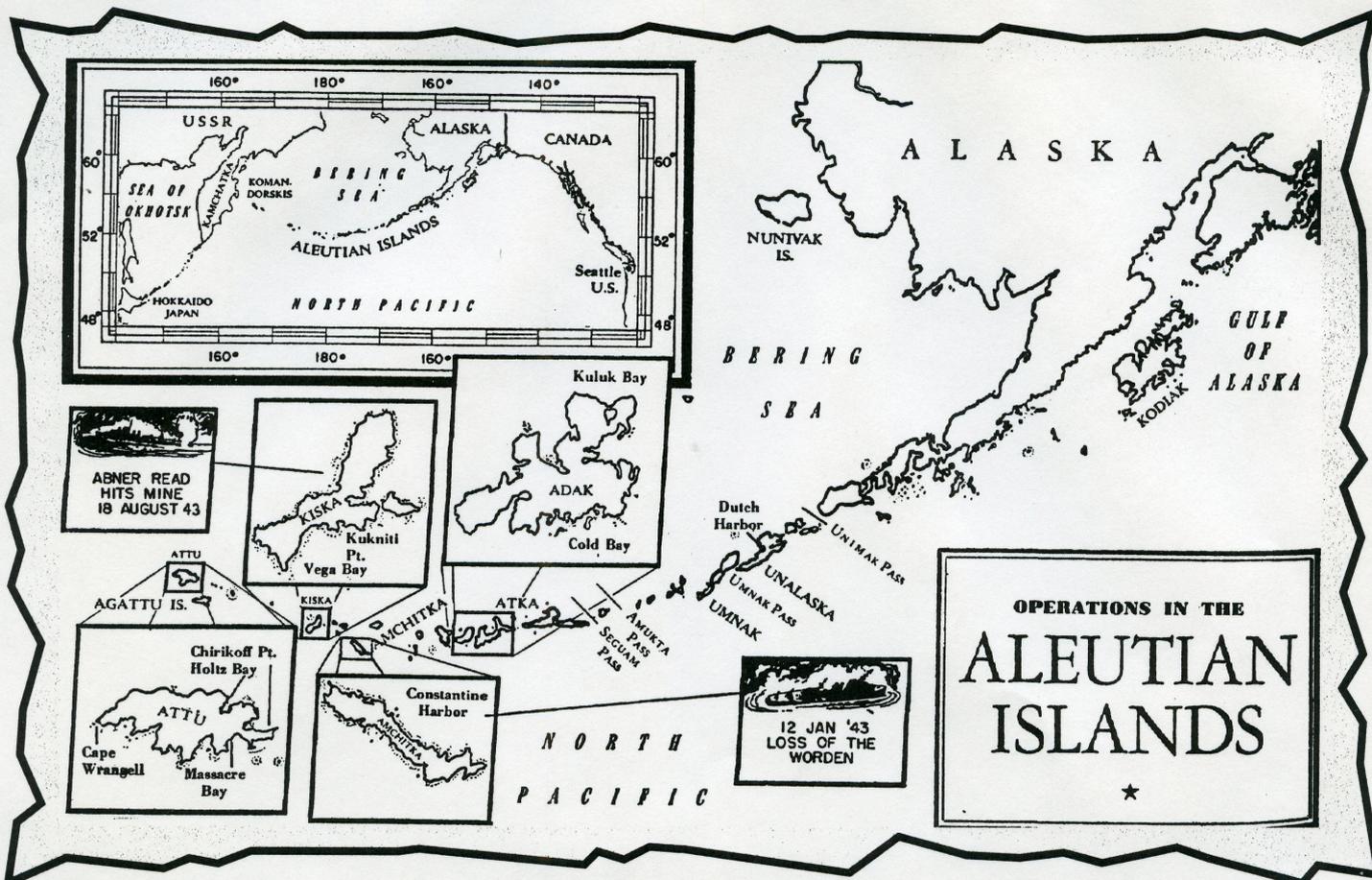
Though there are periods of relative calm, more typical are seas of 15-20 feet, winds 25-35 knots, and visibility of 2-4 miles. Star sighting to record position was rare. With nearly continuous fog, navigators were grateful for their SG surface

radar. The units performed remarkably well among the sharply defined volcanic land mass of the Aleutians.

The physical size of destroyer escorts particularly made North Pacific service a challenge and ordeal. The 289 feet and 1140 tons of the *Evarts*-class destroyer escorts were far from what was required to provide comfortable sailing on storm-tossed seas. Destroyer escorts, often referred to as "the infantry of the Navy," though uncomfortable, were strongly constructed. Capable of enduring incredible rolls without capsizing, the craft's mettle was tested on more than one occasion in the North Pacific.

Huge waves drenched watch standers and the Officer of the Deck on the open bridge, 43 feet above the waterline. Tons of water repeatedly blasted the weatherdeck and superstructure. In these type of sea conditions life rafts were tossed about, gunshields flattened, and on one memorable night on the *ENGSTROM*, several depth charges broke free and careened about the deck.

Destroyer escort duty in the Aleutians consisted mostly of escorting supply ships, transports, oilers and tankers from Adak to the western islands. Armed with three 37.50-caliber, nine 20mm, and a 1.1, their pri-





mary capability was as a submarine killer. For this they were supplied with sound gear (sonar), surface radar, depth charges and hedgehogs (forward thrown rockets).

North Pacific destroyer escorts

also accomplished a mission that was unique in the war. From 10 July 1943 until the war's end, US air power repeatedly struck the northern Kurile Islands. Flying a minimum of 1300 miles from Attu and Shemya, if

An elevated dockside view of USS *GILMORE* (DE-18) reveals her open mount 3-inch guns, hedgehog launcher behind "A" gun, and trio of 20mm Oerlikons flanking the bridge. Part of CortDiv-14, *GILMORE* sank the Japanese submarine *I-180* on her Arctic deployment.

★ DES

they experienced any difficulty due to enemy origin or not, the icy water of the North Pacific would quickly snuff out their lives. It was for this reason that

the guard ship program began. Sailing approximately 250 miles westsouthwest of Attu, a destroyer escort would remain within 70 miles of Point Bess (51.40-167.00) for usually a week's duty on weather watch. When Army and Navy air missions were flown, the guard ship would cruise within 10 miles of Bess or one of six other positions in the area, passing through the designated point at approximately the time the returning planes would fly over. If unable to return safely to land, the aircraft would ditch next to the DE and the crew would be rescued.

Guardship duty (or picket duty as the sailor's referred to it) was not eagerly anticipated and was considered an ordeal. The designated destroyer escort would steam a square of about five miles to a side at five knots watching "the zoomies" flying

back and forth. The only excitement ever experienced by Lt.(jg) Roy Heckel, Jr. USNR, on the *ENGSTROM* was once during midwatch seeing St. Elmo's fire in the rigging.

Things did get more exciting than that, however. Both on 18 and 19 May 1944 a "Betty" bomber attacked the *DONEFF* (DE-49) both times being driven off. After that, P-38s and B-25s began flying air-cover missions for the guardship.

The salient historical event of destroyer escort duty in the North Pacific in World War II is the killing of the Japanese submarine *I-180* by *GILMORE* (DE-18).

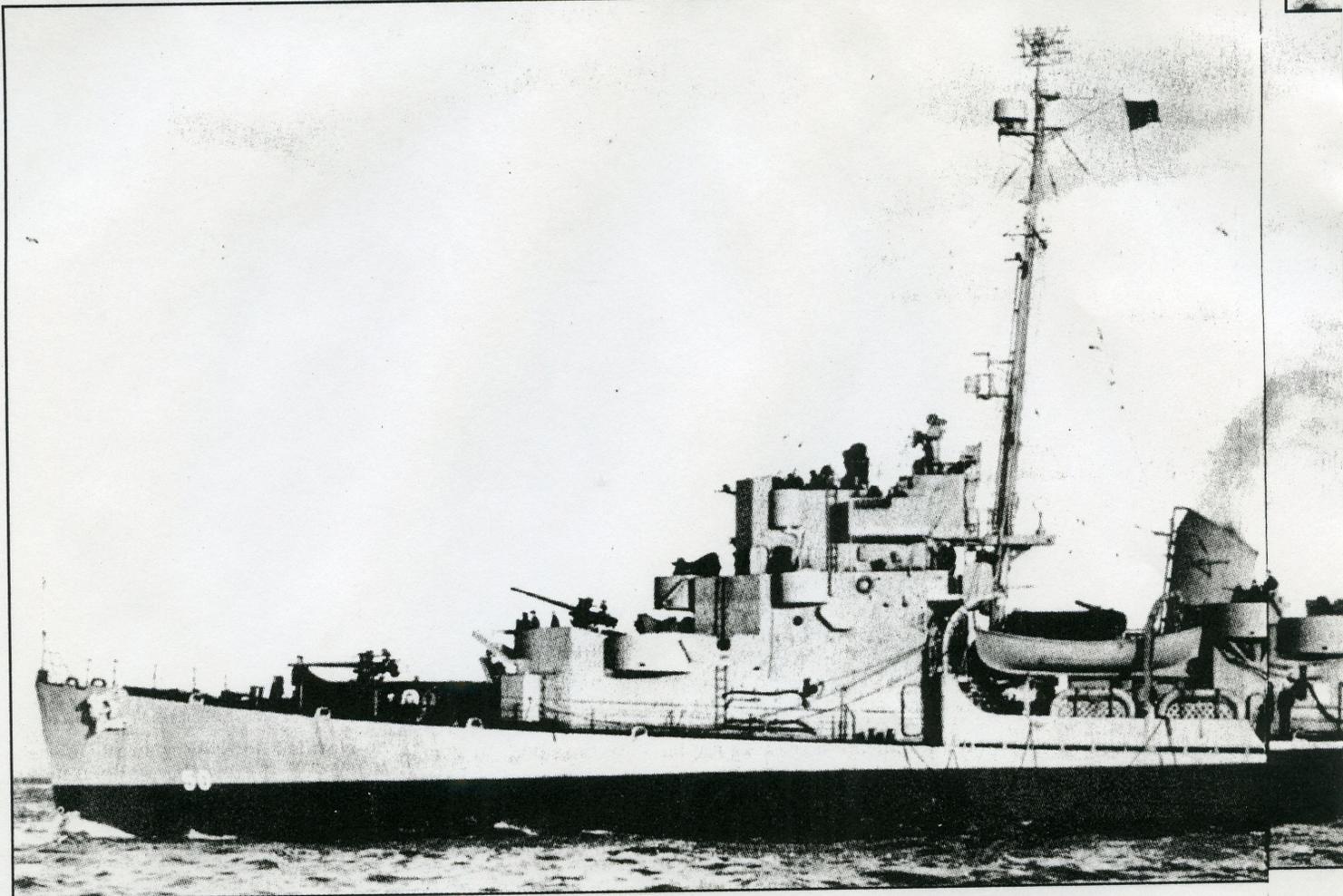
On 20 March 1944 the KD7-type, medium-range attack submarine *I-180* departed the submarine base at Ominato, Honshu. Expecting an American invasion of the Northern Kuriles, Lt. Gen. Kiichiru Higuchi, who would become the combined Army/Navy operational commander the 27 March, badly desired intelligence on American forces. Not having any aerial intelligence since 14 October 1943 and no submarine reconnaissance since the end of November, Lt. Cmdr. Fujita Hidenori, commander of *I-180* was ordered to de-

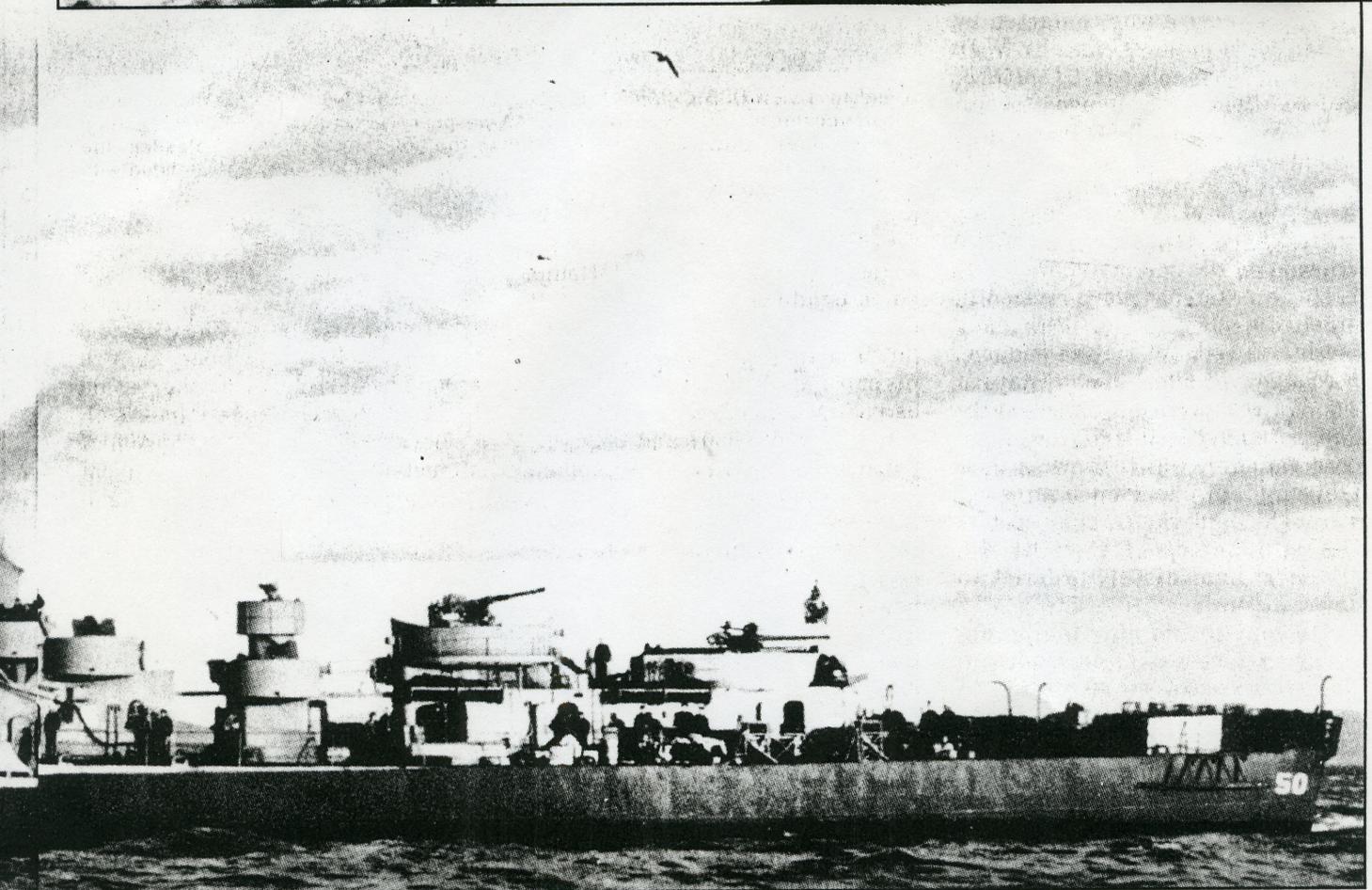
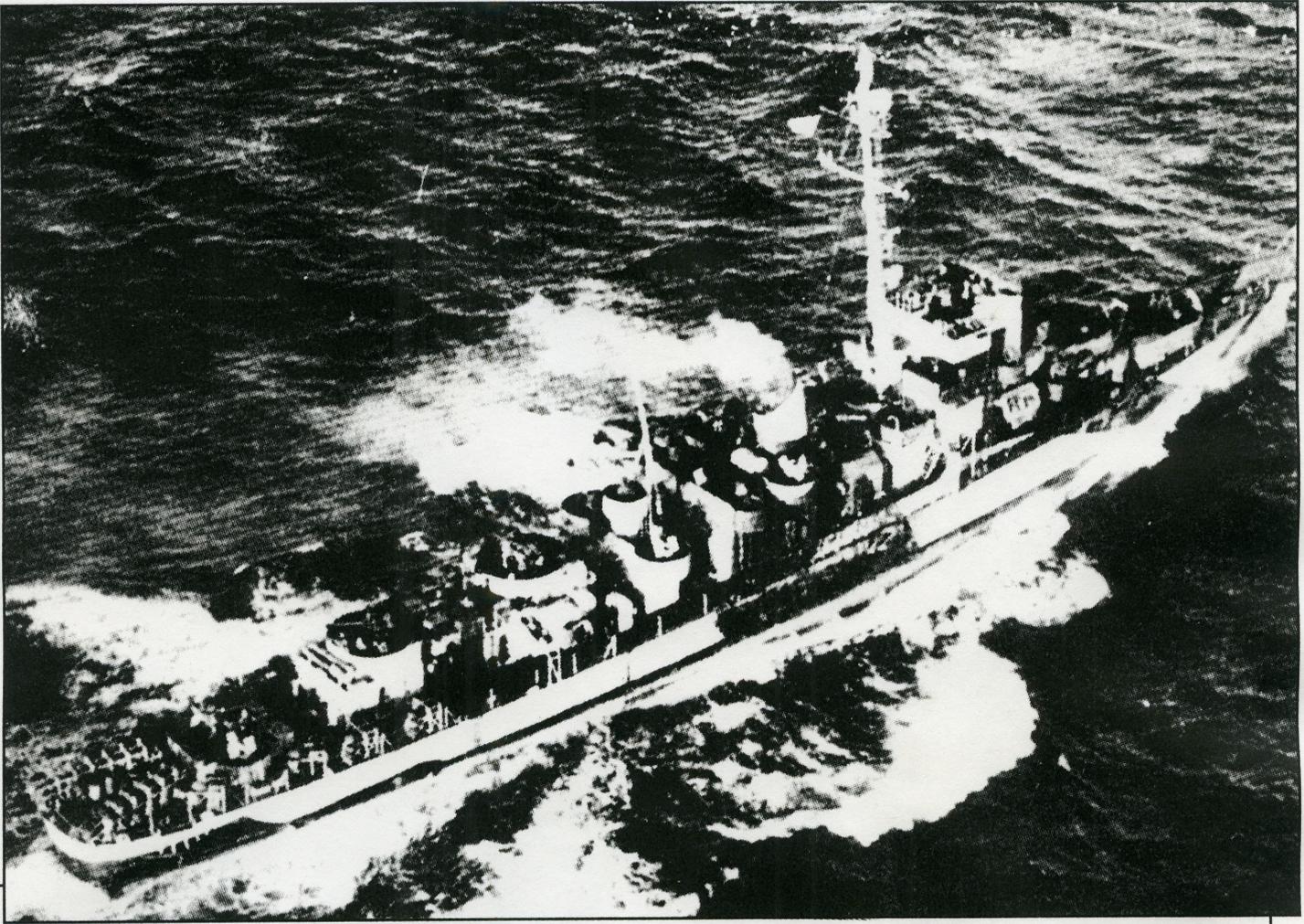
Class leader *USS Evarts* seen in August 1944 wearing "crazy quilt" Measure 32 camouflage. All the *Evarts'* were quickly scrapped after the cessation of hostilities.

stroy enemy shipping but particularly to reconnoiter US waters from Unalaska to south of Kodiak Island. This would be a deep penetration behind enemy lines and much farther than *I-2's* reports on the western Aleutians in November. This mission would be monitoring the seas between the major US bases at Dutch Harbor, Unalaska and Kodiak Island and sea traffic steaming to and from the western continental United States.

Thirty-six days later, *USS GILMORE* accompanied by the *USS EDWARD C. DALY* were on duty,

USS ENGSTROM (DE-50) was typical of the early *Evarts*-class DEs which came to be known as "short hulls" because they were 17 feet shorter than the better performing "long hulls" when initial production began. Although their antiaircraft armament varied, *ENGSTROM* was typical of the DEs that saw service in the latter stages of the war. She is seen with three open mount 3-inch/50s, a new twin 40mm Bofors aft (sometimes a quad mount) and nine 20mm Oerlikons. The DEs also carried one Hedgehog spigot mortar on the bow, eight "K" gun depth charge projectors and two depth charge racks on the fantail.





★ DES

escorting merchant ships to Kodiak from Dutch Harbor. From 1 March to 20 April *GILMORE* had completed nine escort missions from Dutch Har-

bor to Attu, not having served as the guardship since being relieved 1 February. The crew was in high spirits because Kodiak was the closest landfall to a stateside liberty town. Another factor most amazing to Aleutian sailors was — Kodiak had trees!

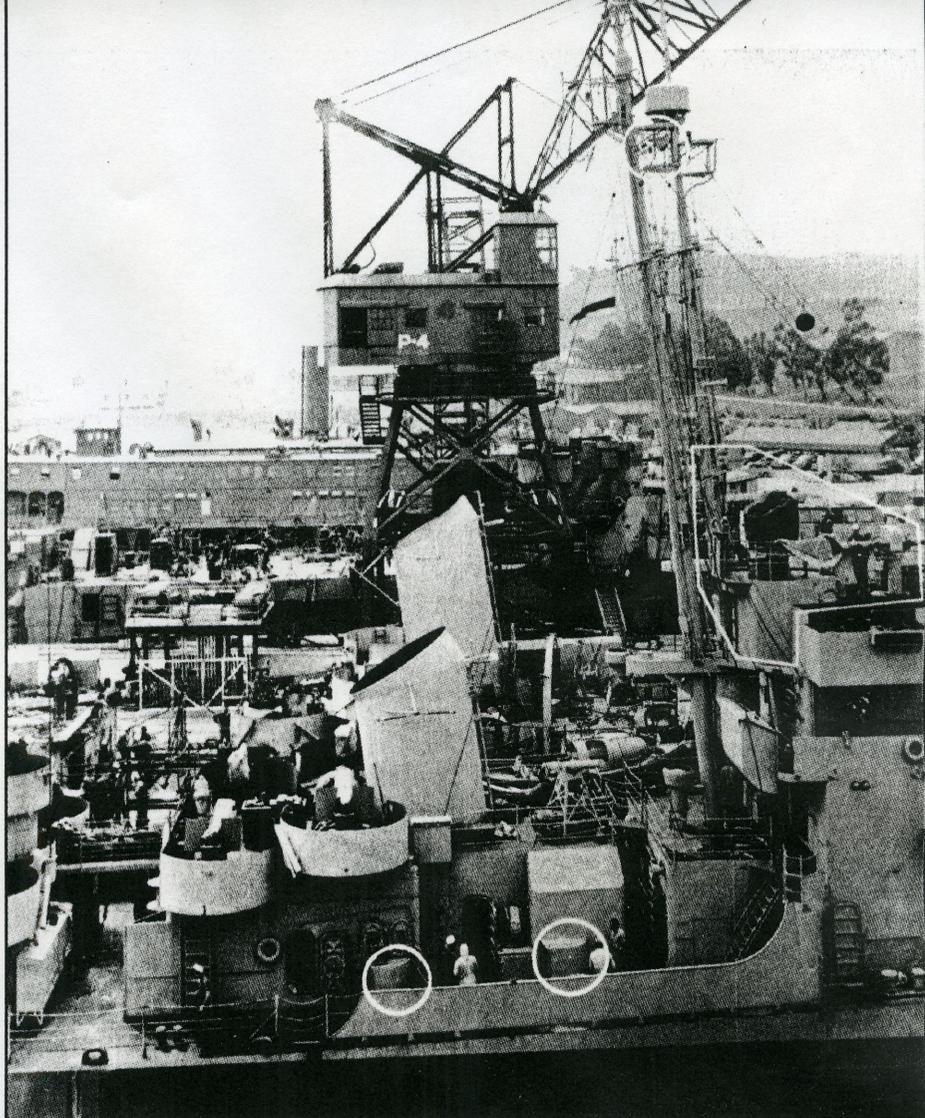
Evarts-class destroyer escorts had a short funnel and when the wind came from astern, sailors on watch on the open bridge had diesel fumes blowing over them. On the evening of 25 April the watch on *GILMORE* was breathing deeply of the diesel fumes. Below decks, men dreamed of home, played yet another game of acey-deucey, argued over who would gaff the largest salmon on Kodiak, and read Navy supplied "pocket books." The *GILMORE* was about 120 miles southwest of Kodiak Island when, at 2230, a radarman detected a "pip" on his screen, range four miles.

Cmdr. Lee F. Sugnet on the *EDWARD C. DALY* was contacted by "Talk-Between-Ships" and Lt. W.D. Jenckes, commander of *GILMORE*, ordered the course changed toward the target. "General Quarters" was sounded and as the sailors raced to their battle stations the "pip" disappeared on the radar screen.

Lt. Cmdr. Hidenori had *I-180* cruising on the surface, charging its batteries. Hatches were opened in order to freshen the air in the submarine, the odor of the sub and men becoming ripe after so many days at sea. Watches were out, sailors of the Japanese navy well trained in night observation. It was then when their training and experience paid off. Through the darkness they spotted the silhouettes of CortDiv 14. Hidenori immediately ordered an emergency dive.

On convoy and guardship duty sonar contact was often made but the target always was identified as a whale or weedbed. This time it was different. The "pip" had disappeared from the screen and at 2238 there was a sound contact at 2600 yards.

Lt. Cmdr. Jenckes was aggressive and quickly closed the distance to destroy the sub. *GILMORE*'s first



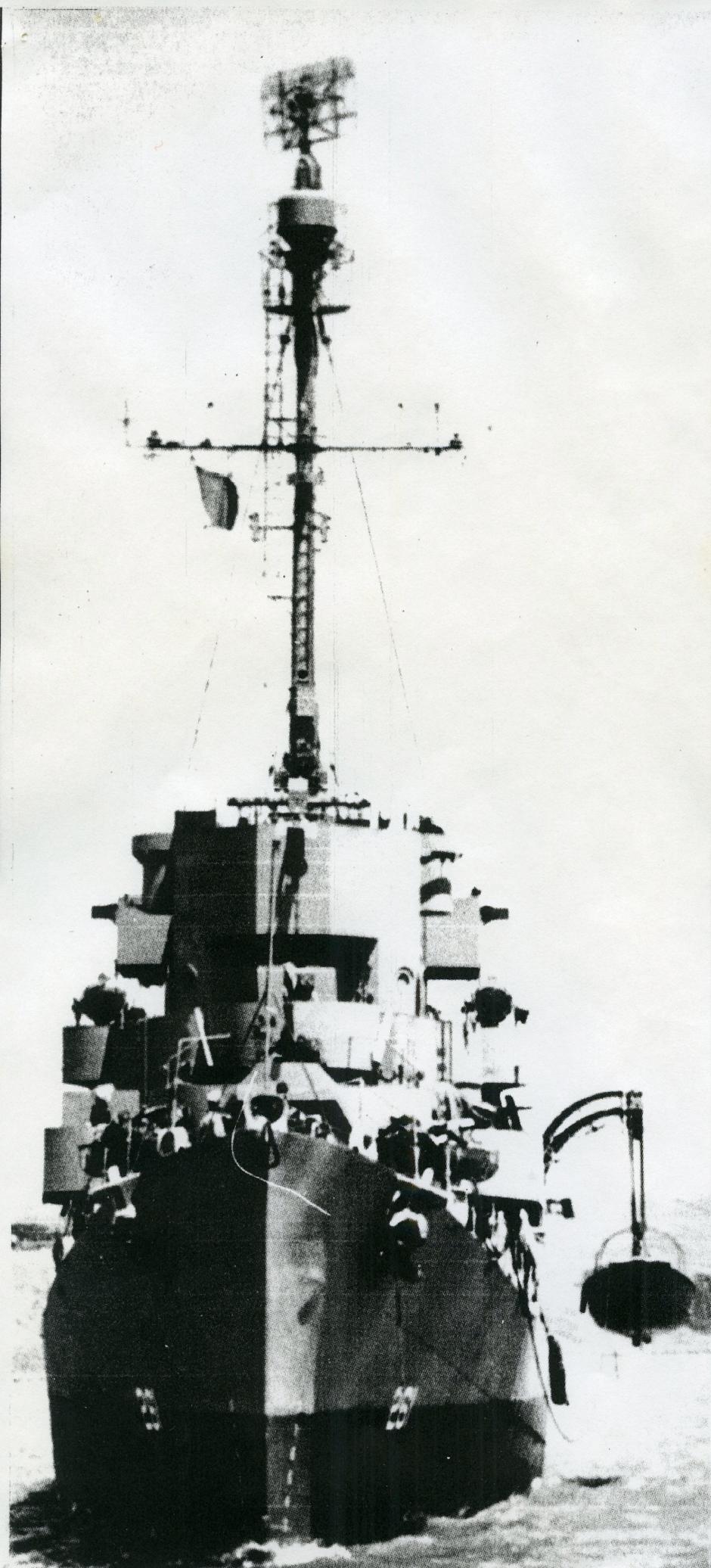
A midships view USS *CANFIELD* (DE-262) at Mare Island in 1945 shows her crowded superstructure, short stack and midship AA weaponry. At center and far left is a portion of the waist-mounted 20mm guns. Unlike the 306 feet "long hull" classes, the *Evarts*-class did not carry torpedo launchers. At this time *CANFIELD* was fitted with 40mm quad mount aft.

attack was with an A/S Mark 10 projector. Lt. Cmdr. Hidenori attempted to evade the attack, radically maneuvering and trying to place as much of the North Pacific between his sub and the inevitable explosions as possible. Jenckes fired hedgehog salvos at 2252, 2307 and 2336. The Japanese submarine men remained as quiet as possible as the winebottle-shaped weapons exploded about them. At 2400 there was no indication of a hit so at this time Jenckes made the tactical decision to attack with depth charges. At 0027 thirteen depth charges were laid in a barrage of force and sound designed to kill the submarine and/or bring it to the surface. Still no visual or sonic evidence of a hit was noted, so just before one o'clock Jenckes had fathometer readings taken over the target, and at 0107 ordered another barrage of depth charges.

The destroyer men were beginning to wonder what the solution would be, how long their attack must continue, and even if maybe the submarine had been able to escape. Suddenly, just when some believed that the enemy had been able to evade them by escaping off at an odd angle, there arose a tremendous explosion from the depths of the sea.

The *GILMORE* shook violently from the concussion. Sonar and radar men carefully searched their screens for any trace of the submarine, but none could be found. Contact could not be regained after the explosion and later the *GILMORE* was secured from "general quarters."

Throughout the early months of 1944 the Kurile Islands continued to be reinforced, Japanese troop strength finally reaching approximately 60,000 by mid-1944. Major



◀ Lacking the range required for Pacific operations because they carried only 198 tons of diesel fuel versus the 350 tons of the larger DEs, the "short hulls" were relegated to less demanding rôles. Seen in this bows-on view is the *Evarts*-class USS *DIONNE* (DE-261). Powered by diesel engines developing 6000 shp, the *Evarts*' could sail 4000 miles at 12 knots and make 21.5 knots at flank speed. They carried crews of 180 men.

movements were completed by the end of April, most troops transferring from Manchuria and Sendai. A notable exception was the arrival from the south of Air Group 203 which included Japan's top ace of the war, Lt.(jg) Hiroyoshi Nishizawa. The main unit remained until 11 August, leaving to historical speculation what impact their presence in more southern theaters might have had.

Lt. Gen. Higuchi remained ignorant of the American's intentions throughout the war. Never again would he send I-Boat submarines west, Japanese aircraft never flying east except for their Parthian shot at *DONEFF* 19 May. Signals intelligence was all that was available to him and, it too was controlled. The outstanding example of this was Operation Wedlock. It was a campaign of false radio broadcasts meant to convince Higuchi and Tokyo that an phantom 9th Fleet prowled offshore, thus diverting attention from operations in the Marianas Islands.

After exemplary service, CortDiv 14 departed the Aleutians at the end of January 1945, later to be headquartered at Saipan, and by the war's end, at Guam. On 8 July 1945 *Edsall*-class escorts, the USS *RAMSDEN* (DE-382), *RHODES* (DE-384), *RICHEY* (DE-385), and *SAVAGE* (DE-386) arrived in Sweepers Cove, within the week escorting Task Force 92's service group to refuel the task force for its bombardment of Suribachi, Paramushiru, 22 July. On 15 July *RAMSDEN* departed Attu for guardship duty, 23 July *SAVAGE* departed Cold Bay, Unimak Island, for the first of its three convoys to Kamchatka, USSR, supplying the Soviet invasion of the Kurile Islands.

On 9 September 1945, North Pacific World War II destroyer escort service was appropriately completed when DEs with Task Force 92 in Ominato Harbor witnessed the surrender of Northern Japan to Vice Adm. Frank Jack Fletcher, Commander, North Pacific Forces, on *PANAMINT* (AGC-13). •