THE CRUISER THAT HAD TO BE SAVED: USS RALEIGH

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The light cruiser RALEIGH *(CL-7) torpedoed in the attack on Pearl Harbor, was saved only by the efforts of her heroic crew. She would survive to get her revenge against the Japanese in the Kurile and Aleutian Islands*

At 0756 December 1941 two Japanese torpedoes were launched at the *Omaha*-class light cruiser *RALEIGH* (CL-7) during the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. Occupying berth F-12 which usually was occupied by an aircraft carrier, one torpedo passed approximately twenty-five yards astern of the ship, the other struck the cruiser portside amidships, causing immediate flooding of the two forward boiler rooms and the forward engine room. In the thick of battle, over an hour later, a dive bomber released a bomb that sliced through three decks and exited the ship's side, exploding near the vessel at frame 112. Though the cruiser suffered damage from the bomb's mining effect, by pure luck a compartment containing 3500 gallons of aviation fuel was missed by ten feet. Capt. R. Bentham Simons, the commander of the *RALEIGH*, ordered counterflooding and the jettisoning of topside weights, barely saving the vessel, fighting the ship's inherent construction and defective hatches. Negative buoyancy more important than list, only by lashing a barge alongside was the *RALEIGH* preserved.

Soon after the torpedo struck, the *RALEIGH*'s antiaircraft battery of .50 caliber, 1.1-inch, and 3-inch guns erupted, her gunners eventually assisting in the destruction of five enemy planes...one hitting the USS *CURTISS*...one crashing north of Ford Island...two falling near Pearl City ...another exploding in midair. V.Adm. William Pye, Commander, Battleforce, later commended Capt. Simons and his crew for their aggressive and remedial actions. At sea rather than at berth the ship would have certainly been lost, even though only moderately damaged, but due to quick actions the ship fought and miraculously suffered only a few wounded.

The day after the attack, yard craft and the destroyer tender *WHITNEY* (AD-4) rendered assistance, the tender coming alongside and towing the ship into the Navy Yard for repairs. These took place from 3 January-14 February 1942. On 21 February she departed Pearl Harbor on one engine escorting a five-ship convoy to San Francisco. It was not until 23 July that she cleared Mare Island and with Task Force 15 began convoy escort duty between the West Coast, Hawaii, Samoa, and the Fiji Islands.

In November the *RALEIGH* drew a scouting mission searching for four Japanese picket supposedly operating between the Ellice and Gilbert Islands, and then, the search proving negative, headed for what would prove to be her primary theater of service during World War II-the North Pacific.

On 6 June 1942 the Japanese had invaded Kiska Island in the Aleutian Chain which was the first invasion of the United States since the War of 1812. Originally a feint for their Midway Operation, after the disastrous Battle of Midway the Japanese strongly fortified Kiska and the westernmost island in the chain, Attu. The U.S. Navy efforts in the theater since that time had been sweeping the seas for enemy ships off the islands and bombarding them on a number of occasions.

Arriving in the Aleutian Islands with her sister ship *DETROIT* (CL-8) 24 November she immediately renewed her fundamental search and escort mission. She sought out enemy vessels conveying reinforcements in the area of the Rat, and Near Islands, and escorted supply and troop ships between the main American base of Dutch Harbor and the growing air and naval base on Adak Island. In January 1943 accompanying Task Group 8.6 (R.Adm. Charles "Socrates" McMorris) she covered the occupation of Amchitka Island, and in the abysmal Aleutian weather (6 January, 100-knot winds were recorded at Adak) patrolled off Amchitka and Kiska.

Detached from TG 8.6 10 February, just missing a Japanese air attack that day, she again escorted ships between Dutch Harbor and Adak before finally arriving from Aleutian waters 23 March at Puget Sound Navy Yard for repairs.

Events in the north were gaining momentum when

***RALEIGH* was visited by thousands of interested civilians on Navy Day October 1930. Then six years old, she was relatively new but obsolete compared to other cruisers being designed and built.**

BY KEVIN DON HUTCHISON

RALEIGH **sistership** ***RICHMOND*** **reveals the odd placement of cheek-mounted guns common to the earlier era of cruiser designs.** ***RICHMOND*** **is seen as she was armed in September 1943.**

RALEIGH **would do her fighting in the North Pacific and Bering Sea campaigns.**

the *RALEIGH* departed Puget Sound 22 April. On the first of the month, final orders for the invasion of Attu were issued by Commander-in-Chief, Pacific (Cin CPac), Adm. Chester Nimitz and Western Defense Commander, Gen. John DeWitt. The day before she sailed R.Adm. Thomas Kinkaid, Commander, North Pacific Forces (ComNorPac), issued the Attu invasion operation order. The invasion which would occur on 11 May necessitated the movement north of tens of US Navy craft — battleships, cruisers, destroyers, destroyer escorts, oilers — and the *RALEIGH* was one of them. But she was not destined to assist in the invasion but to cover it. Arriving at Adak the 28th she joined Task Group 16.6 whose mission it was to cover the approaches to the Near Islands and the southern approaches to Kiska.

Likewise, the *RALEIGH* did not participate in the invasion of Kiska 15 August. After Attu was secured 29 May with the loss of 549 Americans, Kiska was invaded 15 August. The Japanese had escaped destruction by their evacuation 29 July, but the island was not declared secure until 22 August. In the foggy interim, 28 Americans were killed and 54 wounded. The *RALEIGH* had contributed to the 2 August bombardment of Gertrude Cove and blasted enemy positions on Kiska again 12 August. After the bombardment, however, she departed northern waters before the invasion for San Francisco.

She again headed for the Aleutians 15 September and resumed her escort and patrol duties, sweeping the sea from Kiska to west of Attu. This she continued during the horrific Aleutian weather of the next four months. Her next mission, however, was not only of historical significance, but allowed her crew members aboard during the Pearl Harbor attack to even the score. It was the *RALEIGH*'s next duty to expose the Japanese Homeland to its first taste of what the Japanese forces had portioned out to so many others. *RALEIGH*'s next mission was to participate in the first surface bombardment of Japan in World War II.

In a 7 January 1944 message, Adm. Nimitz ordered new ComNorPac V.Adm. Frank Jack Fletcher to attack the Japanese Kurile Islands. The northernmost islands of Shimushu and Paramushiru had been the staging and supply area for Japanese actions on and around the Aleutian Islands. As the "Great Northern Shield" of Japan the islands had been heavily fortified since before the war to defend the Homeland from the Soviet Union or the United States. Now what had been a rear area would become the front line in the North Pacific theater until August 1945.

The main problem for American offensive actions was that little was known about the islands or the enemy's defenses there. Information for ships sailing in the region was based almost exclusively on the *Asiatic Pilot* which was derived from an 1897 text by Capt. H.J. Snow, *Notes on the Kurile Islands*. Aerial reconnaissance photographs were required, but the round-trip distance of 1300 miles in nearly constant fog using the navigational equipment of the day was a challenge. Flights could circle for hours in the thick cloud cover and return unsuccessful. Weather was capricious to the extremes, with rain, sleet, ice and snow all possible in an hour's time.

While submarines had been observing the islands since April 1942, their shores and what they contained remained an enigma. S-35 had returned 30 December to Dutch Harbor after patrolling the Ominato-Mushashi-Kashiwabara shipping lanes for twelve days. A typically arduous S-boat mission, she had returned unsuccessfully from a mission that included freezing conditions in deep fog and 20 hours of repairs off the Kamchatka coast. On the way to her patrol zone, S-45 lost an antenna 12 January. Like S-35, S-45's captain, Cmdr. Robert Calwell failed to destroy any enemy shipping, and after observing the activity at the southeastern tip of Paramushiru (Kurabu Zaki) for several days, reported to Attu on the 28th.

R.Adm. Wilder Dupey Baker, a 1914 graduate of the Naval Academy and veteran of L-Boat service off Ireland in the First World War, was the commander of Task Group 94.6. With the knowledge of enemy mining of the destroyer *ABNER ROAD*

(DD-526) off Kiska in August 1943, the erratic currents and the offshore submarine pinnacles and volcanic ridges off Paramushiru were not all that concerned Baker. When Lt. Tom McKelvey of Fleet Air Wing Four returned with the first aerial photos of Kurabu Zaki 22 January, possible coastal gun positions at the peninsula's tip were revealed along with the snowy outline of a hitherto unverified airfield. This was the fourth major airfield that was known to the Americans, and Baker's task group had no air cover.

Task Group 94.6 consisted of the *Fletcher*-class destroyers *PICKING* (DD-685), *SPROSTON* (DD-577), *WICKES* (DD-578), *YOUNG* (DD-580), *CHARLES J. BADGER* (DD-657), *LUCE* (DD-521) and *KIMBERLY* (DD-522), and the First World War-era *OMAHA* (CL-4)-class light cruisers *RALEIGH* and her sister ship *RICHMOND* (CL-9). *RICHMOND* would be Baker's flagship in the coming action, and to avoid enemy aircraft the force would sail to full speed after attack. They would rely on surprise to prevent the enemy's aircraft from being warmed up and ready to respond.

At a meeting of task group commanders 30 January on Attu, problems which had been revealed during the gunnery exercises and special formation practice off Adak Island earlier in the month was discussed. All available information that could be culled and verified was presented to the commanders. This included aerial photos, submarine reports, Soviet merchantship notes and prisoner-of-war sources. To avoid Japanese intelligence gains in case any of the ships were lost during the action, Baker had ordered that all secret publications and correspondence be left at Adak. The task group would sortie Massacre Bay, Attu, the evening of 1 February. Without auxiliaries or support vessels, the task group was to fill any supply or fueling needs in the interim and make all preparations for battle.

Unknown to Baker, at Kashiwabara Wan, Paramushiru and Kataoka Naval Base, Shimushu, was moored the Japanese Fifth Fleet (21st Cruiser Squadron and 1st Destroyer Squadron). Understrength with the departure of the 21st Destroyer Division and the yet to arrive 7th Destroyer Division, the Fifth Fleet, if able to get steam up in time to intercept Baker's return, would be a force approximately half the American's strength. V.Adm. Michitaro Totsuka, the Northeast Area Fleet commander, had retained only one fighter squadron in the Northern Kuriles over the winter. His air assets would not reach full capacity until the end of April. The waters off Kurabu Zaki were not mined as Baker feared, but the defenses probably did include eight coastal batteries with six searchlights to direct them. The Japanese expected an American invasion in Spring and were just beginning to be reinforced, but due to the arduous conditions and expense of manning the Northern Kuriles in winter the area was maintained at a weakened state in this period with confidence that American maneuvers were unlikely in that season.

The captain of the *Raleigh* was now Capt. Albert T. Sprague, a forty-five-year-old graduate of the 1919 class of the Naval Academy. Born in Massachusetts, and twenty-eighth of the 199 graduates of his academy class, Sprague would twice earn the Legion of Merit in his career and eventually retire as a rear admiral. The *RALEIGH* would join with Baker's flagship the *RICHMOND* (Capt. W.A.S. Macklin) to form Task Unit 94.6.1. The goal of the coming attack strategically would be to divert Japanese attention from events in the South and Central Pacific theaters (specifically the invasion of the Marshall Islands) and damage the facilities and morale of Japanese troops in the Northern Kuriles.

The cruisers and destroyers of the task group steamed a course to well south of Paramushiru in order to mislead any Japanese observers that the unit's target was the mid-Kurile island of Matsuwa. The sea was moderate to rough as the task group sailed to their designated point, just previous to the bombardment becoming calm, as did the weather. At the approach to Paramushiru, the forecastles of the American ships were all bright white due to the ice formed by the high speed of their maneuvers. The gun houses and masts of Task Unit 94.6.3 (the *PICKING*, the *SPROSTON*, the *YOUNG*, and the *WICKES*) 10,000 yards in the lead could be clearly seen. A three-quarter moon in the cloudless sky revealed the cape as a snow-covered level stretch of land, markedly hilly along its central axis. No movement nor lights could be observed on the enemy shore prior to the bombard-

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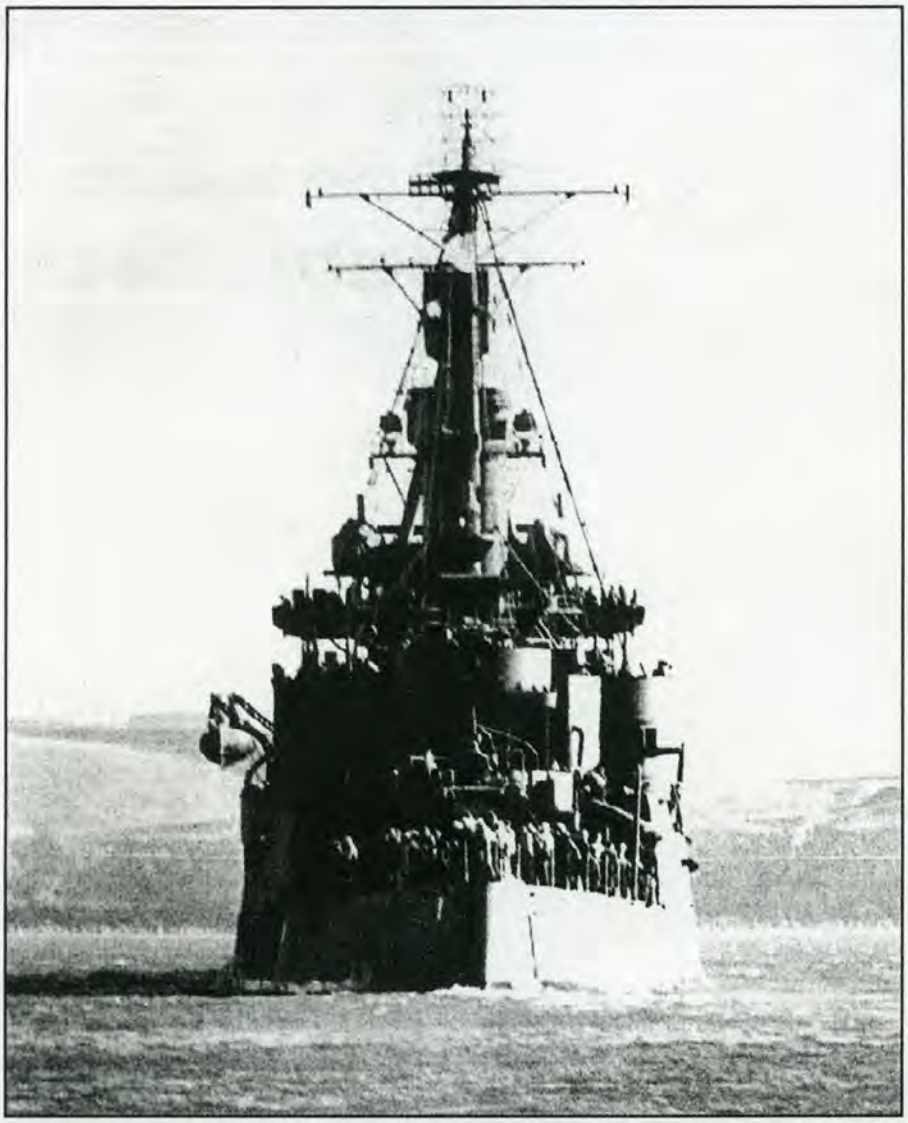


A 1942 stern view of the *RALEIGH* reveals her low aft freeboard, one of the features that earned this class' reputation for being extremely "wet" vessels for their size.

ment, but the intensity of the moonlight had to have revealed the Americans to the Japanese if they had been prepared.

Just minutes before the bombardment commenced, a search with binoculars along the coast identified a 5000-ton merchantship standing down close inshore, five miles distance to the north. No response from either ship or shore would prove that the enemy was completely surprised.

At zero minute the calm of the North Pacific night was torn in an instant as American 5- and 6-inch shells boiled up from their barrels. Great arches of light traced the path of the trajectories only to terminate in flashing orbs on the enemy shore. The coastal batteries on the cape's tip were the target of the opening salvos of the *RALEIGH* and the *RICHMOND*, as the *CHARLES J. BADGER*, the *LUCE* and the *KIMBERLY* (Task Unit 94.6.2) distributed their fire between the canneries at 0 Zaki point and the coastal revetments between them. As the *RICHMOND* shifted her fire north of the revetment area, *RALEIGH* continued to fire at the coastal batteries until the destroyers which had swept the harbor (the *YOUNG*, *WICKES*, *PICKING* and *SPROSTON* or Task Unit 94.6.3) commenced fire on that target. The targets that the gun crews knew so well from the aerial photographs appeared as "a churning mass of snow and debris" as the merchantship which was now close inshore began firing machine guns at the Americans.

RICHMOND dealt with the attack with a four-shell salvo which hulled the maru from stem to stern, just as the *CHARLES J. BADGER* claimed a torpedo hit astern on the merchantship. The trail of heavy black smoke from the enemy stack immediately changed to billows of steam as the ship swung hard to port, growing flames licking from her forward hold.

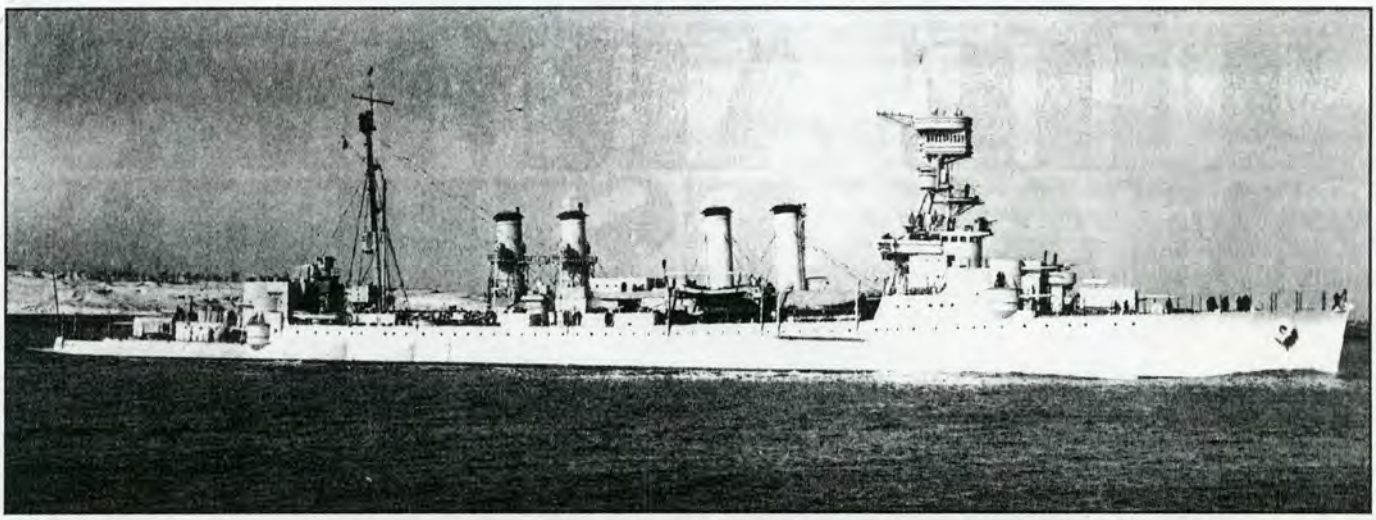
The *RALEIGH* continued her heavy fire from her "twin sixes," when approximately ten minutes after the bombardment began three splashes of 4- to 5-inch fire were observed off *RICHMOND*'s port quarter which seemed directed at the *RALEIGH*. No exploding on impact, one of the shells were 300 yards short, the other pair short by one thousand yards.

By fifteen minutes after the bombardment had commenced the *RALEIGH*'s shells on the cape's battery created a fire which increased and grew until it and the blazing merchantship were the largest fires on Paramushiru's coast. Judged to be fuel tank, this fire with its reflection on the clouds was visible twenty miles seaward and was reported still burning five hours later from aerial reconnaissance.

RALEIGH fired 532 6-inch rounds of the 5745 rounds of 3-, 5-, and 6-inch shells fired in the first bombardment of Japan. Approximately 141 tons of projectiles were directed at the target 1280 miles north of Tokyo destroying a merchantship, fostering a number of fires and originating multiple secondary explosions. By emerging unexpectantly from the midst of a freezing night, the Americans suffered no damage or casualties. The only difficulty were gun crew members who collapsed due to excessive gun smoke in the gun mounts.

On the 14th of February the Japanese Army General Staff directed the Northern Army commander Lt. Gen. Kiichiro Higuchi to defend sea bases in the Kurile Islands by building small boat shelters and storage facilities along the sea line of communications. Vichy radio reported that a Japanese communique stated that the invasion of the Kurile Islands was under way. The Chinese newspaper Takungpao speculated that the Japanese fleet would soon battle the Americans in large-scale action and be destroyed. And on 7 February V.Adm. Fletcher congratulated all the crews of Task Group 94.6 "...whose combined efforts assured (the) first naval surface ship bombardment (of) Japanese territory during this war..."

The *RALEIGH* was headed back stateside, however, after touching at Attu 5 February. Capt. Sprague would enjoy his forty-sixth birthday



at Puget Sound Navy Yard, the *RALEIGH* undergoing a three-month overhaul before rejoining *FLETCHER*'s North Pacific force. The crew did not know then that it was the *RALEIGH*'s fate to never again participate in combat. Rendezvousing with Task Force 94 in Massacre Bay the 6th of June, she suffered a casualty to her number two main engine while en route to bombard Matsuwa Island 13 June. She was unable to assist her sister ships *CONCORD* (CL-10) and *DETROIT* as they rained 854 6-inch rounds onto the teardrop-shaped isle.

Following repairs at Puget Sound, she departed Seattle 22 June, finally arriving at the United States Naval Academy where she would conduct two midshipman cruises. The fleet was now filled with ever-growing numbers of ships, the shipyards in the United States now at full capacity. *RALEIGH* was no longer needed. She earned three battle stars in World War II and took her last cruise in the Philadelphia Navy Yard.

On 2 November 1945 she was decommissioned and on the 28th of November struck from the Navy list. She was sold as scrap 27 February 1946.

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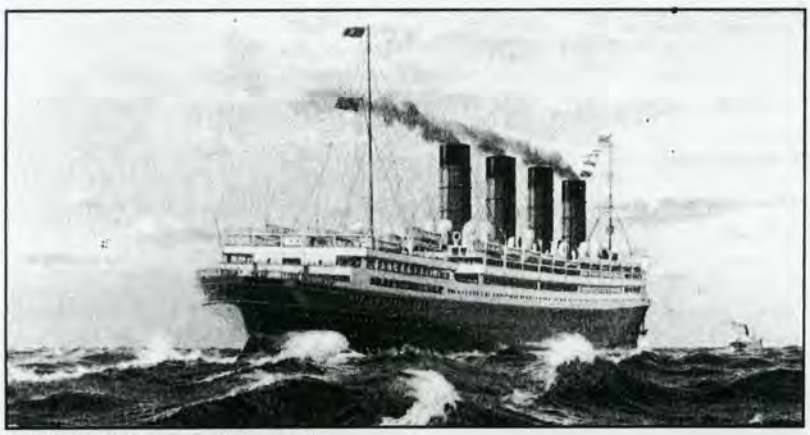

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