

HISTORY OF USS BURNS (DD 588)

The war history of USS BURNS reads like the story of the American offensive in the Pacific. From the first major carrier raid on Wake Island in October 1943 to the final Japanese surrender, BURNS participated in almost every major operation.

For almost two years this sleek 2,100-ton FLETCHER Class destroyer ranged up, down, and across the vast Pacific, piling up over 250,000 miles on her log, the equivalent of ten trips around the world. She earned for her officers and men the right to wear nine battle stars on their Asiatic-Pacific Area Service Ribbon, and two on the Philippine Liberation Ribbon, plus 30 awards and decorations including one Navy Cross and two Silver Stars.

Second destroyer to bear the name, DD-588 was launched on 8 August 1942, with Mrs. Harry L. Smith, great granddaughter of Captain Otway Burns in whose honor the ship was named, acting as sponsor. The ship's namesake, Captain Burns, was born in 1775 at Queens Creek, North Carolina, and died in 1850 at Portsmouth, North Carolina. This gallant skipper made a name for himself in the War of 1812 while in command of the letter of marque SNAP DRAGON, during which time he had several encounters with British men-o'-war, taking 15 prizes, one of which had a cargo valued at \$350,000. From 1821 to 1834 he served in the General Assembly of North Carolina. In 1935 he was appointed by President Jackson as keeper of Brant Island Shoal Light, which position he held until his death.

The first BURNS (DD 171), a four stack destroyer, was commissioned on 7 August 1919 and later converted into a light minelayer, the DM-11. She had a normal displacement of 1,191 tons, an overall length of 314 feet 4 inches, and a speed of 33 knots. She was stricken from the Naval Vessels Register on 18 November 1930, and disposed of on 22 April 1932 in accordance with the London Treaty for the limitation and reduction of naval armament.

After her commissioning at Charleston, South Carolina, on 3 April 1943, and a sound 6-weeks' shakedown in the Guantanamo Bay area, the new BURNS, Commander (now Captain) Donald T. Eller, USN, commanding, steamed westward through the Panama Canal for action against the enemy. After a few preliminary operations in the Gilbert Islands and the Bismarck Archipelago, she was assigned to duty with the now famous Task Force 38/58; and during the next ten months of nerve-wracking activity, she participated in some 20 operations, acting as anti-submarine

escort, picket ship, fighter-director ship, and aircraft rescue vessel, while the task force struck by sea and air against nearly all the major Jap bastions in the Pacific -- the Marshall Islands, Truk, the Marianas, Iwo Jima, Yap, Palau, Ponape, New Guinea, Okinawa, Formosa and the Philippines.

The dramatic story of BURNS's first big chance begins shortly after mid-night on 30 January 1944..... Returning from rescuing some downed carrier airmen off Kwajalein in the Marshalls, she encountered a 4-ship enemy convoy steaming along under cover of darkness. It was a black, moonless night with heavy rain clouds and occasional showers. Visibility was limited to 1,000 yards, seas moderate, winds northeast at 15 knots.

At 0025 radar contact was made on an unidentified target, range 20,000 yards, at which time only one target contact was made. CIC immediately commenced tracking the target, which was first expected to be a rain cloud in as much as several cloud echoes had been tracked and ranges were erratic. The target was moving in the direction of the wind at about wind speed. As Task Group 58.2 was in the area the possibility of the target being that force was considered. BURNS went to General Quarters at 0042, the target then appearing to divide into two parts. The young officer of the deck standing his underway watch on the bridge, asked the skipper, "Shall I order flank speed and try to slip through them, sir?"

But Commander Eller had no such conservative intention. "Slip through them, my foot," he said. "I've been waiting for a chance like this for years, and we're not going to run for it now."

Turning up 25 knots he proceeded northwest of the target, made a turn to the right, trained the five-inch battery to port and prepared to join action. His ship was then in the most advantageous and strategic position for attack. He was able to blanket fire from the most distant ship as well as take advantage from any "overs".

At 0047 BURNS reduced speed to 20 knots. Sixteen minutes later --0103-- she commenced the death run, loaded the main battery and called the unknown ships on the TBS, reporting her bearing from the target and that fire was about to be opened. Task Group 58.2 was heard intermittently on the TBS immediately prior to this challenge which was made as a safety measure. It was now up to whoever or whatever was out there in the darkness to answer up.

BURNS bored in. Range decreased. All hands were alert, tense, impatient. But it was a black night--impenetrably black--and the target was not visible to the naked eye. Yet the target was there; CIC had determined its course and speed. It was just a matter of minutes.

At 0107 the range stood at 9,000 yards--the time had come.

BURNS' five 5-inch 38's split the night with flame and steel, and almost immediately a sheet of flame rose in the distance. A dead-on hit had been made on what later turned out to be a Jap tanker. As the range grew closer, light machine gun fire was observed returning from the target. Four minutes later, range 6,000 yards, BURNS' gunners shifted to the second target, a medium AK, and set it on fire. Determined to make a clean sweep of it, BURNS then devastated a third target, using her 20 MM and 40 MM AA guns as well as her main battery. Three minutes later she finished off a fourth target which exploded and sank immediately. With one ship sunk and three burning, BURNS illuminated with her searchlight and looked for more game. But she had made a clean sweep, dividing the seas evenly with the sons of Nippon--awarding to them the bottom half.

This action took 34 minutes from the time BURNS opened fire until she ceased fire. The score: 1 medium oiler, 1 medium cargo ship, 2 small cargo ships or escort ships.

BURNS rejoined her group the following morning with a broom flying proudly from her masthead indicating that a "clean sweep" had been made, and as she went alongside the battleship IOWA to fuel that day, the "Battlin' BURNS" was given a lusty ovation by the crew of the super-battlewagon.

Shortly thereafter, during the first carrier raid on Truk in the Carolines, the "588" added to her fighting reputation by her single-handed sinking of a 180-foot Jap sub chaser on patrol within sight of Truk. BURNS then lowered one of her boats and took half a dozen reluctant prisoners from the water, right under the noses of the garrison on Truk.

Upon joining a special striking unit a short time later, she engaged in a one-sided gun and torpedo battle with Jap warships attempting to escape from Truk, now already reeling under the blow of Task Force 58's air arm, and earned for herself an "assist" in the sinking of a Jap cruiser, a destroyer and a minesweeper. In these two skirmishes alone, BURNS' captain and crew received 18 awards, including a Navy Cross for "Skipper" Eller and a Silver Star for her Gunnery Officer, Lieutenant James P. Jamison, USN.

Not only in Gunnery did BURNS prove herself worthy of her association with the slugging THIRD Fleet. As picket ship and fighter director ship during an air-strike on the Marianas, she sent out her combat air patrol of two fighters to down four unsuspecting enemy planes as the carrier task force surged ahead toward its objective.

When assigned the duty of escort commander to screen the retirement of two of our crippled cruisers which had taken aerial torpedoes off Formosa, BURNS did such a commendable job that her second skipper, Commander Jacob T. Bullen, Jr., USN, was awarded the Silver Star.

Not satisfied that her reputation should depend entirely on her record of destruction, the destroyer also turned in many commendable performances as a rescue ship. Time and time again she sped to the rescue of hapless pilots forced to make water landings.

Early in January 1945, while enroute to Lingayen Gulf, to support the invasion of Luzon with the SEVENTH Fleet, the escort carrier unit, of which BURNS was a part, was attacked by Kamikaze aircraft which managed to score a suicide hit on OMMANEY BAY. The resultant fires swept out of control and internal explosions rocked the bomb-laden vessel. BURNS lowered both boats to rescue survivors who began pouring over the side of the stricken carrier as soon as the "abandon ship signal" was given. She and her gallant sister ship USS BELL, then proceeded alongside the disintegrating escort carrier to recover any personnel remaining aboard.

After all survivors had been removed, a sizeable explosion rocked OMMANEY BAY, showering the destroyers with flying steel and hot debris. Fortunately neither vessel received serious injury. During this rescue work, BURNS took aboard over 160 survivors and her boats had delivered many others to nearby vessels. In addition, her whaleboat crew had boarded the whaleboat of another ship which was running in circles after its crew had been killed by the same explosion which rocked the destroyers. Finally, after rescue work was completed and darkness had set in, BURNS sent a single torpedo into the flaming hulk sending it to the bottom lest anything be left for the Japs to salvage.

After the landings had been consolidated at Lingayen Gulf, during which time BURNS survived several Kamikaze attacks and added another plane to her total, she received her long-awaited orders to return to the United States for a badly needed overhaul and rehabilitation period for her war-weary crew after 19 months in the Pacific.

Six weeks at Seattle, Washington, afforded her crew opportunity for brief, but long-awaited leaves.

Mid-May found the renovated ship back in the Pacific war zone. Reassigned to the SEVENTH Fleet, she participated in the bombardment and occupation of Borneo at Brunei Bay and Balikpapan. When the first news of surrender came, BURNS was doing special escort duty east of the Philippines.

Final surrender saw BURNS heading into the Yellow Sea of China to support our forces of occupation in the Korea and China area. Here she earned a "well done" for her work in sighting and destroying by gunfire 28 drifting mines as the task force patrolled the Yellow Sea.

After the landings in Korea were accomplished, BURNS steamed across the Yellow Sea to the famous pre-war summer resort city of Tsingtao, China, in advance of the occupation forces. Here she acted in a protective and diplomatic capacity as a liaison vessel with the few American occupation teams already ashore who were supervising the evacuation of civilian internees and paving the way for the landings by the SIXTH Marine Division. BURNS also took control of six prize Japanese held merchant ships.

Following the landings by the U.S. occupation forces, the bluejackets swarmed ashore on liberty, practically on the heels of the invading marines.

With the main pressure of occupation support off, DD-588 settled down to routine duties with the North China Fleet. Mail runs and escort trips through the Yellow Sea were separated by periods at anchor in Tsingtao, Shanghai, and Jinsen.

In December 1945, USS BURNS set course from China for the West Coast of the United States. Following her return to the United States, the ship operated briefly on the West Coast, and on 25 June 1946 she was placed out of commission in reserve in the San Diego Group, Pacific Reserve Fleet.

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COMMANDING OFFICERS

Commander D.T. Eller, USN	- 3 April 1943 to 29 July 1944
Commander J.T. Bullen, Jr., USN	- 29 July 1944 to 4 August 1945
Commander H.F. Wells, USN	- 4 August 1945 -----

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USS BURNS (DD 588) earned ten battle stars on the Asiatic-Pacific Area Service Ribbon for participating in the following operations or engagements.

- 1 star/Pacific Raids - 1943
 - Wake Island Raid - 5-6 October 1943
- 1 star/Gilbert Islands Operation - 13 November to 8 December 1943
- 1 star/Marshall Islands Operation - 1943-1944
 - Occupation of Kwajalein and Majuro Atolls - 29 January to 8 February 1944
- 1 star/Asiatic-Pacific Raids - 1944
 - Truk Attack - 16-17 February 1944
 - Palau, Yap, Ulithi, Woleai Raid - 30 March to 1 April 1944
 - Truk, Satawan, Ponape Raid - 29 April to 1 May 1944
- 1 star/Western New Guinea Operations - 1944
 - Hollandia Operation - 21 April to 1 June 1944
 - Morotai Landings - 15 September 1944
- 1 star/Marianas Operation - 1944
 - First Bonins Raid - 15-16 June 1944
 - Battle of Philippine Sea - 19-20 June 1944
 - Second Bonins Raid - 24 June 1944
 - Third Bonins Raid - 3-4 July 1944
 - Capture and Occupation of Saipan - 11 June to 10 August 1944
 - Capture and Occupation of Guam - 12 July to 15 August 1944
 - Palau, Yap, Ulithi Raid - 25-27 July 1944
 - Fourth Bonins Raid - 4-5 August 1944
- 1 star/Western Caroline Islands Operation - 1944
 - Capture and Occupation of Southern Palau Islands - 6 September to 14 October 1944
 - Assaults on the Philippine Islands - 9-24 September 1944
- 1 star/Leyte Operation - 1944
 - Third Fleet Supporting Operations Okinawa Attack - 10/10/44
 - Northern Luzon and Formosa Attacks - 11-14 October 1944
 - Luzon Attacks - 15, 17-19 October; 5-6, 13-14, 19-25 November; 14-16 December 1944
 - Battle of Leyte Gulf - 24-26 October 1944
- 1 star/Luzon Operation - 1944-1945
 - Lingayen Gulf Landing - 4-18 January 1945
- 1 star/Borneo Operation - 1945
 - Brunei Bay Operation - 7 June to 15 July 1945
 - Balikpapan Operation - 15 June to 20 July 1945

STATISTICS

STANDARD DISPLACEMENT - 2,050 tons	ARMAMENT - Six 5"/38 calibre batteries, ten 21" Quin. torpedo tubes, and 40 - and 20 MM AA guns.
LENGTH OVERALL - 376 feet 6 inches	
BEAM - 39 feet 4 inches	
COMPLEMENT - 300 plus officers and men	SPEED - 35 plus knots

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(Stencilled 16 March 1949)