

Captain Daniel J. Callaghan – the Rest of the Story

By Joe Winkel

Visitors to the Potomac get some information about Captain Callaghan from the panel in the officers' quarters. They see that he was President Roosevelt's Naval Aide from July, 1938 to May, 1941; that he subsequently lost his life while on the bridge of the [USS San Francisco](#) commanding a task force in the South Pacific that became engaged off Savo Island during the [Guadalcanal Campaign](#) and that he received the Medal of Honor posthumously.

We can learn more about the man himself by considering two documents: the letter that FDR wrote when releasing him to take command of the USS San Francisco and the text of the citation awarding him the Medal of Honor. And, to complete the story, we can look to his legacy.

Naval Aide to FDR



When appointed Naval Aide on the recommendation of FDR's personal physician Admiral Ross McIntyre, Callaghan held the rank of Commander. It was not until October of 1938 that he would receive his promotion to Captain. That Captain Callaghan, who would turn out to be one of FDR's longest serving Aides and who could be frequently found

cruising on the Potomac with him, earned the deepest respect of the President is clear from what he wrote:

It is with great regret that I am letting Captain Callaghan leave as my Naval Aide. He has given every satisfaction and has performed duties of many varieties with tact and real efficiency. He has shown a real understanding of the many problems of the service within itself and in relationship to the rest of Government.

The Medal of Honor

In April 1942, Callaghan was promoted to the rank of Rear Admiral and appointed Chief of Staff to the Commander, South Pacific Force. Killed in action a few months later, the Citation accompanying the Medal of Honor awarded to him posthumously for his actions while serving as Task Group Commander sets out the circumstances of the engagement and the character of Admiral Callaghan:

For extraordinary heroism and conspicuous intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty during action against enemy Japanese forces off [Savo Island](#) on the night of 12-13 November 1942. Although out-balanced in strength and numbers by a desperate and determined enemy, Rear Admiral Callaghan, with ingenious tactical skill and superb coordination of the units under his command, led his forces into battle against tremendous odds, thereby contributing decisively to the rout of a powerful invasion fleet and to the consequent frustration of a formidable Japanese offensive. While faithfully directing close-range operations in the face of furious bombardment by the superior enemy fire power, he was killed on the bridge of his Flagship. His courageous initiative, inspiring leadership, and judicious foresight in a crisis of grave responsibility were in keeping with the finest traditions of the United States Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life in the defense of his country.



At that time, he became the third US Navy admiral killed in action during World War II. The first two were fellow Rear Admirals Norman Scott, earlier in the same engagement, and Isaac Kidd, killed on the bridge of the USS Arizona at Pearl Harbor.

His Legacy

Named in his honor are Callaghan Hall at Officer Training Command, Newport, Rhode Island and Admiral Callaghan Lane in Vallejo, California. A monument at Lands End, San Francisco (including part of the bridge of the USS San Francisco) honors him and his comrades.

The rest of the story is that two US destroyers were named after Admiral Callaghan. The first so named was commissioned November 27, 1943 and carried the designation DD792. This USS Callaghan carries the unique distinction of being the last destroyer to be lost in World War II. Ironically, she was lost off Okinawa while on radar picket duty when hit by a kamikaze plane on July 28, 1945 - less than two hours before she was to be relieved by another ship in order to return to the States for an overhaul.

The Last Destroyer
The Story of the USS Callaghan



The second was commissioned August 29, 1981 and carried the designation DDG-994. This USS Callaghan was of a class of ships designed for air defense in hot weather. Originally the ship was ordered by the Shah of Iran, but was undelivered when the 1979 Iranian Revolution occurred. The U.S. Navy elected to commission her and her sister ships for service in the Persian Gulf and Mediterranean Sea since they were equipped with heavy-duty air conditioning. In addition, they were also well suited to filtering sand and any results from NBC (Nuclear, Biological, Chemical) warfare.

On September 1, 1983 the Callaghan was on deployment to the Western Pacific and making a port visit in Japan. Korean Air Lines Flight 007, on its way from Anchorage,



Alaska to Seoul, Korea, carrying 269 passengers and crew, strayed into Soviet airspace. A Soviet fighter jet was sent up to destroy the intruding Boeing 747. After the attack, the Callaghan's crew was recalled and sent to search for survivors. During its survey of the crash site, the Callaghan was under very close scrutiny by the Soviet Navy, narrowly avoid-

ing open conflict while engaged in their search. No survi-

The Callaghan received a Meritorious Unit Citation from the U.S. Navy and a special citation from the South Korean government for its role in the mission.

In the years following she earned two Battle Efficiency awards and the Humanitarian Service Medal for saving two boatloads of people in the South China Sea. She was decommissioned on March 31, 1998. Sold to the Republic of China in 2004, she spent almost two years of refitting and training in the U.S. before becoming a commissioned naval vessel of the Republic of China.



The Second USS Callaghan, DDG-994