

THE (DM)'s DESTROYER MINELAYERS
By Charles D. Nichols (DM-29)

On 24 June 1944, CinCPac Fleet Admiral Nimitz expressed to CoMinCh, Fleet Admiral King, the need for 12 (35+Knot) destroyer type minelayers. Support ships trained in all aspects of mine warfare having great firepower. The fire power that could give dedicated protection to our minesweepers in Japanese waters. He recommended using 2200-ton destroyer hulls, then under construction. Admiral Nimitz wanted provisions to carry 120 MK6 mines and the removal of all torpedo tubes for weight compensation. These new (DM)'s to be ready for service in the Pacific by February 1945. CoMinCh directed that the conversion of the 12 Sumner Class destroyers be completed by 1 November 1944.

The **USS Robert H. Smith (DM23)**, the first in this class of 12 ships for Mine Squadron Three, was commissioned on 4 August 1944. This squadron was made up by Mine Division Seven which consisted of the **USS Robert H. Smith (DM 23)**, **USS Thomas E. Fraser (DM 24)**, **USS Shannon (DM 25)**, and the **USS Harry F. Bauer (DM 26)**. Mine Division Eight was composed of the **USS Adams (DM- 27)**, **USS Tolman (DM-28)**, **USS Henry A. Wiley (DM 29)**, and the **USS Shea (DM 30)**. Mine Division Nine, the last group in this squadron, included the **J. William Ditter (DM-31)**, **USS Lindsey (DM 32)**, **USS Gwin (DM 33)**, and the **USS Aaron Ward (DM 34)**.

All 12 DM's in the Mine Squadron Three, performed their assigned duties in the highest traditions of the United States Service. Out of 43 Presidential Unit Citations awarded to destroyers in WW II, three awards went to DM's in Mine Squadron Three. From this squadron four DM's received the Navy Unit Commendation out of 53 awards given to destroyer type ships. Then too, it must be pointed out that six of these 12 DM's did not see combat until the Okinawa Campaign. Collectively this squadron destroyed a grand total of 140 enemy aircraft. An outstanding record indeed.

ROBERT E SMITH - DM 23. Launched on 25 May 1944 at the Bath Iron Works Corp. in Bath, Maine as DD 735. Redesignated on 19 July 1944 as DM-23 and commissioned 4 August 1944. Saw combat at both Iwo Jima and Okinawa. Credited with downing 5 enemy aircraft and earning 5 battle stars.

THOMAS E. FRASER- DM 24. Launched on 10 June 1944 at the Bath Iron Works Corp. in Bath, Maine as DD-736. Reclassified on 20 July 1944 as DM-24 and commissioned 22 August 1944. Saw combat at both Iwo Jima and Okinawa. Credited with 12 enemy aircraft. Received 3 battle stars.

SHANNON - DM 25. Launched on 24 June 1944 at Bath Iron Works Corp. in Bath, Maine as DD-737. Reclassified as DM-25 on 19 July 1944 and commissioned 8 September 1944. Saw combat at both Iwo Jima and Okinawa. Destroyed 10 enemy aircraft. Served as Flagship Mine Division Seven.

Returned to the United States in October 1945 to join Division Two in the Atlantic Fleet.

HARRY F. BAUER - DM 26. Launched on 9 July 1944 at the Bath Iron Works Corp. in Bath, Main as DD-738. Redesignated as DM-26 and was commissioned on 22 September 1944. Saw combat at both Iwo Jima and Okinawa. Credited with 18 enemy aircraft, earned 4 battle stars. Hit by enemy plane flooding two compartments where an unexploded 250Kg bomb was found in one of them. Was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation.

ADAMS - DM 27. Launched on 23 July 1944 at the Bath Iron Works Corp., in Bath Maine as DD-739. Was reclassified as DM-27 and commissioned on 10 October 1944. Saw combat at Okinawa. Was hit by enemy Kamikaze aircraft, 12 killed.

Received 2 battle stars and was awarded the Navy Unit Commendation.

TOLMAN - DM 28. Launched on 13 August 1944 at the Bath Iron Works Corp. in Bath, Maine as DD-740. Was redesignated as DM-28 and commissioned on 27 October 1944. Saw combat at Okinawa. Splashed 7 enemy aircraft and earned one battle star.

HENRY A. WILEY - DM 29. Launched on 21 APRIL 1944 at the Bethlehem Steel Co. in Staten Island, NY as DD-749. Was reclassified as DM-29 on 20 July 1944 and commissioned 31 August 1944. Saw combat at Iwo Jima and Okinawa. Credited with 15 enemy aircraft and 2 Baka Bombs. Had 3 men wounded by friendly fire and earned 4 battle stars. Was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation with Star.

SHEA - DM30 Launched on 29 May 1944 at the Bethlehem Steel Co. in Staten Island, NY as DD-750. Was reclassified as DM-30 and commissioned on 30 September 1944. Saw combat at Okinawa. Credited with 14 enemy aircraft. Was hit by a Baka Bomb, 27 killed, 91 wounded. Earned one battle star and awarded the Navy Unit Commendation.

J. WILLIAM DITTER – DM31 Launched on 4 July 1944 at the Bethlehem Steel Co. in Staten Island, NY as DD-751. Was reclassified on 20 July 1944 as DM-31 and commissioned 28 October 1944. Saw combat at Okinawa, Credited with 14 enemy aircraft. Was hit one Kamikaze, many unknown casualties. Received one battle star and the Navy Unit Commendation.

LINDSEY – DM32 Launched 5 March 1944 at Bethlehem Steel Co. in San Pedro, California as DD-771. Was redesignated as DM-32 on 19 July 1944 and commissioned 20 August 1944. Saw combat at both Iwo Jima and Okinawa. Was hit by 2 Kamikaze planes that took off her bow. There were 57 killed and 57 wounded. Earned 2 battle stars,

QUIN – DM 33. Launched on 9 April 1944 at Bethlehem Steel Co. in San Pedro, Calif. As DD-772. Reclassified as DM-33 and commissioned 30 September 1944. Saw combat at Okinawa. Credited with 16 enemy planes. Was hit by one Kamikaze killing 2, injuring 11 and 2 are missing. Earned 4 battle stars and received the Navy Unit Commendation.

AARON WARD – DM 34. Launched 5 May 1944 at Bethlehem Steel Co. in San Pedro, California as DD-743. On 19 July was reclassified as DM-34 and commissioned 28 October 1944. Saw combat at Okinawa. Destroyed a total of 17 enemy aircraft. Was hit by 6 of these Kamikaze planes killing 23 with undisclosed number of wounded, 17 missing. Awarded the Presidential Unit Citation.

None of these ships in this class remain. All have been removed from the Naval Register and sold to salvage or sold to foreign governments. Their collective exemplary service may seldom be exceeded.

References:

1. Navy Department – Office of Public Information.
2. Captain Paul H. Bjarnason, US Navy

In approximately 1995 this report was prepared by:

Charles D. “Boats” Nichols -- BM1C, Oneonta, NY, Reported to the USS Henry A. Wiley in May, 1944 and departed the ship in December of 1946. His battle station: Mount Captain 26/28. He enlisted in the US Navy in 1941. He served on the USS Robinson DD562 in 1951-53 during the Korean conflict. His professional career was in education and retired as Professor Emeritus of Industrial Technology at the State University College of Technology at Delhi, NY. “Boats” loved the Wiley and the Reunions and died in August of 2000.