



# USS RADFORD

## Newsletter

### 2023 Special Edition

**This special edition of the USS RADFORD Newsletter is devoted to our ship, and some of the stories about her. I hope these accounts, that you may have never heard before, shed new light on our wonderful old ship.**

- **The story of our ship from the Naval History and Heritage Command entitled “USS Radford (DD-446) – A History” is a wonderful chronology of the Radford from that second day in October, 1941 when her keel was laid down in New Jersey to her final day on November 10 1969.**
- **An article titled “This Destroyer Did the US Proud Through Three Wars.” written by Kris Osborn, President & Founder of the Center for Military Modernization, provides us with his personal insight into our amazing ship through three wars. The article ends with a humorous story about Radford’s fight to the end.**
- **Lastly, an article by our first association president, Vane Scott, entitled “Deliverance at Kula Gulf” tells about his first-hand recollection of the events that took place when our ship was engaged in the Battle of Kula Gulf and his effort to memorialize that engagement.**

# USS Radford (DD-446) – A History

1942-1969

The second *Radford* (DD-446) was laid down on 2 October 1941 at Kearny, N.J., by the Federal Shipbuilding & Dry Dock Co.; launched on 3 May 1942; sponsored by Mrs. Francis E. Matthes; and commissioned on 22 July 1942, Lt. Comdr. William K. Romoser in command.



DD-446 Specifications: displacement 2,940 (full load); length 376'5"; beam 39'7"; draft 17'9"; speed 35 knots; complement 329; armament 5 5-inch, 10 40 millimeter, 7 20 millimeter, 10 21-inch torpedo tubes, 6 depth charge projectors, 2 depth charge tracks; class *Fletcher*)

After shakedown off the New England coast, *Radford* towed the burning transport *Wakefield* (AP-21) to Halifax where the fires were extinguished. Antisubmarine patrol off the east coast followed and on 5 December 1942 *Radford* got underway for the Pacific.

At Noumea, New Caledonia, *Radford* joined TG 67.5 with which she bombarded Japanese positions and installations on Guadalcanal on 19 January 1943. On the night of 23-24 January, she attacked the enemy staging area on Kolombangara and within the next week had splashed three enemy planes. *Radford* then retired to Tulagi, whence she sailed to cover the occupation of the Russell Islands by U.S. troops. *Radford* shelled Munda Airfield and installations on New Georgia Island on the night of 5-6 March and, on the nights of 15 and 16 March, bombarded Kolombangara.

On 29 June 1943, *Radford* steamed with the First Echelon of the Western Force for Rendova to provide shore bombardment and antisubmarine patrol to cover the landing of troops. During this action she shot down five planes. On 1 July she damaged a Japanese submarine with gunfire and depth charges. She was involved in the night surface engagement off Kula Gulf, 5-6 July, firing on three enemy ships and picking up survivors of *Helena* (CL-50). During the night of 12-13 July *Radford* acted as a screening unit for TG 36.1 while that force conducted an offensive sweep against the "Tokyo Express."

On 17 July 1943, she left the Solomons for the New Hebrides; Auckland, New Zealand and Noumea, New Caledonia. Returning to Guadalcanal 14 September, she sank a number of enemy barges and on 25 November sent the Japanese submarine *I-40* to the bottom off Makin. After the Gilbert Islands operations, *Radford* steamed for Pearl Harbor and San Francisco where she arrived 15 December for overhaul.

By 2 February 1944 *Radford* was back at Majuro Atoll. On the 18th, she screened tankers as they fueled the Truk Island striking force, then escorted the replenishment force to the New Hebrides. In March, she returned to the Solomons and shelled gun emplacements on Bougainville.

Proceeding to New Guinea in April 1944, *Radford* bombarded the beach at Humboldt Bay in support of landings there on the 22nd. She steamed back to the Solomons; stopped at Noumea; and returned to the New Guinea area in early June. Into September she continued support of the New Guinea campaign with escort runs and gunfire support missions.

On 12 September 1944 *Radford* sailed for Pearl Harbor for repairs. On 20 November she steamed for Eniwetok and Ulithi. On 4 December she got underway escorting a group of merchant vessels to Leyte Gulf. She operated there and off Mindoro until steaming for Lingayen Gulf on 4 January 1945. After supporting the landings on Luzon, she delivered fire support on the beaches of the Bataan Peninsula. While maneuvering into Mariveles Harbor to take the mine-damaged *La Vallette* (DD-448) in tow, *Radford* was herself damaged by a mine.

Sailing for Leyte Gulf on 20 February 1945, she continued on to Eniwetok Atoll, Pearl Harbor, and San Francisco. She remained there undergoing repairs until 30 September 1945. *Radford* was decommissioned on 17 January 1946.

After conversion to an escort destroyer (DDE-446), on 26 March 1949, especially equipped for antisubmarine warfare, *Radford* was recommissioned at San Francisco on 17 October 1949. Following shakedown off the California coast, she sailed to her homeport of Pearl Harbor. In May 1950 she escorted *Valley Forge* (CVA-45) to Subic Bay and Hong Kong. With the outbreak of the Korean Conflict, she was dispatched to Korea where she operated until returning to Pearl Harbor 9 November.

Occupied with overhaul and type training at Pearl Harbor for the next year, *Radford* then sailed 19 November 1951 for operations with Task Force 77, a fast carrier striking group, off Korea. Other operations found her with British units off the west coast of the embattled peninsula and steaming close inshore for bombardment and to support minesweeping operations. She also rescued survivors from the grounded SS *Easton* off the coast of Japan, before returning to Pearl Harbor 21 June 1952.

*Radford* cleared Pearl Harbor 4 September 1952 for operations on patrol and in exercises in the western Pacific, based at Eniwetok. She returned to Pearl Harbor 25 November for type training until 3 May 1953, when she headed for the Far East. Once more *Radford* operated with TF 77, bombarding the east coast of Korea. From 12 to 22 July, in company with *Manchester* (CL-83), she steamed off Wonsan Harbor, firing on targets in the vicinity of Hode Pando, and later entered the harbor itself. Following duty on the southern patrol in the Taiwan Strait, she returned to Pearl Harbor 30 November.

During the next 16 years *Radford* alternated operations in the Hawaiian area with deployments to the Far East. During this period she made 11 WestPac cruises, serving on the Taiwan Patrol in 1954, 1955, and 1956 and operating in Japanese waters in 1957, 1958, and 1959. On 25 March 1960 she entered the U.S. Naval Shipyard at Pearl Harbor to begin her 7-month long FRAM (Fleet Rehabilitation and Modernization) II overhaul, which gave her a helicopter hanger and flight deck. During 1961 she operated continuously in the Hawaiian area, picking up the nose cone of *Discoverer XXV* on 19 June and rescuing 5 fishermen from the sea 16 November.

On 5 February 1962 *Radford* sailed for the western Pacific as a unit of Antisubmarine Warfare Task Group 70.4 composed of *Bennington* (CVS-20) and the eight destroyers of Destroyer Divisions 252 and 92. She participated in joint SEATO operations, was called to the South China Sea to help meet the Laotian crisis in May, and in June was called to the Taiwan Straits due to heavy Communist buildups in the area. She returned to Pearl Harbor 18 July and became DD-446 again 7 August 1962. On 3 October *Radford* was stationed a few hundred miles east of Midway Island in the 4th orbit recovery area for Project Mercury's *Sigma 7* flight.

In a 1963 overhaul Variable Depth Sonar and DASH equipment was installed. *Radford* steamed to WestPac again in 1963, 1965, and 1966. During 1967, 1968, and 1969, she operated on Yankee Station and bombarded Viet Cong targets in South Vietnam. *Radford* decommissioned at San Francisco and was stricken from the Naval Vessel Register on 10 November 1969 to be sold for scrap.

*Radford* earned 12 battle stars for World War II service, five battle stars for Korean War service, and four for Vietnam service.

# This Destroyer Did the US Proud Through Three Wars

By Kris Osborn

President & Founder, Center for Military Modernization



Navy Destroyer USS Radford

From supporting amphibious attacks against the Viet Cong to fighting off Japanese warships, the USS Radford has seen it all -- and the Fletcher-class destroyer is credited with one of the most daring rescues of World War II.

The Radford, which was commissioned in 1942, saw action in World War II, the Korean War and Vietnam. It became famous in 1943 for sinking a Japanese submarine while carrying out a perilous rescue operation, Naval History and Heritage Command historian Guy Nasuti told Military.com in an interview.

The Radford's rescue of (*sailors from*) the cruiser USS Helena came after the U.S. Navy had captured the small island of Munda, a Japanese outpost in the Pacific. After the U.S. invasion of the island, the USS Radford and other U.S. ships engaged in open-water warfare with the Japanese.

"A Japanese torpedo tore off Helena's bow and two more hit the main hull, sending it to the bottom. That battle became a contest between Japanese torpedoes and American gunfire," states the history journal "World War II." The article, titled "Heroic Rescue of Helena's Survivors," catalogs the deadly battle between a U.S. Navy cruiser division and a 12-warship strong Japanese naval force.

The ocean battle presented unique challenges for the Radford and other U.S. Navy forces, because the Japanese attacked with a powerful Akizuki-class destroyer equipped with a newer type 22 radar detector and Long Lance torpedoes.

As open-water warfare progressed, the USS Radford pulled wounded "oil-soaked" sailors from the Helena out of the sea with cargo nets -- all the while under enemy fire. Despite the perils of ongoing Japanese attacks, the Radford repeatedly returned to rescue more sailors.

"The ships were like sitting ducks, stopped dead in the water to allow the men in the sea to swim over to them. Their rescue operations continue to be interrupted by enemy attacks," writes Thomas McLoughlin.

## **USS Radford Home to Enduring Friendships**

During the Vietnam War, the Radford provided naval gunfire support and escorted aircraft carriers during the Gulf of Tonkin incident in 1964. The destroyer became an instrumental part of a broad amphibious attack strategy during the ensuing Vietnam War.

Not all the occurrences aboard the Radford during the war were happy ones. A particularly memorable and poignant moment occurred when Lt. Doug Vaughan was laid to rest at sea -- after being hit by a Viet Cong ambush during treacherous land warfare operations.

Vaughan had been an officer on the Radford and volunteered for ground duty during the height of combat in the war. According to Nasuti, in an unexpected coincidence, Vaughan's close high school friend (and fellow sailor) had been assigned to replace Vaughan on shore duty. Tragically, Vaughan's friend was injured while at a special military survival school and did not get a chance to see Vaughan before his death.

Vaughan's sense of duty and dedication to the mission have inspired a lasting memory among his fellow service members. "I feel privileged and honored to be able to tell these stories, to keep the memories of these veterans and people that served alive," Nasuti said.

The Radford was finally decommissioned in 1969 and sold for scrap a year later, but not without one final feisty moment. She broke away from the tug that was towing her from California to Portland, Oregon, resulting in a 34-mile chase along the Oregon coast to retrieve her. In all, the Radford received 12 battle stars and two Presidential Unit Citations for World War II service, five battle stars for the Korean War, four for the Vietnam War and the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal.

Currently, memorabilia from the Radford, including photos, uniforms and displays about the ship and her service, can be found at the USS Orleck Naval Museum in Lake Charles, Louisiana.

*(Editor's note: The USS Orleck was relocated to Jacksonville, FL in 2022)*

# Deliverance at Kula Gulf

By Vane Scott

When the RADFORD Association was planning their second national reunion in 1993, it was to be held in Chicago and it was also to mark the 50th Anniversary of the Battle of Kula Gulf and the dramatic rescue of the HELENA CL50 survivors. It ranks with the most heroic rescues of any war.



Before my wife and I went to Chicago for the event, I wanted to have created a dramatic piece of artwork, that would depict the rescue in such a way as to capture the moment. The sheer terror, excitement, urgency, and intense human connection.

I had it all pictured in my mind.

I had hopes of a famous artist doing the piece just for us. I tried to contact the famed World Olympics artist but he was too busy. I tried my son who is a professional artist and teaches art. All were too busy to take on the project and there was just not enough time. My wife told me I was running out of time; I would have to do it myself

I have been an artist during all of my memory but I didn't consider myself up to the task for this project because I considered it beyond my capabilities and besides the human hand is the toughest part of the anatomy to reproduce. My oldest son and I both attended the Art Institute of Pittsburgh. He graduated. I didn't.

We were down to about 10 days left before we would leave for Chicago. I went up to my studio. Approached my drawing board and began to make crude sketches of the idea I had pictured in my mind. I went through all my files looking for hands that were just right. Nothing was suitable. I went to the library and thumbed through many books and magazines but to no avail.

Finally, in desperation, I put my elbow on the drawing board, raised my one hand up limply, like I was in the water needing to be rescued. I grabbed that wrist with my other hand and studied for a while. I could see the effect I wanted but how do I put it on paper when I've got one hand grasping the other wrist. I couldn't draw it by holding a pencil in my teeth.

While holding up my left hand I began to sketch it more in detail with my right hand. Then I would grab my wrist again and try to remember what I saw while I sketched that. Finally, it started to take shape. After about two hours it was what I wanted.

Using an overlay sheet I drew it again and again to work in more details till finally I did the ink version. We rushed it to the printers and got the reunion's Saturday night banquet program covers printed. Packed and we left for Chicago,

Chicago was the right location to have the reunion that year because in 1944 the CBS Radio network had broadcast a re-enactment of the battle and rescue from Chicago. The program, "*First Line*" was every Thursday night and it was sponsored by the Wrigley Co. It featured exciting stories from the war fronts all over the world.

As it turned out, our wonderful friend Abigail Van Buren was there Along with the Vice President of the Wrigley Co. to help us commemorate that 50th Anniversary. Earlier she had told our story in her nationally syndicated column and helped us find 12 sons of the survivors that had named their sons Radford after the ship that had saved them.

There were several HELENA survivors and four of the sons in attendance at the banquet. It was a very emotional evening with the survivors being able to hug and shake hands and thank the men that had saved them 50 years before.

Now, over three years later we are going to open our own museum in Radford, VA and this piece of art will be done as a life size sculpture to be displayed there.

The original artwork was displayed earlier in the Temperance Tavern Museum in Newcomerstown, OH where my wife Barbara is president of the Historical Society. The museum features the effects of Denton True "CY" Young, the great baseball pitcher and Woody Hayes, famous Big Ten coach of Ohio State - both natives of Newcomerstown.

The artwork was hung as part of a large military display commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the end of World War II. It caught the eye of Marjorie Hanson Bean, a former native of Newcomerstown and very fine sculptress from Palin Beach Gardens, Florida. She asked me if she could do the dramatic scene as a sculpture. "Of course I was elated and gave her the go ahead.

She said she would need about 10 or 12 snapshots of real people grasping the hand to arm pose. The photos would need to be done in a 360 degree circle to capture all angles. It was my choice or the models.



This was in 1995 and our annual reunion was coming up in Reno and I knew there would be survivors there to use as one of the models. During that reunion I asked two men I knew that were involved in the rescue, my good friend Marty O'Brien from the RADFORD and Ruby Tolvin, a survivor from the HELENA that was rescued by RADFORD crew.

This was going to be a very dynamic piece to try and capture the moment of a drowning sailor being snatched from his watery grave at the last possible moment.

Martin J. O'Brien served on RADFORD as an Electrician in 1942-44. He is from Troy, NY and a retired Professor from Hudson Valley College. He is not a big framed man. He would be the rescuer because he really was there and participated.

The man in the water is Rubin "Ruby" Tolvin of Union, NJ and survivor from the HELENA that was rescued by the RADFORD crew. He is a large man and I'm sure there is no way Marty could pull him up over the side of a destroyer without an awful lot of adrenalin going. Ruby survived that ordeal only to be assigned to another ship and have it shot out from under him. He barely survived that sinking due to serious burns and was actually put in a body bag when someone noticed he was not dead. He was hospitalized for over a year after the war.

I wanted the rescuer's hand and arm to be a little smaller than the man in the water to show that even a small, young man can rise to the occasion and do what has to be done. This man in the water has a family that loves him and wants him to come home when the war is over.

The man in the water is large, muscular and heavy. He is totally exhausted and at the brink of his existence. He has been struggling in the water for a long time. His eyes have swollen shut and he is inundated with the heavy oil and has begun to slip beneath the surface never to be seen again.

At the last second, a young sailor sees the hand come up out of the water reaching for the net in a last desperate attempt at life. The small, young sailor reaches between the lifelines and stretches to his small body's limit to reach the hand. He makes a grab but the oil is slippery and he can't hold him. Finally, with one last burst of adrenalin he grabs it again and begins to pull him toward safety.

Other sailors come and join the task. Finally, the almost drowned sailor is on the deck and the relative safety of a destroyer getting ready to go back into battle again but this time with hundreds of survivors on her deck. The rescued man thinks after all that he may still die but this time on the RADFORD. Who could rescue him now?

The RADFORD breaks away and lunges back into the battle of two small ships against the *Tokyo Express*. Three times she goes back, while shooting the guns and torpedoes over the heads of these survivors. Many of them helped pass the ammunition.

RADFORD along with the NICHOLAS were successful in fighting them off. They sunk two destroyers and a cruiser that night while rescuing over 700 men of the ill-fated HELENA CL50. Both ships were awarded the highest honor a ship can receive, the Presidential Unit Citation.



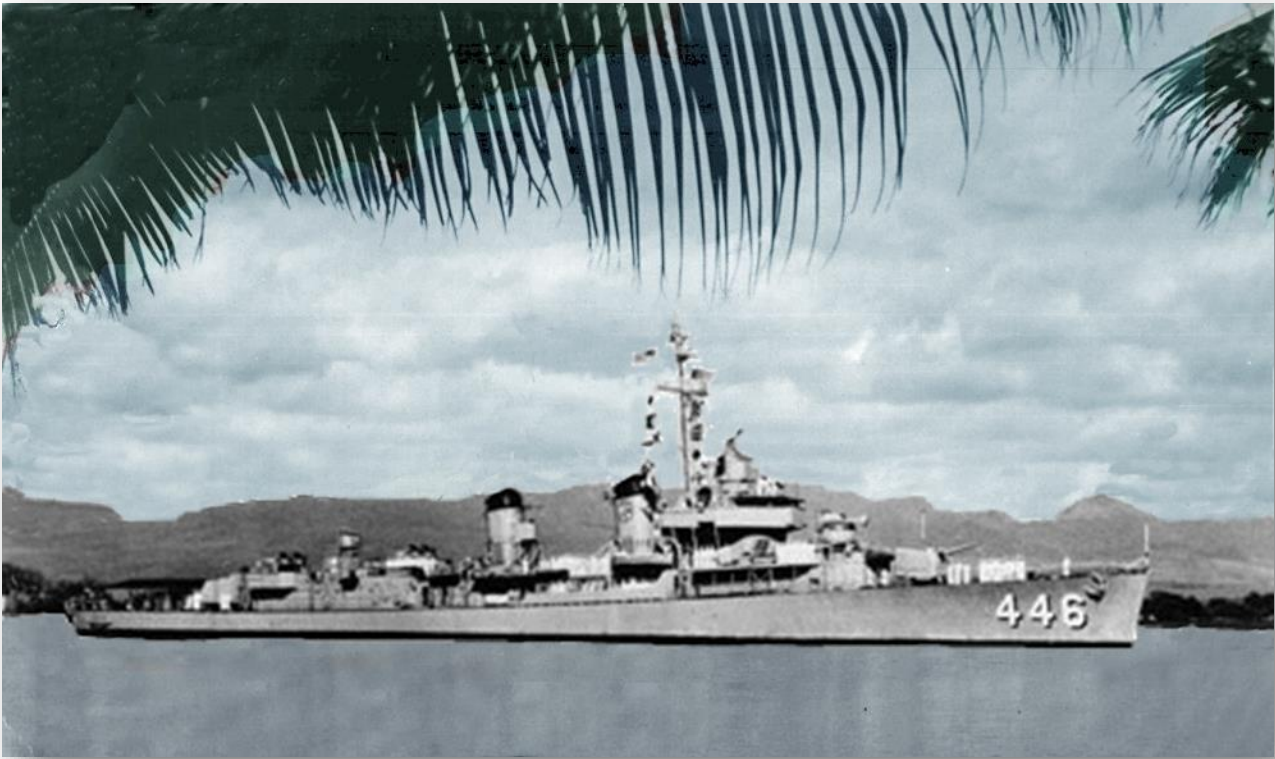
**RADFORD with 468 USS HELENA Survivors on her Upper decks in Tulagi Harbor, 24 August 1943**

This piece of art is dedicated to the memory of all those men that took part in that heroic rescue on the night of July 5-6, 1943.



**“Deliverance”**

Here are some photos of USS RADFORD collected from various military and naval websites:





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