McCampbell Holds Memorial Ceremony for Battle of Leyte Gulf

Story and photo by MC3 Mikey Mulcare, *USS McCampbell* Public Affairs

PACIFIC OCEAN – The crew of *USS McCampbell* (DDG 85) held a ceremony to honor those who fought in the Battle of Leyte Gulf was held on the Aug. 4.

The ceremony, led by *McCampbell*'s chief petty officer selectees, included a narration of the key events of the battle and called for a moment of silence in remembrance of those lost in battle.

The ceremony especially hit home for the crew of *McCampbell*, because Cmdr. David McCampbell, the ships namesake and an F-6F Hellcat fighter pilot, fought in the battle in 1944 and was awarded several awards and commendation as a result.

"During the battle of Leyte Gulf in the waters around Cebu, the same water we now sail upon, assisted by only Ensign Roy Rushing, Cmdr. McCampbell broke up a large group of Japanese fighters headed for *USS Essex* [CV 9]," said Electrician's Mate 1st Class (SW/AW) Youssef Saab, a speaker for the ceremony.

During the conflict McCampbell and Rushing were able to shoot down a total of 14 enemy aircraft in the course of one morning, potentially saving the lives of their own crew.

"There were many scarifies and moments of unimaginable bravery, a testament to what Sailors are capable of," said Gunner's Mate 1st Class (SW) Edward Stasny. "Those acts of heroism took place in these very waters we sail in today the Sailors who fought here will be forever memorialized."

Leyte Gulf is a body of water east of the Filipino island of Leyte, where allied forces fought the Imperial Japanese Navy. Losses on the allied side totaled 3,000 casualties, one light carrier, two escort carriers, two destroyers, one destroyer escort and more than 200 aircraft. The battle is consider to be a crucial turning point in World War II.

EN1 William Embry gives a speech aboard *USS McCampbell* (DDG 85) during a ceremony Aug. 4 to honor those who fought in the Battle of Leyte Gulf. McCampbell is one of seven Arleigh Burke-Class guided-missile destroyers attached to Destroyer Squadron 15 and is currently underway in the Western Pacific.

The editor asks:

Did you know, according to history.navy.mil, on Oct. 20 1944, U.S. Forces landed on the Island of Leyte, the first of the Japanese-held Philippine Islands to be invaded. In response, the Japanese Navy activated the complex "Sho-Go" Operation, in which several different surface and air forces would converge on the Philippines to try and drive off the Americans. As part of Vice Admiral Takeo Kurita's Center Force, Japanese battleship *Yamato* moved to Brunei Bay, Borneo, to refuel and then steamed toward the operational area in company with four battleships, ten heavy cruisers and numerous other warships.

On 23 October, while west of the Philippines, the Center Force was attacked by the U.S. submarines *Darter* (SS-227) and *Dace* (SS-247). Three heavy cruisers were torpedoed and two sunk, including Kurita's flagship, Atago. The Admiral then moved to *Yamato*, which served as his flagship for the rest of the operation.

The next day, as the Center Force steamed through the Philippines' central Sibuyan Sea, it was repeatedly attacked by planes from U.S. aircraft carriers. The Japanese battleship *Musashi* was sunk and a heavy cruiser forced to retire. *Yamato* and several other ships were hit but remained battleworthy. The Americans thought the entire center force had retreated, but it transited the San Bernardino Strait at night and entered the Pacific.

In the morning of 25 October, while off Samar, Kurita's Center Force encountered a U.S. Navy escort aircraft carrier task group. In a long running battle, in which *Yamato* fired her big guns at enemy ships for the only time in her career, one U.S. carrier and three destroyers were sunk. Fiercely opposed by the escort carriers' planes and the destroyers' guns and torpedoes, Vice Admiral Kurita lost three heavy cruisers, and his nerve. Though the way was almost clear to move onward to Leyte Gulf, where a climactic battleship gunnery duel would have certainly resulted, he ordered his force to withdraw and return to Brunei Bay. That ended *Yamato's* participation in the last great naval battle of WWII, and marked the end of the Japanese Fleet as a major threat to Allied offensive operations in the Western Pacific.