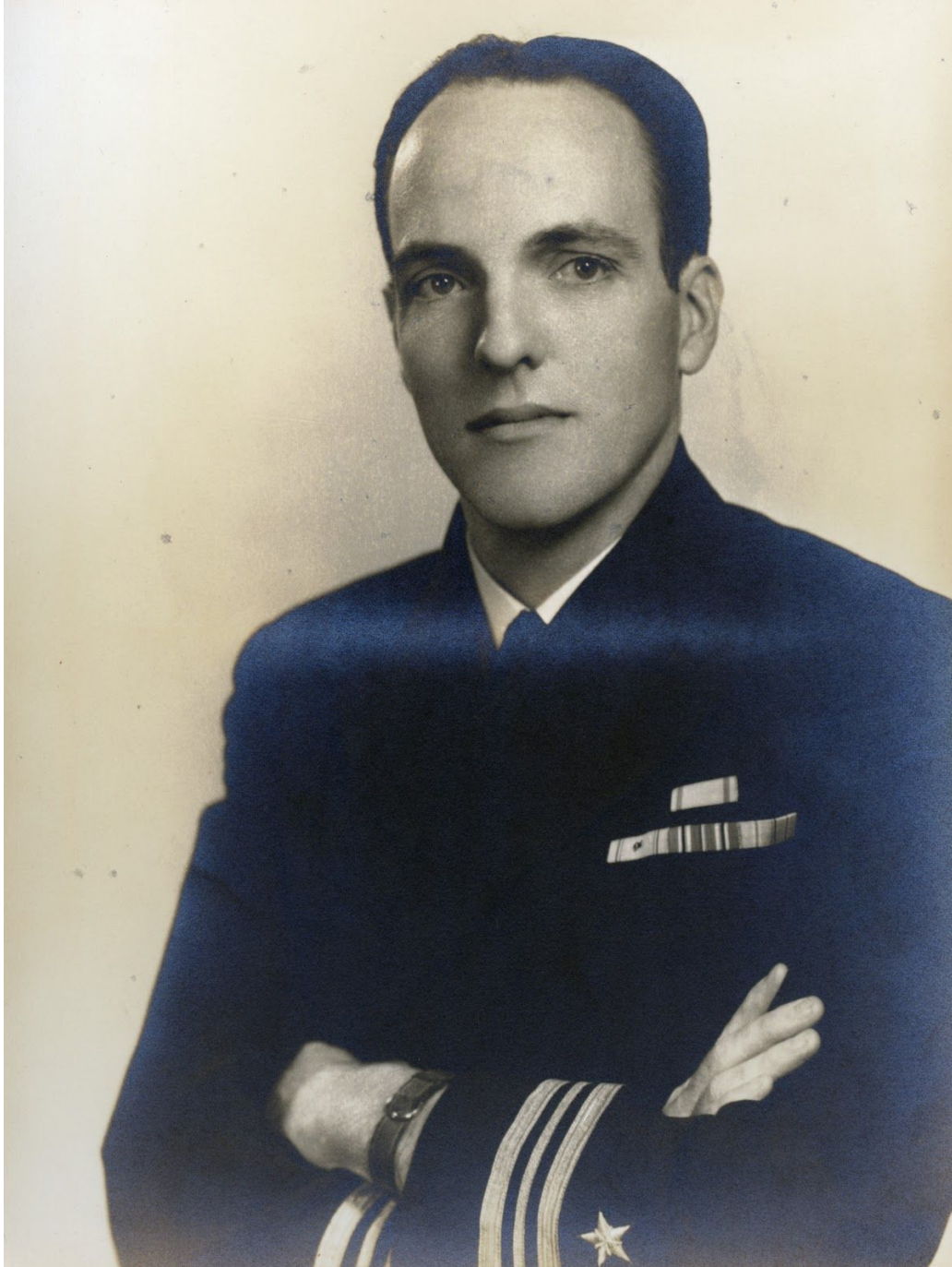


Philip Wallace Winston and USS Cotten

By John A Winston
Charlottesville, Va.
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LCDR Philip W. Winston, ca. 1942

Preface

Some time ago I realized that my children and grandchildren knew very little about my father's World War II service, particularly his time as captain of USS Cotten in the Pacific. I decided to try to pull together some of my memories of his (few) comments, plus what I knew of the history of that period. Then as I started my research I discovered the book *200,000 Miles Aboard the Destroyer Cotten* by C. Snelling Robinson. Robinson had been a junior officer on *Cotten* throughout the war, and his well-written memoir gives a detailed account of the period, including a number of descriptions of my father. So with Robinson's invaluable aid, I decided to attempt the project. This is the result.

Early Career

In 1941 when the United States entered the war, Lieutenant Commander Winston had already served over ten years in the Navy. He was born in Richmond, Virginia on April 26, 1911, attended Richmond public schools, and entered the US Naval Academy in 1929. He graduated in 1933, but was not commissioned because of Depression-era budget restrictions. He received his commission as ensign in June 1934. When they learned the news, he and his sweetheart, Mary Louise Austin, had to rush to get married, since ensigns at that time were not allowed to marry. Winston's initial assignment was to the cruiser USS Indianapolis, home ported in Long Beach, CA. He and Mary Lou moved there to begin their marriage and his career. All of the other Indianapolis ensigns were unmarried, so she served as a sort of den mother, known to them all as "the bride of the wardroom."

In 1936 Winston and Mary Lou traveled to China, where he joined a destroyer (USS Peary) in the Asiatic Fleet. Winston also served there on destroyers USS Edwards and USS Edsall. On Edsall he became engineering officer. During this time, he and Mary Lou lived in Chefoo (now called Yantai), China, and Manila in the Philippines.

In December, 1938, Winston was ordered to the cruiser USS Wichita, then finishing construction in the Philadelphia Navy Yard. In September 1939 he was assigned to the destroyer USS Hatfield home ported in Seattle, WA, where he and Mary Lou rented a small house. On December 18, 1940 their first child, John, arrived.



Lieutenant Philip Winston, Seattle, ca. 1941

When the war started, in December 1941 with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Hatfield began actively patrolling in Puget Sound and up the coast as far as Dutch Harbor in the Alaskan Aleutian Islands. They were on the lookout for Japanese forces, but encountered none.



USS Hatfield, DD-231

In May 1942, Winston, now executive officer of Hatfield, was ordered to the US Naval Academy to serve as instructor of thermodynamics and damage control. He was probably frustrated not to head for the fighting, but must have known that with so many new ships under construction his chances for a later command were good. He and Mary Lou lived in an apartment in Annapolis where their second child, Lavinia (Binnie), was born, on January 26, 1943.



Lieutenant Commander Philip Winston and son John, Annapolis, ca. 1944



Mary Lou with John and Binnie, ca. 1944

In June 1944 Winston received orders. He was to travel to San Diego for two weeks of “Sound School” (Sonar training), then on to Pearl Harbor for two weeks of pre-command school, after which he would take command of the USS *Cotten*, DD-669, a destroyer in the Pacific. Mary Lou and the children moved to Richmond, VA, to be close to her family. Before he left, he and the

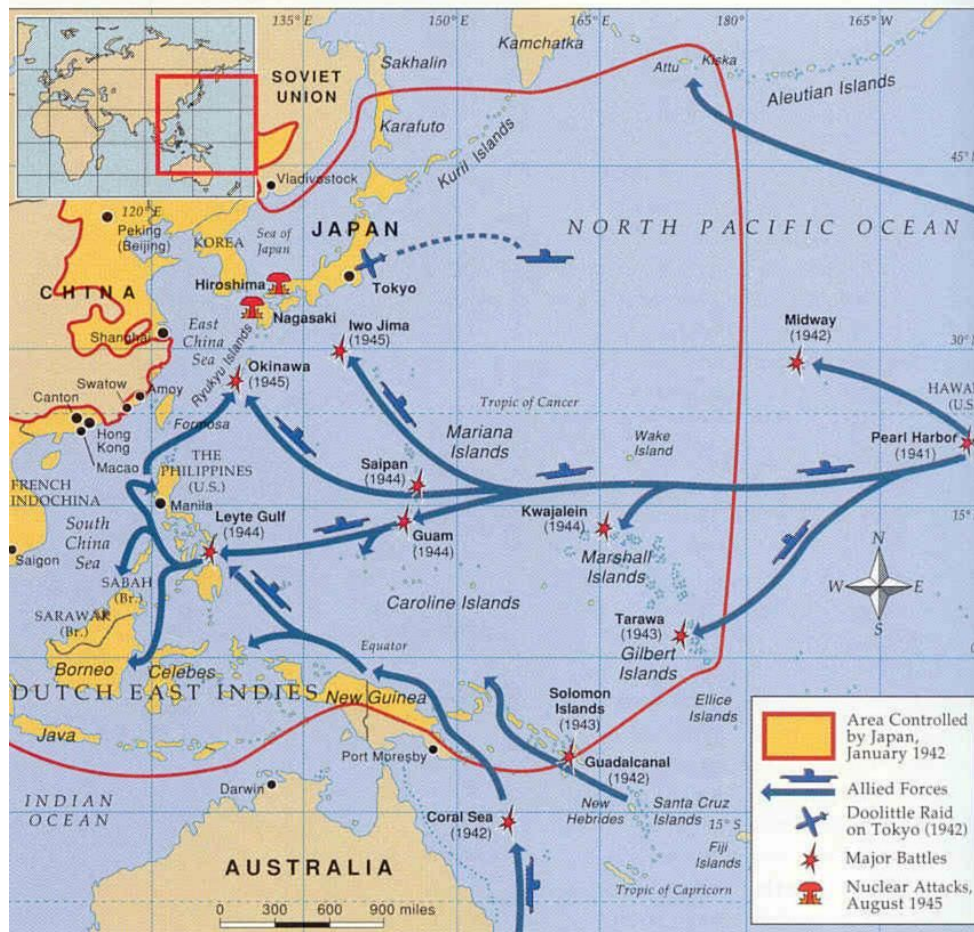
family spent a few days at the family's home on the Rappahannock River. I distinctly remember saying goodbye when he left and crying for some time afterward.

We stayed at the River during the summer, then moved to an apartment on Park Avenue in Richmond. I can remember stomping on tin cans in the kitchen to flatten them for wartime recycling, visiting grandparents, and playing in the alley behind the apartment.

War in the Pacific

By this point in the Pacific War, the United States had gained the initiative over the Japanese. In the Southwest Pacific, forces led by General Douglas MacArthur based in Australia had recaptured a number of Japanese-held islands and controlled the north coast of New Guinea. They were now preparing for a leap to the island of Leyte and the liberation of the Philippines. In parallel, a separate offensive in the central Pacific was driving west and north under the command of Admiral Chester Nimitz, based in Pearl Harbor. His forces had liberated a string of Japanese-held islands, most recently the Marianas (Guam, Saipan, and Tinian) and were preparing to assault Iwo Jima, then Okinawa and finally, together with MacArthur, the Japanese home islands.

The Pacific Theater in World War II



Pacific Theater in World War II

(Source: http://spiritualpilgrim.net/03_The-World-since-1900/07_World-War-Two/07i_War-in-Asia+the-Pacific.htm)

By 1944, US Naval power had grown hugely since the start of the war and included hundreds of fighting ships. The heart of its striking force was the fast carrier forces, especially the Essex-class fleet carriers. These could steam at over 30 knots and carried around 100 aircraft, a mix of fighters, dive bombers, and torpedo bombers. They could strike targets up to 200 miles away. The carriers were organized as a task force, that is a unified operational command. It was too large to maneuver as a single unit, and so was divided into four task groups that each included fleet carriers, smaller light carriers, and accompanying battleships, cruisers, and destroyers.

Photo # 80-G-68097 USS Essex underway, May 1943



USS Essex, CV-9 (Source: <http://www.navsource.org/archives/02/020914.jpg>)

The carrier task groups made the US island-hopping strategy work by providing air cover for the amphibious forces when they were beyond the range of land-based air. Once the forces ashore captured or built airfields, the carriers could move on to further targets. In addition to supporting amphibious attacks, the carrier forces also struck Japanese targets ashore and at sea in the home islands, Formosa, and elsewhere.

USS Cotten

Cotten was part of Task Group 38.3 under Rear Admiral Frederick C. Sherman. The group had two fleet carriers, *Essex* and *Lexington*, as well as two light carriers, four battleships, four cruisers, and 14 destroyers. All of these forces were part of Task Force 38 under Third Fleet, commanded by Admiral William F. ("Bull") Halsey. Admiral Halsey alternated command with Admiral Raymond A. Spruance. When Spruance commanded, the fleet was designated Fifth Fleet, but the ships remained the same. In this way, while one commander was at sea, the other with his staff was ashore planning the next operation.

USS *Cotten*, DD 669, was a Fletcher-class destroyer commissioned in July 1943. She displaced 2050 tons, was 376 feet long, and could steam at 35 knots. She carried five 5-inch guns that could fire at surface or air targets, 40mm and 20mm anti-air guns, torpedoes and depth charges. She had radar for detecting air and surface targets and sonar for hunting submarines. She had a crew of 310-325 men and 16-18 officers.



USS *Cotten*, DD-669 (Source: <http://www.navsource.org/archives/05/pix2/0566938.jpg>)

By August 1944, *Cotten* had already seen significant action; she fought in the Gilbert and Marshall Island campaigns, the Marianas, and was part of the Battle of the Philippine Sea. Thus although most of the officers and men had been civilians little more than a year ago, they were by now authentic combat veterans.

In late August 1944 *Cotten* was at Eniwetok, the Marshall Islands atoll used as a base for ship resupply and repair. Lieutenant Commander Winston assumed command on August 28, relieving LCDR Frank Sloat. Snelling Robinson remembers his first impressions:

The obvious professional difference between Sloat and Winston concerned their comparative time in destroyers. Because the *Cotten* now enjoyed an experienced cadre of officers, most of whom had been to sea for at least a year in almost continuous combat, Captain Winston did not have the initial responsibility of teaching us our jobs; he could concentrate on learning his own. He was a man of quick intelligence and intellectual

depth so he did not have any difficulty fitting into his new and highly demanding job as our commanding officer.

A noticeable difference between the two captains was in their personal styles and mannerisms. Sloat had been my idea of a sea dog, with the volatile reactions and colorful vocabulary that years of sea duty will impart to almost anyone. Winston was the epitome of a Virginia gentleman, with what bordered on drawing-room manners, and for a while this characteristic kept us more than a little off balance.

The new exec, Bob Rothschild, who preferred to be called “Rocky” knew how his job should be done ... It was fortunate for us all that Rothschild was somewhat informal when it came to military etiquette, as Captain Winston was definitely a stickler in this respect.¹

Later, when Winston left *Cotten* to take up a new command, he had the option of taking Rothschild with him as exec, but did not do it. I once asked him why not, and he replied “Oh, his language was too bad.” Still, at post-war *Cotten* reunions the two were always quite friendly.

The Battle Line

In addition to carrier air combat, Third Fleet had to be prepared for possible surface action. For this ADM Halsey created Task Force 34, called the Battle Line, which included six modern battleships from Task Force 38 as well as seven cruisers and 18 destroyers, including *Cotten*. When surface action seemed possible, these ships would withdraw from their regular task groups to form Task Force 34 under ADM Willis A. Lee and act independently to engage the enemy, away from the vulnerable carriers. The battleships included *Iowa* and *New Jersey*, the Navy’s newest and most powerful. These ships carried nine 16-inch guns that fired projectiles weighing over a ton at a range of 26 miles, as well as numerous 5-inch, 40mm, and 20mm guns that were mainly used for air defense. With armor over a foot thick in critical areas, the ships could also withstand considerable damage.

¹ C. Snelling Robinson, *200,000 Miles Aboard the Destroyer Cotten*, The Kent State University Press, 2000



USS Iowa, BB-61 (Google Images)

On August 30, 1944, the Battle Line was ordered to sea for exercises, and *Cotten* steamed out of Eniwetok just two days after Winston had assumed command. Coming from over two years shore duty and only two weeks pre-command training, he must have experienced the full weight of his new command. Still, with an experienced crew he had support in his new role. Robinson tells us that as they left Eniwetok harbor, those on the bridge in addition to the captain included the exec, the navigation officer, and the special sea detail OOD (officer of the deck), all experienced officers. Also, Winston would have met with his squadron commander and possibly other destroyer captains before departure, for orders and advice. All of the other destroyer captains would have been roughly his age and would have spent years in the (small) pre-war Navy, so it's likely that many were former classmates or shipmates, which would have helped him adjust to his new role.

For the next several days and nights the Battle Line ships practiced tactics. For the destroyers this meant searches and mock torpedo attacks on opposition forces as well as maneuvers to protect their own forces from attacks. All ships had to become skilled in communication and coordination both night and day. At the conclusion of these exercises, the Battle Line ships rejoined Task Force 38 which had been conducting air strikes against the Palau Islands and the central Philippines.

Back in Task Group 38.3, *Cotten's* normal position was in the "screen." The destroyers steamed in a circular formation with a radius of 6,000 yards (about three miles) to protect against enemy aircraft and submarines. The carriers, battleships and cruisers formed a concentric circle inside that was half as large. All ships had to maintain their relative position through speed and course changes ordered by the commander. If air attack was expected the formation shrank to half the size in order to provide a more concentrated defensive fire.

Cotten occasionally had the additional duty of plane guard. When a carrier was launching or retrieving aircraft, the destroyer would leave the screen and take up station 1000 yards behind in order to pick up pilots who crashed on takeoff or landing. *Cotten* rescued several flyers this way.

The task group continued strikes against enemy islands in the Philippines area. Once, *Cotten* was assigned night picket duty 12 miles to the east of the task group with orders to return the next day. She detected enemy planes in the early morning and fired sixty 5-inch rounds, but didn't hit them.

Finally, the force withdrew to Ulithi at the end of the month.

Ulithi

Ulithi is an atoll like Eniwetok, that is, a harbor inside a circular ring of coral reefs and islands. It became the main forward base for the Navy in 1944 and included resupply and repair facilities including floating dry docks. There were some recreation sites for tired crews where sailors could lie on the beach, play ball, and drink beer (no alcohol was permitted on Navy ships). Opportunities were limited, however, since the first priority was always repair and resupply that had to be completed before the next scheduled sortie. Captains could visit their colleagues nearby, and I once asked my father about the alcohol prohibition. He said on one visit to a fellow captain, the host produced a bottle and offered him a drink. "What did you do?" I asked. "I took it," he said.



Third Fleet in Ulithi Atoll (Google Images)

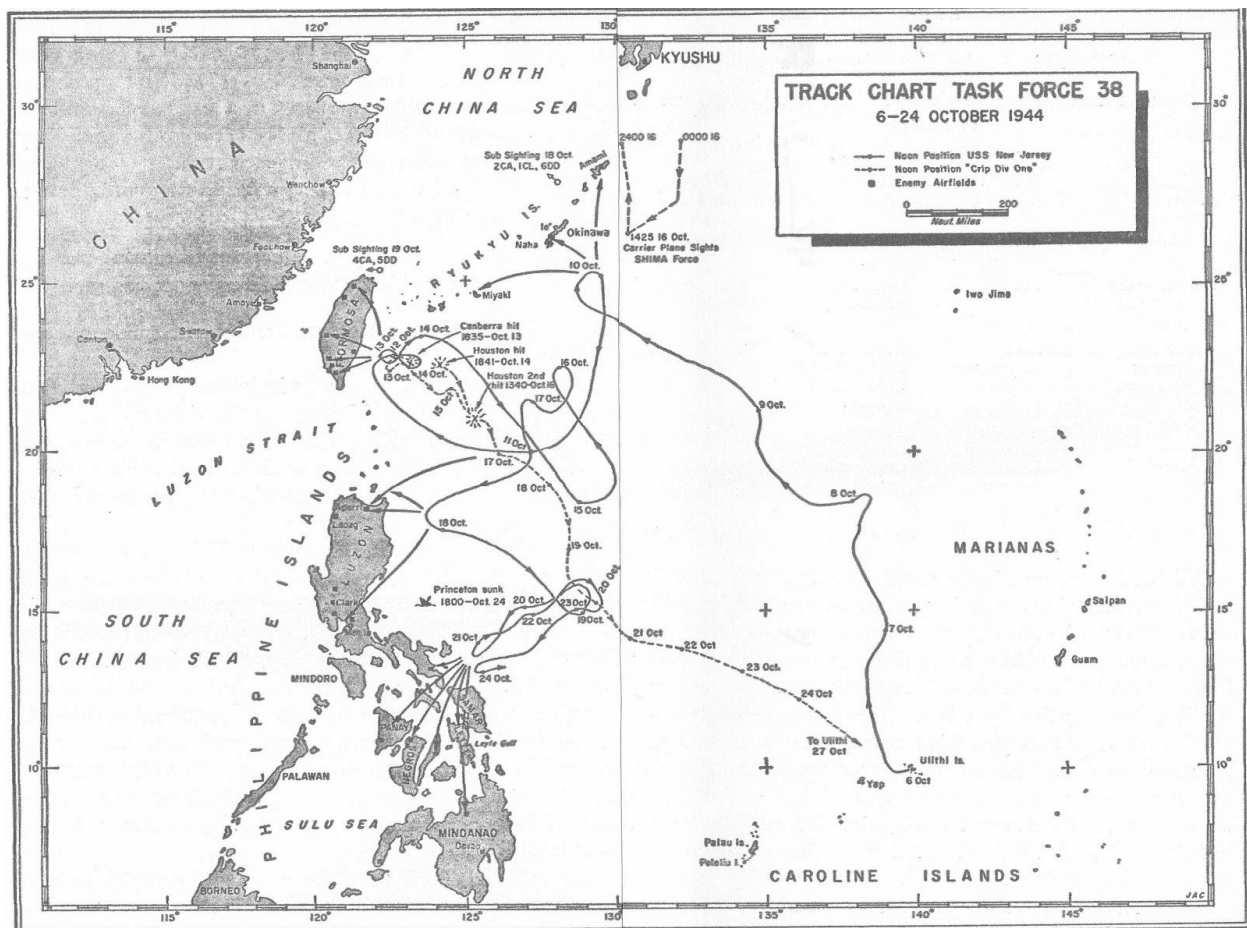
Leyte Operations

Preparations were now intense for MacArthur's planned Leyte landings in the Philippines on October 20. Task Force 38 left Ulithi on October 6 to carry out strikes 1300 miles to the north on Okinawa and Formosa in order to reduce Japanese air strength that might have reinforced the

Philippines. Then they would attack the northern Philippines and be in position to support the landings on the 20th.

The task force struck Okinawa on the 10th as scheduled. Returning pilots reported two cargo ships some thirty miles northeast of *Cotten's* task group. At 0955 ADM Sherman ordered the cruiser *Mobile*, along with *Cotten* and the destroyer *Gatling* to sink them. The three headed for the enemy at 30 knots with *Cotten* and *Gatling* ahead on either bow of *Mobile*. Robinson reports:

At 1051 the two enemy ships, cargo types of about twenty-five hundred tons each, came into sight at a range of twelve thousand yards. Our three ships went to battle stations and formed into column with *Gatling* in the van followed by *Cotten* and *Mobile*. Shortly afterward, the column made a turn to the right, which brought the cargo ships on our port beam. We slowed to fifteen knots and commenced firing when the range had decreased to sixty-one hundred yards. Within two minutes the two ships disappeared beneath the sea.²



Task Force 38 Operations, October 1944 (from S.E. Morison, *Leyte*, Little, Brown and Company, 1958, pp. 88-89)

² Robinson, op. cit., p. 115

The enemy was hit hard by these airstrikes, and it is estimated they lost over 500 planes in the Formosa attacks alone.³ But it was still able to retaliate. Off Formosa (Taiwan):

Starting at dusk, those remaining combat-ready Japanese aircraft initiated an all-out attack on Task Force 38. Our task group was under almost continual attack from 1900 on October 12 until 0124 on October 13, and the last enemy aircraft did not disappear from the radar screens until 0310. Admiral Sherman ordered thirty-seven evasive emergency turns during the attacks, with the task group at flank speed. On two occasions the enemy was within range of the *Cotten's* five-inch battery, which fired forty-eight rounds without result. Twice during the midwatch of October 13, Admiral Sherman ordered all ships to make smoke in order to hide our carriers from the enemy, adding to the confusion inherent in defending against nighttime air attack.⁴

Task Force 38 moved south from Formosa and continued to attack Japanese air power in the northern Philippines to prepare for the Leyte landings. In this period, *Cotten* like other destroyers would sometimes be used as a taxi to transfer people and supplies between ships. Robinson writes:

During the morning of October 15 ... *Cotten* was ordered to go alongside flagship *Lexington* to pick up Captain Arleigh Burke, Admiral Marc Mitscher's chief of staff ... Captain Winston conned the *Cotten* for the twelve miles to Admiral Halsey's flagship, *New Jersey*, where Burke was to present a detailed action report covering the air strikes on Okinawa and Formosa.⁵

Arleigh "31 knot" Burke was the legendary destroyer leader who had made his name during the Solomon Islands campaign in 1942-43. One can only imagine how Captain Winston felt when conning *Cotten* under his eye. Apparently, all passed off well.

Battle of Leyte Gulf

According to the historian Samuel Eliot Morison, the Battle of Leyte Gulf "must rank with the greatest naval actions of all time."⁶ As shown in the nearby chart, it was a complex event involving several widely separated actions, and I can only summarize them briefly. Although *Cotten* was far from the center of things, she played an active and significant role.

³ Samuel Eliot Morison, *Leyte, June 1944 - January 1945*, Volume XII in *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II*, Little, Brown and Company, 1958, p. 94

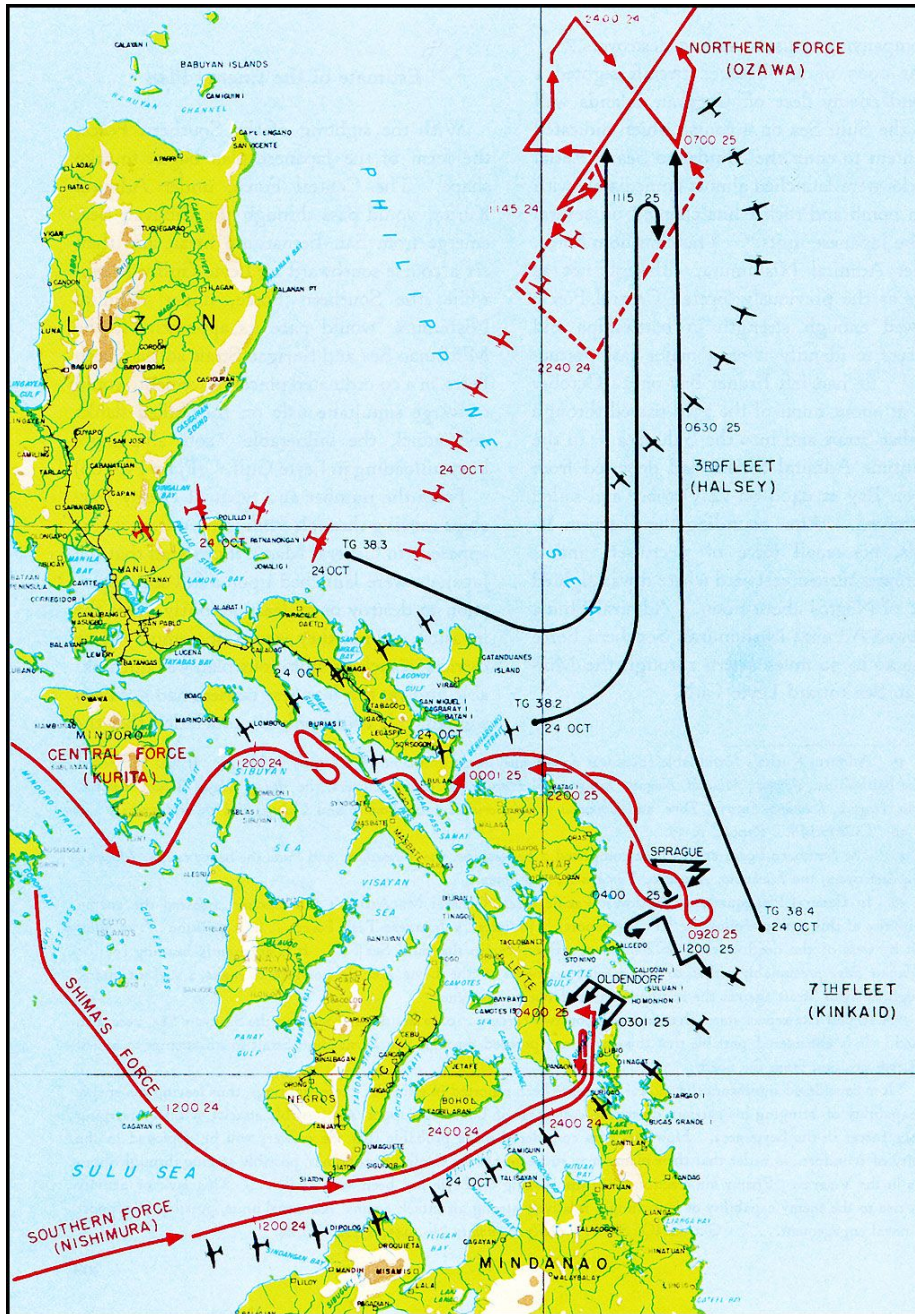
⁴ Robinson, op. cit., p. 116

⁵ Robinson, op. cit., p.117

⁶ Samuel Eliot Morison, op. cit. p. 159

The bulk of the Japanese surface navy, battleships, cruisers, and destroyers, was based in the Netherlands East Indies, south of Singapore, in order to be near Japan's dwindling fuel supplies. After MacArthur landed in Leyte on October 20, Japan resolved to risk all in an attack on the landings with their remaining surface forces in order to disrupt the landings and defeat the US Navy in a decisive sea battle. Their plan called for three surface forces to converge on Leyte from the north and south. At the same time, a decoy force of Japan's remaining carriers (that had only a few planes on board) plus cruisers and destroyers would sail south from Japan to decoy Halsey's Third Fleet away from Leyte.

On October 23, US submarines reported large enemy formations heading for the Philippines. Halsey ordered Task Force 38, located to the east of the islands, to conduct intensive air searches to locate the enemy. On the 24th, the enemy launched heavy attacks on Task Group 38.3 near the main island of Luzon. An enemy bomb struck the carrier *Princeton* and exploded inside causing severe damage. Although other ships tried to help control the fires, *Princeton's* torpedoes exploded, and she finally had to be abandoned.



Battle of Leyte Gulf, 24-25 Oct. 1944 (Wikimedia Commons)

The air attacks were severe. Robinson writes:

... our ships put up their maximum firepower each time an enemy plane was sighted over the formation. With so many guns firing, at times the sky filled with 40-mm bursts ... the surface of the ocean was torn by fragments of 5-inch antiaircraft shells ... During one of these firing sprees, three spent 5-inch projectiles descended on the Cotten. One, which failed to detonate, fell a hundred feet dead ahead and covered our forecandle with spray as

we sped forward. At the same moment, two more exploded thirty feet above the sea, one fifty feet to starboard and one fifty feet to port, just abeam of the bridge. When the casings of the exploded shells spattered against the *Cotten*'s hull and bulkheads, it was like being inside an oil drum being hammered with buckshot.⁷

My father once described such an action when he was on the bridge and saw a plane diving at them. He said they were trained to call out something like "target, red 30, low," but instead he pointed and yelled "Get that son of a bitch!"

While Task Group 38.3 was fighting off attacks, other planes from TF 38 found an approaching enemy ship formation and sank a super battleship and damaged several other ships. Then late in the day Halsey got word of a Japanese carrier force approaching from the north about 200 miles away. He ordered TF 38 to concentrate for possible action, and at midnight he ordered the combined force north after the reported carriers, leaving the northern approaches to the Leyte landing undefended. Halsey has been widely criticized for this decision.

As TF 38 raced north Halsey ordered formation of the Battle Line, TF 34. These battleships, cruisers, and destroyers (including *Cotten*) left their normal stations and, in a difficult nighttime maneuver, joined together as a separate unit. Their role was to engage any enemy surface power and to destroy crippled enemy ships. At dawn, TF 38 launched its first air strikes at the enemy carrier formation 145 miles away. Air attacks continued all day, and by late afternoon four enemy carriers had been sunk; this was the end of Japanese carrier power.

Meanwhile, however, a huge problem had developed down south. At 0645 in the morning of Oct. 25, US Naval forces detected a major Japanese force entering Leyte Gulf through the unguarded northern approach. This force comprised 4 battleships, including the super battleship *Yamato* with its 18-inch guns, 6 heavy cruisers, and a destroyer screen. There was nothing on the US side to match them except some destroyers and six tiny, "jeep," escort carriers. As these began a desperate fight, urgent cries for help started reaching ADM Halsey, far to the north. Halsey was intent on finishing off the Japanese with all his forces, but finally at 1115 he ordered TG 38.2 and most of the Battle Line to turn south and head for Leyte Gulf. Before these ships reached Leyte, the Japanese admiral, under attack by air and surface forces and fearing the arrival of TF 38, decided to retire. This ended the Japanese navy's threat to the Leyte landings.

Up north, left behind from TF 34 to continue northward was a force of four cruisers and nine destroyers, including *Cotten*.

Winston later recalled what happened next:

⁷ Robinson, op. cit., p. 124

“I remember my ship, along with five other destroyers, was sent to an area near Leyte to sink a Jap aircraft carrier that had been badly damaged in a surface fight with our forces. Aircraft had been sent to finish it off, but the carrier was well supported, and they sent us to do the job with torpedoes. We were cruising at about 20 knots when our lookout spotted a light on the horizon,” said Winston.

“I broke my ship out of formation, to check the light and it turned out to be a downed navy flyer who had signaled us with a mirror. We picked him up and headed back to the formation at flank speed, about 32 knots,” said Winston.

“My executive officer was on the wing of the bridge when suddenly he yelled, ‘Damn.’ There dead ahead of us in the water was a man swimming in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. We turned around to pick him up and he was another flyer who had been shot down, and the Japs had shot at him on the way down. He had lost all of his equipment, except a Mae West lifejacket, and was just swimming along. We picked him up and found he had been swimming for 7 hours, and the sharks had gotten to him a little. He was not too seriously injured, though, and soon came around,” said Winston.

“We then tried to catch the attack group before they finished off the carrier. We took up position just before the carrier came into range, and before we could launch our torpedoes to finish her off, she rolled over and sank from the prior damage,” laughed Winston. “We really felt cheated,” he added.⁸

The cruiser-destroyer force continued north and sank a Japanese destroyer that had been left behind to delay pursuit; the remaining Japanese ships escaped. Afterward, *Cotten* and the others joined TG 38.3 and returned to Ulithi on Oct. 30.

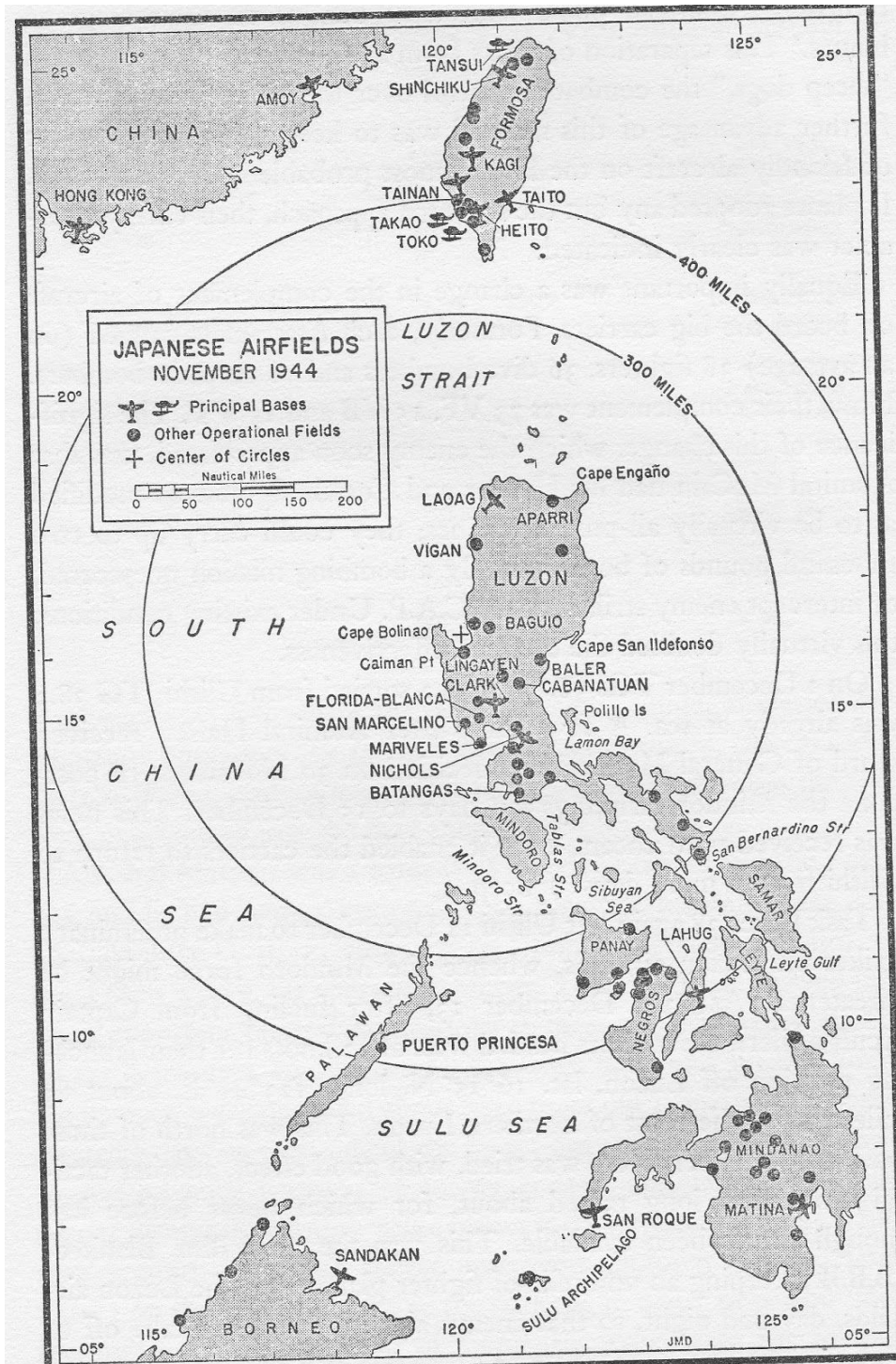
The Battle of Leyte Gulf was over, and Japan never again threatened the Americans with a fleet action. But for *Cotten* and TF 38 the war was far from over. MacArthur was ashore at Leyte with over 80,000 men, but Japanese resistance was fierce, and Japan was rushing every possible reinforcement to the battle. In addition, because of bad weather and poor terrain, the army engineers were far behind schedule in building airfields. The Navy carriers had to stay nearby to provide air support.

Kamikazes and Submarines

For most of November and December 1944 TF 38 was supporting ground operations in the Philippines. MacArthur’s forces were gradually advancing in Leyte and preparing for a landing on Mindoro Island on Dec. 15 to be followed by landings on the main island of Luzon in January 1945. Throughout this period the Japanese tried to reinforce by bringing aircraft from Okinawa

⁸ John Reynolds article, *Rappahannock Times*, Dec. 2, 1982.

and Formosa to Luzon. Once in the Philippines, the planes could be disbursed across a large number of air bases.



Japanese airfields in the Philippines (Morison, *The Liberation of the Philippines*, Little, Brown and Company, 1959, p. 56)

The Japanese air threat was made far worse with new, Kamikaze tactics. These suicide missions meant that each plane was a potential ship killer. Early statistics showed that one in every four suicide bombers found a target, and one in thirty-three sank a ship.⁹ A number of measures attempted to counter the threat, including destroyer radar pickets stationed far from the task groups for early warning, increased numbers of fighter planes and use of night fighters, and reorganizing the task force into just three, larger task groups for greater defensive power. Also the task groups conducted frequent exercises to sharpen defenses. Throughout, they continued attacks on airfields in Luzon and on ships bringing in reinforcements.

The task groups periodically returned to Ulithi for rest and resupply. One of these visits brought more excitement. Robinson recounts:

We were proceeding slowly through the anchorage when there was a tremendous explosion close aboard to port. The source of the explosion was a large oceangoing oiler, the *Mississinewa*, which had been riding at anchor fully loaded with (highly volatile) aviation gasoline and heavy fuel oil. Immediately after the blast, the *Mississinewa* erupted in a ball of fire as the “avgas” exploded, hurling droplets of the fuel oil high into the air along with a towering column of black smoke. The *Cotten* was close enough to the inferno to become covered with the drops of heavy oil that fell from the smoke, carried over to us by the light wind.

Captain Winston stopped the ship and ordered the gig lowered into the water. .. When the gig was on its way to the flaming oil-covered waters surrounding the wreck, the *Cotten* headed toward the vicinity of the anchored cruisers *Biloxi* and *Mobile*, which had reported seeing a periscope nearby.

A half-hour later, Admiral Sherman ordered Winston to take temporary charge of the ships that were searching for the submarine or submarines presumed to have torpedoed the oiler from inside the lagoon. Captain Winston then organized a coordinated sonar search by destroyers *Rall* and *Halloran*, which had joined us, around *Mobile* and *Biloxi*. At 0647 *Rall* obtained a sound contact and dropped depth charges ... Two minutes later two dead Japanese popped to the surface ... Admiral Sherman now set up a patrol inside the anchorage using the available destroyers and destroyer escorts, relieving Captain Winston of the responsibility.¹⁰

⁹ Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Liberation of the Philippines, Volume XIII in History of United States Naval Operations in World War II*, Little, Brown and Company, 1959, p. 53.

¹⁰ Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

Operations often involved complicated ship handling. *Cotten* had four junior officers who shared OOD watches, meaning they conned the ship during their four hour watch, although the Captain might oversee their work in difficult situations. Robinson recounts one incident:

From time to time, heavy rain squalls at sea caused Admiral Sherman to maneuver our task group to clearer areas so returning pilots could see their carriers when they came to land.

On one of these instances, when I was on the bridge as OOD, TG 38.2 merged with our task group on a crossing course, which forced all ships to maneuver at high speed to avoid collisions. The focal point of this traffic jam was the *Cotten's* part of the screen, so that when Captain Winston reached the bridge after being advised of the situation, he was confronted with the sight of the heavy ships of the center of TG 38.2 on either side of us, steaming at twenty knots at right angles to our own course. The unusual conglomeration of task groups terminated as soon as our flight operations were concluded ... During this brief period of confusion, Captain Winston had maintained a dignified silence, and I was pleased that he had not seen fit to offer comment concerning my ship handling when the heavy ships were crossing ahead and astern of us.

Typhoon

One of the greatest trials for Task Force 38 was not caused by the Japanese. This was the great Typhoon of 1944. Morison says:

This typhoon was comparatively small, but, owing to the fact that a number of deballasted destroyers ran smack into it, more damage was inflicted on the Navy than by any other storm since the famous hurricane at Apia, Samoa, in March 1889. Three destroyers capsized and six or seven other ships were seriously damaged, with the loss of almost 800 officers and men. As Admiral Nimitz said, this was the greatest uncompensated loss that the Navy had taken since the Battle of Savo Island.¹¹

The weather gradually worsened December 15-17, and the peak of the typhoon occurred on the 18th. Initially Halsey tried to keep in formation, but finally ships were allowed to take whatever action seemed best. The smaller destroyers had the worst of it. For stability, they were supposed to ballast, that is, to pump seawater into any fuel tanks that were not full in order to fill them and so increase ship stability. Captains were reluctant to do this, especially if they expected to fuel soon, since it took as much as six hours to pump the seawater out again before they could fuel. It is believed that all the three destroyers that were lost, one of which was *Fletcher* class like *Cotten*, had failed to ballast. I remember my father telling how before the storm got too bad, he ordered ballasting, and the engineering officer was reluctant to contaminate his fuel tanks. My

¹¹ Morison, *The Liberation of the Philippines*, op. cit., p. 59.

father said he got in front of him, pointed his finger and said “You will ballast, and you will do it now!”

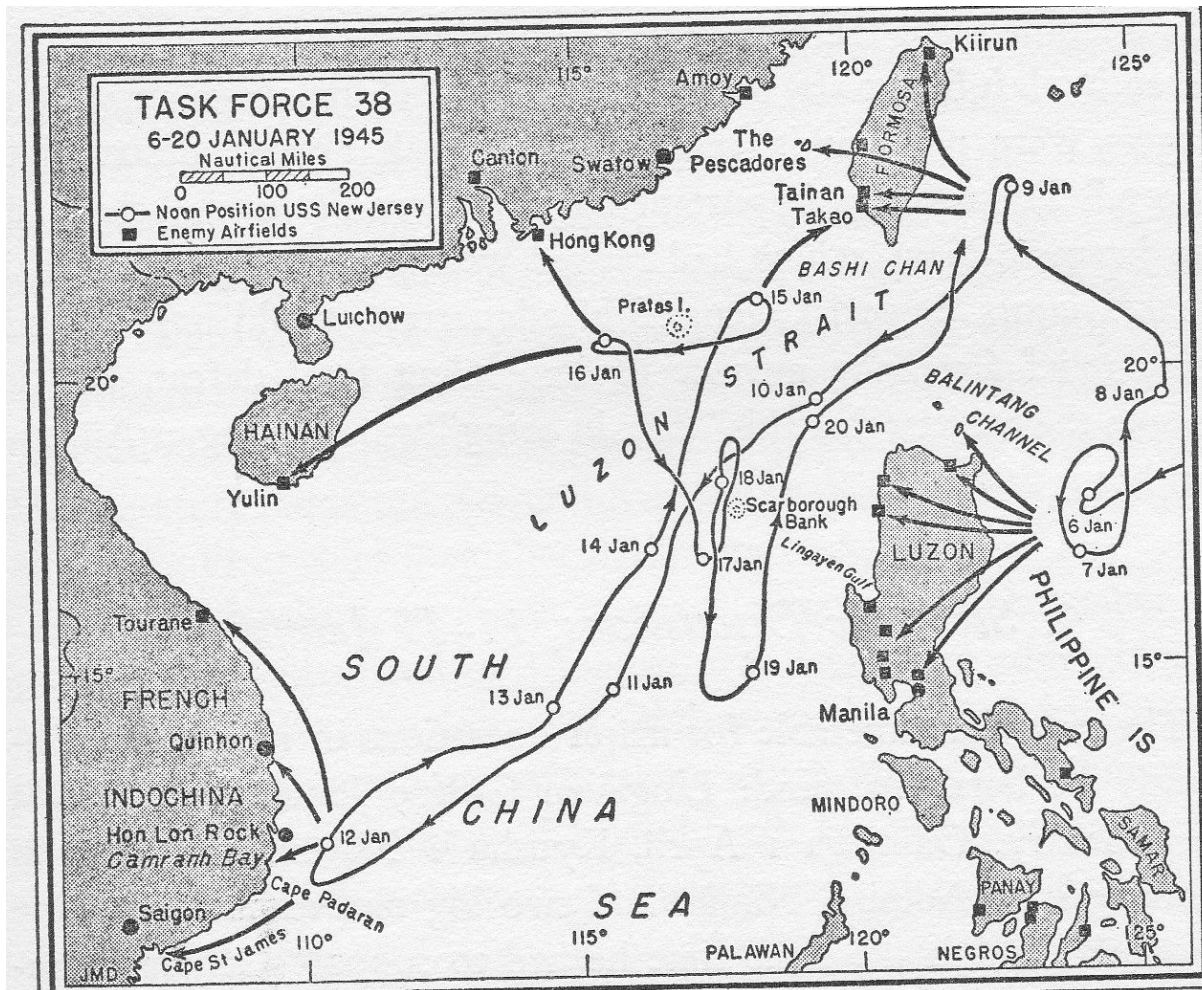
As the storm intensified on the 17th, Admiral Sherman ordered *Cotten* to take up a position between task groups 38.2 and 38.3 to act as a communications link. This made things somewhat easier as she did not have to keep a strict position in formation but could maneuver independently. On the 18th, Robinson writes,

The *Cotten*'s worst moments came when seas caught up from behind, lifting the stern seventy feet higher than the bow and giving the impression that we were headed right for the ocean's floor. It felt as if each wave wanted to move our stern to port or starboard, so that it could then roll us over on our side. In order to prevent this, the rudder had to be put over to counter the wave's thrust on the stern before it could get a good start; in several exceptional cases the outboard engine (the port engine when the stern was being pushed to port, and vice versa) had to be reversed and the inboard engine speeded up to assist the rudder. Even so, we often rolled well over forty-five degrees ... On the *Cotten* during the first hour of the 1200-1600 watch, when Herb Kanter was OOD, the bridge anemometer showed gusts of as much as ninety-three knots, or 110.75 miles per hour.

By the afternoon of the 18th the storm started to drop, and by the morning of the 19th it was gone. *Cotten* was making 25 knots to maintain its position between the task groups, and at 0845 she was ordered to return to Task Group 48.3.

South China Sea

After rest and resupply at Ulithi, TF 38 left on Dec. 30 to launch wide-ranging attacks that for the first time included the South China Sea along with Formosa and Luzon. The attacks were intended to choke off the flow of aircraft from Japan down to the Philippines, where MacArthur was preparing to invade Luzon, the largest island where the capital, Manila, was located.



Task Force 38 operations, January 1944 (Morison, *The Liberation of the Philippines*, Little, Brown and Company, 1959, p. 173)

These long-range and lengthy missions were only possible because the Navy had developed elaborate techniques for mobile fuel supply. Ocean-going oilers, along with escorting warships, would follow the task forces, which would periodically rendezvous to take on fuel. The destroyers needed to fuel frequently, and sometimes if oilers weren't available they would fuel from the larger ships.



Cotten coming alongside carrier *Essex*, 1944 (Museumships, Facebook)

Refueling, especially in heavy weather, could be hazardous. Robinson gives an example from January 17, 1945:

At 1659 we were ordered to go alongside flagship *Essex*, which had earlier completed fueling from *Pamansett*. *Essex* was now fueling screen destroyers in the effort to speed the storm-delayed and, in our case, interrupted process. From Captain Winston's point of view, this was an intimidating assignment. The carrier loomed alongside us like a

mountain. When it rolled in our direction, the flight deck seemed directly overhead; when we rolled together, our masthead seemed destined to crack into the carrier. The captain guided us as close as he dared, which was not very close, and at 1720 our men managed to get one hose aboard. All went well for nineteen minutes, when a sudden sea parted the two ships enough to snap the hose free once more, spewing hot oil all over the *Cotten* and into the South China Sea. For our day-long exertions we had received a pitiful total of 398 barrels of fuel, about one day's consumption at fifteen knots.

This time, Admiral Sherman called our squadron commander on TBS and directed that "a more efficient Small Boy¹² be sent alongside for fueling." The *Cotten* left the *Essex* for the screen with an uncharacteristically fuming Captain Winston on the bridge ... I did my best to avoid the captain for the rest of the watch. The strain on our bridge was eased somewhat when the entire fueling fiasco was terminated by Admiral Sherman at 1834.¹³

After completing operations in the South China Sea, TF 38 returned to Formosa to attack its airfields once again. Here on January 21 they underwent vigorous Japanese counterattacks:

At 1211 carriers *Ticonderoga* and *Langley* were both struck by bombs from conventional dive-bombers, not kamikazes, one of the two planes dropping the bombs being immediately shot down by gunfire.

A plume of smoke erupted from *Ticonderoga* as more Japanese planes appeared over our formation. At 1233 *Ticonderoga* reported that a group of its men had been blown overboard by the bomb blast. At 1236 a plane dove on *Essex*, its bomb narrowly missing. *Cotten* sighted another enemy plane overhead and commenced shooting with both 5-inch and machine gun batteries. This plane was shot down. Then, at 1320, we sighted life rafts in the water and picked up two of the men who had been blown overboard from *Ticonderoga*...

At this time several mines were sighted floating inside our formation. Two were sunk by gunfire while other men from *Ticonderoga* were being picked out of the water by destroyers in the screen. A bit later *Cotten* sighted another mine, sinking it with 20-mm gun fire.¹⁴

Tokyo and Iwo Jima

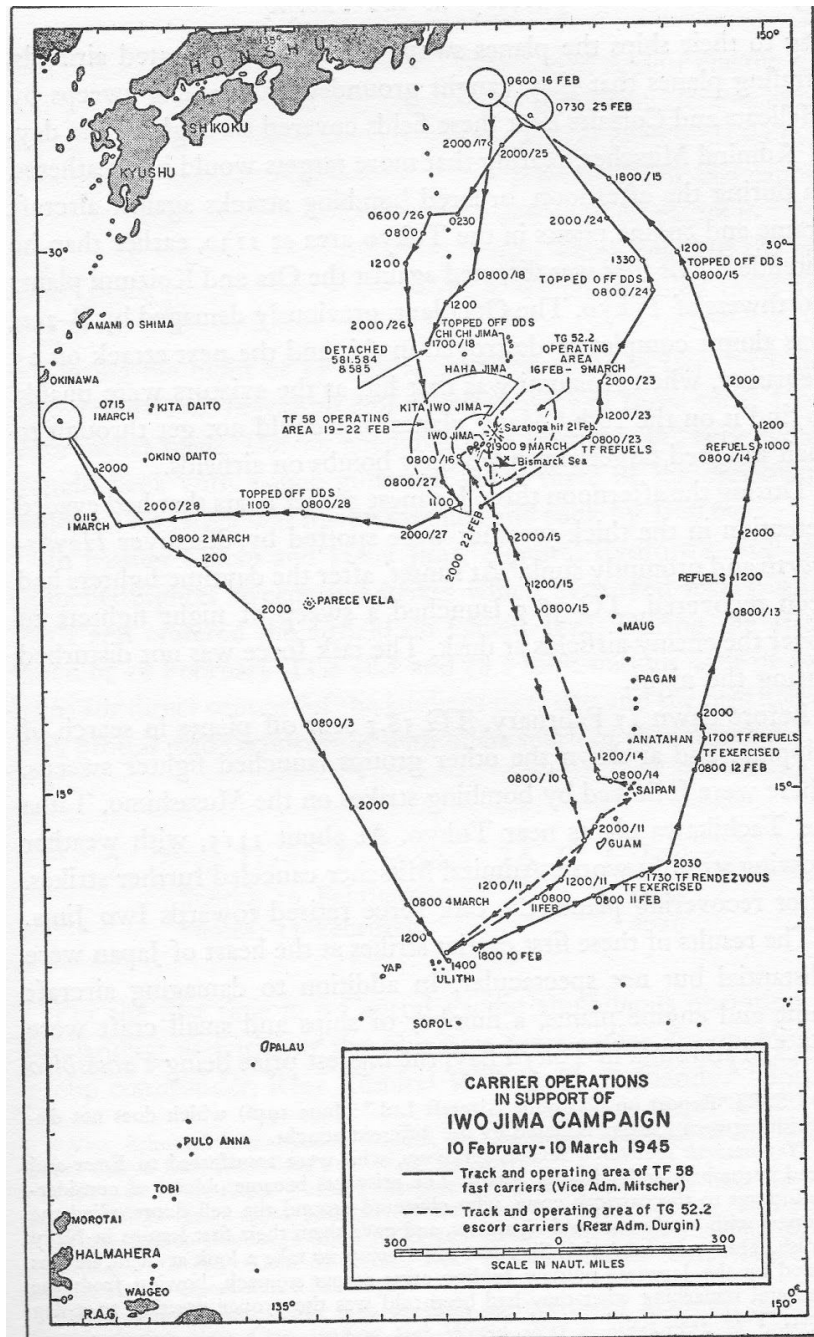
As MacArthur, supported now by his own air power, continued to overrun the Philippines, the Navy could turn to the island of Iwo Jima. It lay about half way between Japan and the Marianas where B-29s attacking Japan were based, and it was needed to serve as an emergency airstrip and

¹² destroyer

¹³ Robinson, op. cit., p. 163.

¹⁴ Ibid., p.. 165

to prevent its use by Japanese fighters. At the end of January, 1945, Admiral Spruance, who had been planning the operation, took over the fleet from Admiral Halsey (who began planning the invasion of Japan), and the fleet became Fifth Fleet instead of Third. The fast carrier force was now Task Force 58 and comprised 17 carriers with a total 1200 aircraft, eight fast battleships, 16 cruisers and 77 destroyers. TF 58 was divided into five task groups. *Cotten* was in TG 58.4 under Rear Admiral Radford.



Task Force 58 Operations (Morison, Victory in the Pacific, Little, Brown and Company, 1960, p. 23)

D-Day at Iwo Jima was set for February 19, 1945. To support it TF 58 would launch air strikes on Tokyo and the surrounding region to destroy aircraft, shipping, and factories that might provide support to Iwo Jima. This would be the first time carriers attacked Japan since the famous Halsey/Doolittle raid of 1942, when Doolittle's B-25 bombers flew from carrier *Hornet* to bomb Tokyo.

For the attack TF 58 adopted a new formation. To avoid observation and give early warning of any attack, an advanced scouting line of destroyers, including *Cotten*, was formed that extended 60 miles in width and was 36 miles in front of the task groups. The lead destroyers kept their position until they were only 100 miles from Tokyo Bay (a short plane trip), when the carriers began launching strikes at 0730 on Feb. 16. At this time the scouting destroyers returned to take up defensive positions in their task group screens.

TF 58 launched air strikes during the 16th and 17th until the weather became too bad. In spite of much worry, the enemy never attacked in retaliation. TF 58 claimed 341 enemy planes shot down in the air and 190 destroyed on the ground; our losses were 60 planes in combat and 28 operationally out of 738 sorties.

After these strikes, TF 58 headed south to support the Iwo Jima landings. On the evening of the 18th, *Cotten* and the four other destroyers in its division were ordered to leave the task group and escort the fire support ships - battleships *Washington* and *North Carolina* and cruisers *Biloxi*, *Santa Fe*, and *Indianapolis* - directly to Iwo Jima. At 0400 on the 19th, D-Day, Iwo Jima showed on the radar, and the formation broke up so that each of the heavy ships could go to its designated fire support area. Robinson, who was OOD, recounts:

Our course at high speed, through a pitch-black moonless night, would bring us under the sterns of the four destroyers to our right ... The captain placed himself over the rubber viewing hood of the pilothouse surface search radar repeater, which unfortunately kept me from seeing the overall picture. Because every ship was now heading for a different position, there was no way to keep track of them except to see them or observe the radar screen ... I searched ahead with binoculars and saw [destroyer] *Healy*, also on our port bow, and satisfied myself that on our present course speed we would pass clear. At this moment, from his position at the radar, the captain called out "Watch out for the *Healy*!" ...

This time I looked ahead as I should have done previously, and now I could make out what was in fact the [destroyer] *Gatling*, fine on our port bow and barely moving. I immediately ordered, "Right full rudder!" The helmsman spun the wheel all the way to the right. The *Cotten*, heeling over to port, turned to starboard quickly enough to rush

past the *Gatling*, leaving it not more than two hundred feet to port and perhaps considerably less, our speed still a blistering 30 knots. ...

I ordered the rudder back to amidships and was quickly analyzing our next move when the captain yelled out, “You are too close to the *Washington*! Don’t embarrass the admiral.” Of course, our maneuver to avoid the *Gatling* had brought us far to the right, and we were rapidly closing the *Washington* as a result. I turned back to the left to compensate and then asked the captain if he would please step away from the radar ... he asked me if I was in control of the situation, and I assured him that I was. I was also considerably relieved that the previous twenty minutes were now behind us.¹⁵



Iwo Jima Landings, Feb. 19, 1945 (CNN.com)

For D-Day *Cotten* was assigned to patrol a line to the right of the landing boat lanes. The crew were close enough to see the landings through binoculars and could hear the radio traffic as 30,000 marines came ashore. It quickly became clear that the marines were in a brutal fight, as the Japanese were deeply dug in and well armed. At the end of the day, the fire support ships withdrew to sea with *Cotten* and other destroyers serving to screen them. For the next few days *Cotten* provided screening for fire support ships during the day as they bombarded targets ashore and then withdrew with them at night.

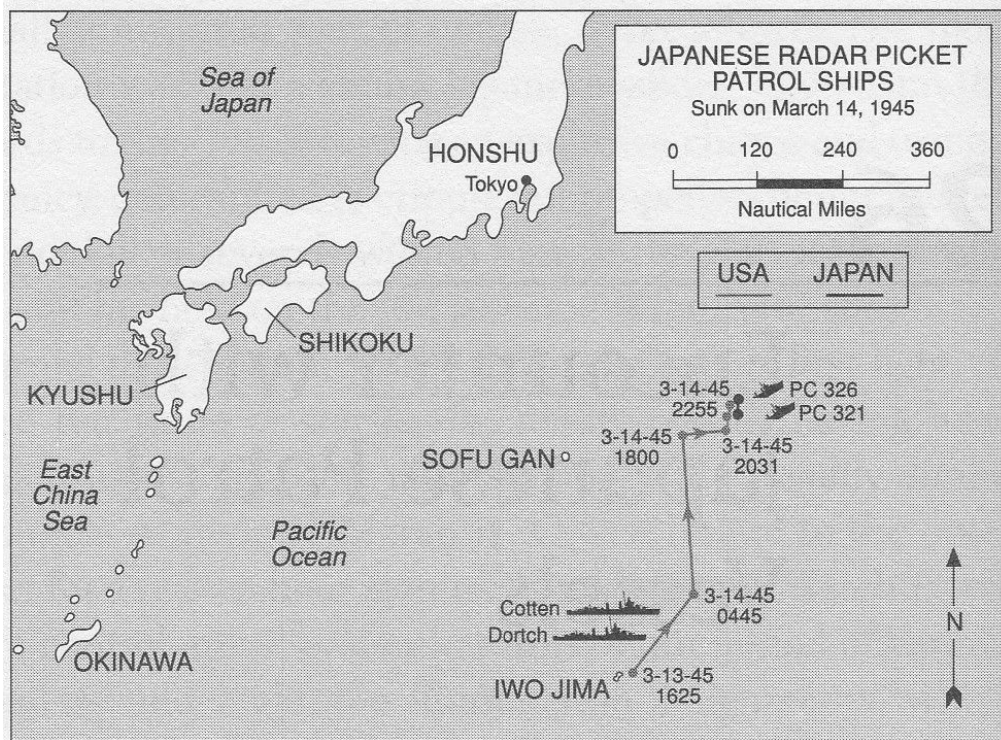
¹⁵ Robinson, op. cit., p. 176

On Feb. 22 *Cotten*, along with other destroyers and some of the fire support ships, was ordered to leave Iwo Jima and join with TF 58 for another strike on Tokyo. Due to bad weather, this accomplished little, but was followed by successful strikes and aerial reconnaissance on Okinawa. Following these missions, *Cotten* returned to Iwo Jima on March 4.

From March 5 to March 13 *Cotten* provided gunfire support for marines ashore. Marine fire control liaison officers would call in target coordinates, and *Cotten* would fire 5-inch salvos at them. Often the initial shots would be off and the marines would radio corrections until they were on target. The shells would explode in the air to saturate the ground below with shrapnel. At night, *Cotten* would be required to fire illumination rounds (star shells), sometimes one round every six minutes, all night long. This fire support was critical for the marines to move forward and to prevent Japanese counter attacks.

Encounter With Patrol Boats

On March 14, the naval commander at Iwo Jima, Admiral Hill, directed that destroyers be sent to sink two Japanese radar pickets that were providing warning of B-29 raids. The pickets were located some 420 miles north-northeast of Iwo Jima, about halfway to Japan. The destroyer squadron commander selected *Cotten* and *Dortch* (commanded by Commander Richard E. Myers) for the mission.



Radar Picket Ship Mission (Robinson, *200,000 Miles Aboard the Destroyer Cotten*, p.192)

Winston later recalled:

Shorty Myers in *Dortch* was Second Section leader in our five ship division and I, in *Cotten*, was Tail End Charlie. I chased Shorty for about 4 months and had a big time of it.

My recollection of the episode you mentioned is very vague as to details. I remember that one afternoon we were ordered to proceed to an area to the north of Iwo to "Seek out and destroy two Jap picket vessels." I don't remember where the information came from - plane contact, electronic fix or whatever - but we went up after them and as I recall, our departure from Iwo was in the afternoon so that our run in to the target area would be after dark. Don't remember whether there was any radio plan to simulate a larger force. We made radar contact perhaps about 2300 -?- and Shorty told me to take one while he took the other. We laid off for a little while and fired 5 inch but we weren't getting anywhere - one salvo would set him on fire and the splash from the next would put the fire out - so we went in close with the 40 and 20 mm. I was never able to identify the ship positively. It was a stack-aft type with a relatively high bow, a converted fisherman or coastal freighter I suppose. We practically went alongside trying to pick up some of the survivors - there [were] 20 or more in the water - but we couldn't get any. With all the shooting and lights I was reluctant to stop and put a boat in the water since we were still afraid of Jap subs.

The ship had burned to the water-line and we even tried to put a depth charge under her in an attempt to split the hull but our first pass failed and Shorty was calling me by then so we left her. Shorty had called me earlier and said to look out for these guys because they bit. Maybe his was tougher than mine for he took a shell, he thought was about 2 in, through a sight port on one of his mounts which wounded a couple of his men. He said he was having director trouble and I should come over and finish off his boy so I could paint another craft on the bridge screen. I remember the transmission but I don't remember whether we fired any more or not - perhaps Shorty had taken care of him by the time we got there.¹⁶

Robinson provides a more detailed account (based in part on ships' logs):

At 2109, at a range of ten thousand yards, Captain Winston ordered the *Cotten's* main battery to fire the first five-gun salvo. The main battery continued to fire five-gun salvos approximately once every half-minute for the next hour and ten minutes, as the range to our own target gradually decreased to five thousand yards. In all this time no hits on the enemy ship were observed. Stokey in main battery control concluded that the target was steaming in circles, effectively confusing the fire control solution ...

¹⁶ P.W.Winston, letter to Admiral H.W. Hill, Feb. 19, 1962.

On the bridge Rothschild and Winston were equally frustrated. Finally, after 850 rounds had been fired without effect, they decided to alter the style of attack radically. Stokey was ordered to cease fire. All battle stations were notified that the *Cotten* would close the enemy at high speed without firing and would slow down when the range was reduced to one thousand yards. At that range we would turn to port to unmask the starboard battery, and on command, illuminate the enemy with the starboard 36-inch searchlight and open fire simultaneously with all guns ...

Captain Winston was as good as his word, bringing the *Cotten* alongside the enemy at what amounted to point-blank range. As he turned to port to free up the starboard guns, he gave the order to the starboard searchlight to illuminate, and to main battery control and Sky 1¹⁷, "All guns commence firing." The beam of the searchlight found the enemy, a gunboat approximately 130 feet long, lighting it up in complete detail. All guns immediately opened up in a continuous fusillade, the tracers in the shells of all calibers screaming towards the enemy vessel.

The enemy guns our 40-mms were firing at were a 3-inch mount on the forecastle and at least three other guns mounted elsewhere, which looked something like our own 40-mms. Initially the Japanese fired back, but so sudden and overpowering was our fire that within less than a minute, all their guns were hit and out of action. The 20-mm gunners concentrated their fire on the enemy personnel, and within an equally short period the decks were bare, the Japanese sailors either being swept away by the hail of fire or diving overboard when their weapons had been destroyed. The 5-inch guns fired into the wooden hull of the enemy, finally hitting the target with rapid continuous fire, a 5-inch shell going out approximately every three seconds.

At 2255 the enemy, which had the number "326" on the bow, was a battered shambles. It had filled with water, and its main deck was awash, preparatory to heading for the bottom. The captain then ordered the searchlight turned off and gave the order, "Cease fire."

Captain Winston reported our target's destruction to Captain Myers of the *Dortch* at 2256. Captain Myers, now fourteen miles to the north, request the *Cotten's* assistance. The *Dortch's* fire control radar had been hit by enemy fire and put out of action, with the result that *Dortch* had been unable to destroy its target. Captain Winston set the *Cotten* in motion toward the *Dortch* at thirty knots, bringing us close aboard by 2334. The *Dortch* then withdrew, turning the second enemy over to *Cotten*.

¹⁷ "Sky 1" was Robinson's position in command of the 40-mm and 20-mm guns

This time the *Cotten* commenced firing at a range of four thousand yards. Stokey fired the five-gun salvos as before but set the shells' fuses to explode over the target instead of on impact, in the hope that the enemy's guns would be put out of action before we closed to point-blank range.

At 0011 on March 15, Captain Winston ordered the main battery to cease fire and headed the *Cotten* in to bring it alongside the second enemy ship. At 0027 the order to illuminate with the 36-inch searchlight was given, and with the enemy, PC321, in the full glare of the light, all guns commenced firing. Unlike the *Cotten's* first target, the 321 had suffered considerable damage, caused either by the *Dortch* at long range or by our recent long-range air bursts, before receiving the short-range all-caliber shelling. By 0035 the enemy ship was awash and rapidly sinking, all personnel having abandoned ship. Captain Winston gave the order to cease firing and extinguish the searchlight. The crew was then secured from battle stations ...

During the engagement with the Japanese patrol craft, *Cotten* had fired 1,040 rounds of 5-inch AA (antiaircraft) "common," 187 star shells, 511 rounds of 40-mm and 630 rounds of 20-mm - the 40-mm and 20-mm rounds having been expended over the course of a few minutes. Winston's decision to take his destroyer within a thousand yards of the enemy's guns in order to accomplish the ships' destruction was obviously the reason the mission was ultimately successful, in sharp contrast to the very ineffectual early stages of the engagement.¹⁸

After the engagement, *Cotten* and *Dortch* returned to Iwo Jima and at noon March 15, refueled, *Cotten* was on station at an outer radar picket station.

Iwo Secured and Voyage Home

Iwo Jima was declared secured at 1800 on March 16, although significant action remained for the marines to overcome surviving Japanese. On the morning of March 28, *Cotten* received orders to return to San Francisco via Eniwetok and Pearl Harbor for much-needed overhaul. She reached Eniwetok on April 2, refueled, and departed for Pearl Harbor. She arrived in Pearl Harbor on April 10 and spent only three hours there before departing for San Francisco. At 1453, April 16, *Cotten* anchored off Treasure Island in San Francisco Bay.

¹⁸ *Robinson, op. cit., pp 192-194*



Cotten approaching San Francisco, April 15, 1945 (Robinson, op. cit., p. 199)

Mary Lou had driven across country with the two children to meet the ship. This was no small feat in those days before Interstates, and I vaguely remember her entertaining us from the front seat while my two-year-old sister and I were in the back. At one point I remember she put a Halloween mask on the back of her head while driving in order to converse with us.

Winston was given quarters at Hunters Point in San Francisco where *Cotten* would be refurbished. The junior officers were invited to a party to meet the wives of the captain and executive officer. Robinson remembered, “Captain Winston’s wife seemed well matched to our sometimes fastidious commanding officer and the presence of the two of them was definitely a restraining influence on the amount of alcohol consumed.”¹⁹

Winston remained in command for only a month. On May 18, now Commander Winston was relieved by Lieutenant Commander Joseph Linehan. For his service on *Cotten*, Winston was awarded the Bronze Star with Combat “V.” The citation reads:

For meritorious achievement as Commanding Officer of the U.S.S. *Cotten*, assigned to a Carrier Task Force, operating against enemy Japanese forces during the Palau and Philippine invasions and air strikes against the Philippines, Okinawa, and

¹⁹ Robinson, op. cit., p. 213. *Interesting comment; they were not always so straight-laced!*

Formosa, from August 30 to November 11, 1944. Leading his command forcefully and with cool courage under repeated enemy air attacks, Commander Winston fought his ship gallantly during operations against these formidable hostile strongholds and, by his daring initiative, determination and skill, maintained a sturdy defense of the Task Force and contributed to the infliction of extensive damage on the Japanese. Also participating in the rescue of numerous downed air pilots, Commander Winston, by his expert tactical ability and tenacious devotion to the fulfillment of each vital mission upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.

Epilog

Winston's orders on being relieved were to command the destroyer *Brinkley Bass*, DD-887, then under construction in Orange, Texas, after first completing pre-command training in Norfolk. On August 4, 1945 he arrived with family in Orange. Of course, on August 6 and then on August 9 the atom bombs were dropped on Japan, and Japan announced its surrender on August 15, 1945, ending the war in the Pacific, so Winston's tour on *Bass* became peacetime duty. *Bass* was commissioned on October 1, 1945. I can remember going to nursery school in Orange and watching from the shore as the ship left on its first cruise.



CDR Winston assuming command of USS Brinkley Bass, DD-887, Oct 1945

Winston went on to a successful Navy career and retired in 1960 as a captain. In later years, he and Mary Lou attended a number of *Cotten* reunions and were always treated with affection by the crew. My father enjoyed telling the story of one reunion where a portly, gray-haired man came up to him and said, “Captain, you don’t remember me? I was an 18-year-old radioman on *Cotten!*”

Winston and Mary Lou retired to the family home on the Rappahannock River in Dunnsville, Va. He had a 15-year second career teaching high school in Tappahannock, VA, where he was known as “the Captain.” He passed away on August 19, 1994.

After Winston left, *Cotten* continued an extensive overhaul and then went to San Diego for refresher training. On July 30 she left to join the Third Fleet. At Guam the crew learned of Japan’s surrender. *Cotten* spent several months as part of the occupation force in Japan, then returned to San Diego, eventually to be mothballed and placed out of commission in Charleston, SC July 15, 1946. She was returned to commission in the Korean War before final retirement in 1960.