

The only ship on record to sink a Japanese submarine using potatoes.

USS *O'Bannon* (DD/DDE-450), a *Fletcher*-class destroyer was the U.S. Navy's most decorated destroyer during World War II, earning 17 battle stars and a Presidential Unit Citation. She also has the distinction of being the only ship on record to sink a Japanese submarine using potatoes.

On the 5th of April 1943 the, *O'Bannon* sighted the Japanese submarine *Ro-34* on the surface near Guadalcanal and made to ram it. At the last moment, the commanding officer that that the sub may be a minelayer and would cause severe damage to the ship if they collided. The rudder was turned hard and this action brought the destroyer directly alongside the sub. The Japanese sailors rushed to man their three-inch deck gun. The *O'Bannon's* deck hands, who were not armed, grabbed potatoes from nearby storage bins and pelted the Japanese with them. Thinking the potatoes were hand grenades, the submarine's sailors were too occupied with throwing them away from the sub to fire. This gave the *O'Bannon* the opportunity to distance itself to fire its guns at the sub. The conning tower on the sub was damaged. The sub managed to submerge but the *O'Bannon* used depth charges to finally sink it.

1942

O'Bannon briefly trained for war in the Caribbean and sailed from Boston on 29 August 1942 for the Southwest Pacific, where the long and arduous Guadalcanal campaign had just begun. For over a year, the Navy—stretched thin to cover its worldwide commitments at a period when new ships were just beginning to join the fleet in any number—was to fight and fight again in the Solomon Islands in one of the most bitterly contested campaigns of history, wresting air and sea control from the Japanese and providing the Marine Corps and the Army with every possible support as they gained ground inch by inch on the myriad islands. Assigned the Destroyer Squadron 21 (DesRon 21), *O'Bannon* played a valiant part in these endeavors, winning a Presidential Unit Citation.

Based at Nouméa, New Caledonia, *O'Bannon* first escorted *Copahee* (CVE-12) on a run to Guadalcanal, where on 9 October, twenty Marines flew their Grumman F4F Wildcats off *Copahee's* decks, desperately needed at the beleaguered Henderson Field. Through the remainder of the month, *O'Bannon* sailed the New Hebrides and southern Solomons on escort duty. On 7 November at Nouméa, she joined Rear Admiral Daniel J. Callaghan's Support Group, ready to sail with a convoy carrying critical reinforcements, replacements, food, ammunition, and aviation material.

On the approach to Guadalcanal, *O'Bannon* sighted and fired on a surfaced enemy submarine, holding it down while the convoy passed safely. On the afternoon of 12 November, the partially unladen transports were attacked by sixteen enemy torpedo bombers; eleven were shot down. *O'Bannon* fired on four of the enemy planes.

Now came word that the Japanese were moving south in force. Two battleships, a light cruiser, and 14 destroyers were bound to destroy Henderson Field by bombardment, to break up the American reinforcement mission, and to cover reinforcement movements of their own. *O'Bannon* and the other ships of the Support Force, two heavy and three light cruisers and eight destroyers, confronted the greatly superior enemy early on 13 November

in Ironbottom Sound, so named for the number of ships on both sides sunk there during the Guadalcanal campaign. *O'Bannon* boldly attacked the Japanese battleship *Hiei*, closing so near that the battleship could not depress her main battery far enough to fire on the destroyer. *O'Bannon's* gunfire, in combination with the attacks of the rest of the force, damaged *Hiei* so badly that she was a sitting duck for the air attack, which forced her scuttling the next day.

This first engagement of the Naval Battle of Guadalcanal was short but furious. Two American light cruisers, in one of which Rear Admiral Norman Scott lost his life, and four destroyers were lost, while two Japanese destroyers were sunk, and *Hiei* prepared for her doom. Above all, the Japanese were turned back, and Henderson Field was saved from destruction. The importance of this success is illustrated by the fact that the next day, Henderson aviators sank eleven enemy troop transports attempting to reinforce the island.

Through October 1942, *O'Bannon* protected landings, carried out escort duties from Nouméa and Espiritu Santo to Guadalcanal and Tulagi, joined in bombardments at Guadalcanal, Munda, and Kolombangara, and shouldered her share of the nightly patrols up "the Slot", guarding against Japanese reinforcements.

1943

In the same month after sinking submarine Ro-34, the *O'Bannon* also splashed at least two enemy aircraft in various attacks.

In the Battle of Kula Gulf (6 July), *O'Bannon* fought with three cruisers and three other destroyers against ten Japanese destroyers, swept the enemy from the area, though an American cruiser was lost. A week later, the Battle of Kolombangara had to be fought in the same waters against a Japanese cruiser, five destroyers and four destroyer escorts. The same American force sank the Japanese cruiser *Jintsu* and turned the smaller ships away, losing one destroyer themselves and having three cruisers damaged.

For the next two months, *O'Bannon* spent most of her time in Vella Gulf, guarding landings, intercepting Japanese troop convoys and their covering escorts, and fighting off air attacks. With the aid of sister destroyers, she sank a number of barges, two submarine chasers, an armed boat, and a gunboat on various patrols. The climax of operations in the area was the Battle of Vella Lavella on 6 October, brought on by Japanese attempts to evacuate their troops from that island. With *Selfridge* (DD-357) and *Chevalier* (DD-451), *O'Bannon* made the first attack on the evacuation force, a group of nine or ten destroyers and smaller armed craft. The three American ships contacted six enemy destroyers and raced at 33 knots (61 km/h) to launch torpedoes and open gunfire. Japanese destroyer *Yūgumo* was turned into a blazing hulk, but both *Selfridge* and *Chevalier* took torpedo hits. *O'Bannon* was close on *Chevalier's* stern when the latter was struck, and the most radical maneuvers could not keep her from swinging into her sister's side. The enemy retired with three newly arrived American destroyers in pursuit, while *O'Bannon* guarded her stricken sisters, rescuing the survivors of *Chevalier*.

1944

O'Bannon made battle repairs at Tulagi, then sailed to the west coast for overhaul. By 18 March 1944, she was back in the Solomons, ready for her part in the series of westward-

moving amphibious assaults that won New Guinea. Again, it was escort and bombardment repeatedly until 18 October, when *O'Bannon* cleared Hollandia to escort reinforcements for the invasion of Leyte. The convoy was brought in safely on 24 October, the eve of the Battle for Leyte Gulf. *O'Bannon* guarded the Northern Transport area and patrolled the entrances to Leyte Gulf during the battle, coming under air attack. Thus, she played her part in the definitive destruction of the Japanese Navy.

1945

Through June 1945 *O'Bannon* operated primarily in the Philippines, serving in the escort or assault force for the long roll call of invasions: Ormoc Bay, Mindoro, Bataan, Lingayen Gulf, Corregidor, Palawan, Zamboanga, Cebu, and Caraboa. Air attacks were frequent in the early period, and *O'Bannon* splashed several raiders. During the Lingayen offensive on 31 January 1945, *O'Bannon*, with three other destroyers, attacked and sank an enemy submarine. Japanese records studied after the war indicate it was most likely *Ro-115*. At the end of April and early in May, *O'Bannon* interrupted her Philippine operations to give fire support at Tarakan, Borneo, and cover minesweeping operations there.

O'Bannon rendezvoused with a group of escort carriers off Okinawa on 17 June and guarded them as they struck against Sakishima Gunto. In July, she protected the large carriers as they flew strikes on northern Honshū and Hokkaidō. With the close of the war, *O'Bannon* patrolled the coast of Honshū until 27 August, when she joined *Nicholas* (DD-449) and *Taylor* (DD-468) to escort *Missouri* (BB-63) into Tokyo Bay, by order of Admiral William Halsey, "because of their valorous fight up the long road from the South Pacific to the very end." There, she patrolled until 1 September. She then sailed to San Francisco and San Diego. She was decommissioned after overhaul on 21 May 1946.

(from the article [USS O'Bannon \(DD-450\)](#) on www.Wikipedia.org)