**History of USS John D. Henley (DD-553)**

The USS John D. Henley was a Fletcher-class destroyer, one of 115 destroyers ordered under the 70% expansion program of Fiscal Year 1941. Henley specifically was one four destroyers ordered under Program 18d on 09 September 1940 and assigned to Gulf Shipbuilding, Chickasaw, Alabama.

Laid down on 21 July 1941, John D. Henley was launched on 15 November 1942, sponsored by Miss Shelah Keith Kane, great-great-great-granddaughter of the ship’s namesake. Placed in commission at 1400 02 February 1944, Commander Charles H. Smith commanding. Fitting out was accomplished at Mobile, Alabama and Naval Operating Base Algiers, Louisiana, after which the ship proceeded to Bermuda for shakedown training. Upon completion of shakedown (28 February-26 March), the ship went to Norfolk Navy Yard for a brief post-shakedown repair period, arriving there 28 March.

On 06 April 1944 the ship left Norfolk as escort for the Knox (APA-46) and proceeded, via the Panama Canal, to Pearl Harbor, arriving there 23 April. After a short period of operation training in the Hawaiian Islands, the ship went on her first operational assignment as escort in Task Group 12.1. This assignment took her to Majuro, Marshall Islands where she reported to ComServRon 10 for duty on 08 May. As escort for tankers Kennebago (AO-81), Neches (AO-47) and SS Bladensburg, she departed Majuro 11 May and returned to Pearl Harbor on the 17th, where Captain Edward E. Paré came aboard as CTG 50.17.

On 27 May 1944 Henley got underway with TG 16.6 and proceeded to Majuro. On 06 June 1944, Task Group 50.17 left Majuro for operations in the vicinity of the Marianas Islands, Henley acting as Task Group flagship. Operations consisted of fuelling the fleet during the occupation and consolidation of Saipan, Tinian and Guam. Actual engagements with enemy aircraft occurred on 17 and 18 June. During the latter action Neshanic (AO-71) and Saranac (AO-74) were damaged by bombs. On 14 August arrived at Eniwetok, where Task Group 50.17 was dissolved.

On 17 August Captain Jasper T. Acuff came aboard and formed Task Group 30.8. With CTG aboard, the ship got underway 20 August and proceeded with the group to Seeadler Harbor, Manus, arriving 26 August. On 04 September, TG 30.8 departed Manus for operations in the vicinity of the Palau Islands and Ulithi Atoll. Operations were similar to those in the Marianas. On 25 September she recovered the crew of a VC-77 Grumman TBF which had ditched from Rudyerd Bay (CVE-81)[[1]](#endnote-1) . On 29 October, Henley arrived at Ulithi and departed 04 November for further fueling operations with TG 30.8. On 21 November returned to Ulithi, where CTG 30.8 shifted his flag to Aylwin (DD-355).

On 22 November departed Ulithi with TG 38.3 for operations covering the Leyte landings. On 23 November reported to CTG 38.2 for duty and on 25 November underwent air attack during which Hancock (CV-19) and Intrepid (CV-11) were damaged by kamikazes. Shortly after she recovered the crew of another crashed TBF. On 27 November returned to Ulithi for a training and upkeep period. During this period she sortied several times for gunnery and training exercises.

On 26 December departed Ulithi with TG 30.3. After being detached from that group on 28 December, Henley proceeded to Guam with Boyd (DD-544) for temporary duty with Task Unit 94.7.1. The operations for the period from 28 December 1944 to 30 January 1945 consisted of various escort missions from Guam to Eniwetok and Saipan, anti-submarine patrol and search in the vicinity of Guam, and short upkeep and training periods. At 0821 09 January, two men fell overboard at approximately 12-36n 155-11e and were not recovered after a thorough search. While conducting the search, the ship’s whaleboat carried away and had to be cast loose; the members of the boat crew thrown into the water were recovered safely by PC-1079. These were the only casualties suffered by this destroyer. On 30 January, proceeded independently to Ulithi, arriving there the next day.

Conducted operation training for coverage of underwater demolition teams, 01-08 February 1945. On 09 February, departed Ulithi with TG 52.16 enroute to Saipan, arriving the 11th. Conducted further training exercises off Saipan until the 14th, then departed with TG 52.19 for operations in connection with the Iwo Jima landings.

The period 16 February to 05 March were spent in the vicinity of Iwo Jima conducting fire support, shore bombardment, screening and radar picket missions.[[2]](#endnote-2) On 05 March proceed to Ulithi with TU 51.29.7 and arrived there 08 March.

The period 08-21 March was spent engaged in upkeep and training at Ulithi. On 21 March departed there with TU 52.1.2 for operations in the vicinity of Okinawa Gunto. Operations consisted of screening for CVL-type carriers during air support for the landings and occupation of Okinawa. On 25 March underwent “non-aggressive” attack by enemy aircraft, no damage inflicted by either side. On 03 April, enemy aircraft attacked formation. Wake Island (CVE-65) was damaged during this action by a kamikaze. Entered Kerama Retto anchorage at various times for logistic purposes. On 11 May recovered the crew of a ditched VC-93 TBF from Petrof Bay (CVE-80),[[3]](#endnote-3) and two hours later, the pilot of a ditched VC-94 F4F from Shamrock Bay (CVE-84). On 17 May she similarly recovered a ditched VC-97 F4F pilot from Shipley Bay (CVE-85).[[4]](#endnote-4) On 28 May Henley’s unit designation was changed to TU 32.1.1. During the morning of 31 May while delivering mail, suffered engine derangement when the spring bearing and packing of the port turbine gave way, and spent the first six days of June anchored in Kerama Retto making repairs. On 07 June underwent another air attack which damaged Natoma Bay (CVE-62). Other planes approached but did not attack. Natoma Bay was not extensively damaged and resumed action within two hours. On 27 June, Henley arrived and anchored in San Pedro Bay, Leyte and went alongside Yosemite (AD-19) for a tender availability.

On 30 June 1945 Lt. Commander Simon E. Ramey relieved Commander Charles H. Smith as commanding officer. Ramey had formerly commanded Edwards (DD-619). Smith went on to command Fiske (DD-842) and would later receive the Legion of Merit for his time in command of John D. Henley.

On 01 July departed Leyte Gulf with TU 32.1.2 to provide air and surface coverage for minesweeping operations north and west of Okinawa Gunto. Entered Buckner Bay 15 July for logistics and departed 17 July to screen carrier operations, returning to Buckner Bay the 20th. Departed 25 July for further coverage of minesweeping operations off Shanghai, China with Task Group 95.3. Returned to Buckner Bay on 07 August and operated from there on night retirements during negotiations for the cessation of hostilities with Japan. On 24 August departed Buckner Bay with Aulick (DD-569) to take air-sea rescue station off Amami O Shima during preliminaries to the actual surrender. On 28 August she recovered three crew of a USAAF bomber which had crashed.[[5]](#endnote-5) On 02 September returned to Buckner Bay pending detachment for return to the United States.

On 06 September departed Okinawa enroute to the west coast. Arrived San Francisco 24 September and entered Hunters Point drydock for overhaul. On 30 April 1946, John D. Henley was decommissioned at San Diego and placed in the Pacific Reserve Fleet there in January 1947. Later moved to Bremerton, Washington, she was struck from the Naval Register on 01 May 1968. She was sold for scrapping in May 1970 to Zidell Explorations, Inc., Portland, Oregon.

**SOURCES:**

War Diaries, USS John D. Henley (DD-553), February 1944 – August 1945

War History, USS John D. Henley (DD-553), dated 05 October 1945 (DD553/A12 Serial 237)

Action Report, Assault and Occupation of Iwo Jima (DD553/A16-3 Serial 028)

Muster Roll, USS John D. Henley (DD-553), Report of Changes, 19 January 1945

War Diary, Composite Squadron 93, May 1945

Compiled by David L. Wright

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1. This was TBM-1C BuNo 46052, piloted by LT C.A. Collins [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. John D. Henley expended 1879 rounds 5”/38 AAC, 113 White Phosphorus, 291 Illuminating and 7146 rounds 40mm during this fire support operation. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. This was TBM-3 BuNo 68711, piloted by LT(jg) L.S. DeVries. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. This was either FM-2 BuNo 57073 or 74110 [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. This was USAAF B-32 Dominator 42-108528 of the 386th BS/312th BG, which had crashed due to mechanical difficulties. Aulick recovered nine others, one of whom died aboard that evening, while one crewman remained unaccounted for. This bomber had taken off from Yontan Airfield on Okinawa on a photo reconnaissance over Tokyo to see if the Japanese were complying with the surrender terms. It was likely the last combat mission loss in World War Two. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)