

# IRANIAN NAVY'S

# BLACKEST DAY

THE US NAVY'S LARGEST SURFACE ACTION SINCE WORLD WAR TWO  
BY MYLES ROBERTSON

Taken from an attacking intruder, this photo shows Iranian frigate IRIS Sahand burning after being attacked by A-6Es off the USS Enterprise.



Jacket patch for Operation Praying Mantis.



Damaged frigate USS Samuel B. Roberts underway after striking an Iranian mine. USMC CH-46 Sea Knight is on the helicopter pad.

The 18th of April 1988 is a day the Iranian Navy probably never wishes to repeat. Earlier that month, the Iranians had been busy. They were laying minefields in the open shipping lanes of the Persian Gulf, hoping to engender destruction and panic among the civilian shipping companies that frequented the area.

On 14 April, the frigate USS Samuel B. Roberts (FFG-58) entered the area and came in contact with an Iranian-made Sadaf 02 (Farsi for "oyster"). This was a moored contact mine based on a 1908 Russian design. The resulting explosion inflicted severe damage to the Samuel B. Roberts. The frigate's keel was broken and the explosion started fires while also flooding two main spaces. An alert lookout had spotted the mine field and this gave the ship's captain just enough time to order the crew to get above the main deck before the ship hit an unseen mine while attempting to back out of the minefield. Captain Paul X. Rinn's quick action kept casualties to ten wounded, four of which were serious.

Later, a computer simulation showed that the frigate should have sunk but the well-trained crew saved their ship in one of the most inspiring damage-control efforts in the Navy's history. Rear Admiral Anthony Less, commander of the US Middle East Force, radioed Rinn and asked if he was going to abandon the burning and flooding frigate. Rinn replied that he had no intention of giving

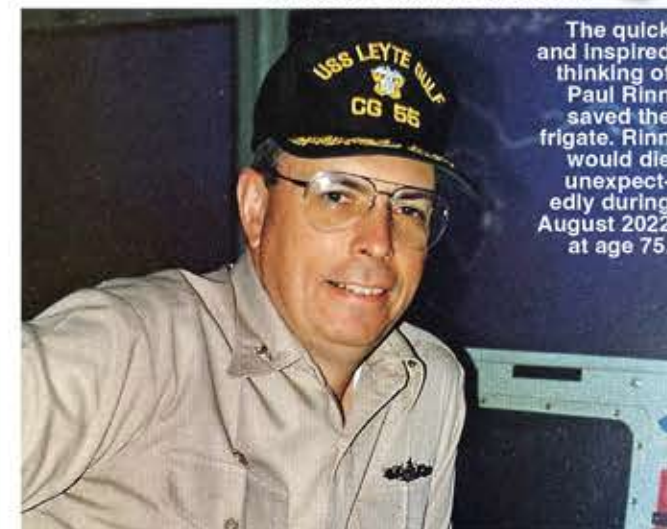
up the ship and finished the message with the ship's motto of "No Higher Honor." This famous motto derived from a battle report that had been filed by L/Commander. Roberts Copeland, commander of the first Samuel B. Robert (DE-413). The plucky destroyer escort was lost in an extraordinarily valiant sacrificial action during WWII's Battle of Leyte Gulf. Copeland stated there was "no higher honor" than to lead the American Sailors who displayed such extraordinary courage during battle.

The frigate had been taking part in Operation Earnest Will, the 1987/1988 effort to protect reflagged Kuwaiti oil tankers from Iranian attacks during the deadly Iran-Iraq War. One particularly bad character in this operation was the Iranian captain of the frigate Sabalan who was known as Captain Nasty. This nick-name came from his practice of firing into the crew compartments of neutral merchant ships and tankers. He would then leave these high-casualty scenes of attack with this trademark radio call of "Have a nice day."

The illegal Iranian activities



Iranian Sadaf 02 mine that struck the Samuel B. Roberts.



The quick and inspired thinking of Paul Rinn saved the frigate. Rinn would die unexpectedly during August 2022 at age 75.