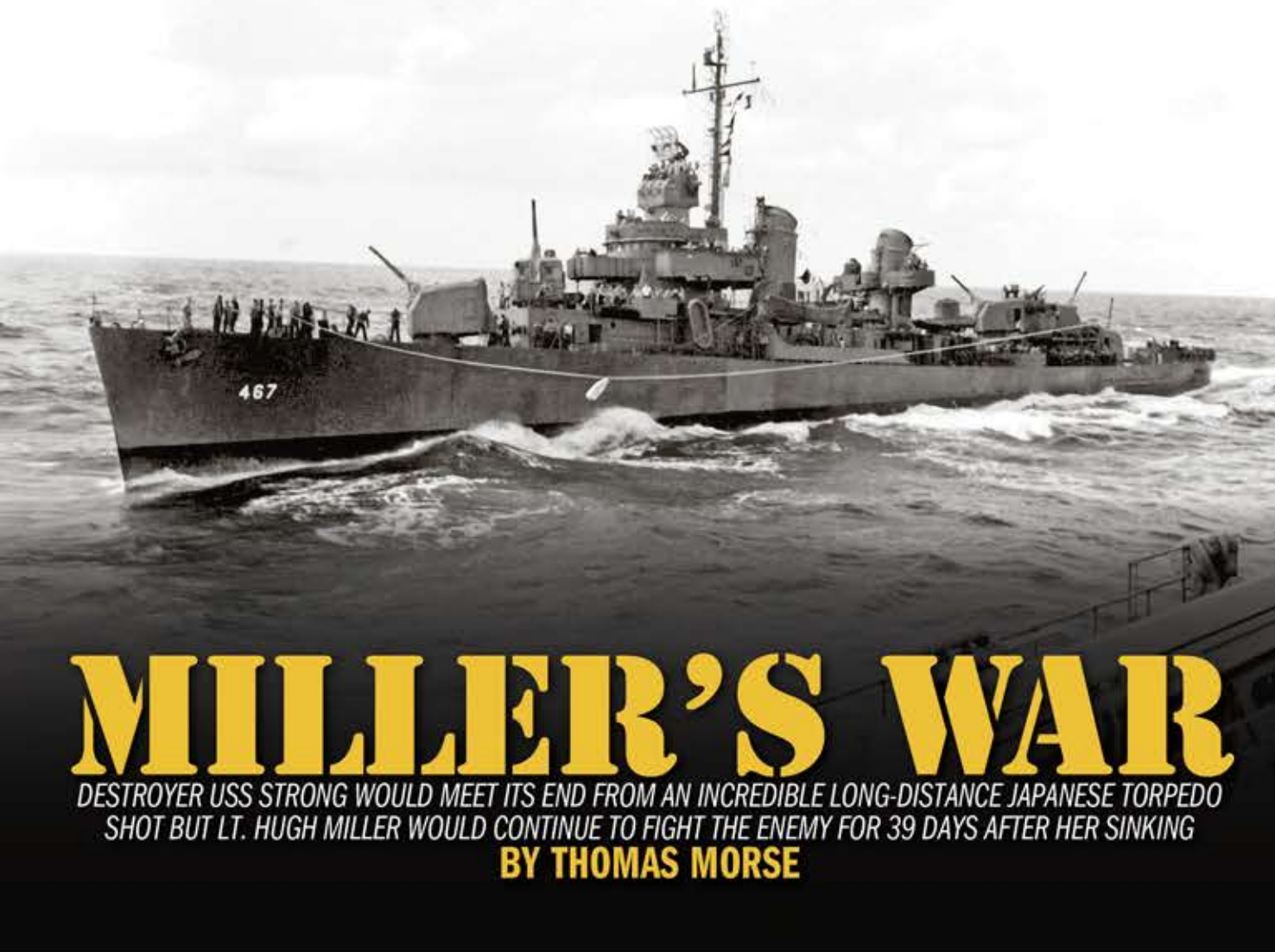




MILLER'S WAR

DESTROYER USS STRONG WOULD MEET ITS END FROM AN INCREDIBLE LONG-DISTANCE JAPANESE TORPEDO SHOT BUT LT. HUGH MILLER WOULD CONTINUE TO FIGHT THE ENEMY FOR 39 DAYS AFTER HER SINKING
BY THOMAS MORSE

Like all her sisterships in the Fletcher-class, USS *Strong* (DD-467) was a sleek and beautiful weapon of war. She had been named after R/Adm. James H. Strong who was in command of USS *Monogahela* during the Civil War. She was a barkentine-rigged screw sloop-of-war doing an admirable job in stopping Confederate blockade runners. Strong was a career sailor and he inspired his crew to meet and defeat Confederate forces wherever they found them. During July 1864, Strong ordered *Monogahela's* boats to be lowered and the sailors to row out for a recon of Mobile Bay to determine if any mines had been laid and to also gauge the strength of Confederate defenses. Gaining valuable intelligence, Strong passed the information on to Adm.

Farragut who used the intelligence to plan an all-out attack on Mobile Bay.

On 5 August, Farragut took his force of 18 ships that had been stripped for all-out action into battle. Four monitors were in the force and the objective was to destroy Confederate ships and defenses in what would become known as the Battle of Mobile Bay. Strong sailed along the shoreline while his cannons bombarded enemy positions but then he spotted the Confederate ram CSS *Tennessee*. The ram had been joined by wooden gunboats CSS *Gaines*, *Morgan*, and *Selma* and they steamed into combat against Farragut's powerful fleet. *Tennessee* could have stayed near the protective guns of the Confederate fort but Lt. James D. Johnston decided to directly engage the much superior Union force.

Steaming into the Union fleet, *Tennessee* became the main target for every Union ship. That is when Strong decided to use the *Monogahela* to ram the Confederate ship. He steered his vessel directly at the Confederate and impacted the ship with great force. *Monogahela* was not designed as a ram so damage to *Tennessee* was minimal but Strong's ship had been heavily damaged. Other ships attacked the Confederate and the situation was hopeless so Johnston had little choice but to surrender. *Tennessee* was quickly repaired and joined the Union forces. For his valor and initiative, Strong received a high commendation along with promotion to captain.

Thus, it was most appropriate that the new destroyer carried his name when it

was launched on 17 May 1942. With the war going badly for America, *Strong* and every other destroyer was desperately needed in the fight with Japan. For her first mission, *Strong* was assigned to Convoy UGS-2 that was heading for North Africa and she set sail on 13 November. The voyage was uneventful and she returned to New York with Convoy GUF-2.

Following a period of maintenance, *Strong* set out on 27 December to transit the Panama Canal. She would refuel at Bora Bora in the Society Islands before arriving at Noumea on 27 January 1943. At that location, she was assigned to convoy duty. On 1 February, she joined USS *Cory* to guard a convoy headed for Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides. After that, she patrolled the dangerous waters off Guadalcanal until 13 February when she joined Task Force 67 that was composed of four cruisers and a destroyer escort.

For the next month, TF-67 patrolled in and around the Solomon Islands, searching for contact with the enemy. On 14 March, *Strong* detached from TF-67 to join with *Nicholas*, *Radford*, and *Taylor* to bombard shore installations on Kolombangara Island along with targets on the Vila Stanmore Plantation. After this was done, the ships resumed normal patrol duties.

Early on the morning of 5 April 1943, *Strong* made surface radar contact with what was later determined to be submarine *Ro 34*. The target was illuminated by the ship's searchlight and, joined by destroyer *O'Bannon*, the enemy was engaged with 5-inch fire at a range of about 9000 yards. Three hits were made and *Ro 34* began to settle by the stern and then sank. *Strong* then dropped two patterns of depth charges and saw debris rise to the surface.

On the early morning hours of 7 May, *Strong* joined three destroyer minelayers and headed to Blackett Strait between Kolombangara and Arundel Island where they laid a field of mines. On the morning of 8 May, four Japanese destroyers sailed around Kolombangara Strait and went directly into the mine field. One of the enemy ships immediately sank while two others were damaged and limped out of the area only to be attacked and destroyed by Navy



Aerial view of *Strong* showing the purposeful lines of the Fletcher-class.

aircraft. The last destroyer managed to escape in what was a major victory for the Americans.

On the night of 12/13 May, *Strong* and the task force blasted Kolombangara with cannon fire before heading to patrol duty around Guadalcanal. On 16 June, *Strong* was between Tulagi and Guadalcanal when a flight of around 15 Japanese dive-bombers attacked the destroyer and other ships of the task force. *Strong* was in the lead and her gunners claimed the destruction of three of the dive-bombers.

American forces landed at Rice Anchorage on the morning of 5 July and *Strong* and the ships of TF-18 were lending support by shelling Vila Stanmore, Enogai, and Bairoko. Steaming ahead of the main force, *Strong* and *Nichols* entered Bairoko Harbor and began shelling the area.

Just nine minutes after she began shelling enemy targets, a torpedo slammed into the destroyer's port side. The torpedo was part of a salvo fired by the IJN destroyer *Niizuki*, which had launched them from the incredible distance of eleven nautical miles. This is believed to be the longest-range torpedo kill in history.

Seeing that *Strong* was gravely wounded, USS *Chevalier* intentionally rammed *Strong's* bow so that nets and lines could be tossed to the damaged ship. By doing this, 241 men were rescued. Japanese shore gunners spotted



The destroyer was named after Civil War veteran Cmdr. James H. Strong.

all the action and then fired star shells to illuminate the area. They then began firing high-explosive rounds that struck *Strong* and *Chevalier*. *O'Bannon* entered the battle and began firing at the Japanese gun emplacements while the other two destroyers withdrew from the area.

Strong began to rapidly settle with a 40- to 60-degree list to starboard. She then broke in two and began to sink but several of her depth charges exploded and 46 sailors were killed.

Aboard the damaged USS *Strong* was Lt. Hugh Barr Miller, Jr. Prior to joining the Navy, Miller had established a strong football career with the University of Alabama and had gained the nick-named "Rose Bowl" Miller. He had been born in

Fletcher-class USS *Strong* (DD-467) was photographed high-lining mail to USS *Honolulu* during operations in the Solomon Islands during early July 1943. She would be torpedoed a few days later.