

HISTORY OF USS FRANK E. EVANS (DD 754)

Namesake

USS FRANK E. EVANS (DD 754) was named in honor of Brigadier General Frank E. Evans, U.S. Marine Corps. Frank E. Evans was born 19 November 1876 in Franklin, Pennsylvania. He was an infantryman in the Spanish-American War and was commissioned in the Marine Corps 15 February, 1900. He served in the Philippines with the First Marine Brigade and had various duties in the United States before America's entry into World War I. He sailed for France with the Sixth Regiment of Marines, earning the Navy Cross and other awards for distinction of his service with the American Expeditionary Force. His post war career included duty in Haiti where from 1927 to 1930 he commanded the Constabulary Detachment and was Chief of the Gendarmerie d'Haiti. Brigadier General Evans was also District Marine Officer of several Naval Districts. He retired 1 December 1940 and died at his home in Honolulu, 25 November 1941.

Construction

FRANK E. EVANS (DD 754) was built by the Bethlehem Steel Company, Staten Island, New York. Her keel was laid 21 April 1944. She launched 3 October 1944, under the sponsorship of Mrs. Frank E. Evans, widow of Brigadier General Evans, U.S. Marine Corps. The destroyer commissioned in the New York Naval Shipyard 3 February 1945, Commander Harry Smith, USN, commanding.

FRANK E. EVANS (DD 754) was designed for a length overall of 376 feet, 5 inches; extreme beam 41 feet, 1 inch; standard displacement of 2200 tons; draft of 15 feet, 8 inches; a designed speed of 34 knots; and designed complement of 11 officers and 325 men. She was initially armed with 3 gun mounts (each five-inch guns), .6 each 38 caliber guns; 11 each 20mm guns and 10 torpedo tubes in two quintuple mounts. For antisubmarine warfare, she carried 6 depth charge projectors and 2 depth charge tracks.

1945-1949

FRANK E. EVANS departed New York on 24 February 1945 for shakedown training out of Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. She returned on 31 March for alterations and sailed from Norfolk 23 April for brief operations at Guantanamo Bay before transit of the Panama Canal 5 May for duty in the Pacific. She arrived at Pearl Harbor 23 May and sailed the 28th with a military convoy bound by way of the Marshalls, the Marianas, and the Caroline Islands to Okinawa.

FRANK E. EVANS reached Okinawa on 24 June 1945 and several times drove off enemy aircraft while on picket patrol off that newly-won Fleet Base. She remained on duty off Okinawa as hostilities with Japan came to an end on 15 August 1945. On the 30th, she put to sea with a cruiser-destroyer task force that called at Port Darien, Manchuria (2-6 September) to insure release of former prisoners-of-war by the Japanese. She supported the occupation landings at Jinson, Korea, and was one of the units operating among Chinese ports to insure demilitarization in the following months. This duty came to an end on 6 March 1946 when she departed Tsingtao for return to the United States. Her port calls were Guam, Eniwetok, and Pearl Harbor, en route to San Francisco, California, arriving 31 March 1946. She entered the Mare Island Naval Shipyard 7 June 1947. She was then decommissioned at San Diego on 7 July 1947.

FRANK E. EVANS remained in reserve until re-commissioned at San Diego, 11 May 1949, Commander William C. Meyer, USN, commanding. Following a fitting out period in the San Francisco Naval Shipyard and brief operations out of San Diego, she again decommissioned 14 December 1949.

1950-1959

The communist invasion of South Korea and resulting intervention by the United Nations returned FRANK E. EVANS to duty and she was re-commissioned again on 15 September 1950 and departed San Diego 2 January 1951 for duty with the 7th Fleet. The destroyer arrived at Yokosuka 23 January and put to sea 3 February to join the Fast Carrier Task Force 77 off the coast of Korea. She carried out her first bombardment mission in Wonsan Harbor 26 February 1951 and engaged enemy shore batteries eleven times in the following months. On 18 June she was straddled by enemy fire and shrapnel ripped more than thirty holes in her plating. Four of her men suffered minor injuries in this action. She made

a quick trip to Sasebo for repairs and was back on bombardment station 28 June 1951. The destroyer also bombarded targets of opportunity in the Songjin-Chongjin area. She departed Yokosuka 24 August 1951 and returned to San Diego 4 September 1951.

Following a yard period, and readiness operations off the coast of California, FRANK E. EVANS departed San Diego 22 March 1952 to again support United Nations Forces in Korea. She arrived at Yokosuka 14 April and sailed four days later to join the fast carriers off the East Coast of Korea. She departed the carrier formation 1 May for anti-junk patrol between Songjin and Wonsan. With the cruiser MANCHESTER (CL 83), she rained destruction on enemy gun emplacements off Songjin and hit hard at coastal targets ranging to the "bomb line" south of Wonsan. This duty came to an end 11 May 1952 when she rejoined the Fast Carrier Task Force 77. She returned to Sasebo 18 May and got underway the 24th to patrol in the Taiwan Straits until 20 June. She next joined cruiser BREMERTON (CA 130) to resume coastal bombardment and blockade ranging from Wonsan to Hungnam Harbor. She bombarded Hungnam Harbor the night of 5 September 1952 and continued in action between Wonsan and the "bomb line" through 26 September when she again joined the fast carriers. She had a brief respite at Sasebo 9-10 October, then returned off Wonsan in company with battleship IOWA (BB 61). After gunfire support in the Kojo Area she returned to Yokosuka 18 October 1952. She sailed for home 21 October and arrived at her new home port of Long Beach, California, 6 November 1952.

Following overhaul and coastal Operations, FRANK E. EVANS sailed from Long Beach 13 June 1953 and reached Yokosuka 7 July. The truce brought an end to armed conflict in Korea but the destroyer patrolled in the Taiwan Straits and joined the screen of Fast Carrier Task Force 77 keeping watch over the uneasy truce in the Far East. She departed Yokosuka 1 December 1953 and returned to Long Beach 20 December. She had completed five additional cruises to the Far East with her return to Long Beach 28 August 1959.

1960-1968

FRANK E. EVANS began a new phase in her naval career 17 May 1960 when she stood out of Long Beach with the Anti-submarine Task Group built around anti-submarine warfare carrier HORNET (CVS 12). Following Fleet problems in Hawaiian waters the task group ranged to Japan, the Philippines, Taiwan and Okinawa, as a part of the powerful Seventh Fleet. The destroyer returned to Long Beach 18 December 1960 and received a modernization overhaul in the Long Beach Naval Shipyard during 6 February-9 October 1961. She again sailed with HORNET (CVS 12) hunter-killer task group 7 June 1962 to serve the mobile Seventh Fleet throughout the Far East until return to her home port 21 December.

FRANK E. EVANS departed Long Beach 29 July 1963 with HORNET task group for anti-submarine readiness exercises in the mid-pacific out of Pearl Harbor. She returned home 23 August and again sailed with HORNET 10 October 1963 to serve on anti-submarine warfare duty with the Seventh Fleet until 2 April 1964. She returned to Long Beach 15 April 1964 and received alterations in the Long Beach Naval Shipyard that included many improvements in her fighting ability.

She supported an amphibious assault training operation off the coast of California, then sailed 24 March 1965 as one of the units of an anti-submarine warfare task group led by anti-submarine carrier BENNINGTON (CVS 20). She participated in SEATO convoy operations from Manila to Bangkok, and joined the screen of the Fast Carrier Task Force off Vietnam 29 July 1965. After surveillance station in the screen of BENNINGTON (CVS 20), she departed 6 August to patrol in the Taiwan Straits. She rejoined BENNINGTON anti-submarine warfare task group 20 September and departed Yokosuka 23 September for home. She arrived in Long Beach 7 October 1965.

FRANK E. EVANS sailed for the Far East 9 June 1966. A unit of a hunter-killer group led by KEARSARGE (CVS 33), she arrived at Yokosuka 17 July. Three days later she was underway for antisubmarine warfare exercises with naval units of Japan and Korea. She departed Sasebo 8 August to join Fast Carriers in the Gulf of Tonkin. After bombardment missions on the coast of South Vietnam, and rescue of a jet pilot, she arrived in Subic Bay 5 September to prepare for patrol in the Taiwan Straits. She again arrived in the Gulf of Tonkin 21 October 1966. She plane guarded attack carriers CONSTELLATION (CVA 64) and ORISKANY (CVA 34), then teamed with guided missile cruiser CHICAGO (CG 12) as a Positive Identification Radar Advisory Zone (PIRAZ) station. This duty continued until 14 November when she began day and night bombardment support to the Third Marines in the Tenh Quang Noai Province, South Vietnam. She rejoined the carriers 17 November and departed Yokosuka 9 December for Long Beach, arriving 20 December 1966.

FRANK E. EVANS conducted readiness exercises along the California seaboard until 17 August 1967. She then sailed for Pearl Harbor with KEARSARGE (CVS 33) Anti-submarine Task Group for Yokosuka 8 October 1967. Ten days later she headed for Tonkin Gulf to support Vietnam operations through 12 November. During 10 through 18 December, she gave gunfire support to the Army's First Air Cavalry Division. After spending the Christmas holiday in Sasebo, she again gave gunfire support off the Vietnamese Coast during 2-18 February 1968. She arrived at Sasebo 23 February and put to sea 1 March to patrol the frigid waters of the Sea of Japan, ready to deal with any action that might arise out of the capture of PUEBLO by units of the North Korean Navy. She departed Sasebo 4 March and returned to Long Beach 24 March 1968. She entered the Long Beach Naval Shipyard 7 May 1968 for an overhaul that completed 7 September 1968.

1969

FRANK E. EVANS completed readiness training along the western seaboard. She again sailed for the Far East 19 March 1969. She arrived at Yokosuka 26 April 1969 and put to sea 30 April 1969 to operate off the Coast of Vietnam with KEARSARGE (CVS 33) Anti-submarine Task Group. Following this duty she proceeded to Subic Bay in the Philippines, arriving 17 May 1969. Here, she joined in preparation for Southeast Asia Treaty Organization maneuvers and exercises in waters reaching to Thailand. On 26 May 1969 she departed in the screen of the Australian anti-submarine warfare carrier HMAS MELBOURNE (R 21) bound towards Thailand.

FRANK E. EVANS was steaming in a darkened condition in the early morning darkness of 3 June 1969, engaged in "Operation Sea Spirit" with more than 40 ships of SEATO nations. In the action of taking a new station 1,000 yards astern of HMAS MELBOURNE, the two ships were soon on collision course. The Australian carrier ripped the American destroyer in two. Only the stern section remained floating. Seventy-four men lost their lives when FRANK E. EVANS was cut in two or perished when her bow section sank in only three minutes. Among those lost were the three Sage brothers from Niobrara, Nebraska: Gary 22, Gregory 21, and Kelly, 19. Mrs. Linda Sage, wife of Gregory, did not blame anyone for the tragic loss: "It was their wish that they serve together. That's the way they wanted it and that's the way we accepted it." FRANK E. EVANS' 199 survivors boarded HMAS MELBOURNE and soon transferred to KEARSARGE (CVS-33). A salvage party from EVERETT F. LARSON (DD-830) brought flooding under control before the stern section was taken in tow by fleet tug TAWASA (AFT 92) for Subic Bay in the Philippines.

FRANK E. EVANS arrived at Subic Bay 9 June 1969. Her stern section was stripped in floating dry dock WINDSOR (ARD 22) and she decommissioned 1 July 1969. Her name was struck from the Navy List the same day. The hulk of her stern section was sunk in fleet target practice.

Battle Stars and Rewards

U.S.S. FRANK E. EVANS (DD 754) received 11 Battle Stars and other awards as follows:

1 Star/Okinawa Gunto Operation Assault and Occupation of Okinawa Gunto	24-30 Jun 1945
China Service Medal	2 Sep 1945-6 Mar 1946
Navy Occupation Service Medal Asia Clasp	2 Sep 1945-6 Mar 1946; 6-11 Sep 1953 15-27 Sep 1953; 18-21 Sep 1954 20-26 Oct 1954; 30 Oct-9 Nov 1954; 14-27 Feb 1956
1 Star/First U.N. Counteroffensive-Korea	5 Feb-19 Mar 1951
1 Star/Communist China Spring Offensive	22 Apr-8 Jul 1951
1 Star/U.N. Summer-Fall Offensive	9 Jul-17 Aug 1951
Korean and United Nations Service Medal	23 Jan-24 Aug 1951; 14 Apr-24 May 1952; 19 Jun-21 Oct 1952; 17 Jul-5 Sep 1953; 29 Sep-1 Dec 1953
Republic of Korea Presidential Unit Citation Badge	23 Jan-24 Aug 1951; 14 Apr-24 May 1952; 19 Jun-21 Oct 1952
1 Star/Second Korean Winter	20 Apr-17 May 1952; 21 Jul-18 Oct 1952
1 Star/Korea, Summer-Fall	1953: 16-27 Jul 1953
1 Star/Vietnam Defense Campaign	29 Jul-6 Aug 1965; 24-26 Sep 1965
1 Star/Vietnamese Counteroffensive Phase II	11-30 Aug 1966; 1-4 Sep 1966; 19-31 Oct 1966; 1-24 Nov 1966
1 Star/Vietnamese Counter Offensive Phase III	22-31 Oct 1967; 1-13 Nov 1967, 29-30 Nov 1967; 1-20 Dec 1967; 6-20 Jan 1968
1 Star/TET Counteroffensive	1-20 Feb 1968
1 Star/Vietnam Operations	2-15 May 1969

Commanding Officer List

Commander Harry Smith, USN	3 Feb 1945 - 16 Nov 1945
Commander Frank D. Schwartz, USN	16 Nov 1945 - 15 May 1946
Lieutenant Elmer Ozenberger, Jr., USN	15 May 1946 - 12 Jul 1946
Lieutenant Commander Means Johnston, Jr., USN	12 Jul 1946 - 3 Oct 1946
Lieutenant Commander Edward T. Sullivan, USN	3 Oct 1946 - 10 Feb 1946
Lieutenant John W. Meyer, USN	10 Feb 1947 - 7 Jul 1947
Commander William C. Meyer, USN	11 May 1949 - 14 Dec 1949
Commander Gerald L. Christie, USN	15 Sep 1950 - 12 Mar 1952
Commander Nelson D. Salmon, USN	12 Mar 1952 - 17 Feb 1954
Commander John D. Chase, USN	17 Feb 1954 - 23 Apr 1956
Commander Joseph H. Behan, Jr., USN	23 Apr 1956 - 26 Apr 1958
Commander Ralph G. Johns, USN	26 Apr 1958 - 4 Sep 1959
Commander Harold H. Ellison, USN	4 Sep 1959 - 20 May 1961
Commander Joseph E. Easter, USN	20 May 1961 - 30 Oct 1962
Commander Nelson W. Sanders, USN	30 Oct 1962 - 23 Oct 1964
Commander James B. Allen, USN	23 Oct 1964 - 16 May 1966
Commander C. Thor Hanson, USN	16 May 1966 - 26 Mar 1968
Commander Albert S. McLemore, USN	26 May 1968 - 1 Jul 1969

The Final Chapter of USS FRANK E. EVANS (DD 754)

by Jan Thomas Igras, Former ETN2 USS JOHN R. CRAIG (DD 885)

The men who survived the disastrous collision of USS FRANK E. EVANS with HMAS MELBOURNE must wonder what ultimately became of their ship? This is a personal account of my recollections of the very last days of USS FRANK E. EVANS (DD 754). Perhaps one or two of the survivors will read these words. Perhaps they can find some modicum of comfort, some small feeling of closure, in knowing the final chapter of their good ship's story.

My first knowledge of the disaster came via the newspaper - most likely the Stars and Stripes. Hanging on every printed word, I devoured what news I could. The prospect of a ship, a Sumner class destroyer, being cut in two was very hard to believe. The loss of life was tragic.

At that time, I was a seaman who had served a total of six months aboard the Gearing class destroyer USS JOHN R. CRAIG (DD 885). EVANS and CRAIG were World War II vintage tin cans. Their utilitarian design made them practical work horses for shore bombardment, picket duty, and plane guarding during the Vietnam War. While EVANS was being cut in two, my ship was preparing to leave San Diego on its way across the Pacific on what was to be my first of three Westpac deployments. I had no idea at that time that our ship and EVANS were destined to meet soon in Subic Bay, Philippines. USS JOHN R. CRAIG finished a tour plane guarding at "Yankee Station" off the Vietnam coast. After a period in the ship yards at Subic Bay, we were sent to a new mooring, but not alongside the other destroyers and support ships. We were assigned to a berth at a rather secluded part of the sprawling naval base. We moored within a few yards of the remaining stern section of FRANK E. EVANS. I had come within sight of the ship I had read, heard, and talked about. The sight of the crippled stern section was chilling. There was a ship, similar to our own, damaged beyond repair. The comprehension that our destroyers were hardly invincible became a stark and frightening reality. It was distressing to think of the lives lost aboard that ship. Little did I know that our time in Subic Bay was to be a death watch for USS FRANK E. EVANS.

For several days, groups of sailors and shipyard workers boarded FRANK E. EVANS and unceremoniously removed everything that could be salvaged from the stricken ship. The workers reminded me of ants, carving up and carrying away parts of a fallen grasshopper. I watched from the starboard side of our torpedo deck as the macabre work proceeded. The Philippines was a lush and green place. The area where our ships were berthed was bereft of greenery. The soil adjacent to the piers seemed red in color, devoid of life. The sky was an overcast, somber gray. The sad colors of the land and sky were appropriate for the grim salvage work at hand.

We put to sea after several days. Our mission was simple: we were to sink the hulk of FRANK E. EVANS. It seemed obscene that one American destroyer was to sink what remained of another! Why not simply tow the shattered gray lady out to sea and scuttle her with dignity, a funeral of sorts? Such is not the way of the Navy or the gods of war. The hapless FRANK E. EVANS would prove herself a valuable practice target for CRAIG's inexperienced gun crews. Her end was to be pragmatic, not ceremonial. Our ship was to be the final instrument of FRANK E. EVANS' destruction. USS FRANK E. EVANS, in her death throes, would serve her country one last time.

The day was fair and sunny; the seas calm. Our gun crews first used what I was told were "sand shells" to fire on FRANK E. EVANS. They were non-explosive rounds that made a dust plume to register a strike. FRANK E. EVANS was fired upon all day long. Only the gun crews were at their battle stations. For the rest of the crew it was normal ship's work routine. I, like most of my shipmates, went topside many times throughout the day to witness the morbid work in progress.

The announcement came over the 1MC that FRANK E. EVANS was about to sink. We could watch the death throes of a once vital man o' war from our Asroc deck amidships. Perhaps twenty or thirty of CRAIG's curious crew gathered there to watch her final minutes. She was less than a mile off our port side. Our ship began a high speed run and both of our five inch gun mounts, two guns per turret, opened fire. Several salvos found their mark. The explosions aboard FRANK E. EVANS could not be heard, but the large plumes of white smoke indicated that explosive shells had done their work. The last furious blows dealt by a friendly ship were too much for the now twisted and sinking FRANK E. EVANS. Her end was not spectacular. She neither rose at the truncated bow nor the stern. There were no explosions.

FRANK E. EVANS merely slipped beneath the gentle blue sea. It was as if the ship itself had given up in her struggle to remain afloat and had resigned herself to accept the watery grave that awaited. Frosty Edkin's bass voice announced over the IMC the somber and soulful words, "The hulk of FRANK E. EVANS is now sunk." The tone of the boatswain's mate of the watch was respectful, like that of a priest delivering a sermon at a funeral. His words were chosen carefully and delivered just as carefully. My blood ran cold on that hot summer day when hearing the announcement; just as it runs cold now as I write these words.

We stood dumbstruck. No one spoke. Each of us stood silently listening to our own private thoughts. Nothing remained of FRANK E. EVANS' hulk. There was no sign that two thirds of a destroyer had just slipped beneath the waves. There was no debris floating on the surface; no bubbles rising from the depths. We saw only the dark blue water sparkling in the tropical afternoon sunshine. One by one we slipped quietly away to return to our own ship's work.

Memories of that eventful day are now fading with passage of some thirty-nine years. Sometimes my mind wanders back to that August afternoon. I cannot remember the names of those who stood as witnesses beside me, but I can certainly remember the powerful feelings I had while watching the sinking of a ship so much like our own. My thoughts were of the men - sailors like us - who had tragically died in her. The thoughts were also of the mortality of both men and the machines they create. The lives of both FRANK E. EVANS and her lost crewmen were all too ephemeral, so delicate, so short and fragile.

I wonder now about the men who sailed aboard FRANK E. EVANS on that disastrous early June morning on a faraway sea. I think of all the other crews who had sailed in her previously. After all these years I can only imagine the grief they still must carry - both the survivors and their families and friends. Time merely dulls the pain that grief inflicts; it does not eliminate it. The men of MELBOURNE also must shudder when their minds drift back to that night. The captains of both ships must be haunted by their memories of that awful event. What thoughts are in their minds when reflecting on the pre dawn hours of 3 June 1969? What mental tortures must be evoked by those memories of long ago for all those good men involved in the collision? How many have asked themselves, "Why," or, "What if?"

USS JOHN R. CRAIG ultimately shared the same fate as FRANK E. EVANS . In June of 1980 the old tin can, her useful working life behind her, was towed out to sea off the California coast and sunk. Thinking about her fate now, it seems like some form of poetic justice. Like EVANS, CRAIG's last trip to sea was to be one last example of service to her country. Her end, though not tragic, was the same.

Two once proud destroyers now lie below seas on opposite sides of the Pacific Ocean. They are separated by thousands of miles and a little more than a decade in time. Yet those two sleek greyhounds of the sea are historically linked forever because of one tragic incident that claimed the lives of seventy-four sailors and the resulting fateful coup de grace that was delivered to USS FRANK E. EVANS (DD 754) off the Philippine coast in October 1969 by USS JOHN R. CRAIG (DD 885) and other naval vessels.

