



SAGINAW VALLEY NAVAL SHIP MUSEUM



History of the USS Edson DD-946 and Namesake Major General Merritt Austin Edson

Submitted by
Major Herbert Robbins Edson, USMC (Ret.)

CONSTRUCTION AND COMMISSIONING

The keel for the Forrest Sherman class destroyer USS EDSON (DD-946) was laid at Bath Iron Works in Bath, Maine, on 3 December 1956. EDSON is one of the relatively few ships of the U.S. Navy named for a United States Marine, in this case Major General Merritt Austin Edson.

Edson was launched on 4 January 1958 by General Edson's widow, Ethel Robbins Edson, who broke the traditional bottle of champagne over the ship's bow. EDSON'S final fitting out and sea trials occupied the next ten months, and on 7 November 1958, EDSON was commissioned under the command of CDR Thomas J. Moriarty, USN. She then sailed in early 1959 to the Caribbean and through the Panama Canal to reach her original homeport of Long Beach, California, on 2 March 1959.

For the next two decades, EDSON served as a valuable member of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, earning a reputation as a Top Gun ship and the nickname, "The Destroyer." Her ship's crest included a skull copied from the shoulder patch worn by then Colonel Edson's First Marine Raider Battalion.

Edson's last decade of service began by sailing to her new homeport of Newport, Rhode Island. There, on 15 December 1988, EDSON was decommissioned by CDR Gideon W. Almy III, USN, the eighteenth and final Commanding Officer. EDSON then served for many years as part of the Intrepid Sea-Air-Space Museum in New York City, prior to be returned to the U.S. Navy.

ABOUT THE SHIP'S NAME

Merritt Austin Edson was born 25 April 1897 in Rutland, Vermont., enlisted in the Marine Corps Reserve at the outbreak of World War I and was commissioned a Second Lieutenant in the regular Marine Corps Reserve 9 October 1917. He served in France from September 1918 to December 1919. Edson was promoted to First Lieutenant in 1921 and then served as a Naval Aviator from 1922 to 1927. Promoted to Captain in 1928, he commanded the Cold River Patrol in the jungles of Nicaragua for one year, during which time he was rewarded the Navy Cross for his "display of extraordinary heroism on 7 August 1928." An expert marksman, Edson served as firing member, coach and captain of winning rifle and pistol teams. Promoted to Major in 1936, Edson subsequently served with the Fourth Marine Regiment in Shanghai, China from 1937 to 1939.

Edson was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel in 1940 and assigned as Commanding Officer, Fifth Marine Regiment, in June 1941. During the remainder of that year he directed experimental operations which included training with high-speed transports. These led to the First Battalion's re-designation as the First Marine Raider Battalion one month after the United States entered World War II. This battalion was the prototype for Marine Raider and Army Ranger Battalions formed later in the war.

Edson led the Tulagi Combat Group (consisting of First Marine Raider Battalion, Second Battalion, Fifth Marines and First Parachute Battalion) during which fierce Japanese resistance was encountered. Due to his skill, courage and aggressiveness during the assault, Edson was awarded a Gold Star in lieu of a second Navy Cross. On 8 September 1942, Edson and his Raiders, reinforced by two companies of the First Parachute Battalion, executed a daring amphibious raid against the coastal village of Tasimboho. Fortune smiled as several thousand Japanese troops fled into the jungle, leaving packs, food and weapons, including artillery and precious intelligence documents. Based on these documents, Edson determined how the enemy planned to attack and capture Henderson Field, the Marine invincible aircraft base.

He requested, and was then assigned to defend the ridge on Guadalcanal which dominated Henderson Field. For his superb and heroic leadership on the nights of 13 and 14 September when his men, and those of the attached First Parachute Battalions, stood off a fanatic attack by a much larger Japanese force, Colonel Edson was awarded the Medal of Honor and the Distinguished Service Order by the British Commonwealth.

As Chief of Staff of the Second Marine Division, Edson participated in the capture of Tarawa in 1943; for "exceptionally meritorious conduct" he was awarded the Legion of Merit with Combat "V." Promoted to Brigadier General and assignment as Assistant Commander of the Second Marine Division, Edson participated ashore during the capture of Saipan and Tinian, Marianas Islands in 1944; for "brilliant leadership at great personal risk," he was awarded the Silver Star Medal. Edson then served as Deputy Chief of Staff and then as Chief of Staff for the Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific from 26 August 1944 to 30 June 1945; for "exceptionally meritorious conduct and leadership" he was awarded a Gold Star in lieu of a second Legion of Merit. From 2 July to 13 December 1945, Edson served as Commanding General, Service Command, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific.

After duty in the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations and Marine Corps Headquarters, Major General Edson retired 1 August 1947. From 1947 to 1951 General Edson served as the first Commissioner of Public Safety for the State of Vermont, during which time he established the Vermont State Police. From 1951 until his death on 14 August 1955, General Edson served as Executive Director of the National Rifle Association of America. Both General and Mrs. Edson are buried at Arlington National Cemetery.

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE USS EDSON

Awarded: January 27, 1956 • Keel laid: December 3, 1956 • Launched: January 4, 1958 • Commissioned: November 7, 1958
Decommissioned: December 15, 1988 • Builder: Bath Iron Works, Bath, Maine
Propulsion system: Four - 1200 lb. boilers, Two steam turbines; two shafts
Propellers: Two • Length: 418.3 feet (127.5 meters) • Beam: 45.3 feet (13.8 meters) • Draft: 22 feet (6.7 meters)
Displacement: Approx. 4,000 tons full load • Speed: 32+ knots • Aircraft: None
Armament: Three Mk-42 5-inch/54 caliber guns; Mk-32 ASW torpedo tubes, (two triple mounts) • Crew: 17 officers, 275 enlisted

USS Edson DD-946

Commanding Officers

Cdr. Thomas J. Moriarty	7 Nov 58 – Nov 59
Cdr. Cecil Bradford Collins	13 Nov 59 – 4 Aug 61
Cdr. Melvin J. Carpenter	4 Aug 61 – 17 Mar 63
Cdr. John J. Herrick	17 Mar 63 – 27 Apr 64
Cdr. Kenneth G. Haynes	27 Apr 64 – 16 Feb 66
Cdr. Jay J. Vermilya	16 Feb 66 – 31 March 68
Cdr. John S. Holmes	1 March 68 – 27 Aug 69
Cdr. Henry F. Boyle	27 Aug 69 – 9 Sep 70
Cdr. Timothy McC. Wallace	9 Sep 70 – 6 Jan 72
Cdr. Jack E Roe	6 Jan 72 – 20 Aug 73
Cdr. James E. Shay	20 Aug 73 – 22 Nov 75
Cdr. Boyden T. Steele	22 Nov 75 – 2 Nov 77
Cdr. Gilbert H. Mc Kelvey	2 Nov 77 – 9 Jan 80
Cdr. John P. Davis	9 Jan 80 – 3 Aug 82
Cdr. Jos Pete Marnane	3 Aug 82 – 30 Sep 82
Cdr. Welbourne Fred Bronaugh Jr.	30 Sep 82 – 22 Sep 84
Cdr. David R. Scheu	22 Sep 84 – 9 Aug 86
Cdr. Gideon W. Almay	9 Aug 86 – 15 Dec 88

