

Epilogue: The Fletchers Fade Away

*Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.*

Dylan Thomas

In 1972 the *USS Uhlmann* (DD-687), a Pacific War division sister of the *USS Colahan*, stood as the oldest commissioned destroyer in the United States Navy. All other survivors of her famous class had been retired to the reserve fleet, or sunk as targets, or sold for scrap, or transferred to foreign navies. Only the *Uhlmann* proudly flew her commission pennant. She had served her country in three wars. Alongside the *Colahan*, the *Halsey Powell*, the *Cushing* and the *Benham* in the Tomcat Squadron's Destroyer Division 105, she fought her way through the climactic campaigns of the Pacific War, earning seven battle stars. In the next quarter of a century she won two more stars off Korea and five more off Vietnam. Now, at age twenty-nine, the *Uhlmann* found herself alone, the last *Fletcher*-class destroyer on active duty, an old and tired warrior. Judged unfit for further service, she was decommissioned and struck from the Naval Vessel Register, both actions coming on the same day, 15 July 1972. Shortly afterward she was sent to the junk yard and cut into little pieces for what she was worth, which was not much.

All *Fletchers* in American commission were now gone, but there were still plenty of them around, without even counting those in foreign service. Mostly they lay in mothballs with silicon gel stuffed into every orifice, but some performed useful training duties in the early Seventies. *Jane's Fighting Ships*, the world's authority on such matters, reported that thirty-two *Fletcher* destroyers were still carried on the U.S. Navy's register in 1974. Then the final slaughter began, reaching a climax on the first of December 1974 when two dozen *Fletchers* were removed from the official list in one fell swoop. Only three reserve ships remained, but they would not last long. In March 1975 the *USS Porterfield* (DD-682), a Destroyer Squadron 17 sister of the *Colahan* during the Korean and Cold wars, was struck from the register, along with the *USS*

Picking (DD-685). That left the *USS Stoddard* (DD-566) as the last *Fletcher* in the United States Navy's reserve fleet, and she became history by June.

As we know, the *USS Colahan* was destroyed by U.S. naval aircraft in the mid-Sixties. *Jane's Fighting Ships 1968-69* reported her death as follows: "Callahan DD658 was stricken on 1 Aug 1966 and expended as a target off San Diego." The poor *Colahan's* name was badly mangled in this little obituary. She could be positively identified only by her hull number.

Here comes a heartfelt diatribe: *Jane's* is a well-known source of warship information for all the world's navies, but it is a poorly edited publication, crammed with sloppy mistakes. On the same page as the above quote, the "Callahan" is mentioned once again, this time as a World War II loss instead of a 1966 target ship. The disparity should have suggested — to a good copy editor, if *Jane's* had any — that something was wrong here. It was the *USS Callaghan* (DD-792), not the "Callahan" or the *Colahan*, that was lost in battle off Okinawa on 28 July 1945, just couple of weeks before the Japanese surrendered. The *Callaghan* was the last *Fletcher* to die in the Pacific War.

So, all *Fletcher*-class destroyers were gone from the United States Navy by 1975, but twenty-one of them were still active in seven foreign navies a dozen years later. *Jane's Fighting Ships 1987-88* listed the *Yarnall*, the *Mullany*, the *Twining* and the *Kimberly* in Taiwan's Republic of China Navy; the *Lewis Hancock*, the *Irwin* and the *Shields* in Brazil; the *Conner*, the *Charrette*, the *Wadsworth*, the *Hall*, the *Ringgold* and the *Aulick* in Greece; the *John Rodgers* in Mexico; the *Erben* and the *Hickox* in Korea; the *David W. Taylor*, the *Jarvis* and the *McGowan* in Spain, and the *Clarence K. Bronson* and the *Van Valkenburgh* in Turkey.

All these ships were flying foreign flags under foreign names. A few were modified so extensively that American *Fletcher*-men might not recognize them immediately. *Jane's Fighting Ships* offered a 1983 photograph of Taiwan's *Kwei Yang*, once known as the *USS Twining* (DD-540), the *Colahan's* squadron sister in the Pacific War and division sister in the Korean and Cold wars. The old *Twining's* tripod mast had been replaced with a fat bird-cage tower. A smaller but identical tower rose aft of the rear stack. Very Oriental-looking. Very strange-looking. Very sad. The *Colahan* was built by Americans and taken to war by Americans, and at the end of her life she was laid to rest by Americans. Foreigners, both friends and foes, never touched her. We xenophobic *Colahan* fans can take a bit of cool comfort from that.

Nineteen *Fletchers* were lost during the Pacific War. Nine of them — the *Pringle*, the *Luce*, the *Bush*, the *Morrison*, the *William D. Porter*, the *Twiggs*,

the *Callaghan*, the *Colhoun* and the *Little* — were sunk by kamikazes off Okinawa. The *Chevalier* and the *Strong* succumbed to torpedoes in the Solomons. The *DeHaven*, the *Brownson* and the *Abner Read* died in bomb attacks by non-kamikaze Japanese aircraft. The *Hoel* and the *Johnston* went down under heavy-caliber gunfire in the Battle Off Samar. The *Longshaw* was a victim of shore bombardment off Okinawa. The *Spence* capsized in the great Philippine Sea typhoon of December 1944. The *Halligan* was sunk by a Japanese mine in Okinawan waters.

In summary, 175 *Fletcher*-class destroyers were built during World War II to fight the Germans and the Japanese. Nineteen of the class were lost in battle. Fifty-five were transferred to the navies of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, West Germany, Greece, Italy, Japan, South Korea, Mexico, Peru, Spain, Taiwan and Turkey. Three — the *USS Kidd (DD-661)*, the *Sullivans (DD-537)* and the *Cassin Young (DD-793)* — were permanently docked as memorial ships. All the rest, totaling ninety-eight, were sunk as targets or scrapped outright. The *USS Gregory (DD-802)*, a member of Destroyer Squadron 17 in the Fifties, escaped her fate for a while. Some months before the *Colahan* died as a target ship, the *Gregory* became a non-seagoing training ship in San Diego. Renamed *Indoctrinator*, she was tied to the shore for the rest of her life.

[Revise this graf.] To the author's knowledge, the disposition list that follows cannot be found anywhere else. If such a list had been available from one of the several naval institutions, the author would have been very grateful, because then he could have spared himself the many hours, even days, that it took to dig the information from the Navy Department's eight-volume *Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships* and the multinational volumes of *Jane's Fighting Ships*. A Naval Institute Press book, *U.S. Warships of World War II*, was also helpful in this regard. Even so, my list is not complete in a definitive sense. As just one of many examples, the class namesake, the *USS Fletcher (DD-445)*, was converted to an escort destroyer in 1949, but what happened to her after that? The author does not know. More work is needed here.

Disposition of 175 *Fletcher*-Class Destroyers:

445	Fletcher	Converted to DDE in 1949; sold for scrap in February 1972.
446	Radford	Converted to DDE in 1949; sold for scrap in October 1969.
447	Jenkins	Converted to DDE in 1951; sold for scrap in July 1969.
448	LaVallette	Sold to Peru for spare parts in July 1972.
449	Nicholas	Converted to DDE in 1949; stricken from Navy list in January 1970.
450	O'Bannon	Converted to DDE in 1949; sold in June 1972.

451	Chevalier	Sunk by torpedo in Solomon Islands, October 1943.
465	Saufley	Converted to DDE in 1949; sunk in 1968 Navy explosion tests.
466	Waller	Converted to DDE in 1950; sunk as target ship in February 1970.
467	Strong	Sunk by torpedo in Solomon Islands, 1943.
468	Taylor	Converted to DDE in 1951; became Italy's <i>Lanciere</i> in 1969.
469	DeHaven	Sunk by bombs at Savo Island in February 1943.
470	Bache	Converted to DDE in 1951; stricken after 1968 grounding in Greece.
471	Beale	Converted to DDE in 1951; sunk as target in June 1969.
472	Guest	Transferred to Brazilian Navy in 1959; served as <i>Para (D-27)</i> .
473	Bennett	Transferred to Brazilian Navy in 1959; served as <i>Paraiba (D-28)</i> .
474	Fullam	Sunk in Navy underwater explosion tests in July 1962.
475	Hudson	Struck from Navy list on 1 December 1972.
476	Hutchins	Damaged by suicide boat at Okinawa in 1945; sold for scrap in 1948.
477	Pringle	Sunk by kamikaze at Okinawa in April 1945.
478	Stanly	Stricken from Navy list in December 1970; sold for scrap in 1972.
479	Stevens	Stricken from Navy list in 1972; sold for scrap in 1973.
480	Halford	Stricken from Navy list in May 1968.
481	Leutze	Damaged by kamikazes at Okinawa in 1945; scrapped in 1947.
498	Philip	Converted to DDE in 1950; struck from Navy list in 1968.
499	Renshaw	Converted to DDE in 1950; sold for scrap in 1970.
500	Ringgold	To Germany in 1959 as Z-2; to Greece in 1981 as <i>Nearchos (D-65)</i> .
501	Schroeder	Stricken on 1 October 1972; sold for scrap in 1974.
502	Sigsbee	Stricken from Navy list on 1 December 1974.
507	Conway	Converted to DDE in 1949; sunk as target in June 1970.
508	Cony	Converted to DDE in 1949; sunk as target in June 1970.
509	Converse	Transferred to Spain in July 1959; served as <i>Almirante Valdes (D-43)</i> .
510	Eaton	Converted to DDE in 1951; sunk as target in March 1970.
511	Foote	Stricken from Navy list on 1 October 1972.
512	Spence	Lost in Philippine Sea typhoon on 18 December 1944.
513	Terry	Stricken in April 1974 and sold to Peru.
514	Thatcher	Decommissioned in November 1945; scrapped in January 1948.
515	Anthony	To West Germany in 1958 as Z-1; to Greece in 1979 as spare parts.
516	Wadsworth	To West Germany in 1959 as Z-3; to Greece in 1980 as <i>Kimon (D-42)</i> .
517	Walker	Converted to DDE in 1949; became Italy's <i>Fante (D-516)</i> in mid-1960s.
518	Brownson	Sunk by Japanese aircraft at New Britain on 26 December 1943.
519	Daly	Stricken from Navy list on 1 December 1974.
520	Isherwood	Transferred to Peru in early 1960s; served as <i>Guise (DD-72)</i> .
521	Kimberly	Loaned to Taiwan in 1967; sold in 1974; served as <i>An Yang (918)</i> .
522	Luce	Sunk by kamikazes at Okinawa on 3 May 1945.
526	Abner Read	Sunk by Japanese dive bomber off Samar on 1 November 1944.
527	Ammen	Damaged in collision off Long Beach in 1960; scrapped in 1961.
528	Mullany	Purchased by Taiwan in 1971; served as <i>Chiang Yang (947)</i> .
529	Bush	Lost 6 April 1945; sunk by three kamikazes off Okinawa.
530	Trathen	Struck from Navy list on 1 November 1972; sunk as target ship.
531	Hazelwood	Stricken from Navy list on 1 December 1974.
532	Heermann	Transferred to Argentina in 1961; renamed <i>Almirante Brown (D-20)</i> .
533	Hoel	Sunk by Japanese gunfire in Battle Off Samar, 25 October 1944.
534	McCord	Stricken from Navy list on 1 October 1972.
535	Miller	Stricken from Navy list on 1 October 1972
536	Owen	Stricken from Navy list on 15 April 1973.
537	The Sullivans	Stricken from Navy list in 1974; memorial ship in Buffalo, New York.
538	Stephen Potter	Stricken from Navy list in December 1972.
539	Tingey	Collided in 1963 with DE off So. Calif.; sunk as target in mid-1960s.
540	Twining	Sold to Taiwan in August 1971 and served as <i>Kwei Yang (908)</i> .

541	Yarnall	Transferred to Taiwan in June 1968 and served as <i>Kun Yang</i> (919).
544	Boyd	Transferred to Turkey in October 1969; served as <i>Iskenderun</i> (D-343).
545	Bradford	Transferred to Greece in October 1962; renamed <i>Thyella</i> (D-28).
546	Brown	Transferred to Greece in October 1962; renamed <i>Navarino</i> (D-63).
547	Cowell	Transferred to Argentina in 1971; renamed <i>Almirante Storni</i> (D-24).
550	Capps	Loaned to Spain in May 1957; renamed <i>Lepanto</i> (D-21).
551	David W. Taylor	Transferred to Spain in 1957; renamed <i>Almirante Ferrandiz</i> (D-22).
552	Evans	Decommissioned in November 1945; sold for scrap in 1947.
553	John D. Henley	Stricken from Navy list in May 1968.
554	Franks	Transferred to Brazil in 1959.
555	Haggard	Scrapped in 1946 because of damage suffered in the Pacific War.
556	Hailey	Loaned to Brazil in July 1961; renamed <i>Pernambuco</i> (D-30).
557	Johnston	Sunk by Japanese gunfire in Battle Off Samar, 25 October 1944.
558	Laws	Stricken from Navy list on 15 April 1973.
559	Longshaw	Battered by Japanese shore batteries off Okinawa in 1945; scuttled.
560	Morrison	Sunk by kamikazes off Okinawa, 3 May 1945.
561	Prichett	Transferred to Italy in 1970; renamed <i>Geniere</i> (D-555).
562	Robinson	Stricken from Navy list on 1 December 1974.
563	Ross	Stricken from Navy list on 1 December 1974.
564	Rowe	Stricken from Navy list on 1 December 1974.
565	Smalley	Stricken in May 1965 and sold for scrap.
566	Stoddard	Last <i>Fletcher</i> on U.S. Navy list; stricken on 1 June 1975.
567	Watts	Stricken on 1 February 1974 and sold for scrap.
568	Wren	Stricken from Navy list on 1 December 1974; sold for scrap in 1975.
569	Aulick	Transferred to Greece in 1959; renamed <i>Sfendoni</i> (D-85).
570	Charles Ausburne	Transferred to West Germany in April 1960; renamed Z-6.
571	Claxton	Loaned to West Germany in December 1959; renamed Z-4.
572	Dyson	Loaned to West Germany in February 1960; renamed Z-5.
573	Harrison	Transferred to Mexico in 1970; renamed <i>Cuauthemoc</i> (F-1).
574	John Rodgers	Transferred to Mexico in 1970; renamed <i>Cuitlahuac</i> (F-2).
575	McKee	Stricken from Navy list on 1 October 1972; scrapped.
576	Murray	Converted to DDE in 1951; sold for scrap in 1966.
577	Sproston	Converted to DDE in 1949; sold for scrap in 1968.
578	Wickes	Struck from Navy list in 1972; expended in 1974 ordnance tests.
579	William D. Porter	Sunk by kamikaze off Okinawa, 10 June 1945.
580	Young	Sunk as target ship off Atlantic coast in April 1970.
581	Charrette	Transferred to Greece in 1959; renamed <i>Velos</i> (D-16).
582	Conner	Transferred to Greece in 1959; renamed <i>Aspis</i> (D-06).
583	Hall	Loaned to Greece in 1960; served as <i>Lonchi</i> (D-56).
584	Halligan	Sunk by Japanese mine off Okinawa, 26 March 1945.
585	Haraden	Sunk as target off Port Hueneme, Calif., in 1970s.
586	Newcomb	Damaged by kamikazes at Okinawa; scrapped in 1947.
587	Bell	Struck from Navy list on 1 November 1972; sunk as target ship in 1975.
588	Burns	Struck from Navy list on 1 November 1972; sunk as target ship in 1974.
589	Izard	Stricken from Navy list in May 1968.
590	Paul Hamilton	Struck from Naval Vessel Register in May 1968.
591	Twiggs	Sunk by kamikaze off Okinawa, 16 June 1945.
592	Howorth	Sunk as target in torpedo tests off San Diego, 8 March 1962.
593	Killen	Sunk in 1963 as a target ship for missiles off Vieques Island, P.R.
594	Hart	Stricken from Navy list on 15 April 1973.
595	Metcalfe	Stricken from Navy list on 2 January 1971.
596	Shields	Sold to Brazilian Navy in 1972; served as <i>Maranhao</i> (D-33).
597	Wiley	Struck from Navy list in May 1968; sold for scrap in 1970.
629	Abbot	Stricken from Navy list on 1 December 1974.

630	Braine	To Argentina in 1971; renamed <i>Almirante Domecq Garcia</i> (D-23).
631	Erben	Loaned to Korea in 1963; sold in 1977; renamed <i>Chung Mu</i> (DD-91).
642	Hale	Transferred to Colombia in 1961; renamed <i>Antioquia</i> (DD-01).
643	Sigourney	Stricken from Navy list on 1 December 1974.
644	Stembel	Loaned to Argentina in 1961; renamed <i>Rosales</i> (D-22).
649	Albert W. Grant	Stricken from Navy list on 14 April 1971.
650	Caperton	Stricken from Navy list on 1 December 1974.
651	Cogswell	Transferred to Turkey in 1969; served as <i>Izmit</i> (D-342).
652	Ingersoll	Sunk as target in May 1974.
653	Knapp	Transferred to Argentina in mid-1970s; used for spare parts.
654	Bearss	Stricken from Navy list on 1 December 1974.
655	John Hood	Stricken from Navy list on 1 December 1974.
656	Van Valkenburgh	Transferred to Turkey in 1967; served as <i>Izmir</i> (D-341).
657	Charles J. Badger	Transferred to Chile in 1974; used as spare parts.
658	Colahan	Sunk off San Diego as aircraft target ship in December 1966.
659	Dashiell	Stricken from Navy list on 1 December 1974.
660	Bullard	Stricken from Navy list on 1 December 1972.
661	Kidd	Stricken in 1974; memorial ship in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.
662	Bennion	Stricken from Navy list on 15 April 1971.
663	Heywood L. Edwards	Loaned to Japan in 1959; served as <i>Ariake</i> (DD-183).
664	Richard P. Leary	Transferred to Japan in March 1959; renamed <i>Yugure</i> .
665	Bryant	Decommissioned in 1947; sunk as target ship in August 1969.
666	Black	Stricken from Navy list on 21 September 1969.
667	Chauncey	Stricken from Navy list on 1 October 1972.
668	Clarence K. Bronson	Transferred to Turkish Navy in 1967; served as <i>Istanbul</i> (D-340).
669	Cotten	Stricken from Navy list on 1 December 1974.
670	Dortch	Transferred to Argentina in August 1961; renamed <i>Espora</i> .
671	Gatling	Stricken from Navy list on 1 December 1974.
672	Healy	Stricken from Navy list on 1 December 1974.
673	Hickox	Loaned to Korea in 1968; sold in 1977; renamed <i>Pusan</i> (DD-93).
674	Hunt	Stricken from Navy list on 1 December 1974.
675	Lewis Hancock	Loaned to Brazil in 1967; sold in 1973; served as <i>Piaui</i> (D-31).
676	Marshall	Stricken from Navy list on 12 July 1969.
677	McDermut	Struck from Naval Vessel Register in 1965; sold for scrap in 1966.
678	McGowan	Transferred to Spain in 1960; served as <i>Jorge Juan</i> (D-25).
679	McNair	Stricken from Navy list on 1 December 1974.
680	Melvin	Stricken from Navy list on 1 December 1974.
681	Hopewell	Stricken from Navy list on 2 January 1970; sunk as target in 1972.
682	Porterfield	Stricken from Navy list on 1 March 1975.
683	Stockham	Stricken from Navy list on 1 December 1974.
684	Wedderburn	Struck from Navy list in 1969; sold for scrap in 1972.
685	Picking	Stricken from Navy list on 1 March 1975.
686	Halsey Powell	Transferred to South Korea in 1968; served as <i>Seoul</i> (DD-92).
687	Uhlmann	Last <i>Fletcher</i> on active Navy duty; decommissioned on 15 July 1972.
688	Remey	Stricken from Navy list on 1 December 1974.
689	Wadleigh	Transferred to Chile in July 1962; renamed <i>Blanco Encalada</i> (D-14).
690	Norman Scott	Stricken from Navy list on 15 April 1973.
691	Mertz	Stricken from Navy list on 1 October 1970.
792	Callaghan	Sunk by kamikaze off Okinawa, 28 July 1945.
793	Cassin Young	Stricken from Navy list in December 1974; memorial ship in Boston.
794	Irwin	Loaned to Brazil in 1968; sold in '73; renamed <i>Santa Catarina</i> (D-32).
795	Preston	Transferred to Turkey in 1969; served as <i>Içel</i> (D-344).
796	Benham	Transferred to Peru in December 1961; renamed <i>Villar</i> .
797	Cushing	Transferred to Brazil in July 1961; renamed <i>Parana</i> .

798	Monssen	Struck from the Navy list in 1963; scrapped the next year.
799	Jarvis	Transferred to Spain in 1960; renamed <i>Alcala Galiano (D-24)</i> .
800	Porter	Stricken from Navy list on 1 October 1972.
801	Colhoun	Damaged by several kamikazes off Okinawa; scuttled 6 April 1945.
802	Gregory	Became <i>Indoctrinator</i> , an inoperable San Diego trainer, in 1966.
803	Little	Lost 3 May 1945 off Okinawa; one of many kamikaze victims.
804	Rooks	Loaned to Chile in July 1962; served as <i>Cochrane (D-15)</i> .