

# Lieutenant Ed Trudeau

By Jackson Sellers

*Many of the details in this profile came from Tony Mesones, senior vice president of the California Bank of Commerce. He is a great nephew of the Colahan's Lieutenant Trudeau. Other information was drawn from Jackson's book, "The Original Tomcat," which chronicles the warship's 1944-45 battles. This article was published in the November 2011 issue of the "USS Colahan DD-658 Newsletter."*

THE *USS Colahan* lost two crewmen in World War II, both overboard, one by suicide, the other by accident. On 3 September 1944, a couple of days after the Pollywog-laden warship celebrated crossing the Equator, Machinist's Mate 2nd Class William L. McGrath climbed onto a 20-millimeter ammo storage box, saluted the flag and jumped overboard. He reportedly was despondent over a "Dear John" letter. On 7 August 1945, when the war was almost over, Seaman 1st Class Matt Berberich fell into the sea from the dangling starboard whaleboat, in which the young shipfitter striker was working. In both cases, the steaming *Colahan* heeled around in the tightest circles her single rudder could manage, but her rescue attempts were unsuccessful. Unlike McGrath, Berberich did not want to die, and he was a strong swimmer. But something went wrong. Perhaps he was injured in the fall, and he wasn't wearing a life jacket, which might have kept him afloat until the *Colahan* reached him.

Plank-owning Lieutenant Edmond Trudeau didn't die aboard the *Colahan*, but he didn't survive the war either. Fate, bad luck, whatever you want to call it, killed this fine officer. When Ed Trudeau stood on the *Colahan's* main deck on 23 August 1943 and watched the raising of the destroyer's commissioning pennant, he was a 24-year-old full lieutenant, senior in rank to all thirteen LTJGs and ensigns aboard. In fact, he was an old hand at outfitting warships, putting them officially into the fleet, then serving as a line officer aboard them. The *Colahan* was his fourth! He owned the planks of three destroyers and a battleship.

A native Californian, Trudeau was born in



Courtesy of Tony Mesones

**Lieutenant Edmond Trudeau in late 1944,  
visiting his family in Berkeley, California.**

Pomona, raised in Glendale and educated at the University of California. He entered the Navy as an ensign in early 1940 and was soon assigned to an old four-stacker, the *USS McFarland (DD-237)*, a *Clemson*-class destroyer undergoing conversion to a seaplane tender. Re-commissioned in October 1940 as the *USS McFarland (AVD-14)*, the ship was the first to convey plank-owning status to Ed Trudeau. More than a year later, with Ensign Trudeau aboard, the *Gleaves*-class *USS Emmons (DD-457)* was commissioned just two days before Japan's 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor. In a letter dated 8 December 1941, Trudeau wrote a "Dear Folks" letter to his parents in Berkeley, California:

"Tonight is the first night aboard the *Emmons* that I am the duty officer, and although we have much to do, I thought I would drop you a line. You can well imagine the feeling in the service, especially [among] those of us who have been out in Hawaii, when we got the amazing news. We were all aboard Sunday [December 7th] when we got the dispatch, and none of us could believe it. We thought it must be only a drill.... Censorship has started, and this means that anything even remotely connected with any ships, etc., must not

be mentioned. Consequently, you will not know where I am, or what we have been doing.... Everyone is so damn determined to get those Japs for such an unprovoked attack.... You can't imagine how much we'd all like to get in there and get into action against the slant eyes.... The ship is sure beautiful, and I have a nice room all to myself.... I'm very well satisfied with being on the newest destroyer in the Navy."

Promotions come fast in wartime. While serving aboard the *Emmons* during the entirety of 1942, Trudeau was promoted twice – first trading his single ensign stripe for the one-and-a-half stripes of a lieutenant junior grade, then donning the two full stripes of a lieutenant. In early 1943, he was ordered to Philadelphia, to do what he had done twice before, but this time it was a battleship that needed outfitting. The *USS New Jersey (BB-62)*, with Lieutenant Trudeau aboard, was commissioned in May 1943. The *Colahan*, Trudeau's very next assignment, would spend lots of sea time with the *New Jersey* in the last two years of the war.

Kwajalein in the Marshall Islands was the *Colahan*'s very first battle. When the new destroyer arrived early on the morning of 31 January 1944, the bombardment of Kwajalein was already a day old. She had entered a battle in progress. The previous day, the big battleships *Massachusetts*, *Indiana* and *Washington*, moving in from Rear Admiral Marc Mitscher's Task Force 58, fired 716 rounds of sixteen-inch ammunition. The large-caliber salvos, although highly destructive, were mere samplings of the concentration of projectiles still to come. The *Colahan*'s task group took over bombardment chores at 0618. The *Pennsylvania* and the *Colahan*-screened *Mississippi* began blasting away. During the rest of the day, and into the night, these two old battleships, together with battlewagons *New Mexico* and *Idaho* and task group cruisers *Minneapolis*, *San Francisco* and *New Orleans*, plus some destroyers, bombarded Kwajalein Atoll, delivering approximately 13,400 rounds of fourteen-inch ammunition, four hundred rounds of eight-inch, and five thousand rounds of five-inch.

The young *Colahan* crew was excited. After six months of training aboard the ship, and endless speculation about battle and being in it, here they were, just kids really, within the very midst of booming and belching naval warfare. The sight-setters in the main five-inch mounts could not contain their awe and enthusiasm, and the sound-powered phone system linking the five guns offered a perfect conduit for these

high spirits. "We were cutting up and chattering over the phones," confessed Seaman Bill Greenough in his personal shipboard diary. They did not know that Lieutenant Ed Trudeau was listening in.

"When we secured from general quarters, a ship announcement was heard," Greenough continued. "All five-inch gun talkers were to report immediately to Lieutenant Trudeau's quarters. He told us, in no uncertain terms, that such conduct would cease, that there would be no more of it, that there was a war going on. Then he dismissed us. We had a lot of respect for him."

At 1800 that evening, after devoting her daylight hours to guarding the old *Mississippi*, the *Colahan* was reassigned to the antisubmarine screen surrounding Admiral Kelly Turner's *Rocky Mount* flagship. The destroyer zigzagged through the night, keeping station on the command ship, from which Turner issued directives to the forces converging on the enemy-held islands and islets of Kwajalein Atoll. At one point, Turner ordered the battleships to close within two thousand yards of the beach. Nervous dreadnought captains questioned the order, asking for verification. This irritated Turner, who cussed about as much as he drank, which was a lot. The admiral was not accustomed to being second-guessed. He promptly lopped off another five hundred yards to show the captains he meant what he said the first time, damn it!

These shore-hugging operations in a poorly charted region surely contributed to the circumstances in which the *Colahan* plunged into trouble. But the major blame probably lay in heavy traffic and poor visibility due to intermittent rain squalls. It was still dark on this first morning of February, and the destroyer was forced to maneuver to avoid collision with other ships. When it happened, she was knifing through the darkness at thirteen knots. Lieutenant Trudeau was on the bridge as officer of the deck, the officer in charge. At 0520, just hours before the troop landings, the *Colahan* ran hard upon a submerged coral reef south of Enubuj, a couple of miles from the Kwajalein landing beaches.

The *Colahan* managed to clear the reef without assistance shortly before 0700. But vibrations felt throughout the ship during the maneuver were "indicative of damaged propellers," to quote Lieutenant Trudeau in the ship's deck log. A diver was sent over the side and reported that the screws were bent out of shape and the sound dome was bashed in. Later it was discovered that the shafts were out of alignment.

The destroyer was still afloat but out of action, dead in the water, unable to make way under her own power. She had to be towed 2,000 miles to Pearl Harbor for repairs.

Whose fault was it? When a warship runs aground and suffers incapacitating damage, someone must take the blame. Trudeau was the OOD, but Ted Knudson, the *Colahan*'s supply officer, related a story that blamed the short-tempered captain, Commander Donald Wilber. It goes like this: Trudeau called the captain from his sea cabin to report that the task group could not be found on radar. Wilber, irritated, told the OOD, "What the hell do you want me to do, stand your watch for you?" Then the captain ordered flank speed, and the *Colahan* went bumping over a coral reef.

In the wake of the grounding, the Navy reprimanded Trudeau, Wilber and the *Colahan*'s navigator, Executive Officer Grant Heston. But it was only Lieutenant Trudeau who was sent packing, after less than nine months on the ship. A *Colahan* legend was born: As punishment for running the *Colahan* aground in her first battle, Trudeau was ordered to the *USS Indianapolis* (CA-35) and died when the heavy cruiser was sunk by a Jap sub. There may be some truth in it. Maybe not. While the *Colahan* was undergoing repairs at Pearl Harbor, the lieutenant was ordered to the staff of the admiral commanding all Pacific destroyers. Sounds almost like a promotion. Months later, he was transferred to San Diego's Operational Training Command. He didn't report to the *Indianapolis* until March 1945, more than a year after the *Colahan* tried to climb that Kwajalein reef.

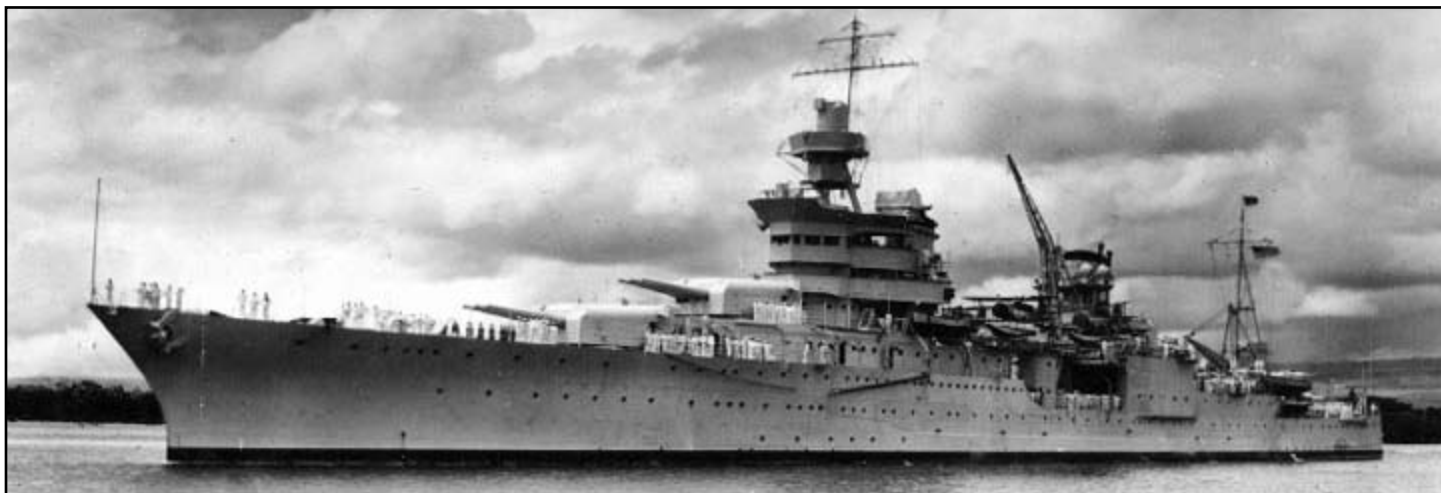
At Kwajalein, and for a full year afterward, the *Indianapolis* served as Admiral Raymond Spruance's flagship. Late in the war, after Spruance shifted to the

battleship *New Mexico*, the cruiser delivered to Tinian the atomic bomb destined to be dropped on Hiroshima. She made the Tinian delivery on 26 July 1945. That's when Lieutenant Trudeau wrote his last "Dear Folks" letter. He thanked his family for birthday cards and gifts. Three days earlier, he had turned 26 years old. On 30 July, while crossing the Philippine Sea unescorted, the *Indianapolis* was sunk by a Japanese submarine. Two well-placed torpedoes caused her to go down in just 12 minutes. She was the last American warship to be destroyed by the enemy in World War II. The ill-fated ship's roster included "Trudeau, Edmond Arthur, Lt." Only 316 out of nearly 1,200 sailors survived the tragedy. Ed Trudeau was not among them. He died in the explosions or when the ship capsized and sank, or perhaps a day or two later in shark-infested waters.

The lieutenant's parents, Mr. and Mrs. James A. Trudeau of Berkeley, California, received a Western Union telegram from Vice Admiral Randall Jacobs, the Chief of Naval Personnel:

"I DEEPLY REGRET TO INFORM YOU THAT YOUR SON LIEUTENANT EDMOND ARTHUR TRUDEAU USN IS MISSING IN ACTION 30 JULY 1945 IN THE SERVICE OF HIS COUNTRY. YOUR GREAT ANXIETY IS APPRECIATED AND YOU WILL BE FURNISHED DETAILS WHEN RECEIVED."

If you believe the *Colahan* cause-and-effect legend, Trudeau was fatally unlucky. The turning point in his short span on this earth came when he drew the 0400-to-0800 bridge watch aboard the destroyer on 1 February 1944. The *Colahan* ran aground, and he was shuffled off to a doomed vessel. Such is the random luck of war, and of life itself for that matter.



The heavy cruiser *USS Indianapolis* (CA-35) was sunk by a Japanese submarine on 30 July 1945.