

STATEMENT OF DR. WILLIAM S. DUDLEY
DIRECTOR OF NAVAL HISTORY
BEFORE THE
SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
ON
THE *USS INDIANAPOLIS*

14 SEPTEMBER 1999

Good morning, Mr. Chairman. I am Dr. William S. Dudley, Director of Naval History, Department of the Navy.

The cruiser INDIANAPOLIS (CA-35) was built by the New York Shipbuilding Company at Camden, New Jersey, and placed in commission on 15 November 1932. She served with the Pacific Fleet throughout World War II, providing anti-aircraft protection to fast carrier forces, bombarding shore targets, and furnishing heavy artillery support to amphibious landings. On 18 November 1944 Captain Charles B. McVay, III, assumed command.

Captain--later Rear Admiral--McVay had graduated from the Naval Academy in 1919. He served in a variety of ships and shore commands, assuming increasing responsibilities.

When the United States entered World War II he was commanding officer of the oiler KAWEAH. From June 1942 to April 1943 he was executive officer of the cruiser CLEVELAND (CL 55). During this time CLEVELAND took part in the invasion of North Africa, protected troop transports bringing reinforcements to Guadalcanal, and fought off heavy Japanese air attacks in the battle of Rennell Island. For his seamanship and conduct in a bombardment of Kolombangara Island, Solomons, in March 1943, during which CLEVELAND helped to sink two Japanese destroyers, Captain McVay was awarded a Silver Star medal.

From May 1943 to October 1944 then-Captain McVay was chairman of the Joint Intelligence Staff in the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, and was then ordered to take command of INDIANAPOLIS. Under his command, INDIANAPOLIS took part in carrier strikes on the Japanese mainland and the capture of Iwo Jima. On 31 March 1945, while engaged in the pre-landing bombardment of Okinawa, she was hit near the stern by a Japanese suicide plane. The plane was carrying a bomb, which penetrated INDIANAPOLIS' decks to explode under the ship's bottom. The shock of the explosion opened two large holes in the ship's hull, flooding compartments and killing nine of her crew. After

emergency work by a salvage ship, INDIANAPOLIS returned to Mare Island Navy Yard, Vallejo, California, for repairs.

On 16 July 1945 INDIANAPOLIS sailed from San Francisco with the internal components of the two atomic bombs destined for Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Her orders called for secrecy and high speed. The need to get the atomic bomb components to Tinian was so urgent that INDIANAPOLIS had to postpone the customary post-overhaul shakedown training. Refueling at Pearl Harbor, INDIANAPOLIS delivered her cargo at Tinian, in the Marianas Islands, on 26 July. She was ordered to Guam, and thence to Leyte, Philippine Islands, where she would conduct shakedown training before going on to report to Vice Admiral Jesse Oldendorf's Task Force 95 at Okinawa.

When INDIANAPOLIS arrived at Guam, Captain McVay was to report to the port director at the naval base, who would give him routing instructions to Leyte. When he entered Leyte Gulf, he was to send a message notifying Admiral Oldendorf of his arrival and reporting for duty. At Leyte, he would report directly to Rear Admiral Lynde McCormick, commander of one of Admiral Oldendorf's task groups (Task Group 95.7) for training.ⁱ

Coded copies of INDIANAPOLIS' orders were sent to the Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet; Commander, Fifth Fleet;

Commander, Marianas area; Vice Admiral Oldendorf and Rear Admiral McCormick; and to the port directors on Guam and Tinian. Admiral McCormick's copy was received by his flagship, the battleship IDAHO (BB 42) on the evening after INDIANAPOLIS sailed from Tinian for Guam. The radio staff incorrectly decoded the address as Task Group 75.8 instead of 95.7 and went no farther, assuming, since it was addressed--they thought--to another command and was only classified "Restricted," the lowest security category, that it was a routine matter having nothing to do with them.ⁱⁱ

On arriving at Guam on 27 July 1945, Captain McVay visited the Advanced Headquarters of the Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet, commanded by Commodore James Carter. McVay asked Carter if he could conduct his training at Guam instead of waiting until he arrived at Leyte, but Carter told him this training was no longer given in the Marianas. McVay went on to ask about intelligence information, remarking that he had been out of the forward area since Okinawa. Carter said nothing about Japanese activity; he later recalled that "I don't remember that we discussed any intelligence information.that intelligence was provided by the port director at the time the ship was routed, as a normal procedure."ⁱⁱⁱ

Captain McVay then went on to the port director's office. Lieutenant Joseph Waldron, the convoy and routing officer, directed two of his junior staff officers to work out the arrangements for INDIANAPOLIS' voyage to Leyte. Ships in that area were normally not permitted to exceed 16 knots without specific need, to conserve fuel. McVay also wanted to steam at medium speed, to ease the burden on his engines after his high-speed run from San Francisco, and wanted to arrive off Leyte Gulf at dawn so he could conduct anti-aircraft practice on the way into the gulf.

McVay and the staff officers calculated that 24 to 25 knots would bring INDIANAPOLIS to Leyte in the morning of 30 July. McVay felt this would press his engines too far. They then calculated that, if INDIANAPOLIS departed Guam at 0900 the next morning, 28 July, and steamed at an average of 15.7 knots, she would arrive at Leyte in the morning of 31 July.

INDIANAPOLIS' route was prescribed by Wartime Pacific Routing Instructions, which laid out a direct route from Guam to Leyte, code-named "Peddie," and stated that "under normal procedure, combatant fleet components proceeding to, or returning from, combat operating areas shall be sailed on standard routes whenever such routes are available."^{iv}

The staff officers did not believe that an antisubmarine escort ship would be available, since such ships were urgently needed in the war zone between Okinawa and Japan, and Captain McVay was not overly concerned, since he had often sailed without escort ships. One of the staff officers called the surface operations officer at the headquarters of naval forces in the Marianas. The operations officer, Captain Oliver Naquin, was not there, but his assistant, one Lieutenant Johnson, said that no escort was thought necessary under a general policy that ships below a certain degree of north latitude could steam without escort.

That evening INDIANAPOLIS' navigator, Commander John Janney, returned to the routing office and spoke to the same two staff officers. They gave him two papers. The first, INDIANAPOLIS' routing instructions, directed her to sail at 0900 on 28 July, steam at an average speed of 15.7 knots, and arrive at Leyte Gulf at 1100 on 31 July.^v The orders contained standard language stating that "commanding officers are at all times responsible for the safe navigation of their ships" and that INDIANAPOLIS should "zigzag at discretion of the commanding officer."

The intelligence brief listed three reported submarine sightings, one of them five days old by this time and the

other two considered doubtful. This was information that INDIANAPOLIS had already obtained from radio traffic before arriving at Guam. INDIANAPOLIS was not, however, informed that Japanese messages, intercepted and translated by Pacific Fleet headquarters at Pearl Harbor, had shown that a group of four Japanese submarines were operating in the Philippine Sea. The decrypted information had been sent to Commodore James Carter, commander of the Pacific Fleet's advanced headquarters at Guam. Carter, in turn, orally passed it on to Commander, Marianas' surface operations officer, Captain Naquin. Naquin did not, however, inform the intelligence office at Guam who prepared the brief for INDIANAPOLIS. When the brief was written, the intelligence office knew nothing of the Japanese submarine operations, nor did they know that the destroyer escort UNDERHILL (DE 682) had been sunk by a Japanese submarine between Okinawa and Leyte on 24 July.^{vi}

INDIANAPOLIS sailed from Guam on the morning of 28 July. Shortly after 1600 that day, a merchant ship sent off two messages reporting that she had sighted, and fired on, a periscope. A destroyer escort and several planes were sent to search the area but, by the evening of 29 July, they turned away from the area without contacting anything that could be confirmed as a submarine. This

action took place about 170 miles ahead of INDIANAPOLIS, and some 60 miles off her track. Commander, Marianas, was kept informed of this operation by radio, but nothing was done to divert INDIANAPOLIS from her route. INDIANAPOLIS intercepted a message reporting antisubmarine operations in progress; at 1800 on 29 July the incoming and outgoing officers of the watch calculated that, if the reported submarine was after INDIANAPOLIS, it could not catch up if the cruiser continued on her present course and speed.^{vii}

Between 1930 and 2000 on the 29th Captain McVay ordered the officer of the watch to cease zigzagging and resume the ship's base course. Captain McVay later stated that "the knowledge that I possessed indicated to me that there was little possibility of surface, air, or subsurface attack, in fact no possibility."^{viii} Just before 2000, he also ordered the speed increased to 17 knots to make sure the ship would make good her projected time of arrival.

Shortly after 2330 the Japanese submarine I-58 came to the surface, and almost immediately spotted something on the horizon. Her commanding officer, Lieutenant Commander Mochitsura Hashimoto, ordered his torpedo tubes made ready for firing, with two of the *kaiten* suicide piloted torpedoes she was also carrying. The submarine maneuvered to bring herself to one side of the track of the oncoming

ship and, as the target drew closer, Hashimoto was able to identify it as a battleship or large cruiser. Seeing that the ship would pass about 1,600 yards ahead of him, he decided to attack with conventional torpedoes instead of suicide weapons. Just after midnight on 30 July 1945 I-58 fired a spread of six torpedoes at INDIANAPOLIS.

At about five minutes after midnight, a torpedo hit INDIANAPOLIS below her forward 8-inch gun turret; seconds later, a second one hit below the cruiser's bridge. Internal communications and fire mains were knocked out. The ship's engines continued to turn over, pulling tons of water into the great holes blown by the torpedoes. Radiomen attempted to send out SOS messages, but the question of whether or not the messages actually got out, and whether or not they were received, is still disputed.^{ix} Some 12 minutes after I-58's torpedoes hit, INDIANAPOLIS rolled over on her side and went down by the bow some 250 miles north of the Palau Islands, 600 miles west of Guam, and 550 miles east of Leyte.^x

I-58 surfaced at 0100 and approached the area where INDIANAPOLIS had sunk, looking for debris that would confirm a sinking. They could see nothing in the darkness but Hashimoto felt certain that their target could not have survived and radioed Tokyo to report that he had sunk "a

battleship of the IDAHO class." His message was decoded by Pacific Fleet intelligence at Pearl Harbor which, however, took no action on it. While intelligence had learned to read Japanese messages, they had been unable to decipher the system used to identify American ship types. They were thus unable to identify the type of ship I-58 was claiming to have sunk. Japanese messages had been found to contain many exaggerated claims and much deliberately-planted false intelligence; all reports of this kind had originally been investigated but without result; by this time, very little credence was given to claims of ship sinkings. In this case, the unhappy result was that no one compared the position of I-58's reported sinking with movements of friendly ships in that area.^{xi}

At that time there was no procedure in effect to account for the nonarrival of a warship at a scheduled place. Current Pacific Fleet instructions specified that arrivals of warships were not to be reported; in this case, the individuals involved at Leyte assumed that this applied to nonarrivals as well. Thus, when INDIANAPOLIS did not arrive at Leyte Gulf on schedule, the port director's office did not attach any particular significance to this. Instead, they assumed that INDIANAPOLIS had been delayed in passage, or that her orders had been changed by direct

message while she was at sea. Thus, none of those involved were yet aware that anything was amiss.^{xii}

Survivors were first spotted in the water by a patrol plane flying out of Peleliu, in the Palau Islands. At 1125 on 2 August the pilot reported sighting men in the water to the headquarters of Commander, Western Carolines Sub-Area, Rear Admiral Elliott Buckmaster, headquartered at Peleliu. Every available plane was ordered out with rafts and survival gear, and ships within reach were diverted to the area to search for survivors. Lieutenant R. Adrian Marks arrived on the scene in a PBY flying boat. Realizing the desperate need of the men in the water, he set his plane down in 12-foot swells to rescue 56 of them. A few minutes after midnight on 3 August the first of the rescue ships arrived and began picking up survivors. Through that day rescuers continued to arrive, and retrieved all men still living from the water, but ships continued to scan the area until 8 August.^{xiii} Only with the recovery of survivors did command headquarters learn that INDIANAPOLIS had been lost, with most of her crew.

On 9 August 1945 Fleet Admiral Nimitz ordered Vice Admiral Charles Lockwood to convene a court of inquiry on Guam on that date "or as soon thereafter as practicable for the purpose of inquiring into all the circumstances

connected with the sinking of the U.S.S. INDIANAPOLIS..., the rescue operations, and the delay in connection with reporting the loss of that ship." Vice Admiral George Murray (Commander, Marianas) and Rear Admiral Francis Whiting were the junior members of the court.

The inquiry began on 13 August, and concluded with a recommendation that Captain McVay be tried by court-martial on charges of failing to send a distress message immediately after his ship was torpedoed, and of failing to order INDIANAPOLIS to zigzag. Fleet Admiral Nimitz disagreed, holding that McVay's decision not to zigzag was "an error in judgment, but not of such nature as to constitute gross negligence," and proposed to give him a letter of reprimand in lieu of a court-martial.^{xiv} Fleet Admiral Ernest King, Chief of Naval Operations, disagreed with Nimitz and recommended that McVay be court-martialled, and that INDIANAPOLIS' loss be thoroughly investigated. With Secretary of the Navy Forrestal's approval, King, on 18 October 1945, directed the Naval Inspector General to perform such an investigation.^{xv} On 12 November 1945, however, before the Inspector General could complete his inquiry, Forrestal ordered Captain McVay to stand trial by court-martial.^{xvi}

The Navy Department issued a series of press releases on INDIANAPOLIS' sinking. The first of these, on 14 August 1945--V-J Day--stated that INDIANAPOLIS had been "sunk by enemy action," and "with a heavy loss of life." Everyone on board was counted on the casualty list, totalling 1,196 men, Navy and Marine Corps. Five were listed as dead; 875 as missing; and 316 wounded. The rest of the release recounted INDIANAPOLIS' war service and named her wartime commanding officers.

On 28 November 1945 a summary biography of Captain McVay was released. This followed the usual form of such summary biographies of senior officers, and quoted at length from his 1943 Silver Star citation. The only reference to INDIANAPOLIS' loss was a statement that "she was announced lost in the Philippine Sea in July, 1945 as a result of enemy action," and that McVay "in September 1945 was ordered to report to the Bureau of Naval Personnel, Navy Department, Washington, D.C. for temporary duty."

The court-martial charges and specifications in Captain McVay's case were released on 3 December 1945. This was simply a copy of the order from Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal to Captain Thomas Ryan, the Judge Advocate in the proceeding.

On 12 December 1945 a "Memorandum to the Press" announced that Commander Hashimoto had been summoned from Japan by the Navy Department, and would testify in Captain McVay's court-martial on the next day. It discussed the type of oath to be administered, and briefly spoke of I-58 and of Hashimoto's naval service.

On 23 February 1946, after completion of Captain McVay's court-martial, three releases were issued by Fleet Admiral Nimitz, now the Chief of Naval Operations. The first of these summarized the two charges, inefficiency in ordering abandon ship and failure to steer a zigzag course. It noted that he had been acquitted of the first charge, but found guilty of the second and sentenced to lose numbers in his temporary rank of Captain and his permanent rank of Commander, and that the court had unanimously recommended clemency in view of his outstanding record of service. It went on to say that the Judge Advocate General had found the proceeding legal, and that the Chief of Naval Personnel had approved the verdict but had recommended that the sentence be remitted and McVay be restored to duty. Fleet Admiral Ernest King, Commander in Chief, United States Fleet, and Chief of Naval Operations, concurred in this. Secretary of the Navy Forrestal approved, remitting the entire sentence.

The second release was a lengthy "Narrative of the Circumstances of the Loss of the USS INDIANAPOLIS." This started with a long discussion of the non-availability of escort ships. In recounting the final events in INDIANAPOLIS' life it remarked that "Information of possible enemy submarines along the route was contained in the routing instructions and was discussed with [INDIANAPOLIS'] Navigator" and, again, brought up the matter of escort ships. The release noted that INDIANAPOLIS was "steaming unescorted, and not zig-zagging, at a speed of 17 knots...under good conditions of visibility and in a moderate sea" when she was torpedoed. On 31 July, INDIANAPOLIS' scheduled date of arrival at Leyte, she was removed from the plot kept by Commander Marianas and recorded, at Leyte, as presumably having arrived. Since, under prescribed procedures, arrivals of warships were not reported, ships of that type were assumed to have arrived "on the date and at approximately the time scheduled in the absence of information to the contrary." Since INDIANAPOLIS did not arrive, the port director at Leyte should have sought to find out why. The release went on to discuss the decoding of I-58's report of having sunk a large warship and why it was not taken seriously though, "had this information been evaluated as authentic, it is

possible that the survivors...might have been located within 24 hours of the...sinking...and many additional lives might have been saved." It discussed the question of INDIANAPOLIS' nonarrival at Leyte, speaking at length about the responsibilities of Lieutenant Commander Jules Sancho, the acting port director at Leyte, and Lieutenant Stuart Gibson, Sancho's operations officer, with Commodore Norman Gillette, acting commander of the Philippine Sea Frontier and Captain Alfred Granum, Sea Frontier operations officer, and criticizing their performance. It goes on to briefly recount the discovery of the survivors and the subsequent search-and-rescue operations. The release concludes by listing the disciplinary actions taken: court-martial for Captain McVay, letters of reprimand to Commodore Gillette, Captain Granum, and Lieutenant Gibson, and a letter of admonition to Lieutenant Commander Sancho. [All four letters were later withdrawn by Secretary of the Navy Forrestal.]

The final release quotes a letter from the father of one of the men lost with INDIANAPOLIS to Fleet Admiral Nimitz, asking for a statement concerning Nimitz' "part in the mistake and inefficiency connected with the sinking," with the text of a letter in reply from Nimitz, stating that "to the extent that a Commander in Chief should be

held responsible for failures or errors of judgment on the part of subordinates, I must bear my share of responsibility for the loss of the INDIANAPOLIS. There is no thought of exonerating anyone in the Navy who should be punished for his performance of duty in connection with the sinking of the INDIANAPOLIS and the attending loss of life."

References:

- Lech: Raymond B. Lech, *All the Drowned Sailors* (New York: Stein & Day, 1982).
- McVay: Captain Charles B. McVay, III, oral narrative, Sinking of USS INDIANAPOLIS. 27 Sep 1945.
- Morison: Samuel E. Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II*, Vol. XIV (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1960).
- Newcomb: Richard F. Newcomb, *Abandon Ship! Death of the U.S.S. INDIANAPOLIS* (New York: Henry Holt, 1958).
- Navy Department Press Releases:
- "USS INDIANAPOLIS." 14 August 1945.
- "Captian [sic] Charles Butler McVay, III, U.S. Navy." 28 November 1945.
- "Charges and specifications in case of Captain Charles B. McVay, III, U.S. Navy." 3 December 1945.
- "Memorandum to the Press [Testimony of Commander Mochitsura Hashimoto]." 12 December 1945.
- "Report on Court Martial of Captain Charles B. McVay, III, U.S.N., Commanding Officer, USS INDIANAPOLIS." 23 February 1946.
- "Narrative of the Circumstances of the Loss of the USS INDIANAPOLIS." 23 February 1946.
- "Sample Exchange of Correspondence Between Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, U.S. Navy, Chief of Naval Operations, and Next-of-Kin of Personnel Lost Aboard the USS INDIANAPOLIS." 23 February 1946.

-
- ⁱ Lech, 4-5.
ⁱⁱ Lech, 5-6.
ⁱⁱⁱ Lech, 10-11.
^{iv} Lech, 12.
^v McVay, 2.
^{vi} Lech, 15-17.
^{vii} Lech, 21-24.
^{viii} Lech, 24.
^{ix} Lech, 46-49; Newcomb, 82-85; McVay, 3; 17-18.
^x Newcomb, 108.
^{xi} Lech, 51-52.
^{xii} Newcomb, 104-106; Lech, 67-69.
^{xiii} Morison, XIV:325-326; Newcomb, 134-140; Lech, 90-114.
^{xiv} Lech, 116-126; Newcomb, 172-176.
^{xv} Lech, 128; 187-194; Newcomb, 257-259.
^{xvi} Lech, 130-131.