Navy Confirms Wreck Site off Philippines Coast that of USS Samuel B. Roberts



The U.S. Navy destroyer escort USS Samuel B. Roberts (DE-413) circa June 1944, while off Boston, Massachusetts. *NAVAL HISTORY AND HERITAGE COMMAND*

WASHINGTON – Seventy-eight years after its loss during World War II, the U.S. Navy confirmed on June 25 the location of USS Samuel B. Roberts (DE 413), the Naval History and Heritage Command said June 27.

As announced on Twitter June 24 by retired naval officer and underwater explorer Victor Vescovo, he and a team from the undersea technology company Caladan Oceanic located the destroyer escort ship more than four miles beneath the surface

in the Philippine Sea.

Vescovo tweeted, “With sonar specialist Jeremie Morizet, I piloted the submersible Limiting Factor to the wreck of the Samuel B. Roberts [DE 413]. Resting at 6,895 meters, it is now the deepest shipwreck ever located and surveyed. It was indeed the ‘destroyer escort that fought like a battleship.’”

USS Samuel B. Roberts was the first ship named for Coxswain Samuel Booker Roberts Jr., who was killed in the Battle of Guadalcanal. Commissioned April 28, 1944, the destroyer escort was lost that same year during the Battle off Samar when it, along with several other U.S. warships, engaged Japanese forces off the Philippine coast and selflessly put itself in harm’s way to protect U.S. invasion forces in Leyte Gulf.

“USS Samuel B. Roberts was lost in one of the most valiant actions in the history of the U.S. Navy,” said Naval History and Heritage Command Director Samuel Cox, a retired rear admiral. “The gallantry of her crew serves to inspire U.S. Navy personnel today, knowing they are entrusted with upholding the legacy and example of this ship and crew.”

Now that USS Samuel B. Roberts has been positively identified, the wreck site is considered a Department of the Navy sunken military craft protected from unauthorized disturbance by the Sunken Military Craft Act. Violations of the act can carry penalties of up to $100,000 a day, confiscation of the vessel used to disturb the sunken military craft and liability for damages caused. Permission to disturb U.S. Navy sunken military craft for archaeological, historical, or educational purposes is sought from the Naval History and Heritage Command. There are no plans to disturb USS Samuel B. Roberts.

“The site of the wreck marks the location of a hallowed war grave,” Cox added. “It serves to remind all Americans of the great cost born by previous generations for the freedom we should not take for granted today.”

More than 40 years after the ship’s historic actions in WWII, the story of DE 413 and its crew’s heroism inspired another generation of Sailors serving on a ship with the same name.

A bronze plaque commemorating the crew of DE 413 was aboard the Oliver Hazard Perry-class guided missile frigate USS Samuel B. Roberts (FFG 58) when the ship struck an Iranian mine in the Persian Gulf April 14, 1988. The mine blew a 15-foot hole in the hull of the ship, breaking its keel. Because of the fast actions of the crew, after a five-hour effort to purge water and fight fires, the ship was saved. The captain of the vessel, Cmdr. Paul Rinn, noted that while running to their stations to save the ship, the FFG crew would touch the plaque for good luck to honor and recognize the bravery of the crew of DE 413.

The plaque is now in the collection at the National Museum of the U.S. Navy at the Washington Navy Yard in Washington, D.C. It reads: “In Memory of Those Who Have Sailed Before Us/USS Samuel B. Roberts (DE-413)/LCDR R. W. Copeland, Commanding Officer.” The remainder of the plaque includes the names of the original crew of the USS Samuel B. Roberts.