

Collection #
SC 2875

**USS INDIANAPOLIS
PAPERS, 1932–1934**

Collection Information	1
Biographical Sketch	2
Scope and Content Note	3
Contents	4

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January 2011

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COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF
COLLECTION: 1 folder

COLLECTION
DATES: 1932–1934

PROVENANCE: All acquisition information unknown

RESTRICTIONS: None

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ALTERNATE
FORMATS:

RELATED
HOLDINGS: USS *Indianapolis* Collection, M 0645; Colleen Mondor, USS
Indianapolis Correspondence, 1995–1996, M 0782

ACCESSION
NUMBER: 0000.0844

NOTES:

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

The heavy cruiser USS *Indianapolis*, CA 35, was commissioned in November 1932. It saw its first combat of World War II in the South Pacific Theater in February 1942. The *Indianapolis* became the flag ship for the 5th Fleet and it saw extensive combat duty in the South Pacific, receiving ten battle stars for action in numerous engagements including the assault on the Marianas ("The Great Marianas Turkey Shoot"), June–August 1944, the covering of the Iwo Jima landings, February–March 1945, and the pre-invasion bombardment of Okinawa, March 1945.

On 16 July 1945 the ship departed from Mare Island Navy Yard in California on a secret cargo mission to Tinian Island in the Marianas. The cargo mission entailed carrying several parts for the assemblage of the atomic bomb, including uranium. After successfully delivering its cargo on 26 July, the ship was torpedoed and sunk by a Japanese submarine between Guam and Leyte four days later. Because of the secret nature of its mission, there was some confusion after the ship's sinking and it was four days before all the survivors were rescued. Of the 1,196 men on board, only 316 survived, many perishing because of the elements while waiting to be rescued.

The ship's commander, Captain Charles Butler McVay, III, was court-martialled and found guilty of negligence in failing to issue the order to "zig-zag" in hostile waters. McVay was the first officer in the history of the United States Navy to be court-martialled for losing his ship to the enemy in time of war. He was sentenced to lose 100 numbers in his temporary grade of Captain and also in his permanent grade of Commander. The Navy granted McVay clemency in February 1946.

Charles Butler McVay, III (1898–1968), was a 1920 graduate of the United States Naval Academy. Prior to the outbreak of the Second World War he served as senior naval aide to President Roosevelt. During the war McVay won the Bronze Star, Silver Star, and the Purple Heart. In November 1944 he was given the command of the *Indianapolis*. After his court martial, McVay was assigned to the 8th Naval District in New Orleans. He retired as a Rear Admiral and chief of staff from that district in 1949. McVay died from a self-inflicted pistol wound to the head. In July 2001 the Secretary of the Navy officially cleared Captain McVay of any negligence resulting in the ship's destruction.

Sources:

Collection guide to the USS *Indianapolis* Collection (M 0645).

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The collection contains six items from the ship's first years of service, 1932–1934. Included are: “Prayer on the occasion of the commissioning of the USS *Indianapolis*, 15 November 1932; “Remarks by captain on the occasion of the commissioning of the USS *Indianapolis*, 15 November 1932; a pamphlet “Remarks by captain on the occasion of the presentation of the silver service to the USS *Indianapolis*, 3 December 1932; two USS *Indianapolis* Christmas cards, n.d.; and a typed letter from J. M. Smeallie aboard the *Indianapolis* at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba to Mandelkorn, 12 October 1934.

CONTENTS

CONTENTS

USS *Indianapolis* materials, 1932–1934

CONTAINER

Folder 1