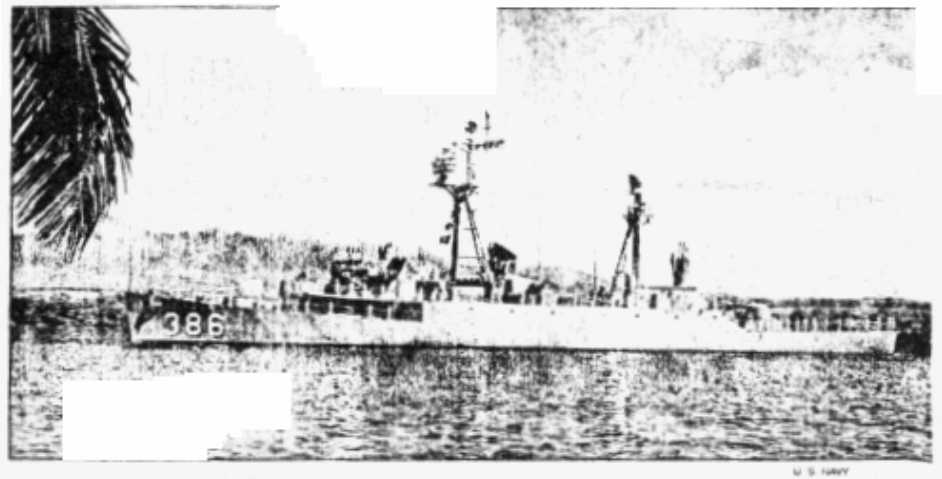


"Barrier Patrol"

(See J. J. Hyland, pp. 58-59, Fall 1959 *Naval History*)

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(Retired)— Reading this article prompted me to comment on the surface side of the mid-Pacific barrier operations. As in the Atlantic, aircraft and surface units made up the barrier forces. The barrier was established on a line from Midway to Unalaska Island. The planes, Lockheed Constellations (WVs), flew a racetrack pattern between the terminal points with five surface stations manned by radar picket ships located along the line at all times. The **patrol** duration was 24 days. The deployment began when the ship left Pearl Harbor en route to the northern station. On arrival, each ship rotated south **one** station. And so on. Each ship was required to remain within a 30-mile circle of its station, unless weather or some emergency required departure. On leaving the southern station, the ship returned to Pearl Harbor, unless a fuel stop at Midway was necessary.



The USS Savage DER-386, steams out of Pearl Harbor channel circa 1960. As a destroyer escort modified by the addition of extra radars, she operated as part of the Pacific barrier patrol to help give advance warning against surprise attack.

Much like the Atlantic rough weather was common and could occur at any time of the year. Ships took a **beating** and were often in dangerous situations because of high seas and winds. There were periods of calm, however, when it was possible to lie to order to conserve fuel.

It took about 12-15 ships to maintain the five station barrier. There were several "gold-platers" assigned, meaning they had state-of-the-art surveillance equipment. My ship, the USS *Savage* DER-386, was one of these. At the height of the barrier operations, the schedule was sacrosanct, making **for** high morale because the crews could make personal plans accordingly. We had a decent reenlistment rate. On board the 'SAVAGE' eight of nine junior officers either augmented or extended their active service. The barrier was periodically tested by P-2s. I cannot recall a Soviet aircraft ever penetrating the line. For the most part, **it** was a lonely tour, save for the flights of WVs. An important function comprised reporting meteorological data every four hours, which was most appreciated by many including **the** Strategic Air Command.

In the spring of 1960, the barrier was reduced to two stations. Some of the older ships were inactivated; others were sent to other ports. Those remaining at Pearl Harbor manned the barrier and participated in special operations involving the Soviets. One ship monitored an intercontinental ballistic-missile shot. The *Savage* went on two surveillance missions when Soviet range ships came into the central Pacific. During the second, Yuri Gagarin made his famous orbit of the earth, on 12 April 1961 with the *Savage* obtaining important telemetry as he passed overhead. With the onset of the Vietnam War, the remaining ships were sent to duty in that theater. The barrier ceased to exist.

In spite of the unfavorable weather encountered on patrol, assignment to a radar picket ship was to be among some most competent sailors. Pound for pound, the *Savage* was the equal of my more prestigious commands.