

Liberty Call

1942 - Battle of Midway Commemoration - 2001

Capt. Gilven M. Slonim, 1913 - 2000

Former intelligence officer at Station Hypo honored with burial at sea

By PH2 Chad McNealey
Staff Photographer

WHEN USS Hopper (DDG 70) left Mike pier on May 30 for a short underway period they had an additional special mission and a Navy tradition that needed to be completed. Retired Capt. Gilven M. Slonim's ashes were dedicated to the sea during a ceremony on the fantail of Hopper on a beautiful, clear and calm day.

With the aid of fellow cryptologist and intelligence shipmates at Naval Security Group, Pearl Harbor and the crew of Hopper, Slonim's final wishes were granted.

During a 21-gun salute, his remains were scattered from the deck of a destroyer in the Pacific Ocean in honor of his days as a destroyer captain. Slonim's request to have his remains scattered during the anniversary of the Battle of Midway was just as fitting, because it was at that time in history that Slonim's expertise was directly responsible for the U.S. Navy's victory during that battle.

Slonim, born in Duluth, Minn. in 1913, graduated from the Naval Academy in 1936. At the suggestion of a mentor, Slonim attended language school to become a Japanese-language officer and was stationed at the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo, Japan from 1939 until he transferred to Station Hypo, the Combat Intelligence Unit at Pearl Harbor responsible for trying to decipher the Japanese Naval Code, JN-25.

Slonim had just come off the mid-watch at Station Hypo on the morning of Dec. 7, 1941 when the Japanese attacked. Slonim marveled at, "How realistic the 'drills' were becoming with the Army painting Japanese markings on their planes." Unfortunately, the "drills" turned out to be real thing and Slonim found himself in the middle of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

After the attack, Slonim was assigned to the staff of Adm. William "Bull" Halsey, Commander, U.S. Third Fleet. The staff was assigned to USS Enterprise (CV 6) and Slonim intercepted a Japanese broadcast that had revealed the location of the USS Hornet (CV 8) task force that was underway in the western Pacific with a secret load of Army B-25 bombers ready to attack Japan.

Slonim's intercept forced Adm. Halsey to launch the Doolittle Raiders earlier than planned. The raid was successful because of the early launching and the U.S. won an important psychological edge by bombing the Japanese on their homeland.

During the Battle of Midway in June 1942, Slonim was assigned to the staff of Adm. Raymond Spruance, Commander U.S. Fifth Fleet, and provided critical intelligence that contributed directly to the Navy's victory at Midway.

Slonim was also involved with gathering of intelligence that would give the Americans yet another psychological edge and revenge on the Japanese for the attack on Pearl Harbor. Slonim intercepted Japanese traffic that led to the shooting down of Japanese Adm. Isoroku Yamamoto's airplane, killing all onboard. Yamamoto was the chief planner of the attack on Pearl and the loss of their brilliant leader devastated the Japanese fighting spirit.

Slonim participated in every major battle in the Pacific theater during World War II except the invasion of Iwo Jima. Slonim was ordered to take 30 days leave by Adm. Spruance and returned home for the only time in six years to Duluth, missing the battle.

Slonim ended the war in the only way fitting. After surviving the attack on Pearl Harbor and making significant contributions through most of the major battles of the war in the Pacific, Slonim served as senior Japanese interpreter to Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz on USS Missouri (BB 63). His contributions to the Navy and his country continued with an intimate involvement in every aspect of the Japanese surrender onboard USS Missouri on Sept. 2, 1945, which ended the war.

After the war, Slonim continued his Navy career as a destroyer captain. He commanded USS Jarvis (DD 799), USS Irwin (DD 794), USS Everglades (AD 24), Destroyer Division 162 and Destroyer Squadron 28.

The historical aspects of Capt. Slonim's career read page for page with history of the U.S. Navy during World War II. He was present from the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 through every campaign and battle in the Pacific theater to the final surrender on the teakwood decks of USS Missouri.

His career continued through the Korean Conflict until 1965 when he retired from the Navy that he loved. That same year, his son, retired Lt. Cmdr. Richard G. Slonim, joined the Navy, following in the footsteps of his father as a cryptology specialist.



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(Above) USS Hopper honor guard fires a 21-gun salute in honor of Capt. Gilven M. Slonim, a retired World War II intelligence officer and Korean war destroyer captain. Hopper dedicated Slonim's ashes to the sea during the week of the anniversary of the Battle of Midway in which Slonim played a pivotal role.

(Far left) Capt. Slonim's official Navy portrait.

(Left) USS Hopper executive officer, Lt. Cmdr. Werner H. Jurinka, commits Capt. Slonim's ashes to the sea during the ceremony.

(Below) Japanese naval officers go over charts of Tokyo Bay during a piloting conference with Adm. William F. Halsey's Third Fleet staff, August 27, 1945, as preparations were being made for the entrance of U.S. Third Fleet and British Pacific Fleet ships into Japanese waters. At left, in the baseball cap, is Rear Adm. Robert B. Carney, Third Fleet Chief of Staff. At far right is Cmdr. Slonim who was assigned to Adm. Nimitz's Third Fleet Staff as his Japanese interpreter.



Photo courtesy of Lt. Cmdr. Richard G. Slonim



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Naval Historical Center photo



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Personal artifacts of Capt. Slonim were on display during the burial at sea including his cover, shoulder boards, Naval Academy class of '36 class ring and the National Ensign that was presented to his family.