

HISTORY OF THE USS PLUNGER (SS 179)

Built under the 1935 Emergency Appropriation Act at the Portsmouth (New Hampshire) Navy Yard, submarine USS PLUNGER was launched at 1450 E. S. T. on 8 July 1936. Miss Edith Elizabeth Greenlee, daughter of the Yard's Acting Commandant Captain H. R. Greenlee, served as sponsor at the ceremonies on that date, wielding the traditional bottle of champagne as the boat slid down the ways and was water-bourne. PLUNGER was subsequently placed in commission on 19 November of that same year and her first Commanding Officer, Lieutenant G. L. Russell, embarked.

The neophyte submarine was put through her nautical paces by Skipper Russell during mid-1931 in preparation for service with the U. S. Pacific Fleet. Taking on ammunition at New York City in March, the boat went south to the warm waters of the Caribbean for her shake-down cruise. There, the PLUNGER crew were indoctrinated in the ways of underwater warfare as the boat made practice torpedo approaches, crash dives and submerged evasive maneuvers. Neophyte became professional.

PLUNGER returned from the Caribbean to Newport, Rhode Island, for torpedo firing tests in late May, thence to Portsmouth for final post-trial examination and repairs. Lieutenant Russell's boat was found to be at the peak of fighting proficiency and her sleek, tube-shaped steel body was ready to make its appearance with sister submarines in Pacific waters.

USS PLUNGER departed home waters in November 1937, transited the Panama Canal and made San Diego, California, on the 26th, Thanksgiving Day.

As the world made an effort to maintain a quasi-security in the face of international chaos, the U. S. Pacific Fleet roamed the broad, blue expanse between the Eastern and Western Hemispheres, engaged in tactical maneuvers and mock naval engagements that were to become reality in the not-too-far-distant future. Submarine PLUNGER, as a unit of the fast-growing Fleet, operated out of San Diego until 15 March 1938, made a 1-month cruise to Dutch Harbor with five other subs of her class, rejoined the Fleet at San Francisco in April.

Presidential Review brought PLUNGER to San Francisco in June 1938, from whence she returned to San Diego the Subsequent month. The boat sailed with the Fleet on Maneuvers in 1939, underwent an overhaul at Mare Island, California, and had her first change of command as Lieutenant Russell was relieved by Lieutenant W. R. Headen in late June.

The remainder of PLUNGER's short-lived peacetime career was spent exercising between Pearl Harbor and West Coast submarine bases. Drill was the order of the day, combat exercises, routine. With Lieutenant D. C. White in command, the boat again sailed for Pearl Harbor on 30 November 1941, was lying in the shadow of towering

Diamond Head prior to entering as the Japanese holocaust struck on the first Sunday in December.

A thick pall of smoke hung over devastated Pearl Harbor as PLUNGER nosed in through wreckage-strewn waters the following day. Blackened and burned out U. S. Naval vessels lay at their moorings, gaunt hulks of twisted steel which had once been our outer bulwark of Pacific defense. For one-third of the Fleet, at least temporarily, the war was over as quickly as it had begun. For USS PLUNGER it began on 14 December 1941.

Scene of PLUNGER's first war patrol was the Kii Suido, strategic straits at the entrance to the Sea of Japan. Choked with men-of-war sailing to seize and cargo-transport following in their wake to supply and garrison the seizures, Kii Suido offered fertile field for conquest to an aggressive unit of American submarine service.

Eighteen days were spent in making the trans-Pacific task to patrol station and as the boat began entering the dangerous water radius off the sea of Japan, heavy seas and rain squalls foretold a not-too-favorable sojourn. At this early stage of the war, radar equipment had not yet come into service and all sub contacts were made either by sight or sound.

On one occasion an alert Japanese destroyer sighted PLUNGER and hurriedly sliced through the water to catch her. Lieutenant Commander White took his sub deep as crew and vessel rigged for depth charging.

In seconds the green-black sea off Japan was alive with explosions as a total of twenty-four depth charges plummeted down around the corner sub. As the assault diminished in intensity, submarine PLUNGER slipped away in the depths and lost her surface antagonist.

Only one vessel worthy of a torpedo approach, a 7200-ton merchantman, was encountered during the entire 18-day prowl, and it was promptly dispatched to the bottom with a generous amount of PLUNGER torpedoes.

In the first days of February, USS PLUNGER proudly rode the surface into Pearl Harbor, her first war patrol successfully completed, her first kill effected.

On 5 June 1942, after a Navy Yard overhaul at Pearl Harbor, PLUNGER put to sea for her second war patrol, again under the direction of able Skipper White. Her assigned area the China Sea off rubble-strewn Shanghai.

For nine days the boat patrolled her area, ready to ambuscade anything that hove into view. And ambuscade she did.

Captain White gazed longingly through the periscope at a sluggish Japanese convoy moving along the Chinese coast, quickly gave the order to go deep. PLUNGER responded and moved along to the area of the ships, inched to within firing range and began her firing. Confused

and panicky, the convoy quickly became disorganized with the huge, gray vessels scurrying away from their unseen assailant.

The anxious screams of convoy escorts could be heard whirring on the surface as PLUNGER calmly sent first one passenger-freighter to the bottom and then another. Her torpedoes secured hits on and severely damaged two other freighters, but the area was getting uncomfortably active with Jap naval vessels. PLUNGER called it a day - a big day.

Captain White received a radio dispatch that the States-bound SS CONTE VERDE was leaving Shanghai laden with diplomats (among the diplomats: ex-Ambassador to ex-friendly Japan Joseph Grew). PLUNGER sighted the exchange vessel the next day, was able to make out the protecting lights and markings and held her torpedoes in check.

Skipper White's dexterous boat terminated her 40-day second war patrol at Midway Island on 15 July 1942. PLUNGER was the first submarine to refit at the advanced base, but due to limited facilities, the boat returned to Pearl Harbor to complete the much-needed overhaul.

Once more at our most formidable Pacific base, PLUNGER was presented with a complete set of the highly effective surface search radar while her Commanding Officer was presented the Navy Cross for his capable Administration of the boat during war patrol No. 2. With the crew refreshed after a period of recreation at Pearl Harbor, PLUNGER set forth to patrol the area off the beleaguered Solomons where our Marines had been stopped cold in the initial U. S. Pacific offensive.

Soon after her arrival in the designated Solomons area, PLUNGER's steel shell went aground on an uncharted reef as she was traveling at periscope depth. With her sound gear demolished and bottom badly damaged, the third war patrol looked like a complete failure. Captain White eased her out of her untimely berth and PLUNGER continued on patrol until receiving orders to return to port.

Next morning, business began picking up as an enemy heavy cruiser pulled into view on the periscope. Gaining favorable position, PLUNGER fired two of her torpedoes, secured two hits, but was forced to go deep by escorting destroyers before damage could be ascertained.

By 8 November the badly-damaged submarine was moored alongside the tender GRIFFIN in Brisbane Harbor, Australia, to undergo repairs. A rejuvenated PLUNGER departed Brisbane on 22 November for her fourth war patrol, ploughed up through the already-historic Coral Sea to Guadalcanal Island.

Probing the waters on the Munda Bar side of Guadalcanal where Jap warships were coming in at night, unloading troops and supplies, and getting out before daylight, was not easy for submarine PLUNGER. The shallowness of the waters and the ever-present threat of numerous Japanese naval vessels made patrol No. 4 extremely precarious.

Some nine destroyers and one submarine were contacted off

Guadalcanal on this patrol. On two separate occasions, PLUNGER moved in to launch torpedoes at Destroyers, on both occasions was rewarded with one destroyer kill and, the close quarters of the islands making escape without counter-attack impossible, was both times severely drubbed with depth charges.

War patrol No. 4 ended in Pearl Harbor on 12 January of the new year 1943. As PLUNGER was being repaired in Pearl Harbor, on the 26th of January, Lt. Commander White went on to further duties and Lt. Commander R. H. Bass, USN, took over command.

Under direction of her new Skipper, PLUNGER sallied from Pearl Harbor on 16 February. Her assigned fifth war patrol area: the Nipponese Southwest Pacific Island fortresses in the Caroline Islands Group.

Captain Bass took his submarine roving through the Caroline waters at periscope depth for 17 days. 14,000 tons of Jap naval tanker was contacted and proved an ideal target. PLUNGER angled for position and began a steady stream of torpedoes swishing for the big vessel. Six explosions marked hits on the target but all six were absorbed with the ship still miraculously afloat. Destroyer escorts began sounding out PLUNGER and the boat left the area of the attempted kill in haste.

However, PLUNGER did succeed in topping off her Caroline patrol with the sinking of one 9,000-ton freighter, returned to Pearl Harbor on 27 March 1943.

Constituting the Japanese "Pearl Harbor," Truk Island lay like some impregnable Gibraltar in the middle of the Caroline chain. PLUNGER's sixth war patrol area was to be in the tropic waters around that bastion.

Lieutenant Commander Bass took his boat out of Pearl Harbor on 27 April and headed due southwest. On 8 May, four days after PLUNGER's arrival in the Truk area, she spotted a convoy of five freighters and three naval escort coming over the horizon. It was a submariner's dream.

Blissfully unaware of the danger that threatened from beneath the seas, the Jap convoy continued in formation until one explosion after another began reverberating mysteriously among the ships. For the next two and one-half days the vessel zig-zagged and tried to shake off the tracking American sub, fought back as best they could and were sunk one by one.

PLUNGER made a total of six torpedo attacks on the convoy, accounted for four out of the five freighters. Finally, with complete victory in her grasp, the boat boldly broke the surface to open fire with her deck gun. Her victory was complete as the fifth freighter was picked apart by the shellfire, caught fire and disappeared in a swirl of white, foamy steam. Only the three destroyer escorts were able to escape the deadly PLUNGER fish, bustling back to their port with all of their charges at the Pacific bottom.

By 22 May submarine PLUNGER was back in Pearl Harbor having left a total of 24,098 tons of demolished Jap shipping below the waters off Truk. For his handling of PLUNGER on patrol No. 6, aggressive Skipper Bass was awarded the Navy Cross.

Lt. Commander Bass in charge, PLUNGER departed Pearl Harbor on 18 June 1943, headed out into the Pacific for the Sea of Japan, designated area for her seventh war patrol. The real peril of this patrol lay in reaching the inland sea, since it was planned to enter from the north through the narrow Soya Kaikyo (La Perouse Straits). These straits were known to be clogged with Jap mines which were land-controlled from southern Sakhalin and the northern tip of Honshu so that Russian shipping might transit Soya Kaikyo unmolested.

Stealthily, PLUNGER slipped through the arch-effective Jap defenses, steamed south into the Sea of Japan and went to work under a deadline in the rough weather. One supply vessel was hit with a brace of PLUNGER torpedoes, went up in flames and sank.

Allowed a maximum of seven days after firing had elapsed to clear the area, PLUNGER made her escape from the Jap home waters, reached Midway Island on the 20th of July.

With a 2-week refit by the tender SPERRY at Midway, PLUNGER was ready for a repeat performance, departed 6 August for another risky passage through Soya Kaikyo.

Once inside the Sea of Japan, Captain Bass noted with pleasure that the weather had cleared since the previous visit, but this was offset when many of the torpedoes which she carried were found to be faulty and erratic when fired. However, two Jap cargo vessels totaling 9000-tons were stopped dead in their course with torpedo hits and carried their precious war material to the bottom with them.

Mission accomplished, USS PLUNGER arrived in Pearl Harbor on the 5th of September 1943, having completed two patrols in the Sea of Japan - a feat not to be equalled by any other American boat until the last few weeks of the war.

There was a 2-month interim between the 8th and 9th war patrols as PLUNGER moored in the Pearl Harbor Submarine Base undergoing a complete refit and yard overhaul.

PLUNGER was to depart from routine in the projected ninth patrol and devote herself to rescue work - operations that proved fully as hazardous as any of her previous combat assignments. American troops had effected landings in the Gilbert Islands and Naval carrier strike units were providing a divertive series of aerial assaults on the Marshalls to the north. Veteran submarine PLUNGER, commissioned to proceed to the scene of the Marshall air blows and stand ready to pick up downed pilots, departed Pearl Harbor on 6 November for her ninth war patrol.

Off the Marshalls' coral-coated Mille Atoll, PLUNGER was notified by radio on 19 November that a carrier plane had crashed in the vicinity, its pilot left floundering in the seas awaiting rescue.

Under close coordination between scout planes and surface patrol craft, the sub was directed by radio to the Navy pilot's exact location. However, as PLUNGER broke the surface, she found more than a drifting aviator waiting for her.

The pilot was sighted and a rescue party quickly poured up through the hatch, prepared to launch a rubber boat. Suddenly, from out of the sun, a Jap Sero roared in to rake the deck from stem to stern with his machine guns. As the crew made a mad dash back to the hatch with hot leaden hail nipping at their heels, PLUNGER's gunners manned their anti-aircraft guns to pepper the plane which, in seconds, became a speck on the blue Pacific horizon. A check of those wounded in the strafing showed the Executive Officer and five enlisted men had taken slugs.

Rescue operations were successfully carried out as a drenched and thankful pilot was hauled in out of the sea. PLUNGER's powerful Elliott motors were revved to the maximum during a 36-hour full power run to Makin Island where American landings were in progress. At Makin, the wounded men were hurriedly transferred to a hospital ship and the pilot later returned to his carrier. By 18 December PLUNGER was back at Midway, her ninth war patrol successfully completed.

Due respect for PLUNGER's air conditioning unit existed among the crew from this patrol on. Air conditioning having failed as the boat first reached her Mille area, the temperature of the interior had risen rapidly until it hit a near-suffocating 105 degrees with 100 percent humidity. In consequence, the average loss of weight was twenty pounds per man.

Captain Bass was presented the Legion of Merit at Midway for his pioneering work in aircraft-submarine coordination, teamwork that was to accomplish many such rescues in the war years to come. With the refit completed on 13 January 1944 and a fresh load of supplies for both crew and tubes, the boat departed for Northern Empire waters on what was the tenth and Lt. Commander Bass's last PLUNGER patrol.

Providing a frigid contrast to tropical waters, PLUNGER's tenth war patrol in the northern Pacific was rewarded as she sighted another cargo-rich convoy. Going deep she loosed spread after spread of torpedoes before the escorts could locate her, left the seas littered with a host of bobbing oil drums and wreckage from four sunken Jap ships.

PLUNGER rigged for depth charge attack and began zig-zagging evasive maneuvers as a racing, weaving, interlacing squadron of destroyer escorts closed in to get her. For hours the sub was pummeled and buffeted as she hugged the ocean floor. With each detonation her sides shuddered violently as if rammed. There was nothing to do but sit there. It was the Jap's game from then on.

The last depth charge onslaught almost measured PLUNGER's endurance but the strong seams of the steel shell held against the tremendous pressure of the explosions. Late in the afternoon she was able to slide silently away as her surface antagonists went off to

report another submarine kill to their command.

With 800 gallons of fuel left aboard, approximately 6 hours worth of steaming, submarine PLUNGER skimmed into Midway's harbor on 3 March, having come through some 350 depth charges in the closest escape of her silent service career.

Far more extensive repairs to PLUNGER machinery were required than Midway could afford, and the battered boat proceeded to Pearl Harbor, arrived 8 March 1944.

Navigator of PLUNGER, Lt. Commander E. J. Fahy, USN, relieved Commander Bass as Commanding Officer five days after arrival at the Hawaiian base.

Reestablished at her fighting best, PLUNGER set out on war patrol No. 11, journeyed to Midway for fuel and arrived at the designated Bonin Islands area on 18 May.

Persistent fog and lack of targets made this 65-day patrol seem even longer, the only break in the monotony coming as a Japanese wolf pack of submarines spotted PLUNGER and chased her for many miles, firing torpedoes at their target all the while they were in hot pursuit. PLUNGER returned to Midway for refit on the 30th of June.

Sub tender PROTEUS worked on the sub at Midway and Skipper Fahy was ready to take her out to sea on 23 July. The twelfth war patrol had barely begun when trouble with the boat's diesels forced her to enter recently-annexed Majuro Atoll.

Truk had been by-passed on the amphibious road to Tokyo, but American bombers were nevertheless making an all-out attempt to neutralize the enemy stronghold. Engines repaired, PLUNGER departed Majuro on the 1st of August for her assigned twelfth war patrol area off tottering Truk. Her mission: to rescue any bomber crews shot down

Inaccuracy of the Japanese batteries on Truk made little work for PLUNGER, and the resulting patrol was almost uneventful. As if to save PLUNGER's crew from becoming rusty, a lone Jap diesel freighter was caught as it attempted to bring supplies into the harassed Japs on Truk, only succeeded in supplying Davy Joney with 5,000 more tons of Jap shipping.

On 21 August PLUNGER cleared the area and headed south to Brisbane via Seadler Harbor, New Guinea. Her war days had come and gone.

It was obvious that a major navy yard overhaul would be required before PLUNGER could proceed on wartime patrol, and the boat returned to Pearl Harbor in early October. On the 11th of October, Lt. Commander H. D. Spratlin, USN, assumed command, replacing Commander Fahy, and PLUNGER began operating in peaceful Hawaiian waters as an experimental boat for the Pacific Submarine Training Command.

Departing Pearl Harbor on 25 February 1945, the venerable sub passed through the Panama Canal, made her way to the New London (Connecticut) Submarine Base to become a training boat for green sub crews.

From March through June 1945 the Pacific combat veteran was given a complete navy yard overhaul at Philadelphia, proudly sailed north to New London for her training duties. Her final appearance as a unit of the United States Naval Service was made at the New Haven observances on Navy Day 1945, October 27th. Three days later she rode the nautical "last mile" to the Boston Navy Yard, was there placed out of commission on 15 November 1945.

By Directive dated September 1946 the USS PLUNGER was assigned to the THIRD Naval District for operations in connection with the Navy's Reserve Training Program.

SUMMARY OF PATROL RESULTS

No. of Patrol	No. & Type		Total Tonnage		No. & Type		Total Tonnage	
	Ships	Sunk	Ships	Sunk	Ships	Damaged	Ships	Damage
1	1	- AK		7,200	-	-	-	-
2	2	- AK		18,900	2	- AK		10,000
3	-	-		-	1	- CL		6,500
4	1	- DD		1,315	1	- DD		1,315
5	1	- AK		9,000	1	Tanker		14,100
6	3	- AK		24,068	2	- AK		14,780
7	1	- AK		5,124	-	-		-
8	2	- AK		9,000	-	-		-
9	-	-		-	-	-		-
10	4	- AK		22,500	-	-		-
11	-	-		-	-	-		-
12	1	- AK		5,000	-	-		-
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>			<b>102,107</b>	<b>7</b>			<b>46,695</b>

On 9th War Patrol: 1 Aviator rescued

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The USS PLUNGER (SS 179) earned sixteen (16) battle stars on the Asiatic-Pacific Area Service Ribbon, for participating in the following operations:

- 1 Star/Submarine War Patrols-Pacific -- 14 December 1941 to 4 February 1942
- 1 Star/Submarine War Patrols - Pacific -- 9 June to 15 July 1942
- 1 Star/Submarine War Patrols - Pacific -- 16 February to 27 March 1943
- 1 Star/Submarine War Patrols - Pacific -- 23 April to 22 May 1943
- 1 Star/Submarine War Patrols - Pacific -- 18 June to 20 July 1943



- 1 Star/Submarine War Patrols - Pacific -- 6 August to 5 September 1943
- 1 Star/Submarine War Patrols - Pacific -- 13 January to 8 March 1944
- 1 Star/Submarine War Patrols - Pacific -- 23 July to 14 September 1944
- 1 Star/Submarine War Patrols - Pacific -- 12 October to 8 November 1942
- 1 Star/Submarine War Patrols - Pacific -- 22 November 1942 to 15 January 1943
- 1 Star/Pearl Harbor-Midway -- 7 December 1941
- 1 Star/Capture and Defense of Guadalcanal -- 10 August 1942 to 8 February 1943
- 1 Star/Midway -- 3-6 June 1942
- 1 Star/Eastern New Guinea Operation  
Supporting and consolidating operations designated by Commander SEVENTH Fleet -- 17 December 1942 to 24 July 1944
- 1 Star/Gilbert Islands Operations -- 13 November to 8 December 1943
- 1 Star/Marianas Operation  
First Bonins Raid -- 15-16 June 1944

The PLUNGER also received the Navy Unit Commendation for her war patrols in the Pacific.

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#### STATISTICS

SURFACE DISPLACEMENT	1,330 tons
LENGTH OVERALL	300 feet 6 inches
BEAM	25 feet
SURFACE SPEED	20 knots
COMPLEMENT	57 officers and men

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Restencilled October 1950  
Restencilled April 1951