

## *Sailfish vs. Japanese Escort Carrier*

- 1745: Surfaced in typhoon weather. Tremendous seas, 40-50 knot wind, driving rain, and visibility, after twilight, varying from zero to 500 yards.
- 2348: Radar contact bearing  $114^{\circ}\text{T}$  ( $154^{\circ}$  relative), range 9,500 yards. Commenced tracking (ship contact #1).
- 2351: Estimated target course  $320^{\circ}\text{T}$ , speed 18 knots.
- 2352: Radar contact on another and smaller target just to right of and 900 yards closer than first contact (ship contact #2).
- 2353: Radar contact on a third target about same size as first contact and located 1,000 yards beyond the first contact (ship contact #3).
- 2355: Radar contact on a fourth target smaller than the other contacts and 900 yards closer than No. 2 contact (ship contact #4).
- 2356: Have still only managed to build up speed to twelve knots since initial contact. With these fast targets at close range, have abandoned any idea of a methodical approach, the seas are mountainous with a driving rain. Can't see a thing but blackness and water with the water mostly in my face.
- 2358: Came left to  $300^{\circ}\text{T}$  to get off the track of the near target (believed to be a destroyer).

So reads Lieutenant Commander R. E. M. Ward's report, *SAILFISH's* tenth war patrol; date: December 3, 1943; time: early evening until midnight.

On the stroke of midnight the log continues:

- 0000: Near target close aboard on starboard quarter turned on what appeared to be a good size searchlight with a greenish tinge to it, directed at us and apparently signalling. He could not have seen us so assume he was signalling to someone else near us or he had a doubtful radar contact.

- 0001: Dove to 40 feet and came right to course  $340^{\circ}\text{T}$  for bow shot at biggest pip. We are 400 yards off track of near destroyer. All targets seem to be in line of bearing, roughly  $280\text{-}100$  degrees true with  $900\text{-}1,000$  yards between targets. Although initial radar contact was not made until a range of  $9,500$  yards, the picture looks as though we are on the left flank of a fast group of men of war, consisting of a destroyer, then possibly a cruiser, then a carrier or battleship, then another carrier or battleship with possibly something beyond that. Selected nearest of the two largest pips as our target.
- 0009: Near destroyer passing close aboard to starboard and ahead.
- 0012: Fired tubes 1, 2, 3, and 4, by radar setup, range  $2,100$  yards, gyro  $53^{\circ}$  to  $37^{\circ}$  right, track  $108$  to  $120$  port, torpedoes set at  $12$  feet, using spread of  $1\frac{3}{4}^{\circ}$  right,  $1\frac{3}{4}^{\circ}$  left,  $5^{\circ}$  left, and  $5^{\circ}$  right. Times of hits indicate torpedoes one and four were the hitting torpedoes. Commenced swinging left to bring stern tubes to bear. Heard two torpedoes hit.
- 0016: Two depth charges fairly close. Went deep and started crossing astern of target.
- 0017 to
- 0152: Nineteen depth charges, none very close. Completed reload.
- 0158: Surfaced and commenced running up target track to intercept possible cripple. Unable to make much speed without shipping black water.
- 0230: Radar contact bearing  $310^{\circ}\text{T}$ , range  $8,400$  yards. Commenced tracking (ship contact #5).
- 0240: Tracking shows target to be circling. The pip is small, yet can't believe radar would pick up a destroyer at  $8,400$  yards tonight. Commenced easing in slowly. At times the pip has an edge on it giving a momentary indication of another target very close to the one we are tracking.
- 0430: Target settled down on a northwesterly course, speed  $2$  to  $5$  knots. Radar pip now looks like we may have two targets very close together.
- 0550: Morning twilight and visibility improving fast, rain has stopped, but bridge is still shipping water, targets tracking with speed varying from  $1$  to  $3$  knots, range  $3,500$  yards. With visibility improving so rapidly must fire soon, hence have decided to fire three bow tubes on the surface and then attack again in daylight by periscope, making reload during approach.
- 0552: Fired tubes 1, 2, and 3, range  $3,200$  yards, gyros  $002^{\circ}$ ,  $00\text{-}1\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$ , and  $004\text{-}1\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$ , estimated track  $148^{\circ}$  starboard, TDC speed  $1$  knot, torpedoes set at  $10$  feet, spread of  $0^{\circ}$ ,  $1\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$  right, and  $1\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$  left.
- 0557: Observed and heard two torpedo hits. First hit looked like a momentary puff of fire, second hit looked like and sounded (on the bridge) like a battleship firing a broadside—even with the locomotive rumble so characteristic of sixteen inch shells. Commenced swinging ship to bring stern tubes to bear in case if target started going somewhere.

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0558: The Nips started celebrating by firing star shells and heavy AA tracers from at least a dozen guns located at the point of the torpedo explosions, but didn't seem to know where we were because the shooting was directed everywhere but towards us. It's a good show but despite the illumination I can't see the target.

0600: Tracers coming our way now—plenty of them.

0601: Submerged. Commenced checking torpedoes and reloading.

0603 to

0605: Four depth charges not near us.

0748: Finally see something—*Aircraft Carrier, range about 10,000 yards, dead in water (ship contact #6). Nothing else in sight.*

Impatiently continuing check of torpedoes. All tubes were flooded during each preceding attack. Gyro pots of one torpedo aft and one forward are flooded necessitating reload.

The carrier, stopped dead in the water, had been hit by two torpedoes.

That spoke volumes for the improvements which had been made on the Mark 14 exploder. It also spoke for a brand of fire control and the sort of submarine marksmanship that hell and the highest water could not frustrate.

Ward himself was not sure he had scored a hit in that wild typhoon. But the captain of the Japanese carrier was sure. At once he had flashed the message, "We are torpedoed."

But Japanese communications had broken down—only the cruiser MAYA received the carrier's first S.O.S.

The destroyer URAKAZE noticed from maneuvers that one of the vessels in the convoy was apparently in trouble, but she received no instructions and continued on her course.

At 0030 the carrier radioed a dispatch to Tokyo. "*Hit by one torpedo at 0010. Fire in crew's quarters forward. Able to proceed. Position 3230N., 14350 E.*" In reply, Japanese Headquarters ordered URAKAZE to escort the damaged carrier and the other carrier in the convoy.

This message did not get through. A tow was then ordered for the crippled vessel, but the storm apparently canceled this assistance.

Then, at 0600, the damaged carrier was struck by another SAILFISH torpedo.

"*Hit by torpedo,*" she radioed frantically. "*Can make no headway. Position 3155N., 143E.*" Far distant, the carrier ZUIHO received this message and ordered the warships in the damaged carrier's vicinity to go to her assistance.

One of these, apparently URAKAZE, was sighted by SAILFISH.

0748: Momentarily sighted tops of a destroyer apparently standing by the carrier (ship contact #7). The picture now indicates that we have a badly damaged carrier plus one destroyer. If there were a cruiser here with 85 foot tower and 125 foot mast he'd show up like a sore thumb compared to the carrier's 60 foot flight deck. Depth control is extremely difficult due to mountainous seas. When we are at 60 feet there is nothing but green waves with the scope looking into or under a wave most of the time. At 55 feet we damn near broach and still can only see about twenty percent of the time. I am convinced that the carrier is a dead duck but there should be someone else around besides a single destroyer, yet there is nothing else in sight from 55 feet and no screws on sound. Am passing carrier down port side from aft forward, range about 1,500 yards. He has many planes on deck forward and enough people on deck aft to populate a fair size village. The only visible evidence of previous hits is a small list to port and a small drag down by the stern. The number of people on deck indicates they are prepared to abandon ship—a reassuring picture.

Ward maneuvered SAILFISH abeam of the stalled carrier.

As there were still no other Japanese ships in sight, he steered the submarine around into position to aim the stern tubes at the target for a straight stern shot.

0940: Fired tubes 5, 6, and 7, TDC range 1,700 yards, gyros 182° 185¾°, track 88 port, torpedoes set at 12 feet, using a spread of 0°, 8° right, and 2° left. All torpedoes heard running normal.

0942: Two hits (time indicates 2,700 yard torpedo run) heard on sound and throughout the boat, followed by a very heavy swish on sound then by exceptionally loud breaking up noises heard not only on sound but also very clearly throughout the boat. Although I had the periscope up anticipating the pleasure of watching the hits, depth control was so lousy that we were at 60 feet when the torpedoes hit and all I could see when the scope was out of the waves was a skyful of tracers being shot up into the air from the carrier's bearing. Ordered right full rudder and came to 70 feet to come around for bow shots. Can't figure how I made the range. Have been using a carrier flight deck height of 60 feet on the stadiometer.

0944 to

0945: Two depth charges not too far away.

0950: Completed turning. Still hear the breaking up noises.

0951: At 55 feet for a look. Nothing in sight on, or either side of, generating bearing. Made sweep to look for the destroyer and sighted a heavy cruiser of the TAKAO or NACHI Class. Commenced swinging hard left to bring bow tubes to bear (ship contact #8).

0952: Angle on the bow 10 starboard and he is still swinging towards, range 3,300 yards. Between my surprise at having underestimated the range to the carrier (2,700 yard torpedo run instead of 1,700), the fairly close depth charges from a destroyer I still hadn't been able to see, the surprise sighting of the cruiser racing our way with her forefoot showing over the waves, and the boat starting to broach with her left full rudder, I ordered 90 feet, and thus threw away the chance of a lifetime. Picked him up on sound and attempted to get a ping range on the QC head. Took turn count on JK head of 220, indicating 18 knots. By the time data was obtained from sound to allow even a chance of a hit he was astern and fading out fast. The Monday morning quarterbacks can have a field day on this attack! To top it all off, I have personally criticized the sinking of the SORYU, where the towing cruiser could have been gotten first, then the carrier at leisure—yet, I didn't go up ahead of the carrier and make *absolutely* certain that this wasn't a similar set up. This cruiser was undoubtedly on the off bow of the carrier.

0954 to

1004: Seven depth charges not too close. Destroyer screws fading in and out. Keeping them abaft the beam.

1330: Periscope depth. A careful fifteen minutes look at depths between 52 and 60 feet reveals nothing. I am convinced the carrier has been sunk and the cruiser has gotten clear.

1400: Set course to proceed to area.

2400: One full day's work completed.

The carrier, hit a third time at 0942, had gone down at 0948. Conducted from start to finish in a dragon-toothed typhoon, the battle had lasted ten hours. Ward had no need to worry about the comments of the "Monday morning quarterbacks." Vice Admiral Miwa, Commander Japanese Submarines, cited the SAILFISH performance as a striking example of what submarines could accomplish by relentless and persistent attacks.

Malign fate. A favor on one hand, and cruel deprivation on the other. Veteran of the Pacific War, the escort carrier sunk by SAILFISH had been one of Japan's busiest—made frequent runs as an aircraft ferry to Truk. She was CHUYO. And aboard her on this fatal return trip to Japan were the 21 SCULPIN survivors who had been placed in her hold at Truk.

Only one of these SCULPIN men survived the sinking of CHUYO. A final irony—that SCULPIN should have been the submarine which stood by during the SQUALUS rescue in 1939 when SQUALUS sank off the Isle of Shoals. SQUALUS—raised and renamed SAILFISH.