

HISTORY OF THE USS SEAWOLF (SS 197)

This story has 80 heroes and one heroine. The heroes are the officers and men of an American submarine. The heroine is the ship herself. More than 300 feet long, with eight torpedo tubes and a surface speed of better than 20 knots, she was commissioned 1 December 1939. Since that day, she led an exciting and secret life. During fifteen war patrols she sank approximately 110,000 tons of enemy shipping, covering practically the whole of the known Pacific shipping routes.

It all began at the Portsmouth Navy Yard in New Hampshire. The sleek, cylindrical ship was launched 15 August 1939. Her sponsor was Mrs. Edward Kalbfus, wife of Rear Admiral Edward C. Kalbfus, USN (Retired).

Four and one half months later, 1 December 1939, the commissioning pennant was run up the mast, Lieutenant Frederick B. Warder published his orders as commanding officer and the first watch was officially installing the SEAWOLF as a unit of the U. S. Navy.

SEAWOLF is the second vessel of the United States Fleet to bear the name. The first was authorized 3 March 1909 and her name was changed to USS H-1, 17 November 1911. She was launched 6 May 1913, placed in commission 1 December 1913 at the Navy Yard, Mare Island, California. She operated with the Pacific Submarine Fleet from the time of commissioning until 1917 when she was based at Key West, Florida, and in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 1918. She grounded off Santa Margarita Island, Lower California, 12 March 1920 and sank during salvage operations 12 days later on 24 March.

After Commissioning, the second SEAWOLF left Portsmouth for her shakedown cruise. This maiden voyage took the submarine to the ports of New York, New York; Tampa, Florida; Galveston, Texas; Corpus Christi, Texas; Coco Solo, Canal Zone; and Annapolis, Maryland during the month of April and June 1940. The SEAWOLF proved her worth and her crew set a standard they were to follow.

After shakedown, the SEAWOLF was assigned to the Pacific with her home port in San Diego.

December 7th, 1941 found the SEAWOLF at Manila on routine patrol. Immediately the word was flashed and on 8 December the SS-197 began her first war patrol of World War II.

Coins of all denominations flashed over the side and into the water, in keeping with one of the many traditions which are so deeply rooted and have such a part in the submarine service. Their luck assured, the men of the SEAWOLF took her down, and went hunting, searching prow of the sub nosed around Northern Luzon, Babuyan Channel and Bojeador Cape. Then on 14 December in the aft torpedo room flashes of the tubes signalled the departure of four tin-fish. Skipper Warder got a last glimpse of the target, a Japanese seaplane-tender.

before the submarine dove. Scant seconds later, engine room men heard four muffled explosions. On the bottom - quiet reigned. But not for long; the concussion of nearby exploding depth charges shook the SEAWOLF. For 60 plodding minutes the sickening boom of "cans" jarred the dormant submarine and then heavy silence again filled the ship. At last, assured that the angry surface vessels had gone their way, the SEAWOLF crept to the top, and finding the coast clear--returned to her home port.

After refueling and rearming, the Sea Wolves started on their second war patrol. En route from Manila Bay to Port Darwin, Australia, she spent 31 days in submerged operations but sighted no enemy ships.

From 16 January 1942 until 7 February the SEAWOLF was on her third war patrol covering the territory en route to Darwin, Australia, Corregidor, and Surabaya, Java, carrying a cargo of .50 caliber anti-submarine ammunition. Several Japanese destroyers were sighted during this patrol but it was deemed advisable not to attack these sub killer. Aside from this encounter, the patrol was an uneventful one with the ammunition cargo unloaded at Corregidor and passengers safely debarked at Surabaya.

War Patrol No. 4 was more successful than the proceeding cruises. During this patrol--from 15 February to 7 April 1942--the SEAWOLF covered the Surabaya and Java Sea areas, the southern approaches to Sunda Strait, the Australian-Sunda traffic lanes, and the waters surrounding Christmas Island. SEAWOLF's skipper later reported that during this sortie, the S3-197 was in a number of "tight spots" and suffered a number of mechanical casualties.

Contact with the enemy occurred on 19 February, 25 February, 31 March and 1 April. One Jap transport, target for two of the SEAWOLF's torpedoes on 19 February was observed with a starboard list and down by the stern, escorted by four Jap destroyers. Another enemy transport, at anchor at the time, was attacked by the SEAWOLF with unknown results. Other Jap ships attacked included one large transport and destroyer on 25 February; one enemy light cruiser, which subsequently retaliated with a depth charge attack; one Matori-type cruiser and one Jintau-type cruiser, both on 1 April. On February 25 two Asashio destroyers harried the SEAWOLF in a four-hour attack. Many times destroyers ran over the submarine without dropping charges, being ignorant of their immediate proximity. SEAWOLF received credit for sinking a transport and damaging a freighter, three light cruisers, and two transports. For this she received the Navy Unit Commendation.

From 12 May to 2 July 1942, the SEAWOLF was engaged in waging an offensive patrol against enemy combatant supply and transport ships in the Philippine area; and to determine the major ports of collection and traffic routes which the Japs were using to strip the islands of their wealth. She patrolled off Manila and Subic Bay until 16 June, then moved South.

Patrolling for four days, within a radius of 20 miles from Corregidor, she was subjected to frequent depth charging by both escorts and patrol vessels before favorable attack positions could be reached. On three occasions the SEAWOLF was depth charged by two enemy merchantmen after launching successful torpedo attacks. During

the patrol she attacked one 5000-ton armed freighter; one 7000-ton armed freighter; one 2000-ton mine layer, one destroyer of the Magiri class; one 5000-ton vessel of the Maru type; one 4500-ton freighter and one 2500-ton freighter. Only one of these freighters was a "sure kill."

Given the job of attacking enemy combatant, supply and transport ships in the vicinity of Sibutu Pass and the Western Celebes Sea, the SEAWOLF was in the area for 51 days from 25 July to 15 September on her sixth war patrol. On this hunt she destroyed the USS WENCHOW, a 3100-ton Jap freighter on 15 August; and one 5000-ton tanker on 25 August. She also damaged a 7000-ton tanker.

One Tidori Class destroyer was in sight for several hours on 9 August, but the SEAWOLF was unable to attack. She also was unsuccessful in an attack on a 5000-ton Jap tanker.

Patrol No. 7 found the SEAWOLF patrolling in the Davao Gulf area off Palay, Yap Island. She ran up quite a score. She sank one freighter of 3500-tons; a freighter transport of 4000-tons, for a total of 16,810-tons. Ships damaged include one freighter of 5000-tons. The successful attack on the 900-ton silk liner anchored off Talomo Wharf was believed to be the first instance in which an American submarine operated for any appreciable period in waters as confining as those of Davao Gulf.

On 11 November trouble with the main generator cables almost forced the skipper to abandon the patrol. Subsequent improvement in their condition, however, prompted him to patrol waters around Yap on 15 and 16 November before proceeding to Pearl Harbor.

At Pearl Harbor, extensive repairs were made and skipper Warder was relieved by Commander R. L. Cross. Upon termination of her stay at Pearl Harbor, the submarine started on her eighth Prowl of the war. This cruise was terminated early because of the expenditure of all the torpedoes. Jap shipping sunk totalled 13,050-tons for this period including one freighter of 10,000-tons; 1 tanker of 2000-tons, 1 destroyer of 900-tons and two sampans of 150-tons each. The first attack, made on a larger escorted freighter was typical of the entire patrol.

The intermittent clang of the gong, the pad of rubber-soled shoes to battle stations, the murmur and bustle of intense and closely coordinated activity, the commanding officer standing near the periscope cylinder as it slides up to eye level, tense waiting--relieved by the calm but terse orders issued by the skipper as the big 3000-pound fish slid into their tubes--quietness, broken only by the voices of the five-man plotting team--then: FIRE ONE! In the torpedo room the command is heard. A valve is twisted and with a whoosh of air the missile of death leaves the boat. FIRE TWO! FIRE THREE! FIRE FOUR! Up in the conning tower the skipper gives the command - "up periscope." Quickly he scans the waters--directly ahead are four breaks of water rather thin, white bubbly lines, like fluid ice, cold as the death they presage; against the ship's side they explode with appalling concussion and a wild flash of flame. Immediately the long, sleek shadows of destroyers dart toward the origin of the wake and the skipper gives the command "Rig for depth charging and silent

running!" The last sight he has is a destroyer wheeling in a hard turn and a black silhouette came hurtling into the water. Then muff explosions shake the boat and send men sprawling. At last the bottles and men listening, and finding it quite unnecessary to listen, for the horrible boom of the cans which shatter light bulbs and nerves. For long hours and finally silence. Everyone takes a deep breath and the commanding officer says, "OK, boys, let's go up and have a smoke."

After a brief rest, the SEAWOLF and her crew returned again to the fracas, this time running the length of the China Sea from Formosa to Nagasaki. This patrol, which was the ninth of her war career, lasted 57 days and resulted in the sinking of one passenger freighter of 4317-tons and one 75-ton sampan. She also damaged an escort vessel of 1000-tons. Of the seven contacts made on this patrol, five were on large convoys.

Turning to the East China Sea, the score for the tenth patrol amounted to one freighter of 8500-tons; one freighter of 6600-tons; and two sampans of 150-tons each. The SS-197 made contact with a six-ship convoy on the third day in the patrol area. She attacked day and night for three days, using all her torpedoes and finally succeeding in sinking the 6600-ton freighter with her 3-inch gun. Having exhausted her torpedo supply, she headed for her base; having been in the area for only five days. Again a potent weapon, she reentered the patrol area on 29 August; three days later encountering the real "find" of the patrol, the five freighters escorted by a Chidori and a small trawler. She attacked at 0655 on 31 August and in less than 48 hours later all her torpedoes were gone.

War Patrol No. 11 took place in the South China Sea from 5 October to 27 November 1943. The attacks, all made at night using radar fire control, resulted in the sinking of one 4000-ton minesweeper and one cargo vessel of 10,000-tons. One 5000-ton freighter was damaged.

Back in the East China Sea north of Formosa, the SEAWOLF's twelfth war patrol covered the period from 22 December 1943 to 27 January 1944. She was credited with sinking 24,000-tons of enemy shipping, including one 10,000-ton passenger freighter. In addition she damaged 14,000 tons of Jap shipping including a 6000-ton freighter in a gun attack.

In a seven ship convoy attack on the night of 10 January, the SEAWOLF sank three ships and damaged a fourth. With but three torpedoes remaining, the SEAWOLF engaged another convoy, successfully blowing up a freighter that was loaded with gasoline.

SEAWOLF's thirteenth war patrol was conducted in the Palau area from 4 June to 7 July 1944, her primary job to close the shore line and conduct a special photographer reconnaissance. This she did successfully despite heavy air and surface anti-submarine units. Although not on lifeguard duty at the time, the SEAWOLF rescued two downed Navy fliers on 21 June. No targets worthy of torpedo fire were contacted on this patrol. On her fourteenth patrol, she delivered aid to guerrilla activities in the Philippines.

SEAWOLF, then under the command of Lt. Commander Albert L. Bondien left Brisbane on 21 September beginning her 15th war patrol and arrived at Manus on 29 September. Leaving Manus on the same day, she was directed to carry stores and Army personnel to the east coast of Samar.

On 3 October SEAWOLF and NARWHAL exchanged radar recognition signals at 0756. Later the same day an enemy submarine attack was made at Latitude 2 degrees and 32 minutes North-Longitude 129 degrees and 18 minutes east which resulted in the sinking of the USS SHELTON. Since there were four friendly submarines in the vicinity of the attack, they were directed to give their positions, and the other three did, but SEAWOLF was not heard from. On 4 October, SEAWOLF was again directed to report her position and again there was no answer.

The USS ROWELL, a destroyer escort, and an aircraft in the area attacked a submarine in the vicinity of the attack on the SHELTON, having at that time no knowledge of any friendly submarines in the area, and it was thought that SEAWOLF was possibly the submarine attacked.

The report from ROWELL indicated that an apparently lethal attack was conducted in conjunction with a plane which marked the spot with dye. ROWELL established sound contact on the submarine, which then sent long dashes and dots which bore no resemblance to the existing recognition signals. After one of the several hedgehog attacks, a small amount of debris and a large bubble were seen. It has been established that the submarine RO-41 (Japanese) which sank SHELTON on 3 October, was able to return to Japan.

In view of the above facts, and the fact that there is no attack listed in the Japanese report of anti-submarine attack which could account for the loss of the SEAWOLF, it is possible that she was sunk by friendly forces in an anti-submarine attack or that she was lost due to an operational casualty or as a result of an unrecorded enemy attack.

On 28 December 1944, the Navy Department's Office of Public Information announced in communique No. 564, "The Submarine USS SEAWOLF is overdue from patrol and presumed lost. Next of kin of casualties have been informed."

USS SEAWOLF earned two Navy Unit Commendations, one for her 4th war patrol and one for her 7th, 10th, and 12th war patrols. The citations follow:

"For outstanding heroism in action during the Fourth War Patrol in enemy Japanese-controlled waters of the Southwest Pacific. Operating dangerously during a period when Japanese naval and air power was at its height, the USS SEAWOLF boldly tracked her targets into treacherously confined and shallow waters to launch in rapid succession one smashing attack after another on heavily escorted convoys and vital enemy combatant units. Undeterred by inevitable countermeasures, she struck daringly to sink or damage thousands of tons of shipping including Japanese cruisers and transports, a freighter and a destroyer, returning persistently to the attack despite exceptionally severe depth charging which started numerous leaks, broke her instruments and put vital machinery out of action. Highly vulnerable during prolonged periods of relentless attack in perilously shallow waters, the SEAWOLF escaped destruction only by the skill, courage and superb seamanship of her gallant officers and men which enabled her to surface and retire from the scene of action after twenty-one hours of submergence and nearly two full days at battle stations."

The second citation reads as follows:

"For outstanding heroism in action against enemy Japanese shipping during her Seventh War Patrol in the Davao Gulf, Palau and Yap areas, from October 7 to December, 1942; her Tenth War Patrol in the East China Sea from August 14 to September 15, 1943 and her Twelfth War Patrol in the East China Sea December 22, 1943 to January 27, 1944. Persistent and daring, the USS SEAWOLF penetrated the mouths of enemy-held harbors in bold pursuit of hostile shipping. Striking fiercely in the face of severe depth charges, aerial bombs and gun fire, she launched a series of brilliant attacks which destroyed eleven cargo ships and extensively damaged two freighters. After exhausting all torpedoes, the SEAWOLF tenaciously pursued and demolished by gun fire one enemy ship and turned another back into the attack range of a friendly submarine. Her outstanding performance in combat attests the skill and superb teamwork of her courageous officers and men and reflect the highest credit upon herself and the United States Naval Service."

USS SEAWOLF also earned thirteen Battle Stars on the Asiatic-Pacific Area Service Medal for participating in the following operations:

1 Star/Philippine Island Operation -- 8 to 26 December 1941 and 10 to 29 February 1942

1 Star/Netherlands East Indies Engagements
Badoeng Strait -- 19 - 20 February 1942

1 Star/Submarine War Patrol, Pacific -- 15 February to 7 April 1942

1 Star/Submarine War Patrol, Pacific -- 12 May to 2 July 1942

1 Star/Submarine War Patrol, Pacific -- 25 July to 15 September 1942

1 Star/Submarine War Patrol, Pacific -- 7 October to 1 December 1942

1 Star/Submarine War Patrol, Pacific -- 3 April to 3 May 1943

1 Star/Submarine War Patrol, Pacific -- 17 May to 12 July 1943

1 Star/Submarine War Patrol, Pacific -- 11 August to 15 September 1943

1 Star/Submarine War Patrol, Pacific -- 5 October to 27 November 1943

1 Star/Submarine War Patrol, Pacific -- 22 December 1943 to 27 January 1944

1 Star/Submarine War Patrol, Pacific -- 8 August to 23 August 1944

1 Star/Marianas Operation
Battle of Philippine Sea -- 19 and 20 June 1944

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STATISTICS

OVERALL LENGTH	311 feet
BEAM	27 feet
SPEED	21 knots
DISPLACEMENT	1450 tons

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