

HISTORY OF USS BLACKFISH (SS 221)

The USS BLACKFISH, a submarine of the GATO-class of 1941-1943, was built by the Electric Boat Company of Groton, Connecticut and was launched April 18, 1942. Mrs. Henry de F. Mel, wife of Captain Henry de F. Mel, SC, USN, was the submarine's official sponsor.

The BLACKFISH was placed in commission on July 22, 1942, with Commander R. W. Johnson, USN, as the ship's first commanding officer.

After a three-month period of training and fitting out, the submarine proceeded to European waters and made her first patrol off Dakar, French West Africa. Many planes were sighted and the U. S. transport MOUNT VERNON, with her escort, was encountered. On November 9, 1942, the BLACKFISH attacked two Italian freighters escorted by two antisubmarine vessels. A torpedo hit was obtained on one of the freighters and it was believed sunk. The escorts then attacked the submerged BLACKFISH with depth charges but the submarine successfully rode out the attack. The lack of enemy shipping encountered was disappointing to the crew but the patrol gave invaluable experience.

After a period of inactivity at Roseneath, Scotland, the sub made her second war patrol in Atlantic waters. No shipping which could be considered as a legitimate target was encountered although planes appeared -- as did neutral ships and fishing craft.

The BLACKFISH returned to Roseneath, then made her third war patrol off Bilbao, Spain, spending it largely off Bilbao Harbor. After sighting several ships flying neutral flags, the submarine attacked two small antisubmarine vessels flying the German ensign on February 19th. Two torpedoes were fired at each with a hit obtained on one. It was presumed sunk. The BLACKFISH was in turn attacked with depth charges with resultant damage to her conning tower and other impairments of a more minor nature. She escaped, however, and was repaired at the Royal Navy Dockyard, Devonshire, England, and later underwent other repairs alongside a tender.

The SS 221's fourth patrol began April 5, 1943, and was performed in northern Atlantic waters, off Norway and Iceland. Diving difficulties and equipment troubles were encountered due to collecting ice, as the run was mostly made on the surface due to the continuous northern daylight. No shipping and few planes were encountered.

The BLACKFISH's fifth patrol was carried out once more in Atlantic waters; and again the submarine located no favorable targets.

For her part in the Pacific war, the submarine prepared for sea at New London, Connecticut; trained off the Canal Zone; then proceeded to Brisbane, Australia; after which she entered the Solomons-New Guinea-Bismarck Archipelago area. She left on patrol October 19, 1943, and on the same day sighted two unloaded cargo ships which she had to let pass rather than reveal the submarine scouting line.

In bad weather, on November 22, she sighted the smoke of a convoy and moved in to a favorable firing position. Trailing the convoy -- four cargo ships and two escort vessels -- all day, she attacked with six torpedoes on November 23rd and was officially credited with one AK sunk and one damaged. On December 4th, with the patrol completed, she returned to Milne Bay, New Guinea. During this patrol, the BLACKFISH was surprised on the surface and nearly sunk by two Japanese planes.

After a two week respite in Milne Bay, during which time the crew moved ashore for rest and recreation, the BLACKFISH was underway Christmas Day 1943 for her seventh patrol, this time in the Solomons area.

Many ships were sighted but the submarine was unable to reach a favorable firing position until January 16, 1944, when smoke was sighted and a convoy of two cargo ships and a destroyer was finally brought within range. Six torpedoes were fired -- and one "Maru" rolled over and sank. The second was believed damaged but this could not be verified since the escorting destroyer made an intensive though ineffectual depth charge attack on the submarine. On February 3rd another convoy was attacked. This time it consisted of two destroyers and two other ships. A Maru and a tanker of 6,000 and 4,500 tons, respectively, were sunk and it was believed one of the escorting destroyers was damaged.

Next, under the command of Lieutenant Commander Robert F. Sellars, USN, the BLACKFISH made one of the longest patrols on record -- eighty days in the New Guinea area. The sub constantly encountered hostile aircraft and was twice bombed by them. Once, as she moved to a firing position on an enemy convoy, it was discovered that the enemy ships were already under air attack by U. S. planes and the BLACKFISH had to retire. Later she fired at an unidentified ship; either a large destroyer or a cruiser.

Her ninth patrol took place from September 23 to November 24, 1944, in the Formosa area. Two attacks were made with negative results; one on a destroyer and a night radar attack on an unidentified ship.

After returning to Midway Island, she was underway again on January 1, 1945, on her tenth patrol, which was to last until February 21st. After a stop at Guam, she sighted a large two-masted sailing vessel on January 23rd. The BLACKFISH surfaced and made a gun attack. Unfortunately, her 4-inch deck gun proved inoperative but the sailing ship was riddled with small-caliber fire. On January 30th, she fired two torpedoes at two junks, both of which missed, passing under the shallow-draft targets. The SS 221 then surfaced and riddled them with gunfire and, finding herself in the midst of a large fleet of these craft, managed to get her 4-inch gun back into commission with the result that three were sunk and eight damaged. Her patrol completed, the BLACKFISH returned to Guam.

Patrol eleven, from March 21 to May 10, 1945, found the sub in the South China Sea. After performing life guard duty and searching vainly for downed U. S. flyers, the BLACKFISH shelled Bataan Island

in the Philippines on March 28, wrecking a lookout tower and two other buildings against no return fire. On March 31st, she smashed a radio tower on Pratas reef with surface gunfire and returned on April 24 to demolish a radio tower. A large ammunition or fuel dump also went up in flames. This patrol was performed under the command of Lieutenant Commander R. G. Gillette, USN.

The BLACKFISH's twelfth and last patrol was in the Nansei Shoto-China Sea-Yellow Sea area, and lasted from June 14 to August 14, 1945. Many floating mines were sighted and, on August 5, a successful rescue operation was accomplished when six downed Army fliers were located and taken off the life raft on which they had floated for two days. On August 8, Kusakakai lighthouse was shelled and numerous hits were obtained.

After the cessation of hostilities in World War II, the BLACKFISH remained in active duty status until, by Directive dated January 1949, she was assigned to the SIXTH Naval District for training Naval Reserves.

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The USS BLACKFISH (SS 221) earned one (1) battle star on the European-African-Middle Eastern Area Service Ribbon for participating in the following operation:

- 1 Star/North African Occupation
Algeria-Morocco Landings -- 8-11 November 1942.

The BLACKFISH also earned seven (7) battle stars on the Asiatic-Pacific Area Service Ribbon for participating in the following operations:

- 1 Star/Eastern New Guinea Operation
Finschhafen Occupation -- 22 September 1943 - 17 February 1944.
- 1 Star/Bismarck Archipelago Operation
Arawe, New Britain -- 15 December 1943 - 1 March 1944.
- 1 Star/Asiatic-Pacific Raids -- 1944
Palau, Yap, Ulihi, Woleai raid -- 30 March - 1 April 1944.
- 1 Star/Leyte Operation -- 10 October - 16 December 1944.
- 1 Star/Iwo Jima Operation
Assault and Occupation of Iwo Jima -- 15 February - 16 March 1945.
- 1 Star/Okinawa Gunto Operation
Assault and Occupation of Okinawa Gunto -- 24 March - 30 June 1945.
- 1 Star/THIRD Fleet Operations against Japan -- 10 July - 15 August 1945.

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STATISTICS

OVERALL LENGTH	312 feet
BEAM	27 feet
DISPLACEMENT	1,525 tons
SURFACE SPEED	20 knots
ARMAMENT	One 4-inch, 50-caliber deck gun; ten 21-inch torpedo tubes.