

HISTORY OF USS HERRING (SS 233)

A veteran of both the Atlantic and Pacific theaters of operation during World War II, the USS HERRING sank or damaged over 50,000 tons of Japanese and German shipping before she was reported missing on her eighth war patrol. Although her final destruction totals do not show it, the aggressive undersea veteran performed possibly her greatest job in the Atlantic where she participated in the invasion of Casablanca, chased blockade runners, and combed enemy shorelines for valuable reconnaissance data.

The USS HERRING (SS 233), a 1,525 ton fleet submarine of the ALBACORE Class, was built by the U.S. Naval Shipyards at Portsmouth, New Hampshire, where her keel was laid on 14 July 1941.

The first submarine to be launched by the Portsmouth yard after the United States declared war, the USS HERRING was christened on 15 January 1942 by Mrs. Ray Spear, wife of Rear Admiral Ray Spear, USN, Chief of the Bureau of Supplies and Accounts, Washington, D.C.

The HERRING was named in accordance with the Navy's policy of naming submarines for fish or other denizens of the deep. The herring is defined as "a very valuable food fish which reaches a length of about one foot and is extraordinary abundant in the temperate and colder parts of the North Atlantic."

Placed in commission on 4 May 1942, the USS HERRING sailed on her first war patrol on 21 October of the same year, under the command of Lieutenant Commander Raymond W. Johnson, USN. She was one of the pack of five subs which took position several days in advance of the invasion of the "Iron Coast" to keep the invasion forces posted on what the French defenders of Morocco were doing. The HERRING's station was off Casablanca, where she arrived without incident on 5 November.

While the HERRING was lying in hiding off Casablanca, many good targets were contacted since, unaware of the coming invasion, Axis shipping was running in and out of the Moroccan port. However, the HERRING and her sisters had strict orders to hold their fire as it was part of the plan that they remain inconspicuous until the assault began.

The submarine's chance came with the Allied invasion at dawn of 8 November 1942. The thundering gunfire that ensued with enemy forces sent strong metallic shocks through the boat and there was no need for secrecy any longer. While searching for suitable targets, a 5,700 ton French cargo vessel tried to sneak through the blockade around the port and the HERRING let go with two torpedoes from her bow tubes. One missed the mark, but the other hit the French ship slightly ahead of the foremast. An accurate follow-up shot from the stern tubes struck the vessel in its after section and it soon sank to the bottom in shallow water.

Those were the only shots fired by the HERRING during her first patrol and the submarine came into Roseneath, Scotland, on 25 November 1942 for normal refit.

The HERRING departed for her second war patrol on 16 December 1942; a 50-day run which was extended eight additional days. The entire patrol, conducted mainly in the Bay of Biscay, was void of any opportunity for offensive action and proved exhausting to the crew, since long periods of time were spent on submerged station without relaxation or comfortable rest.

On 1 January 1943, an order was received to intercept a German blockade runner and, with her crew keyed up in anticipation of action, the submarine set out to meet the enemy vessel. During the approach, a German U-boat suddenly popped up and quickly dived again upon sighting the HERRING. This led to the belief that they were nearing the German runner. A short while afterwards the booming of gunfire could be heard in the distance and later a message was received that the enemy ship had been sunk by British surface craft. The HERRING returned from her patrol without firing a torpedo.

Under command of Commander John Corbus, USN, the HERRING began her third war patrol on 5 March 1943. Several days passed without incident but, while patrolling on the surface in the Bay of Biscay on the night of 21 March, a greenish white flare was sighted sharp on the port bow. At about the same time, radar picked up a contact at 2,300 yards and, though for a while it was thought to be a blockade runner, it proved to be a German submarine which was sending recognition signals into the sky.

Attacking immediately, the HERRING fired two torpedoes, while planes of the U.S. Army Anti-Submarine Squadron No. 1 began dropping bombs. The combination finished off the U-boat, subsequently identified as the U-524.

The remainder of the patrol was spent searching for blockade runners, and search areas were shifted from time to time to conform with the latest reports of enemy vessel movements. However, the patrol ended on 12 April 1943 without another kill.

The HERRING's fourth war patrol, conducted in the North Atlantic was an anti-submarine sweep off Iceland. Although the area was thoroughly searched, the boat could find no suitable targets, and returned to the United Kingdom on 9 June without firing a single torpedo. After sweeping across the Atlantic on her fifth patrol, the ship returned to New London, Connecticut, on 26 July 1943. Two weeks later she sailed for Pearl Harbor and richer hunting grounds in the Pacific, via the Panama Canal.

Following a period of training in Hawaiian waters, the HERRING steamed out of Pearl Harbor on 15 November 1943 for her first stab at Japanese shipping. However, it was nearly a month later before she was able to make her first Pacific kill.

At 0348, 14 December, the HERRING had, according to her log, "worked herself down the throat of a heavy Jap convoy." Two of her bow torpedoes ripped the leading ship to pieces, and her stern tubes scored hits on another transport and a tanker. There was no time to observe the effects of her torpedo fire, for the Japanese escorts began severe depth charge attacks, forcing the sub to go deep. Post-war records credited the ship with sinking the 3,948 ton passenger-cargo ship, HAKOZAKI MARU.

The sub celebrated New Year's day by firing torpedoes into the NAGOYA MARU, a cargo-aircraft ferry of 6,072 tons. This highly successful patrol ended in Midway on 18 January 1944.

The seventh patrol, the HERRING's second in Pacific waters, began on 15 February 1944, with Lieutenant David Zabriski, Jr., USN, as the sub's skipper.

At first it looked as though that cruise, too, would be as bare of results as some of her Atlantic patrols, but while on her way back to Midway, the HERRING encountered a group of Japanese destroyers on the evening of 22 March 1944. Upon gaining a firing position, torpedoes were sent streaking toward two of the enemy ships -- but all missed their mark. The following night another was contacted and attacked with three torpedoes. One of the "fish" hit the target, stopping it dead in the water. However, the enemy did not sink, and eventually got underway under its own power.

On the night of 24 March the HERRING made another radar contact and went to investigate. Upon her approach, she discovered a large Japanese aircraft carrier, screened by several destroyers or cruisers. It was kind of target that is every submariner's fond dream and, using her radar as sparingly as possible, the HERRING carefully stalked her prey. But the enemy had radar too, and before the submarine could get within firing range, gunfire from the destroyers forced her to submerge. That gave the carrier a chance to turn and speed away and the contact was never regained.

Three nights later an unidentified vessel was closed and attacked. Four forward tubes were fired but all missed. The HERRING subsequently ended the patrol with the results being one 1,360-ton destroyer damaged.

Enroute from Pearl Harbor on 16 May 1944 to conduct her eighth war patrol, the HERRING stopped off fuel at Midway and departed on 21 May for the Kurile Islands area. No word was ever received from HERRING direct, after her departure from Midway, but she did accomplish a rendezvous with the BARB on 31 May 1944. A few hours after leaving HERRING, BARB made a contact with two Japanese merchant ships and, while developing the contacts, heard distant depth charging. She took this as an indication that HERRING was making an attack.

Later that evening BARB picked up a prisoner who revealed that HERRING had sunk the escort vessel of the convoy BARB had been attacking. The Jap ship was ISHIGAKI, a new type destroyer escort vessel, and it was sunk with one torpedo hit. The sinking resulted in the scattering of the three-ship convoy and two ships which subsequently passed near BARB were sunk by her. Post-war information revealed that HERRING sank the third merchantman of the convoy.

BARB was unable to contact her after 31 May. Consequently, on 27 June, Midway was directed to post a sharp lookout for HERRING which might be returning without ability to transmit by radio, and was expected by 3 or 4 July. When she did not appear by 13 July 1944, she was reported as presumed lost.

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HERRING, under Lieutenant Commander D. Zabriskie, Jr., left Pearl Harbor on 16 May 1944 to conduct her eighth patrol in the Kurile Islands. On 21 May she topped off with fuel at Midway and departed for the Kurile region. No word was received from HERRING direct after her departure from Midway, but she did accomplish a rendezvous with BARB on 31 May 1944.

These two boats were to patrol the Kurile Islands area cooperatively, and at the rendezvous, as recorded in BARB's report of her eighth war patrol, the areas for which each was to be responsible were delineated. A few hours after leaving HERRING early on the afternoon of 31 May, BARB made contact with two Japanese merchantmen. While developing the contacts BARB heard distant depth charging, which she took as an indication that HERRING was making an attack.

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On 3 June 1944 orders were sent to BARB and HERRING directing them to stay outside of a restricted area in which friendly surface ships would be operating during the Marianas Campaign. A receipt was required for this message, but none was heard from HERRING. BARB was unable to contact her after 31 May. Consequently on 27 June, Midway was directed to post a sharp lookout for HERRING, which might be returning without ability to transmit by radio, and was expected by 3 or 4 July. When she had not appeared by 13 July 1944, HERRING was reported as presumed lost.

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For her first seven patrols, HERRING sank nine ships, totaling 45,200 tons, and damaged two, totaling an additional 8,400 tons. Her first four patrols were in the Atlantic, the first three off the coast of Spain, and the fourth near Iceland. The first netted an Axis freighter, while on the second HERRING saw no enemy ships. Her third patrol saw her sink Nazi U-163 and her fourth was again unproductive of enemy targets. Her fifth patrol was the passage from the United Kingdom, where she had been based for her Atlantic patrols, to New London, Conn., thence to Pearl Harbor. She patrolled the East China Sea on her sixth war run, and sank two large transports, a freighter, and a small escort type

vessel. HERRING's seventh patrol was in the area just south of the Japanese home islands; here she damaged a destroyer type vessel.