

### HISTORY OF USS GUNNEL (SS 253)

USS GUNNEL's brilliant war-time career identifies her as one of the U. S. Navy's fightingest ships. Beginning with the African invasion and continuing service through eight war patrols up until V-J Day, the sub accounted for seven enemy ships sunk and three damaged for a total of 58,300 tons of Nip shipping being sent to the bottom.

The ship was built by the Electric Boat Company, Groton, Connecticut. Following the Navy policy, she was named after the gunnel fish, which is a small, trip species of the blenny salt water fish. On 17 May 1942, USS GUNNEL slid down the ways and entered into her element. Sponsor at the launching was Mr. Ben Moreell, wife of Rear Admiral Moreell, Chief of Bureau of Yards & Docks.

Commissioned on 20 August 1942 with Lieutenant Commander J. S. McCain, Jr., USN, as commanding officer, the GUNNEL, after an intensive training period, set out in October for Fedala French Morocco. This was a special mission in connection with the invasion of French Morocco and Algeria. She arrived several days before D-Day to photograph the proposed beachhead, and make a general reconnaissance of Casa Blanca and Fedala. At the zero hour, signals were sent to the approaching U. S. Fleet, guiding them to the correct beachhead, and during the remaining early morning hours, the GUNNEL had a ringside seat for the bombardment.

GUNNEL then nosed south to aid in the interception of the French fleet should it attempt to leave Dakar. Then orders were received to head for Glasgow, Scotland. While enroute all four main engines foiled, leaving one lone auxiliary engine with a speed of about 2.5 knots. However, GUNNEL pulled into Flammouth, England, Thanksgiving Day on the one small engine, which the crew had monickered the "Cannon Ball." Glasgow was reached in December and GUNNEL's engines were repaired. It was necessary, however, to return to the States for a major overhaul at Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

After completion of her overhaul and trials, at Portsmouth, she got underway for Pearl Harbor and then on to Midway and Nagasaki, the assigned patrol area. In May 1943, GUNNEL sighted a Jap transport. Three torpedoes were fired obtaining one hit amidship. The Jap began firing with their deck guns, so the sub let them have two more torpedoes: score one more hit, no more stern, no more gun crew, no more Jap transport.

Several days later while patrolling Danjo Gunto Island, a seven ship enemy convoy loomed on the horizon. After the Nip destroyer screen was successfully penetrated, six torpedoes were fired sinking one ship and damaging a second. A 16 hour depth charge attack followed, the first for all hands.

Escaping the Jap's attacking escorts, GUNNEL again surfaced in search of more "game". The sub found that now it was being attacked by a Wakatake class destroyer. The chase was soon reversed, and as the range closed in, the destroyer began firing all guns, shells popping on all sides of GUNNEL,



Two torpedoes were sent down the wake and the GUNNEL submerged just as the destroyer was hit and sunk. Another six hour depth charge attack began as the angry sister ships of the sunken destroyer arrived, but GUNNEL successfully evaded them and headed for her base.

After another much needed overhaul at Mare Island the boat set out in November 1943 via Pearl Harbor and Midway for the homeland waters of Japan off Honshu. Enroute a Jap carrier task force was sighted and although three torpedoes were fired they missed astern of the fast moving target which soon got out of range.

Then one night shortly afterward, GUNNEL ran into one large and two small enemy ships. Under the inky cover of darkness, the sub was able to make a surface attack. Four deadly "fish" were sent leaping toward the largest target, identified as a 10,000 ton transport. All found their mark. Thinking it unwise to remain, as the escorting destroyer came around the stern of the doomed ship, USS GUNNEL reached for the ocean floor to take the complete treatment of depth charges which continued for four hours. Some days later, while heading into Surugu Wan Bay, she nearly met her fate as three torpedoes from an attacking destroyer came uncomfortably close, one passing directly under the stern.

The fourth patrol was spent in the waters off Manila. However, GUNNEL failed to add any further Jap tonnage to its score on this trip. The fifth patrol, likewise, failed to be fruitful in the Sunda Straits between the Islands of Java and Sumatra. The Jap fleet refused to be lured out of his lair around Singapore. The patrol was then shifted to the French Indo China coast off Cape Padaran, but still no Jap fleet.

On 14 July 1944 Lieutenant Commander G. E. O'Neil, Jr., USN, relieved Commander McCain as commanding officer of the GUNNEL, and she prepared to leave on her sixth patrol. In August 1944, sighting a convoy of six sea trucks, the sub made a battle surface and opened fire. While heavy cross fire was in progress, GUNNEL's guns became jammed, and she was forced to dive. The recoil of the last shot out of the deck gun knocked the gun captain, Rudolph William Velle, over the side. The dive could not be stopped to rescue him and before the sub could resurface, a Jap PT boat came dashing up to drop a depth charge and hold GUNNEL down. On surfacing later a thorough search was made for the lost gunner. However, Velle was a good swimmer and all hands felt certain he would safely reach land. On arriving in port it was learned that Velle had encountered friendly guerillas and was safe. Several other attacks were made on enemy shipping during this patrol, but it seemed GUNNEL was running in hard luck and failed to mark up any scores.

On her seventh patrol in the South China Seas while an observation was being made, an enemy aircraft flew right over the periscope so close the Commanding Officer could count the rivets in the float of the Pete type aircraft. In early November the GUNNEL arrived off Subic Bay where a life-guard station was assigned for carrier strikes on Manila Bay. A large convoy was sighted one morning heading for Manila and position was gained for a submerged attack. An alert escort picked up GUNNEL by sound, and warned the convoy



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which turned away and pulled clear. However, the escort, a Chidori class destroyer of 600 tons, was not so lucky, upon starting a depth charge run it was met by a torpedo fired "down the throat" and blew up.

On 14 November 1944, a large convoy was encountered, but just as GUNNEL turned to go in, two enemy escorts were discovered coming out to investigate. After eluding them another approach was attempted but before an attack position could be reached the convoy became an inferno as several of the ships blew up and the others scattered. It was then learned that three other U. S. subs had taken advantage of the absence of the escorts which were chasing GUNNEL and made their attacks.

During the night a few days later a convoy of five Nip ships and their convoy were spotted. An approach was made on the surface and six torpedoes were fired at three of the larger ships and three more at a fourth transport. It was necessary to pass an enemy destroyer about 900 yards astern in order to fire. Two of the ships, a large tanker and a transport were hit and both blew up almost instantly. A reload was made and four torpedoes were then sent speeding toward a medium transport obtaining one hit. The convoy then altered its course, and GUNNEL after almost an hour chase, submerged to fire three more "fish" at a medium tanker, hitting it in the bow. The ship merrily retired from the scene leaving a skeleton convoy of two cripples, one undamaged ship, and an escort behind.

Now it became GUNNEL's duty to act as a rescue ship. It was to Capayas, Palawan Island, where eleven naval aviators, who had been cared for by friendly guerillas, were waiting that the sub now turned her bow. She arrived in the assigned rendezvous and during the night, after the correct light signals were sighted, a sailboat drew alongside with the Americans aboard. These aviators were part of the crew of a PB4Y patrol plane shot down over Puerto Princessa two months previous and also the crews of two Navy dive bombers who had taken part in the strike on the islands north of Palawan. All had made their way by devious means into the hands of friendly guerilla forces. Strange as it seems, it was on this same night that another U. S. sub picked up Machinist Mate Velle, who had been lost over the side of the GUNNEL some months back.

After riding through a typhoon GUNNEL reached Tanopag Harbor, Saipan, and with regret said good-bye to her passengers who were now as much at home under the sea as they had been in the air. The sub then journeyed to Hunter's Point Naval Drydocks, San Francisco, California, for a general overhaul, reaching the homeland in January 1945.

It was the slender snout of a seasoned veteran that pushed the water aside as USS GUNNEL, now completely overhauled, set out on her final patrol. Turning her bow toward the Pacific again, her next duty was to patrol the waters south of the Japanese main islands as a lifeguard submarine for B-29 strikes on the Empire. The patrol was then shifted to the entrance of Bungo Suido between Shikoku and Kyushu Islands. Here she joined other submarines as lifeguards for almost nightly B-29 strikes. While patrolling in this area several Jap subs were sighted, but hugged too close to shore line



for combat. The remainder of the patrol was uneventful. None of the B-29's required assistance and no further enemy shipping was encountered. After refitting in Pearl Harbor in August and the war over, USS GUNNEL headed for the Panama Canal, with the eventual destination the East Coast and home.

By Directive of January 1947 the ship was placed out of commission in reserve, U. S. Atlantic Fleet, and berthed at New London, Connecticut.

USS GUNNEL earned one Battle Star on the European-African-Middle Eastern Area Service Medal, and four Battle Stars on the Asiatic-Pacific Area Service Medal for participation in the following operations:

(European)

1 Star/North African Occupation

Algeria-Morocco landings -- 8 - 11 November 1942

(Pacific)

1 Star/Okinawa Gunto Operation

Assault and Occupation of Okinawa Gunto -- 17 - 21 June 1945

1 Star/Second submarine war patrol -- 28 May - 3 July 1943

1 Star/Third submarine war patrol -- 17 November 1943 - 7 January 1944

1 Star/Seventh submarine war patrol -- 21 October - 28 December 1944

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STATISTICS

OVERALL LENGTH	312 feet
BEAM	27 feet
SPEED	20 knots
DISPLACEMENT	1,468 tons

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