

HISTORY OF USS HARDHEAD (SS 365)

Named for a fish of the croaker family, USS HARDHEAD caused the "croaking" of fourteen Jap ships during her six war patrols.

The keel of this aggressive ship was laid at the Manitowoc Shipbuilding Company, Manitowoc, Wisconsin, on 7 July, 1943. She was launched on 17 December 1943 in a sideway launching. Mrs. E. F. McDonald, wife of Commander E. F. McDonald, USNR, (Ret), and president of Zenith Radio Corporation, did the honors as sponsor. The commissioning ceremony took place on the morning of 18 April 1944.

From 18 April to 10 May the shakedown period was conducted in Lake Michigan. On the afternoon of 10 May HARDHEAD departed for New Orleans via Lake Michigan, the Chicago Canal, the Illinois and Mississippi Rivers. She arrived at Lockport, Illinois the following day, and was docked in a floating drydock for the trip down the river. Propelled by a river tug, she arrived at New Orleans in the record time of four and one half days. On arrival at New Orleans on 16 May, the periscopes and shears which had been removed to insure sufficient clearance under bridges, were replaced, and final preparations for sea were made at the naval base at Algiers.

On 22 May the ship steamed out of Algiers for the Panama Canal, arriving on 27 May. Transit of the Canal was made the same day and HARDHEAD moored at the Submarine Base, Balboa for voyage repairs. An intensive training period was conducted in the vicinity of La Perlas Islands from 30 May to 14 June, after which she returned to Balboa. On 18 June HARDHEAD departed for Pearl Harbor, arriving on 7 July 1944. Another training period followed, and then on 27 July HARDHEAD, eager and ready, departed on her first war patrol.

She arrived at Midway on 31 July to top off on fuel and departed the same day. The first patrol was to be conducted in the vicinity of Siargao Strait on the east coast of the Philippines. Enroute to the area the HARDHEAD was initiated by her first typhoon, which was of such intensity that water was almost continuously taken down the hatch. Upon surfacing after the morning trim dive the boat rolled to 60 degrees in the heavy seas.

Early on the morning of 18 August two enemy ships were encountered 200 miles east of San Bernardino Strait. One of the ships was identified as a NATORI class light cruiser. In the following surface attack, the first salvo of nine torpedoes resulted in four hits, which stopped the enemy dead in his tracks. After reloading, six more torpedoes were sent on their way from the surface, resulting in six more hits, but the target still remained doggedly afloat. As the moon had now risen and dawn was nearing, the Jap opened fire. HARDHEAD dived, and closed for a submerged attack. However, shortly before reaching a firing position the enemy cruiser's "rising sun" set amid several loud explosions.

The remainder of this patrol was uneventful except for rendering life-guard services for the first carrier strikes on the Philippines from 9 to 14 September. Although no calls for services were received, all hands received a big thrill when the large U. S. task force was sighted.

On leaving the patrol area HARDHEAD proceeded to Fremantle, West Australia via Mulukka Passage, Banda Sea, Timor Sea and the Indian Ocean. On arrival at Fremantle on 26 September, all hands left for a two week rest period. This first patrol was of 63 days duration, and was considered highly successful. At the end of the rest period, Commander F. A. Greenup relieved Commander F. McMaster as commanding officer of the sub.

On 24 October HARDHEAD departed on her second war patrol, stopping at Exmouth Gulf enroute to top off on fuel. The transit of Lombok and Makassar Straits was without incident. On 30 October while passing through the Sulu Sea, a lookout sighted an unusual object some 1,500 yards distant. On closing cautiously, it was determined to be a downed American Naval Flyer in a liferaft. The flyer was Commander Bakutis, skipper of VF 20, who had been shot down $6\frac{1}{2}$ days before, after firing the first shot of the Second Battle of the Philippines. Five minutes after Commander Bakutis was aboard an enemy plane livened things up, forcing HARDHEAD to submerge.

The second war patrol was conducted off Manila in a coordinated group with USS GROWLER and USS HAKE. Early on the morning of 8 November the group contacted a large enemy tanker with three escorts. HARDHEAD gained position ahead and dived for an attack, but before an attack could be made, the enemy apparently was alerted and changed course radically. After surfacing, a position ahead of the target was again attained, and again HARDHEAD submerged for the attack. This time the target group kept coming, and four torpedoes leaped from the stern tubes, resulting in three hits. The tanker, apparently loaded with gasoline, disintegrated with a tremendous explosion after the third hit, and dropped from sight, USS HAKE witnessed this attack from 10,000 yards away on the surface, and, unknown to HARDHEAD, decoyed the escorts away, which resulted in her being severely depth charged. HARDHEAD thinking that she was easily eluding the escorts as the depth charge explosions became farther away, was able to surface at noon.

On 13 November, while patrolling off Manila, HARDHEAD received orders to render lifeguard services off Subic Bay. Less than half an hour later a large convoy was contacted. It was to the great chagrin of the crew that an attack had to be passed up in order to reach the lifeguard station on time. This was more than compensated for, however, by the rescue of another Naval pilot, Ensign Tom McCue, also of VF 20, who had been hit over Clark Field, and ditched near the lifeguard point.

On the night of 21 November, opportunity knocked again when two escorts and several landing barges were contacted. Six torpedoes were fired from the surface, all six going wild. Two nights later, a large unidentified ship with several escorts was contacted. A favorable firing position could not be attained, however, as the full moon necessitated a submerged attack and the enemy's proximity to the beach and the alertness of the escorts prevented making an attack.

The last attack of this patrol developed under unusual circumstances. Early in the evening of 25 November, HARDHEAD submerged for a plane contact. Eighteen minutes later screws were contacted on the sound gear. After sound contact was lost, HARDHEAD surfaced, and immediately had radar contact on one large merchant ship and four escorts. She gained favorable position ahead, and submerged for an attack. With escorts very close to her, HARDHEAD let go with six torpedoes at the merchant ship and four torpedoes at one escort. One hit was scored on the escort, which immediately dropped out of the war. Eleven minutes later, with escorts still mulling around, HARDHEAD fired one torpedo at the merchant ship, which resulted in a hit. A brief but close depth charging followed, but no damage resulted.

The return to Fremantle was uneventful, except for a rendezvous with USS FLASHER to transfer her a T.D.C. follow-up motor, which FLASHER subsequently used to sink five ships. HARDHEAD arrived at Fremantle on 5 December, and a twelve day rest period followed. The second war patrol had lasted 46 days.

On 24 December HARDHEAD departed on her third patrol via Lombok Strait and the Java Sea. On the night of 30 December, while transitting Lombok Strait, two large patrol boats were contacted at 13,000 yards, near the northern entrance. With the aid of a full moon, HARDHEAD was soon detected by the patrol craft. The skipper headed for the north coast of Bali, hoping to out run them, as the strong currents in the strait made it undesirable to submerge. The patrol boats were able to close to about 5,000 yards, and at this range their guns began popping. A dense rain squall provided a temporary respite, but on emerging from this cover, the patrol craft again bore down with accurate gun fire, one shell ricocheting over the bridge. At this point HARDHEAD deemed it wise to submerge, and shortly after fired two torpedoes at the escorts. Both missed. No depth charges were dropped, and about four hours later the sub was able to surface, thus ending the premature New Year's Celebration.

The third war patrol was conducted in the South China Sea off the Gulf of Siam, with an average depth of water of 30 fathoms. This patrol was coordinated with USS BESUGO and USS BLACKFIN. In the early twilight of 6 January, BESUGO contacted a 15,000 ton tanker with four escorts. HARDHEAD gained contact shortly after, and both submarines tracked from ahead on into the night. When both subs were in a favorable firing position, BESUGO released her deadly fish. Three resounding hits into the gasoline fat tanker sealed her fate. With a terrific explosion she plummeted to the bottom. The illumination from the holocaust made it expedient that HARDHEAD submerge in order to avoid detection by the leading escort, a destroyer. A few minutes later HARDHEAD cautiously surfaced, and quickly fired four torpedoes at the destroyer, but all missed.

On 24 January, shortly before dawn BLACKFIN contacted a large unloaded tanker with four escorts. In the ensuing attack, she sank one escort and scored one hit on the tanker. Soon afterward, BESUGO regained contact and scored another hit in the tanker's innards. HARDHEAD reached this position at daylight and after tracking the damaged tanker for some time submerged

for an attack. However, the enemy tanker was able to effect repairs, changed base course and increased speed to 16 knots, so that HARDHEAD was unable to close the track sufficiently to obtain a firing position on either the tanker or the remaining escort.

A Japanese destroyer escort was contacted on 26 January. As HARDHEAD got on the targets track, she submerged to attack, but was unable to obtain a firing position. Hunting was better on the night of 2 February, when she contacted a small unescorted tanker. Four torpedoes were fired, scoring half as many hits, and the Jap was sent to join his "honorable ancestors".

The return to Fremantle was delayed two days while rendering lifeguard services for B-29 strikes on Singapore. Upon arrival at Fremantle after this wearying 55 day patrol, a two week rest period was the order.

On 20 March, 1945 under an unusual blanket of secrecy, HARDHEAD departed Fremantle carrying a load of twenty-three mines and sixteen torpedoes. After an uneventful 3 days she arrived at Onslow, Western Australia to top off on fuel and welcome aboard an unexpected passenger in the person of Rear Admiral James Fife, USN, Commander Submarines, SEVENTH Fleet. She got underway the same day enroute to patrol station and except for infrequent aircraft contacts the transits of Lombok Strait, Java Sea and Karrimata Strait were uneventful.

The evening of 2 April 1945, was spent in laying twenty-three Mark 12 mines off French Indo China. The mine laying was accomplished with a minimum of effort, with all hands hoping for speedy results. HARDHEAD slipped out of the mine area and headed up into the Gulf of Siam, thereby being the first U. S. submarine to start an offensive patrol in the Gulf. At 2032 of 5 April a convoy consisting of one large tanker and two medium freighters was sighted a few miles east of Pulo Panjang. After completing four attacks and disgustedly seeing only one torpedo hit, the Captain prepared for another try with the last two torpedoes aboard. Taking careful aim, these two last hopes were sent speeding on their way as the crew waited with bated breath. Results: two well placed hits, and the Japs were minus one of their few remaining 10,000 ton tankers. The skipper then started closing the remaining freighters for a surface gun attack. However, finding that the enemy had many more (and larger) guns to shoot back with, he decided to break off the attack and headed for Subic Bay, for a reload of torpedoes.

On 8 April while enroute to Subic Bay personal mail was transferred to USS ROCK. The next day more mail was transferred to USS BOARFISH. This latter rendezvous was very inconveniently interrupted by a Jap plane, but no damage was done. HARDHEAD once again headed for Subic Bay, arriving on 11 April to commence voyage repairs and reload.

On 15 April she once again headed out on patrol, and once again to the Gulf of Siam. After several days of unsuccessful hunting, two Jap trawlers were sighted in Sawi Bay, and promptly annihilated with the deck gun. No more contacts were made, and new orders called for patrolling off Great Natoena Island on the South China Sea. This area proved to be the most barren of any encountered, and not a single contact resulted. HARDHEAD departed station on

6 May, short of fuel and full of fish, and headed for Exmouth for more fuel and to relieve two British subs of 2 Jap prisoners and 5 Maylayans. On 16 May she arrived at Fremantle to undergo a normal refit, leave, and recreation.

On 9 June HARDHEAD pointed her snout out of Fremantle on her Fifth War Patrol. Very heavy seas were encountered immediately on departure, and on 10 June the main induction flooded, but no damage was sustained. On 13 June it was discovered that one coil still was out of commission, so the sub proceeded to Onslow to install new coils.

Repairs were completed on 18 June and HARDHEAD departed for patrol in the Java Sea via Lombok Strait. During the afternoon of 22 June three small ships were sighted; one small merchant ship of 1,000 tons, one medium minelayer, and one subchaser. An hour later she submerged on their track but on closing the commanding officer decided to wait until dark to attack. Shortly after dark HARDHEAD commenced a gun attack, but the accurate return fire of the minelayer necessitated breaking it off. Four hours later HARDHEAD submerged on the target track, and on reaching a favorable firing position, fired four torpedoes at the minelayer. One hit resulted and nine minutes later the minelayer dived for the bottom. Five torpedoes were released in two other attacks at the merchant ship. All missed. Persistent to the end, HARDHEAD surfaced half an hour later and closed the merchant ship, opening fire with the five inch and 20 mm guns. Eight minutes later she had the target blazing from stem to stern. Two hours later it slid to a watery grave. Twelve minutes after the "cease fire" order came on the merchant ship. HARDHEAD had opened fire on the subchaser. The Jap maneuvered radically, and numerous five inch and 20 mm hits failed to stop him for some time. Finally he was left burning in the gray dawn, and as HARDHEAD retired over the horizon it exploded and sank.

On 22 June HARDHEAD and BULLHEAD carried out a combined attack in Ambat Roads, on the northeast coast of Bali. The subs racked up one score each, as HARDHEAD sank a heavily loaded auxiliary schooner and BULLHEAD sank a 300 ton lugger. A 300 ton sea truck was destroyed by 20 mm gun fire off Karang Taket Reef on 5 July. The following day a gasoline loaded 300 ton lugger was contacted off Ambat Roads. The first burst of the guns set the target on fire, and she blazed fireceely for several hours accompanied by intermittent burps from the gasoline explosions.

One of the crew was stricken with appendicitis on 9 July and the next day HARDHEAD departed the area for Onslow to transfer the patient and replenish her supply of ammunition. She left Onslow on 15 July to complete her patrol, however, the commanding officer became ill, forcing her to return to Onslow. On 17 July Lieutenant Commander J. L. Haines, USN, relieved Commander F. A. Greenup as skipper. This terminated the Fifth War Patrol of 38 days duration.

On 18 July HARDHEAD got underway on her Sixth War Patrol, which was also to be conducted in the Java Sea. One day of training exercises was conducted with USS CHARR south of Lombok Strait. Thirty minutes after entering the patrol area on 23 July a 300 ton subchaser was contacted. The commanding officer decided on a gun attack. Several near misses on the target caused his

gun fire to be erratic. The fifteenth salvo apparently hit the magazine of the subchaser. There was a deafening explosion and a billow of flame and smoke 300 feet high shot out of the ship. One minute later the enemy ship sank.

On the night of 27 July an enemy ship was contacted off the coast of Bali, which was later identified as a 1500 ton merchant ship, cleverly camouflaged including a palm tree growing from his mast. Three five inch hits convinced the Japs they should beach the ship, which they did. The commanding officer of HARDHEAD skillfully maneuvered the ship to within 1000 yards, and lowered the boom with the 20 mm guns. In two minutes the enemy ship was burning brightly from stem to stern, and the blaze continued until the following afternoon.

On 5 August, HARDHEAD departed the area for Subic Bay, arriving on 10 August. Here she began a two weeks rest period. This ended USS HARDHEAD's sixth successive "Successful" war patrol -- and also brought the end of the war.

On 31 August the sub departed Subic Bay for Pearl Harbor in company with USS H. W. GILMORE and seventeen other submarines. On September 14 she arrived at Pearl Harbor and departed the following day for San Francisco. On 22 September exactly sixteen months after leaving the states, HARDHEAD steamed under the Golden Gate Bridge, bringing to a close her brilliant and aggressive tour of duty in the Pacific.

By Directive of January 1947 the gallant sub was placed out of commission in reserve, U. S. Pacific Fleet and berthed at Mare Island, California.

USS HARDHEAD (SS 365) earned six Battle Stars on the Asiatic-Pacific Area Service Medal while participating in the following operations:

- 1 Star/Leyte Operation Second submarine war patrol -- 21 October - 5 December 1944
- 1 Star/First submarine war patrol -- 27 July - 26 September 1944
- 1 Star/Third submarine war patrol -- 24 December 1944 - 15 February 1945
- 1 Star/Fourth submarine war patrol -- 20 March - 15 May 1945
- 1 Star/Fifth submarine war patrol -- 9 June - 17 July 1945
- 1 Star/Sixth submarine war patrol -- 18 July - 11 August 1945

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STATISTICS

OVERALL LENGTH	312 feet	BEAM	27 feet
DISPLACEMENT	1470 tons	SPEED	20 knots
COMPLEMENT	8 Officers -- 72 enlisted		

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