

## HISTORY OF USS HARDER (SS 257)

"The most brilliant submarine patrol of the war."

Breaking out of its usual terse language, the official comment on USS HARDER's fifth war patrol sums up the high point of a successful career. One of the most aggressive submarines of the fleet, in one patrol HARDER sank five enemy destroyers in four days in addition to contributing to the Japanese defeat in the Battle of the Philippine Sea.

USS HARDER, laid down on 1 December 1941, six days before Pearl Harbor, was built by the Electric Boat Company of Groton, Connecticut. Launched on 19 August 1942, she was sponsored by Miss Helena M. Shafroth, daughter of Rear Admiral John F. Shafroth, USN. The submarine was named for a South African Cape herring.

The HARDER had only one commanding officer. Lieutenant Commander S. D. Dealey assumed command of the sleek craft when she was placed in commission on 2 December 1942, and went down with her off Mindoro less than two years later. In recognition of his brilliant work as commanding officer, Commander Dealey was awarded the Medal of Honor, the Silver Star, and the Navy Cross with three Gold Stars in lieu of his second, third and fourth Navy Crosses, and the Presidential Unit Citation.

The brand new submarine arrived in Pearl Harbor in late May, 1943, following her shakedown cruise on the East Coast. After two weeks in port, Commander Dealey took her out for her first war patrol off the coast of Japan.

Refueling at Midway, the submarine slipped into her area on 19 June, covered by a hazy sky and intermittent rain squalls, and set up her patrol only an hour's flight from Tokyo. Working her way inside a picket line, she sighted her first target shortly after midnight on the 22nd.

Making a surface approach by radar, HARDER ran in past the safety of the 100 fathom curve and at 4000 yards dived for a submerged approach. Eighteen minutes after first sighting her target, the submarine fired four torpedoes at the leading ship of the two ship convoy. The first exploded prematurely, but the other three signalled a highly successful beginning to HARDER's career by hitting with shattering explosions which rocked the submarine. Flames from three hits enveloped the ship, setting her ablaze from bow to stern in seconds.

Diving to escape the escort, HARDER made her first landing on the shore of Japan in 355 feet of water, wrecking her sound head. As she withdrew with difficulty, the flames from the target could still be seen, and must have been visible to a large part of the population of Honshu.

Three patrol boats tried to box the submarine in on the 23rd, but she easily avoided the trap. An hour later a large passenger freighter was sighted, and she flooded down to make a periscope approach. As dawn broke,



she fired four of her bow torpedoes and scored one hit. Deciding that it was not worth the risk to come closer to the shore, HARDER withdrew.

Three cargo ships passed her sights during the next morning, but escaped with only one hit because of a failure in the firing computers. On the 25th, three ships in column came in view, and Commander Dealey set up a stern shot. When the ships were within good range, four torpedoes leaped out from the stern tubes as the sub swung hard right to bring her bow tubes to bear.

Firing three torpedoes from the bow, HARDER's crew could hear the blasts as torpedoes hit the last two ships. Blowing their whistles wildly, both turned for the beach two miles away and their escort charged down the torpedo wake toward the submarine. A last look showed the first target sinking stern first with the after deck house already awash. The second ship was still headed for the beach at full speed.

Four days later the ship began an approach on a target which seemed to be dead in the water, only to discover that she was the ship torpedoed on the 23rd who had evidently been run aground. Deciding to use her last two torpedoes to finish her off, HARDER began to work her way in toward the beach.

One last look around before firing changed her mind, however, when she found herself in the midst of a submariner's nightmare, with five juicy targets in range and only two torpedoes left. A three ship convoy was 7000 yards away, moving right into her lap, and an unescorted freighter was standing off only five miles away.

Since it seemed that the beached ship would be of little value to the enemy again, Commander Dealey shifted the attack to the center freighter of the convoy and began his approach. Working carefully, he fired both torpedoes. The first struck the ship between her bow and foremast with a terrific crash which completely demolished 50 feet of her bow. The second went on to hit a tanker which had been overlapping.

HARDER's maiden patrol ended in Midway on 7 July, when she refueled and set course for Pearl Harbor for a refit.

On 24 August 1943 the submarine again departed, setting another record by being the first United States submarine to head for the war zone with a Victory Garden aboard. The garden consisted of papai plants for Midway, where she refueled before going on to Honshu.

She announced her arrival on 9 September by a daring attack on a single ship. Working inshore of the target's track, the submarine fired three torpedoes. Her target zigged away at the same time and the phosphorescent torpedo tracks loomed up like white arrows as the missiles passed ahead of the target.

Since the water was quite shallow, HARDER's skipper decided to risk a surface getaway and set course for the open sea at full speed. Suddenly an escort loomed up out of the darkness, a scant 2000 yards away, and detection seemed inevitable. Swinging hard right, the sub slipped by 1200 yards abeam, expecting the enemy to open fire at any minute. All his lookouts were asleep at their posts, however, and the ship continued on her course without challenging HARDER.



During the next afternoon a merchantman with one escort was sighted, but could not be closed until after sunset. Surfacing, the submarine ran ahead of the convoy and maneuvered to put her target in the moonstreak. Forty-five seconds after firing three stern torpedoes, an explosion set off a blaze of fire and dense billows of black smoke 200 feet high. A hit amidships broke the target's back and she began breaking up as HARDER dived.

Cruising off Iro Saki, the ship was plagued by glassy seas and alert escorts, going three days without firing a shot. Finally on the afternoon of the 13th two cargo ships came in view, and in spite of the handicaps of being inside the 100-fathom curve and in a glassy sea, HARDER set up an attack. Just as she got into position, however, the two changed course directly for her, forcing her to pull off their track at full speed in order to fire a broadside. A plane spoiled her shot by forcing her under just as two torpedoes were fired, and both missed. A series of depth charge attacks began then which kept the sub under water for 58 of the next 66 hours, almost exhausting her batteries.

During the night she began an end run to get into position for a dawn attack on a single ship, but was warded off by three patrol vessels. Just before noon she fired two torpedoes at an enemy minesweeper and saw both of them run under the target before air cover forced her down once more. Finally at 2100 she was able to surface long enough to recharge her batteries and to change the air in the boat.

Working in fog, HARDER sighted her next target on the 19th. A more valuable ship, a heavily loaded tanker, was immediately behind the cargo vessel first sighted, though, and she shifted her sights to her, firing three torpedoes. When the first hit and failed to explode, it looked as if the attack had been futile, but the second hit squarely, and disintegrated the entire forward part of the ship, hurling big chunks of her 100 feet into the air. The rest of the hapless ship took an immediate nose dive, and 20 seconds later only a few feet of the stern could be seen sticking straight up in the air. Even this soon disappeared.

Typhoon weather forced the marauder to break off operations for another three days until the seas calmed on the 22nd. Two ships crossed the sub's path then, but three torpedoes ran under her initial target, and some very close bombs from an unsuspected airplane made it advisable to retire.

She picked up two good targets about two hours before dawn on the 23rd, and began running ahead to get in position for a dawn attack. Diving five miles ahead of the convoy, she began her approach and, at 0554, fired three bow tubes at the first of the two ships in column. One hit in her stern took care of the first target, and HARDER shifted her attention to her companion, who was by now making full speed toward Nagoya Bay.

Firing three of her stern tubes, the submarine was rewarded by a solid hit amidships, and quickly swung her periscope to watch her first target sink. Only 50 feet of her bow was visible now, and the entire midsection of the second ship was ablaze. Her work done, the submarine dived, but before she had gone past 80 feet two heavy explosions sounded through the boat, as internal explosions ripped her second target apart.



Her last two torpedoes were fired at a convoy of five cargo vessels on the 28th, but the only hit turned out to be a dud torpedo. Left with no offensive weapons except her deck guns, the submarine set her nose toward Midway.

Enroute, she spotted two armed trawlers, and "Battle Surface" sounded through the ship as she maneuvered to silhouette both of them in the sunset. Since her guns outranged those aboard the trawlers, she stayed just out of their range and, using a slow, deliberate fire against the larger ship, scored several hits until all her ammunition was expended. She arrived in Midway on 4 October and from there proceeded to Pearl Harbor, arriving on the 8th.

SNOOK, PARGO and HARDER sailed out of Pearl Harbor on 30 October 1943, to conduct a coordinated search and attack mission near the Marianas. Refueling at Midway, HARDER arrived on station by 12 November 1943.

A merchant vessel crossed her path the same day and, after tracking her for two hours, she fired three torpedoes for two hits. "The destructive effect was the most instantaneous and complete of three war patrols," Commander Dealey wrote. The target immediately broke in two. The stern section went down in less than ten seconds and the rest of the ship simply disintegrated.

An hour later the killer returned to the surface and found, to her surprise, that the trawler which had been escorting her target was lying dead in the water, in complete shambles. One of her depth charges had evidently exploded in the racks, for her stern was blown off and she was listing 20 degrees to starboard. The crow's nest dangled above the mass of topside wreckage by a single cable.

When the sun went down HARDER surfaced and closed in to 100 yards, raking the trawler with three-inch and 20 mm fire. When the target burst into flames and began settling by the bow she withdrew, and began patrolling between Rota and Saipan.

The radar began to give indications of three large ships on the 19th, and, sending out contact reports to SNOOK and PARGO, HARDER began closing for an attack.

Three cargo vessels soon appeared, with a destroyer in the lead. As HARDER began her approach, it became necessary to pass within 400 yards of the destroyer and, sure that she would be detected, the sub swung hard left, "hoping but not expecting to get the torpedoes off before the depth charging began."

"I felt like a possum in a hen house," Commander Dealey reported when the destroyer let her pass unnoticed. In a perfect position, he fired three torpedoes at the ship on the right flank of the group and then swung to fire three more at the center target. As the explosions from hits in each ship rang through the sub, she was forced to move quickly to avoid being rammed by the third ship of the group. She fired one stern tube as she went by, but the range was too short for good results.



The center target was again in perfect position, and so three more of HARDER's calling cards went racing out for her, bringing the total hits on the one ship to five. By now the escort knew that something was definitely amiss and began tossing depth charges through the area, but HARDER had no trouble evading them all.

During the late afternoon of the same day she surfaced to find one of her targets gone and another in tow. Getting ahead, she dived for an unhurried, elementary approach, firing four torpedoes, all of which ran under the target. Surfacing, she began an end run to get ahead of the alert target, which was now making radical zigs.

Shortly after midnight she submerged and fired three more torpedoes for two hits on the undamaged ship, one amidships and one near the stern. The target started settling by the stern immediately, and in five minutes her decks were almost awash astern. Holding the sub at periscope depth, the commanding officer let the crew file by one by one to watch the ship sink.

The stubborn ship refused to sink, however, and in ten minutes had stopped settling. Moving to a spot only 600 yards away, the sub fired one more torpedo, but an erratic run robbed her of a hit. The excellent damage control party by now had the ship's screws turning once more and she began maneuvering, keeping her bow pointed at the periscope. At 0145 she was in position again, and HARDER fired three more torpedoes, only to see them all run erratically with the last one circling and exploding close aboard. Giving up, HARDER headed for the general area where the cripple was, with all her torpedoes gone. Heavy seas worked up soon after which evidently sank one of the cripples, for Japanese documents after the war recorded two sinkings during this attack.

After arrival in Pearl Harbor, the submarine was sent on to Mare Island, California, for a general overhaul. It was not until 27 February that she arrived back in Pearl Harbor, and on 16 March she departed for Johnson Island with SEAHORSE.

Her first mission during this patrol was the reconnaissance of Woleai Island on 29 March. Strikes by carrier planes began on the 31st, with HARDER standing by to rescue any pilots who might be forced down. On 1 April she got her first call -- a naval aviator had been shot down and washed ashore on the enemy-held island.

Guided by fighter planes who had seen the man go down, HARDER began the search, finally locating him lying on the beach, exhausted and severely injured. Although the air cover kept the Japanese down by constant strafing, the rescue seemed hopeless, for the man could not make it out to the submarine, and a reef some 1200 yards offshore kept her from coming very near.

Although the odds seemed almost insurmountable, Commander Dealey picked the most likely looking spot in the reef and put the nose of his ship against the coral, using both screws to keep her from being thrown broadside against the reef. A party of three volunteers, chosen from a large group, were sent over the side in a rubber boat, paying out a line so that they could be hauled back against the breakers.



One of the planes circling overhead dropped a boat to the aviator, who began feebly paddling out toward his rescuers. To complicate matters, a float plane which was also attempting to rescue taxied over the line connecting the boat to the submarine, cutting it and leaving the entire party stranded. One man managed to swim back to the sub and another volunteer made the trip back with a line. Little by little they were pulled aboard through the surf, under fire from Japanese snipers, and, with a sigh of relief, the skipper backed off the reef and headed out to sea.

On 13 April a Japanese patrol plane sighted HARDER, and sent a destroyer out to hunt her down. The raider began slipping silently toward her, and at 900 yards commenced firing, "expending four torpedoes and one Jap destroyer." The crew could be seen plainly, running in all directions when the torpedo wakes were sighted. The first hit beneath the large stack, followed in seven seconds by another. The destroyer was immediately wrapped in black smoke and heeled over 30 degrees to port. Getting clear, HARDER stopped to take pictures as the bow dropped under and the destroyer started down. Although HARDER was 500 yards away, the explosion of the ship's depth charges rocked her severely, breaking light bulbs and throwing loose gear around. When she returned to periscope depth, nothing was in sight.

Emboldened by her success, HARDER began pursuing a merchant vessel escorted by two destroyers three days later in a day-long chase. By 0110 on the 17th she was in position, waiting for the destroyer on the port hand. When she should have been in position, however, an inopportune rain squall covered her. Deciding to take the "bird in hand," HARDER fired four at the cargo ship for one hit just under the bridge.

Knowing that this would surely bring out the destroyer, she began searching for her. The search lasted only a few seconds, however, for one of the torpedoes which had missed the cargo ship struck the destroyer, sending out a large sheet of flame which momentarily covered her. With the cargo ship burning merrily, HARDER went deep for the usual depth charging from the other destroyer, returning to periscope depth by 0620.

The cargo ship was in plain sight three miles off, listing heavily to port and down 20 degrees by the bow. A mass of flames covered her from bow to stern. When HARDER surfaced at 1100, no survivors or ships could be found.

Deciding to add to the enemy's severe case of war nerves, HARDER's intrepid crew closed Woleai during the morning of the 20th and began a shore bombardment under cover of a rain squall. After a few minutes of banging away at the enemy, she withdrew and set course for Fremantle, arriving on 3 May.

The ease with which the two destroyers had been disposed of caused Commander Dealey to decide to specialize in destroyers, and with this in mind, he requested the area between the north capes of Borneo and the fleet anchorage at Tawi-Tawi. On 26 May HARDER sailed from Fremantle with REDFIN.

On 6 June the submarine began her first effort to transit the Sibutu Passage, the heavily-patrolled main traffic bottleneck for the whole area. A rich convoy blundered into her lap during the evening, however, and it was decided to delay the passage long enough to dispose of the convoy.



Surfacing, she began chasing the 15-knot group, which consisted of three large tankers and two destroyers. While she was still 16,000 yards away, the moon suddenly broke through, flooding her with light. The nearest destroyer turned toward her and put on 24 knots as HARDER tried to elude on the surface.

At 8500 yards Commander Dealey ordered a crash dive and waited. A triple dose of torpex leaped from the sub's tubes when the destroyer was almost 1000 yards away, with instantaneous results. The first missed the target, but the second and third blew the ship apart. Swathed in smoke and flame, the ship turned her stern toward the sky and went under.

Another destroyer came through the area fifteen minutes later, searching for the marauder. HARDER fired six bow tubes at him for 1250 yards, but scored no hits as the destroyer's evasive maneuvers threw them off the track. The ensuing depth charges kept her pinned down until the convoy had escaped. Later during the night she grounded momentarily while making an approach on what turned out to be a small island.

At 0730 on the 7th, while HARDER was well into Sibutu Passage, a plane came over. Sighting the submarine as she dived, the plane called for a destroyer, and soon the periscope watch sighted her, combing the area. Closing in silently, the submarine let him have three torpedoes from a bare 650 yards. Two of the "fish" hit amidships, and as HARDER stood away, a terrific magazine explosion tore the ship apart. Another destroyer came rushing in and the submarine went deep to receive 17 depth charges in the next two hours.

The enraged Japanese began to fill the area with destroyers. By 1840 in the evening six were near HARDER, forcing her to withdraw. "We felt as if we had a monopoly on the whole Pacific war this date," Captain Dealey wrote. "Such popularity must be preserved."

The following night the submarine put in on the coast of Borneo to pick up a pair of British coast watchers. When they were safely aboard, HARDER began the difficult passage through Sibutu again.

Two destroyers were patrolling the entrance, which was only six miles away from the Japanese fleet anchorage at Tawi Tawi. After figuring out their patrol plan, the submarine went to radar depth, waited until they presented an overlapping target, and began her attack. With the range 1000 yards, she fired four torpedoes at the near destroyer. The first ran ahead, the second hit the bow, the third hit under the bridge and the last went astern.

Swinging hard right to avoid hitting the destroyer, HARDER found that the last torpedo had gone on to hit the second destroyer. As she was enjoying the view, a tremendous blast from the exploding boilers of her first target heeled her over as the ship took a quick nose dive and disappeared. When last seen, the second was sticking straight into the air.

Fifteen minutes later Japanese bombers arrived belatedly, and continued bombing until early morning. When the air was clear again, HARDER surfaced



and set course for a point south of Tawi Tawi, where she could see what forces the enemy had present.

At 1700 she hit the jackpot, with a large task force of three battleships, at least four cruisers and six to eight destroyers with air cover. Just as she had identified the nearest battleship as the mammoth MUSASHI, an alert plane spotted her and called a destroyer at 36 knots. Commander Dealey "decided that as we would be depth charged anyway, we would take another down-the-throat shot." Soon the range closed to the point that if she did not hit the destroyer, it was certain that the submarine would be sunk herself.

When just 1500 yards separated the on-rushing destroyer and the waiting submarine, she fired three of her bow tubes. The torpedoes hit with a jarring crash, far worse than any depth charging, and as the sub passed 80 feet the destroyer blew up directly overhead.

Rivets started all over the submarine, the mooring chain snapped loose, gear went flying about the deck and everyone aboard was knocked down. As the destroyer's sisters began churning the water with their depth charges, one of the Englishmen remarked, "I say, old boy, would you mind taking us back to Borneo?"

It was two hours before HARDER could come to the surface to clear the area to make her contact report. When she had gotten her message off, she went back into the lion's mouth for more scouting duty. About six cruisers and the same number of destroyers together with approximately three battleships and a few merchant ships could be seen in the anchorage.

Her duty well done, the victorious ship set out for Darwin, Australia, and moored there on 21 June, receiving twelve more torpedoes to continue her patrol.

Following the end of the war, reports were pieced together to show just how successful HARDER's fifth patrol had been. Some months previously, the Japanese had drawn up a plan for the defense of Saipan, which called for a coordinated attack on the American forces by all available forces. HARDER thoroughly disrupted the plan, causing the battle to end in heavy losses for the enemy.

Planes from the carrier force were to strike at the American Fleet and then land on fields in the Marianas for refueling, returning the following day for a second strike on their way back to the carriers. Some 300 land based planes were to join in an operation which might well have wiped out the fleet.

But when Admiral Toyoda at Tawi Tawi received reports of the 20 sightings made on HARDER, together with sightings of RABALO and REDFIN, he sent word to Tokyo that the anchorage had been surrounded by an immense force of United States submarines, and decided to clear out 24 hours early.

This caused Admiral Ozawa to come up through the Sulu Sea and through San Bernardino Strait far ahead of schedule, with costly results. He contacted three more submarines in the Philippine Sea, and decided that the other half of the American submarine force must be there. Therefore, he changed



the original plan, which had provided for the planes being able to return to the carrier in case of an emergency, and launched them from a point so far away that they absolutely had to land in the Marianas.

By the time that the planes reached the Marianas, the Marines had captured the field on Saipan, and the ones of Rota, Guam and Tinian were pocked with shell and bomb craters. Of the 400 trained pilots sent out, not one returned. Japan's air arm never recovered.

While waiting to launch the attack, Admiral Ozawa was forced to circle through the Philippine Sea, killing time until the planes from the Empire could arrive for the coordinated attack. This allowed ample time for the United States forces to arrange a hot reception for his flyers, and brought him into submarine waters. USS CAVALLA put three torpedoes into the big carrier SHOKAKU, sinking her with half her planes. ALBACORE torpedoed TAIHO, the largest carrier in the world, just as she was fueling her planes, and blew her apart.

But still the results of leaving his safe anchorage a day early continued to pile upon the hapless Admiral. During the afternoon of 20 June 1944 search planes located the Japanese force, and soon another carrier had been sunk, with three carriers, a battleship, a cruiser and a tanker damaged. Only 16 American planes were shot down before low gasoline supplies and darkness cut the attack short.

HARDER left Darwin on 22 June for the second phase of her patrol, spending another 11 days at sea without being able to attack any worth while targets, before returning to Darwin on 3 July.

HAKA, HARDER and HADDO were assigned to work together on their next patrol, which was HARDER's sixth and last. Commander Dealey conned his command out of Fremantle on 5 August 1944 and set out for the attack area west of Luzon.

Acting on a tip from USS RAY, Commander Dealey, who was in charge of the group, organized a dawn attack on a Japanese convoy as it came out of Paluan Bay on the northwestern coast of Mindoro. During the attacks launched on 21 August, four ships were sunk, and it is likely that one of them was the victim of HARDER's torpedoes.

Teaming with HADDO the submarine sank three small coastal defense vessels off Bataan on the following day, and on the 23rd answered an urgent call from HADDO, who had crippled a destroyer with her last torpedo.

During the ensuing attack, coordinated with HAKE, HARDER was caught by a series of 15 depth charges and lost with all hands.

In recognition of her outstanding record, the USS HARDER was awarded the following Presidential Unit Citation:

"For outstanding performance and distinguished service during her War Patrols in enemy-controlled waters. Resolute and daring in combat, the U.S.S. HARDER has operated dangerously. Striking



wherever the enemy could be found, she sank or damaged many thousands of tons of hostile shipping. The officers and men of the HARDER have achieved a brilliant record of gallantry in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service."

USS HARDER earned six Battle Stars on the Asiatic-Pacific Area Service Medal for participating in the following operations:

- 1 Star/Asiatic-Pacific Raids -- 1944  
Palau, Yap, Ulithi, Woleai raids -- 30 March - 1 April 1944
- 1 Star/Second submarine war patrol -- 7 June - 10 August 1943
- 1 Star/Third submarine war patrol -- 24 August - 7 October 1943
- 1 Star/Fourth submarine war patrol -- 30 October - 1 December 1943
- 1 Star/Fifth submarine war patrol -- 26 May - 10 July 1944
- 1 Star/Sixth submarine war patrol -- 5 August 1944 - 24 August 1944

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#### STATISTICS

OVERALL LENGTH	312 feet
BEAM	27 feet
SPEED	20 knots
DISPLACEMENT	1525 tons

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