

Office of Naval Records and History
Ships' Histories Section
Navy Department

HISTORY OF USS CREVALLE (SS 291)

The keel of USS CREVALLE (SS 291), 56th submarine to be launched from the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, Portsmouth, New Hampshire, was laid on 14 November 1942. The 1,525-ton submarine of the GATO Class of 1940 was launched on 22 February 1943 with Mrs. Una Gielow Fisher, wife of Rear Admiral Charles W. Fisher, USN, as the official sponsor.

USS CREVALLE was placed in commission on 24 June 1943 with Lieutenant Commander Henry G. Munson, USN, as her first commanding officer.

Initial training was accomplished in the Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and New London, Connecticut, areas and on 1 September 1943 sailed for the Canal Zone. The passage was made without incident or contact and CREVALLE arrived at Coco Solo, C. Z., on the 9th. After four days of voyage repairs, CREVALLE made her transit of the Canal on 13 September, and reported for duty to Commander Submarines Pacific at Balboa, Canal Zone.

CREVALLE got underway from Balboa on 14 September enroute to Brisbane, Australia. A fueling stop of ten hours was made at South Seymour Island, Galapagos Islands, on 17 September. Another stop of six hours was made on 26 September at Pitcairn Island for correction of defects in the hydraulic system. The remainder of the voyage was without incident and the submarine arrived at Brisbane on 11 October 1943.

On 20 October 1943, CREVALLE left Brisbane on her first war patrol. Passage was made via Grafton Passage, the Inner Route, and Torres Strait to Darwin, Australia, where fuel and stores were topped off. Upon receipt of orders from Commander Task Group 71, CREVALLE left for the Sulu and South China Seas on 27 October.

About noon on 10 November 1943, CREVALLE attacked for her first time when an enemy convoy of one escort vessel and three cargo ships was sighted. After six bow tubes and four stern tubes were fired, one hit was seen. Observation of full damage could not be made because of depth charging by the escort vessel. The following night a 750-ton Japanese merchant vessel was sunk by gunfire near the southern entrance of Mindoro Strait.

While patrolling submerged west of Capones Island on the Takao-Manila lane, a ship of the TATUKAMI MARU Class (7,065 tons) was seen to come out of the mist at a range of 6,000 yards. An unfortunate zig at firing position caused a change in tactics. Four torpedoes were fired "down the throat" from 900 yards range. One hit was heard and the target broke up. Two small escorts depth charged ineffectively for two hours.

Again near Capones Island, just after surfacing, radar picked up a ship steaming at 19 knots. A long full-power chase was rewarded by having the target, an auxiliary aircraft carrier accompanied by a MUTSOKI Class destroyer, make a fortunate zig and four hits were obtained for the six bow tubes fired. The counter attack was successfully avoided.

On 25 November a properly marked hospital ship was allowed to pass nearby unmolested. CREVALLE's remaining four torpedoes were expended on a 4,000-ton unescorted cargo ship. Two hits were obtained and the Jap vessel sank shortly afterwards.

Passage to Fremantle, Australia, was uneventful except for a single bomb, dropped close aboard by a two-engined bomber near Makassar. Upon arrival at Fremantle on 7 December 1943, Division 161 refitted CREVALLE.

The first patrol lasted 49 days and the Force Commander credited CREVALLE with 29,815 tons of enemy shipping sunk and 5,640 tons damaged. Commander H. G. Munson, USN, commanding officer of CREVALLE was awarded the Navy Cross as a result of this successful first patrol.

CREVALLE's second patrol was spent in the South China Sea; the submarine getting underway from Fremantle on 30 December 1943. While crossing the Flores and Java Seas on 7 January an enemy RO Class submarine was encountered. The nationality was unknown upon picking up the contact and repeated attempts to establish identification resulted in the Jap sending the proper challenge. Finally, as dawn broke, it was seen that the contact was a Jap. Two stern tubes were fired as the Nip dove but explosion of the torpedoes before they reached their mark spoiled the attack.

While proceeding up Makassar Strait two days later, a small (5-ton) sail boat was stopped and sunk by 20 millimeter fire. The period of 14-15 January 1944 was spent in planting a mine field near Great Catwick Island; which was accomplished without incident.

Early in the morning of 26 January, radar contact was made on a large cargo ship with a small trawler-catcher type escort but the usual predawn change in base course thwarted a dawn submerged attack. A daylight end around was made and position for attack was gained about 1300. An unfortunate zig at the firing point prevented the second attack but another daylight end around was made and finally at 2200 four torpedoes were fired in a surface radar approach. One terrific hit sank the enemy ship in three minutes. The escort made a futile attempt to overhaul CREVALLE but it had a 9-knot speed disadvantage.

Near Alice Channel a 150-ton armed tug was encountered on 11 February and a surface gun battle began immediately. The tug was wild in its shooting and CREVALLE maneuvered to remain out of effective Jap gun range. A 4-inch hit on the tug's depth charges blew his stern off and with the target also holed forward, it was left in a burning and sinking condition.

Contact was made with a seven-ship convoy north of Halmahera in the early morning of 15 February. The convoy was tracked all day; CREVALLE remaining on the surface to do so. A night surface attack was made shortly after dusk and by that time two more ships had joined the group. Nine torpedoes were fired for six hits in several of the Japs. Evasion was attempted on the surface but ramming tactics plus numerous close shell hits made submerged evasion more desirable. A reload forward was completed and the attack redeveloped on a large merchantman. A full bow salvo was fired but due to speed error, only one torpedo hit. This apparently was enough, as the ship was seen to sink shortly thereafter. In the ultimate confusion of attacking a large convoy, full damage could not be observed but the commanding officer of CREVALLE was of the opinion that only two of the enemy vessels got away unscathed.

As all torpedoes were expended, course was set for Fremantle and, on the way, several contacts were made and broadcast for the use of nearby subs. CREVALLE arrived at Fremantle on 28 February, and refit was again accomplished by Division 161.

The second patrol was of 60 days duration; 51 days of which were spent in enemy controlled waters. The Force Commander credited CREVALLE with 19,801 tons of enemy shipping sunk and 20,000 tons damaged. Commander Munson was awarded a Gold Star in Lieu of a second Navy Cross as a result of this successful patrol.

During the refit period, CREVALLE's former executive officer, Lieutenant Commander Francis D. Walker, Jr., USN, relieved Commander Henry G. Munson, USN, as the submarine's commanding officer.

The third war patrol, in the South China Sea, northwest of Borneo, began on 4 April 1944. The first contact was gained on the night of 15 April and, after tracking the target, it was found to be a small patrol craft. Avoiding action took place immediately.

While patrolling approaches to Balabac Strait, a large freighter, with two small sea trucks in column astern, and one escort vessel were contacted on 25 April. The seas were flat calm and the attack was held off until the enemy group was in 25 to 30 fathoms of water. A full salvo of torpedoes was fired from the bow tubes and two hits caused the freighter to break in two and sink. The smaller fry turned for shoal water at high speed. The afternoon was spent in avoiding search planes and, though several bombs were dropped, none caused damage. Late that afternoon, a six-ship convoy plus escorts was sighted entering Marudu Bay.

The following morning the enemy convoy sortied but as an attempt was made to get in on them, a WAKATAKE Class destroyer interfered with CREVALLE's movements. A decision was made to attack the destroyer interfered with CREVALLE's movement. A decision was made to attack the destroyer but its erratic maneuvers prevented the attainment of

good firing position. A two-day unsuccessful search for the convoy was hampered by the presence of enemy planes which bombed ineffectively

On 3 May, while patrolling submerged, an approach was made on two ships. Although high speed running was resorted to, only a long range shot could be made. Accordingly it was decided to end around dark and attack from a radar submerged position. Three targets were picked up and an approach was made, though considerably hampered by rain squalls. Submerged radar approach was utilized and four stern tubes were fired for two hits. Nothing could be seen because of the driving rain. CREVALLE then surfaced and made an end around, during which a tremendous explosion was heard and one of the pips disappeared from the radar screen. Four bow torpedoes were fired on the surface at the remaining target (one had disappeared shortly after the first attack and the second right after surfacing) and the first three torpedoes missed ahead. The fourth hooked to the right and ran erratically. Further attempts to attack were blocked by the target running in shoal water inside suspected mine fields.

Late the next afternoon, a six-ship convoy with an air screen was sighted but it also remained in shoal water. An unsuccessful attempt was made to contact it off Balambangan Island.

Eight ships were sighted early on the morning of 6 May, crossing the entrance to Marudu Bay, and three more were seen coming up plus several destroyers. An approach was started on the largest ship, a whale factory of TONAN MARU #2 type. Due to shallow water, numerous violently maneuvering escorts, air cover, and glassy seas, plans were changed continually but only in respect as to what target should be singled out for attack.

As the situation cleared, four torpedoes were fired at the whale factory for two observed hits plus a third timed one. Two bombs were dropped by the escorting planes along the torpedo tracks and evasive tactics began though the water was only 24 fathoms in depth. The counterattack was vicious and continuous for thirty minutes and numerous close depth charges caused considerable damage. Finally the submarine bottomed at 174 feet and all machinery was secured except the lighting motor generator. About 10 o'clock it was discovered that the Japs were successfully dragging grapnels down CREVALLE's sides and the sub immediately got underway and pulled clear without the Japs suspecting the movement. A total of 61 close depth charges were received during this evasion action.

Orders were received to pick up refugees at Negros Island and this was accomplished during the period of 9-11 May. A total of 41 passengers were taken aboard, ranging from two to sixty-two years of age. Thirty-five of this number were either women or children, both native and white. Four of the men had taken part in the Death March on Bataan. The family of an American missionary was rescued and the husband, after seeing his wife and children safely below, went back ashore and joined the guerrillas -- much to the astonishment of his wife who had expected him to accompany them to safety.

Two suspicious bancas were contacted and fired upon. The crews abandoned their boats but no prisoners were taken due to the already over-crowded conditions existing.

A Jap bomber broke out of the clouds on 14 May while CREVALLE was approaching Bangka Passage and dropped a bomb before the ship was fully submerged. No damage was sustained. Later the same morning a six-ship convoy with five escorts was sighted and closed, but before the attack could be made, a CHIDORI apparently detected CREVALLE. Eight depth charges were dropped which landed practically on top of the ship. These caused extensive damage which knocked out various pieces of equipment, including both gyros and the bow planes. The first pass of the CHIDORI was its best. Late in the afternoon contact was lost and the damage repaired. Upon surfacing, the topside of CREVALLE was found to be in a shamble. The passengers were terrified during all this procedure. Bilges were full to the floor plates in all compartments and it was the worst working over that CREVALLE had ever received.

The passengers were debarked at Darwin, Australia, where emergency repairs were effected. A doctor reported aboard for passage to Fremantle but on the way it was learned that USS ANGLER's entire crew was suffering from food poisoning. Accordingly ANGLER was intercepted and the medical officer transferred to that submarine.

CREVALLE arrived at Fremantle on 28 May 1944, and repair of the extensive battle damage was done by USS ORION and Squadron Sixteen relief crews.

This patrol lasted 55 days and the Force Commander credited CREVALLE with 24,414 tons of enemy shipping sunk and 33,913 tons damaged. The commanding officer, Lieutenant Commander Francis D. Walker, Jr., USN, was awarded the Navy Cross for this successful patrol.

The fourth war patrol of USS CREVALLE was conducted in the South China Sea near the northern Philippines and began when the submarine left Fremantle on 21 June 1944. She was a unit of a wolf pack with FLASHER and ANGLER during this patrol; the group being commanded by FLASHER.

After clearing Lombok Strait on 29 June a sampan was engaged by gunfire using both 4-inch and 20 millimeters. The 4-inch gun failed to return fully to battery after the 18th shot but numerous hits had already been made and the enemy vessel was left well holed and listing badly.

At 0600 on 25 July, word was received from ANGLER that she was in contact with a ten-ship convoy and steps were immediately taken to close the enemy group. Considerable difficulty was experienced in gaining contact due to the presence of both land and ship-based enemy aircraft. Position ahead was finally attained and CREVALLE dove for

attack at 1340 -- then the weather began to interfere. A driving downpour cut the visibility but, nevertheless, the approach was continued. A snap set-up was obtained on a large merchantman and four stern tubes were fired. Only one set-up was available and the range guess was bad. All torpedoes missed.

At the time of firing, the poppet on #10 tube stuck open and water began coming into the submarine in quantities. At the same time, an aircraft escort carrier was seen close aboard with destroyers. Due to the uncertainty of the poppet casualty and the fact that the boat started to broach, deep submergence was ordered. The Japs then began an ineffective depth charge attack, dropping 32 charges. A second attack of 20 charges was much closer.

Upon surfacing that evening, contact reports from the other members of the pack aided in regaining contact. Attack was made on the surface just prior to dawn and five bow tubes and four stern tubes were concentrated on two of the larger remaining ships. Two torpedoes were observed to hit one of the targets and one seen plus two timed hits were obtained on the second target. Both enemy ships were seen to sink. Again the escorts closed, forcing escape at deep submergence. No charges were dropped but two escorts remained in the vicinity for a couple of hours.

After avoiding this attack, a large cargo ship was seen lying to. This ship had been crippled by FLASHER in a previous attack. Approach was started, the timing being planned to fire while the two circling escorts were on the far side of the freighter. Four bow tubes were fired; two observed and two timed hits being obtained. Pictures were snapped of the sinking ship. During this process, bombs landed close aboard and then the escorts raced over and gave CREVALLE a fairly close working over with depth charges.

Upon surfacing, FLASHER reported that she was out of torpedoes and was heading for Fremantle. CREVALLE was directed to take charge of the pack.

Eight ships and four escorts were contacted on the 28th of July but the desired attack was foiled by a last minute zig. However, six bow tubes were fired down the throat for two timed hits. The counter-attack was accurate and persistent. The escorts dropped numerous close charges and were not shaken off for six hours.

With her torpedoes expended, CREVALLE set course for Fremantle. While making a submerged transit of Lombok Strait, a little trouble was had with a CHIDORI Class torpedo boat but no attack developed. The submarine arrived at Fremantle on 9 August 1944, and refit was begun by the submarine repair unit there.

This fourth patrol lasted 50 days and CREVALLE was credited by the force commander for the sinking of $3\frac{1}{2}$ enemy freighters totaling 25,500 tons. Half credit for one of the sinkings went to FLASHER.

Lieutenant Commander Walker, the commanding officer, was awarded a Gold Star in lieu of a second Navy Cross as a result of this successful patrol.

SS-291 left Fremantle on 1 September 1944, on her fifth war patrol, bound for the Flores Sea. On 11 September, while surfacing from a routine trim dive, the ship took a sharp down angle and resubmerged with upper and lower conning tower hatches open. The officer of the deck, Lieutenant Howard J. Blind, USNR, and one lookout, Fritchen, W L., GM2, USNR, were washed overboard. CREVALLE dived to 190 feet with a large down angle estimated at 42 degrees. The upper conning tower hatch was closed at 150 feet and the ship was only surfaced by backing full speed. On the surface, Fritchen was recovered but Lieutenant Blind was not found, though CREVALLE remained in the general vicinity and searched the remainder of the day.

It was believed that Lieutenant Blind lost his life while attempting to close the upper conning tower hatch and for this act of gallantry he was posthumously awarded the Navy Cross.

The actions of the officers and men in handling the casualty were highly commendable; this being especially true of Yeager, Robert L., MoMMic, USNR, who quickly and correctly analyzed the dangerous situation and on his own initiative ordered the motors to back full. At this time the conning tower and control room were unable to communicate with the maneuvering room. For his initiative, Yeager was awarded the Silver Star Medal.

CREVALLE set course for Darwin and after a hectic passage, during which all hands strove to repair the damage, port was reached on the 15th. USS COUCAL escorted the submarine to Fremantle and, upon arrival on 22 September 1944, USS EURYALE started on the emergency repairs.

After repairs were effected at Fremantle, CREVALLE sailed for Mare Island Navy Yard, San Francisco, via Pearl Harbor. She left Fremantle on 22 October, spent 6-11 November in Pearl Harbor, and arrived at Mare Island on 18 November.

On 23 December 1944, Commander Everett H. Steinmetz, USN, relieved Commander Francis D. Walker, Jr., USN, as CREVALLE's commanding officer.

The submarine departed San Francisco on 14 February 1945, after engaging in a week's services off Monterey, California, in connection with aircraft anti-submarine warfare training under the direction of Commander Fleet Air, Alameda. Upon arrival at Pearl Harbor, the usual training was completed and CREVALLE was ready for her sixth war patrol.

Departing Pearl Harbor for Guam on 13 March 1945, CREVALLE began her sixth war patrol. She arrived at the Marianas base on 25 March, and there followed three days of specialized training. On the 29th, the submarine got underway for the East China Sea via the Nansei Shoto.

During the voyage a four-hour diversion was made in order to perform life guard duty for a B-29 strike on Honshu, but her services were not necessary. CREVALLE was ordered to join SEAHORSE and later BONEFISH in an informal wolf pack in which SEAHORSE was designated pack commander.

The period of 6-8 April was spent first in attempting to intercept the Jap task force containing YAMATO and later in search for survivors of the sunken Jap battleship. Though both enemy and friendly plane contacts were numerous during this period, no contact with the crippled enemy fleet or survivors was made.

On 9 April, while submerged close to Fukao Shima, a trawler and sub chaser were sighted. The decision was made to attack on the surface with guns and a spirited gun duel commenced as it was found that the trawler had as much gun power as CREVALLE. With numerous straddles falling too close for comfort, CREVALLE dived and torpedoed the picket boats which were delivering a depth charge attack. The depth charging terminated abruptly and the remaining set of screws faded out of hearing.

Shortly after surfacing on the night of 10 April, contact was gained with two targets. An attack was commenced and three bow torpedoes were fired for two hits sinking a 1,000-ton minelayer. Evasion was made on the surface to the accompaniment of a few wild shots from the rapidly sinking target.

The following night a torpedo attack was made on two minor combatant craft determined to be PC boats. Three bow torpedoes were fired but no hits resulted and evasion on the surface by CREVALLE was uninterrupted. A torpedo attack was made on two picket boats on 16 April. One was sunk and, in sinking, it came down practically on top of CREVALLE. Upon surfacing that night a large crude grapnel was found on deck along with some Japanese metal life rails and pieces of zinc. In addition, one of the rungs on #1 periscope shear ladder was sawed in two by the wire cable attached to the grapnel.

The period of 23-26 April was spent in conducting a special mission in the Nishi Suido Straits.

The entire patrol was characterized by numerous contacts with small shallow draft anti-submarine teams and night radar equipped Jap planes. The only real ship contact was made on a large properly marked hospital ship.

CREVALLE arrived back at Guam on 3 May 1945, where she was refitted by Submarine Division 161 relief crews and USS PROTEUS. The patrol had lasted 52 days and the Force Commander credited CREVALLE with sinking 1,250 tons of enemy shipping and damaging 167 tons by gunfire. Credit was also given for a successfully completed special mission. The commanding officer, Commander Everett H. Steinmetz, USN, was awarded the Navy Cross as a result of this successful patrol.

CREVALLE left Guam on 27 May 1945, in company with SEADOG and SPADEFISH, on her seventh war patrol. This group, known as "Hydeman's Hepcats," was the first of three groups to enter the Japan Sea. CREVALLE was part of the nine-boat wolf pack collectively called "Hydeman's Hellcats."

Passage into the Sea of Japan was made via Tsushima Straits and apparently was undetected. Shipping was allowed to pass unmolested until 9 June when all boats struck simultaneously.

On the night of 9 June, CREVALLE fired two torpedoes for two hits which rapidly sunk an engine-aft freighter. The next morning a single torpedo was fired at a tug, but due to the broaching of the torpedo the enemy craft succeeded in avoiding it.

Three hours later three tubes were fired at another engine-aft freighter and two hits sank him so fast that it was impossible to take pictures.

The next morning a surface approach was made on another freighter and two torpedoes missed due to the target ship sighting another broaching torpedo. However, a fast end around, followed by a submerged attack, sank this ship with two hits out of two torpedoes fired.

The next few days were spent avoiding anti-submarine vessels while attempting to find where the Japs had holed up their ships. Then, at dawn of 13 June, a gun action resulted in the sinking of two Jap cargo-carrying luggers.

On 14 June, while making an approach on a coast-hugging convoy, two MATSU destroyers interfered. Three torpedoes were fired down the throat at the leading destroyer but no hits were heard. An ineffective depth charging was avoided. The enemy destroyers persisted in their hunt and were not shaken off until six hours later.

Several other submerged daylight attacks were unsuccessful because of erratically running electric torpedoes. Torpedoes were seen to broach in several cases, thus alerting the target ships. In the next to last attack, a long range shot was necessitated by picking up the target just after completing a turn away from the coast and the fact that only stern shots remained. Three torpedoes missed the target and exploded against the beach, thus alerting the enemy escort vessels. A depth charge attack followed and, after coming to periscope depth at the cessation of the attack, a destroyer and a low-flying plane could be seen searching diligently. Seven hours passed before CREVALLE could surface. After putting in a fast battery charge, position was gained ahead for attack on the still searching destroyer. A night submerged radar periscope attack was commenced and a zig at firing point caused a down the throat shot to be made using the last two torpedoes, loaded aft, from a 600-yard range. One torpedo scored a hit and the enemy destroyer was found lying on its side when CREVALLE surfaced shortly afterwards.

CREVALLE led the northern group out through La Perouse Strait in the high-speed surface exit of Hydeman's Hellcats. The long trip back to Pearl Harbor was made at high speed and on 5 July CREVALLE terminated her final patrol, receiving a wonderful ovation as she arrived with the Hellcats.

For this 39-day patrol the Force Commander credited CREVALLE with 8,500 tons of enemy shipping sunk. Commander Steinmetz, the sub's commanding officer was awarded a Gold Star in lieu of a second Navy Cross for this patrol.

After a refit period by Submarine Division 43 relief crews and completing her training period, CREVALLE departed Pearl Harbor on 11 August 1945 for Guam. At the cessation of hostilities with Japan, orders were received to join the tender ORION at Saipan. Then, on 1 September 1945, CREVALLE left Saipan for the East Coast of the United States via Pearl Harbor and the Panama Canal. Upon arrival on the East Coast, CREVALLE reported to Commander in Chief, U. S. Atlantic Fleet, for active duty. By Directive dated January 1947, CREVALLE was placed out of commission, in reserve, attached to the U. S. Atlantic Reserve Fleet with her berthing area at New London, Connecticut.

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USS CREVALLE (SS 291) was awarded the NAVY UNIT COMMENDATION for her first four war patrols as follows: 27 October to 7 December 1943; 30 December 1943 to 28 February 1944; 4 April to 28 May 1944; and 21 June to 9 August 1944.

The submarine also earned four Battle Stars on the Asiatic-Pacific Area Service Medal -- one each for her first four war patrols.

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SUMMARY OF WAR PATROLS

Number of Patrols:	7
Number and Type of Ships Sunk:	1 auxiliary aircraft carrier 10½ freighters 1 tanker 2 freighter-transport 1 mine layer 1 destroyer 1 picket boat 1 submarine chaser 1 merchant vessel 1 patrol tug * 1 sailboat * 2 miscellaneous * (* -- by gunfire)

Total Tonnage of Ships Sunk:	113,780 tons
Number and Type of Ships Damaged:	10
Total Tonnage of Ships Damaged:	33,306 tons
Special Missions Completed:	3

NOTE: All estimates of sinkings, tonnage, and types sunk are taken from the commanding officer's evaluations during the war patrols.

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STATISTICS

OVERALL LENGTH	312 feet
BEAM	27 feet
DISPLACEMENT	1,525 tons
SPEED	20 knots

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Compiled: July 1951