

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

BRIEF HISTORY OF USS ROBALO (SS 273)

When the submarine USS ROBALO left Freemantle, Australia, in her wake on June 22, 1944, she was leaving on her third and last war patrol. It was her last patrol not by choice but by the fortunes of war. It was like the beginning of every other patrol. Every man and officer in the crew knew that it might be the last, but they did not think about it. Their thoughts were concerned with the things that were happening at the moment; turning valves, watching dials, navigating the ship. Any thoughts of not coming back were kept deep down within each man and became only a part of the tension a submariner knows during war patrols.

Little publicized, the submariners go about their dangerous missions with sealed lips and at a great personal risk, inflicting tremendous devastation to the enemy. They are men of the "Silent Service." Silently and unsung, they prey upon enemy waters and when they are lost they go down silently and unseen by the world. In this manner the ROBALO met her end.

Authorized by Act of Congress on July 19, 1940, the submarine ROBALO was built by the Manitowoc Shipbuilding Company at Manitowoc, Wisconsin. The ship's keel was laid on October 24, 1942, and she was launched on May 9, 1943. Mrs. E. S. Root, wife of Captain E. S. Root, USN (Retired), served as official sponsor of the ship.

Placed in commission on September 28, 1943, Commander M. M. Kimmel, USN, served as the first commanding officer of the submarine.

In her first war patrol, the USS ROBALO hunted for Japanese ships in an area west of the Philippine Islands, where she damaged a large freighter. Her second patrol was in the South China Sea near Indo-China. There she sank a 7,500-ton tanker, the cargo of which was so badly needed to lubricate and drive the far-flung Japanese war machines.

The ROBALO, skippered by Commander M. M. Kimmel, departed Freemantle on June 22, 1944 on her third war patrol. She set a course for the South China Sea to conduct her patrol in the vicinity of the Natun Islands. After traversing Makassar and Balabac Straits, she was scheduled to arrive on station about July 6th and remain until the night of August 2, 1944.

On July 2nd, a contact report stated that the USS ROBALO had sighted a FUSO Class Japanese battleship with air cover and two destroyers for escort. The ship was then in Latitude 3°-29' North, Longitude 119°-26' East, just east of Borneo. No other messages were ever received from the submarine and when she did not return from patrol, she was presumed to be lost.

The following information was received via the Philippine guerrillas and a U. S. Navy enlisted man who was a prisoner of war at Puerto Princesa Prison Camp on Palawan Island in the Philippines. On August 2, a note dropped from the window of the prison cell in which survivors from the ROBALO were held.

It was picked up by an American soldier who was on a work detail nearby. The note was, in turn, given to H. D. Hough, Yeoman, second class USN, who was also a prisoner at the camp.

Hough contacted Mrs. Trinidad Mendosa on August 4th. She was the wife of the guerrilla leader, Doctor Mendosa, who furnished information on the survivors. From these sources, he put together the following facts.

The USS ROBALO was sunk on July 26, 1944, two miles off the western coast of Palawan Island from an explosion in the vicinity of her after battery. It is supposed that the explosion was caused by the submarine striking an enemy mine. Only four men swam ashore; an officer and three enlisted men. They were Ensign Samuel L. Tucker; Floyd G. Laughlin, quartermaster, first class; Wallace K. Martin, signalman, third class; and Mason C. Poston, electrician's mate, second class.

They made their way through the jungles to a small barrie northwest of the Puerto Princessa Camp. Japanese Military Police captured them there and confined them in the prison. It is believed they were held for guerrilla activities rather than as prisoners of war. On August 15th, they were evacuated by a Japanese destroyer and no other information is known regarding their destination or whereabouts.

It is possible that they may have been executed by the Japanese or that the destroyer in which they were embarked was sunk. In any case, they were never recovered and their note stated that there were no other survivors. A grateful nation can only say "God rest their brave souls."

* * * * *

The USS ROBALO (SS 273) earned two (2) battle stars on the Asiatic Pacific Area Service Ribbon, one for each of her first two war patrols. Her first patrol was from January 8 to March 6, 1944; and the second from April 10 to May 30, 1944.

* * * * *

STATISTICS

Overall Length	307 feet
Beam	27 feet
Displacement	1,525 tons
Armament	One 3-inch dual purpose gun; two 20 millimeter antiaircraft batteries; and ten 21-inch torpedo tubes.

* * * * *