

Division of Naval History
Ships' Histories Section
Navy Department

HISTORY OF USS PUFFER (SS 268)

Our submarines were employed in our mounting offensive in the Pacific to cut enemy communications to his great sea empire, even attacking shipping in Japanese home waters. Our subs were also used to support fleet actions as pickets, weather stations, landing reconnaissance raiders and by attacking combat units including ASW vessels.

In a brilliant career of twenty-six months the USS PUFFER took a steady toll of Japanese shipping, and on her maiden patrol survived a severe depth charge attack. Decorated with nine Battle Stars, she was also awarded the Navy Unit Commendation for her heroism during the Fourth War Patrol.

The submarine's keel was laid at the Manitowoc Shipbuilding Company at Manitowoc, Wisconsin on 16 February 1942. Named for a fish of the Plectognathi group which inflates its body with air, the PUFFER was launched on 22 November 1942. Mrs. Ruth B. Lyons, grand-daughter of Mr. Chris Jacobson, the shipyard's oldest employee, served as sponsor.

After extensive trials in Lake Michigan the PUFFER was placed in commission on 27 April 1943, with Lieutenant Commander M. J. Jensen, USN, commanding. She was then transported to New Orleans, Louisiana on a floating dry dock via the Mississippi River. Upon departure from New Orleans, she exercised at Panama for a month, and then steamed to Darwin, Australia.

The PUFFER arrived at Darwin on 6 September 1943, and departed the following day for her first war patrol in the Makassar Strait and Celebes Sea Areas. Her first opportunity to attack enemy shipping came on 17 September when she made a periscope approach on a group consisting of a transport, a freighter and one escort vessel. The attack resulted in the freighter being sunk and the transport damaged. Depth charge attack by the escort prevented further attack, but she had already exacted from the enemy a toll in an amount approaching her own cost.

By mid-morning on 9 October 1943, the PUFFER was on the track of a large Japanese merchant ship. At 1110 she hit the merchantman with two torpedoes. The target stopped dead in the water and assumed a list, but refused to sink. Two more torpedoes were fired from the stern tubes. One prematured, and the other torpedo either missed or was a dud. So the PUFFER maneuvered for still another attack. The ship's escort, a CHIDORI-class torpedo boat, had been seen earlier in the morning, but at this time was nowhere in sight. Left to defend herself, the damaged merchant ship opened fire on the submarine. Then, at 1125 three distant depth charges were heard by the PUFFER's sound operator, and a few minutes later there was "pinging" and the sound of fast screws approaching. Commander Jensen decided to clear the area, but still hoping to finish off the damaged ship, did not order deep submergence. The attack came raining down. The first attack of six depth charges let water in all hatches, backed sea valves off their seats, sprung the sound head bearing, blew numerous gaskets, and damaged the

rudder. Practically all the damage done was inflicted during this first attack. Thereafter she remained at a deep submergence, held down by the obdurate tenacity of the "pinger". It was evident that the enemy was able to easily follow the PUFFER. She may have been leaving a trail of air bubbles, or there may have been oil leaks. Most of the enemy's depth charges went off close by and directly overhead, but they were not set deep enough to crush the submarine with their explosions.

The enemy would drop a pattern of depth charges, retire, and then return in a hour or so to make another try. The PUFFER had been submerged since 0525, and at 1820 another anti-submarine ship joined the first. The two hammered at the PUFFER until well after midnight. Meantime, the air conditioning was stopped to conserve power, a bucket brigade was formed to control the water, and after 12 hours, submergence oxygen was used. The last depth charges were dropped at 0115 on 10 October, but the Japanese remained over her making "dry runs" until noon of that day. Thirty-one hours after PUFFER first submerged, and more than 25 hours after her attack on the merchantman, the enemy finally left, and the counter-attack was over. A racing current had interfered with evasive maneuvers, and when she surfaced she found her self in the same spot where she had submerged. Though other ships have undergone worse attacks, this depth charging was unique in the stubborn perseverance with which it was conducted and the consistency with which the enemy tracked the PUFFER. The sub was found to have a sharp port list, caused by the free water and the flooded induction lines. During the hour required for her crew to bring her to an even keel, she was a helpless target since it would have been impossible to use the 3-inch deck gun. Contact with an enemy patrol was made about 15 minutes after surfacing, but the PUFFER managed to evade and was not attacked. She limped into Port Darwin on 17 October 1943, and then steamed to Fremantle, Australia for refit and repairs. During this period Commander Jensen was relieved by Lieutenant Commander F. G. Selby, USN.

On 24 November 1943 the PUFFER sailed on her second patrol to be conducted in the Sulu Sea, and approaches to Manila. She enjoyed good hunting. On 20 December she sank the old 820 ton destroyer FUYO, and on 1 January 1944, the 6,707 ton freighter RYUYO MARU. She also sank an 85 ton picket trawler, by gunfire and had the skipper taken prisoner. Two additional freighters and one auxiliary naval tender were damaged. She returned to Fremantle on 12 January 1944 for refit.

She departed for her Third War Patrol on 4 February 1944 which was to be conducted in the South China Sea Area. This was to be a grueling patrol in shallow waters. On 22 February a Japanese ocean liner was sighted off the Natona Islands on the road between Singapore and Brunei, Borneo. The PUFFER maneuvered for attack position, and fired a spread of torpedoes. Explosions boomed, signaling that the 15,105 ton transport TEIKYO MARU went under. No more contacts were made, and the PUFFER returned to Fremantle on 4 April 1944.

She sailed from Fremantle on 30 April on her Fourth War Patrol in Madoera Straits, Makassar Straits and Sulu Seas Area. In Madoera Straits she acted as lifeguard for the first Allied carrier strike on Soerabaja. In a dramatic escape from confined waters she lashed back at her pursuers to sink

a large freighter of 7,500 tons. Evading the depth charges, she proceeded to a scouting station off the Japanese fleet anchorage of Tawi Tawi in the Sulu archipelago. Here she found a task force of four carriers underway in Sibutu Passage. The PUFFER was able to close and severely damage a carrier of 26,900 tons. On 5 June she climaxed her most successful patrol to date by intercepting a force of three tankers heavily screened enroute to Tawi Tawi to refuel the Japanese fleet in preparation for the sortie to their disastrous defeat in the First Battle of the **Philippine Sea**. In a brilliant attack with both tube batteries, the PUFFER sank the ASHIZURI and the TAKASAKI for an estimated tonnage total of 15,000 tons, and damaged the remaining tanker. She then proceeded to Ulithi for refit, ending the patrol on 21 June 1944.

On 14 July the PUFFER departed for the Fifth War Patrol conducted in Makassar Straits, Celebes Sea, Sulu Sea, and China Sea Areas. In the Northern approaches to Makassar Strait she contacted an enemy force consisting of a submarine tender screened by five escorts. In a determined chase covering three days, the PUFFER closed the target twice, only to be frustrated by shallow waters. Finally, on the third contact, it was possible to close the target, and the frantically zigzagging tender was sunk. The thwarted escorts subjected the PUFFER to a barrage of 30 depth charges that sent the cork and light bulbs flying, but she weathered it like a veteran.

After picking off an ammunition loaded freighter in the Sulu Seas area, the PUFFER was left with nine torpedoes aboard. These were awkwardly distributed with four forward and five aft, so she pulled clear of the coast and skillfully affected the hazardous shift of two torpedoes from after to forward torpedo rooms. This foresight was well rewarded when on 12 August she contacted a convoy consisting of at least ten large freighters and tankers amply screened with escorts, making a sortie from Verde Islands Passage. In a shrewd, brilliant attack with both tube batteries, the PUFFER scored five hits with her remaining torpedoes to sink the 5,113 ton tanker TEIKON MARU, a large freighter, and damage another large tanker which was beached and finished off by torpedoes from the BLUEFISH. The PUFFER then steamed to Pearl Harbor and thence to Mare Island Navy Yard for overhaul.

During her stay at Mare Island the Executive Officer, Lieutenant Commander Carl R. Dwyer, USN, relieved Commander Selby as commanding officer. On 21 November 1944 the sleek submarine departed enroute Pearl Harbor for intensive training and on 16 December departed for her Sixth War Patrol. Conducted in the Nansei Shoto area, the PUFFER battered a convoy of thirteen vessels, screened by escorts, in a series of well executed attacks. After three successive night surface attacks the PUFFER's score was one large tanker, one large freighter, and a FUBUKI class destroyer sunk, and one FUBUKI class destroyer and two medium freighters damaged. With a total of 20,200 tons of valuable Jap shipping sunk and damaged, the PUFFER returned to Guam on 17 January 1945 for supplies.

The Seventh War Patrol, beginning on 11 February 1945, was conducted in Luzon Straits, Northern South China Seas and Wake Island areas. It was a 71 day arduous patrol, unrewarded by contacts worthy of torpedo fire. The PUFFER had to be content with bombarding enemy installations on Pratas Island, thus breaking her perfect record of successful patrols.

After her refit at Midway she departed on 21 May 1945 enroute to the South China and Java Seas areas to conduct her Eighth War Patrol. This patrol was coordinated with various U. S. and Allied submarines. In a surface sweep of the Northern Bali coast, the PUFFER was able to destroy by gunfire two Japanese sea trucks and six landing craft on 5 July, and inflict extensive damage to harbor installations in Chelukan Bawang and Buleng Bali. She returned to Fremantle, Australia on 11 July 1945.

She departed Fremantle enroute to her ninth patrol. The cessation of hostilities found the PUFFER patrolling in the Java Sea, tenaciously hunting the remnants of the once proud Japanese sea power. After repairs at Subic Bay, she departed on 31 August for Pearl Harbor, arriving on 14 September 1945. On 9 October she sortied with Admiral Halsey's task group headed for San Francisco. Entering San Francisco Bay on the 15th, the warships paraded in column under the Golden Gate Bridge.

After refitting and training the PUFFER got underway on 2 January 1946 for Honolulu, arriving on 9 January 1946. Here she reported for duty involving training submarine crews, surface craft, and aircraft. The sub returned to San Francisco on 19 March 1946, and on 17 April Lieutenant Commander R. F. Reilly, USN, relieved Commander Dwyer as commanding officer. On 28 June 1946 he turned the PUFFER over to the Commander Mare Island Group, U. S. Pacific Reserve Fleet, out of commission. By Directive dated December 1946 the PUFFER was assigned to the THIRTEENTH Naval District for training Naval Reserves, with Seattle, Washington her home port.

The Secretary of the Navy takes pleasure in commending the USS PUFFER for service as follows:

"For outstanding heroism in action against enemy Japanese shipping and combatant units during her Fourth War Patrol in the Celebes and Sulu Seas from April 30 to June 21, 1944. Operating in bold defiance of persistent and severe hostile countermeasures, the U.S.S. PUFFER daringly struck at heavily escorted Japanese convoys. Going in despite relentless opposition, she penetrated the enemy's formidable screens to press home her attacks, launching her torpedoes with devastating speed and precision to sink numerous valuable units of the Japanese Fleet. Skillfully handled by her valiant officers and men, she withstood merciless depth charges and repeatedly returned to deliver crushing blows to the enemy's vital life lines of supply. Her gallant fighting spirit, and intrepid devotion to duty were exemplified in an outstanding combat record, in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service."

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

1 Star/Iwo Jima Operation

Assault and occupation of Iwo Jima -- 17 February - 16 March 1945

1 Star/Okinawa Gunto Operation

Assault and occupation of Okinawa Gunto -- 17 - 27 March 1945

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- 1 Star/First War Patrol -- 21 August - 24 October 1943
- 1 Star/Second War Patrol -- 24 November 1943 - 12 January 1944
- 1 Star/Third War Patrol -- 4 February - 4 April 1944
- 1 Star/Fourth War Patrol -- 30 April - 21 June 1944
- 1 Star/Fifth War Patrol -- 14 July - 29 August 1944
- 1 Star/Sixth War Patrol -- 16 December 1944 - 17 January 1945
- 1 Star/Eighth War Patrol -- 20 May - 11 July 1945

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STATISTICS

OVERALL LENGTH	312 feet
BEAM	27 feet
SPEED	20 knots
DISPLACEMENT	1525 tons
COMPLEMENT	8 officers and 72 men

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Compiled: 2 December 1953