

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

HISTORY OF USS WAHOO (SS 238)

The ship was called the one-sub wolf pack, she was called plenty of things by the Japs, she was called WAHOO! No one knows where she is now. Perhaps there is some Valhalla for submariners; some happy hunting ground for the men who found such good hunting under the seas.

The keel of the WAHOO was laid 28 June 1941 at the Navy Yard, Mare Island, California, where she was launched 14 February 1942 with Mrs. William C. Barker, Jr., wife of Captain William C. Barker, Jr., USN, swinging the traditional bottle of champagne against the submarine's blunt nose. She was commissioned 15 May 1942 with Lt. Commander Marvin G. Kennedy as her first Commanding Officer.

It was a great day for WAHOO, 23 August 1942, for she was slipping out of Pearl Harbor on her first war patrol. Three days later she crossed the 180th meridian and another three days found her surfacing in enemy water 90 miles east of Taongi Atoll. While patrolling north of Ponape, between Hall and Namonuito Islands, she picked up the sound of fast propellers crossing her bow headed toward Truk. Her first contact - probably a patrol boat.

WAHOO never did find out whether she sank her first tanker 15 miles north of Truk on 6 September for an approaching plane forced her to dive. Two explosions followed, after which the sound of propellers was lost. With a Jap plane overhead and the Jap base nearby, no periscope observations could be made.

Just before midnight of 20 September the officer on watch sighted a column of smoke across the horizon and WAHOO started out for a "kill". Upon approaching, the target appeared to be of the 6500-ton KEIYO MARU class. One torpedo hit scored as the Jap ship took a 50 degree list and settled by the stern. An escort approached and WAHOO was greeted with about a dozen depth charges dropped 1000 yards off. Shortly after, sounds were picked up which sounded like internal explosions from the cripple. Billows of black smoke were seen until the ship slid under the surface.

Just about the time WAHOO got her speed up, an escort vessel came down upon her by leaps and bounds, but the most welcome rain squall WAHOO had ever had the pleasure to encounter afforded sweet sanctuary. But the Jap escort followed WAHOO right on through and forced her to plunge right back into the squall and make a radical turn which left the Jap pursuer barely visible on the horizon.

The last of September WAHOO sighted a Jap aircraft tender but she presented no target for a torpedo and was lucky in zig-zagging to safety. But WAHOO had apparently found a busy sea lane, for 5 October brought an aircraft carrier into view. She was well protected with an AMAGIRI-class destroyer ahead and astern and the best approach was still 7000 yards away. It was heartbreaking for the submarine to see the best target she could ever hope for slip away over the horizon untouched. The carrier's position was successfully radioed to Pearl Harbor.

The first war patrol ended 17 October 1942, and WAHOO had cut her fighting teeth. She had sunk one medium sized freighter and scored one or two hits on a small tanker.

Before her second war patrol, WAHOO was equipped with a 4-inch gun and two 20 millimeter guns, which she tested on her departure from Pearl Harbor, 8 November. She arrived in the patrol area 20 November near Bougainville, and had her first chance at a Jap ship ten days later. It was a dark night with brilliant flashes of lightning at irregular intervals which illuminated the sea to the horizon all around. Neither sound equipment nor radar could pick up the target and the lightning flashes proved to be inadequate illumination to afford a satisfactory approach.

After patrolling the Buka-Kilinaillau Channel for 17 days without a good contact, WAHOO started to patrol the sea lanes between Truk and the Shortland Islands for a few days. Heavy smoke was sighted on 10 December which proved to be three heavily loaded freighters escorted by an Asashio class destroyer. WAHOO closed in and fired a spread of four torpedoes into the largest of the three freighters. Three hits were scored, but before WAHOO could pick up another target, the destroyer had closed in and was laying a pattern of depth charges across her stern.

WAHOO was jolted by some 40 odd explosions which resulted in some, flooding, some of the lights going out, and a series of nuts, bolts and paint chips flying around. As the explosions sounded farther astern, WAHOO came up to periscope depth to have a look around. One freighter was picking up survivors and the destroyer was still patrolling the area, periodically dropping depth charges. The target ship settled slowly and sank at 1815, WAHOO moving on to new waters of opportunity.

One of the Emperor's submarines hove into view on 14 December at 3000 yards. WAHOO closed the distance between them and noticed the Rising Sun and "12" painted on her conning tower. The first torpedo of a spread of three hit forward of the conning tower and the sub went down with Jap sailors still on the bridge. She collapsed with a terrific noise way down in Davy Jones' locker.

The patrol terminated as WAHOO churned into Brisbane 26 December, with a heavily loaded freighter and a Japanese submarine to add to her score.

While she was undergoing a refit period at Brisbane, Australia, Lt. Commander Kennedy was relieved as Commanding Officer by Lt. Commander Dudley W. Morton on 31 December 1942.

As the third war patrol started out, WAHOO was ordered through the vicinity of Wewak, a more or less undetermined spot. The position was determined as behind Kairuru and Muahu Islands on the northeast coast of New Guinea by a two-bit atlas owned by one of the sailors aboard. WAHOO steamed into a harbor at Mushu Island and sighted a ship which at first appeared to be a "sitting duck" target but a second look proved it to be a Fubuki class destroyer just getting underway. The first spread of three torpedoes missed and a fourth was evaded as the destroyer charged at full speed. The topside was

covered with Japs on turret tops and in the rigging. Over 100 members of the crew must have been acting as lookouts. WAHOO withheld fire until the destroyer had closed in to 800 yards and then let a torpedo fly which hit amidships with a terrific explosion and broke the ship's back. WAHOO commenced her nine-mile trip to the open sea with the sinking destroyer still firing and shore batteries joining in a chorus of gun fire.

The next day, 25 January 1943, WAHOO fired a tommy gun across the bow of a fishing boat and brought her alongside. By sign language, it was learned that there were originally nine in the crew of fishermen; three had died, one was apparently blind, another very sick and a third obviously suffering from scurvy. Neither the Camoro nor Filipino mess boys could converse with the Malaysians in the boat. They were given food, water and directions as WAHOO extended a helping hand.

The role of the Good Samaritan ended as WAHOO sighted smoke on the horizon 26 January. She approached and soon two masts pierced the line where sea and sky met. With a submerged approach, she lined up a two-ship target and four torpedoes were sent on their way. The first two hit one ship in the bow and stern. The third passed ahead of the second target but the fourth torpedo struck the Jap.

The first target was listing badly and sinking by the stern, the second was headed directly for WAHOO at slow speed. A third Jap ship was sighted beyond the second one. It was a huge transport. When this big target came into firing position a spread of three torpedoes was let go, two of which struck home. The second ship was still coming down on WAHOO so she fired two torpedoes down the Jap's throat. The second scored but it didn't stop her and WAHOO was forced to turn hard left and duck with full speed to avoid collision.

So many explosions followed that it was hard to tell what was taking place. Eight minutes later, upon coming to periscope depth, it was observed that the first target had sunk, the second still going, but slowly, with evident steering trouble, and the transport was still afloat but stopped. The transport was firing continuously at the periscope wake with deck guns and rifles, but it didn't prevent WAHOO from firing another torpedo at 1135. The torpedo wake headed right for the stack and the explosion which followed blew the midships section high into the air. Troops commenced jumping over the side like ants off a hot stove. Her stern went up and she headed for the bottom while WAHOO took pictures.

The second target was crippled but still going away. She was tracked but WAHOO's batteries were getting low and she could not close the range. During the chase, the masts of another ship poked above the horizon and revealed a tanker as she joined the crippled ship. At 1829 WAHOO finally got into position to fire a spread of 3 torpedoes into the tanker and observed one good hit. As the tanker turned away at high speed, WAHOO continued the chase on the surface. After numerous approaches, a stern tube shot hit the tanker just abaft midships. Her back was broken and she sank almost immediately.

WAHOO turned on full speed to chase the freighter, the last target remaining. It was quite evident that she had a good crew aboard for she upset the approaches and kept up a lively gunfire which almost

hit the bow of the submarine, forcing her to dive. Fifteen minutes later, upon surfacing, a searchlight commenced sweeping on WAHOO's bow. It was assumed that this was a man-of-war and the freighter would approach it for protection. The attack had to be pressed home in a hurry and, as the freighter headed for the searchlight, she made a target sep-up which released WAHOO's last two torpedoes for hits which exploded so violently it jarred the crew of the submarine.

As the belated man-of-war was coming over the horizon, silhouetting the freighter in her searchlight, WAHOO headed out for the wide, watery wastes, leaving the searchlights sweeping a clear horizon without a ship in sight. It had taken four hits in three separate attacks to sink the last ship.

Before returning to Pearl Harbor, WAHOO sighted another convoy and radioed the position for a possible attack by another submarine in the area. She also took pictures of the Japanese Phosphorite Works on Fais Island.

Damage Inflicted on Third War Patrol

Sunk

1 destroyer - Asashio class	1500 tons
1 freighter - Dakar Maru class	7160 tons
1 freighter - Arizona Maru class	9500 tons
1 tanker - Manzyu Maru class	6520 tons
1 transport - Seiwa Maru class	7210 tons
Total	<u>31,890 tons</u>

The fourth war patrol covered a period of 42 days between departure 23 February from Pearl Harbor and return to Midway, and took her to a patrol area along the Nagasaki-Formosa shipping lanes. After encountering many small vessels around Maikotsu Suido, the skipper decided that this was not good hunting territory as the vessels were all too small. This channel of operations was dubbed "Sampan Alley".

On 19 March WAHOO found a freighter for a target very early in the morning. She sped to gain a good firing position by daylight and finally let go with a torpedo which disintegrated the after part of the ship. The forward part of "NANKA-MARU" followed the stern down to the bottom in less than three minutes, leaving only an empty row boat and debris on the surface to fight for the Rising Sun.

Later the same morning, another freighter was sighted and WAHOO commenced a seven mile chase to put a tremendous hole in the bow of a new freighter. A second torpedo hit amidships but it was a dud. By constant maneuvering, the ship presented no more target sep-ups and the chase had to be abandoned.

While patrolling off Chosen Kan Point on 21 March, WAHOO was rewarded by sighting a ship at 7000 yards. Closing for the kill, the

submarine waited for position to send off three torpedoes. The third one struck amidships and the ship went down and out of sight in four minutes. The 33 slant-eyed survivors, counted clinging to debris in the chilly water, were spending their last hour before visiting their honorable ancestors.

It was good hunting that morning, for the officer on watch sighted a ship at 13,000 yards, later identified as the NITU MARU. Three torpedoes fired from the stern was enough to hit the ship under the bridge and under the mainmast. The ship went down vertically by the bow.

On 22 March WAHOO headed for a point just around the corner from Port Arthur to contact some Chinwangtao traffic. She had to maneuver carefully in the "wading pond" known as the Yellow Sea to prevent plowing her nose in the bottom. She was not bothered by plane patrols up to this point, because this was virgin territory for submarines, but the honeymoon was over now and the trouble could be expected at any time.

The next day, a small freighter was sighted and WAHOO maneuvered to a position for firing one torpedo which hit just under the bridge. It was a collier and after she was hit she was obscured by a cloud of coal dust. She settled fast and thirteen minutes later was no longer in sight.

It was very disappointing for the WAHOO crew on 24 March when, after tracking a large tanker, she let go three torpedoes with no luck. Two torpedoes exploded prematurely, the third missed and so did the fourth. The tanker opened up with 4" or 5" guns placing a very close burst just ahead of the submarine. Torpedo trouble had almost cost her life, and allowed the Jap tanker to open up on her radio to frustrate WAHOO's newly discovered shipping route.

The personnel aboard the submarine may have been disappointed but they hadn't given up. Following the ship into the night, they finally had her outlined in the middle of a rising moon. The second torpedo of a spread of three hit the Jap ship and Davy Jones caught her stern first as the bow disappeared below the surface. The Japs never used a drop of the full load of fuel oil that marked the spot.

The moon was shining brightly the next night when a green running light indicated the starboard side of a ship. Two torpedoes were fired, both of which exploded prematurely, and WAHOO pursued the ship on the surface with her 4-inch gun booming and a generous stream of 20 millimeter fire raking the deck at close range. The Jap freighter was pounded with almost 90 rounds of 4-inch and burst into flames in several places. Her life boat was dangling from the forward davit and the Nips decided it was time to swim for it. About a dozen chattering survivors were passed in the water, and the crew yelled at them "So sorry, please."

A lookout reported a ship on the horizon about this time and the first freighter was left burning and listing badly as WAHOO pursued the new target. It turned out to be a neat little diesel-driven freighter of about 1000 tons. With all her guns blazing, WAHOO approached on the surface. Fires were started but were soon put out

and the ship speeded to 19 knots in an effort to ram the sub. One of the Japs was in the forestop waving his arms in an apparent effort to conn the ship. A few 20 millimeter hits in his vicinity caused him to slide down the guy wire like a monkey. Repeated gunfire soon had the ship blazing all over and she went dead in the water.

During this engagement the first freighter was seen to sink and the second had been persuaded to join her. WAHOO had expended 170 rounds of 4-inch and 2000 rounds of 20 millimeter ammunition in sinking these two ships.

Shortly thereafter an aircraft was sighted. This was bad, for a plane was sure to have seen the ships burning and sinking and would pass the alarm, spoiling the newly found hunting grounds.

When a large passenger freighter was sighted at 1222, WAHOO commenced her approach and knew that something had gone wrong when the big ship suddenly reversed course. It was another plane. The sub tried to clear the area on three engines as a new Jap destroyer closed the range to 8000 yards. WAHOO was now the hunted instead of the hunter. She went to 150 feet and rigged for depth charging. It hurt her pride to crawl into her shell and hide. The destroyer may have picked up sounds from one of the sunken ships, for explosions were heard in that direction. Finally, all was clear so she left the area behind her.

The next morning, WAHOO opened up with all her guns on a trawler and threw some "Molotov cocktails" made by the marines on Midway. The sea was rough and the trawler water-soaked so she didn't burn. She was left in a wrecked condition. Two more motor sampans were left full of fish and full of holes on 28 March. The crew was sorry the sea was too rough to board them to get a mess of fresh fish.

It was just light enough at 0255 the next morning to see a fairly large freighter through the periscope. In an hour and twenty minutes, WAHOO had maneuvered into a good position to let two torpedoes go at the freighter identified as the KIMISHIMA MARU. The first torpedo hit under the mainmast and completely disintegrated everything abaft the stack. The forward section sank soon after, making a good deal of noise as she broke up. The second torpedo missed because the first stopped the Jap in his tracks.

With all torpedoes expended, WAHOO headed back for her base, arriving at Midway 6 April 1943.

Score for 4th War Patrol

Sunk

1 freighter - Nanka Maru class	4065 tons
1 freighter - Seiwa Maru class	7210
1 freighter - Nitii Maru class	6543
1 freighter - Katyosan Maru class	2427
1 tanker - Syoyo Maru class	7499

Score for 4th War Patrol Continued

1 freighter - Kimishima Maru class	5193
1 freighter - Sinsei Maru class	2556
1 freighter - Hadachi Maru class	1000
1 trawler - #825	100
2 Sampans -	100
Total	36,693 tons

Damaged

1 freighter - Toi Tori class 5973 tons

Leaving Midway for her 5th war patrol, WAHOO headed for the patrol area via the Kurile Islands 25 April. Through the morning mist of 4 May she sighted an auxiliary seaplane tender fairly near a harbor. One torpedo of a spread hit the tender between the stack and the bridge. She tooted her whistle, commenced firing, and turned away, dropping depth charges in her wake. A stern view showed a port list.

Two ships were seen hugging the shoreline on 7 May. The after ship was fitted with guns and appeared to be escorting the other. Two torpedoes fired at the lead ship, YUKI MARU, scored a hit right under the stack, and broke her back. A spread of four torpedoes was blown out toward the escort but she turned and miraculously steamed between them. As YUKI MARU sank, WAHOO went deep to avoid the depth charging and plane patrols which followed.

The next day WAHOO sighted a convoy zig-zagging along the coast of Kobe Zaki. Two vessels were escorting a naval auxiliary similar to the KINRYU MARU of 9310 tons. Three torpedoes were fired. One exploded half way to the target, the second was deflected from its course by the first explosion and the third was a dud which sent a plume of water up the ship's side as the air flask exploded. A series of depth charges was WAHOO's only reward for this disappointment.

She wasn't disappointed, however, on 9 May, when two radar contacts led her to a tanker and a freighter making a night run between ports without escort. A spread of three torpedoes reached out for the tanker and three more went after the freighter. The first torpedo hit the tanker amidships, breaking her back. She sank by the bow and caught fire aft. The fourth torpedo hit the freighter under the bridge, breaking its back while the fifth hit her aft. She sank by the stern as WAHOO cleared the area for the Tokyo-Paramushiru route to the tune of distant depth charges and explosions throughout the day.

Japanese bombers apparently spotted WAHOO during the morning of 12 May, for explosions from bombs or depth charges sounded all during the morning. At 1725 she chased after smoke on the horizon and found two freighters in column. They were well beyond the range for a submerged attack so WAHOO surfaced and raced after the enemy at full speed while charging her batteries. By 2051 the ships were picked up by radar at 9400 yards and the submarine worked around to their stern so

USS WAHOO (SS 238) earned six Battle Stars on the Asiatic-Pacific Area Service Medal, for participating in the following operations:

- 1 Star/Anti-submarine Assessment -- 14 December 1942
- 1 Star/Submarine War Patrol - Pacific -- 23 August to 17 October 1942
- 1 Star/Submarine War Patrol - Pacific -- 17 January to 7 February 1943
- 1 Star/Submarine War Patrol - Pacific -- 23 February to 6 April 1943
- 1 Star/Submarine War Patrol - Pacific -- 25 April to 21 May 1943
- 1 Star/Submarine War Patrol - Pacific -- 2 to 29 August 1943

She earned the Presidential Unit Citation for the period of 16 January to 7 February 1943 in the New Guinea area.

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STATISTICS

DISPLACEMENT	1,525 tons
OVERALL LENGTH	311 feet
SPEED	20 knots

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Restencilled October 1950