

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

HISTORY OF USS TANG (SS 306)

USS TANG, in her short but brilliant career identified herself as one of the U.S. Navy's fightingest ships. In five war patrols into enemy controlled waters the TANG sank about 100,000 tons of Japanese shipping, rescued twenty-two Naval aviators, and conducted her patrols in such a fashion that they will long remain high in the annals of submarine warfare.

The results of TANG's dramatic battles proved to be of immeasurable assistance toward the Allied conquest of the Pacific. TANG exacted a terrific toll on enemy shipping at a time when the enemy could ill afford to lose even a single unit.

It might be said that the TANG was predestined to be a success. Her keel was laid 15 January 1943 in the Navy Yard, Mare Island, California. Seven months later she slid down the ways and entered into her true element. Sponsor at the launching was Mrs. Antonio S. Pitre, wife of Commander Pitre who was then production officer at the Navy Yard, Mare Island, California. Two months later, on 15 October 1943, TANG was commissioned, a full-fledged modern submarine in the U.S. Navy.

Lieutenant Commander Richard O'Kane, USN, former Executive Officer of the famed USS WAHOO took command. Lt. Murry B. Frazee, Jr., went aboard as Executive Officer. Under the capable guidance of these seasoned submariners, TANG was put through her paces in the San Diego area and after eighteen days of intensive training exercises left for Pearl Harbor, arriving there on 8 January 1944. Nineteen more days of training followed and then TANG reported ready to wage war against the enemy.

On 22 January 1944, TANG departed from Pearl on her first war patrol. The patrol was conducted in the Caroline and Marianas Island Area and the early part of the patrol consisted of lifeguard duty for downed planes in the vicinity of Wake and Truk. TANG, however, was not called on for rescue services. Upon being released from lifeguard duty, TANG went out in search of prey.

Early in the morning on 17 February, a convoy of two freighters with heavy escort of a destroyer and five smaller vessels was contacted by radar. TANG tracked the convoy, determined its course and speed, then went in for an attack. When nearly ahead, the starboard flanking escort suddenly appeared at 7000 yards closing.

TANG was forced down, deep; and five depth charges were dropped in a half-hearted attack and the escort continued on. Fifteen minutes later TANG resumed the approach at periscope depth in spite of additional charges in the vicinity dropped at random by the escorts. The range closed to 1500 yards and TANG cut loose with a salvo of four torpedoes at the nearest freighter. Three hits blasted him solidly and Commander O'Kane calmly watched through the periscope as it sank by the stern amidst milling escorts. Thus did the terrific TANG draw her first blood.

TANG cleared the area at deep submergence undetected. An attempt was made to again get ahead of the convoy for a dawn attack but the remaining freighter passed out of range under cover of air escort.

During the night of 22 February, just five days later, two surface attacks were made on a convoy of three freighters with a destroyer and three smaller escorts. After tracking the convoy for half an hour, TANG maneuvered into a firing position on the port bow of one of the freighters, about 4000 yards from the nearest escort. An unpredicted zig required a "dipsy doodle" to maintain an ideal firing position, but the freighter came on nicely, and with a range of 1500 yards, and TANG dead in the water and holding her breath, she let the freighter have it with four torpedoes spread over her length. The enemy ship literally disintegrated under four hits and sank before TANG had completed ninety degrees of her turn to evade. One of the escorts guessed right and began to close in on TANG, but she seemed to find a couple of extra knots in her engines and left the escort behind in very short order.

Another approach was made on the convoy. This time the lead escort of what was later determined to be a Jap submarine tender, conveniently moved way out ahead of the vessel. TANG succeeded in sneaking into the position formerly occupied by the escort on the port bow of the sub tender. Then, TANG stopped, waited, and at the precise moment fired four torpedoes. The first two were beautiful hits in her stern and just aft of the stack, but the detonation as the third torpedo hit forward of her bridge was terrific! The enemy ship was twisted, lifted from the water as you would flip a spoon on end, and then commenced belching flame as she sank. TANG was shaken far worse than by any depth charge remembered. A quick check-up, as soon as the crews' jaws came off their chests, showed serious damage done. During the following day the remnants of the convoy could not be found.

About an hour before noon, two days later, a tanker, a freighter, and a destroyer were sighted. Effort to gain satisfactory position for a day periscope attack was unsuccessful because of rain squalls and the wide zig-zagging of the targets.

Contact was maintained and a night surface attack with four torpedoes resulted in three good hits which destroyed the freighter. The tanker opened fire fore and aft immediately, while the destroyer, then nearly 3000 yards away, closed the scene rapidly, spraying shells in every direction. Contact with the destroyer and the tanker was maintained and position gained for a dawn attack submerged. The decks of the tanker were covered with lookouts as three of the four torpedoes fired blasted into the ship. The explosion was wonderful, throwing Japs and debris above the belching smoke. She sank by the stern in four minutes, and TANG went to deep submergence as the depth charges started pouring down.

The final attack was made after moonset on 22 February, after a late afternoon contact had been made and the enemy tracked. A transport, a freighter and four escorts made up the convoy. TANG maneuvered into position on the wildly zig-zagging transport and fired four torpedoes. All missed astern, however, as she speeded

TANG thus concluded her first war patrol, returning because a of her torpedoes had been expended. Sixteen hits out of twenty-four torpedoes fired shows the excellence of TANG's fire control party.

After a normal refit on Midway Island, TANG, on 16 March 1944 departed on her second war patrol which was conducted in the areas northwest of Palau, east of Davao, and in the vicinity of Truk.

Of five surface craft contacts, three were small patrol craft and were evaded, one was an RO-class submarine which dived at a range of 3000 yards on appearance of U.S. aircraft, and one smoke contact of two ships. It was impossible to close this contact because of a combination of air screen attacks, proximity to shoal water on Grey Feather Bank and operation orders to take a lifeguard station.

Although disappointing that no shipping loss was incurred by the enemy, the second war patrol of TANG was outstanding as its first. By virtue of the remarkable cooperation with aircraft of the U.S. striking force attacking Truk, willingness to proceed from point to point within gun range of shore batteries in order to rescue expeditiously, personnel of downed aircraft, and seizing the initiative by bombarding known gun emplacements when passing Ollan Island, twenty-two U.S. Naval aviation personnel were rescued from life boats and downed aircraft. The scarcity of targets was attributable in part to the presence of a heavy U.S. Task force in the western Pacific.

On 6 May with twenty-two extra personnel aboard, and TANG's relief in the area, the sub departed for Pearl Harbor, arriving there May 15. This concluded TANG's second war patrol.

June 8, 1944, marked the beginning of the third war patrol for USS TANG. Departing from Pearl Harbor after a normal refit, TANG conducted her patrol in the East China Sea and Yellow Sea Areas.

The first contact of this patrol occurred on the night of 24 June. TANG, on the surface, tore into a convoy of six large ships with at least sixteen escorts, and with six torpedoes (three at each) sank a 7500 ton freighter and a 10,000 ton tanker.

Lady Luck again gave TANG the nod five days later. Just prior to noon while patrolling submerged, an unescorted medium freighter was sighted on a course which prevented TANG from reaching a firing position. TANG turned away, surfaced, made an end around, and four hours later, submerged and fired two torpedoes at the vessel. Both missed. Depth charges were dropped on TANG and she had to lay low for awhile. TANG surfaced and chased for an hour before regaining contact, again made an end around and at 750 yards range on the surface, fired one "feeler". This torpedo broke the ship in two and it sank under the eyes of the TANG's crew.

TANG's next quarry was sighted in the morning while she was at surfaced. It proved to be a 4000 ton medium freighter and a 2000 ton escort freighter. Submerging for a periscope attack, TANG fired two torpedoes at the escort freighter. One hit and the ship went down in just 2 minutes - 20 seconds. The other freighter reversed course and TANG trailed submerged until dusk when she surfaced, ran up ahead of the freighter, submerged and at 500 yards range loosed two torpedoes. One hit was all that was necessary. The manner in which the ship blew up indicated a cargo of munitions.

The Fourth of July was celebrated with fire works in the traditional manner. At dawn TANG made an end around on the masts of a ship and dove one hour later to continue the approach on what developed into a 16,000 ton seaplane tender. With rapidly shoaling water and the keel about to scrape the bottom, TANG backed down and fired three torpedoes. Two hits sank this ship and TANG surfaced to clear the area in the midst of 34 fishing boats with about 50 survivors thrashing around in the water.

In the late afternoon of the same day, 4 July, smoke was sighted and closed until finally the ship was sighted. After tracking to determine his zig-zag plan, a submerged approach resulted in the firing of two of TANG's torpedoes. One hit sank this ship. TANG then surfaced to pick up a survivor. It was necessary to snake one of two large overturned lifeboats along side with grapnels, and threaten with tommy gun bursts to convince the one visible survivor to come on board.

The following night under a beautiful full moon TANG made a submerged approach on a medium freighter. Loosing her last two torpedoes, both of which found their mark, TANG finished off her eighth ship on the patrol. Midway Island was reached on 14 July, ending the third war patrol.

This, the third consecutive outstanding patrol turned in by TANG, was characterized by the same aggressive, determined and efficient fighting spirit that was so noticeable in her first and second patrols. To her enviable record of sinking five ships on her first patrol and the efficient rescuing of twenty-two Naval aviators on her second patrol, TANG added eight more ships sunk on this patrol.

In recognition for the excellent performances of TANG on her first three war patrols, she was awarded her first Presidential Unit Citation.

Text of the citation follows:

"For outstanding performance in combat and distinguished service during her First, Second and Third War Patrols in Japanese-controlled waters. Operating boldly in defiance of alert hostile air patrols in dangerous areas far from her home base, the USS TANG struck devastating blows at Japanese combatant units and heavily escorted convoys in the Pacific despite unfavorable attack opportunity, sinking thousands of tons of valuable enemy shipping during her first and third war patrols. Rendering gallant lifeguard service during air strikes against enemy-held atolls by United States Forces, the TANG braved the treacherous reefs off the coast of a powerfully fortified enemy stronghold to rescue twenty-two Naval aviators in seven pick-ups, completing this perilous mission within close range of hostile shore batteries. The brilliant and heroic achievements of this vessel reflect the highest credit upon the courage, seamanship and determination of her officers and men and enhance the fine traditions of the United States Naval Service."

The fourth war patrol of TANG was conducted off the coast of Honshu in the Japanese Empire Waters.

TANG's first kill occurred on this patrol when she attained position on the beam of two freighters in column accompanied by a boat and a smaller escort. Three torpedoes were fired at the first ship and a similar salvo at the second ship. After a quick look which showed the gun boat proceeding rapidly and closely across the stern, one hit was observed amidships in the first target resulting in a disintegrating explosion. Two timed hits were heard in the second target as TANG took evasive action and she was subjected to "Tooth-shaking" depth charge attack.

TANG's next action was a surface battle. A patrol yacht was attacked with the 4" gun. Eight hits were scored, demolishing the deck house aft and exploding in the patrol boats' sides and upper works.

Next, a patrol vessel of about 1500 tons was found at anchor. The night was black. This vessel was, however, recognized as one which had previously depth-charged TANG. Two torpedoes from the stern tubes produced no results so bow tubes were brought to bear and two more torpedoes fired. One of these hit the point of aim and the target sank after a spectacular explosion. TANG had her revenge.

August 23 was another lucky day for the terrific TANG. A large transport accompanied by a PC or DE ahead, an SC on his bow, and an LST and PC astern, was sighted. A beautiful approach put TANG in position 800 yards abeam and three torpedoes fired resulted in two hits and in the sinking of this valuable loaded transport.

Shortly thereafter, from a position inshore of a modern diesel tanker proceeding close to the beach, three torpedoes were fired from the stern tubes. Down went the tanker to the bottom of the sea!

With all torpedoes expended, TANG steamed back to Pearl Harbor to rest her crew and overhaul her equipment.

TANG's brilliant fifth patrol began on 27 September and ended 24 October. This is a saga of one of the greatest submarine cruises of all times, the fifth and last patrol of a fighting ship.

On 11 October 1944, shortly after entering her area in Formosa Straits, TANG started off this auspicious patrol by launching two skillfully planned and smartly conducted torpedo attacks which resulted in the sinking of two heavily laden freighters. On 23 October after a thorough analysis of all shipping routes, TANG made contact on a large heavily-escorted convoy composed of three large tankers, a large transport loaded with troops and a large freighter.

The Commanding Officer took TANG into the middle of the convoy on the surface and delivered a brilliantly conceived torpedo attack which resulted in devastating hits on all three of these valuable tankers. Amid the resulting pandemonium, TANG swung and fired at the freighter when it was noticed that the transport, angry for revenge, was fast bearing down on the TANG with intentions of ramming. Emergency speed and hard left rudder saved the sub from hitting the on-rushing transport by seconds.

TANG was now boxed in with three blazing, sinking tankers on one side and the freighter, transport and several destroyers coming in from the other side. Despite a deadly hail of bullets and shell coming from all directions, Commander O'Kane launched another torpedo attack which blew the freighter and transport out of the water.

Then, with no torpedoes in the tubes TANG broke through the escorts to reload. In the incredibly short time of ten minutes of breath-taking action, TANG sank an entire enemy convoy.

Twenty-four hours later, contact was again made with the enemy this time with another heavily-loaded, heavily-escorted convoy steaming to support the Leyte Campaign. The tankers all carried planes on their decks and even the bows and sterns of the transports were piled high with plane crates jammed in with the troops. Again, TANG fearlessly ran into the formation and launched four torpedoes, two at a transport and two at a tanker. At a range of less than 1000 yards all torpedoes hit as planned with a series of violent explosions.

TANG's position was revealed to the enemy in the light of the burning, exploding ships and they were quick to act against the submarine which had caused so much damage among their ranks. With debris flying high in the air and escorts firing from all sides, TANG was again completely boxed in by the enemy. A large transport and a tanker were off the stern, a destroyer was charging in at high speed from one side, two or more destroyer escorts were coming in from the other side, and three burning sinking ships were directly off the bow. Full speed ahead was rung up and TANG charged the enemy. A salvo of three torpedoes was fired and they found their mark with great devastation; the first hit the tanker and sent it and its valuable cargo of aviation gasoline sky-high; the second hit the transport and smashed it dead in the water; and the third hit the destroyer and blasted out her submarine destroying intentions with mighty roar which rocked TANG from stem to stern.

TANG now had but two torpedoes left. Moving in on the crippled transport, the last two were fired. The first torpedo ran straight and true to the target. The second torpedo, however, ran erratically and started a circular run after leaving the tube. Emergency speed was called for but twenty seconds after firing, the malfunctioning torpedo hit the stern of TANG.

The Commanding Officer and several members of the crew were blown off the bridge by the explosion and the TANG sank immediately. Some other members of the crew also escaped and in all, nine men were captured by the Japanese and liberated by U.S. Forces after the war was over.

Though the short but illustrious career of the fighting TANG was stilled forever by an unavoidable act of fate, this outstanding submarine, led by its courageous captain, Commander Richard H. O'Keefe, succeeded in exacting a monumental toll among the enemy. In recognition of the results of TANG's fourth and fifth war patrols she was awarded a second Presidential Unit Citation.

Text of the citation follows:

"For extraordinary heroism in action during her Fourth War Patrol against enemy Japanese shipping in the Honshu Area from July 31 to September 3, 1944, and her Fifth War Patrol in Formosa Straits, September 27 to October 24, 1944. Boldly searching out the enemy through perilous coastline shoal waters to establish contact with a large hostile convoy the USS TANG penetrated a heavy escort screen to launch a series of smashing torpedo attacks and sink five Japanese ships totaling 22,500 tons. With every surface unit vital to the enemy during accelerated hostilities pointing toward the crucial battle for Leyte Gulf, the TANG daringly challenged two large, well armed, heavily escorted convoys bound for the Philippines with reinforcements and supplies. Operating without support and in heroic defiance of severe countermeasures, she attacked relentlessly from all sides, waging furious battle against terrific odds and climaxing her aggressive Fifth Patrol by sending every ship of both convoys to the bottom. A seaworthy, fighting ship, handled brilliantly by her gallant officers and men, the TANG rounded out her previous distinguished record of achievement by her crushing blows against the enemy's power to wage war, thereby materially furthering the vital operations to control the Pacific and upholding the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service."

STATISTICS

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