

NAVY DEPARTMENT  
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS  
DIVISION OF NAVAL HISTORY (OP-29)  
SHIP'S HISTORIES SECTION

HISTORY OF USS FLASHER (SS 249)

USS FLASHER (SS 249), first ship of the Fleet to bear the name, was built by the Electric Boat Company of Groton, Connecticut. Her keel was laid 30 September 1942 and she was launched 20 June 1943, under the sponsorship of Mrs. Willard A. Saunders, wife of Lieutenant Commander Saunders, USN, who was awarded the Navy Cross for heroic service during command of submarine GRAYBACK. The ship was placed in commission at New London, Connecticut, 25 September 1943, when Lieutenant Commander Reuben T. Whitaker, USN, assumed command.

FLASHER conducted training in the vicinity of Newport, Rhode Island, and on 6 November 1943, departed for Key West, Florida, where she provided services to the Sound School and engaged in maneuvers and exercises with destroyers and destroyer escort vessels. After a week of this duty she steamed for the Pacific. Transit of the Panama Canal was made 30 November 1943, and she arrived at Pearl Harbor on 15 December 1943. FLASHER underwent repairs in the Pearl Harbor Navy Yard and conducted several weeks of intensive training in the Hawaiian area.

On 6 January 1944, FLASHER departed Pearl Harbor to conduct her first war patrol. Enroute to her patrol area off Mindoro, 18 January, she made her first torpedo attack which sank ex-gunboat YOSHIDA MARU of 2,900 tons (23°-50'N; 151°-28'E). On 5 February, she conducted an attack in waters off Manila, Philippine Islands, scoring hits which sank cargo TAISHIN MARU of 1,723 tons (13°-09'N; 120°-24'E). While on patrol in the vicinity of Macariban Island, 14 February 1944, she made two successive attacks on a convoy to sink cargo MINRYO MARU of 2,193 tons (13°-44'N; 120°-40'E); and, cargo HOKUAM MARU of 3,712 tons (13°-40'N; 120°-27'E). She concluded her patrol at Fremantle, Australia, arriving 29 February 1944.

FLASHER departed Fremantle, 4 April 1944, to conduct her second war patrol off the French Indo-China coast. On 29 April, in coastal waters of French Indo-China, about 3 miles off Hon Doi Island, she found river gunboat TAHURE of 644 tons in convoy with cargo SONG GIAN MARU of 1,065 tons, and delivered a torpedo attack to sink both ships (13°-02'N; 109°-28'E). The last of her torpedoes were expended, 7 May 1944, when she attacked a large cargo vessel in the Sulu Sea, scoring hits for unobserved extent of damage. She returned to Fremantle, 28 May 1944.



On 19 June 1944, FLASHER sailed from Fremantle to conduct her third war patrol in the South China Sea. On 28 June, she encountered a heavily escorted convoy of 13 ships. A surface attack did not seem advisable because of shallow water and FLASHER made an end-around to starboard bow of the leading ships of the convoy during the night. At 0111, the morning of 29 June, she maneuvered in for the attack on overlapping targets and fired three bow torpedoes at each target. Cargo NIPPO MARU of 6,079 tons, hit three times, broke in two and immediately sank ( $00^{\circ}-43'N$ ;  $105^{\circ}-31'E$ ). Two other hits stopped a large passenger-cargo vessel in the water who opened fire as FLASHER retired on the surface. In the vicinity of Cape Varella, the evening of 7 July 1944, she intercepted a freighter with one escort and screened by rain, made a fast end-around to fire four after torpedoes. Cargo KOTO MARU of 3,557 tons exploded in flames and sank ( $13^{\circ}-02'N$ ;  $109^{\circ}-26'E$ ). On 12 July, she formed a coordinated attack group with submarines CREVALLE and ANGLER under command of Lieutenant Commander R. T. Whittaker in FLASHER. The next morning she reported contact with a two-ship convoy to ANGLER and CREVALLE. The escort headed for FLASHER who outran the enemy on the surface. Some thirty minutes later she was forced down by enemy aircraft and the anti-submarine vessel closed but passed overhead without making contact.

On 19 July 1944, FLASHER sighted a ship emerging from the overcast and submerged to commence immediate approach as the target was identified as a cruiser under escort of a destroyer. When the target showed a thirty degree port angle, Lieutenant Commander Whitaker headed in for a bow shot but the enemy shifted to a seven degree port angle and FLASHER sped ahead to cross the enemy's track for a stern shot, firing four torpedoes for two hits as she went deep. She evaded a pattern of depth charges dropped by the destroyer and about an hour later was at periscope depth to observe the cruiser obviously disabled. Range was closed to 3,200 yards and a spread of four bow torpedoes were fired for no hits as FLASHER again dived to evade another barrage of depth charges from the destroyer. Lieutenant Commander Whitaker held FLASHER at a depth of 150 feet and rushed to reload her forward tubes. She was barely ready to commence third approach when explosions echoed under the sea as light cruiser OI of 5,700 tons slipped beneath the waves. ( $12^{\circ}-45'N$ ;  $14^{\circ}-20'E$ ). Periscope observation some hours later revealed the destroyer alone on the seascape. On 26 July,



she downed tanker OTORIYAMA MARU of 5,280 tons (18°-10'N; 117°-15'E). She also obtained hits for damage to cargo AKI MARU of 11,409 tons, who was sunk that same day by submarine CREVALLE. Having expended her torpedoes, FLASHER steamed for Fremantle, arriving 7 August 1944.

On 30 August 1944, FLASHER departed Fremantle to conduct her fourth war patrol in the area of the Philippine Islands, forming a coordinated search and attack group with HAWKBILL and BECUNA, under command of Lieutenant Commander Whitaker in FLASHER. On 18 September, she intercepted ex-light cruiser SAIGON MARU of 5,350 tons and sank her off Corregidor. (14°-11'N; 120°-02'E). The next nine days were spent on uneventful life guard station off Cape Bolinao, Luzon. She then resumed patrol in the Philippine area. On 27 September, she scored hits to sink transport URAL MARU of 6,374 tons (15°-40'N; 117°-18'E). While patrolling off Santa Cruz Harbor, Luzon, 4 October, she intercepted and sank TAIBIN MARU of 6,886 tons (15°-26'N; 119°-49'E). FLASHER returned to Fremantle, 20 October 1944.

On 31 October 1944, Commander Reuben T. Whitaker was relieved by Lieutenant Commander George W. Grider, USN. For heroic achievement during his command of FLASHER, Commander Whitaker was awarded the Navy Cross, two gold stars in lieu of a second and third Navy Cross; and, a gold star in lieu of a second Silver Star Medal. He also received the ribbon for and a facsimile of the Presidential Unit Citation awarded FLASHER for extraordinary heroism during her Third, Fourth and Fifth War Patrols.

On 15 November 1944, FLASHER departed Fremantle on her fifth war patrol, forming a coordinated search and attack group with HAWKBILL and BECUNA, under command of Captain E. H. Bryant, USN, in HAWKBILL. Enroute to her patrol area off Camranh Bay, about one-third of the way from Palawan to the Indo-China coast, the early morning of 4 December 1944, FLASHER received contact report from HAWKBILL of a Japanese tanker convoy and steamed to intercept. Some thirty minutes later she sighted silhouettes of the oilers and gained ahead to await approach of the enemy. She headed in for attack but as the range shortened from 2,000 to 1,100 yards, fired a salvo of four torpedoes at a destroyer which had suddenly loomed out of the downpour as FLASHER was closing. Two hits



stalled the destroyer and she took a list, smoking heavily. Lieutenant Commander Grider obtained a quick set-up on a large tanker beyond the destroyer and fired four stern shots at this target. A hasty periscope sweep revealed the destroyer down by her stern in the water. As this spectacle was observed, a second destroyer bore down on FLASHER only 700 yards distant and she coasted deep as two hits were heard to explode on the tanker target. Sixteen depth charges exploded close about her but she evaded and again came to periscope depth to observe the tanker afire and settling by the stern. Some distance from the burning tanker, a destroyer, a net tender and other escorts were standing by. FLASHER rushed to reload and moved in to attack the destroyer and finish off the tanker. Upon first approach rainsqualls blinded her periscope as she closed range. But some minutes later a break in the downpour enabled a limited view of the targets and four torpedoes were fired at the destroyer. Two of these torpedoes were set to pass beneath the destroyer and hit the tanker beyond. Four hits exploded as FLASHER dived to evade counter-attack which continued for half an hour. When she again came to periscope depth, the torpedoed destroyers were nowhere in sight but three escorts remained on the scene with the torpedoed tanker, afire from stem to stern. The tanker was abandoned at sundown and the escorts had departed. Since the enemy was still above water and might be salvageable, one torpedo was fired to blow under tanker HAKKO MARU of 10,022 tons (13°-12'N; 116°-37'E). She joined destroyer KISHINAMI of 2,100 tons sunk at the same location in earlier attacks that day by FLASHER.

Foul weather hampered FLASHER during the next two weeks as she patrolled westward to the Indo-China Coast. While off Hon Doi Island, the morning of 21 December 1944, a small patrol boat excursionsed up the coast and was allowed to pass at about 3,000 yards. Shortly afterwards FLASHER sighted a convoy of large oil tankers under heavy escort as she moved farther out to sea. The convoy passed within 2,000 yards of FLASHER but high waves made torpedo performance doubtful and she steamed to surface some twenty miles off-shore and commenced a long end-around. Heavy seas compelled Lieutenant Commander Grider to order three-engine speed - as fast as he dared drive FLASHER over the hills of water. Contact was lost that afternoon but that night, FLASHER's radar picked up what first appeared to be a small island and was about to reverse course when the island was observed underway. This contact soon proved to be five large tankers with three escorts and a destroyer steaming through the night at 11 knots, following a course which traced the shoreline.



An attack from seaward was prevented by intervening destroyers with the tankers in tight formation of a column some 500 yards apart. FLASHER maneuvered for an attack from the land side, the enemy tankers being about 12 miles off the beach. As FLASHER moved on the port bow of the leading ship, a destroyer briefly intervened, then dropped back to starboard of the convoy but one escort remained on the port bow of the lead ship. The other escorts were on the convoy's starboard flank. FLASHER moved in and fired three bow tubes at the leading tanker then shifted to fire three at a second. She then swung right to bear her stern tubes on a third tanker as two hits each were observed on the first two. The second tanker blew up and illuminated the area as the third tanker exploded and flames of these two targets flowed together in a river of fire. A destroyer which had dropped back as FLASHER fired, now came forward on her port beam at a range of 4,000 yards, made one circle to the left and fell into position again on her port beam at a range of 3,200 yards. She did not find FLASHER and as she dropped back, the first target exploded and all three tankers disintegrated by explosions being swallowed in the flames. No depth charges were dropped and no guns were fired. The enemy apparently believed they had struck a minefield. In this action FLASHER sank tanker OMUROSAN MARU of 9,204 tons, and tanker ARITA MARU of 10,238 tons (15°-04'N; 109°-06'E). FLASHER retired to the southeast, returning to Fremantle, 2 January 1945.

On 29 January 1945, FLASHER departed Fremantle on her sixth war patrol. She battle surfaced, 21 February and sank a sea truck with her gunfire and on 25 February, scored hits to sink cargo KOHO MARU of 850 tons (20°-04'N; 111°-22'E). On 4 March 1945, she put into Subic Bay for repairs, departing 8 March for the coast of Indo-China to join a Coordinated Search and Attack Group. No contacts were made by 27 March 1945, and that midnight she was ordered to Pearl Harbor, arriving 3 April 1945. A few days later she sailed for overhaul at San Francisco, arriving 24 April 1945. She returned to Pearl Harbor, 24 July 1945. She departed for Guam, 21 August but received orders, 24 August, to return to Pearl Harbor.

On 28 August 1945, FLASHER departed Pearl Harbor for the United States. She completed transit of the Panama Canal, 14 September, and sailed via New Orleans to New London, Connecticut, where she was placed out of commission in Reserve, 16 March 1946. Lieutenant Commander George W. Grider was awarded the Navy Cross for heroic service as commanding officer of FLASHER during her Fifth War Patrol. He also received the ribbon for and a facsimile of the Presidential Unit Citation awarded FLASHER for extraordinary heroism in action during her Third, Fourth, and Fifth War Patrols.



USS FLASHER (SS 249)

In addition to the Presidential Unit Citation for her Third, Fourth, and Fifth war patrols, she was awarded six battle stars for operations listed below:

- 1 Star/SUBMARINE WAR PATROL-PACIFIC: 6 Jan-29 Feb 1944
- 1 Star/SUBMARINE WAR PATROL-PACIFIC: 4 Apr-28 May 1944
- 1 Star/SUBMARINE WAR PATROL-PACIFIC: 19 Jun-7 Aug 1944
- 1 Star/SUBMARINE WAR PATROL-PACIFIC: 30 Aug-20 Oct 1944
- 1 Star/SUBMARINE WAR PATROL-PACIFIC: 15 Nov 1944-2 Jan 1945
- 1 Star/SUBMARINE WAR PATROL-PACIFIC: 27 Jan-13 Apr 1945

The text of FLASHER's Presidential Unit Citation reads as follows:

"For extraordinary heroism in action during the Third, Fourth, and Fifth War Patrols against enemy Japanese surface forces in restricted waters of the Pacific. Constantly forced down by fierce and repeated depth charging and threatened by strong hostile air coverage, the USS FLASHER persistently resurfaced to carry on a vigorous and determined offensive against the Japanese. She effected wide coverage of assigned areas far from home base and developed every contact; she boldly penetrated formidable screens to press home her attacks by day or night - in the glassy seas or foul weather; she placed her hits with devastating accuracy, evaded fierce countermeasures of escort vessels and inflicted terrific damage on the enemy in vital ships sunk or severely damaged. Ceaseless in her vigilance and daring in combat tactics, the FLASHER has served with distinction in thwarting the war efforts of a fanatical enemy and her brilliant record of achievement is a reflection of the personal valor and superb seamanship of her officers and men."

ORIGINAL STATISTICS

LENGTH OVER-ALL:	311'9"
EXTREME BEAM:	27'3"
STANDARD DISPLACEMENT:	
Tons:	1526
Mean Draft:	15'3"
SUBMERGED DISPLACEMENT:	
Tons:	2424
DESIGN SPEED:	
Surface:	20.25 knots
Submerged:	8.75 knots
DESIGN DEPTH:	300'
DESIGN COMPLEMENT:	
Officer:	6
Enlisted:	54
ARMAMENT:	
Torpedo Tubes:	(10) 21-inch
Secondary:	(1) 3"/50
	(2) .50 caliber
	(2) .30 caliber
TORPEDOES:	24

Compiled and Stenciled  
30 July 1958 (kes)