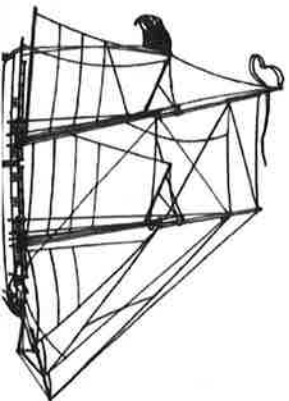


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USS SHARK



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By Jeff Kelly

The schooner **America** was heading south on a port tack. A southeast wind filled her white sails and her black hull shouldered effortlessly through a gentle two foot swells. Fort Zackary Taylor and Key West receded off her stern at 9 knots. She was 129 feet of sail powered grace and beauty. Onboard was a full complement of sun-baked tourists.

I lay five hundred yards off, clutching in and out of gear and waiting for her to come in range. Forward I had a gun turret to starboard with a pair of twin fifty caliber machine guns, port amidships was another turret with twin fifties and on the stern a 20mm Oerlikon cannon. Torpedoes and depth charges rounded out the deck weaponry. My plan was to hold position until she was nearly abeam then power up and come left aiming directly at her foremast. With both engines wide open we would be closing at almost thirty knots. On that course and estimating her speed I would cross her wake and rake her stern with fire. All that was needed was a quick radio call to America's captain so he could charge her cannons. We had to make a fair fight out of it, after all.

"Battle stations," I called. The

## The Last PT Boat



*PT 728 alongside the pier in Key West bight. Photo credit: Dale McDonald  
Collection Monroe County Library.*

mate went forward with our 12-gauge shotgun loaded with blanks. My crew of tourists donned World War II era helmets and readied their digital cameras. **PT-728** was in attack mode. I shoved the throttles and as the engines roared yelled, "Get your war faces on, shipmates!" The tourists hooted and smiled.

**PT-728's** steering wheel has 16 turns limit-to-limit. A "speed spoke" attached at a right angle to the wheel allows for swift, if athletic, cranking. At idle speed her three small spade rudders were pretty useless, but on a speed run the boat could be aimed with the precision of a laser. I usually passed within a hundred feet of a vessel while attacking but that's only because I didn't want to alarm the other captain. With **PT-728** precise

steering I could easily and pass much closer. The boat went exactly where you pointed it. Obviously, the steering was designed to aim torpedoes.

**America** fired her first shot when I was over fifty feet out, a tube of gray smoke reaching out across our bow. Too early, a miss, I thought. My mate thought so too and waited for my signal. A second later we were nearly dead astern. I gave the signal and he fired point blank. **America** answered with her second cannon and got us broadside. Sensing a wounding the mate worked the pump and emptied his weapon into **America**. I cranked the wheel and spun a tight circle around the sailing ship. Cameras on both sides

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