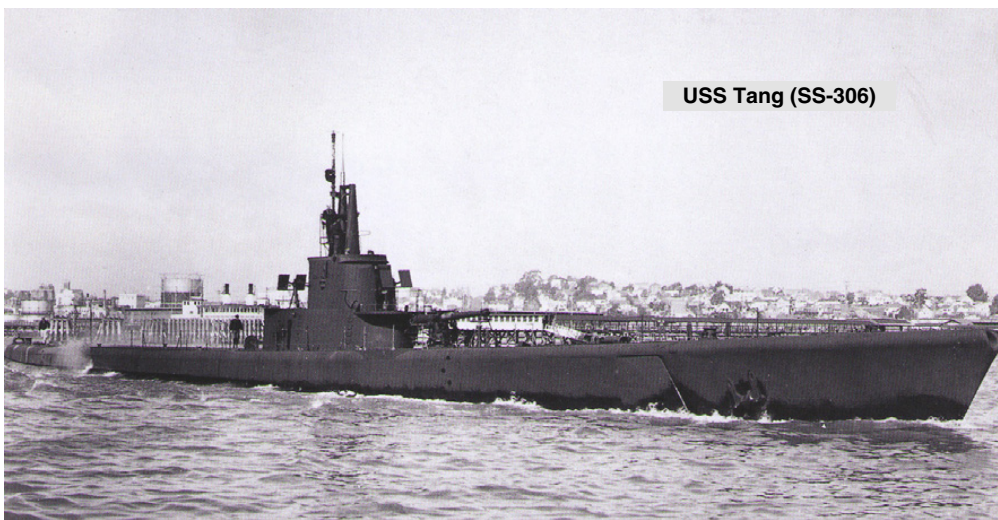


Bizarre, Fascinating, and Wacky World War I & II Secrets. The Submarine That Sank Itself

It was Tuesday night, October 24, 1944, and the American submarine USS Tang (SS-306) was nearing the end of her fifth war patrol. The Tang had fired twenty two torpedoes at enemy ships, resulting in thirteen being sunk. The skipper, Commander R. H. O'Kane, ordered the sub to surface to finish a Japanese transport ship that was stopped earlier. This was in an area called the Formosa Straits, between the coasts of Formosa and China. The USS Tang had only two torpedoes left. Then she had to be re-fueled and re-armed by a submarine tender. (A supply ship for our submarines) The first torpedo was fired, and made a



USS Tang (SS-306)

straight line for the ship's middle. When the last torpedo was fired, the most bizarre and most wacky thing happened! The Tang's torpedo curved sharply to the left and flipped over on its side. Next, it made a circle, and headed back, straight for the Tang's broadside! Quickly, Commander O'Kane shouted into the intercom, "emergency speed ahead full and full right rudder!" The sub's big diesel engines roared to life, and it began to move. But the torpedo was too close to be dodged completely. So it struck the stern (rear) of the Tang, and a violent explosion followed! It was so severe that sailors in the control up front received broken bones. (Remember, the torpedo was loaded with 1,000 lbs. of TNT.) The three after (back) compartments flooded quickly, and the sub sank to the bottom in 180 ft. of water!

Nine officers and sailors were on the sub's bridge, but only three were strong enough to swim through the night. For they were not rescued until eight hours later. A few of the crew gathered in a front compartment. Only thirteen were able to escape, for the surface was a long way up. If a sailor goes straight up too

quickly, he will get a bad case of the "bends". That will cause gas bubbles to form in the bloodstream, which will either paralyze you or kill you. But the Navy had developed a me-

chanical lung that could help you escape. Every submariner must learn to use one before passing boot camp. Of the thirteen sailors who escaped from the sub, only eight were able to reach the surface. And only five of these were strong enough to swim until rescued.

There were only nine survivors, seventy eight submariners were lost! The nine survivors were picked up by a Japanese destroyer escort. Onboard they were beat half to death, because the ship was carrying survivors from the ships that the Tang had torpedoed! They languished in a Japanese prisoner of war concentration camp until the war was over.

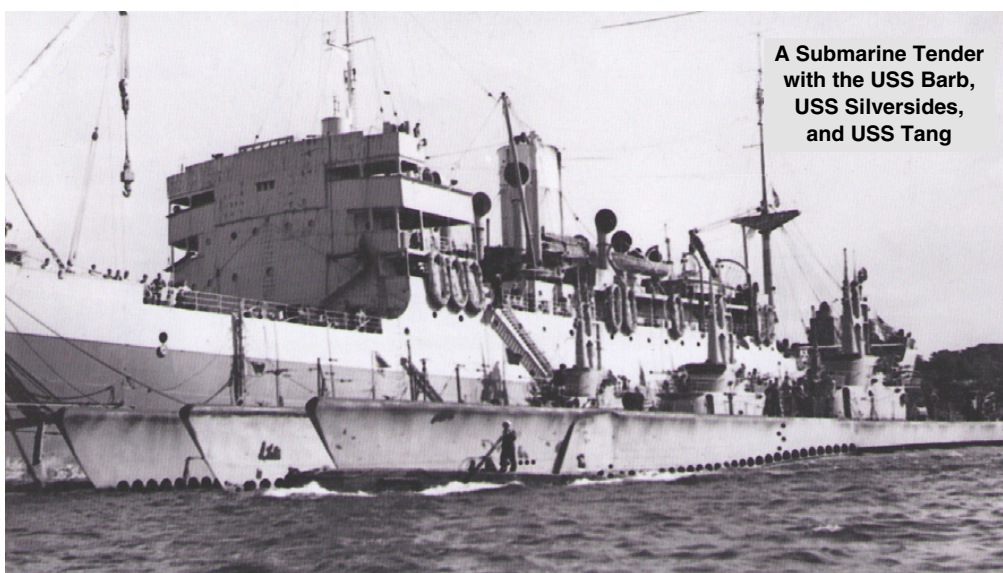
The USS Tang was launched on August 17, 1943. The skipper was Lieutenant Commander O'Kane. As he had a new submarine and a green crew, he had to give orders for a shake-down cruise so the crew could become familiar with the sub and each other, also to work out any "bugs" that might be found in the sub. And it is drill, drill, drill, in order to train the crew.

One of the most important drills is dive, dive, dive, clear the conning tower. Then the sailors on watch must jump quickly down

the hatch (door), into the sub. The Submariners must learn to make a 311 ft. 9 inch submarine, sailing along at 20 knots, disappear completely beneath the waves.... in just under 60

seconds. And this does take lots and lots of practice, but it can mean the difference between life and death, especially if the sub has been spotted by enemy airplanes.

The USS Tang was one of the "Gato" class submarines. This was adopted as our standard type of submarine of World War Two. Two hundred of these Gatos were built during the war.



A Submarine Tender with the USS Barb, USS Silversides, and USS Tang

They had a welded hull, which made them much stronger, and allowed them to dive down to 300 ft. if necessary. Their length was 311 ft. 9 inches and 27 ft. 3 inches wide. Their armament was 10 torpedoes (each was loaded with 1,000 lbs. of TNT), and topside on deck was either a 3 inch or 5 inch gun. Some also had either 20mm or

40mm anti-aircraft guns. The Tang had an impressive speed of 20 knots on the surface (almost 23 MPH) and half that speed when submerged. Every inch of space on a submarine has to

be used. But conditions were still very cramped; some submariner's beds were on top of the spare torpedoes. But the submarines were designed to give every consideration possibly to the crew. So morale is always very high, and it is like one big happy family. (80 sailors make a full crew) The only way you could become a submariner

was to volunteer. Then the training was so tough, only 50 percent of the volunteers made it through boot camp. This was called "the silent service", even today most people know very little about it.

One out of every seven submariners lost his life, and one submarine out of four never returned. When Japan started World War

Two with us, they sank and crippled our US Navy Surface Fleet very very severely. However, our Pacific submarine fleet of 55 submarines was left untouched. And during the course of the war, we built and launched 204 more.

Few people know that our US submarines waged the only complete successful submarine offensive of the war.... by completely strangling the lifelines of the maritime nation. Japan was already doomed to defeat, because their merchant ships, which brought essential supplies, had nearly all been sunk. At least 63 percent of these ships were sunk by our submarines.

The USS Tang had only five war patrols, but established a record that was equaled by no other submarine in World War Two. On her first patrol near Truk Island, in the South Pacific, three freighters, one large tanker, and one submarine tender were sunk. In the second patrol, also near Truk, the Tang supported US carrier planes, attacking Japanese held islands there.

While there, the Tang rescued twenty two carrier pilots that were shot down.

Sometimes, to accomplish this, the Tang had to slip deep into the Truk Island Lagoon. This was very dangerous, because the Truk was a very heavy Japanese stronghold. The skipper, Commander R.H. O'Kane was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. He



by Cecil Owen

was called the submarine's most outstanding officer.

The third patrol found the Tang in the East China and Yellow seas. This time six freighters, one tanker, and one large aircraft transport was sunk.

In August, 1944, the Tang was operating along the southern coast of Honshu, Japan. Here one freighter, one large transport, one tanker, and two patrol craft were sunk. Also, one freighter, and one small patrol craft were damaged.

On her last patrol, the Tang sunk thirteen Japanese ships, totaling 107,324 tons. (And damaged two more)

In the Tang's five war patrols, she is credited with sinking thirty one Japanese ships totaling 227, 800 tons. Commander O'Kane and his entire crew are all national unsung heroes of the United States Navy's "silent service".

A total of 1,292 Japanese ships were sunk by our submarines during World War Two. But we paid a price too, for 52 of our submarines never did return. They are still on patrol, somewhere in the vast depth of the Pacific Ocean. (For there are no tombstones in the sea) They are indeed "the silent service".

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