

# THE **A**merican

March, 1943: p. 26

## WE RAID THE COAST OF JAPAN



**Little Has Been Told of the Navy's Deadly Undersea Killers, Who Strike Across the Pacific to the Very Shores of Japan. A Submarine Officer Tells the Thrilling Story of a Fighting Crew That Crept Through Perilous Enemy Patrols and Endured the Bone-Jarring Hell of Exploding Depth Bombs to sink Thousands of Tons of Tojo's Precious Ships**

BY LIEUT. *Slade Cutter*, U.S.N.

WITH DON EDDY



THE United States submarine of which I was executive officer and navigator, had been operating against the enemy in the vicinity of Japanese-held islands when, one afternoon, our captain, Lieutenant Commander Lewis S. Parks, called me to his cabin.

I thought his eyes gleamed with unusual excitement, but he only said casually, "Good news, Slade," and handed me a wireless he had just received. I held it to the light and read:

"PROCEED AT ONCE TO THE COAST OF JAPAN—"

Sometimes it is difficult to repress an impulse to whoop with delight, and this was one of those times. This was the moment we had lived for, the moment every submariner dreams about.

We turned and cruised steadily westward in the days that followed, practicing incessantly at the business of submarine warfare. Not that we needed much practice. . . .

We were 130 miles off Pearl Harbor when the war began, and missed the first big show. By the time the smoke had cleared away we had our orders and were sliding through a sullen, turbulent sea, on our first war patrol.

You'd have thought we were going on a picnic. The men were singing and whistling at their work as I made a routine inspection. It felt like the night before the Big Game. Our submarine is no plaything; she's 25 feet wide and 300 feet long—as long, exactly, as a football field—and every cubic inch of her insides was fairly crackling with electric excitement.

## Undersea Killers



*THE AUTHOR, a former Annapolis football and boxing star, was executive officer of a U. S. submarine which blasted Jap shipping*

We were ready. War was our trade. True, we had learned it by playing at problems. Not a man of us had ever killed a human being or fired a shot in anger. No one had ever tried to kill us. Yet we had always known that the hour might strike, and now it had come. Now we were playing for keeps. We were eager to get at it.

The Pacific was jittery in those first days of war, and we took no chances with airplanes. Friend or foe, we dived first and asked questions afterward. Planes put us down five times the first day, and the following day we were bombed twice. The second attack was a bad one.

Our lookouts saw three planes peel out of a cloud 2,500 feet away. We made a quick dive and were under when the first bomb went off a short distance away. It was a sharp, cracking explosion, like a big firecracker. We in the control-room were congratulating ourselves, when suddenly Quartermaster Cox, my assistant navigator, looked at me with a peculiar expression. "Hear that, sir?" he asked.

"No. What?"

at his station as I passed through, and their voices were steady.

"Any damage here?"

"No, sir." . . . "All fast here, sir."

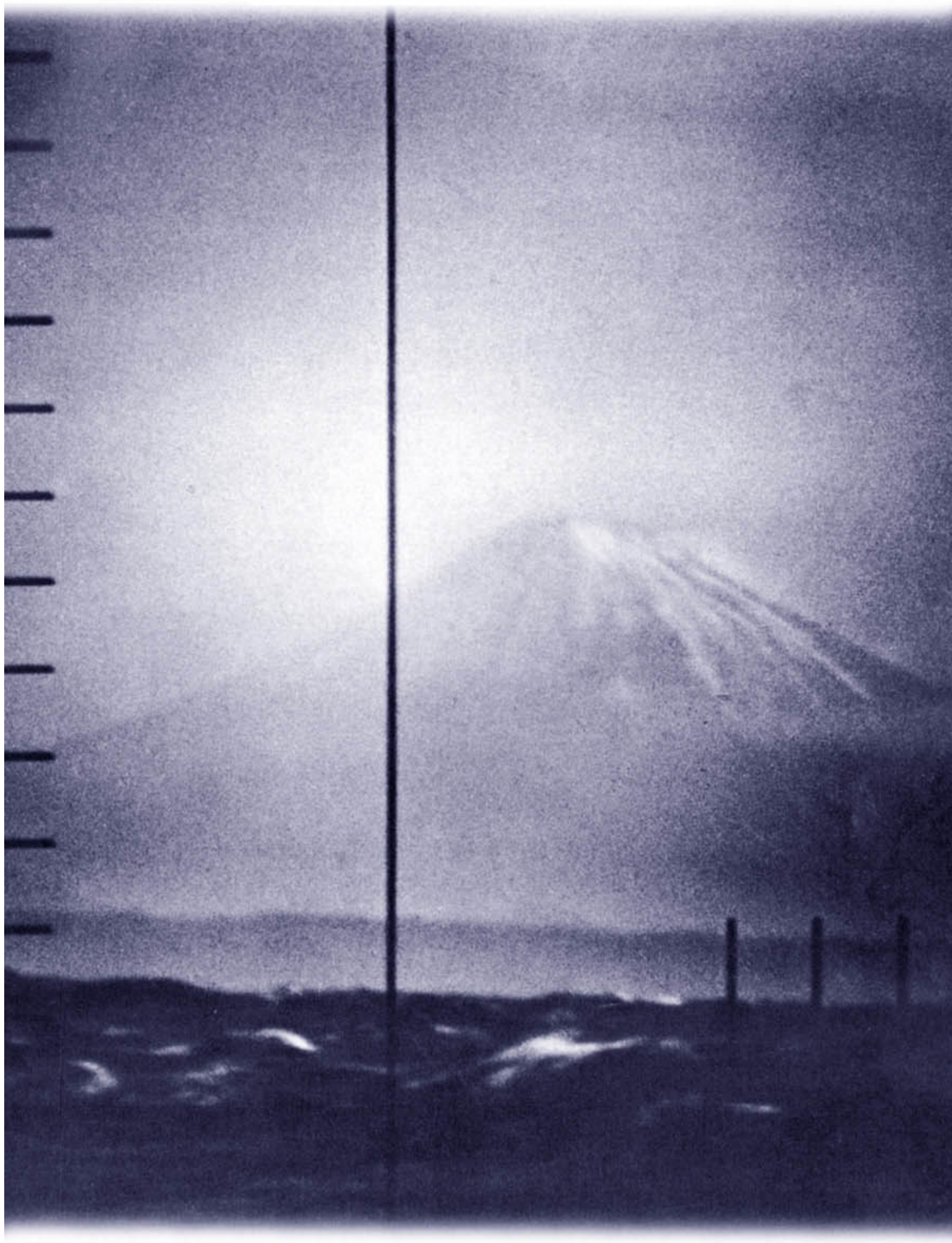
Thirty-six men slept in the after battery compartment in tiers of bunks. As I neared the bulkhead door, I heard a man cursing furiously. He swung around as I entered, and I saw that it was Herbert Calcaterra, a handsome California giant whom his mates called "Chainfall" because of his great strength. He had been off duty and asleep.

"What's the matter, Calcaterra?"

"My mother, sir!" He was in a blind rage. "Those blasted devils bombed her off the bulkhead."

It took a few questions to establish that he meant his mother's picture, which he had fastened above his bunk with adhesive tape. The explosion had jarred it loose. By a freak, it had slipped through

## Undersea Killers



*Mt. Fuji as seen through a U.S. Navy periscope*

the doorway into the engine-room, through a grating and into the muck of the bilge. Calcaterra was just twenty-two and devoted to his mother. He never forgave the Japs. He hated them with a savage ferocity to the instant he died.

And that was our introduction to warfare. No other bombs came near. When we determined that the ship had not been seriously injured, we stayed down for the rest of the day, and thus took up a new mode of life. Days, we idled along on batteries beneath the surface. We dived each dawn and seldom surfaced until after dark. Nights, we ran on our Diesel engines while charging our batteries and changing the inside air.

prize. And we decided, too, that she was our duck. We stood on and off the harbor mouth for three days waiting for her.

It was a midmorning when the Captain turned from the periscope and said quietly, "Here she comes."

Twenty-five minutes later we had maneuvered into position. As we came cautiously to periscope depth, the Captain, cool as ice, never taking his eye from the finder, remarked in a mild conversational tone, "Stand by torpedo tubes—fire number one!"

**T**HE ship jerked convulsively as the torpedo left the tube. A moment later, on command, we fired a second. Then a third, and a fourth. A lifetime of tension had passed. I glanced at the chronometer. It had been exactly 55 seconds.

The Captain said suddenly, "Hit!"

An instant later a shudder ran through the submarine. After an appreciable interval we heard the muffled sound of the first explosion, followed by the others.

The Captain said: "She's settling."

The atoll erupted like an angry anthill. Patrol ships boiled out of the harbor. Planes roared up. The sea was very rough so we went deeper to reload the torpedo tubes in case we had to polish her off, proceeding steadily toward the stricken ship.

Through the loud-speaker system, from his listening post in the bow, Ensign Roger Paine, our sound officer, reported laconically, "Screws slowing down." After a brief interval: "Screws stopped."

There was a long period of silence. Suddenly Roger said in a puzzled tone, "I hear considerable crackling disturbance in the direction of the target. I've never heard anything like it. I cannot identify it."

It was deathly quiet in the ship. We waited. Nothing happened.

The Captain said into his microphone, "What do you hear, Roger?"

The answer came promptly: "Nothing, sir. Nothing at all."

We eased up to periscope depth and took a look. Where the big ship had been, the sea was empty. We knew then that Roger, through his listening apparatus, had heard the death rattle of our first victim.

## Undersea Killers



*A U.S Navy submarine of W.W. II*

But there were other worth-while targets off the islands. One was a heavily armed patrol ship which was coursing about like a sniffing terrier a few miles away. He was trying to find us. Jubilant over our first victory, we determined to turn the tables. We circled and began to stalk him.

It was a long time before we could maneuver into position for a shot. When we achieved it finally, we fired two torpedoes. I had barely taken my hand from the firing button when there was an enormous explosion just ahead. There was only one explanation: one of our torpedoes had exploded prematurely. The jig was up.

The patrol ship turned and drove for us at full speed, his bow wave curling high. We fired two more torpedoes into his path before we dived. His first depth charges exploded quite close. After an appreciable interval the second salvo went off, apparently near our bow. It lifted the nose of our ship to a sharp angle, and the whooshing sound of the water rushing *up* each side of the hull was like a heavy cataract.

That was our first depth-charge attack. After that rugged day any of us could tell the difference between a depth charge and an aerial bomb as far as we could hear them. Where the bomb makes a sharp crack, the depth charge makes a dull, heavy roar.

Men who keep busy don't get frightened, which is one reason every man has a job to do during an attack. This time, for some reason, we neglected to give one man an assignment. I noticed him during one of my inspection tours. He was stretched out on a seat in the crew's messroom, apparently asleep. I shook him sharply and called his name. He didn't stir. I felt his face. It was clammy. I had never seen a case of nervous prostration before, but I knew the symptoms. I covered him with blankets and left him there. Hours later he awakened. He had no memory of anything after the first or second depth charge. He was desperately humiliated, felt he was disgraced for life—and became one of the bravest, coolest men we had aboard.

Another cool hand was "Doc" Joseph Duane, our pharmacist's mate. "Doc" was not only a good pill prescriber but a first-class fighting man, and it was he who gave us the laugh we needed.

**A**T THE height of our difficulties, while we were using desperate evasive tactics to save our hides, Sound Officer Paine, at his listening apparatus, kept up a running fire of reports on the whereabouts of our nemesis.

"Target to starboard," he would call. Or, "Target abaft the port beam." "Target" this. "Target" that.

It was proper naval talk, but as a depth charge exploded close to our stern, Duane burst into uproarious laughter. "Saints in heaven!" he howled. "Sound still thinks that guy's the target!"

Shortly thereafter the patrol ship left us and we shed no tears over his going. We inspected every inch of the ship and found no damage we could not repair ourselves. But when we had attained the safety of the deep sea we discovered we were completely done in. My bunk felt good that night.

Yet it takes more than that to knock a submariner down. I was awakened after two or three hours by a good-natured tumult, and tumbled out to find the crew fairly bubbling with high spirits. There was a fresh kettle of sizzling doughnuts, and coffeepots were steaming. The phonograph was going full blast.

As I reached for coffee, I noticed big Calcaterra standing soberly at my elbow, an unspoken question in his eyes.

"What's on your mind?" I asked.

"Sir," he said, "you know that so-and-so back there. We're not going to let him get away with that stuff, are we?"

## Undersea Killers

"I haven't heard the orders," I told him.

"We ought to go back there, sir," he said earnestly. "We ought to get that guy. He can't treat us like that."

Calcaterra was doomed to disappointment. We didn't return. Just after that we received the orders I mentioned at the beginning of this report—orders to raid the coast of Japan. . . .

**T**HE Japanese coastal patrol system extends many miles to sea and is painstakingly thorough. We should know; we ran the gantlet more than once. The first time we got very close to shore before we were spotted. Just before daylight, as we were preparing to dive, a patrol boat came at us with its guns spitting. We didn't want to waste torpedoes—we were a long way from replacements—so decided to fight it out with our deck guns. It was our first surface engagement and it proved almost disappointingly brief. One of our first shells struck the enemy's magazine and he simply disintegrated. We cruised over the area, but found no survivors.

A day or two later, and in the same neighborhood, we spotted a big tanker about sunrise. After some maneuvering we gave him three torpedoes. All were hits. The third struck aft, and must have exploded his boilers. There was a terrific blast that blew parts of his bridge clear over his mainmast, and he sank in three minutes and four seconds. He went down by the stern, his bow rising high in the air, to give us an excellent view of the rising sun painted on it. We surfaced and cruised among the men in the water, intending to give them emergency supplies, but a bomber came winging out from the land and we had to dive.

At this time we were in the busy steamer lane between Yokohama and Singapore where important targets might be expected. So, when Lieut. (j.g.) Ralph Pleatman saw a heavy smudge on the horizon one afternoon, we hurried over to investigate. It proved to be a troop transport of 13,600 tons, heavily loaded with men and supplies and escorted by a large destroyer. It was headed for Singapore.

We had a ticklish problem. The destroyer was weaving a zigzag course which could not be predicted. It was a long time before we could maneuver into a position off the transport's port beam. We gave her two torpedoes. Both hit. Before we could turn, the destroyer was coming for us full speed, following down the torpedo tracks. We dived and maneuvered to safety. When the destroyer had to leave us to pick up survivors, we raised our periscope in time to see the transport settle slowly on an even keel. We surfaced in the early darkness and headed toward the spot, but an approaching destroyer drove us down and we moved on to new hunting grounds.

An interisland freighter was our next target. We decided to attack with our deck gun to save torpedoes, so surfaced at point-blank range and let go. We had fired 17 rounds, when three things happened simultaneously: Our gun jammed with a projectile wedged in the barrel, their ship caught fire, and the Japs surrendered by striking their colors and running up a weird assortment of white cloths ranging from sheets to underwear. They took to their rafts, and their ship continued to burn until she sank.

A short time later we sank a trawler in a brief gun battle, and then moved in to the very coast of Japan, barely a mile off the beach. The water is very deep there and we were pestered a good deal by small boats. We decided they were units of the inshore patrol. We felt sure they were looking for us.

In a way, those were the most delightful days of the patrol. During the daylight we cruised along the sea lanes at periscope depth seeking worth-while targets. Nights, we would surface in a quiet spot, usually in the lee of one of the many small islands, to charge our batteries. It was there that I smelled for the first time the strange, haunting fragrance of the Japanese forests. At dawn we lay offshore for a long time, watching the people.

Lieutenant Dave Connole, standing periscope watch one morning, electrified the ship by reporting: "Target off the starboard bow!" We had been idle just long enough to crave excitement. After a time Dave added, "She's a freighter—a big one." We estimated her at 7,000 tons displacement. She looked like a push-over.

As we moved up to let her have it, we discovered that she had been masking an escort destroyer. He was on her opposite side; we couldn't hope for a more favorable opportunity. Without delay, we fired a bow tor-

## Undersea Killers

pedo. It had barely left the tube when the destroyer swung sharply and came charging toward us. We fired another torpedo into his path.

What followed was a submariner's dream.

The first torpedo hit the freighter squarely amidships, throwing a column of water over her superstructure. She took on a heavy list, and started settling by the stern.

The destroyer was getting dangerously near us.

The cry, "Rig for depth charge attack!" rang through the ship, and barely an instant later there came a second and much louder explosion in the direction of the freighter.

We had made a double kill—the big freighter with our first torpedo, the destroyer with our second.

We waited around until the freighter sank. She went down stern-first in 20 minutes. The whole action had taken place in plain view of the shore and we knew it would stir up a hornets' nest. It did. From that instant, the whole Japanese patrol force seemed concentrated on rubbing us out. We hadn't gone a mile before the bombs began to drop.

At dawn next morning we could see several naval vessels in our vicinity. The finest target was a 15,000-ton auxiliary. We made an approach and fired three torpedoes in rapid succession.

The big fellow saw the torpedoes in the placid water and got out of their way. At the same instant he opened up on us with his 5-inch guns. We could see the flashes and hear the shells striking the water all around, but since only our periscope was above the surface and it presented an almost impossible target, we felt perfectly safe.

But once they had found us, they harried us unceasingly. We ate and slept with the noise of exploding bombs and depth charges in our ears.

Tom McGrath was as weary and haggard as any of us, but his wit was unimpaired, if somewhat corny. "I love to be bombed," he said soberly as we sat over a cup of coffee. "It feels so good when they stop."



*The Submarine Combat Patrol  
Insignia worn by sub crews during  
the Second World War*

**WE WERE** on the surface in the first glow of dawn. In 30 minutes the pack of destroyers came over the horizon again, and we had to make a quick dive.

The strange thing was, none of us wanted to quit. We had been shoved around so long and so hard that we wanted only one thing—revenge. We wanted to hear the sweet music of our torpedoes striking home.

But there are limits to endurance, and the skipper knew it. We headed for a quiet spot we knew among the islands, and there we rested and made repairs.

Our next destination was a thirty-mile stretch of tide-ripped water surging between two headlands. Steamer traffic had to negotiate this narrow channel, so it was well protected. Islands make a series of giant steppingstones across the water, and on one there is a lighthouse with a steady beam. Surrounding the line of islands is a deep, wide bay which forms the ocean gateway to an important Japanese port.

When we came in from the open sea toward three o'clock in the morning of a nasty night, we could see the dull glow of cities on the far horizon. Nearer at hand, the sea was sprinkled with pin points of light, where patrol boats danced in the choppy whitecaps.

As we slid past the outer islands, we studied the lay of the land. We knew it well from the charts. We knew it was well protected, and we dared not silhouette ourselves against the lights of the patrol boats. So, after an hour, we dived to spend the day submerged. It was a long, tense day. From time to time we heard patrol craft, but we were not molested.

**IT WAS** full dark that evening when we surfaced with hardly a ripple. It was soft autumn and the air felt good. The Captain, McGrath, myself, and four lookouts were on the bridge, when one of the lookouts, Blum, spoke at my elbow:

"There's something to port, sir, I think. I can't quite make it out. If it's a ship, it's a big one."

## Undersea Killers

The night was very black. As I turned to look, a blinding finger of light stabbed out of the night and we realized we were caught in the full glare of a three-foot searchlight, probably from a cruiser.

As the light went on, heavy guns winked from three turrets on the big ship and we heard the shells rumble overhead like freight cars and crash into the sea. We were going down the hatch by that time, all seven of us in a stream like drops from a pitcher, and we dived so fast there was no time to fasten the conning-tower hatch. As the water closed over us, four men were hanging from the inside of the hatch to hold it shut. They took a shower as the water streamed in, but after a moment the outside pressure seated the hatch and it could be made fast at leisure.

Did I say leisure? There was to be no leisure for us that night.

Sound reported the destroyers closing in—five of them. For the first time on the cruise, watertight doors were sealed throughout the ship, isolating all compartments. The whole ship became a taut, listening unit.

It wasn't long before the familiar explosions began once more, and it was a long time before the muted voice of the sound officer came through the speakers:

"Very heavy screws approaching with escorts." After a moment he added, "Approaching very rapidly." And after another moment, "They will pass directly over us."

In the cabin across the way, I heard our torpedo and gunnery officer muttering angrily.

"Damn him!" he was saying over and over.

There is something infuriating to a submariner about a target he knows to be within range, yet which he is powerless to attack.

We knew this was a whale of a target, and it made us hopping mad.

Yet this ship we hated helped to save our lives, for it gave us a chance to elude the destroyers, which were still listening for us upstairs.

We got directly under it and started off in the same direction, headed straight for the nearest Japanese port.

The destroyers couldn't hear us, and so we slipped away. In twenty minutes we had lost them. In another ten minutes the big ship had run away and left us. We were alone, under the surface of an island-studded, tide-ripped channel on the coast of Japan. Beyond that, we had only a general idea of where we were.

All at once we struck bottom with a rasping, grating bang. We had not been traveling fast enough to cause serious damage, but it was a disconcerting moment. Almost immediately the stern began to swing slowly around to starboard, and we knew we were caught in the strong tidal current. Before we could take any step to check the swing, the rudder hit something solid and spun the wheel out of the helmsman's hands. He fought it stubbornly.

We did the only thing we could—pulled free and started south, toward the open sea. We were making slow speed when, seven minutes later, the bow struck solidly and the ship stopped dead. Simultaneously, the lights flickered and almost went out.

From his post in the control-room the Captain said quietly, "Be prepared to carry out your orders."

I felt for my weighted sacks of confidential papers. They were where I had tucked them inside my shirt. Then we blew the last drop of ballast water and came up groggily, like a waterlogged stump. The instant we surfaced we threw open the hatch. I wriggled up to the bridge. And the first thing I saw was a brilliant beam of light striking me full in the eyes! It was the steady lighthouse on the island in the channel. It was not more than 100 yards abaft our starboard beam. I looked out the other way, over the sea, and could pick up nothing, not a flicker of light. And I knew we had a gambler's chance of winning free.

**T**HE water we had taken in had flooded the battery-charging engine, but the two forward main engines would run. We set one of them to charging the batteries and put the other on propulsion, and so limped southward toward the open sea. All we could do was keep going and trust in the luck that had carried us through so far. And although that lighthouse leered at us like an evil eye, silhouetting us for anything that might have been watching from outside, our luck held firm. By daybreak all the bad leaks had been repaired, the batteries were charged, and we were on our way once more.

Some days later we sighted a ship lying to,

## Undersea Killers

and approached close aboard at periscope depth. The sea was moderately rough, with enough white plumes to make camouflage for the periscope wake. She was a patrol ship carrying a Y gun and stern rack for depth charges, cannon, and several machine guns. We determined to attack her.

She didn't see us but she must have heard us, for while we were maneuvering into torpedo position she moved off. We had to surface and run full speed to catch her, and by that time a torpedo attack was out of the question. We had to rely on our deck gun.

The battle was joined at a range of a mile and a half. Our first shot was short; our second was over; our third was a direct hit. We went to rapid fire and closed the range. We had fired perhaps 35 rounds, when one of the gunners grunted and slumped to the deck. He was carried below, and another man took his place at the gun. It was done smoothly, without slowing the rate of fire.

As they carried the wounded man past me toward the hatch, I glanced at his face. It was big Calcaterra.

We closed to 1,500 yards, and every salvo hit home, but the Japs fought on. Smoke began to curl out of their hold and flames licked at their deckhouses, but still they continued firing with everything they had. It was an hour and a half before the ship went down beneath them, and they were firing when the water closed over them. In all that time, except for wounding Calcaterra, they had been able to do nothing more serious than knock the paint off our hull.

A few moments after they sank, a terrific explosion shot a geyser of water high into the air as their depth charges let go. Bodies of men flew into the air, yet when we cruised over there four of the Japs were still alive and unhurt. Two of them were lying on a wooden raft. We offered to take them aboard, but they refused.

We put Calcaterra on a cot in the forward torpedo room. I went in to see him at the close of the battle. I asked how he felt.

"Pretty good, sir," he said.

When I went back to see him an hour later he was flushed and half delirious. At 9:25 that night he died. The bullet had ripped his lungs.

Nobody slept that night.

We sewed Calcaterra snugly into a length of clean canvas and draped an American flag across his body. One of the machinists found a heavy wrench we never used, and we fastened that securely to his feet.

**T**OWARD morning the Captain called me to his stateroom. He looked uneasy. "Slade," he said, "do you know any prayers?"

I thought hard. The only one I could remember was the one I'd learned in childhood, the one that goes, "Now I lay me down to sleep—"

"No," said the Captain, "that won't do."

"There's The Lord's Prayer," I remembered suddenly.

"Ah!" he said. He took down the Bible. "Now, let's see," he said; "where do we find The Lord's Prayer?"

We found it after a little search. The Captain said thoughtfully, "There was a Psalm I used to like. Was it the twenty-third?"

"Maybe," I said.

He looked it up and read it to himself, nodding in satisfaction. "I guess that'll do it," he said.

We stopped the ship just as the sun came over the edge of the world, and all of us who were not on duty gathered on the deck. The Captain had put on a fresh uniform and he had the places in the Bible marked with white pipe cleaners. There was no noise aboard and very little wind on the sea, and his voice sounded unnaturally loud.

"The Lord is my Shepherd," he read, "I shall not want . . ."

The words came back to mind as he read them. He started on The Lord's Prayer, and all at once we were all chiming in. And finally he said, "And now, we commit our beloved brother to the deep."

Two men lifted Cal by the shoulders; his feet, with the heavy wrench concealed inside the canvas, slid over the side. They lowered him down and let him go, and he slipped from sight into the opalescent water.

"I think he'd like that," McGrath said, clearing his throat.

Three minutes later we were on our way.