

SCRATCH

Three Subs

BY LIEUTENANT RICHARD H. WALKER

Over the course of several nights in February 1945, what had been a slow and disappointing war patrol for the *Batfish* turned into a record-setting mission.



By most any measure, Richard Walker had a remarkable World War II career. Graduating from the U.S. Naval Academy on 19 June 1942 in the accelerated class of 1943, he was on board the USS Honolulu (CL-48) less than two months later when she participated in the bombardment of Japanese-held Kiska Island in the Aleutians. After that taste of action, the cruiser, with Walker still on board, participated in three Solomon Islands battles: Tassafaronga, Kula Gulf, and Kolombangara.

With the Honolulu undergoing extensive repairs after sustaining a torpedo hit at Kolombangara, a request Walker had submitted for transfer to submarines was granted, and in September 1943 he entered submarine school in New London, Connecticut. On 24 April 1944, Walker reported aboard the USS *Batfish* (SS-310), a Balao-class fleet boat, in time for her third patrol. He would serve as her torpedo and gunnery officer. In the following edited transcript from Lieutenant Walker's account of his wartime service, he recounts what would be a record-setting patrol, which began when the *Batfish* departed Pearl Harbor on 30 December.¹

We made our sixth and last patrol in the South China Sea between the Philippines and China. We spent quite a bit of time off Hainan and Hong Kong without making any contacts. We finally went south of Hainan and found one small ship that was running back and forth, making some sort of a milk run between harbors down there. We closed in for one of the most beautiful shots I've ever seen. We fired at 900 yards—90-degree track, zero gyro—and missed.² That sort of thing is breaking the hearts of a lot of submarine skippers these days. We set our torpedoes for four feet, and there was no reason why they shouldn't hit. Our sound tracked them to and beyond the target, they must have gone deep.

After almost three weeks in this very unproductive spot we were given orders to proceed north of Luzon. We were told that five submarines were being used for evacuation of officials from Luzon, carrying them up to Formosa.³ Fortunately, we were provided with rough departure dates and a fairly good course, or track, for the enemy submarines. After three days in the area, one night we picked up what we all soon recognized as Japanese submarine radar 158 on our APR.⁴ We closed in and finally picked him up on the radar itself, made a pretty fine pip, and we closed in for an approach.

Our first approach on this sub was a stern approach. We were coming in from his quarter. He was making about 12 knots on the surface. We got

in pretty close but just at the time we fired we were presented with a pretty bad shot. For an electric torpedo, a quarter shot is pretty tough because it runs slowly and has to go quite a ways to catch up, so we missed on that approach.

We made an end around run, decided to make a surface approach from his bow, trying to get a 90-degree-track, zero-gyro shot. This we were able to do. We reached a position about 1,200 yards on his beam, closed in, fired three torpedoes, one of which hit and undoubtedly sank this particular submarine.

We sighted him just about the time of firing, and he was positively identified as a submarine, and we believe he was just commencing a dive. He must have seen us at the same time, but our torpedoes got to him before he got down. We were pretty happy about this, because even just sinking one small Japanese submarine makes a pretty successful patrol. I don't think there's a more nerve-racking thing in this business than one submarine chasing another one. We all had the "jits" pretty badly about it the next day,

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On 24 March 1945, Lieutenant Richard Walker visited the Navy Department in Washington, D.C., where his war recollections, including those of the *Batfish's* sixth patrol, were recorded.

thinking he could have gotten us just as easily as we had gotten him.

We went back to the spot the next day, stayed underwater, but searched the area pretty much for any wreckage that we might find, any debris floating on the water, and all we got for our efforts was a torpedo fired at us by some unknown source. I had the deck at the time, and I'm thoroughly convinced that it was an airplane that we had seen in the periscope observation shortly before. We were at 60 feet then, and the soundman reported an unusual noise astern of us. I asked him what it sounded like, and he said it sounded "damn like a torpedo." So, we pulled the plug and went down to about 200 feet, and the thing passed right astern of us. It's the biggest scare I've got out of this war.

The next night we came back to the surface and thought we might possibly repeat. On the 8-to-12 watch that night, sure enough, we picked up another contact. We had the same 158 signal on the APR, so we were fairly convinced that it was another submarine. We chased this fellow for quite a while. Finally we got up alongside of him and decided to make a submerged radar approach. We eased up to him in the same fashion, had a beautiful shot from about, oh the torpedo run was less than 800 yards. A shot like that you can't miss and we didn't. He blew up and started to sink and continued to blow up for about five minutes. Can't quite figure out what it was. We guessed that he might have been carrying ammunition or something of that sort down to Luzon along with his evacuation runs, because about two minutes after our torpedo hit him, he blew up with a shake that just about tossed us out of the water.

Well, after two submarines we figured we were pretty much a bunch of heroes or something, because up to that time no submarine had ever sunk two Japanese submarines in one patrol. We would have been very glad to

have cleared the area then. We didn't want to stretch our luck, we'd gone up against two submarines and been able to outguess both of them. However, we had to stay in the area, and the third night was pretty much of a blank. We patrolled the area and had quite a bit of trouble with aircraft. They interfered with our battery charge, but we were able to get it in. We spent that next day submerged, came back out on the surface that night, and ran into the same 158 APR signal again.

We had a little trouble with this fellow. We made an end around on him, got into perfect firing position, and he dived. We were about 1,200 yards away at the time and might possibly have gotten a torpedo shot at him as he was going down. But we decided to hold our fire and figured, it being nighttime, he wouldn't stay underwater long. To keep him from making an approach on us, we bent on four engines and turned away.

Not more than five minutes later, I had the deck again, it being the 8-to-12 watch, the sound man reported large blowing noises, which we assumed to be him blowing his main ballast tanks. This proved correct, for shortly afterward we had the 158 on the APR again. We turned back in his direction, picked him up, made our usual end around, got into a beautiful firing spot, made another submerged radar approach, and really got a sock at this one. We watched him blow up on the radar before we heard the bang, and we had the periscope up in time to see the flash, and away he went.


I was surprised that all three torpedoes didn't hit him. We had a beautiful solution on the TDC that time, and I figured he must have blown up or gone down too fast, otherwise at least one of the other fish should have hit him.⁵

We surfaced right after that. We were getting rather elated with our submarine sinkings, and we really wanted a survivor. We popped up on the surface, mounted our searchlight, gave the area a

pretty good going over. We found quite a bit of debris and the usual amount of diesel fuel oil, but couldn't find any bodies or anything to carry back.

The next morning we came back to the spot and picked up a little of the plunder—got a box full of navigation equipment and were able by this to plot this submarine's track from the Empire down to Formosa.⁶ It made a pretty interesting souvenir, and later pages were torn from this navigation notebook and presented to everyone in the crew.

Oh, at that time we had three Jap subs and we were really ready to go back.⁷ Fortunately, we only had two more days in area, which were unproductive, and we left station in company with the *Archerfish* [SS-311] and proceeded to Guam.

That wound up our sixth war patrol. At Guam we were told we were going back to the States for an overhaul, major overhaul. We proceed to Pearl Harbor, where we were congratulated soundly, and everybody had a very fine time making plans for going back to the States. Our submarine at that time had been at sea and in action for the better part of 17 months; most of the crew hadn't been back in well over a year. Some of them hadn't been back in two, two and a half years, so on the sixth of March we left Pearl Harbor for the States and arrived in San Francisco on the 13th. 

1. "Narrative by Lieutenant Richard H. Walker, USN," transcript of recording, RG 38, World War II Oral Histories . . . , National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD.

2. A 90-degree-track, zero-gyro-angle shot has a high probability of a hit. The torpedo runs on a straight line from the submarine and theoretically impacts the target ship at a 90-degree angle.

3. According to historian Clay Blair Jr., the Japanese submarines were reportedly evacuating pilots. Blair, *Silent Victory: The Submarine War Against Japan* (Philadelphia and New York: J. B. Lippincott, 1975), 833.

4. The *Battfish's* APR radar detector picked up the enemy boat's 158-megacycle (mgc) signal.

5. The TDC is the torpedo data computer.

6. Empire refers to the Japanese home islands.

7. The three submarines were *Ro-115*, *Ro-112*, and *Ro-113*, all 199-foot, 10-inch *Ro-100*-class boats. Blair, *Silent Victory*, 833–34.

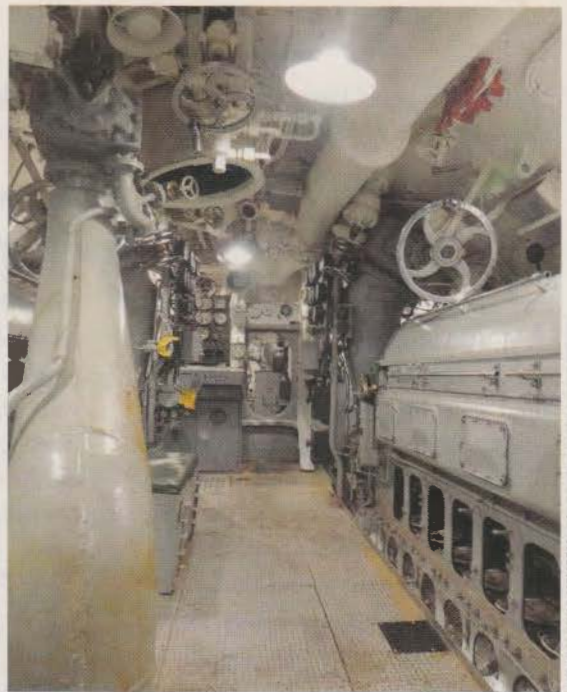
A Closer Look at a Fleet Boat

Balao-class submarines had the cruising range of *Gato*-class boats—11,000 nautical miles—but their thicker, improved hulls enabled them to dive 100 feet deeper. They comprised the largest class of subs in the U.S. Navy, with 122 completed between 1942 and 1947. Here's a look inside a *Balao* featuring historical and present-day photos of the *Batfish* (SS-310).



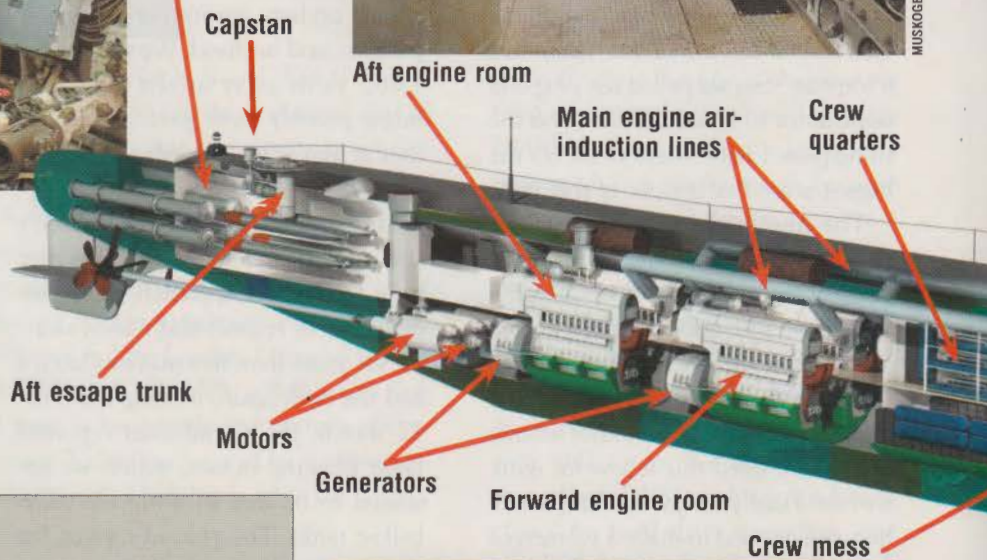
MUSKOGEE WAR MEMORIAL PARK AND MUSEUM (BRENT TROUT)

Aft torpedo room



MUSKOGEE WAR MEMORIAL PARK AND MUSEUM (BRENT TROUT)

Aft engine room



Tanks

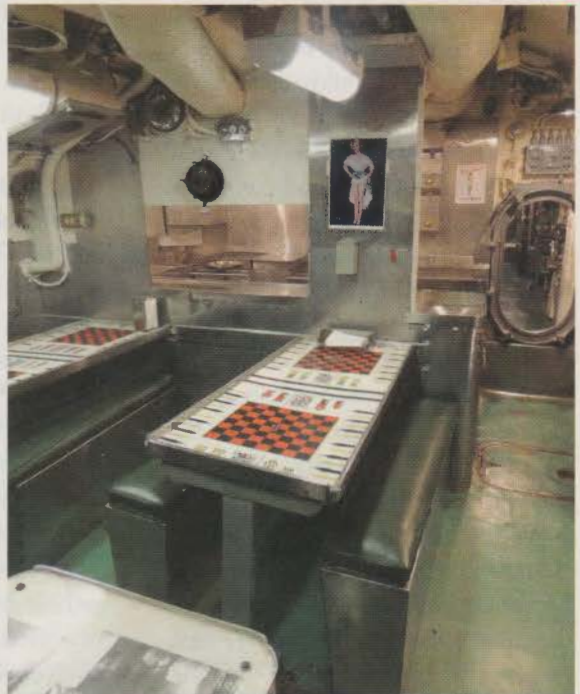
- Ballast
- Fuel
- Fresh Water

Balao-class submarine

Length:	311 feet, 9 inches
Beam:	27 feet, 3 inches
Displacement (tons):	1,525 (surfaced); 2,415 (submerged)
Speed (knots):	20.25 (surface); 8.75 (submerged)
Surface endurance:	11,000 nautical miles at 10 knots
Test depth:	400 feet
Tubes:	6 x 21-inch bow, 4 x 21-inch stern
Torpedoes:	24
Guns (<i>Batfish</i> , sixth patrol):	1 5-inch/25-caliber gun 1 Bofors 40-mm cannon 1 Oerlikon 20-mm antiaircraft gun .50-caliber Browning machine guns
Complement:	10 officers, 70–71 enlisted men

Step Inside the *Batfish*

At the Muskogee War Memorial Park and Museum, 3500 *Batfish* Road, Muskogee, Oklahoma, 74403. Phone: (918) 682-6294. For information about the *Batfish*, go to www.ussbatfish.com.



MUSKOGEE WAR MEMORIAL PARK AND MUSEUM (BRENT TROUT)



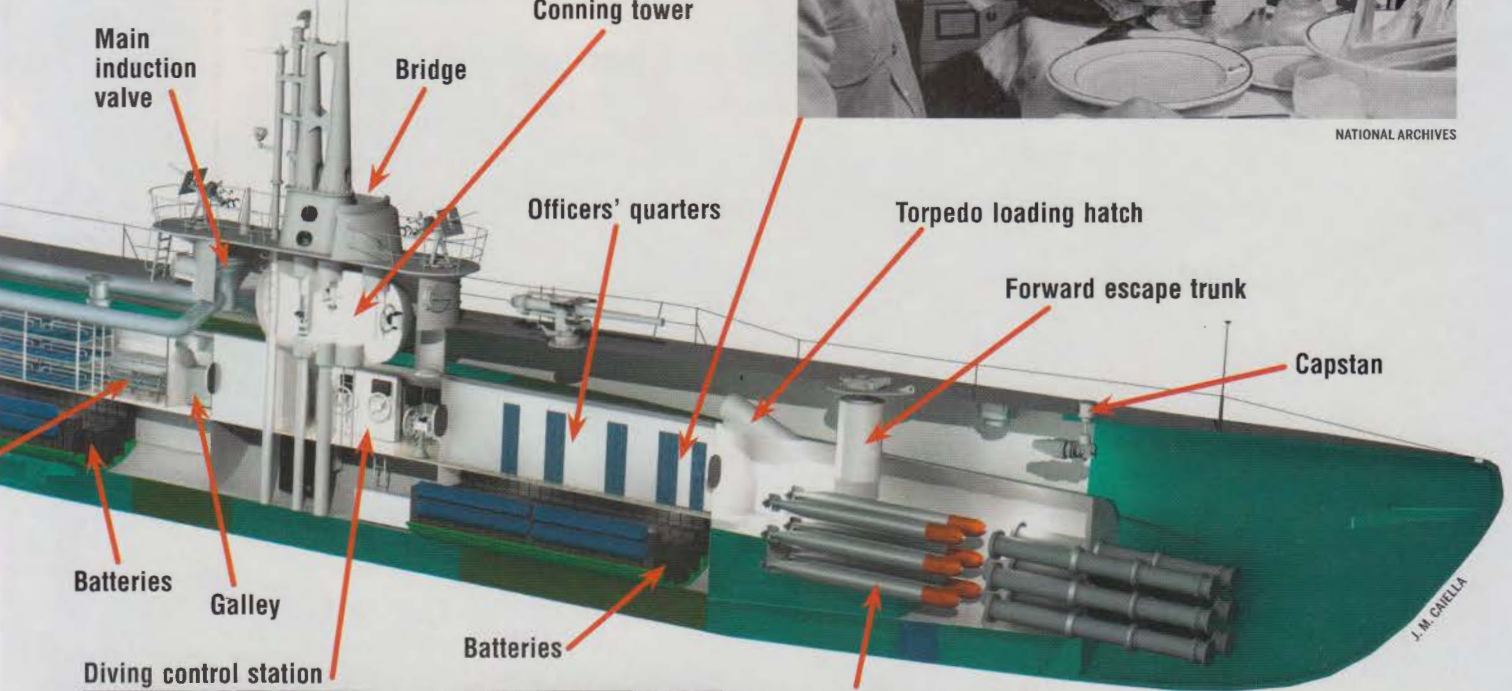
MUSKOGEE WAR MEMORIAL PARK AND MUSEUM (BRENT TROUT)

Conning tower



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Wardroom



Main induction valve

Bridge

Officers' quarters

Torpedo loading hatch

Forward escape trunk

Capstan

Batteries

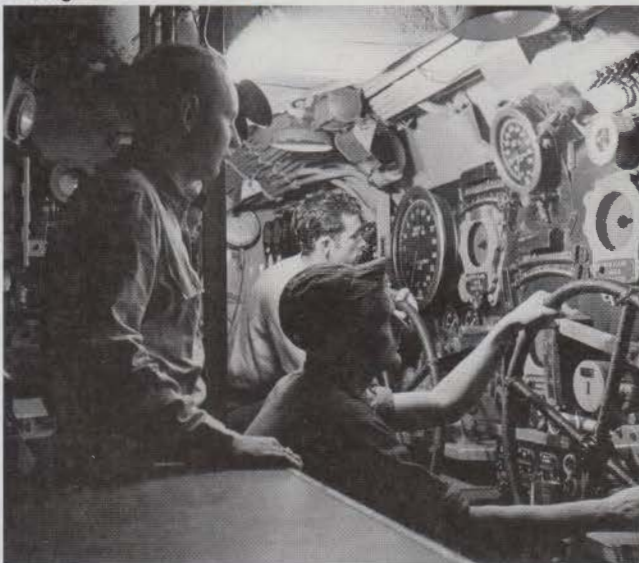
Galley

Batteries

Diving control station

Forward torpedo room

J.M. CHIELLA



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COVER: "Galloping Ghost of the China Coast." Commander E. B. Fluckey's *Barb* (SS-220) races for deep water after a daring surface attack on a Japanese convoy in Namkwan Harbor, China, in January 1945. (U.S. Naval Institute)

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