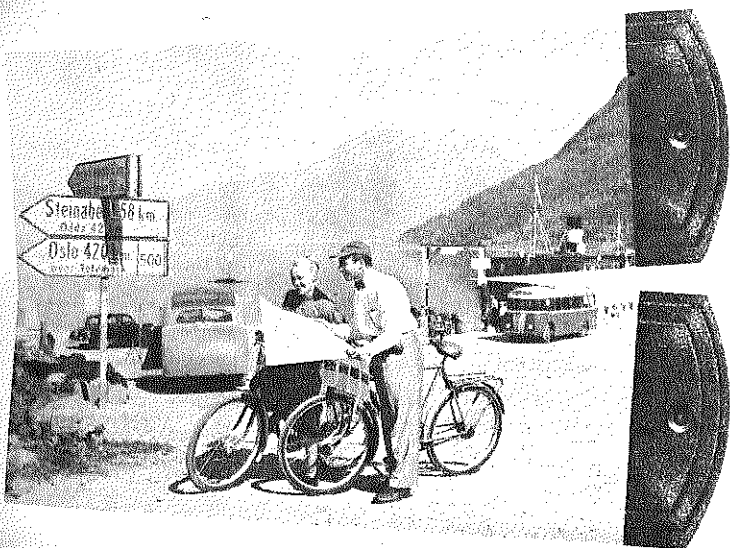




'Battle Stations, Torpedo!'

— — Sixth Patrol
of New Orleans'
USS Battfish



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ROTO MAGAZINE

WARREN C. OGDEN
Editor

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ALEX P. IMPHANG
Art Director

The Cover: She now rides peacefully in the Industrial canal, but 15 years ago her torpedoes were sending Japanese ships to the bottom of the Pacific.

She is the submarine USS Batfish. The thrilling story of her record-setting sixth patrol is told by staff writer John Foster on Pages 8-11. Staff photographer Phil Guarisco made the cover photo and the staff pictures illustrating the story.

In addition to the national ensign, the Batfish flies the Presidential Unit Citation pennant she won on that sixth patrol. The same decoration tops the symbols painted on her conning tower. Below it are ribbons of the American Theater, Asiatic-Pacific campaign and World War II Victory Medal. The Asiatic-Pacific ribbon bears stars representing nine battles. Then come symbols representing the sinking of six Japanese men of war and eight merchant ships, and the damaging of three other Nipponese vessels.

On the bridge is Lt. Norman Cameron, present skipper of the Batfish. E. P. Budd, EM1 (SS), mans the crow's nest, and E. J. Landry, EN2 (SS), is emerging from the gun access hatch.

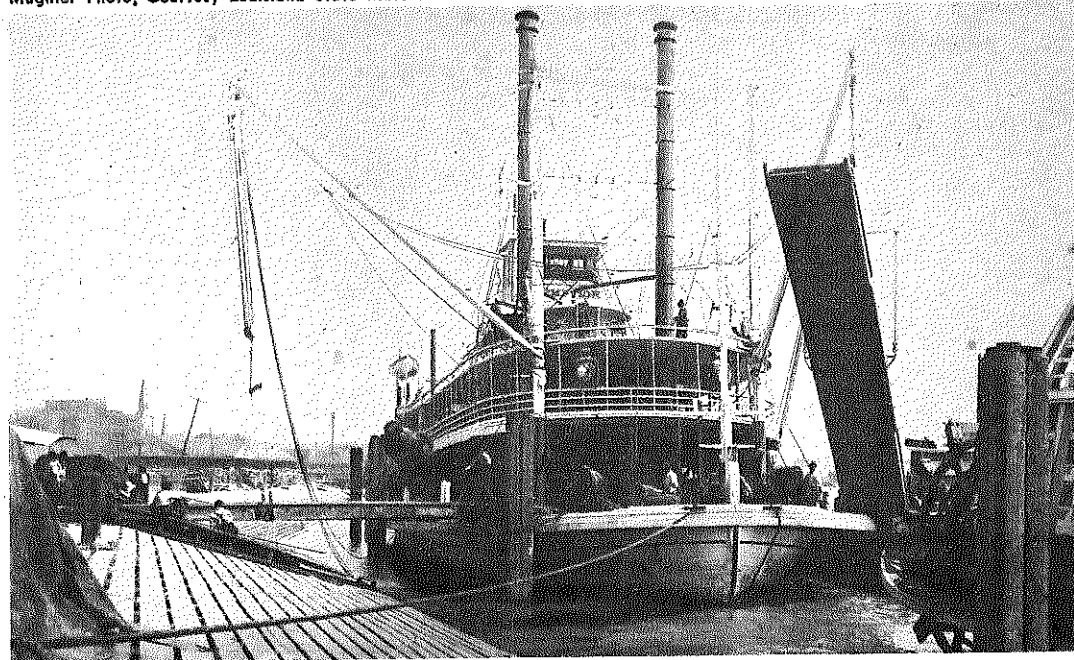
The Batfish, berthed at the Delta Shipyard, now



is used as a training vessel in the Navy Reserve submarine program.

Picture out of Our Past

Mugnier Photo, Courtesy Louisiana State Museum



HER PORT GANGPLANK still hoisted aloft and her starboard one resting on a slanting plank wharf, the steamer Assumption unloads at New Orleans cargo she brought downriver from Thibodaux some time between 1875 and 1895.

She is moored at the site of the present-day Bienville st. wharf, and spires of the St. Louis Cathedral are dimly visible in the left background. A smaller craft named the Maud Vilmot is alongside her, and the fantail of another stern-wheeler is visible at the far right. Among items of interest aboard the Assumption are the buggy and captain's chair on the upper deck.

Leonard V. Huber, treasurer and past president of the Louisiana Landmarks Society and authority on Mississippi riverboat lore, submits the following data on the Assumption:

A Lower Mississippi and Bayou Lafourche pack-

et which ran from New Orleans to Thibodaux, she was built in 1875 at Jeffersonville, Ind., and was 151 feet in length and 35.8 feet in width.

In 1878, her captain was P. A. Charlet and her clerks N. Z. Dupuis and Joe Lagroue. M. H. Landry was clerk in 1883 and F. Gergeron in 1887. In 1894—just before her sad end—the captain was J. J. Dodd and Leonard Noyes was clerk.

The 13th of July, 1895, was an unlucky 13th for the Assumption. Ascending the Mississippi some 30 miles above New Orleans, she struck a hidden obstacle which forced her to sheer and slam into the river bank with such force that she suffered serious damage. She soon afterwards was laid up and gradually fell to pieces.

As for the slanting wharf, the Dock Board reports it was replaced by the present-day Bienville st. wharf in 1931.

'Battle Stations, Torpedo!'

By JOHN FOSTER

UNTIL THE STRANGE SIGNAL showed up on her radar detector, the sixth war patrol of the USS Batfish had been a bore.

So far, the submarine's zenith of excitement had been shooting up a convoy of junks and engaging in a gun duel with a Jap landing barge—small potatoes to the likes of the Batfish, which, on her third war patrol alone, had weathered 67 depth charges, an air bombing, and near misses by two torpedoes. In the process, she had sunk five Jap ships.

Now, more than five weeks out of Pearl Harbor, the sub had already used up her supply of ice cream. The fresh chow was going fast, and all six movies had been



Waves breaking over bow, USS Batfish plows through seas in February of 1945 en route to her record-breaking sixth war patrol in Babuyan channel, north of Luzon

DIXIE, June 5, 1960

shown so many times that the crew knew them by heart. Men had already begun to mark the days, thinking of the return to Pearl Harbor—Pearl with its Navy band on the deck playing "Anchors Aweigh," the truckload of fresh fruit waiting, and the sacks and sacks of mail.

The *Batfish* today is stationed at the Delta Shipyard in New Orleans' Industrial canal, and is used in the Naval Reserve submarine training program. But on Feb. 9, 1945, she was patrolling Babuyan channel, north of the Philippine island of Luzon.

At precisely 10:10 p. m. on that date, a jagged line appeared on the screen of the radar detector in the *Batfish*'s conning tower. The operator notified the officer of the deck, who immediately pressed the buzzer on the A-Call system.

Comdr. John K. "Jake" Fyfe, a 38-year-old native of Fitchburg, Mass., and member of the Naval academy class of '36, had just stretched out his lean, fully clothed frame on the bunk for a few minutes' rest when the buzzer sounded. In seconds he was climbing into the conning tower.

He took one careful look at the target now visible on the *Batfish*'s own radar screen, then switched off the unit. "Jap sub," he snapped. "Battle stations, torpedo!"

The helmsman yanked the general alarm and a gong responded through the ship. "All hands, man your battle stations! All hands, man your battle stations!" The crew (which included Motor Machinist's Mate 1/c Manuel A. Gerhardt of 10004 Suzanne pl., Jefferson parish) ran to their posts.

For the next 79 hours, things would not be boring for the crew of the *Batfish*. She was about to make history.

THE PREVIOUS MONTH, MacArthur had landed on Luzon. Only six weeks ago, he had marched into Manila.

The Japs, skipper Jake Fyfe knew, were using submarines to supply their hard-pressed troops and to evacuate their top brass off the north coast of Luzon. They had radar, although it was inferior to American equipment. Presumably they also had radar detectors. "Keep our radar off except when I give the word," Fyfe ordered. "We don't want to give the Japs the same break that we had."

Bearing of the target was to the southwest, 220 degrees true. The Jap sub was on the surface, probably recharging her batteries, heading north on a zigzag course. Speed 12 knots.

"All ahead flank. Right full rudder," Fyfe commanded.

Her four diesels dug in and the *Batfish* leaped ahead at 21 knots to sweep out and then back, getting into position north of the Jap. It was a black night. On the bridge Fyfe and his lookouts could see nothing. The *Batfish* closed the Jap, using radar.

At 11:31 p. m., at a range of 1350 yards, the *Batfish* fired four torpedoes on radar bearings. Nine minutes later her sonar operator reported four muffled end-of-run explosions. All four fish had missed their target.

"He knows we're here now," Fyfe told his executive officer, Lt. C. K. Sprinkle. "But let's try an end-around and take another crack at him. This time, Sprink, I want to see him with my own eyes before we let go."

Sprinkle smiled wryly. That meant that the *Batfish* would have to come within about 1000 yards of the Jap. An excellent range, but two could play at that game. You had to clobber the Jap before he clobbered you.

The *Batfish* pulled 5000 yards abeam of the Jap sub; then, keeping within American radar distance but outside the range of the enemy's weaker equipment, she powered ahead to set up a new ambush. In the forward torpedo room, the sweating crew wrestled the 3000-pound fish into the tubes. On the bridge, spray drenched Fyfe and his lookouts as they peered through their binoculars for a sign of the Jap.

"Captain, he's on two-four-zero true, speed 12," Sprinkle's metallic voice came over the bridge speaker from the conning tower. "Range 8000. Distance to the track, 3500."

IN THE DIM RED LIGHT of the conn, dials whirred on the torpedo data computer as the operator constantly fed it fresh information. The range kept decreasing: 4000 yards, 3000.

"Captain! He's crossing our bow!" Sprinkle yelled. The men packed in the conning tower looked at each other wonderingly. What was the old man waiting for?

"Come right to three-four-oh," Fyfe ordered calmly into the bridge speaker. "All ahead standard." Calling up to his lookouts, he asked, "Can you see anything yet?"

"Nothing, captain."

But at 1500 yards the man in the crow's nest spotted a darker blur in the darkness and sang out. Feb. 10, 1945, was one minute old when Fyfe clearly made out from the bridge the low silhouette of a Jap I-class submarine 1020 yards ahead. Still he waited, taking a bridge bearing, checking it with the TDC, the range shortening all the time.

At 12:02 a. m., range now a scant 900 yards, Fyfe quietly gave the command, "Fire torpedoes."

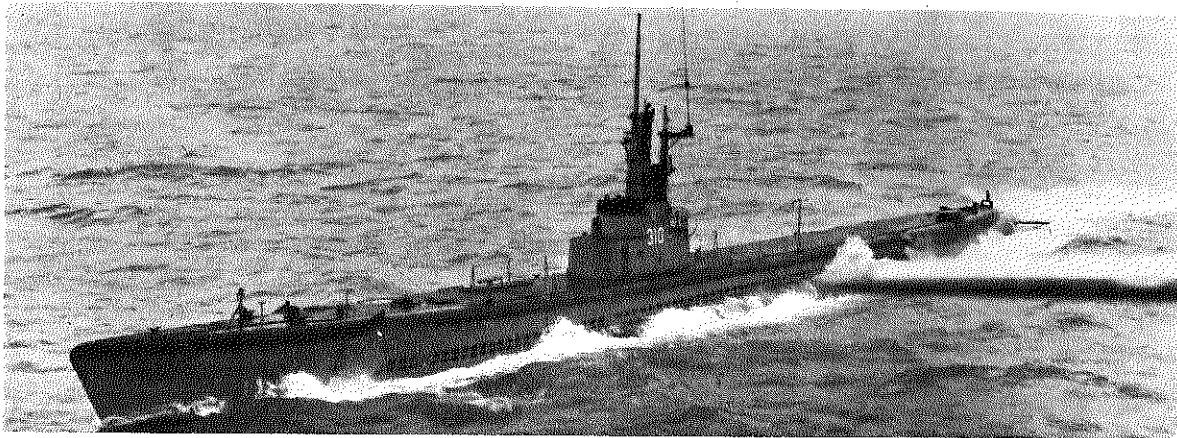
"Shoot!" the firing key operator in the conn yelled.

"No. 1 is fired," came the voice over the battle phones from the forward torpedo room. Seconds later it was a shout. "No. 1 did not eject! She's running hot in the tube!"

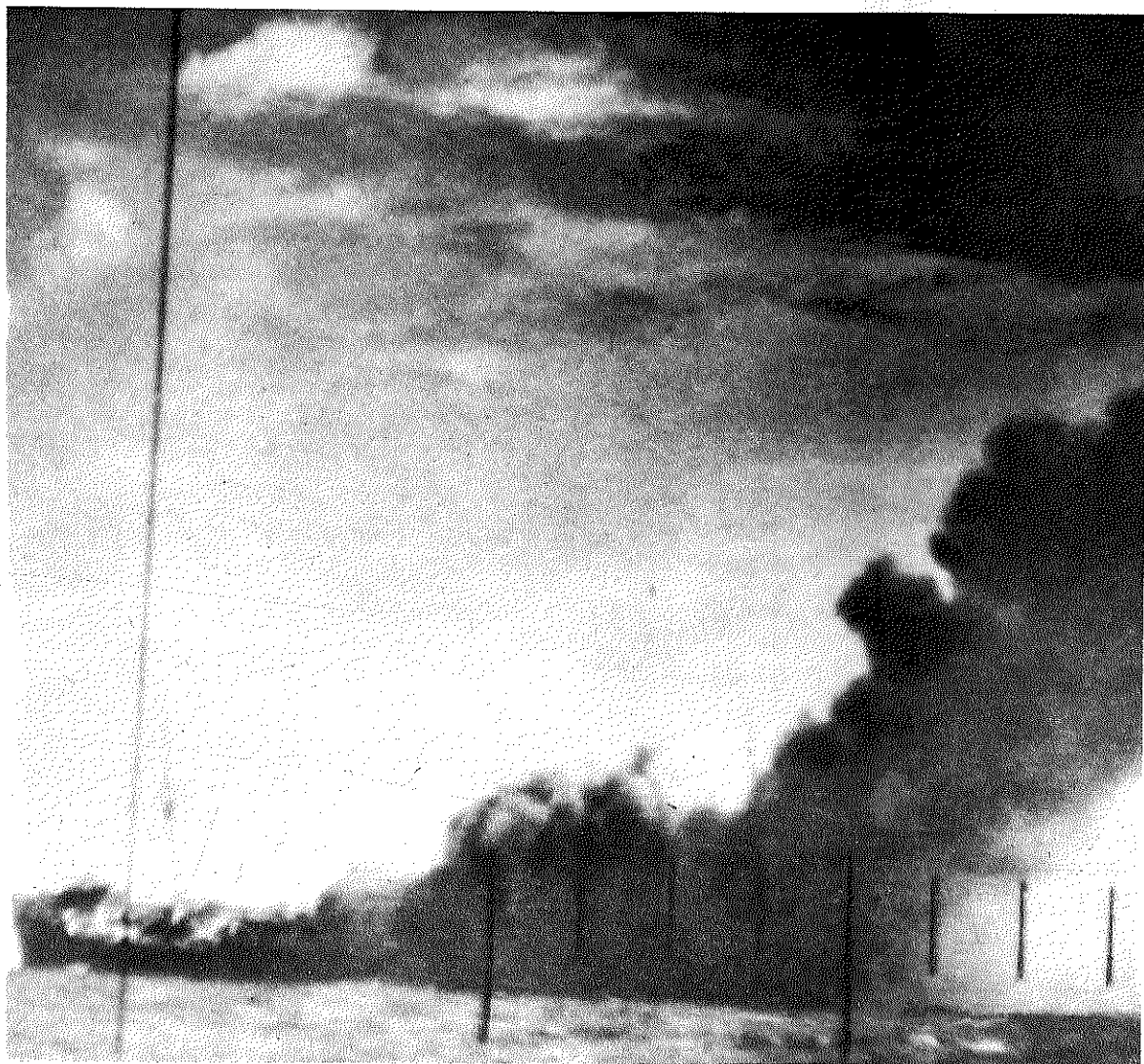
It was a tense moment. There was no real danger of the fish exploding in the tube, but it was a bad time for anything to go wrong. Meanwhile two other torpedoes were streaking toward the target.

"No. 1 fired by hand! Tube is clear!"

A blinding red explosion lit up the entire sky. No. 2 had struck the enemy's magazine. The sub, afterwards identified as the I-41, sank so quickly that torpedo No. 3, passing directly over the same position shortly afterward, had nothing to hit.



Four diesels pushing her at flank speed, often needed on patrols, *Batfish* could make 21 knots on surface



On fifth patrol in South China sea, *Batfish* sank this Jap freighter, seen ablaze through sub's periscope

Continued on Page 10

When the Batfish rose to reconnoiter, a Japanese plane fired a torpedo at her

Continued from Page 9

The stink of oil hung over the water. The Batfish rigged searchlights and looked for survivors but found no one in the sea of oil that extended for miles around.

AT 5:43 A. M., Feb. 10, as dawn was breaking, lookouts spotted a plane coming in fast on the port quarter. The Batfish dived. At 9:47 a. m., having brought the submarine up to periscope depth for a look around, Capt. Fyfe spotted five planes apparently investigating the oil slick astern.

Later, taking another look, he found only four planes. Where was the fifth? He soon found out.

"Torpedo!" the sonar operator yelled. "Coming in on port beam!"

"Take her deep!" Fyfe yelled.

The crew of the Batfish needed no sound gear to hear the rush of the approaching torpedo. It passed overhead. "A tender moment," Fyfe wrote in the combat log.

At 7:51 p. m. Feb. 11, another jagged line suddenly appeared on the Batfish's radar detector. Another Jap submarine—8000 yards off the port bow. The Batfish began to track the new foe.

"It's about as dark as the night before last, Sprink," Fyfe told his exec. "Let's try another surface approach."

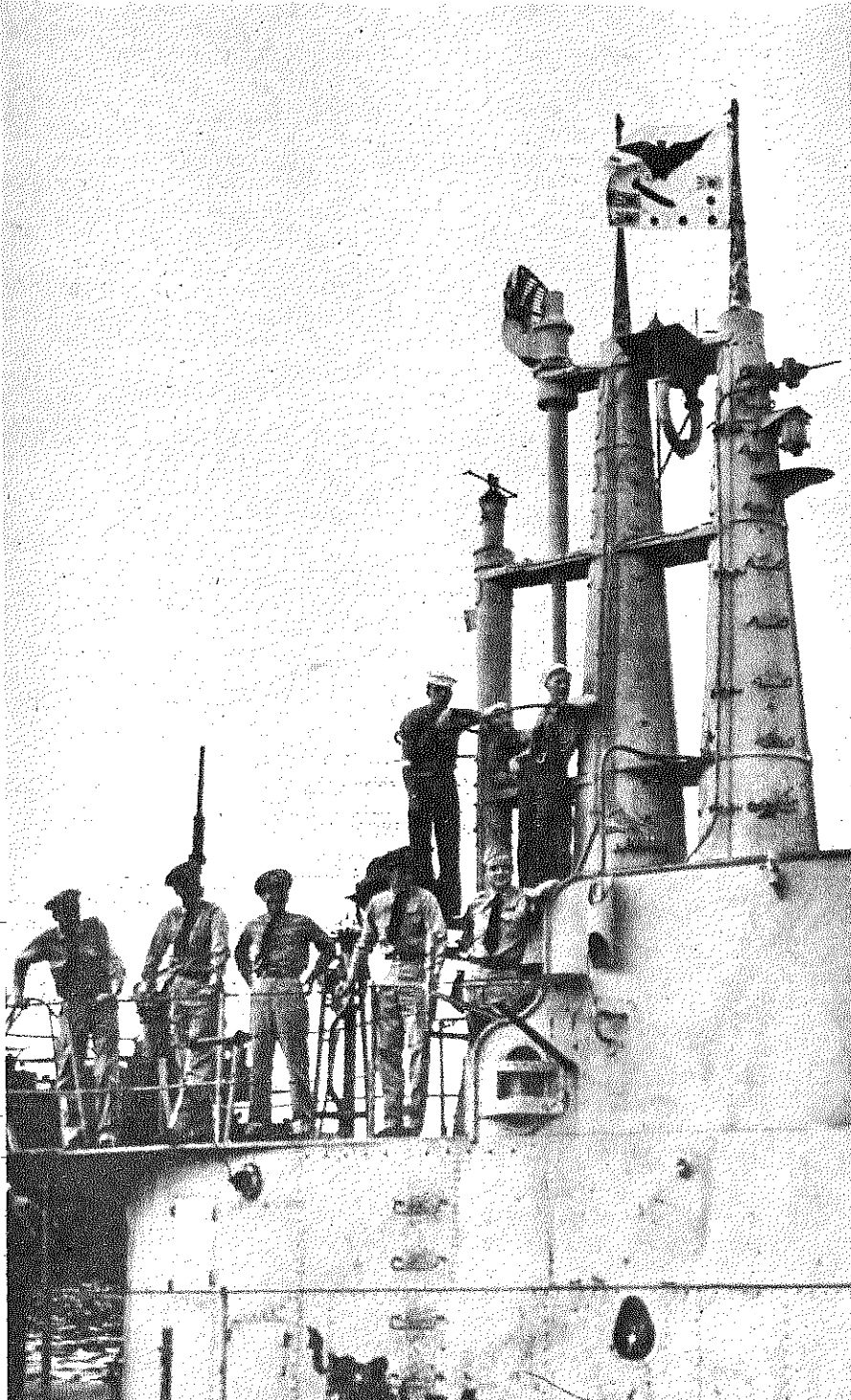
The Batfish moved in. At 1300 yards Fyfe could see the Jap sub clearly from the bridge. An RO-type, smaller than the previous submarine. At 1200 yards Fyfe was about to give the order to fire when the Jap submerged. Why?

Perhaps he had heard about his buddy getting it the night before and was just jumpy. Perhaps he had spotted the Batfish. If he had, he would be making an approach on the American sub. It made for animated discussion on the Batfish, the crew listening to the arguments with one ear, waiting for the sound of approaching torpedoes with the other.

At 9:05, just a half hour after the Jap had submerged, the Batfish's sonar man detected a loud, swishing noise. "Captain!" he yelled through the intercom. "He's blowing his tanks!"

At 9:06 the Batfish's radar picked up the Jap 8650 yards almost dead ahead. "Whether the target heard us or thought he heard us," Fyfe wrote in his log, "saw

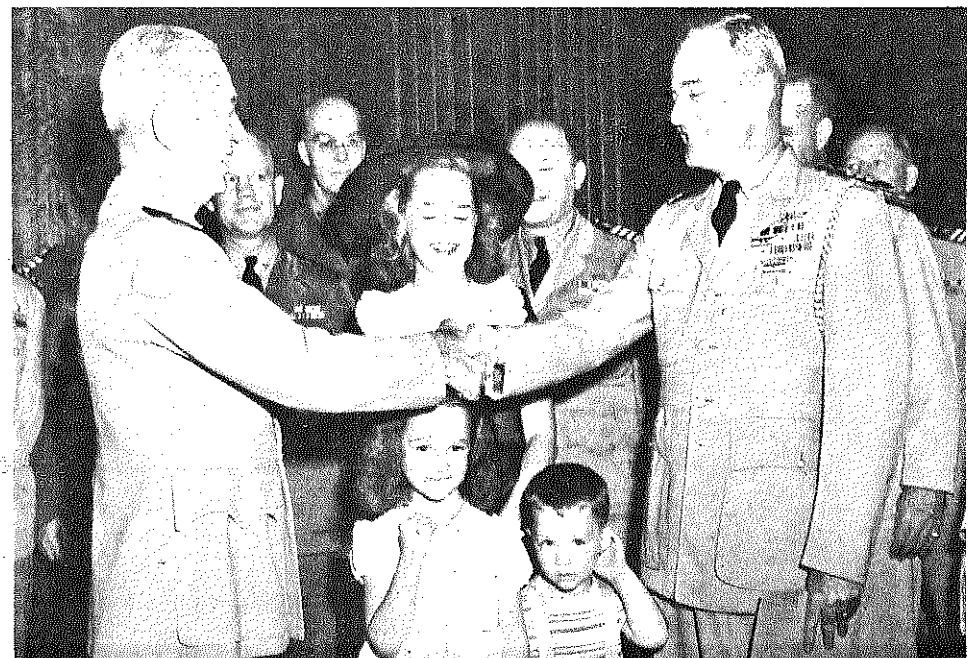
Photos Courtesy US Navy



In picture made at end of fifth patrol, Comdr. Fyfe is officer at extreme right



On afterdeck of the Batfish, crew proudly displays trophy flag after sixth patrol



For her exploit the Batfish won Presidential Unit Citation. As skipper's wife smiles, Vice-Admiral J. T. Kauffman (left) congratulates Comdr. Fyfe over heads of Anne and John Fyfe Jr. Skipper retired as rear admiral in 1957. Son is now at Annapolis

us or thought he saw us, or just made a routine night dive, I don't know. But I do know that he's going to have a hard time finding us this time."

THE BATFISH started an end-around. When Fyfe got 6000 yards ahead of the Jap he brought his submarine down to radar depth. Only the antenna—not much metal for the Jap radar to pick up—was above water as the Batfish made her approach.

At 10:02 p. m., at a range of 880 yards, Fyfe gave the command to fire. Four torpedoes shot forward, the release of their weight giving the Batfish four successive jolts.

In the conn the hands of four stop watches timed the fish. Fifty seconds after the first torpedo was fired, the target on the radar screen disintegrated, tiny pips flying out from center. Nine seconds later the second torpedo exploded against what was left of the submarine, then the third fish blasted the wreckage.

At 10:11, while crewmen were still pounding each other on the back, a heavy explosion shook the Batfish. Could

it be from an air attack? How could the Japs see them? —"But then we realized it was the finale to the swan song of one Nip submarine," Fyfe wrote. "Maybe this guy was carrying ammunition to Gen. Yamashita on Luzon."

The Batfish rose to periscope depth, preparing to surface to look for survivors, but then spotted a Jap plane on the radar and went down to 100 feet.

FEB. 13, 1945, 1:55 a. m. Once again, a jagged line appeared on the Batfish's radar detector. By 2:27 it was clear that the signal represented a third enemy sub. Battle stations!

With two Jap scalps under their belts, the crew of the Batfish was eager to add a third. But there was a hitch. The ship had fired so many torpedoes that she was almost "dry" forward. Fyfe decided to hold onto the two that remained in the forward nest and to use his stern tubes on the Jap.

This was no easy matter. To make a stern shot you must get closer to the enemy than the desired shooting

range, then move away to the desired range. During this period you are inviting him to let you have it with his bow tubes. And the maneuvering involved in lining up a fast-moving target astern is very tricky.

At 2:41, with range to target 7150 yards, the Jap submerged. Perhaps he had detected the Batfish. But Fyfe was not running away. He wrote, "Headed to a position ahead of and on his track when and if he surfaces."

At 3:10, the Batfish's radar detector showed the enemy was again on the surface. Then once more the Jap vanished. For 43 minutes the Batfish's electronics gear searched fruitlessly for him. The Jap must be making a submerged approach on them. He had to be. And the Batfish was on the surface.

But then, at 3:53, the radar picked him up again. He was now off the port bow, range 9800 yards. The Batfish started her approach. At 4:12, when he had brought his ship 3000 yards closer, Fyfe cleared the bridge and brought her down to radar depth.

Enemy sonar in mind, he wanted the Batfish to run as quietly as possible. "Secure all unnecessary equipment," he ordered. This included the fans, blowers and the motors that operated the rudder and the bow and stern planes. Manuel A. Gerhardt was on the stern planes, fighting the wheel that moved the cumbersome planes through the water.

"Scared, Gerhardt?" the man operating the bow planes asked.

Without bothering to look up from his work, Gerhardt snapped, "Anyone who isn't is stupid."

The Batfish was running scared, but she kept moving in until she was less than 1500 yards from the Jap; then Fyfe swung her around in a 150-degree turn to bring her stern tubes to bear.

A riptide flowing through Luzon channel shoved her around, making depth control and steering very difficult. "Let's hope it doesn't mess up our fish," Fyfe told his exec.

At 4:48 he gave the command. "Fire torpedoes!"

Three fish streaked toward the enemy. The dials on three stop watches in the conning tower began to move. Since the range was almost twice as long as on the previous sub, it would take that much longer for the men in the conn to know whether the torpedoes had hit or missed. The first hand made one dragging circuit on the clock face, started on its second circuit—70 seconds, 80—the men pouring sweat, silent, the only sound the faint whirr of the TDC—85 seconds, 90 . . .

They could hear a muffled explosion.

"Did we get him, skipper?" Sprinkle yelled. "Did we get him?"

"We got him."

Through the periscope, Fyfe watched a huge, yellow flower of flame blossom and hang temporarily over the black sea. The Batfish, hushed for more than a half hour, was filled with cheers. The second and third torpedoes missed, not due to error but because the Jap had disintegrated so quickly that there was nothing to hit.

The Batfish surfaced to look for survivors. There were none, of course. But the crew did fish out of the oily water a wooden box holding navigation instruments. The submarine they had just sunk, they learned, was the RO-113, sister ship of the sub they had destroyed 31 hours ago.

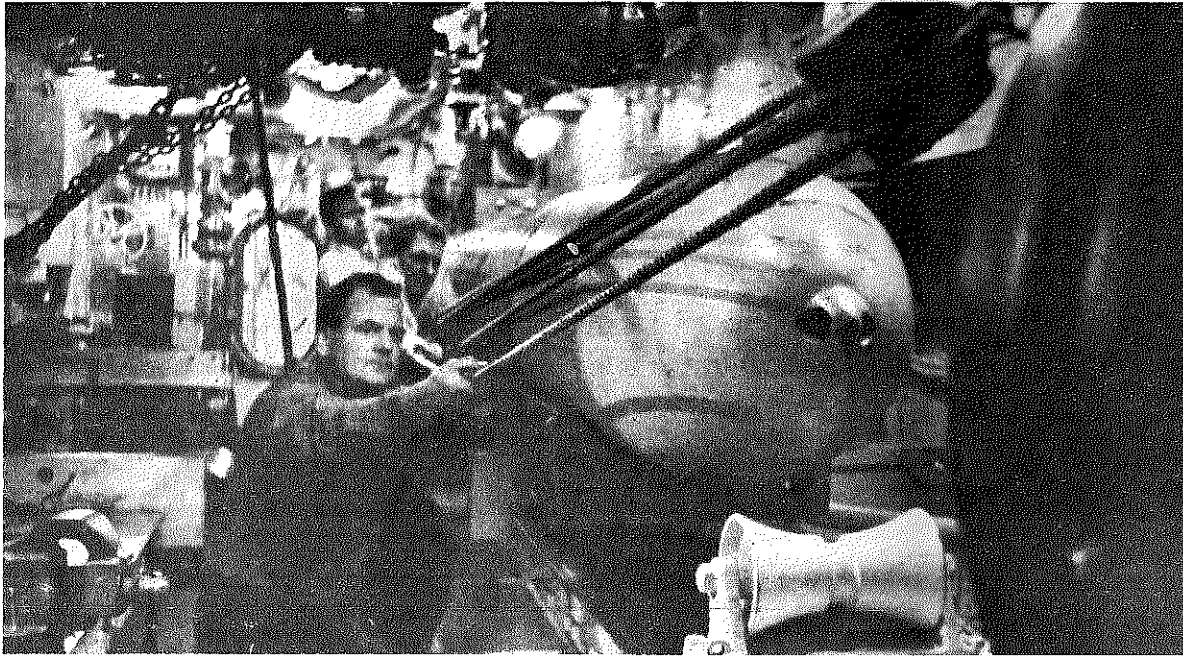
IN SLIGHTLY MORE than three days the Batfish had sunk three Japanese undersea craft—an American submarine record for the war. This gave her a total of 14 enemy ships destroyed and three damaged. She had sunk 37,080 tons of shipping.

At 2 p. m. March 3, 1945, the Batfish pulled into Pearl— with the Navy band on the dock playing "Anchors Aweigh," the truckload of fresh fruit waiting, and the sacks and sacks of mail.

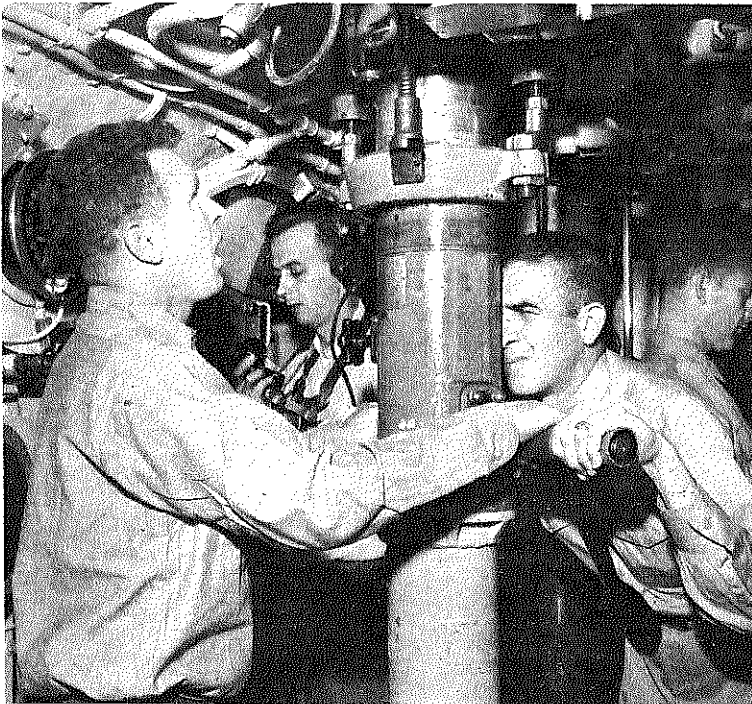
For her sixth war patrol the Batfish received the Presidential Unit Citation. Comdr. Jake Fyfe was awarded the Navy Cross. Voluntarily retired as a rear admiral in 1957, he now lives in Virginia Beach, Va., and is at present working for a civilian firm as systems engineer in the submarine Polaris missile program.

"As far as the Batfish is concerned," he says, "I was just the skipper. Any successes the ship had were due to the splendid spirit, competence and co-operation of all hands. I am prouder of the Presidential Unit Citation than I am of the Navy Cross."

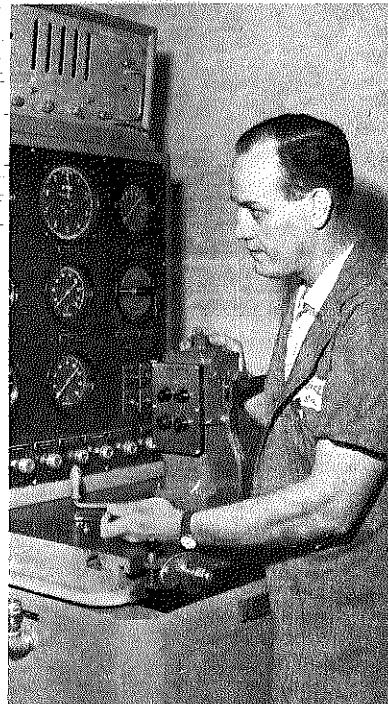
Staff Photos



Aboard the training sub at New Orleans, John L. Sullivan, TM1, uses tackle to slide torpedo into its tube



Lt. Norman Cameron, present skipper, mans 'scope. From left: W. R. Johnson, QM1, periscope assistant; E. P. Budd, EM1, telephone talker; Lt. Cameron; R. E. Garrison, YNC, TDC operator



Manuel A. Gerhardt of 10004 Suzanne pl., Jefferson, served on sub on sixth patrol, now owns diesel shop