



Commander Submarine Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet

USS GROWLER (SS 215)

November 8, 1944 - 86 Men Lost

Early in November 1944, GROWLER, HAKE and HARDHEAD were operating together west of the Philippines group as a coordinated search and attack group under command of Commander T.B. Oakley Jr., Commanding Officer, GROWLER. The patrol was GROWLER's eleventh. On November 7th, GROWLER reported having made temporary repairs to her SJ radar which made it usable, but that she urgently needed spare parts for it. A future rendezvous was arranged with BREAM for the purpose of delivering the parts.



In the early morning hours of November 8th, GROWLER, made radar contact on an enemy target group, and reported it to HARDHEAD. Commander Oakley directed HARHEAD to track and attack from the convoy's port bow. Shortly thereafter, HARDHEAD made contract with both the target group and GROWLER. After about an hour had passed HAKE heard two distant explosions of undetermined character, and HARHEAD heard an explosion which sounded like a torpedo. At the same time, the targets zigged away from GROWLER. Shortly after, HARDHEAD heard three distant depth charges explode.

A little over an hour after these explosions, HARDHEAD attacked the target from the port bow, obtained three or four hits, and HAKE saw a tanker sink.

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HARDHEAD was subjected to a severe counterattack from which it emerged undamaged, while HAKE was worked over thoroughly later in the morning. All attempts to contact GROWLER after this attack were unsuccessful, and she has never been seen or heard from since. The rendezvous with BREAM for the delivery of SJ spare parts was not accomplished. Since GROWLER had tracked targets by radar for at least an hour, it appears that her temporary SJ repairs must have been satisfactory.



*(l)Growler Sailors attend party in Australia,
(r)Signalman First, Clark Shay*

Although Japanese records mention on antisubmarine attacks at this time and place, it is evident that depth charges were dropped in the vicinity of GROWLER, but in the absence of more conclusive evidence the cause of her loss must be described as unknown. The Japanese admit that a tanker was sunk that night which checks with HARDHEAD's sinking. HARDHEAD was heavily depth charged following her own attack and later that morning HAKE was expertly worked over presumably by the same escorts. This leads to the belief that if GROWLER was sunk by depth charging it was at the hands of a skillful antisubmarine group.

The explosion described by HARDHEAD as "possibly a torpedo" may have been a depth charge or a torpedo explosion. It is unlikely that a torpedo hit was made on the convoy at this time because if the tanker had been hit she probably would either have burst into flame, as she subsequently did when hit by HARDHEAD, or slowed down if hit in the engine room. She did neither, nor was there any evidence that any of the three escorts were hit. However, since only three subsequent explosions were heard by HAKE, and a number of depth charges generally are dropped in an accurate or persistent antisubmarine attack, a number of possibilities exist as to GROWLER's end.

She could have been sunk as a result of a premature or circular run of her own torpedo, and the three depth charges heard by HAKE may have been only a token attack by the escort. Although there was a quarter moon, the night was somewhat misty, and she might have made the approach at radar depth. If so, she could have been rammed, thus making it unnecessary for the escort to drop many depth charges. She could have been caught at either radar or periscope depth and the antisubmarine group, evidently a good one, might have verified the results of their attack immediately. An escort could have hit her with a torpedo and only dropped a few depth charges to insure a kill. In any event,

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sinking by her own torpedoes is only a slight possibility. It is doubtful whether a report by the escorts of this convoy would help to decide this question. In the cases of TULLIBGEE and TANG, where survivor's statements leaves little doubt that destruction was by their own torpedoes, the Japanese ships which picked up survivors claimed to have sunk the submarine themselves.

GROWLER was the ship commanded by Cmdr. Howard W. Gilmore on her fourth patrol when, mortally wounded by machine gun fire after GROWLER had rammed a patrol vessel, he ordered the ship submerged while he lay on the bridge. The Commanding Officer, the assistant officer of the deck and a lookout were lost and Cmdr. Gilmore was posthumously awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.

During her first ten patrols, GROWLER sunk 17 ships for a total tonnage of 74,900 and damaged 7 ships, for 34,100 tons. Her first patrol began in June 1942, and was in Aleutian waters. She began her career by sinking a destroyer and severely damaging two. The one sunk was ARARE, sunk while at anchor on July 5, 1942. GROWLER's second patrol was off Formosa; where she sank a large tanker, two medium freighters, a transport and a sampan. In her third patrol, this ship sighted eight vessels, but none could be closed for an attack. The area was near Truk. GROWLER's fourth patrol was on the traffic lanes from Turk to Rabaul. She sank a freighter and a large gunboat, also damaging a second freighter. The fight with the gunboat was the incident which cost the Commanding Officer and two others to lose their lives.

GROWLER's fifth patrol, in the Bismark Archipelago, was productive of but two attack opportunities; she sank a medium freighter and damaged a large one. From mid-July to mid-September 1943 GROWLER made her sixth patrol in the same area as her fifth, but was unable to do any damage to the enemy, having only one opportunity to attack. She returned to this area for her seventh patrol, but this run was cut short by battery and generator difficulties, and no attacks were made. In March and part of April 1944, GROWLER made her eighth patrol in the East China Sea area. In this patrol she sank a small patrol craft and damaged a medium freighter. GROWLER covered the Marianas, the Eastern Philippines and the Luzon Strait areas on her ninth patrol, and was credited with sinking a large tanker and damaging a destroyer escort. She patrolled the Luzon and Formosa Straits in her tenth war patrol. She sank a large tanker, a freighter, a destroyer, a coast defense vessel, and an unidentified escort type vessel. She also damaged two more freighters. The destroyer she sank was SHIKINAMI, sent to the bottom on September 12th, while the coast defense vessel was HIRATO, sunk the same day.

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Sailors Lost On USS GROWLER (SS-215) 11-8-1944

Abel, J. H. TM1
Archer, H. W. EM2
Baker, H. C. S1
Beatty, T. M. GM3
Bergfeld, W. V. EM1
Blackston, H. H. S2
Booker, W. D. TM2
Boone, C. R. CMOMMA
Bridge, R. S. RM2
Carr, W. K. ENS
Chamblin, R. L., Jr. QM2
Clark, L. C. MOMM3
Cleveland, B. ST3
Dallman, G. B. F1
Darby, J. A. MOMM1
Daughtrey, G. P. FCS2
Dawson, F. E. EM1
Durand, A. L., Jr. F1
Erikson, R. D. F1
Ferrario, A. CMOMMA
Flippens, W. STM2
Fredman, C. E., Jr. MOMM1
Fyer, A. J. EM2
George, A. H. F1
Gregory, W. M. LTJG
Hakanson, R. E. TM2
Harris, R. TM3
Heald, H. F. S1
Hedrick, W. E. SC2
Hickey, W. C., Jr. MOMM2
Hope, R. E. TM2
Jacobs, A. M. EM3
Jewett, G. W. LTJG
Johnson, L. S. LTJG
Kaczmarek, H. A. Y3
Kuba, D. J. MOMM1
Laderman, R. S. RT2
Lane, R. E., Jr. RM1
Leveille, M. P. MM1
Lorio, E. P. S1
Lynch, G. S1
Maddox, J. H. TM1
Maness, L. B. CEM
Manning, W. S. MOMM2

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Mason, R. K., Jr. LT
McLaughlin, J. J. QM3
McMullen, L. TM2
Melancon, C. M. MOMM2
Metzler, A. FCS3
Miller, D. C. GM3
Minkle, A. J., Jr. F1
Morrison, W. EM2
Natov, B. RT2
Naylor, N. W. LT
Nixon, C. F. F1
Oakley, T. B., Jr. CDR
Orth, L. R. SC1
Owen, A. D. RM2
Padilla, J. S9
Parus, H. R., Jr. S1
Picard, R. J. MOMM3
Post, E. W. TM3
Ratnecht, C. H. MOMM3
Read, E. P. CMOMMA
Rhodes, H. E. S1
Rothenberger, E. W. RM3
Schulz, K. G. Y2
Sebestyen, P., Jr. TM3
Shay, C. O. S1
Simmons, D. G. ST2
Smith, W. D. LTJG
Smith, W. L. CTMA
Stevanovich, N. L., Jr. QM3
Stoiner, S. J. S1
Stubblefield, J. W. CMOMM
Suba, C. F. S1
Tanner, J. "A" MOMM2
Thigpen, D. T. F1
Thomas, F. P. LT
Thompson, H. E. PHM1
Tullier, R. B. F1
Vail, P. F. EM2
Vecere, R. EM3
Welch, R. D., Jr. EM2
Weterings, R. L. S1
Workman, C. A. MOMM3