

## USS SALMON (SS182)

### (THE ONE THAT GOT AWAY)

The third vessel in the U.S. Navy to be named Salmon was built in Groton, Connecticut and launched on 12 June 1937. This vessel was the first of the new "S" class authorized in 1935 and built in accordance with the London Treaty for the limitation of armaments.

On 15 March 1938 the submarine was placed in full commission as USS SALMON (SS182) and a routine shakedown training cruise was conducted during the spring and summer of 1938 as the sub ranged from Nova Scotia to the Gulf of Mexico while conducting her training operations.

By the time the war started SALMON had been with the Fleet for three years and was then operating out of the Philippines. On the day Manila was attacked, SALMON was underway from Formosa to Manila Bay. On 10 December she had arrived at Manila and commenced preparation for her first war patrol.

USS SALMON was blooded on the first day of her first patrol. Shortly before midnight while en route to her assigned patrol grounds in the Lingayen Gulf--and while surfaced and charging her batteries--the watch sighted a vessel on the horizon.

Some 30 minutes later the contact was identified as two destroyers about 5000 yards off, closing at low speed and maneuvering to keep their bows headed into the sub's stern.

As the ships closed to 2500 yards, one Japanese destroyer presented a broad beam and SALMON fired a brace of torpedoes, which missed. The enemy ships turned toward the sub as their high-speed approach began and, with the leading ship closed to 1000-1500 yards the sub fired another pair of tin-fish as the target made a turn and presented a good angle for the attack.

After firing, SALMON started her dive and two hits were heard and seen. Then the sound operator reported hearing one set of screws astern--running a high speed and then stopping. SALMON's first offensive contact with the enemy had apparently been successful.

One hour of silence passed before the skipper dared bring the sub to surface. Within minutes after coming up, the sound watch reported screws turning up off the port quarter. After peering into the haze for several more minutes, the lookout sighted a ship on a collision course at 1000 yards and SALMON made a quick dive as the enemy passed almost directly above.

Seven separate depth-charge attacks followed and evasive tactics continued throughout the day. Finally, at 1630, all seemed to be serene and clear and SALMON broke surface. No ships were in sight and shortly after dark, the sub commenced a needed battery charge.

Less than a week later, while charging batteries on the surface, there suddenly appeared a large number of ships on both bows running a parallel and opposite course. SALMON immediately changed to battery power and charged in with decks

practically awash. The firing set-up called for a four-shot brace from the bow tube. However, just as she launched the torpedoes, a heavy depth charge attack came. Two of the charges were very close aboard and caused superficial damage in addition to shaking up all hands. Because of the noise of the depth charges, no hits could be identified as such and SALMON, at the moment, was more interested in getting out. Three hours later all was clear and SALMON surfaced for another battery charge.

SALMON's first patrol, typical of so many, lasted for 57 days. By the time she pulled alongside the tanker USS TRINITY (AO 13) in Java, she had suffered considerable superficial damage from depth charges at one time or another, and was badly in need of supplies and refitting. It took an effort of memory to recall when the ventilating system had last worked and, perhaps more important, the last days of the patrol were conducted without a drop of coffee on board.

A week later she was underway again. After five days at sea she had an inconclusive brush with a group of combatant ships and merchantmen and, although there was an exchange of torpedoes and depth charges, no kills were recorded.

Although three other attacks were made during the second patrol it was not until the third that SALMON could irrefutably claim a kill--an 11,000-ton repair ship. After tracking the vessel for an hour, SALMON gained her position and fired a spread of four torpedoes. Four hits resulted. The sub went to 200 feet and rigged for depth charge attack from the two escorting ships. After a brief attack from the destroyers, a muffled explosion was picked up and loud water agitations were heard in the bearing of the target.

Three days later, at about sunset, smoke was sighted on the horizon and the sub commenced tracking at periscope depth. Fifty-five minutes later SALMON fired a set of three missiles and two timed hits were observed. The boat stood by for almost three hours before the target slipped under the surface. This vessel was later found to be the 482-ton passenger cargo ship GANGES MARU.

From Balabac Strait and the Southern Palawan Passage, Manila Bay and Luzon Point, SALMON prowled the seas. After a year of active duty she earned an overhaul period at Pearl and, as the war had now progressed considerably, she operated closer and closer to Japan. The following is typical of this period.

At the end of routine refit and training, SALMON commenced her Seventh War Patrol on 17 July 1943 as she departed Midway en route for her assigned area of patrol in the North Pacific and in the Okhotsk Sea. By 25 July the submarine had reached the area of patrol. The fog was extremely dense, limiting visibility to about 1000 yards.

On 7 August SALMON made a contact and was able to turn this one into an attack. Upon gaining her position, she fired four torpedoes from a range of 1700 yards. After firing, the radar operator tried to bring in the target. Just as the pip appeared, three of SALMON's torpedoes ripped into the Japanese ship. It sank quickly. SALMON could not locate the target 30 minutes after firing.

After a day of "rest" another contact was picked up on the morning of 10 August. Investigation proved it to be a well-deck freighter of about 4000 tons. After closing to a range of 1000 yards SALMON fired a spread of three torpedoes. One missed ahead, the second hit amidships and was seen to bounce off (a dud) and the third missile was not observed.

SALMON fired the fourth bow torpedo, but the ship, upon sighting the wake, swung sharply and caused the shot to miss. This change of course gave the submarine a view from her stern forward and it was observed that the vessel was listing heavily and settling aft. From these appearances, the third torpedo had hit the ship without exploding and ripped through the hull plates.

The crew of the enemy ship was seen to be loading into lifeboats with the davits swung outward and the vessel was being steered on a course for beaching. SALMON attempted to prevent the beaching maneuver by firing another spread of torpedoes. All but one missed and a hit was scored just at the bow. The explosion carried a geyser high into the air and part of the forecastle sailed up about 150 feet. The ship sank in 25 minutes.

Two days later, after waiting out a spell of rain and fog, another contact was made. The attack was unsuccessful because of torpedo failure for reasons unknown. At the end of this attack SALMON headed for home as she had no more torpedoes.

SALMON's eleventh war patrol commenced more than a year later when she cleared Pearl as a unit of the wolf pack comprised of submarines TRIGGER, SILVERSIDES and STERLET.

In the area of Nansei Shoto the pack made contact with a large tanker escorted by four frigate-type ships. During the day the target was lost twice and finally in the late afternoon, when SALMON was several miles off, she saw an explosion alongside the tanker. This proved to be a result of TRIGGER's attack which left the victim dead in the water and drifting with the wind.

Two hours later SALMON pulled into position and fired a spread of four torpedoes with two hits resulting. (STERLET's torpedo caused the actual sinking and credit was divided equally between the raiders.)

As SALMON had made her run, the escorting vessels were closing from their position 1000 yards off and by the end of the torpedo run these A/S ships were well into firing position.

The firing lasted 11 minutes and, by this time, the Japanese escort vessels had picked up SALMON. Depth charging began. First, there were four depth-charge patterns perfectly laid. SALMON's crew were knocked to their knees from the explosions which shook the boat from bow to stern, cutting off the auxiliary power. The ship was without lights. Several more close misses shattered the glass on the clocks, gauges and other fixtures and the flying debris made life hazardous.

Down, down, deeper and deeper--well below 200 feet--went the stricken submarine. The sailors clung to whatever was nearby to keep their balance but again and again the depth charges would batter them against the bulkheads or to their knees again.

During the next 17 minutes, SALMON and her crew outlasted 30 depth charges and went to extreme depths--depths earlier considered fatal for a submarine of SALMON's type. In those 17 minutes, SALMON received possibly the worst beating ever inflicted on an American submarine--which survived--during the entire war.

The skipper finally managed to check his descent by pushing his motors to emergency speed and by using a 20-degree up-angle. Meanwhile, the mangled hull fittings began to leak profusely in the engineroom and water poured in from the gaps. The conning tower bilges were rapidly filling up. The water had already reached the deck plates in most parts of the boat. The compartments were unbearably hot. The escaping fumes from the rapidly weakening batteries were choking the crew, and the stagnant air made breathing difficult. Both diving planes were out of order, which meant that once SALMON surfaced, she would no longer be able to dive.

The crew managed to bring the ship up to 150 feet, but when an attempt was made to level off and reduce speed, SALMON dropped like a rock.

At this point, the skipper faced a vital decision. Should he allow his boat to settle deeper and deeper or, in his crippled condition, should he surface and attempt to fight it out with the four enemy anti-sub craft waiting for him.

There wasn't much choice. He drew a deep breath and at 2030, the captain passed the word for SALMON to surface.

She was really not in much shape to be an active combatant. She had a 15-degree list to starboard and her decks were awash. She was crippled, tired and without power. Some of her crew were still unconscious and all were exhausted.

SALMON's lookouts sighted the enemy, an escort at an estimated range of 7000 yards but, for the moment, she was in no position to do much about it. Some 30 minutes elapsed before the Japanese PC detected SALMON lying helpless on the surface--but it had been time enough to get two engines in operation and the low pressure blowers started. Floods and emergency vents were closed. Then, by the time the enemy spotted SALMON in its searchlight, power steering was back in commission, the stern diving planes were fixed sufficiently to get them to zero, the auxiliary gyro compass was running again and bilges were pumped.

At this stage, the situation grew confused to the point of comedy--of sorts. To this day, no one knows whether the enemy's lookout conveniently developed a bad case of eye trouble or whether the commanding officer decided to play safe and wait for reinforcements. The fact remains that, for 30 precious minutes the enemy took no action, and then finally advanced with great caution. While still at a discreet distance, it opened fire with its three-inchers and 37mm. None of his feeble efforts came close to SALMON.

No sooner had the escort ship opened fire than her companions, some five miles to the southward, also began firing. There was only one target available--the gun flashes of the first PC. Not to be outdone in ineptness, Skipper No. 1 briefly returned the fire of his companions, then returned to the task for which he obviously had no taste--the conquest of SALMON.

He decided to use the cat and mouse technique. The escort would run up on the port quarter and sheer out bringing her after guns to bear. She would fire a few shots before she was out of range, then would pause to somewhat effect her daring had on SALMON. Then the process would be repeated.

Unfortunately, SALMON was not in a position to reply effectively. Her telescope sights had been knocked out by the depth charges and, in spite of all the will

in the world, her gun crew could do no better than a few close splashes with their open sights.

The enemy continued to force SALMON in large circles. Time after time occasional shells would burst close aboard the submarine, often splashing water on the bridge and decks.

By midnight three other escorts had joined the first Japanese ship in a line to the south of SALMON at a distance of some 4000 to 8000 yards. The first escort vessel was to the northwest of the sub when it made its belated effort to get close.

When the enemy now moved within firing range, SALMON broke all the rules by taking the offensive. Instead of firing her guns from a sitting position she turned directly toward the astonished patrol craft as if to ram and, in doing so, SALMON completely reversed the situation. The escort's guns were rendered useless because the gun crews were unable to point their weapons down to the submarine's level. The enemy was caught completely off guard.

Taking best advantage of his opportunity, SALMON's skipper had all his guns trained to starboard, ordered hard left rudder, and passed the enemy at about 50 yards on opposite courses. The sub's gun crew raked the patrol boat from one end to the other, killing most of the company on deck. One four-inch shell found its way into the bridge structure and the small caliber guns sprayed all areas impartially. The escort opened with all its guns momentarily but was soon silenced. Two more salvos from SALMON's large deck gun hit the after part of the escort.

By this time, the second PC crossed astern of the submarine, made several futile passes but became discouraged when a few four-inch shells came close to her stern.

Stubborn SALMON was greatly outnumbered and outgunned, but she continued to ward off the anti-submarine unit for the next two hours. The opposition then dropped out of sight in a rain squall. (It was later learned that the escorts picked up contacts on their sound gear--presumably a part of the wolf pack consisting of STERLET, TRIGGER and SILVERSIDES--and went away from that dangerous area.)

The battle had resulted in the ultimate sinking of one escort and another seriously damaged, while the two remaining vessels escaped. It took place within less than one hundred miles of the Japanese mainland.

The following day at her request, the other three members of the pack formed a protective group around the crippled submarine as course was set for a friendly port. The escort was reinforced by aircraft on the second day and on 2 November 1944 SALMON arrived at Saipan and moored safe alongside USS FULTON .

On 26 January, SALMON stood out from San Francisco Bay in company with the submarine REDFISH and an escort. After passing through the Panama Canal from 6-8 February, SALMON arrived at Portsmouth, New Hampshire, on 17 February.

Tentative plans for the veteran included a yard period and then assignment as a training vessel in the Atlantic Fleet. However, the end of the war resulted in

the abandonment of all plans and on 24 September 1945, the seven year-old submarine USS SALMON was decommissioned and turned over to proper authorities for disposal and scrapping.

The Presidential Unit Citation was awarded SALMON "for extraordinary heroism in action against enemy Japanese surface vessels during a war patrol of the under-seas craft in restricted waters of the Pacific." The text of the Citation reads:

"For extraordinary heroism in action against enemy Japanese surface vessels during a war patrol in restricted waters of the Pacific. Covering her assigned area with relentless determination, the USS SALMON contacted a large hostile tanker, boldly made her approach in defiance of four vigilant escort ships cruising within 1000 yards of the target and launched her torpedoes to score direct and damaging hits. Damaged by terrific depth charging, SALMON daringly battle-surfaced to effect emergency repairs and fight it out. Firing only when accurate hits were assured, she succeeded in keeping out of effective range of hostile guns and confused the enemy by her evasive tactics until the escort warily closed to ram. In a brilliantly executed surprise attack, she charged her opponent with all available speed and opened fire with every gun aboard to rake the target fore and aft and destroy most of the Japanese topside. Still maintaining her fire, she entered a rain squall to repair her damage before attempting the long run home on the surface. Although crippled and highly vulnerable, SALMON had responded gallantly to the skilled handling of her stout-hearted and indomitable officers and men in turning potential defeat into victory."