



Commander Submarine Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet

USS GRAYBACK (SS 208)

February 26, 1944 - 80 Men Lost

by JOCS(SW/AW) Darrell D. Ames

The late Adm. "Skip" Lockwood (COMSUBPAC 1943-1946) once described Cmdr. Johnny Moore as "an aggressive leader who guided his charges into battle at full speed." As commanding officer of the USS Grayback (SS-208) during World War II, Cmdr. Moore used this energetic approach in directing his vessel to sink nine enemy ships totaling 44,000 tons.

Overall, the ship is credited with sinking 22 enemy ships totaling 83,900 tons and damaging nine enemy ships totaling 49,300 tons during her ten war patrols. It was during the tenth and final patrol that the great ship met it's ultimate fate.

At the beginning of the war Grayback was under the command of Cmdr. Willard A. Saunders. Prior to Moore assuming command, the ship already had a deadly reputation. In 1942 alone Grayback, along with four other U.S. Submarines (Gudgeon, Tautog, Triton and Seadragon) acting independently, combined to sink 81 enemy ships from Pearl Harbor to the East China Sea. It was a lethal group.

In 1943 Cmdr. Moore assumed command of Grayback and joined two other subs (USS Shad and USS Cero) to form the first rendition of Capt. Charles "Swede" Momsen's 'wolf-pack' of Submarine Squadron Two. Generally, submarine skippers objected to "wolf-packing." They felt operating independently was more efficient and they all lived in dread that someday this method would sooner or later result in the sinking of one friendly submarine by another. Fear of friendly fire notwithstanding, "wolf-packing" was here to stay and Momsen's first group was just as deadly as the 1942 subs operating alone.

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Cmdr. Johnny Moore lacked experience in fleet boats, but because of his fine record of service in "R" and "S" boats, senior leaders believed he was headed for greatness. Moore was an athlete at the Naval Academy (boxing and soccer) and was considered one of his class leaders. "Professionally, Johnny was tops and we placed him second to no one in the class," said Cmdr. Hank Munson, a former Academy classmate of Moore's. Cmdr. John MacGregor, commanding officer of "wolf-pack" partner USS Shad, labeled Moore as a "go-getter" with a "vivacious personality."

Following her success as a "wolf-pack" member in 1943 Grayback was tasked to operate independently the following year. The ship left Pearl Harbor on January 28, 1944 to begin her tenth and final patrol. The area of what was to be her final mission was located in the East China Sea east of the coast of Chekiang Province, China. After fueling up at Midway on February 3rd the boat received orders to patrol the area running east and west between Luzon in the Philippine Islands and Formosa until sunset February 20th, and then to proceed to her original area of responsibility.



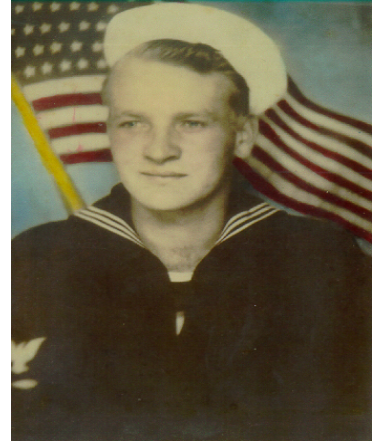
"On July 20, 1943, at the foot of Coburn Mountain, Paul and Fred Coburn were lying in bed in the boy's room of the family home. Fred told Paul 'this is my last night to sleep here because I am going to marry Miss Doris Cantrell tomorrow.' Fred and Doris were married the following day, July 21, 1943 by Brother Charlie D. Thorn.

They were only able to share two weeks together because Fred was home on leave from duty onboard USS Grayback (SS 208) and never returned." - Bob Bentley

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damaged 44,000 tons of shipping thus far on the patrol. The boat had expended the majority of her torpedoes and had only five aft and one forward remaining. The next day, February 25th, Moore reported to Lockwood at Submarine Headquarters in Pearl Harbor that he had fired four of his six remaining torpedoes and had damaged two more ships. Lockwood ordered Moore to return to Pearl Harbor immediately. The ship was never heard from again.

"Torpedoman Marshall Ray Davidson, son of Mr. and Mrs. Ewing Davidson of Garfield, Ark., was reported missing in action in a telegram received by his parents Easter morning from the Navy department. Petty Officer Davidson enlisted in the Navy at Pineville, Mo., in September, 1942, and was assigned to submarine service in March, 1943. He was an all-round athlete at Washburn High School, Washburn, Mo., and is survived by his wife and two year old son." - Provided by Dale Pilant and Mrs. Carrie Rose



Grayback had been expected to arrive at Midway Island on or about March 7th. Had Moore failed to receive or understand Lockwood's order to come home immediately and remained on station the full time she would have reached Midway on or about March 23rd. On March 10th, in an effort to establish Grayback's position, Lockwood requested information from Moore regarding the best "hunting grounds" to locate and destroy enemy shipping. No reply was received and on March 30th the Grayback was officially declared "Lost at Sea."

Japanese records state that on February 26th a carrier plane near Okinawa discovered a submarine on the surface about 300 miles east of Grayback's last reported position. According to the Japanese report, the plane landed a "direct hit at the sub which exploded and sank immediately." Surface craft continued the attack where the sub went down until bubbles and a large oil slick appeared. Had Moore received the message from Lockwood and headed home right away, Grayback would have been in the approximate position reported in the Japanese attack.

Moore and his crew of 80 officers and men are on eternal patrol and were posthumously awarded the Navy Unit Commendation.

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Sailors Lost on USS GRAYBACK (SS-208) 2-26-44

Bangert, S. H.,MOMM1	Barbour, H. X.,MOMM2	Barnett, J. E.,SC1	Bell, F. R.,TM2
Bennett, J. W.,EM3	Blanan, R. P.,MOMM1	Bloodsworth, R.,QM3	Boyer, F. L.,MOMM1
Brandt, J. L.,EM3	Brasch, W. J.,RM1	Bukowski, T.,CRMA	Campbell, W. E.,MOMM2
Capshaw, R. L.,PHM1	Carey, R. E.,S2	Case, H. L.,MOMM2	Chotas, J. N.,RM3
Coburn, F. M.,MOMM2	Cox, L. R.,SC3	Davidson, M. R.,TM3	Davis, V. E.,Y2
Dodson, J. R.,COX	Ferry, G. R.,S1	Fieber, C. E.,EM3	Fielding, C. F.,F2
Forsythe, J. R., Jr.,SM1	Fox, K. W., Jr.,MOMM2	Francis, M. L.,MOMM3	Gavlak, C. B.,FC2
George, M. L.,MOMM3	Gildo, B.,ST1	Gray, J. H.,MOMM3	Hall, F. A.,TM2
Halpert, A. S.,RM1	Halvorson, E. E.,S1	Handlowich, L. I.,S1	Hansen, R. V.,RT1
Hefler, T.,EM1	Hitch, R. D.,EM1	Holzmann, F. C., Jr.,TM2	Hooks, W. C.,F1
Hrudka, A.,QM2	Irizarry, R. A.,SM3	Jackson, N.,TM2	Jacobs, L. F.,S1
James, F. R.,F1	Jones, J. A.,TM1	King, J. P.,EM3	Knops, H. T.,CEMA
Koller, W. A.,MOMM2	Lariviere, R. A.,S1	Leaf, L. H.,MOMM3	Littlejohn, R. O.,LTJG
Lockyer, D. H. N.,TM3	Mayo, R. L.,CDR	McKelvey, F. H.,LTJG	Meyer, F. W. H.,TM3
Meyers, L. J.,MOMM2	Moore, J. A.,CDR	Nicholson, W. G.,CMOMMA	Northam, J. T.,EM3
O'Meara, T. F.,TM2	Parks, R. A.,EM1	Phillips, M. C.,LTJG	Pinho, A., Jr.,EM3
Ralston, W. L.,EM3	Rauber, V. M.,ENS	Rivera, V. U.,ST2	Roy, W. C., Jr.LT
Schellinger, G. K.,S2	Sessler, E. F.,TM1	Shaw, R. T.,CTMA	Silveira, I. V.,RM3
Smith, C. H., Jr., LT	Solomon, S.,EM3	Southern, A. H.,TM3	Stanford, L. C.,CMOMMA
Stewart, J. H.,LT	Stockman, R. E., Jr.,S2	Waliszewski, S. J.,SC1	Wyatt, J. C.,GM1

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"On January 12, 1946, the Secretary of the Navy has officially declared there is no information showing any survivors of this gallant submarine. Because of my son's deep love for submarine life; and because of our submarines' wonderful war activities which have been so rigidly held under strict censorship, I humbly dedicate the following verses to "The Silent Service" with the hope that I have portrayed something of their grandeur."

Ralph Robinson Shaw (father of Ralph T. Shaw)

Sub-Man

**by Ralph Theodore Shaw, USN
November 20, 1918 - February 26, 1944
USS Grayback (SS 208)**

*Courage: Not born of battle rage, Amidst a flaming hell
Of bursting bomb and shell, Where death has set the stage.
Courage: It is to wait - to clench the teeth and hear, The sullen steps of brute Death draw near.
To wait - To watch thin glistening walls of steel, Drip beads of salty sweat along their seams; to reel
From shock that sends you sprawling - yet to rise, And bite the lips, and grin with steady eyes
And mutter: "Close!" And curse the pounding heart, To wait-to see the weakening seams that part
To stabbing fingers of the seeking sea; To hear that last burst seemingly to flee
Along the sodden halls of death, To still the quaking heart and draw a breath
You never know you held, And still wait..., But now to stir, and jest, and mock your fate
Certain that the time will come again, When you must wait and pray Death's blows are vain
Courage? What greater, since you yet can laugh: Although you know your death may be
A silent one beneath the sea, And "failed to return" your epitaph?
Laugh? Sure! To free all men is why you're here; And so you master self - then laugh at fear.*