"JIM"

By Brad Abele

While my father's official name was Mannert Lincoln Abele, all the family including his three sons called him "Jim" rather than "Dad" or "Daddy". I don't remember when this started – we just always did as far back as I can remember. His brother, Trescott, related to us that while "Mannert" was still a small boy, he decided that he liked the name "Jim" better than the one given him by his parents and this was the name he used for the rest of his life. Curiously, I did observe that the majority of his classmates at the Naval Academy at that time (class of '26) carried nicknames that had no connection with either their given or surnames so apparently it was something that at least naval officers of that period just got accustomed to.

The Final Voyage

It was a bright clear day, a bit on the cool side, that Sunday, the 24th day of May 1942. Jim had been working long hours, often several days on end for months now to get his new command, the newly launched and commissioned fleet submarine, Grunion, ready to go to sea and join in the fight against the "evil" axis powers of those days. This morning he had been home and suggested that the whole family join him for Sunday dinner at the officer's club at the submarine base in New London, Connecticut. This was not unusual for us since our family had gone out for Sunday dinners at the "club" not infrequently over the past few months. I remember the "club" as being rather special, though, since it had an air of exclusivity about it and the tables in the dining area were all set up with white table cloths, shining silverware and glistening china. Also, in the back of my mind I remember the friendly rattle of a ping-pong game being played on the tables on the lower level. Our family of five was shown to a table at the right rear corner of the dining room overlooking the Thames River. There we ordered our dinner and enjoyed an hour of desultory family conversation. When we got up to leave, Jim announced that he would have to stay at the base as he had some more important work to do so my mother would have to drive us all home in our one car to our rented house on Reynolds Hill in Mystic, Connecticut. Later that afternoon, we received a phone call from one of the wives of the other five officers attached to the Grunion that she had seen the boat going out of the river that afternoon and that it was probably departing for ports unknown on its first war assignment. We weren't particularly surprised or upset as I remember. We all knew that Jim, as a naval officer and a trained subma-

riner (pronounced sub-mar-in'-er with the accent on the third rather than the second syllable), would be in the thick of things as soon as he could get his boat ready to go to sea. However, as things turned out it would be the last time we were ever to see him. The Grunion was originally designed to carry a complement of 4 officers and 54 enlisted men for a total crew of 58. However, when she left for the war that day she was carrying a complement of 6 officers and 64 men for a total crew of 70.

The Grunion left New London bound for Pearl Harbor via the Panama Canal on Sunday, May 24, 1942. A week later, as she transited the Caribbean for Panama she came upon and rescued 16 survivors of the USAT "Jack," which had been torpedoed by a German U-boat and conducted a fruitless search for 13 other survivors presumed in the vicinity. Coincidentally, one of the survivors by the name of "George F. Drew" was a distant relative and took the time to write a very nice letter to my mother expressing his profound appreciation for having been rescued at sea. The contents of this letter are included in the letter that my mother wrote to all the next of kin which appears elsewhere in this document.

The Grunion dropped off its newly acquired "passengers" at the Naval base in Coco Solo, Panama and proceeded through the canal and on to Pearl Harbor, arriving there on June 20. Pearl Harbor still showed the effects of the Japanese attacks, which had been made on it six months earlier so it must have been somewhat eerie for the men on the Grunion to sail into that harbor in preparation for their first war patrol. The Grunion was in Pearl Harbor for ten days as she prepared for war patrol duty. I'm sure that during her stay there, the crew had ample opportunity to talk with members of other submarine crews who had already been on war patrols and could relate their experiences and give the men on the Grunion some idea of what they might expect when they went out themselves. Already, by that time the small force of only 55 U.S. submarines (only 40 being of the "fleet boat" type) had claimed 109 enemy ships sunk in the Pacific Theater (the number later lowered by JANAC to 63) so there must have been some good stories to tell. We don't know whether the torpedo problems had been properly recognized at that point but undoubtedly there would have been some grousing about shots made that should have been hits but weren't. On June 30, the Grunion left Pearl Harbor on its own first war patrol with orders to proceed to the Aleutian theater and patrol westward on routes between Attu and the Japanese empire. At this time, early in the war, the landing on Guadalcanal had not yet taken place and the victory at the battle of Midway had only occurred three weeks prior on June the 6th.

The author, William Manchester, in his book, "Goodbye Darkness: A Memoir of the Pacific War" writes of this period, "Ever since Pearl Harbor, the Japanese forces had been on a string of unbroken victories and had by that time gained control over not only an enormous sea area but also over a land area larger than that acquired by Nazi forces at the height of their successes. The record of conquest was phenomenal. Within days after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Japan had swallowed up Guam, Indochina and Thailand; she had sunk the only major allied warships west of Midway – the British leviathans *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse*. By Christmas she had taken Wake and Hong Kong. Within two months she had occupied Manila, Singapore and Malaya; in February at Java Sea she sank 10 allied ships; in March the Allies lost Java and Burma and Japanese armies were

in the Owen Stanley Mountains of New Guinea with the coast of Australia almost in sight. Japan had driven the British fleet from the Indian Ocean and the Pacific; she had sunk almost every American battleship in the Pacific Fleet; and at the end of April Japan had lost nothing bigger than a destroyer. In May 1942, Corregidor surrendered and the Philippines fell; Japan invaded the Solomons. She had swallowed Southeast Asia and the islands of the South Pacific; she had crushed all allied strength in the western ocean. Our battleship Navy lay at the bottom of Pearl Harbor and it was a "battleship war" which had been contemplated by the top Navy strategic planners in Washington. Indeed, in the master strategic plan the submarine and air arms of the Navy had been relegated to the relatively minor roles of scouting for the battleships."

Suddenly, after Pearl Harbor, all that had to change fast and those leaving alone on a small submarine into the vast emptiness of the Pacific Ocean to take on this enemy juggernaught must have had rather foreboding feelings about their future. Furthermore, the Japanese forces had just bombed Dutch Harbor in the Aleutian Islands on June 3 and it was expected that they *and perhaps the Alaskan mainland* were the next targets of Japanese expansion. May 1942 was perhaps the low point for the allies in WW2. Along with the success of the Japanese war efforts at that time, Nazi Germany had conquered most of Europe and German U-boats had sunk almost 500 ships right off the North American coast.

On July 10 the Grunion was reassigned to the area north of Kiska. The Japanese forces had on June 7th occupied both Attu and Kiska Islands at the western end of the Aleutian chain and it was feared then that this action was the first move against Alaska and the North American mainland. Grunion made her first report to Dutch Harbor that she had been attacked by an enemy destroyer, had fired three torpedoes at it but observed no explosions. Shortly after this message, Grunion sent another relating that she had sunk three "destroyer-type" vessels. After the war it was learned that she had sunk two brand, spanking-new sub chasers #25 and #27 and damaged #26. In addition the Grunion is (sometimes) credited with having torpedoed and damaged the 8,572-ton merchant ship, Kano Maru. Today, it is hard to understand why the Grunion would attack such small ships as sub chasers – subchasers weigh about 300 tons while destroyers weigh 1500 tons or more - given the fact that torpedoes were very costly (about $10,000 apiece) and in very short supply at that point. One might speculate that, given her location, the sub chasers might have come after her and she had sunk them as a defensive move in the ensuing "fire fight".

On July 19, Grunion was ordered along with 3 other subs, the S-32, Triton and Tuna, to assigned areas approaching Kiska, all to be there by daylight on July 22. A naval bombardment was supposed to have taken place on the afternoon of the 22nd but it never happened. It was rescheduled for the 28th and the official record records that it took place on that day. However, the official record was wrong because it was postponed a second time as well and didn't take place until August 7. On that day, the weather was not good and the fleet chose to lob shells over a landmass lying to the south of the harbor beyond. They had planned to have their shots spotted by one of their seaplanes in typical "Battleship Navy" style. As it was, though, Japanese fighters immediately set upon the

unlucky spotting plane when it got over the harbor and it had to flee for its life into the overcast. As a result there was no spotting done that day and virtually all the Navy shells fell harmlessly without striking any enemy targets at all.

Back on July 28th, however, Grunion reported an attack on unidentified "enemy ships" six miles south of Sirius Point, Kiska. She had fired 2 torpedoes but had observed no explosions. Apparently, Grunion's last transmission was heard on July 30, but there is some disagreement as to the content of that transmission. The official navy version has it that she reported heavy antisubmarine activity that day at the entrance to Kiska harbor and that she had ten torpedoes remaining. She was ordered to return to Dutch Harbor at that point. However, the author and submariner, Edward L. Beach, was the communications officer aboard the submarine, Trigger, which was in the vicinity of the Grunion that day. He recently wrote to me stating that he had decoded a message from Grunion out of curiosity, which was sent on the 30th of July. It seems that the communications officer of the Grunion was Ensign Willy Kornahrens who was a good friend of Beach's and whose wedding Beach had attended a few months before. Beach reported the transmission as: "FROM GRUNION X ATTACKED TWO DESTROYERS OFF KISKA HARBOR X NIGHT PERISCOPE SUBMERGED X RESULTS INDEFINITE BELIEVE ONE SANK ONE DAMAGED X MINOR DAMAGE FROM COUNTERATTACK TWO HOUR LATER X ALL TORPOEDOES EXPENDED AFT … and then the message , which until that moment had decoded perfectly, turned into an unintelligible jumble."
The Grunion carried 24 torpedoes so if it had ten left it would have fired 14 up to that point during its first war patrol. The fact that all its torpedoes aft had been used might hint that at least some of the firings may have been defensive in nature with an attacking ship approaching from the rear. If this was the Grunion's final transmission, it differs significantly from the one reported in the official Navy records.

The Loss of the U.S.S. Grunion

In March of 2002 we found a listing on the web from Commander Submarine Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet in which there was a new entry for the loss of the Grunion. It cited a message from a Japanese man, Yutaka Iwasaki who had translated some Japanese writings in which was described this incident. The article he had translated had appeared in a special July 2001 issue of the Japanese trade magazine "Maru" as a reprint of an article which had first been published (in Japanese) in March 1963 also in a special issue of "Maru". The article by Navy ex captain, Seiichi Aiura who had been the "superintendent" on the Kano Maru, at the time of the attack was headlined "We Have Sunk US Submarine" and the Title was "Transport Kano Maru 8cm gun got the target". In the article, Mr. Aiura states, --"Now the transport mission is the most important work in the Western Aleutian front. But for our transport ship, this work is so dislikeable because the North Sea has the worst weather in the world; dense fog and heavy weather harass the ships through the year. Also the ships must suffer a submarine threat throughout this 'Devil Sea', and in the vicinity of the islands there exists the additional threat from air-

craft. Furthermore, once a ship sinks and one is thrown into this north sea even in summer one cannot survive more than a few minutes." --
Further along in the article he speaks of the encounter with the submarine (almost certainly the Grunion since it was the only US sub reported lost in the area). -- "The *Kanu Maru*, arrived at a point North of Kiska in a heavy fog on the 30th of July 1942. Since it It had lost contact with its escort and was lost, it was forced to stop and drift for most of the night. Later she found where she was by an astronomical fix, which put it then at a position east of Kiska some 12 sea miles NW of Segura Island (which in turn lay some 25 miles east of Kiska Island). The ship started up and changed course so that it was traveling WSW on a course of 255 degrees at 15 knots. At 05:47 on the morning of July 31st, two torpedoes were spotted coming at it from the starboard quarter. The ship tried in vain to turn into the torpedoes but while the first torpedo passed astern, the second exploded aft at the machinery room on the starboard side. At this time the Kano Maru spotted a periscope of a submarine quite close by on the forward starboard side.

The cargo ship hadn't sunk but its machinery room was flooded, and its generator and its radio were out of commission. The now terrified Japanese seamen, recognizing their helplessness and probable fate had to put all their faith in the one remaining operable 8 cm gun on the forecastle – the one on the stern having been made inoperable by the torpedo hit. This forward located 8cm gun was immediately put into action, as were the 13mm machine guns mounted on its bridge. The periscope that had been on the forward starboard side gradually moved aft on the starboard side. Then, at 05:57, ten minutes after the first shot, another torpedo came from about 300 meters distance but passed harmlessly below the ship with out detonating. The periscope was then observed moving from the starboard stern around the stern to the portside. Ten minutes later at 06:07, three more torpedoes in a salvo came, two of which hit the forecastle and amidships with thuds but both of these torpedoes failed to explode. One of these struck the forward bridge at the #2 cargo hold. After it hit, it apparently lost its head while the rest of its body floated on the water, tail down with about 2 feet of it protruding above the surface. Then, having already fired 6 torpedoes at the cargo ship (which was 3 more than Admiral English, COMSUBPAC and Jim's ultimate superior, would have been content with), the Grunion apparently decided to surface behind the cargo ship and finish it off with its deck gun. Shortly thereafter, a submarine was spotted surfacing about 400 meters away and aft of the *Kano Maru* presumably to try to sink the merchant ship with gunfire. The Grunion had now reversed it's course 180 degrees, turning away from the cargo ship and heading once more to the aft of the ship where it might be shielded from the 8 cm gunfire by the superstructure of the *Kano Maru*. At this point the submarine was bearing 135 degrees off the left stern. Before the sub had fully surfaced and moments before it had passed safely astern, a direct hit was scored on the conning tower by the fourth shot from the 8mm gun, after it had resumed firing, and the submarine disappeared from the scene. (This was presumably the 84th shot overall that had been fired from the 8 cm gun.). As the shell hit the washing wave, a column of water was observed and a dull water explosion sound was heard. Also much spouting oil, a piece of a lifeguard buoy and pieces of wood chips that appeared to be material from the submarine deck were observed. In ad-

dition to the 8 cm gunfire, numerous 13 mm shells from the machine guns were also fired, which while ineffective on the submarine structure, served to mark the location of the periscope for the 8 cm gun crews to follow. I have shared this write-up with Cdr John Alden who is touted to be "the most respected keeper of submarine records in the country" and the first to come up with a correct explanation for the loss of the Grunion back in April of 1988 in an article he wrote for "The Submarine Review". He took note of the fact that the Japanese observed a large explosion after the 8 cm shell hit the conning tower, He writes,"Since the conning tower could not have exploded like that, I wonder if it could have been a circular run by a fourth dud torpedo". If this was true, it might explain why the Grunion was surfacing prematurely since it may have been trying to start its diesel engines to escape the path of the torpedo.

Word of this action was reported to the Japanese fifth fleet and the Chief of the Grand Fleet via the fifth guard troop Commander (Kiska Island)" but apparently was lost in transit somewhere for there was no record of the attack in the official Japanese records after the war. (For a diagram of the action see map and its translations in the appendix section.) In his article, Captain Aiura speculated that his report of the action to his high command was not credited because he and most of his men were Japanese *Navy Reservists* and as such were apparently somehow less trustworthy than their regular Navy comrades. This may account for some of the discrepancies between U.S. reported sinkings of Japanese crafts and the "Official" postwar JANAP reports which were invariably lower.

Later, rescue came from Kiska in the form of three seaplanes, a cable laying ship and sub chaser No.26. The damaged cargo ship was towed back to Kiska harbor and tied up at a pier there. On August 8th the harbor was bombed by U.S. Planes. The cargo ship was one of the targets hit and its sinking was claimed by the attacking aircraft. After the war the *Kano Maru* was patched up and re commissioned.

What happened on the Grunion after the 8cm shell (about 3.15 inches in diameter) hit the conning tower can only be speculated on. While the hit alone might have been insufficient to sink the boat, it is possible that the pressure hull between the control room and the conning tower may have been holed by the explosion, the hit might have produced a raging fire or that the hatch between the conning tower space and the control room below might have been open at the moment to allow sub personnel to ascend to the submarine bridge. If that were so, the explosion could have jammed the hatch so it couldn't be closed and when the sub instinctively submerged (they may not have known for sure who or what was firing at it). The water would then not only fill the conning tower but the control room below as well. Also it may have been possible that 3 inch ordinance for the deck gun was present inside the conning tower in preparation for its upcoming use. In any event, the Grunion never made it back to Dutch harbor, which was an easy 1.5 to 2 days run on the surface from where they were hit. Upon learning the details of this account, it is now apparent that if Mr Aiura's estimates of the distance that the Grunion was from the freighter the torpedoes being fired at an extremely short range might not have had enough time and distance to arm themselves between the time they were fired to the time they reached the Kano Maru. According to the specifications for

the Mk XIV torpedo, it required 450 yards of travel after being fired for it to arm itself and be ready to fire when the firing mechanism was actuated.

We first heard of this account in March of 2002. After hearing the initial description of the action, my brother John and I both contacted Mr. Y. Iwasaki who had translated the version which had appeared in July 2001 issue of "Maru" magazine and posed some additional questions to him. He kindly translated the complete article and emailed it to each of us along with answers to our queries. For the prior 59 plus years we had been of the understanding that the fate of the Grunion was unknown and that her crew therefore was officially *missing in action.*

Curiously, while we were investigating this latest information, we learned of an article written by CDR Alden, USN (Ret) that had appeared in the April, 1988 issue of "Submarine Review" which to all extents and purposes described this same action and was offered then as a possible explanation for the loss of the Grunion. We saw this article only after first seeing the complete translation of the Japanese article from which, I believe, the article by Alden may have come from. In one of the earlier summaries of U.S sub losses in WWII published in 1946, there were 5 submarines whose fates remained unknown at the time. These were, Grunion, Grayling, Growler, Kete and Snook.

The U.S. Naval counteroffensive in the Aleutians was slow to get started and equally slow to gain momentum. Nevertheless, it was the United States' first retaliatory campaign in the Pacific. (It preceded Guadalcanal by sixty days.) A total of seven fleet boats (like the Grunion) operated in the Aleutian theater at that time along with nine of older S-type smaller boats. (One of those was the USS S-31 that Jim had commanded for a year before he took command of the Grunion.) Of the 25 submarine war patrols in Alaskan waters up through July 30, only three reported any sinkings at all. Of these three, the only one credited with sinking more than one boat was the Grunion. Howard Gilmore, who commanded the "Growler" (the sister ship of the Grunion) and later in the war was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor posthumously, was a classmate and good friend of my father's and was credited for sinking one destroyer. (He thought he had gotten two.) Charles Kirkpatrick on "Triton" was also credited with sinking one destroyer. While many of the submarine skippers and crews in the early days of the Pacific war were criticized as being too cautious in going after the enemy, it doesn't appear that Jim could be so accused. In the fifteen days of her first war patrol, she spotted and fired at least 19 torpedoes at between 6 and 8 targets, apparently hitting at least four. This was in a war theater featuring terrible weather with poor visibility, poor navigation charts, faulty torpedoes, and one where the great majority of American subs complained of seeing no targets at all during their war patrols.

Admiral Gene Fluckey, who commanded the submarine "Barb" for five war patrols towards the end of the war and won a "Congressional Medal Of Honor" doing so, wrote in his book, "Thunder Below", "At the time of the Pearl Harbor attack, the average age of sub skippers was 42 (Jim was 39). Ten percent produced good results; 90 percent were too cautious, probably due to restricted training in peacetime – which prohibited attacks on merchant ships – and faulty torpedoes. (As an exception to this rule, in 1943, Captain Karl Hensel, 101 Sub Division Commander, who was 42 at the time and who had

earlier given us his dog, Sandy, to keep when he was transferred away from his home in New London , Conn., took command of the aging submarine "Swordfish"(formally the Squalus) and completed an excellent patrol sinking 3 ships and damaging another.) The difficulty for Admiral [Charles] Lockwood was that he couldn't tell who would blossom and who would fade. The age group as a whole didn't cut the mustard, so maximum age was lowered to 35 with entry as low as 30. (The British had identical trouble and lowered their maximum age to 36. Kretchmar, the top surviving German submariner, told me that the *Kriegsmarine* had the same problem and dropped the maximum age to 33." Jim was 38 at the time of Pearl Harbor and *had* received most of his sub training before WW2 began.

Background on the times

Having a regular Navy family during the depression was a terrific benefit. Although Jim's pay was reduced 25% at one point, the threat of layoff so common in those days never really existed for us. However, the depression Navy was very different from the one that followed shortly. Navy department funds were very tight and everyone was expected to live and conduct themselves frugally. The bad news was that the officers trained in the prewar days were not prepared as well as they might have been for the upcoming war**.** As Clair Blair wrote in his book, "Silent Victory", "Before the attack on Pearl Harbor the United States had sworn in various international treaties never to engage in 'unrestricted submarine warfare', that is, submarine surprise attacks against merchant vessels. During peacetime years, U.S. submariners who hoped to become part of the U. S. battle fleet mostly concentrated their training in tactics at sinking important enemy men-at-war – carriers, battleships, cruisers – and their boats, known as fleet submarines were designed with this goal in mind. After December 7, 1941, the United States abandoned its high-minded moral position and ordered unrestricted submarine warfare against Japan. By an accident of history, the fleet submarine proved to be the ideal weapon for war against the Japanese merchant marine. However, the shift in mission caught the submarine force flat-footed. It required new strategy and tactics. Many months went by before the submarine force got the hang of this new role.

There were other problems. Peacetime exercises, most of them unrealistic and artificial, had led submariners to believe that aircraft, sonar gear, and powerful depth charges made the submarine highly vulnerable to enemy counterattack. This belief in turn had led to extreme caution in the submarine force. The best way to survive, the peacetime submarine commanders believed was to make an attack from deep submergence, using sonar apparatus. The daylight periscope attack and the night surface attack were considered hazardous, and for a submarine to operate on the surface within 500 miles of an enemy airbase was considered fatal. Too many months went by before submariners discovered these preconceptions to be wide of the mark. The cautious peacetime training led to serious personnel problems in wartime. In peacetime bold, reckless, innovative skippers who were "caught" in war game maneuvers were reprimanded, and older, conservative, "by-the-book" officers who were strict disciplinarians and conscientious with

paperwork rose to command. When war came, too many of the older men failed as skippers. During the first year and a half of war, dozens had to be relieved for 'lack of aggressiveness' (a disaster both professionally and emotionally, for the men involved) and replaced by brash, devil-may-care younger officers, some of whom would never have attained command in peacetime. This general changeover took months to accomplish. and many valuable opportunities were lost before it became effective. The failure in leadership extended to the highest levels of the submarine force. When the war began, the force was commanded by officers who had risen to the top by the safest and most cautious routes, who did not understand the potential of the submarine. They placed a premium on caution; bring the boat back! Yielding to higher authority, they allowed their forces to be fragmented and employed in marginal fruitless diversions. At least a year and half went by before these command problems were ironed out and men with a good grasp of how submarines could be most profitably employed took over the top jobs. By one standard**,** the year, 1942 wasn't a particularly effective one for the nations submarine force although some 182 Japanese ships had been reported sunk. Japan began the war with 5.4 million tons of shipping, excluding tankers. By the end of December 1942, the figure stood at 5.2 million tons, excluding tankers for a net loss of only 200,000 tons. As for tankers, Japan began the war with 575,000 tons, built more during the year, and at the end of 1942 the figure stood at 686,000 – an *increase* of about 111,000 tons.

While Jim's immediate superior in the Aleutian theater was Admiral Oswald S. Colclough, a former Navy lawyer, who in turn reported to Admiral Robert A.Theobold, the overall command of the submarines in the Pacific came under Admiral Bob English (the predecessor to highly-regarded Admiral Charles A.Lockwood). Clay Blair wrote in "Silent Victory", "Bob English had not distinguished himself in command of submarines Pacific. He failed to organize a hardheaded and persistent strategic war against Japanese shipping in the home islands, allowing his submarines to be shunted to Alaska, Truk, and elsewhere on missions that produced little. He had ignored the Mark XIV torpedo problem, leaving it to Lockwood, a newcomer to the Pacific, to solve. His management of submarines during the battle of Midway had been less than professional. Few of his skippers respected him. One reason was that English continued to write negative and harsh endorsements for patrols --- that were aggressive yet unlucky or bedeviled by torpedo failures. The skippers resented being second-guessed by a man who had little understanding of the fleet submarine and who had never been on one in combat.
Art Taylor, the bright and aggressive skipper of *Haddock*, during his first war patrol wrote a poem that was widely circulated among the submariners of that time and place:

Squat Div One

They're on their duff from morn til nite;
They're never wrong they're always right;
To hear them talk they're in the fight;
Oh yeah?
A boat comes in off a patrol,
The skipper tallies up his toll
And writes it up for all concerned.
He feels right proud of the job he's done,
But the staffies say he should of used his gun!
Three fish for a ship of two score ton?
Outrageous! He should have used but one!
A tanker sunk in smoke and flame –
But still he's wide open to blame.
His fish were set for twenty right –
That proves he didn't want to fight!
Oh Yeah?

The freighter he sunk settled by the stern
With depth set right she'd split in two!
So tell me what is the skipper to do?
He's on the spot and doing his best
But that's not enough by the acid test.
The staff must analyze his case
And pick it apart to save their face.
Just because you sink some ships
Doesn't mean you win the chips –
You've got to do it according to Plan;
Otherwise you're in the pan!

So here's to the staff with work so tough
In writing their endorsements guff –
Whether the war is lost or won
Depends entirely on Squat Div One.
Oh Yeah?

Admiral English wound up with a copy of the poem to read and predictably, he went ballistic. But I think the tone of the poem properly captures the feelings of the submariners about the command structure at that time. I believe that Jim was a fairly independent thinking and strongly anti-bureaucratic person and would have been at least as resentful as the others on this matter. The Grunion was the only submarine lost in the Aleutians in 1942 with total loss of life. The S-27 was lost there in June of 42 by grounding but all hands were rescued. The Grunion was the 7th of 8 subs lost in all of 1942. The only sub

lost after Grunion in 1942 was the S-39, which was lost to grounding without loss of life. The only other submarine lost with all hands in 1942 was the "USS Shark" and it was determined that she was lost probably as the result of reported enemy action in the South Pacific where she was last heard from. For some 50 years after the war, upon checking Japanese records, there were no reported submarine attacks or sinkings in the area where Grunion was last heard from. The area was not thought to be mined because it was a forward Japanese base and these were rarely mined since the enemy's own ships might be hit. The fate of the Grunion remained unknown for some 50 years and the men who were on her were officially recorded as *Missing In Action*. Somewhat surprisingly though, in a letter, which my mother received on 9 October, 1943, well before any Japanese battle records would become available, the following was recorded:

> "Died: 2 August 1943; (Officially reported missing as of Aug 1942, having been attached to the U.S.S. Grunion when that ship was lost in the Aleutian Alaskan area. In compliance with Sec. 5 of Public Law 490, as amended, death is presumed to have occurred on 2 August 1943.)
> Place: Alaska – Pacific area;
> Cause: Loss of ship – *not enemy action*.

For the last 50 years or more I haven't thought too much more about the subject but recently, spurred on by these somewhat peculiar messages, I decided to see if I could learn anything more of what happened to the Grunion back in the summer of 1942. It seemed to me that if the Navy didn't know what happened to cause the sub to "disappear," it would have been logical to assume in 1943, during the thick of the war, that it had been most probably lost to enemy action. After all, the Grunion's last transmission according to official Navy records was that it was experiencing heavy anti-submarine activity at the entrance to Kiska. I wondered whether there was some information that we didn't know about.

Having obtained patrol and weather reports from the USS S-31, which was in the area at the same time as the Grunion, I was able to get a fairly good idea of the weather conditions on the dates where the Grunion was last heard from. The visibility, they reported, was having been fairly good on July 30,1942. I also learned that on that day the orders from ComTaskGroup 8.5 ordering the Grunion back to Dutch Harbor came in by radio message starting at 5:30 PM. The USS S-31 left its position in the general area near the Grunion at 8:00 PM that evening. On July 31 the visibility was "quite good," but on August 1 it was very low east of Kiska and remained quite poor through the next day. By August 3rd, however, the visibility was once more "quite good."

The Home Front After The Loss

That following September we received word via a forwarded telegram that the Grunion hadn't been heard from since July 30, 1942 and was missing in action and presumed lost. I remember the day. It was an early fall, sunny afternoon and my brothers and I were playing with a football in the road out in front of our house in Newton Highlands, MA. My mother came to the door and called us all in and while we stood in a sunbeam by her desk in the front of the living room she read us the "first" telegram. Bruce reacted with some exclamations but I remember being completely devoid of emotional feeling at hearing the news. At that age, I was emotionally extremely phlegmatic. I have speculated that it was perhaps because my father had once told me that a "soldier" never cries (or at least that is what I thought) and I was more or less incapable of ever shedding tears from then on. After hearing the news and reflecting on its meaning for a short while, we returned to our activities out front which we continued to pursue rather listlessly. I remember that my mother never wanted to put any sort of a "gold star" in our window since she considered that the Grunion was officially "missing in action" and not definitely lost – yet.

At that time, Jim had been gone for some 4 months already and had been absent on cruises or work for much of the preceding 18 months. This meant that my younger brother, John, hardly had any time to get to know his father after he was old enough to speak and remember, and I had only been able to know him for some 3 to 4 years on the same basis. Bruce, being the oldest, undoubtedly remembered him the best. In the spring of 1942, when Jim left for war, I was 9 years old, my older brother, Bruce, was 12 and my younger brother, John, was only 5. Jim was 38 years old and would turn 39 in less than two months on July 11.

My mother and Jim had agreed that we would leave the rented house we were in at Mystic, CT after the end of the school year and spend our first summer in a converted barn with our three cousins, Bill, Betty and Catherine Stevens and our Aunt and Uncle, Fran and Dr. Bill Stevens, on the estate of their relatives in Tiverton, RI. While we kids were there, our mother would find suitable housing for us to rent in a suburb of Boston (Newton Highlands) where we might be living closer to her sister's family who lived in Brookline. Since my father didn't yet know where that would be, he had listed his official address with the Navy Department as the Tiverton address. Consequently, when the telegrams arrived in September, they had been sent to our Tiverton address first and forwarded to us from there.

You may have noticed that I used the plural in describing the telegrams. This was not an oversight – curiously, we received two, one sent on September 30 and the next on October 1st. The first telegram stated that our father was "<u>missing following action in the performance of his duty and in the service of his country</u>". The second telegram seemed to make a significant change. After simply stating that our father was missing (period), a new sentence was inserted stating, "<u>However, no proof has been received that it was the result of enemy action</u>." The Navy presumably knew at the time that the Grunion had been in the thick of it in the Aleutian Island battles around Kiska Island and normally would have presumed at that time that it had been lost to enemy action. I've puzzled over the reason it was done this way but I believe that I have the answer now. Probably this was done trying to comply with the official Navy policy at the time to maintain total secrecy about sub losses and to deny the enemy any further chance to claim a victory. Again, Admiral Fluckey in his book, "Thunder Below", related these feelings of the

Navy department, "Admiral [Charles] Lockwood was adamant that submarine operations not be publicized for at least 60 days afterward. For instance, known losses of our subs were not listed as "overdue and presumed lost" until *two months later*. Admiral Nimitz understood and insisted upon this procedure. As one of our earliest submariners, he would never forget the secret briefing at Pearl that went awry and cost us 10 subs. A politician had informed the press that the Japanese were not setting their depth charges deep enough to sink more of our submarines. A war crime!" Although Admiral Charles Lockwood would not take over the command from Joe English as ComSubPac until early in 1943 after the latter had been killed in a plane crash, his feelings about this policy at the Navy department undoubtedly reflected the prevailing feelings in effect at that time so I feel that this is probably was the reason for the second telegram

About a month after our telegrams were received, the news was released to the media that the Grunion was missing in action and that my father had been in command. This appeared on the front pages of the papers in our city in bold headlines. Curiously, though, it was only <u>after the war was over</u>, when reviewing Japanese records of battle actions, that it was found that no mention was made of a possible submarine sinking at that time in that specific region. So the Navy department certainly couldn't have known this when the telegrams were sent. Understandably, the Japanese weren't bashful about publicizing their hopefully successful war exploits during the course of the war. They claimed to have sunk some 468 U.S. Submarines when in actuality the most they could possibly have been able to claim was 41 - so one might assume that if there was any chance that Japanese forces might possibly have sunk an American submarine it would have done so. Of course no one could officially say *where* the sub was lost since we didn't know ourselves at that point. We didn't learn "officially" where the Grunion had been operating until sometime later. Before then, any and all official correspondence, which had reason to do so, merely referred to the area in which the Grunion had been operating as the "Pacific theater of operations." However, we did soon learn quite specifically where the Grunion had been lost - around mid-October, 1942 - when the wife of one of the officers wrote to my mother and told her that she had learned through the Navy's notoriously accurate "grapevine" that the Grunion had been lost in the Kiska area of the Aleutian Islands.

After the story came out in the papers, our family received a number of kind and sympathetic gestures on the part of friends and neighbors. We were new to the Newton neighborhood and these gestures were very much appreciated. The country was in a very patriotic mood in those days and even though we had apparently lost our father, we were all very proud of the fact that he had been a submarine commander, defending his country against our common enemy.

One immediate concern of my mother's must have been how this would affect the future financial plans for her family. My mother had not been a breadwinner up to that time and was saddled with three small boys to bring up. She soon learned of the naval regulations providing for one year's pay for servicemen, who were reported to be MIA, so there was apparently no immediate crisis at hand. Furthermore, in the middle of the month of August 1942, Congress changed the laws governing pay to submariners al-

lowing them to be paid 150% of base pay rather than the 125% of base pay that had been the practiced up until then. This was because of the hazardous nature of this duty. Naval aviators had received such pay for some time but it was only in the summer of '42 that it was decided that submarine duty should receive the same consideration. This meant that the families of the crew of the Grunion would actually receive an increase in pay for the upcoming year and then these payments would end. There were no pensions or survivors benefits for men lost in action in those days, but Jim had a $10,000 government life insurance policy which entitled my mother, as beneficiary, to receive $46.40 per month beginning August 1, 1942 and continuing for the rest of her life. (As it turned out this election resulted in her getting about a 4.3% interest rate for the transaction, which was probably better than the going rate at the time) It was clear to her, however, that she would have to augment the family income fairly soon and as a trained teacher, musician and violinist, she decided to begin a career of teaching children to play the violin. She began by giving private lessons in our home and soon also gave group and private lessons at one or more of the nearby Newton grade schools. I suppose the sound of a violin is music to many ears, but after listening to hours of squawking violin sounds downstairs in our living room, I haven't been able since to really appreciate the true beauty of the sound of a violin. Her efforts were a success, however, in securing future financial independence for our family. This included dealing with a serious illness of my younger brother, John, who contracted osteomyelitis of the hip bone before the widespread use of penicillin for this condition and underwent some 7 years of operations, months in a body cast and in a wheel chair, and more months on crutches. It also included sending both Bruce and me to two years of private schooling and all three of us boys to four years at good colleges. Of course, during the war years, millions of women entered the work force to support the war effort, so having our mother go to work wasn't exceptional for those times. Curiously, though, I don't seem to remember many other kids who lived around us, who had family relatives in the war at that time. I guess I just wasn't too aware of who had fathers home and who did not or who had other family members away at war.

On March 11, 1943, some five months later, my mother received a letter from the assistant Chief of Naval Personnel that Jim had been awarded the Navy Cross (The Navy's highest award) for "extraordinary heroism as a result of the actions of the Grunion from June 30 to July 24 1942". At that time, he was credited with sinking three Japanese "Towlekju" class destroyers although after the war this was reduced to two smaller Japanese sub chasers and damaging a "third". His name was added to "The Roll of Honor" and we received a written citation to go along with the medal signed by Frank Knox, then Secretary of the Navy under President Roosevelt. Still later, we received a certificate signed by Franklin Roosevelt, himself, and another in 1963 signed by then president John F. Kennedy.

At that time, only the commanding officers of submarines were awarded this medal although certainly the 69 other brave men who fought on the ship and lost their lives should have deserved recognition as well. My mother, feeling this way herself, went to the effort of obtaining the names and addresses from Washington of the next of kin of all the crew of the Grunion and then writing a letter to each one. A copy of this letter ap-

pears later in this narrative. Following this action, she received a tremendous outpouring of letters of thanks and appreciation, along with many sad and poignant pleas for any and all additional information she could send. Several of the letters, written in pencil on pages torn from a little notebook related to us news to the effect that their son had enlisted in the Navy a year or two before and they had rarely, if ever, seen him since.

Typical of the of many letters in reply which she received and, in neat but light pencil on faded yellow-lined paper from St Louis, Illinois:

> "Dear Mrs. Abele,
>
> Will ans your nice long lovely letter which I appreciated very much. Although I shedded quite a few tears while reading it, for it was a lovely letter. To think how Brave our Boys was only if we knew they were OK and not suffering. But I still haven't given up hopes yet. I sit up late thinking every time the door bell rings it might be my son coming home. Mrs. Abele, I am sorry I haven't answered your letter sooner. I have been sick and moved and had so much to do for I knew if any of us hears anything we will all know. So I will close wishing you good Luck if you hear good news as we have special reason to be real proud.
>
> Sincerely
>
> Mrs. Nellie Waddell"

Or, on a slightly different note, from Revere, MA:

> "Dear Mrs. Abele,
>
> Please do not think I am being presumptuous in writing to you. Altho I am a stranger to you, I assure you, I feel as tho I've known you for a long time.
>
> My name is Mary M. Channell. My home is in Revere. I am 22 years old. I am engaged to a man aboard your husband's ship. When he left, a year ago, he was at torpedo-man 1/c. On June 22nd 1942 I got word that he had made chief.
>
> Well, his name is probably unknown to you. The crew was new and therefore the names would be unfamiliar. Albert Elbert De Stoop C.T. Age 26. Father and mother both dead. Home, about a mile from mine. In November, 1942 his 2nd "hitch" was up.
>
> You see, I had been "his girl" for five years and waited until his rating was positive. He worked hard and I didn't want to hold him back with a marriage that would have divided his attention when he was so near his goal – or "first real rating". So - we saved our money: picked out our rings: He gave me a beautiful mahogany lowboy hope chest.

Oh, we know what we wanted. We had our bankbooks and bonds. We laid our plans. He was my parents "God son"- and with his own gone he considered them as his "Mum and Pop" – (a nickname he had for Dad).

Our marriage was not going to be a foolish one to be rushed or laid on little or no foundation. Then the date was set. Mamma and Daddy were married 25 years on the 17th of June, 1942. Ours was going to be started. We prayed for delayed sailing orders, but, he went.

Sept. 30 I guess everyone got some word. Then nothing for a long time. After Jan 15, I started to receive mail back that I had sent. Then in March it stopped. Not all of it came back.

Then the second week of this month I saw the clipping about the Navy Cross.

Please tell me just what does it mean? Do they know something? Mrs. Abele, you know how I feel. I am not as brave and strong as American women are supposed to be. Yes, I go along. There is nothing else to do. But I love Al. I am lost without him.

Everyone says that I am young and healthy and all that; yet I can't, you know, I can't just take that and put it aside. Nothing is definite.

Mrs. Abele, please if you can tell me anything; if you can't or wont write it, may I visit you?

A year has gone by. I have counted the days. I won't give up hope. May I hear from you?

Hopefully I remain

Just Mary"

My mother spent many evenings answering each and every letter she received in her own hand. Even today, I find it hard to read many of these letters, which we still have without my eyes filling. Many of these next of kin had known very little of the fates of their loved ones up until that time and naturally craved more information. Unfortunately, there was very little else available at the time, although I have learned a few more facts since then. Several newspapers learned what my mother had done and printed the story in their editions.

Theories About The Loss – Operational; Friendly Fire

When Jim left New London, he had been qualified for command of a submarine and, as one of the more seasoned officers in submarines, was regarded as one of the best submarine commanders in his division. Although his crew was new to the Grunion, it was made up of many highly experienced and qualified submariners of different skills and all were volunteers trained specifically for submarine duty. Subs in those days especially were electromechanical mazes of pipes and valves and hydraulics which were prone to malfunction especially after severe depth charging or bombing. As I thought about it, one type of "operational loss" that the bureaucracy might have known about and would undoubtedly want to keep a top secret was the loss of the Grunion through accidental "friendly fire". There was a realistic concern on the minds of all submariners during

WW2 about this. The brother of an aunt of ours was stationed in the Aleutians in 1942 and wrote that he had heard a rumor to the effect that a US sub had been accidentally sunk by one of our army antisubmarine planes. We've since learned that the army field where he was working and heard the rumor was not built until the end of August 1942 so even if the rumor were true, it would not have involved the Grunion. However, since we weren't aware of that at the time and being just a rumor, we didn't think much about it then.

Nevertheless, had such a thing happened at that time, it would have very likely been kept *Top Secret.* The battle of Midway had been fought and won only three weeks prior and the enemy forces would have very much liked to hear that one of our latest and newest fleet submarines had been sunk by our own forces. Furthermore, the command up and down the ranks probably would rather have kept a thing like this quiet to protect their own careers. Had this been classified as a *Top Secret* at the time, it would not have been available to any and all the historical researchers who were assembling a complete story of the Aleutian campaign. I know my mother never liked the war poster that was quite popular during the war years showing a Navy PBY bombing a submarine and citing the cryptic phrase, "Sighted Sub Sank Same."

At that time the conditions in the Aleutian theater were quite conducive to this sort of thing occurring. The weather was terrible some 80% of the time with low visibility due to widespread and patchy rain, drizzle and fog. There were many planes involved in ASW activity in the area – Navy, Army and Canadian – which were involved in these terribly long, boring and often-dangerous over-water flights. These flights often lasted 13 hours or more with usually no contacts of any kind made. I can easily imagine such a flight in murky weather suddenly coming across a black, unmarked submarine cruising along the surface, or maybe submerged just below the surface where it would be easily spotted by a passing aircraft, and attacking immediately without bothering to investigate before hand. After all, it was known that enemy subs would immediately dive if they saw a plane so the only way to get an effective attack at all was by complete surprise before the sub was aware of the presence of an attacker. All submarines at the time were painted black with no recognition markings of any kind. Radio IFF (Identification, Friend or Foe) gear was not available at that time for submarine identification. Any sort of conventional radio communication between plane and sub would immediately alert the sub, friend or foe, to the presence of an aircraft, of course. There was a system devised using a series of colored flares to be fired from the conning tower of the submarine in the event it wanted to let an attacking plane know that it was a U.S. sub and not a Japanese one, but these did not prove to be particularly effective. In one instance, in that theater of operations, the commanding officer of the submarine, U.S.S. S-31, (who had formerly been Jim's executive officer on the S-31 when he had commanded her in 1940) tried to fire off the appropriate flare when a plane was sighted. The flare misfired and hit him in the chest, causing a fatal injury. A number of submariners of that era have told me that it was general practice to immediately dive when any plane was sighted and there were many instances throughout the war where American subs were fired upon by American planes, on several instances even after the identifying flares had been fired. In at least

one incident, the submarine (Dorado) was lost with all hands in the Caribbean theater after being fired upon by an American plane. I have studied the war patrol reports of submarines operating in the Aleutian theater during that period and noted that there were several incidents of their being fired upon by American planes in these reports, so it's more than just idle speculation. This was no picnic for the pilots of the planes during that time either. During the war a total of 184 aircraft of all types were lost in that area to operational causes – not counting combat losses. If the Grunion were intact on the evening of the 30th of July, when presumably the directions to return to Dutch Harbor were transmitted, it would have taken at least two days or more of cruising to get from the Kiska area to Dutch Harbor. Since she had radioed that she was located at the entrance to Kiska Harbor on the 30th, she would have had over 600 miles to traverse to get back. She most probably would have elected to travel back east along the northern side of the Aleutian chain of Islands. Although anti-submarine patrols probably wouldn't venture into the immediate Kiska area (where she started out from), they very likely might be heading out in a westerly direction early in the morning opposite the direction the Grunion would have been heading. Likewise, they would be likely heading back home in an easterly direction at the end of the day. In both cases if there weren't clouds, the planes would be approaching low out of the sun making them difficult to spot from the lookout stations on the Grunion. "SD" omnidirectional aircraft radar was probably available on the Grunion then but it was very new and untrusted by most of the submarine personnel at that time. Many captains felt that by turning it on, the enemy could home in on their position. The radar, when it did work, seemed to be able to tell only when an aircraft was somewhere within its range rather than at what bearing the plane was located.

We do know that communications from the Aleutian theater of operations during that period was severely lacking. Not only was military security so incredibly tight that it provoked a Congressional investigation of the matter, but there was also a rather furious level of inter-service political infighting going on then which also tended to color any information that did come out of that area.

Theories About The Loss – Malfunctioning Torpedoes

At the start of the war, the American torpedoes used by our submariners were a major problem. Before the war, in an effort to make them more effective, a new type of detonator, a magnetic detonator, was developed. The theory was that the torpedo would be set to run under a ship, and as it passed through the ship's magnetic field, it would detonate hopefully under the keel of the target to render maximum damage. Since our torpedoes contained only 650 lbs. of torpex explosive while the Japanese torpedoes contained 900 lbs. of high explosive, it was felt that increasing the potential of our torpedoes to inflict maximum damage in this way made sense. The problem was that the detonators proved unreliable too often, either detonating prematurely or not at all.

Another difficulty encountered was with the impact detonator designed to explode the torpedo if it hit an object after being armed. In the field, our submariners found that if the torpedo hit at an oblique angle it usually worked OK, but if it hit at a 90-

degree angle to the target, the firing pin would jam and the torpedo would often fail to explode. There were instances during the war where old and somewhat rusty Japanese merchant ships returned to port with a live American torpedo protruding from their sides.

Clay Blair writes in his book "Silent Victory", "by the end of March (1942) almost every Pearl Harbor submariner who had fired a torpedo in anger believed that the Mark XIV torpedo or the Mark VI exploder – or both – were defective. There were insistent reports from Asiatic skippers that the torpedoes and exploders were defective. Sub skipper,"Turkey neck Crawford" had brought word from Europe that the British and Germans had abandoned the magnetic exploder. That Withers, McCann, English, Styer (all higher-ups in that theater of operation) and other desk-bound staffers refused to listen to suggestions and criticisms from those they had sent into combat with this weapon seems in retrospect, incomprehensibly stubborn and stupid. At the very least, Withers could have expended a few days conducting live tests against and expendable target – shortage or no shortage."

. A third difficulty was that particularly for the first year of the war, the depth controls for our torpedoes were faulty, causing them to run some 10 to 11 feet deeper than the depth at which they were set. The depth setting is important with torpedoes because they have stay below the surface in order to run truly. If a torpedo broaches the surface during a run it is likely to swerve far off course, and of course if the torpedo runs too deeply under its target it may not detonate. Another shortcoming of our torpedoes as they were contrasted to that of our enemy was that our torpedoes were all steam-powered. They traveled reasonably swiftly at 45 knots for a maximum range of some 4500 yards but they left a steam vapor trail behind. This enabled them to be spotted more easily and more importantly enabled the "target" to see exactly from where the torpedo had been fired so it could take offensive action. Later in the war, we developed an electric powered torpedo that only traveled at 35 knots for a maximum range of 3500 yards. However, in spite of its reduced speed and range, most of the submariners used them in place of the former steam torpedoes later in the war.

On top of all this, another nasty trick that our torpedoes displayed on occasion was that they would occasionally travel erratically, occasionally in a circular rather than a straight run. Of course the torpedo would miss its target in these cases but worse, if it circled, it would head straight back for the firing submarine! There were two cases of confirmed sinkings of our submarines during the war by circular torpedo runs. Ned Beach, the author, wrote to me saying that he personally had witnessed <u>three</u> circular runs on his own submarine during the war with luckily none of them hitting his sub. A number of other submarines reported this happening to them as well. He estimated that statistically, as many as eight of our subs may have been victims of circular runs during the war.

In addition to these difficulties, there was a tremendous shortage of torpedoes during the early days of the war. They were all being manufactured in Newport, RI and production could not keep up with their expenditures. This resulted in the Navy brass urging the operating forces to conserve torpedoes, costing over $10,000 apiece then, and to fire only 2

rather than the standard 3 torpedoes in a spread. Firing torpedoes in a spread was important early in the war since target data (range, speed and direction) could often not be accurately determined. By firing a spread of three torpedoes, any small errors in firing angle could be compensated for. Many of these deficiencies were at least partly corrected by the end of the war but all would have been faced by the Grunion at the time she was operating in her war zone.

Theories About The Loss – Operational; System malfunction

Operating a submarine in those days was a very hazardous activity even under the best of conditions. Indeed, some 23 submarines have been lost during peacetime alone with another 11 known losses to operational causes during the war years for a total of 34 cases in all. The non-wartime losses alone resulted in the loss of life of some 540 officers and men. . Although the standard "duct tape and WD-40" were not available in 1942, submariners were renowned for ability to repair damage "with bailing wire and tape" if necessary in order to survive and in many cases resume a patrol. I believe that Jim with his craftsmanship abilities was especially well qualified to do this sort of thing.

The operating conditions in the Aleutian Theater were not conducive to safe operation. Weather was abysmal and many of the charts being used by our Navy personnel were old and out of date. Tides and currents were strong and uncharted. One submarine operating in the Aleutian area (USS S-27) was known to be lost to these causes but with all personnel saved. Another submarine in the area (USS S-35) was very nearly lost when it took heavy seas down its conning tower tearing insulation from its cables and starting a bad fire. The fire raged out of control, twice forcing all hands onto the pitching deck topside. Finally, the fire was contained and the sub limped back into Dutch harbor. However, a myriad of operational dangers was ever present for submariners. In the spring of 1939, a sub similar in size to the Grunion sank off Portsmouth, NH with the loss of about half of its crew. In this case, the Squalus (SS-192) who's commanding officer, O. F. Naquin was a classmate of Jim's at the Naval Academy, was out to make a routine diving test. The main induction valve, which shuts the air intake to the diesel engines, either failed to close completely when it dove or else it opened up again after the boat was submerged, The red and green light indicator at the diving station indicated that it was safely closed though at the time of the dive. In the case of the Squalus, after a thorough investigation, it never was *conclusively determined* what cause the accident. This same sort of thing happened on two other submarines of that type in the same time period but without fatal consequences. Later, the Squalus was patched up and reconditioned as the "Swordfish" .Nor did non-combat losses cease after the war. The cases of the tragic losses of the Thresher and the Scorpion in the 1960s were well-documented accounts of such losses. These are just a few examples of the myriad of difficulties that a submarine might encounter, and if in enemy waters when submerged, it could be unlikely for it to survive regardless of how well its crew reacted. Salt water in the battery spaces can generate enough deadly chlorine gas to kill the entire crew in minutes. Fire and/or total electrical failure are also dangers for submariners in addition to pressure hull failure. During

the course of the war there were recorded four strandings, two circular torpedo runs and three "operational" losses (one collision at sea and two probable flooding losses), for a total of 9 submarines lost out of 52 to actions other than enemy attacks. We'll never know whether a single 8cm Japanese shell exploding low in the conning tower could single-handedly sink a fleet type sub but if it didn't, it certainly might create a situation where the sub could be lost to extreme operational difficulties shortly thereafter.

Theories About The Loss – Unreported Enemy Action

Although Japanese records did not record any attacks in the area presumed fatal, it still was possible as we have seen that the Grunion could succumb to such an action. The chief source of information as to attacks made on U. S. submarines by the enemy has been provided by the Japanese since war's end. The list consists of two parts; both exact translations, and purports to be a list of positive sinkings. The first part gives the date and place of attacks made on U.S. submarines; the second is an amplifying report, which gives further information on each attack. *An attached note states that those attacks whose dates or locations are uncertain have been eliminated by the Japanese.* The definite possibility exists that the attack was not recorded because it was thought to be ineffective or because the date or position was garbled. As we have already seen, the Japanese high command was probably wary of any information provided by their "inferior" members of the Japanese Naval Reserve forces.

After July 1943, more strict investigations of possible losses were instigated to confirm the sinkings but the losses earlier than this were reported without further investigation. Japanese records were notoriously ill kept and several specific instances of erroneous or missing records were turned up. For example, although seven submarines were know to have given up prisoners of war to the Japanese, only four attacks in which American prisoners were taken are listed in the report.

Lastly, it must be mentioned that in searching Japanese records to locate attacks, which might have spelled doom for our lost submarines, a great many assumptions were made. While it would be perfectly possible for an accurately placed cannon-shot to sink a submarine immediately, the amount of damage sustained and survived by U. S. submarines during the war is nothing short of amazing. Undoubtedly, many stories of heroic fights to control damage are locked forever in the depths below the waves. The Grunion might have lasted some time after attack which was the primary agent causing her demise.

It was puzzling however, that right after the war, available Japanese antisubmarine attack data show no record of any antisubmarine attack in the Aleutian area at that time. Furthermore, American planes observing approaches to Kiska for indications of enemy salvage operations in connection with Grunion reported negatively. While it was possible that records kept at the Japanese installation at Kiska may have been lost by the end of the war, it would seem that if the Japanese had any idea that they had sunk an enemy submarine in the area at that time, then this news would have been sent *immediately* to empire headquarters as another example of a successful Japanese war effort and it very probably would have become part of the Japanese war propaganda which was being

widely broadcast at that time. When you remember that Japan had just experienced the "less than successful" operation at Midway some 7 weeks prior, it would seem likely that she would want to seize on any scrap of "victory at sea" possible – yet none was forthcoming about the Grunion – even though our own news media broadcast the loss of the Grunion widely some two months later.

Overview

In 1989, the National Park Service with the cooperation of the U.S. Navy third fleet conducted Project Seamark to locate and document submerged objects in Kiska Harbor (but not the area where the Grunion was presumed to have been lost). Sonar scans were made of the harbor bottom and the Japanese submarine RO-65 was located and charted. Although the U.S. Navy submarine efforts in the Pacific theater were impressive, they were surpassed by the German U-boat records in both the first and second world wars.

By way of comparison the following chart points out the differences:

Nation	# ships sunk	total tonnage sunk	# subs lost	men lost
Germany WWI	5,078	11 million tons	178	5,000
Germany WWII	2,882	14.4 million tons	781	28,000 killed
		(Plus 175 men-of-war)		5,000 captured
United States	1,314	5.3 million tons	52	3,506 killed
Japan	171	(less than 1 million tons)	130	?

Although the U.S. had started out the war against Japan with only some 55 submarines in its arsenal, this number had increased by wars end to as high as 247 operational submarines with 200 of them being of the latest "fleet type". U.S. losses in submarine personnel figured to be 22% of the total number of personnel who had actually made war patrols, the highest figure for any branch of the service. The number of ships American submarines were credited with sinking was reduced by post-war assessment and part of this reduction was due to the faulty torpedoes we used. A total of 14,748 torpedoes were expended during the war with some 4000 of them having been fired by the end of 1942.

Fortunately for our submariners, it was found during the war that Japanese antisubmarine efforts were not particularly effective. While they were apparently very good at locating our submarines in general, they were much less successful at finding exactly where to drop their depth charges or bombs and weren't nearly persistent enough once they commenced doing so. This shortcoming enabled our submarines to survive many depth charge and bombing attacks and live to strike again.

The submarine sagas of this period provide a curious peripheral story as well. In an arms treaty conference called the "Washington Naval Arms Limitation Treaty", held in 1922 and again in 1930, a five nation group made up of the United States, Great Britain, Japan, France, and Italy, it was proposed to limit any submarine actions as follows:
In their action with regard to merchant ships, submarines must conform to the rules of International Law to which surface vessels are subject.
In particular, except in the case of persistent refusal to stop on being duly summoned, or of active resistance to visit or search, a warship, whether surface vessel or submarine, may not sink or render incapable of navigation a merchant vessel without having first placed passengers, crew and ships papers in a place of safety. For this purpose, ships boats are not regarded as a place of safety unless the safety of the passengers and crew is assured, in the existing sea and weather conditions by proximity of land or the presence of another vessel, which is in a position to take them aboard.

This agreement was actually signed and agreed to by the U. S., Britain and Japan. However, later in the decade, Japan renounced her agreement and the treaty fell apart. It provides a realistic and somewhat discouraging example of the value of arms limitation agreements. It appears that they will exist only so long as no one of the parties finds it to her disadvantage to do so. Surprisingly, however, in the Nuremberg trials, which took place after the defeat of Germany, German Admiral Karl Doenitz, who had been commander-in-chief of the German U-boat fleet during the war, was found guilty of violating this very pact. He appeared destined to be hanged until U.S. admiral Chester Nimitz testified before the court and explained that U.S. submarines had been doing exactly what German subs were accused of for the past 4 years!

I suppose the arms treaty banning the use of poisoned gas is most often held up as an example of the success of an arms limitation treaty. But even here, I recently learned that no lesser a statesman than the great Winston Churchill had proposed abrogating the treaty in order to end Germany's used of V-1s and V-2s towards the end of the war. Eisenhower's refusal at the time prevented this action from being taken.

About (Jim) Abele

He was born July 11, 1903 in Quincy, Massachusetts. His father was a highly regarded veterinarian and his mother was an extremely bright, hard-working and handsome woman. He had one older brother, Trescott, who was two years older than he. As a boy he was an above average athlete and somewhat of a daredevil. He was an average student with his best grades being in the sciences and his weakest subject being spelling. He was outgoing and gregarious and well liked by his peers. His father died after a gall bladder operation, one of the first of its kind in that day, when Jim was 14 years old. He wished to attend the Naval Academy but was advised by his uncle, who had graduated from the Naval Academy in 1898, that he would have a better chance of getting in if he applied as an enlisted sailor. Accordingly, Jim enlisted in the Navy on August 17, 1920 at

the age of 17, after completing only three years of high school. He took the entrance exam after one year but failed the spelling portion of the exam. When he took it again the following year, he passed and was accepted to start in the summer of 1922 with the class of 1926. During his plebe summer there, however, he was so miserable with his choice that he wanted to quit and revert back to his life as a sailor but his uncle would not hear of it and insisted that he stick it out.

In the summer between his junior and senior year at the academy and while still a midshipman, he was assigned along with a third of his class to partake in Naval Aviation training. Here, he had a chance to try early naval flight and while he liked the idea of being a Naval aviator, he passed on the chance to join up with the earliest of Naval aviators and instead elected a more conventional career path. In 1926 when Jim finished up at the Naval Academy, graduates were granted a very fancy diploma but no degree to go with it. It wasn't until April of 1938 that the Navy decided to grant degrees to its academy graduates, so Jim then received another fancy diploma, granting him at this time a Bachelor of Science degree.

After graduation, he was assigned to the battleship, Colorado. This duty was only a slight improvement of his status as a midshipman. It involved a lot of menial and tedious chores but was required at the time for all Naval Academy graduates. While on the Colorado, one of his duties was to coach the ship's soccer squad, a duty he took on as a result of his having played center forward on the academy's varsity soccer squad.

Approximately one year after graduation from the academy, on June 8, 1927, he married Catherine Eaton, a distant cousin who had once boarded at his family house in Quincy with her sister, Frances, after Jim's father had died. They were married in a small ceremony at her sister's house in Brookline, Massachusetts. Jim's cousin, Nancy Abele, was a flower girl at the ceremony.

Following his two-year tour of duty on the Colorado, he applied for and was accepted to start submarine school on the following January 1929. At the time this was a five months course, which he completed in June of 1929. After finishing sub school, he was assigned as engineering officer to the USS S-23 that was stationed in Pearl Harbor. My mother stayed on in Boston since she was expecting her first child in October. On October 14, 1929, their first son, Bruce, was born in Boston, Massachusetts and shortly thereafter my mother and her new son, Bruce, joined him in Pearl Harbor.

While stationed aboard the S-23 as its engineering officer, Jim discovered a wiring deficiency creating a severe lack of compression in some of the cylinders of the diesel engine. He, and an enlisted man working with him, devised a way of changing the wires around to correct the problem and thereby greatly increased the power and speed of the boat. Although he was angrily ordered to "put it back the way he found it or you'll be court-marshaled" by his commanding officer at the time, he was later credited with a spe-

cial commendation from the Bureau of Navigation in Washington, which in those days included the Bureau of Personnel.

On January 25, 1933, shortly after Jim was transferred to the S-21, his second son, Brad was born and three months later Jim was ordered to shore duty in Washington, DC to work in the Navy's Bureau of Navigation. His wife and two boys, Bruce and Brad, followed him to Washington, traveling by ship through the Panama Canal shortly thereafter.

In May 1936 he was transferred back to sea duty, this time to the USS R-11 in New London, Connecticut on which he was stationed until the following February 1937. He was transferred to, and given command of, the USS R-13 also stationed at New London. Also that February, his third son, John, was born. While commanding the R-13, he was described by his commanding officer as "the ablest commanding officer in the division" and also while in command, his submarine received the Navy's coveted "E" for excellence. The following summer, while his submarine was out on routine operations on Long Island Sound, Jim was badly burned on his sub while checking out the battery mounts with a metal flashlight. The submarine immediately returned to port stopping only to take on a pharmacist's mate on the way back. When in port he was taken out of the sub on a stretcher through the only way out which was straight up a ladder through a tubular hatch about 36 inches in diameter. He convalesced at the Naval Hospital in New London for a month or so and then continued his recovery at home. He was home when the hurricane of '38 struck that area. By October he was finally feeling strong enough to resume work but he retained highly visible burn scars on his hands and body for the remainder of his life.

The following summer in July of 1939, he reported for duty as an instructor of NROTC at Harvard University where he taught for one year. His family moved to Brookline, MA at the end of that summer. One of his pupils at Harvard that year was Endicott Peabody, an all-American football player who later became governor of Massachusetts. He wrote to me in February of 1997 shortly before his death:

> ---"One day in class your father, then a Lt. Cmdr I believe, suggested we look at submarines before we made up our minds, and I tucked that thought away. Later that year I went to the H-Y boat races in New London on my roommate's ketch. An old sub was following us up the Thames River and I noticed the officers dressed in Khaki. I said to myself – "That can't be much different than cruising in a small boat as we were – close quarters, informal, on your own and exciting." So I immediately made my choice.
>
> Your father influenced a lot of our class ('42) including ---."

My brothers and I have chanced to meet several men who were also students of Jim's while taking NROTC at Harvard and they all spoke highly of his skills as a teacher. The informality of the submarine service that Peabody spoke of was undoubtedly an attraction

to many including, probably, Jim. Personnel in subs were known as a part of the "brown shoe" Navy because brown shoes were worn with khaki uniforms rather than the black shoes worn by surface Navy personnel. I remember about that time that Jim acquired a polished pair of brown Jodhpur ankle high boots that he wore with his khaki uniform. Members of the brown shoe Navy tended to flaunt certain Navy traditions felt near and dear to the surface Navy. One manner of doing so was to refer to their submarines as "boats" rather than "ships" as the surface Navy called all craft of this size. Similarly, Naval aviators, who were also part of the "brown shoe" Navy, would refer to the leading edge of their carriers as "the pointy end" rather that the "bow" as the surface Navy would call it.

In 1939 the US was finally starting to dramatically increase its submarine fleet in anticipation of the hostilities, which likely lay ahead, and Admiral Chester Nimitz directed that all personnel, having had any experience on submarines, be immediately transferred back to sea duty. Therefore, after teaching only one year at Harvard, Jim was ordered to command the refitting and sea trails of the USS S-31 that was being overhauled in Philadelphia. His family stayed on in Brookline during the school year, as he would be at sea most of the time for the next nine months. The following summer of 1940, the family paid their first visit to what would be their future summer residence at Tiverton, RI.

In the fall of 1941, he was ordered to command the new fleet type submarine, Grunion, then being built at the Electric Boat Company in Groton, CT and shortly after the school year began, the family moved once again, this time to Mystic, CT. The Grunion, which cost $6,000,000 to build, was launched on December 22 (the first to be launched there after the attack on Pearl Harbor) and Jim took we three boys, Bruce, Brad and John, on to the sub so we could ride it down the ways during its launching. The Grunion was then fitted out and was commissioned on April 22, 1942. During the year we lived in Groton, Connecticut, Jim was involved preparing his new command for war. I remember his being terribly busy and often away for several days while he stayed on the sub at the sub base. The Grunion was a "Gato" class sub with a new type all-welded hull, and was the class of fleet submarine used most in WW II. There were 73 of these submarines built - more than any other class built during that period. The boat was 312 feet long, could cruise 20.25 knots on the surface and 8.75 knots submerged. The pressure hull on the Grunion, which was of 9/16 inch plate, provided it with an official diving limit of 300 feet and the Grunion passed its "Deep Submergence" test on May 7, 1942 by diving to a depth of 315 feet. However, the Grunion was probably capable of going deeper. Commander Eugene Fluckey dove the "Barb", a Gato class submarine built in 1942 only four months after the Grunion, to a depth of 435 feet without adverse effects so presumably the Grunion was capable of diving to this depth as well.

In April 23, 1944, a destroyer built in Bath, Maine was named for him. My mother was asked to be the sponsor (or the one who christens the ship with a bottle of champagne). We, and our extended family of about 25, were invited to the launching. When we arrived there, my two brothers and I were invited to ride the ship down the ways and into the Kennebec River. The destroyer was commissioned the following 4th of

July in Boston and then headed out to the Pacific theater to do battle. Unfortunately, while cruising off Okinawa as a radar picket ship in April of 1945, she was attacked and sunk by a combination of Kamikazi planes and a Baka bomb.

Although I was only nine years old when Jim left for the war, I can remember a few things about him still. He was an exceptionally resourceful and excellent craftsman and turned out numerous impressive works made of wood, using only the most basic of tools. When he was not on duty, it seemed that what he loved most to do was to work around the house or in his workshop area. It seemed as if he never enjoyed "relaxing" in the traditional sense but would soon have to get up and start creating something. I remember only rarely ever playing with him in our yard, partly because he couldn't throw overhand and had to "pitch an object underhand instead, but also because it seemed he was always busy doing something else if he were around. The one amount of time he did allocate to each of his boys was when he would cut our hair and tell us stories while doing so. I remember well that he used a hand clipper that tended to pull the hair as he worked it, making the process rather uncomfortable for us.

At the time he left for war, he was 38 years old, of slight of build, 5 ft 10 inches tall with a waist that was less than 30 inches in diameter and an expanded chest measurement of 37 inches. His weight would hover just below 140 lbs., and not surprisingly his blood pressure at that time was a sprightly 110/62. His most prominent feature was his "Abele" nose that, from profile view, was shaped like a (4-sided) trapezoid on its side. Two of his uncles on his father's side had the same shaped nose. Because of this, he always looked and photographed better from the front view with his officer's cap on because he had a high forehead with a sharply receding hairline.

During his Navy career he had several "medical procedures" performed. He had a case of acute appendicitis and acute tonsillitis with subsequent removal of both. He had a nose operation for a deviated septum, and he had a problem eventually resolved that today might be classified as a urinary infection. Finally, he had the problem of severe first and second-degree burns that he received in 1938 while at sea on the R-13.

Had Jim survived the war, I believe that he most likely would have come out with the rank of Captain. He would probably have been assigned to some sort of shoreside duty, either in a line or a staff capacity until sometime between 1951 and 1956, when he would most likely have retired from the Navy. Of the 465 skippers who commanded submarines during t he war, almost all made the rank of captain. Therefore, since he would most probably have been a captain at the time of his retirement along with having received the Navy Cross, he would have been retired as a rear admiral under the "tombstone" law in effect at that time.

Epilogue

During WW II over 400,000 American servicemen lost their lives, including 375 officers and 3131 enlisted men from the U.S. submarine force. There had been a total 465 submarine skippers who had commanded subs in combat during WW2. Even using JANAC figures whose numbers were undoubtedly lower than actual, about 1.6% of all the naval

personnel in WW2 had accounted for about 55% of Japan's maritime losses. When the Grunion departed for its assignment in the Aleutian Islands, the Japanese had completed an almost unbroken string of victories and many thought that their next target was to be the territory of Alaska itself. The top Navy admirals of the 1930's were the original decision-makers at the outset of the war. They were basically spit and polish ,"black shoe", surface-ship proponents and looked upon the "brown shoe" services of submarines and naval air power as mere support services to the surface fleet. But after Pearl Harbor a new strategy had to be put quickly into effect and suddenly, these forces consisting of thousands of relatively junior "youngsters" were thrust into the fore. That fighting methods and equipment for these forces hadn't been fully developed and tested at that point is another example of the charge that the leaders of our armed forces then seemed to have a propensity of preparing for each new war as if it were to be fought like the last one. It seems to me analogous to a third string quarterback on the varsity football team having been told to dress for the big game but expected to sit out the game on the sidelines. Suddenly, the first two quarterbacks are injured and the third string man is told to put his helmet on, go in and lead the team to victory. Not only that, but by then his team is down 21 – 0! But he goes in anyway, performs brilliantly, and becomes a hero! All the commanders of the submarines (and all the naval aviators) were relatively junior officers, and they were being thrust into the "game" where they were to both make their own plays and execute them as they went along. It would appear that the Grunion operated *very* aggressively from the outset taking her fight directly to the enemy's advanced front line. A number of other American submarines in the Pacific theater were doing the same and surprising the top brass with the effectiveness of their methods. Many heroes emerged from the war years but special merit has to go to those who were at the van of their forces in battle; those who had little or no prior experience to build on as they headed out to take on the "forces of darkness" in mortal combat. I believe that it was this factor and the aggressiveness of the Grunion's actions that earned her the Navy Cross, rather than any particular number of Japanese seamen it killed. And like many other warriors during that war, her aggressiveness led to her award having to be made posthumously.

Thinking back, even before the latest notifications were in, it seemed to me that the most likely cause of its loss was due to enemy action, likely inflicted upon it after the time of its last transmission on the 30th of July and of course this turned out to be the case. Perhaps it wasn't the direct hit that caused her immediate demise, but instead a blow, which started a chain reaction of problems that the crew of the Grunion was unable to overcome. Another possibility I had considered was that the Grunion might have been sunk when it struck a Japanese mine. I had rejected this idea because it had been speculated that there were no enemy mines in the Kiska area because it was an advanced Japanese base and presumably the enemy didn't want to sink it's own ships accidentally. However Rear Admiral Samuel Eliot Morrison, the official Naval historian, claimed that there were some known 200 Japanese mines in the area and indeed, when Kiska was invaded in 1943, the patrolling destroyer, *Abner Read*, hit a submerged mine and was sunk with the loss of seventy-one dead and thirty four injured. So obviously there *were* mines around.

The principal factor which led to the conclusion the boat wasn't the victim of "friendly fire" was that during the entire course of the Aleutian campaign, after thousands of hours of tedious patrols, the antisubmarine efforts of the various aviation units, Navy, Army and Canadian, were unable to officially report a single confirmed sinking of any submarine except the Japanese RO-65 which was bombed while in Kiska Harbor by both army and navy bombers.

During the course of the war, a total of 52 submarines were lost. A number of these cases were losses during the war where the *specific* cause could never be fully determined. The ability of the submarine crews to fight devastating damage conditions and survive to tell the tale in a number of recorded instances is truly amazing. Yet there must have been many instances where the crew lost these battles, and it seems possible that this may have happened to the Grunion as well.