

NAVY DEPARTMENT
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS
NAVAL HISTORY DIVISION (OP-09B9)
S PS' HISTORIES SECTION

HISTORY OF SHIPS NAMED LAPON

USS LAPON (SS(N)-661) is the second ship of the Fleet to bear the name of a scorpion fish of the Pacific coast of America. She is named to commemorate submarine LAPON (SS-260) who earned the Presidential Unit Citation for outstanding war patrols in World War II.

The first LAPON (SS-260) was built by the Electric Boat Company of Groton, Connecticut. Her keel was laid 21 February 1942. She launched 27 October 1942, under the sponsorship of Mrs. Jesse B. Oldendorf, wife of Rear Admiral Oldendorf, U.S. Navy. The submarine commissioned at the Submarine Base, New London, Connecticut, 23 January 1943, Commander Oliver G. Kirk, USN, commanding.

LAPON (SS-260) had a length overall of 311 feet, 9 inches; extreme beam, 27 feet, 3 inches; standard displacement, 1520 tons; mean draft, 15 feet, 3 inches; submerged displacement of 2424 tons; designed depth of 300 feet, a designed surface speed of 20.25 knots, designed submerged speed of 8.75 knots, and a designed complement of 6 officers and 54 men. She was originally armed with ten 21-inch torpedo tubes, one 3-inch .50 caliber gun, two .50 caliber and two .30 caliber machine guns. She was designed to carry 24 torpedoes.

Following torpedo trails at Newport and local training operations out of New London, LAPON sailed 4 May 1943 for the Pacific. She transited the Panama Canal 16 May and entered Pearl Harbor 1 June to join the Pacific Submarine Force. Her first war patrol commenced 17 June 1943 when she departed Pearl Harbor for Midway Island. There she joined submarines PLUNGER (SS-179) and PERMIT (SS-178) in final preparations for the first war-time penetration into the Sea of Japan. That body of water, up to this time, had remained safe from American submarines behind the land barrier of the Japanese Home Islands. It was filled with enemy shipping carrying raw materials to the Japanese war machines from Manchuria and Korea. Of four narrow entrances to the Sea of Japan, one was unavailable as it lay in Russian territory. Two were guarded by minefields (Tsushima Strait between Korea and Japan; and, Tsugaru Strait between the Japanese Home Islands of Honshu and Hokkaido.) The fourth possible entrance was La Perouse Strait between northernmost Hokkaido and Sakhalin Island. It was frozen up for much of each year. Little was known about La Perouse Strait at the time except it was often obscured in pea-soup fog and was dangerously shallow. The use of this strait by Russian shipping made it appear that this passage was not mined. The three submarines hoped to gain entrance through this strait. They would hit enemy targets, then make their way out before mining or other counter measures could "plug up" La Perouse Strait, their only means of "safe" exit from the Sea of Japan. LAPON was to patrol the southern end of the Sea of Japan. PERMIT was to skirt the western coast of Hokkaido while PLUNGER searched the mid-sea area between Dogo Island and the Northern end of Honshu.

LAPON departed Midway 24 June 1943, one of three raiders who transited Etorofu Strait of the Kurile Islands, undetected and under cover of night, thence south across the southern end of the Sea of Okhotsk to the entrance of La Perouse Strait. As the submarine reached this destination, she recorded a worry in the early morning darkness of 3 July 1943: "We are somewhat worried about Dijogan Rock (or Dangerous Rock as the Russians have it.) It's quite a thrill to be blasting through this area at 17.5 knots, trimmed down, not having sighted a thing for days - either ship, or land, or light." With visibility of daylight improving fast, LAPON settled on even keel on the bottom, to await the cover of night. She surfaced in inky darkness, still worried about the proximity of Nijogan Rock. Then her radar blew a fuse: "The 'jig' is up if radar fails us now." A few minutes later her radar was back in commission and she altered from a course that would have taken her almost onto the rock.

Having succeeded in gaining bearings which fixed her position accurately, LAPON was knifing through the middle of La Perouse Strait at three-engine speed at 2140, 3 July. She skirted the eastern edge of a possible minefield, dodged past a radar contact, then headed south in the Sea of Japan. So the Japanese should not be forewarned, and for the mutual protection of all, the three submarines were to begin offensive actions at the stroke of midnight of 6 July.

The morning of 6 July 1943 found LAPON submerged 60 miles south of the entrance to Vladivostok in the Sea of Japan. Her fathometer had quit cold the three nights earlier. In the following days her search radar probed the eastern coasts of Siberia and Korea under visibility conditions "that precludes seeing the beach unless we run up on it as on a surf board." LAPON had found no signs of the hoped-for coastal shipping by the morning of 12 July when she left the Siberian coast for the run to La Perouse Strait. The night of 13 July her search radar picked up land pips that proved to be Rebun Shima, the island off the southwestern entrance to La Perouse. By midnight she was making 19 knots in the throat of the strait to safely exit the Inland Sea of Japan. Once in the open Pacific, 16 July, she began a seven-day patrol, working south and east along the coasts of Hokkaido and Honshu Islands.

While patrolling across lanes to Tokyo the afternoon of 23 July, she sighted a speeding aircraft carrier with destroyer escorts. As LAPON went to battle stations, aircraft bombs landed close by. Escorts also pounced upon the submarine who evaded the depth charge attacks. After giving these hunters the slip, she commenced the great circle course for Midway, thence to Pearl Harbor where she terminated her first war patrol 4 August 1943. LAPON and her two sister submarines brought back with them the news that American submarines could successfully invade the Sea of Japan. The numerous contacts made in its northern surface by PLUNGER and PERMIT were marked down for future reference.

LAPON gained a new commanding officer 19 August 1943 when Commander Oliver G. Kirk, USN, was relieved by Commander Lowell L. Stone, USN. She spent her second war patrol close to the coastline of Southern Honshu, Japan. She departed Pearl Harbor 26 September 1943 and launched four torpedoes at a coastal convoy 12 October. There were no rewarding sounds of explosions. But there was plenty of action from fast patrol boats who made deliberate depth charge runs down both sides of the submarine. The following morning her attack approach on a six-ship convoy was spoiled when a land plane headed for her periscope. She managed to get off four torpedoes before diving for the safety of the deep but could not observe the results of this attack.

The morning of 18 October, one of LAPON's torpedoes ripped into the forward engine room of the 1,906-ton Japanese cargo ship TAICHU MARU who rapidly sank, stern first, and to the bottom. Two days later the submarine attacked a freighter. But she had the disappointment of seeing dud hits splash water alongside this target. She suffered more humiliating experiences 20 and 23 October 1943 when aggressive torpedo attacks resulted in no explosions. This dreary luck may have been due to old-type exploders carried in LAPON's torpedoes during this patrol. She was out of torpedoes upon conclusion of the attack of 23 October. After evading the destroyer she heard 42 very peculiar explosions, not depth charges, lasting until dark. Labeled "block busters" by LAPON's crew, the explosions started with the rumble of a freight train and built up until the vibrations could be felt throughout the ship. She returned to Pearl Harbor from her second war patrol 4 November 1943.

LAPON departed Pearl Harbor 4 November 1943 and entered the Mare Island Navy Yard the 13th to be re-engined and receive modifications to permit the firing of Mark 18 torpedoes. She returned to Pearl Harbor from the West Coast 29 January 1944. She stood out of that base 13 February for her third war patrol which took her to the South China Sea, thence to a new base in Australia. Undaunted by three escorts and an aircraft, 8 March 1944, she made a daylight attack on a four-ship convoy in the Takao-Singapore traffic lanes. As she dived to escape the wrath of the plane and fast patrol boats, she heard thundering torpedo explosions that sounded the requiem for the 5,792-ton cargo ship TOYOKUNI (19°-22.5 N.; 116°-13.3 E). The 5,396-ton cargo ship NICHIREI MARU was also damaged by torpedo hits in the same attack by the daring submarine.

After evading the escorts, LAPON clung tenaciously to the track of the convoy. She made an "end around" after dark and moved in again for the kill a few minutes after midnight of 8-9 March 1944. Finding NICHIREI MARU in tow by another ship, she launched a deadly spread of torpedoes that put that target under the sea. She left other targets aflame to such an extent that the fiery glow was visible for 12 miles. High speed escorts forced LAPON from the convoy. She later destroyed two diesel-powered small craft, one the 10th and another 15 March.

The next day, 16 March, she attacked a convoy of three cargo ships, then dodged to escape a destroyer after observing explosions at the waterline of one target. On 18 March 1944 the submarine outwitted three escorts in a swiftly launched night torpedo attack that sank the 8,359-ton transport HOKOROKU MARU (19°-22.5' N; 116°-53' E). Upon conclusion of her patrol in the South China Sea, LAPON was ordered to Fremantle, Australia. She reached that new base 1 April 1944, having logged 10,226 miles on her third war patrol.

The greater part of LAPON's fourth war patrol was spent north of the Malaya Barrier in the Java Sea, Karimata Strait and South China Sea. She departed Fremantle 25 April 1944 and made two contacts with enemy ship groups worthy of torpedo fire. The first contact came 13 May when a sizeable cruiser-destroyer task force, guarded by aircraft, sped south. This task force was out of torpedo range when sighted and too fast for the submarine to intercept.

LAPON made her second contact the night of 23 May 1944 when she intercepted a convoy of three large cargo ships with two escorts. She attacked this convoy four times within ten hours. In a night surface radar attack the submarine first launched six torpedoes but all ran aft of the target for no hits. About an hour before midnight LAPON again came to attack position and unleashed four lethal torpedoes which disintegrated the stern of the 6,586-ton transport WALES MARU.

(7°-16' S.; 109°-35.5' E.) Wreckage flew high in the air as that target stopped, then quickly slid beneath the surface. The morning of 24 May was only 18 Minutes old when the submarine fired four torpedoes from her stern tubes. The 4,667-ton cargo ship BIZEN MARU burst into flames and sank. Only one large target remained on the surface and the aggressive submarine went after it. At 0308, 24 May 1944, she fired six bow tubes, and observed two damaging hits. The targets slowed to 3 knots and opened with heavy gunfire. Salvos landed uncomfortably close as an escort homed in on the submarine. Dawn was breaking as LAPON pulled away from the hunters in a high-speed run on the surface.

As LAPON continued her patrol she received news that a Japanese submarine had been sighted in her patrol area. All hands went on special alert for this enemy. Also receiving this news was submarine RATON in an adjacent patrol area to the south of LAPON. So the southern boundary of LAPON's area practically formed one vista with the northern boundary of RATON's area. Both American submarines ranged along the adjacent and blending boundary line in the early dawn light of 27 May 1944.

LAPON, cruising submerged, picked up the sight of "I-68 Class" submarine and turned away for a stern tube attack. At 0513, 27 May 1944, she fired the first two torpedoes of an intended four torpedoes. Simultaneously, RATON, having picked up interference on her search radar, was prepared for action with a possible enemy submarine. Minutes after LAPON fired, the RATON was shaken up by two explosions "nearby on the port side." She went hard right and steadied on course as

Commander Stone in LAPON checked fire: "the previous certainty that this was an enemy submarine was lessened in the mind..."

The LAPON-RATON episode may have been the only time an American submarine fired at one of its own family. There were numerous instances where American submarines were tracked by American submarines and finally identified as friendly before any fireworks erupted. But even in this case, keen judgment finally won the day. LAPON could be forgiven under the circumstances -- an enemy known to be in the area and torpedo warfare being what it was. That no tragedies resulted through mistaken identity throughout the war is evidence that American submarine skippers were masters of the fine art of "recognition."

LAPON cleared her patrol area 28 May 1944 and returned to Fremantle 6 June 1944. She was underway for her fifth war patrol by the 29th and made her first kill the night of 17-18 July in Palawan Passage. Six bow torpedoes missed a convoy of two freighters and one escort. But two hits were scored in a second attack. Torpedo tubes were reloaded and LAPON closed for her third try. The passenger-cargo ship KYOKO MARU NO.36 sank in a spectacular explosion. LAPON may also have destroyed the 234-ton submarine chaser KAMO MARU, shown as lost to submarine attack in that area in Japanese records available after the war. LAPON again intercepted a convoy in Palawan Passage 31 July, slamming torpedoes into overlapping freighters. She followed up with a second torpedo attack to sink the 5,061-ton tanker TENSIN MARU. She returned to Fremantle 10 August 1944. Commander Lowell T. Stone, USN, was relieved as commanding officer 22 August 1944, by Lieutenant Commander Donald "G" Baer, USN.

LAPON's sixth war patrol was spent in the Manila-Cape Bolinao Area off the west coast of Luzon. Though a unit of a "wolf-pack" that included FLASHER and BONEFISH, she had little chance to participate in coordinated search activities. Each submarine proceeded independently to the patrol area. Once on the scene, the submarine found enemy traffic hugging the coast of Luzon during daylight and anchoring overnight. This, combined with heavy air coverage during the day, practically precluded coordinated search and attack activities. Successful individual attacks, however, were made by all three submarines. It was on this patrol that LAPON had the rare experience of watching United States carrier-based aircraft destroy a convoy. This event of 21 September 1944 probably remains indelible in the memory of LAPON's officers and men as "The Battle of Palauig Point."

The afternoon of 21 September 1944 found LAPON headed in from eight miles to intercept traffic that might round Palauig Point (reef). Her hunt was rewarded by the sight of masts and smoke of two groups: "This looks like a big outfit and we are about on its track." A minute later, a series of explosions resounded through the water. LAPON could not believe she had been detected by escorts. Upping periscope, she

saw the sky covered with anti-aircraft bursts and splashes around ships we were closing. Convoy scattered in all directions." For some ten minutes "bomb explosions were so rapid and numerous it was impossible to count them. Each stick contained six or seven bombs." LAPON's initial approach had been completely thwarted by the aviators who left her with three damaged ships, all of good size. She had barely time to close again when: "The second wave made their attacks from nearly vertical dives and pulled out close over the tops of the targets...One of the damaged ships we were closing was hit when several planes attacked her...Almost as fast as we selected a new target and headed towards, it blew up or commenced burning." One large destroyer and four other ships had been destroyed by the aviators who seemed to anticipate every attack approach of the submarine and deprive her of a target.

LAPON's skipper, Lieutenant Commander Donald "G" Baer, USN, wrote: "No praise can be too great for the aviators who executed this attack. Their accuracy was remarkable and the swiftness with which the second wave followed was surprising." But if LAPON was full of admiration, she could not be grateful for the targets left behind. She was suddenly besieged by the searching wrath of four destroyers and a fast patrol ship. "All ships have bones in their teeth," wrote Baer, "LAPON is almost dead ahead of the patrol vessel." The enemy formation hovered over and around her as LAPON became "the hub of quite a wheel." She had hoped to get all the hunters forward of her beam and then reverse course. "They did not feel the same way about it and maintained approximately the same relative position on us."

The sound of enemy warship screws finally faded from LAPON's sound gear. She started up to the surface but quickly went deep again as two sets of screws closed in fast, one from starboard bow and one from port quarter. One of the hunters passed directly over her entire length, but providentially did not drop depth charges. She finally evaded the hunters and surfaced in a blinding rain about an hour before midnight of 21-22 September 1944. About this time the glow on the horizon loomed red and high in three explosions, then faded away completely.

A few hours after surfacing; LAPON again intercepted the remnants of the convoy left by the aviators. She closed in on a target guarded by three or four escorts. At 0238, 22 September 1944, she launched a six-torpedo salvo in a night-surface radar attack. The 1,610-ton cargo ship SHUNYUAN took two hits, immediately exploded, and soon was completely enveloped in orange and yellow flame. The ship was clearly outlined as it sank beneath the flames within 17 minutes after first hit. A third hit, was thought to have probably damaged a large unidentified ship. But LAPON was unable to follow to press home additional attacks because, after seventeen hours contact with the enemy, a majority of her crew were suddenly seized with nausea which Lieutenant Commander Baer attributed to extreme fatigue and carbon dioxide poisoning.

The morning of 27 September 1944 LAPON sighted a convoy through her periscope after receiving a contact report from FLASHER. After FLASHER attacked, LAPON waited for the convoy to settle on a base course. She then made an "end around" and submerged ahead on the convoy track. A few minutes before high noon, while the escorts were taking new stations, LAPON fired six bow tubes at overlapping targets. The 5,599-ton tanker HOKKI MARU was hit and swiftly abandoned. The tanker was soon aflame from stem to stern, rudder and screw out of the water, deck awash forward and her hull plates a cherry red. An hour later a loud explosion was heard and flames went high in the sky. The fire subsided and no more was seen of the HOKKI MARU or the fire. LAPON observed a damaging on another unidentified ship in this same attack.

The afternoon of 10 October 1944, LAPON attacked a convoy that had previously been scattered by sister submarine BONEFISH. She closed the coast of Luzon to block the way of the larger group. The wiley submarine was justly rewarded when four cargo ships, with two escorts, came her way. As the convoy came almost opposite Agno Bay, some 500-1000 yards off the beach, the submarine fired at the most heavily laden target - a large cargo ship whose visible cargo was several aircraft and large crates. Two torpedo hits left the 6,868-ton cargo ship EJIRI MARU burning furiously with frequent and numerous explosions. That target was soon beneath the sea. An escort turned for LAPON, blowing whistles and hoisting flags. This enemy received a torpedo that enveloped the stern in a large ball of orange and yellow flames. As LAPON went deep to avoid a second escort, she was shaken violently by heavy explosions that broke light bulbs and caused leaks. As she turned seaward to escape, three outer ships of the convoy passed almost directly overhead but failed to detect the submarine.

The morning of 17 October 1944 found LAPON off Quiniluban Island and with somewhat of a problem: "We are really in a bight as we have four subchasers astern, less than 4000 yards, a 3-fathom spot on starboard bow (Aguirre Bank), and Areta Shoal (5 fathoms) on port bow. Last position was good, but need it exact. Decided to head 180° true and run between banks, then come east when clear of Areta Bank. Evidently a plane tracked us this morning and called out the ASW team. The subchasers had something definite in mind as they searched around over our initial point, then formed search line to eastward...1030 subchasers all have flags painted on sides, and flying man-of-war flags, with many lookouts on top of deck house...1045 Can hear surf noises on both bows--1201 Between Areta Shoal (5 fathoms) and Aguirre Reef (3 fathoms). Commenced running into long line of fishing net buoys. Dropped down to 75 feet, increased speed to pass under or to break through - Back to periscope depth and towing two buoys with us...1400 Have broken away and are clear of nets. Lost screws and can no longer see subchasers...1457 cleared both reefs and changed course to clear Quiniluban Island."

On 26 October 1944 LAPON exchanged calls with submarine GROWLER, giving her information on a patrol craft on Lombok Straits. The following day she was bound for Fremantle where she terminated her sixth war patrol 31 October 1944.

Her seventh war patrol took LAPON again off Luzon where she made only three contacts worthy of torpedo fire. She was one unit of a three-submarine "wolf-pack" that included PADDLE (SS-263) and HAMMERHEAD (SS-364). Two of her contacts were fast destroyers and could not be closed to torpedo range. The afternoon of 18 December 1944 she sighted smoke and trailed submerged until dark. She surfaced in heavy seas for an "end-around" while HAMMERHEAD bore in for attack. Some six hours later, LAPON was in attack position. The morning of 19 December 1944 was 28 Minutes young as she loosed six torpedoes from her bow. Next she fired three from her stern tubes. But her bridge force observed at least three torpedoes broach in the high seas and there were no explosions from the nine torpedoes fired. She was ordered to terminate her patrol 2 January 1945 a few days in advance of the American invasion landings in Lingayen Gulf. Following brief repairs at Guam (10-11 January 1945) she set course for Pearl Harbor, arriving 21 January 1945.

LAPON departed Pearl Harbor 24 January 1945 for overhaul in the Mare Island Naval Shipyard (31 January-22 April). She returned to Pearl Harbor 30 April for post-shakedown training and departed 23 May 1945 to conduct her eighth war patrol which was largely devoted to lifeguard station duty for air strikes. She fueled at Guam (4-6 June) then took lifeguard station off Truk Atoll 14-15 July as "Seafire" planes from British carriers blasted that Japanese sea base. The submarine was still on lifeguard station there 17 June as American "Liberator" bombers struck: "Lots of bombs. What a pasting that island took! Lifeguarding is not so bad when you see what the fliers can 'dish out'."

LAPON returned to Guam 20 June 1945, then touched Tanapag Harbor of nearby Saipan before departing 27 June for lifeguard duty in the Nanpo Shoto area (1-7) July. While on strike station 6 July 1945 her crew worked on number four main engine which had been out of commission for sticking injectors and frozen fuel metering block. The system was purged, a new block installed, the engine was jacked free and rolled with air. On testing the engine, an air header box explosion blew off all but two cover plates and filled the engine room with flame and smoke. There were six men in the engine room, four of whom required treatment for burns about the face, arms, and back. The following day, submarine ASPRO was ordered to relieve LAPON on lifeguard station. LAPON touched Saipan (12-14 July) enroute to Midway, arriving 23 July 1945. The submarine was refitting for another war patrol at that base 15 August 1945 when hostilities ceased with Japan.

LAPON departed Midway Island 25 August 1945 for return to the United States. She touched at Pearl Harbor 29-30 August and transited the Panama Canal 16 September enroute to New Orleans, Louisiana, arriving 20 September 1945. After a month in port she proceeded to Houston, Texas, for the Navy Day Celebration of 27 October, highlighted by receipt of the Navy Unit Commendation in recognition of outstanding valor in conducting war patrol numbers 3 through 6. Presenting the Navy's highest award for valor was LAPON's former Commanding Officer, Captain Lowell T. Stone, USN, Commander Submarine Division 141. She departed Houston three days later for a stay at the U.S. Naval Frontier Base, Tompkinsville, Staten Island, New York (4 November 1945 - 8 January 1946.) She then reported to the Submarine Base, New London, Connecticut for inactivation overhaul. She decommissioned 25 July 1946 and was assigned to the New London Group, U.S. Atlantic Reserve Fleet.

LAPON continued in reserve status until 27 March 1957 when she was ordered to reactivate in preparation for loan to the Government of Greece under terms of the Military Assistance Program. Her extensive refitting and modernization, including snorkel conversion, was completed in the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, New Hampshire. She recommissioned there 13 April 1957, Lieutenant-Commander Samuel Francis, USN, commanding. She floated out of drydock 27 June 1957 and shifted to the Submarine Base, New London, Connecticut, 3 July 1957. Following a brief period of familiarization training for Greek naval officers and men in Long Island Sound, she returned to the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard August 1957. She decommissioned 10 August 1957 and was turned over to the custody of Commander, Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, for formal transfer to the Government of Greece.

LAPON was still on loan to Greece 22 March 1965 when her name was cancelled to permit its assignment to a nuclear-powered attack submarine scheduled for construction. Redesignated on the Navy List as SS-260, she serves the Royal Hellenic Navy as POSEIDON (Y-16).

LAPON (SS-260) was awarded the Navy Unit Commendation for extraordinary heroism during her 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 6th War Patrols. She also received the Philippine Republic Presidential Unit Citation Badge as well as six battle stars for the operations listed below:

1 Star/FIRST WAR PATROL - PACIFIC: 17 Jun-4 Aug 1943

1 Star/SECOND WAR PATROL-PACIFIC: 26 Sep-4 Nov 1943

1 Star/THIRD WAR PATROL-PACIFIC: 13 Feb-1 Apr 1944

1 Star/FOURTH WAR PATROL-PACIFIC: 25 Apr-6 Jun 1944

1 Star/FIFTH WAR PATROL-PACIFIC: 29 Jun-10 Aug 1944

1 Star/LEYTE OPERATION: 10 Oct-16 Dec 1944

PHILIPPINE REPUBLIC PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION BADGE:

Leyte Operation: 10 Oct-16 Dec 1944

USS LAPON (SS-260) - LIST OF COMMANDING OFFICERS

Commander Oliver G. Kirk, USN:	23 Jan 1943-19 Aug 1943
Commander Lowell L. Stone, USN:	19 Aug 1943-22 Aug 1944
Commander Donald "G" Baer, USN:	22 Aug 1944- 1 Feb 1946
Lieutenant Commander Rue O'Neill, Jr., USN:	1 Feb 1946-25 Jul 1946
Lieutenant Commander Samuel Francis, USN:	13 Apr 1957-10 Aug 1957

The second LAPON (SS(N)-661), named for a fish in commemoration of LAPON (SS-260), is under construction by the Newport News Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company, Newport News, Virginia. Her keel was laid 26 July 1965. The nuclear-powered attack submarine is scheduled to launch late in 1966, under the sponsorship of Mrs. Charles D. Griffin, wife of Admiral Griffin, Commander-in-Chief, Allied Forces, Southern Europe.

LAPON (SS(N)-661) is an attack submarine of the "STURGEON" class, specially designed as an anti-submarine weapon. She has an advanced hydrodynamic hull propelled by nuclear power. The extensive use of sound-isolating materials and great care in noise reduction of all moving parts gives LAPON an inherent silent quality and maximum performance of her advanced sonar system. She combines the endurance and environmental independence of nuclear power with deep submergence and high speed. These capabilities, coupled with the latest in submarine weapons systems, including nuclear-tipped and rocket-propelled torpedoes, make LAPON one of the Navy's most effective anti-submarine weapons. She is designed for an overall length of 292 feet, 3 inches; extreme beam, 31 feet, 8 inches; normal surfaced displacement, 4140 tons; submerged displacement 4636 tons. Her designed complement is 12 officers and 95 men. Super quiet, deep-diving and swift, LAPON is not only lethal to hostile surface shipping, but especially suited as a "killer submarine" vitally concerned with denying the effectiveness of a hostile undersea fleet.

33260/A12

NOV 20 1945
U.S. NAVY
COMMANDER SUBMARINE
PACIFIC FLEET

Serial: 158

RECEIVED
New York, New York

CONFIDENTIAL

30 October 1945

From: Commanding Officer.
To: Secretary of the Navy.
Subject: Factual History of U.S.S. LAFON (33260) - Forwarding of.
Reference: (a) ComSubsPacAdComd dispatch 220206 of Sept 1945.
(b) ComSubsLant ltr A-12/(4417) of 25 Sept 1945.
Enclosure: (A) Factual History of U.S.S. LAFON.

1. In accordance with references (a) and (b), enclosure (A) is forwarded herewith.

CC:

D.G. BAER

CincPac
ComSubsPacAdComd
ComSubsLant

HISTORY OF U.S.S. LAMON (SS260)

AUTHORIZED
KEEL LAID
LAUNCHED
COMMISSIONED

September 9, 1940
February 21, 1942
October 27, 1942
January 23, 1943

Built by Electric Boat Company at New London, Connecticut. Commissioned at Submarine Base, New London, Connecticut. Sponsor at launching Mrs. _____.
Commanding Officer at commissioning: Commander O.G. KIRK, U.S. Navy.

The ship was commissioned after the outbreak of the war with Japan and Germany, then a shakedown cruise was impossible. The normal trials and training period were carried out in Long Island Sound, while based at New London. Torpedo trials were conducted at Newport, Rhode Island.

Ready for war, the LAMON departed New London for Pearl Harbor via Panama Canal, on May 4, 1943, and arrived at Pearl Harbor about 1 June 1943, where she passed to the Command of Commander Submarines, Pacific Fleet.

On 24 June 1943, under the command of Commander O.G. KIRK, U.S. Navy, she sailed on her first war patrol via MIDWAY ISLAND. This patrol was of 42 day's duration and was spent in the Sea of Okhotsk, Sea of Japan, and off the east coast of Hokkaido and Honshu. On the night of July 3, 1943, passage was made from the Sea of Okhotsk into the Japan Sea by way of La Perouse Strait in a dense fog. At 2331(1) July 8, four torpedoes were fired at an unseen, unidentified ship; results: Negative. On July 11, a sampan was engaged with small calibre guns and 8 or 10 casualties were estimated. On July 14, after eleven days of fruitless hunting, with few navigational aids, and in continual fog and overcast, La Perouse Strait was again transitted and the ship passed into the Sea of Okhotsk and thence down the coast of Hokkaido and Honshu. On 23 July, a task force of an aircraft carrier and two destroyers was contacted. While stalking this force LAMON was picked up by aircraft; bombed and then forced deep by the escorting destroyers. No further contacts were made and LAMON returned to Pearl Harbor on 31 July for a refit. While results were negative the patrol is significant in that it was the first entry of a U.S. Submarine into the Japan Sea, their own backyard, through a mined strait. 9010 miles were steamed on this patrol.

Commander L.T. STONE relieved Commander O.G. KIRK during the refit at Pearl Harbor. On 26 September the ship departed for her second patrol off the South Coast of HONSHU. A close inshore patrol was the normal daily routine. The ship was depth charged almost daily. Numerous submerged and night surface attacks were made. Twenty-four torpedoes were fired. Partly due to faulty torpedo performance and partly due to fire control errors, only one merchantman was sunk and another was damaged and probably sunk. LAMON returned to Submarine Base, Pearl Harbor on 4 November. The Crew was awarded the submarine Combat Insignia for this patrol and the Commanding Officer received the

Bronze Star Medal. Duration of this patrol was 39 days.

On 7 November, the ship was ordered to Navy Yard, Mare Island, for replacement of her H.O.A. engines with General Motors engines. A major overhaul was completed and ship departed for Pearl Harbor on 22 January 1944. The third patrol was commenced from Pearl Harbor. LAPON proceeded via MIDWAY to South China Sea where 17 days were spent in fruitful patrolling. Four torpedo attacks were made as well as two gun attacks on small fishing craft. An attack upon a 5-ship convoy, escorted by 3 surface craft and 1 aircraft; damaged a tanker with 2 torpedoes. One of the AK's took the damaged tanker in tow while escorts carried out a depth charge counter attack. After work LAPON surfaced and delivered a successful attack upon the towing AK and the towed AO. The AK sank at once and the AO was left in a sinking condition. On March 11, a task force of two battleships, one aircraft carrier, a large cruiser, and two escorting destroyers were contacted. The high speed of this force prevented LAPON from reaching a favorable firing position. Two small fishing boats were sunk by gunfire on 10 March and 15 March. On 16 March, in a night radar attack upon a convoy consisting of 2 AK's and one escort, 3 hits were observed on an AK but LAPON was chased away by an escort before results could be observed. On 18 March a night surfaced radar attack upon a convoy of 2 AK's, 1 AO, and 3 escorts, resulted in the sinking of the tanker and damage to an AK which was later reported sunk. Commander Stone was awarded the Navy Cross for this patrol which accounted for four ships, totalling 32,600 tons sunk, a ship and two small surface craft (sloops) damaged for 6,963 tons. The crew received the Submarine Combat Insignia for this patrol. LAPON proceeded via Palintang Channel, Molukka Strait, Indian Ocean to Fremantle, West Australia, arriving there 1 April 1944. Duration of patrol was 49 days in which 10,226 miles were steamed.

On April 25, LAPON departed Fremantle, Australia, on her fourth war patrol. This patrol was spent in the South China Sea south of Dangerous Ground. Enroute to area the ship passed through Indian Ocean, Lombok Strait, Karimata Strait, and Java Sea. On 13 May, a task force of three carriers, five cruisers, and three destroyers, escorted by aircraft, evaded LAPON with high speed. On 23 May, an attack was made on a convoy of three merchantmen and two escorts headed for Saigon. The submarine tracked until dark and made a night surface attack. After crossing on escort's bow at 1000 yards, Captain Stone fired his torpedoes; 4 of which found their mark and sent one merchantman to the bottom. The escorts were uncertain of the submarine's position and were firing their deck guns in all directions. A torpedo reload was made and the attack resumed. A second merchantman was sunk and a third damaged. Dawn was now breaking and as LAPON cleared the area at flank speed being chased by an escort, the damaged ship commenced firing his 4.7 inch gun, some salvos of which came uncomfortably close. On 29 May a submarine was sighted and determined to be of the I 68 class. Two torpedoes were fired and then fire was held on the certainty that this was an enemy submarine lessened in the mind of the Commanding Officer. Torpedoes missed. Four hours later the conning officer raised the periscope to find himself looking at another periscope close aboard. LAPON evaded at high speed and returned to Fremantle, West Australia, for refit, arriving there 6 June after steaming 8169 miles in a

42-day patrol. Commander Stone received the Silver Star medal for this patrol. The crew received the Submarine Combat Insignia.

On 29 June LAFON departed for her fifth patrol in the eastern part of the South China Sea, south of Dangerous Ground and in Palawan Passage. On July 14 at the entrance of Balabac Pass asuma Glease Cruiser and Matsuyama Destroyer escaped destruction by the LAFON by virtue of their high speed. No torpedoes were fired. The destroyer passed too close to the LAFON to fire torpedoes. On the night of 17 July a convoy of two medium sized merchantmen with a single escort felt the sting of the LAFON's torpedoes in a night surface attack in Palawan Passage. Captain Stone's first six torpedoes missed, probably due to shallow draft of target. He turned the submarine and fired the stern tubes at a range of 2600 yards. Two torpedoes hit and another medium sized cargo vessel was on the bottom. Torpedo tubes were reloaded and the LAFON closed for another attack. Four torpedoes were fired and one or two hit. The ensuing explosion was most spectacular and indicated the ship was loaded with ammunition, destruction was complete. The escort turned tail and ran for shoal water. In the early evening of 31 July, smoke was sighted in Palawan Passage. The convoy consisted of three tankers, three cargo ships, and three escorts. LAFON closed submerged and fired torpedoes in a night submerged radar attack. A tanker was sunk and a large tanker and cargo vessel were damaged. During this attack the inside of the conning tower was lighted with the brilliancy of the burning tanker reflecting through the periscope eyepiece. On August 10 the LAFON moored at Fremantle, West Australia. Commander Stone received the Gold Star in lieu of second Silver Star medal for this patrol and the crew received the Submarine Combat Insignia. Duration of this patrol was 42 days. 9268 miles were steamed.

During the refit following the fifth patrol Commander L.T. Stone, U.S. Navy, was relieved by Lieutenant Commander D.G. Ezer, U.S. Navy, as Commanding Officer, on 22 August 1944. On 4 September, LAFON sailed for South China Sea to act as member of a wolf pack with U.S.S. HAWAII and U.S.S. HANFISH off west coast of Luzon, Lombok Strait, Makassar Strait, Sibutu Pass, Mindoro Strait, were transitted with the usual patrol craft contacts. On 21 September LAFON experienced probably as full a day as she has ever seen. An early morning contact proved to be a hospital ship which passed unharmd. At 1320, smoke was sighted rounding Palau Point and LAFON commenced closing. As attack position was reached, a show began that is notable because it marked the first appearance of U.S. planes in this area since beginning of war. Planes robbed LAFON of this convoy and are credited with five ships hit. Convoy scattered and five escorting destroyers kept the submarine submerged until 2245. LAFON surfaced and at 0238, 22 September, attacked remnants of this convoy, exploding a large tanker and damaging an unidentified cargo ship. On 27 September, HANFISH and LAFON concentrated their efforts to sink three ships and damage a fourth. LAFON hit one AK and the commanding officer watched her break in two halves, a second AK was hit and upon surfacing just before sunset LAFON found her abandoned, aflame from stem to stern, half submerged. On 10 October, LAFON was patrolling three miles off the coast of

LAFON and interrupted a Manila-bound convoy of 4 AX's and 2 escorts in one column and 3 SS's and 2 escorts in another column. Lieutenant Commander Baer maneuvered between the two columns to a position less than 2000 yards off the coast and fired at one AX and a SS were overhauling. The SS and all his depth charges exploded as he sank. The Japs succeeded in burning the AX, which had aircraft on deck. Ten hours later she was still burning furiously and our forces found her there when they invaded the Philippines. 16 to 21 October, LAFON acted as lifeguard off Coron Bay for our planes that were at that time making first real attacks on Philippines. On 31 October, LAFON moored at Fremantle, West Australia, after a 69-day patrol in which 11,708 miles were steamed. Lieutenant Commander Baer received the Navy Cross and the crew received the Submarine Combat Insignia for this patrol.

On November 23, 1944 the LAFON left Fremantle with high hopes as she was returning to the productive hunting ground of her sixth patrol. These hopes were short lived however as most of the patrol was spent in a scouting line two hundred miles from Mindoro Strait to prevent Jap reinforcements from reaching Mindoro and Leyte. Aircraft contacts were many and ship contacts few. Two destroyers escaped the LAFON in early morning, 24 December, at high speed. One convoy of two ships and two escorts was sighted and attacked. Torpedoes ran erratic due to high seas and gave anxious moments as they curved around to come back at the LAFON. LAFON was the last submarine to prow the Lingayen Gulf coast before the United States invasion, having been ordered out of that area at high speed the day before the invasion. This patrol ended, the ship was ordered to Pearl Harbor for voyage repairs and arrived there January 21, 1945, after a 59-day patrol. On 24 January the ship departed for Navy Yard, Mare Island, and commenced a regular overhaul on January 31. Departed Navy Yard for Pearl Harbor on 22 April. At Pearl Harbor from 30 April to 23 May at which time departed for GUAM. On 5 June moored at Guam to receive orders from ComSubPac for patrol.

Departed Guam on 6 June for TRUK ISLANDS to perform special mission of life-guarding for British Carrier Strike, B-24 and B-29 raids. On 19 June mission completed with no planes down, departed area for Guam. 20 June moored at Guam. 24 June departed Guam for Saipan to join other submarines for a picket boat sweep ahead of Admiral Nimitz's forces which were to attack Tokyo area. Upon completion of sweeps LAFON was to proceed to Sea of Okhotsk and area where she had made her first patrol. 24 June moored Saipan and departed with eight other submarines on 27 June. First assignment was lifeguard duty near Tori Shima and about one hundred-fifty miles south of Tokyo. Many aircraft contacts, mostly our own. While no aviators were picked up LAFON did home several planes to Iwo for emergency landings. On 7 July patrol was terminated because of main engine failure and one engine explosion which severely burned five men. LAFON moored MIDWAY ISLAND on 23 July after stopping at SAIPAN for temporary repairs to engines. Ship was refitted at MIDWAY and had just completed her last day of training prior to departing on her ninth patrol when the war ended. On 26 August, LAFON departed Midway Island for Atlantic Coast of United States via Pearl Harbor, and Panama Canal. 15 September LAFON was alongside Pier 2 at Submarine Base, Balboa Canal Zone. Commanding Officer was Commander D.G. Baer, U.S. Navy.

The LACON was awarded the Navy Unit Commendation, "For outstanding performance in action and distinguished service to the United States against heavily escorted enemy convoys in the Pacific Area," during the 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 6th patrols.

SUMMARY OF PATROL RESULTS

<u>PATROL NO.</u>	<u>NUMBER AND TYPE OF SHIPS SUNK</u>	<u>TOTAL TONNAGE OF SHIPS SUNK</u>	<u>NUMBER AND TYPE OF SHIPS BEACHED</u>	<u>TOTAL TONNAGE OF SHIPS BEACHED</u>	<u>TOTAL AVIATORS RESCUED</u>
1	0	0	1 Sampan	-----	0
2	1 AK	2,500	1 AK	4,400	0
3	1 AO	10,000	1 ACVS	6,063	0
	1 AO	8,000	1 Sampan	75	
	1 AP-AK	8,260	1 Sampan	25	
	1 AK	6,320			
4	1 AK	7,500	1 AK	6,500	0
	1 AK	7,500			
5	1 AK	4,000	1 AO	19,400	0
	1 AK	4,000	1 AK	4,000	
	1 AO	10,000			
6	1 DE	500	1 AK	4,000	0
	1 AO	10,000	1 AK	5,800 *	
	1 AK	9,500			
	1 AK	5,600			
7	0	0	0	-----	0
8	0	0	0	-----	0
Total for war:	14	94,060	10	51,063	0

* Later credited by despatch as sunk, found burned and gutted on Luzon coast after Philippines invaded.