

During her World War II career, the submarine USS BALAO made ten war patrols throughout the hostile waters of the Pacific, sinking an estimated 57,000 tons of merchant shipping so desperately needed by the Japanese to supply her far-flung war effort.

The keel for BALAO, first of her class, was laid at the Portsmouth, New Hampshire Navy Yard on 26 June 1942. She was launched on 27 October 1942 and christened by Mrs. Theodore C. Aylward. The new submarine was put in commission on 4 February 1943 and placed under the command of Lieutenant Commander R. H. Crane, USN.

After a six week training period in New London, Connecticut, the new submarine proceeded to Brisbane, Australia, arriving on 10 July. After a brief refit by USS FULTON, she got underway for her first war patrol on the 25th.

The first sortie proved disappointing. BALAO stayed at sea for 51 days with only five enemy contacts, none of which could be developed. She patrolled the Truk - Bismarck shipping lanes until 26 August, when she switched to the Palau - Rabaul route. The patrol ended in Brisbane on 13 September 1943.

The second patrol, beginning on 4 October, gave BALAO her first chance to draw blood. After missing one convoy enroute to Rabaul due to firing at excess range, BALAO joined forces with the submarine SILVERSIDES to ambush a Palau-bound convoy.

The convoy arrived on schedule, and BALAO made contact at dusk, on 22 October. Tracking the convoy from a position ahead, she waited until midnight, when she fired ten torpedoes at three ships which almost overlapped each other.

Six of the deadly missiles hit their targets, sinking one almost immediately and leaving the other two low in the water. Shell fire from an escort forced BALAO to dive and take evasive action before she could press a second attack, and the ensuing depth charging caused her to lose contact with the convoy.

Communications between BALAO and SILVERSIDES then failed, so BALAO could not receive information as to the convoy's whereabouts. It was later learned that SILVERSIDES was credited with sinking three of the seven-ship convoy.

Recalled to Tulagi to replenish fuel and torpedoes, BALAO set out again on 28 October. This half of the patrol was not as successful as the first, with only one attack being made. A convoy of two ships bound for Truk was sighted on 4 November, and six torpedoes were fired with undetermined results. The patrol ended alongside FULTON in Milne Bay, New Guinea on 16 November 1943. The patrol earned the Submarine Combat Insignia.

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The area for BALAO's third patrol was north of the Bismarck-Archipelago. Good targets appeared, but air activity and consistently bad weather hampered operations.

Two days after Christmas, BALAO's lookouts sighted two heavy cruisers escorted by two destroyers. The submarine's position was poor, but four torpedoes were fired anyway, as the target's speed was such that BALAO could not hope to regain a firing position. All of the torpedoes evidently missed, leaving BALAO to bewail her luck.

Her next chance came on New Year's day when a cargo ship, together with two escorts crossed her sights. After an all day chase to get into position, BALAO closed under cover of a rain squall and sent six torpedoes after the freighter. Three smashed home, and BALAO went deep, preparing for the inevitable pounding of the depth charges. Nine depth charge attacks kept the sub busy until early the next morning. When she surfaced to search the area, no trace could be found of the convoy.

Sure that the freighter had been sunk, BALAO did not press the search, but returned to her patrol of the shipping lanes. Sighting another convoy consisting of two escorts and a damaged freighter, she moved in for a shot, only to find that the freighter was her target of the 1st. The defensive maneuvers of the escorts caused her to break off the approach, and she was ordered back to Brisbane, Australia on 7 January.

Anxious to make up for bad luck on her previous patrol, BALAO slipped out on her fourth war patrol on 6 February. That she did accomplish her mission is attested by her record of sinking four freighters for 20,194 tons total. Lieutenant Commander Cole was awarded the Navy Cross for the highly successful war patrol.

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The submarine began her next successful attack on 28 February, after two approaches which had proved fruitless. Falling in with a convoy with one non-descript escort, BALAO tracked the group until shortly after midnight, when "Battle Stations" rang out, and she closed in for the kill.

Heading for the point of the V-shaped formation, BALAO sent her bow torpedoes at the leading ship. Swinging sharply even before the torpedoes had reached their target, she fired the stern torpedoes at the wing ships, which presented an overlapping target.

Right on schedule, the submariners heard the satisfying explosions as torpedo after torpedo struck home. One of the trailing ships, opened fire with a three-inch gun, which was quickly silenced by a heavy internal explosion. Soon one ship faded from the radar screen, to be followed to the bottom a minute later by another. With only the pips of one merchantman and the small escort left on the screen, BALAO pulled off to await developments. Ten minutes later there was no trace of the merchantman, leaving only one small escort with practically no

face left.

On 3 March BALAO picked up a motley convoy of cargo ships, described as "the dregs of the harbor", after having spent four torpedoes in an unsuccessful attack that morning. Nevertheless, BALAO began tracking the group, running on their estimated course when contact was lost in a weather front. Coming out of the squall after three hours, the sub found the convoy right where it should be, and submerged for a "dream" attack at 1802 on 4 March, having trailed the convoy all night. Everything was perfect, until the four torpedoes hit the leading ship. There was a faint explosion as the air flasks blew up, and nothing more. The torpedoes were duds, and a perfect attack together with a day's work in tracking was wasted.

The ensuing depth charging did nothing to relieve the crew's frayed tempers, but no damage was done to BALAO. With all her torpedoes gone, the submarine was forced to return to Langemak Bay, from where she was routed to Pearl Harbor, arriving on 19 March 1944. The Submarine Combat Insignia was awarded for the successful patrol.

Lieutenant Commander M. F. R. de Arellano assumed command of BALAO on 13 April 1944.

The sub set forth under her new commanding officer on 25 April for her patrol area around Palau, only to find herself hampered by the breakdown of the radar gear and finally recalled after only 24 days when her fuel ran low.

BALAO patrolled her area, making several bootless attempts on convoys until 2 June, when she made a run on a four-ship convoy in the early morning. Using a submerged approach, she worked in until she could fire six bow tubes at a 5000-ton passenger freighter from 2600 yards. Two explosions were heard, but an aggressive escort made it unwise to stay in the area to assess the damage.

A nice approach was ruined the next day when a patrol boat stationed itself directly between BALAO and her intended target, forcing her to abandon any hope of scoring. On the same day she was ordered back to Majuro because of a fuel shortage.

After a refit, BALAO put to sea again for her sixth patrol on 5 July. Her primary duty on this patrol was to act as lifeguard for the air strikes on Palau and this duty kept her from actively hunting enemy ships. During her time on station she rescued three Naval aviators and engaged one 100-ton Japanese trawler with 50 Japanese marines on board in a surface engagement, sinking the trawler handily.

The submarine was ordered back to the United States for a complete overhaul following her patrol, and entered the Mare Island Navy Yard, on 20 August 1944. She rejoined the fighting forces at Pearl Harbor on 15 November.

The seventh war patrol of BALAO was conducted in the Yellow Sea. BALAO, along with SPOT and ICEFISH formed a coordinated attack group with the commanding officer of SPOT as group commander. Targets proved to be practically non-existent, but BALAO wound up the cruise with two ships to her credit nevertheless.

The patrol started on 4 December 1944. Only contacts throughout December were fishing boats, one floating mine and a few airplanes. During the night of 2 January 1945, BALAO sighted the masts of a sailing vessel, and closed to look him over. The vessel proved to be a large three masted schooner of about 700 tons, and it was decided to test the shallow depth setting on the torpedoes by firing on the surface.

The first torpedo, fired from 485 yards, broached several times and drifted to starboard, missing the target astern. The second did no better, again broaching and missing astern. Finally, the #3 tube was fired from 910 yards, and after broaching three times, the torpedo hit amidships, sending up a huge plume of black smoke.

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Sure that she had seen the last of her target BALAO circled around her position, only to find that the ship was still afloat. After three more hits, the sub drew off, only to find the target actually underway after taking six solid torpedo hits.

Submerging once more, BALAO again closed to 1085 yards, determined to sink the stubborn Japanese ship. Two more torpedoes missed, due to errors in the tubes, but a third, smashing into the tanker amidships, finally sent her down.

After several more days of patrolling, BALAO set course for Guam, arriving on 19 January 1945. On 7 February Lieutenant Commander R. K. R. Worthington, USN, relieved Lieutenant Commander de Arellano as commanding officer of BALAO.

Her most successful patrol began on 3 May, when BALAO set course for her patrol area in the East China and Yellow Seas. When it terminated, she had sent 20,238 tons of shipping to the bottom and had damaged one 1000-ton escort.

BALAO was again part of a coordinated attack group, which included TENCH, GUARDFISH, and SEA DEVIL. Thirty-three ship contacts were made, eight of which were suitable torpedo targets. However, only three could be developed into attacks.

Her first chance came on 9 March 1945, as BALAO was conducting a submerged patrol off Kyushu. A small tanker, in company with two escorts, was sighted hugging the coast line. Because of the hazy view and the blending of the target with the shore line, BALAO could not get good ranges, but fired four torpedoes anyway. The torpedo wakes were evidently sighted, as all three ships turned away to parallel the wakes, causing the torpedoes to miss entirely.

After waiting out an ineffectual depth charge attack BALAO continued her patrol with numerous contacts which were not worth developing until 18 March, when she caught a 188-ton trawler alone and sank her with gunfire, rescuing three survivors.

BALAO's next big contact came early on the next day, when a convoy was picked up on the radar screen, inside the ten-fathom curve. An aggressive attack from 2000 yards produced four hits. The early-morning darkness made it impossible to assess the damage completely, but as BALAO headed for deep water one ship blew up, temporarily blinding the lookouts. On her last look, one of the convoy was still burning and BALAO received official credit for sinking HAKOZAKI MARU, a 10,413-ton transport.

In the afternoon, BALAO surfaced near some trawlers to put in some gunnery practice. When the session was over, one had been sunk and three were burning fiercely. An 18-year old Chinese crewman was rescued from one of the trawlers, and survivors from the others were given a rubber boat.

Shortly before dawn on 21 March, BALAO began tracking a convoy of two ships and four escorts. The escorts seemed to detect her, and approach after approach was ruined by their evasive tactics. Finally, the submarine slipped in to 1400 yards and fired four torpedoes. Before she could see any results, however, a charging destroyer forced her to run for deeper water, making smoke to cover her surface retreat.

A small cargo ship ventured across BALAO's path five days later and did not stay afloat much longer to regret it. The submarine sounded "Battle Surface" and proceeded to lob five-inch shells into the target until she sank. A small escort appeared after BALAO had submerged, but did not press an attack.

With only four rounds of five-inch ammunition and no torpedoes for the stern tubes, BALAO began the long trek to Guam for a refit. A faulty hatch which refused to close while diving resulted in her radar being put out of commission, and she sighted several hostile airplanes and one Japanese submarine while enroute. She reached Guam safely on 8 April 1945.

BALAO's ninth war patrol proved relatively futile, as she covered her area in the East China and Yellow Seas thoroughly in conjunction with DRAGONET, SHAD and SPIKEFISH. Only one sampan was sunk, due largely to the scarcity of targets and the shortening of the patrol because of material difficulties.

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During the night of 29 May, BALAO was suddenly attacked by torpedoes, which were avoided. No enemy radar could be detected, and no other submarines sighted in

the vicinity. She continued on her course and reached Midway on 3 June, when she transferred her hospital cases and continued to Pearl Harbor, arriving on the 7th.

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The ship departed for the east coast on 31 August 1945 and arrived at Staten Island, New York on 27 September.

By a Directive of January 1947, BALAO was placed in reserve, out of commission in reserve in the Atlantic Reserve Fleet, New London, Connecticut Group.

She was reactivated in accordance with a directive of March 1952 serving with the U.S. Atlantic Fleet until decommissioning.

USS BALAO (SS285) earned nine Battle Stars on the Asiatic-Pacific Area Service Ribbon for participation in the following operations:

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STATISTICS:

OVERALL LENGTH - 312 feet
BEAM - 27 feet
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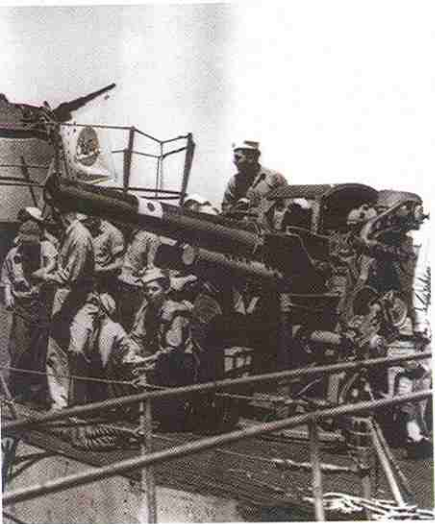
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OVERALL LENGTH	312 feet
BEAM	27 feet
SPEED	20 knots
DISPLACEMENT	1,525 tons

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By the end of the war, the stubby 5"/25 weapon had become the main deck gun carried by U.S. submarines. Here, USS Balao (SS 285), returning from a war patrol, has her 5"/25 gun trained to starboard, showing a Japanese flag and six hashmarks representing small craft destroyed by gunfire. Note the battle flag mounted on the 20mm gun just above the muzzle of the 5"/25.