

HISTORY OF USS BUMPER (SS 333)

With a forboding sky frowning on the yard of the Electric Boat Company at Groton, Connecticut, the new submarine USS BUMPER slid down the ways into the Thames River on August 6, 1944. The launching program was viewed by a large crowd of plant workers and their families, company officials, Navy personnel and other special guests. After selections by the company's band, Mrs. Joseph W. Williams, Jr., wife of the ship's first commanding officer, christened the ship sending foam streaming down the bow. With her father, Harold E. Johnstone, fitting-out superintendent of the company, at her side, it was a launching imbued with special family sentiment. Following the ceremonies, the SS 333 proceeded on to the U. S. Submarine Base, New London, Connecticut, where on December 9, 1944 she was commissioned with Commander Joseph W. Williams, Jr., USN, as her first skipper.

The BUMPER underwent post commissioning training at New London and extended her field of endeavor to the area of Key West. Soon after arrival in this sunny clime, it was discovered that extensive corrosion existed in the main hydraulic system as a result of salt water leaks in the periscope hydraulic hoisting system and it was imperative that the ship return to the Electric Boat Company for repairs. This unexpected job completed, the "333" again departed from New London, this time on February 19, 1945. Back in Key West, three days were used to engage in special tests, and the following two weeks were spent in perfecting various training exercises in the Panama area under the expert guidance of Captain J. B. Jones, USN. March 15, 1945 the ship reported for duty to the Commander-in-Chief, U. S. Pacific Fleet, and commenced the passage to Pearl Harbor, T. H., arriving the first day of April. To further improve her mechanical, engineering, and personnel teamwork, another seige of training ensued at Pearl Harbor. By April 22, 1945, she was regarded as a potential threat to the enemy and was sent out this day to Saipan where she moored May 4, 1945, and commenced fueling and voyage repairs.

The FIRST War Patrol found her in the northern part of the South China Sea off the islands of Formosa and Hainan performing essential and vitally important lifeguard duties. While scouring the waters for downed aviators and their crews, constant searches were made to obtain enemy surface contacts. One day a drifting mine was sighted and sunk with fire from the 20 and 40 millimeter guns.....On May 17th when out about 15 miles off Hainan, it was decided to investigate a large single junk. Upon boarding the junk, a crew of 10 males and 2 females were discovered -- all of whom were affable Chinese. Cigarettes were given the crew and amidst much bowing and waving, the BUMPER men returned after the Chinese insisted they knew nothing of Jap ship movements.

The SS 333 continued working up the coast along the Hainan-Hong route. By May 27th it was decided that this particular area was now empty and so the patrol was shifted to the northern part of the area off the China coast. To add to the general annoyance of a

fruitless search; the men sweltered three days below decks without any air-conditioning, until relief came on the 28th. While patrolling 15 miles off Tonkon Point, the "333" blandly sailed along at noontime on the surface with alleged enemy land on either side at ranges of 3 and 8 miles. Demonstrating the relative safety of the waters, a fishing junk was stopped on the 30th and cigarettes were traded for a basket of fish.

The last day of May the BUMPER entered a new area, the open sea south of Swatow, China, and at 8:15 p.m. an aircraft was detected some 8 miles off. Lookouts observed tracer fire which was noticeably intended for the "333", so she quickly submerged and became aware for the first time of enemy action. The following day just about the time of gathering dusk, another aircraft was contacted and the sub dove to safety, a crew member commenting: "Not dull around here with these elevator tactics!"

June 6th the ship was relieved by the USS BUGARA (SS 331) and was underway for Subic Bay until it became necessary on the next day to reverse course and meet the USS ICEFISH (SS 367) in order to take aboard her injured aviators. Unusually heavy seas prohibited any rescue work so the BUMPER relieved the ICEFISH of lifeguard duty off the mountain laden island of Formosa. Soon a baby typhoon developed with sheets of rain and turbulent seas, but the vessel rode the storm like a veteran and when it subsided she departed for Subic Bay after being relieved by the USS CARBONERO (SS 337). June 15, 1945 she was safely in dock at Subic Bay, Luzon, Philippine Islands, and repairs were made on noisy shafts and refitting was performed by the sub tender USS ANTHEDON and the relief crew of Submarine Division 261.

In reviewing the 55 days of the FIRST War Patrol which was conducted by 79 men, innumerable Chinese junks and fishing sampans were contacted; 90 aircraft contacts were made while the ship was on station and 46 while enroute (majority being friendly craft); and 1 Jap patrol bomber with 2 fighter escorts were encountered.

The BUMPER stood out of Subic Bay on July 10, 1945 for her SECOND War Patrol which was characterized by the tenaciousness and fighting spirit with which the ship chased and repeatedly attacked a convoy. She headed for the Gulf of Siam off Singapore and there, for the first time, was an enemy target composed of a KAMIKAZE Class destroyer (built between 1921-1925) and the accompanying convoy of 2 small tankers, 1 very small freighter, and several PC escorts. Repeated attacks were made on the Jap destroyer but efficient torpedo detection and abrupt maneuvering caused all endeavors to be futile. The USS BRILL (SS 330) and BUGARA, also in the infested area, helped attack the convoy but had negative results. July 15, 1945 a picture-type schooner was noticed hugging the coast while apparently south-bound toward Singapore. All the sails were of new white canvas, the ship was obviously well cared for, and to offer some mystery she was not flying any colors. Using guns rather than torpedoes in order to give any natives a chance to abandon ship, the "333" opened fire at 3,100 yards and in 14 minutes the proud schooner sank like a rock. The manner in which she plunged to the bottom of the sea indicated

that she was carrying an unusually heavy cargo.

The pursuit of the convoy continued and on July 17, 1945 a coastal tanker came in perfect vision for firing. Torpedoes were set and the first one released exploded on the beach and about 15 men were seen running frantically about the decks finally jumping into a small lifeboat and pulling away from the doomed vessel. Soon thereafter the torps found their mark and one hit the stern causing a thunderous explosion, and another clipped the tanker in the middle blowing pieces of the ship all over the cove. The remains of the craft and her cargo of oil then broke into a huge, flaming, smoking inferno with black smoke rising some 1,000 feet in the air. The entire attack was carefully recorded by moving pictures which gave vivid portrayals of the action.

After unsuccessfully chasing the convoy DD again, the BUMPER on July 20, 1945 had an opportunity to release her fury on another tanker in the convoy. Firing the last three torpedoes, there was heard and seen a tell-tale explosion. A tremendous oil slick followed to the leeward of the tanker so it was concluded that the cargo was definitely oil. In order to rest all hands who had been in shooting contact for 14 hours, the submarine then submerged into peaceful waters.

Before continuing the patrol, the "333" returned to Subic Bay for a torpedo reload, and after acquiring a comfortable supply of ammunition, etc., she steamed northward for a search off Singapore, China, and two days patrol in the Java Sea. On the 5th of August at 9:30 a.m., upon being sighted, a tug and barge headed for the beach. Making a surface attack, the first shot blew the barge to pieces and 3 hits from the 5" gun sunk the tug off Klabat Bay of Bangka Island, Netherlands Indies. The next victim for the day was discovered at noon and gunfire this time ceased all activities of a lugger.

With 2525 tons of loot safely on the sea bottom, the BUMPER sailed into the India Ocean and on to Fremantle, West Australia, arriving here at 8:00 a.m. August 15, 1945, just one hour after the Japanese surrender acceptance was announced. Following the joyful news, the SS 333 was refitted by the sub tender USS CLYTIE and the relief crew of Submarine Division 302. For her 37 day patrol she was authorized the Submarine Combat Insignia.

The last day of August 1945, the BUMPER sailed from Fremantle with three other submarines and arrived in Subic Bay September 9, thence becoming a unit of Submarines, Philippine Sea Frontier. The 15th found the "333" peacefully at anchor in Subic Bay, Luzon, P. I., with the prevailing topic of conversation being "When do we get home?" This question was not immediately answered for the ship remained in the Philippine area for the next few months conducting various type training exercises and furnishing incidental services where needed.

1946 started with orders for departure so, on January 7th, the triumphal return was commenced. The great day arrived February 4, 1946 when the BUMPER moored alongside a submarine tender in San Diego,

California. Then began the rehabilitation leave by one half of the crew, and the following month the other members of the crew pursued the same course. The close of March preparations were made for an intensive training schedule which was to be conducted during the month of April. Basic Training continued during April despite demobilization. May 6, 1946 the ship departed for Pearl Harbor, arriving May 13th to take her assigned place in Squadron FIVE, which was permanently based at the Submarine Base, Pearl Harbor. May and June saw more basic training, and by the end of the latter month, with but a few Naval Reservists remaining, the organization had settled down to a fairly permanent basis. Although at about 75% complement strength, by dint of extensive independent training, the ship had three sections capable of handling the ship surfaced and submerged.

By the end of July the BUMPER was off for the States and the California Mare Island Naval Shipyard where overhaul was conducted August through October. By the 30th of October, the SS 333 was fully ready for sea and departed for the U. S. Submarine Base, Pearl Harbor, arriving November 7. During the month of November the BUMPER participated in inter-type exercises with Sub Squadrons ONE and FIVE.

The 16th of December she steamed out of Pearl Harbor for a simulated war patrol enroute to Tsingtao, China. The equator was passed the last of 1946, and it may be long remembered for its thorough initiation of the crew's 37 lowly "pollywogs". Brief sight-seeing stops were made at Truk, Caroline Islands; Guam, Marianas Islands; Yap, Caroline Islands; and Subic Bay, Philippine Islands. After these interludes, there followed a six week services phase for the Commander Northern Training Group, Commander Naval Forces, Western Pacific, at Tsingtao, China, and the Yellow Sea area; a stop of one week at Yokosuka, Japan; and a short stay at Midway Island, T. H. Pearl Harbor was entered on March 29, 1947 and here in her home port she commenced a normal post-patrol upkeep period of two weeks.

By the 16th of April 1947 the ship was ready to begin daily operations with other units of Submarine Squadron FIVE and ONE. On the first day of May, the BUMPER in company with the USS BLACKFIN (SS 322), USS TILEFISH (SS 307), and USS CHUB (SS 329), operating as a wolf pack, departed from Pearl Harbor to intercept Task Force 38. The attacks underneath of the ships of the task force proved very satisfactory for the BUMPER. May 12 the "333" and 11 other subs participated in inter-type exercises and returned to Pearl Harbor on May 22nd for leave and recreation through-out the month of June.

Commander Severance W. Gavitt, USN, after 12 years of continuous sea duty, was relieved as commanding officer by Commander Richard B. Lynch, USN, on July 12, 1947.

During the summer months and until the 30th of September 1947, the vessel was assigned local operations with other submarines of Submarine Squadron FIVE off the blue waters of Pearl Harbor. Basic training was continued until December which was spent in leave and upkeep with approximately one fifth of the crew enjoying Christmas leave with their families on the mainland.

With the advent of the New Year 1948 the BUMPER made ready to depart from Pearl Harbor and by the 5th of January she was underway for the San Diego area where she reported January 12th to the Commander Submarine Squadron THREE for operational control. The remainder of the month was spent conducting various sonar exercises with the San Diego Sound School student officers. On February 13, the ship was off for Treasure Island, California, arriving here the 15th. After embarking 25 reserve officers and some enlisted men, the SS 333 made ready for a two week annual Naval Reserve cruise in southern California waters. An intensive training schedule was conducted at this time which proved of value to both reserves and regulars. The reserves were returned to Treasure Island February 28, and after sound tests were made and ammunition loaded, the vessel entered the Mare Island Naval Shipyard for overhaul on March 1, 1948. The ship was dry-docked March 12 and remained in this status through the month of March and April. The overhaul was completed June 1st and the BUMPER departed for Pearl Harbor on June 5, arriving the 12th of the month.

After a short upkeep and training period off the U. S. island Naval Base, she left this area for a simulated War Patrol in the far East. The first port of call was Hong Kong, China, then came Buckner Bay, Okinawa, where anti-submarine warfare services were conducted for a two week period under the operational control of the Commanding Officer of the USS SALISBURY SOUND (AV 13). Similiar exercises were then conducted off Sasebo, Japan, under the operational control of Commander Destroyer Division ELEVEN; and off Tsingtao, China, for a three week period under the operational control of Commander Task Force SEVENTY-ONE and then off Midway Island.

The BUMPER arrived in Pearl Harbor, still her home port, on September 29, 1948 and commenced a two week period of leave and upkeep. During the remainder of 1948, the BUMPER was busy undergoing basic training with Submarine Squadron FIVE. Navy Day, October 27th, the ship was open for inspection in Kahului, Maui, T. H., and approximately 800 visitors came aboard.

When ship assignments were made at the end of the War, the BUMPER in March 1946 was placed in the U. S. Pacific Fleet of which she is still an active component.

For her activities in World War II, the "333" is eligible for one battle star on the Asiatic-Pacific Area Service Ribbon for the SECOND War Patrol which covered the time from July 10 to August 15, 1945. She earned the Navy Occupation Service Medal for services during March 10 to 18, 1947. The BUMPER also rates the China Service Medal for duties rendered January 25, 1947 to March 7, 1947; July 21 to 24, 1948; and August 23 to September 12, 1948.

STATISTICS

LENGTH.312 feet
BEAM.27 feet
SPEED20 knots
DISPLACEMENT.1525 tons
ARMAMENT.Ten torpedo tubes, one 5"/25
mount, and two 40 milli-
meter mounts.

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