

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

HISTORY OF SHIPS NAMED REDFISH

~~USS REDFISH (SSN-680)~~ is named in commemoration of Fleet Submarine REDFISH (SS-395) who was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation and two battle stars for operations in World War II. She is the second ship of the Fleet named for a sciaenoid or drum fish much esteemed as a gamefish.

The first REDFISH (SS-395) was built by the Portsmouth Navy Yard, Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Her keel was laid 9 September 1943. She launched 27 January 1944, under the sponsorship of Miss Ruth Roper, daughter of Captain R. H. Roper, U. S. Navy. The submarine commissioned 12 April 1944, Commander Louis D. McGregor, USN, commanding.

REDFISH (SS-395) had a length overall of 311 feet, 6 inches; extreme beam 27 feet, 3 inches; standard displacement, 1,526 tons; mean draft 15 feet, 3 inches; submerged displacement 2,391 tons; surfaced speed 20.25 knots; submerged speed, 8.25 knots; designed depth 400 feet; designed complement of 6 officers and 60 men. She was originally armed with ten 21-inch torpedo tubes; one 5-inch .25 caliber gun, one 20-mm gun, and two .50 caliber machine guns.

REDFISH trained out of New London, Connecticut, then transited the Panama Canal 12 June 1944 enroute to base at Pearl Harbor, arriving 27 June 1944. She put to sea on her maiden war patrol 23 July 1944 - a unit of a wolf pack called "Donk's Devils" bound to "Convoy College" - waters of the Luzon Straits between Formosa and Luzon. The wolf pack was under command of Glynn R. Donaho in PICUDA (SS-382). The other member of the deadly trio was submarine SPADEFISH.

REDFISH attacked a convoy for damaging hits to a freighter 18 August 1944 and made hits on another target the following day while SPADEFISH downed a 9,589 passenger-cargo ship. On 22 August SPADEFISH sent a 10,023-ton tanker to the bottom. Three days later REDFISH sank the 5,953-ton cargo ship BATOPAMA MARU while PICUDA blasted a smaller cargo ship as well as a destroyer to the bottom.

Two other wolf packs in adjacent areas sent torpedoes in every direction the next night. As if they could avoid this lethal trap, Japanese convoys switched their shipping routes along the east coast of Formosa. This effort was all in vain. SPADEFISH sank four cargo ships on this route while REDFISH pressed attacks 16 and 21 September to sink the 7,311-ton tanker OGURA MARU NO. 2 as well as the 8,506-ton transport MIZUHO MARU. Attacking in broad daylight, REFISH had been threatened by at least six planes which furnished air cover to the convoy as well a number of enemy escorts. She returned to Midway 2 October 1944.

REFISH departed Midway 25 October 1944 and replenished in Tanapag Harbor of Saipan 2-3 November. After riding out a typhoon, she attacked a convoy the night of 22-23 November, alerting submarines BANG and SHAD who joined in the melee. Transport HOZAN MARU (2,345-tons) became the first victim of REDFISH who soon had shells whizzing by both sides of her bridge. She went deep to evade depth charges which exploded close enough to shatter a starboard side light, gave the enemy the slip, and was soon back to the "area of all the fireworks." Three torpedoes were fired at a damaged ship but there were no sounds of explosions. Two more attacks had similar results. After ten weary hours of chase and attack, REDFISH was out of torpedoes and had a total of ten unexplained misses.

REDFISH replenished at Saipan 27 November-1 December 1944, then continued her patrol. She teamed with SEA DEVIL the night of 8-9 December 1944 in bringing grief to Japanese aircraft carrier JUNYO. REDFISH dodged passed escorts and made three separate attacks until the heavily-damaged carrier passed through the barrier of the Nagasaki minefields. Though JUNYO was not sunk, damage kept her out of action for the remainder of the war. The Japanese Imperial Navy dispatched one last carrier to the Philippines. She was the newly-built UNRYU, and 18,500-ton aircraft carrier who was rushed south by way of the East China Sea.

The afternoon of 19 December 1944 REDFISH spotted a fast destroyer on the horizon and ai aircraft dropped a fairly close depth charge. A second destroyer soon came into focus, then a Japanese carrier hove in view and zigged towards the submarine. REDFISH did not even have to alter course during her attack approach. Within eight minutes four bow torpedoes streaked through the water and explosives hits stopped the carrier dead in the water. UNRYU opened up with all her guns on starboard side while REDFISH let go with four torpedoes at an escort which had passed just astern. The destroyer turned away from the torpedo wakes.

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Shells and depth charges exploded at random while REDFISH worked feverishly to reload. One steam torpedo was aimed just aft the carrier island and the torpedo hit target at the point of aim. The sharp crack of the torpedo explosion was followed instantly by thundering explosions, clouds of smoke, flame and debris which completely enveloped the enemy aircraft carrier. As the submarine dived to escape the fury of the destroyers, "all hell broke loose."

Seven well placed depth charges exploded alongside starboard bow as REDFISH passed 150 feet. Her steering gear jammed on hard left. There was a hydraulic leak in the manifold. Her bow planes were jammed on 20 degree rise. There was loss of all hydraulic power. All sound gear went out of commission and the pressure hull cracked in the forward torpedo room. There were numerous air leaks throughout the submarine and a torpedo was making a hot run in number 8 torpedo tube. The submarine came to rest in 232 feet of water, secured all running machinery and waited out her pursuers. In little more than two hours REDFISH was again on the surface and running away from the destroyers at flank speed. The 18,500-ton carrier UNRYU had sunk to the bottom. Thus the Japanese bombardment force at Mindoro was deprived aircraft carrier support.

REDFISH reached Pearl Harbor 2 January 1945 and sailed four days later to call at San Francisco, thence through the Panama Canal to the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, arriving 17 February 1945. Her battle damage was repaired by 2 July 1945 when she again sailed for Pacific combat. She reached Pearl Harbor 23 July and was preparing for another war patrol when the end of hostilities came 15 August 1945. Two days later REDFISH was presented the Presidential Unit Citation for extraordinary heroism in action during her two war patrols. She sailed from Pearl Harbor 6 September 1945 to base training operations at Guam in the Marianas until 11 January 1946. She then set course for San Diego, California arriving 30 January 1946.

REDFISH departed San Diego 3 March 1947 to base operations out of Apra Harbor, Guam, until 19 May. She then called at ports of Japan before return to San Diego 21 June 1947. The next several years were largely spent in type training out of the latter port, with cruises north to Seattle and west to Hawaii. Following the Communist invasion of South Korea, the submarine sailed 2 February 1951 for operations out of Yokosuka, Japan, until 24 June 1951. She returned to San Diego 3 July 1951 for service that included several cruises

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north to Alaska and the Beaufort Sea: Western Seaboard operations continued through 1 July 1960 when REDFISH was reclassified from a fleet submarine (SS-395) to an auxiliary submarine (AGSS-395). She twice had a role in motion pictures. In the spring of 1954 she participated in the Walt Disney Studios production of "Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea." In September 1957, REDFISH was known as the submarine USS MERKA in the motion picture entitled "Run Silent, Run Deep."

The night of 19 September 1960, REDFISH and amphibious transport COOK (APD-130) joined in training of "Navy Frogman" and a U. S. Marine Corps Reconnaissance Team. When one of the Marines developed "bends" the following afternoon, REDFISH became his decompression chamber. The young man was sealed in her airlocked escape hatch with an attendant Hospital Corpsman. She submerged to depth where recompression could be started, and the Marine experienced immediate relief. For more than 16 hours and some 200 miles the submarine kept under the surface, slowly proceeding towards the San Francisco Naval Shipyard. The patient was put in the recompression chamber ashore, then sent to the Naval Hospital at Oakland, where he completely recovered.

REDFISH operated as a training submarine for men as well as Fleet units along the Western Seaboard until 26 March 1962. She then sailed from San Diego to provide similar services in the Western Pacific. Her time was largely spent in exercises with naval units of the Japanese Maritime, Self Defense Force, Republic of Korea, The Philippines, Nationalist China, and the mobile Seventh Fleet. She visited more than a dozen ports in waters ranging from Hawaii to Japan, Okinawa, the Philippines and Taiwan. The submarine returned to San Diego 26 September 1962. She stood out to sea from Alameda 18 November 1962. A solemn ceremony of tribute was held in Latitude 37°-33.6 North; Longitude 122°-38 West as the cremated remains of Captain Robert L. Gurnee, USN, Retired, were committed to the deep. Captain Gurnee had commanded REDFISH from 26 January 1945 to 17 April 1946.

REDFISH made annual training cruises to the Far East for the remainder of her career. Her last distant service began 3 February 1968 when she departed San Diego for Pearl Harbor, thence to waters ranging to Guam, Tiawa, the South China Sea, Hong Kong, Okinawa, the Philippines and ports of Japan. She departed Yokosuka 7 June 1968 and returned to San Diego 22 June. She decommissioned there 27 June 1968 and her name was struck from the Navy List 30 June 1968. Her stripped hulk was used as a fleet target.

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REDFISH was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation for extraordinary herosim in action during her war patrols. She was especially cited for sinking a new Japanese aircraft carrier and "Her brilliant record of success in combat and her indomitable fighting spirit in the face of the most determined and fierce counter-attacks by an alert and relentless enemy." She also received two battle stars and other awards for the operations listed below:

1 Star/FIRST WAR PATROL-PACIFIC: 23 Jul-23 Oct 1944

1 Star/SECOND WAR PATROL-PACIFIC: 25 Oct 1944-2 Jan 1945

KOREAN SERVICE MEDAL AND UNITED NATIONS SERVICE
MEDAL: 29 Mar-12 Jul 1951

LIST OF COMMANDING OFFICERS - USS REDFISH (SS-395)

Commander Louis D. McGregor, Jr., USN:	12 Apr 1944- 6 Jan 1945
Commander Richard S. Andrews, USN:	6 Jan 1945-26 Jan 1946
Lieutenant Commander Robert L. Gurnee, USN:	26 Jan 1946-17 Apr 1946
Lieutenant Commander Ovid M. Butler, USN:	17 Apr 1946- 3 May 1948
Lieutenant Commander Alfred H. Higgs, USN:	3 May 1948-30 Jun 1950
Lieutenant Commander Charles J. Beers, USN:	30 Jun 1950-21 Jul 1951
Lieutenant Commander John P. Bienia, USN:	21 Jul 1951- 4 Dec 1953
Lieutenant Commander Floyd R. Porterfield, USN:	4 Dec 1953-29 Oct 1955
Lieutenant Commander Karl W. Kunz, USN:	29 Oct 1955-24 Aug 1957
Lieutenant Commander William J. Traynor, USN:	24 Aug 1957-18 Sep 1959
Lieutenant Commander Donald B. Whitmire, USN:	18 Sep 1959-23 Feb 1960
Lieutenant Commander Charles H. Lowry, Jr., USN:	23 Feb 1960-22 Dec 1961
Lieutenant Commander Cornelis Winkler, Jr., USN:	22 Dec 1961-20 Jul 1963
Lieutenant Commander Francis E. Garnett, USN:	20 Jul 1963-21 May 1965
Lieutenant Commander Eugene R. Wells, Jr., USN:	21 May 1965- 1 Jul 1967
Commander Albert W. Houston, USN:	1 Jul 1967-27 Jun 1968