

Shadow Warriors - Submarine Special Operations in World War Two

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*I'm the Galloping Ghost of the Japanese Coast,
You don't hear of me or my crew—
But just ask any man off the coast of Japan
If he knows of the Trigger Maru*

Constantine Guinness, US Navy, 1943

The submarine's ability to penetrate a hostile area independently, covertly and for a long duration, provides a unique tactical advantage. Submarines operating undetected near the enemy's coastline provide a complete picture of the undersea, surface and near shore military conditions, including enemy force dispositions and preparations. The submarine, with its extremely capable communications ability, operating well inside the enemy's defensive barriers, provides valuable tactical information to assist Army and Marine Corps field commanders in making timely, informed decisions. In that role, submarines pave the way for the effective employment of special covert forces and insulate those same forces from unnecessary risks during the initial phases of guerrilla warfare operations.

Between January 1942 and August 1945, dozens of American submarines participated in special operations ranging from destroying enemy mines to serving as lighthouse beacons in order to guide Allied ships through uncharted hostile waters. Oftentimes, those special operations were documented by single-line entries in ships' logs, or mentioned in passing in the official reports of the supported units. Those special operations could not have been performed by any other naval assets, military organizations, or land-based forces at the time, yet their documentation is incomplete and relatively unknown outside military fraternities. The historiography of the special operations of World War II submarines is documented in countless publications scattered throughout museums, military archives and libraries, but no single comprehensive record exists to adequately provide authoritative information on the numerous support missions participated in on a routine basis by members of America's "Silent Service."

In World War II, the submarine's ability to circumvent traditional defenses was exploited to the fullest to deliver supplies to American-led guerrilla forces, to rescue pilots (both Allied and enemy) who had been shot down over the ocean, to land and extract coast watchers on remote Pacific islands, to evacuate escaped prisoners of war, to lay mines and to conduct reconnaissance of potential invasion sites for future Allied actions. Submarines differ from other warships because they operate in the underwater medium, and unlike surface ships and most aircraft, they operate best in isolation relying on the elements of stealth and surprise. They are designed for the role of hunter in hit-and-run attacks, in attrition warfare and for single salvo strikes on shore targets. They are least capable in missions that require prolonged exposure in a sustained defensive posture. Submarines are different: the tactics that give them their greatest fighting

potential do not conform to the classical Mahanian naval strategy of defeating the enemy in a battle of annihilation. Therefore, they are the most effective means for a Navy to circumvent traditional defenses and engage in specialized warfare.

Volunteers manned submarines in recognition of the fact that shipboard life was difficult and conditions of habitability less than ideal. Most were attracted by the force's elite standards, casual discipline, technical challenges and extra pay. The Navy realized that undersea warfare created stresses that weaker personalities could not handle, so all submariners had to pass rigorous physical, mental and psychological tests to qualify for the demanding submarine training program. Crewmembers were chosen for their attributes as hard-working, thorough and idealistic sailors.

The submariner was always aware that an error during underwater operations jeopardized everyone's life. They were dependent upon one another for survival, and any mistake was considered unworthy of the individual sense of trust that formed their common bond. If they lacked judgment and initiative, so did their ship. Every submariner was therefore a reflection of his ship's abilities and character – and no one wanted to disappoint his shipmates or bring dishonor to his ship. Although the US Submarine Service made up but 2% of the United States Navy, it accounted for 55% of Japanese maritime losses. But, this service paid a high price: out of a total of 16,000 Submariners, 375 Officers, and 3,131 enlisted men died at sea. That was a 22% casualty rating, the highest percentage of all US Armed Forces

Modern historians who study the great sea battles of World War II most often focus on the obvious aspects of modern naval warfare by examining the contributions made by aircraft carriers and carrier task forces at battles like Midway, the Coral Sea and the Marianas "Turkey Shoot." To be sure, great sea battles severely crippled the enemy's ability to wage war and provided an incalculable boost to Allied morale, but despite the Mahanian strategic importance of decisive sea battles fought between battleships, heavy cruisers and their supporting units, their outcomes had little tactical value to the troops fighting on land. The old eighteenth century European tradition of *guerre de course* reasserted itself in the twentieth century. The continued erosion of a nation's ability to support land-based troops through its Merchant Fleet showed how lethal commerce raiding could be when wedded to submarine technology. The gradual shift in Naval wartime policy from a strategy relying on sea battles of annihilation to one stressing protracted commerce raiding transformed America's submarine force from a military curiosity to an invaluable wartime asset in less than fifty years.

At the dawn of the twentieth century, and in the wake of the 1905 Russo-Japanese War, the Japanese showed the world that an oriental nation, armed with the same weaponry, comprising the same organization, and using the same techniques and methods as Europeans, could defeat them in a head-to-head war. The Russo-Japanese War also demonstrated the importance of Army and Navy cooperation in the combat theater. In other words, the advantage fell to the nation best capable of cultivating an effective strategy of joint Army-Navy operations. Japan was the nation that proved capable of defeating an enemy by maximizing its military effectiveness through joint-service operations under a single command authority.

In response to the possible Japanese military threat, the US Navy created "**Plan Orange.**" Based

on the theories of Alfred Thayer Mahan the plan assumed that a Japanese attack on the United States would begin in the Philippines. The response to that action would have the Army garrison in the Philippines slow the initial attack, fall back to the island of Corregidor at the mouth of Manila Bay, and await reinforcements and naval support. The main drawback to Plan Orange came from the long transit that the Navy faced in having to go "around the horn" to reach the Pacific Ocean. The plan was a major influence on President Theodore Roosevelt's decision to complete the Panama Canal. The plan became doctrine after the completion of the canal and the establishment of a new American Naval Base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, and its provisions dictated the characteristics for all fleet vessels with regard to speed, range, armament, and at-sea endurance right up until World War I.

At the outbreak of World War I, the British imposed a naval blockade against Germany and the Central Powers. British warships captured or sank any enemy merchant ship attempting to run the blockade. The German Navy was strong, but not strong enough to defeat Britain in an all-out sea battle. Unable to apply naval force to stop the blockade, Germany appealed to the neutral nations, including the United States, to help persuade the British to lift the blockade for humanitarian reasons. Those appeals failed, and Germany was forced to find another means to circumvent the British blockade. On February 4, 1915 Germany announced that a war zone would be established around all of the British Isles and that all hostile ships found within that area would be destroyed by U-boats.

By World War I, the idea of submarine warfare was not new. Militarists had long attempted to develop effective underwater warships. A submarine's underwater invisibility gives it two distinct military advantages: surprise and the means to retreat relatively undetected and safe from counterattacks. Despite the fact that British Intelligence had a tremendous amount of information concerning the movements of the German U-boats, their naval surface forces were unable to destroy the German submarine force. In discussing how much information the British Navy had in regard to German U-boat activity, naval historian Carroll Storrs Alden noted:

They knew almost every time a boat left a German base and often who was the commanding officer ... [They could] determine what course the Germans were following in going to and from their billets, the number of days each stayed out, and the characteristic activities of each, e.g., certain ones used only torpedoes, others preferred to sink ships by gunfire and bombs, others laid mines.

Knowing where submarines might be was only half the battle; destroying them was another matter altogether different and difficult.

Before 1917, German U-boats operating in the Atlantic and practicing commerce raiding were extremely effective in reducing the amounts of war materials and goods that reached England and France. A continuation of that type of warfare would have caused the economic strangulation of Great Britain by November. The Mahanian preoccupation with decisive battleship engagements continued to dominate British military thinkers who concluded that there was "no strategic solution whatsoever to the U-boat menace."

In World War I, German U-boats sank ten battleships, eighteen cruisers, twenty-one destroyers, nine submarines and an astounding 5,708 Allied vessels totaling 11 million tons. About half the merchant ships destroyed by U-boats were British. American naval strategists were able to convince the British Admiralty to abandon their reliance on the dreadnaughts to wipe out the German U-boats and employ a new strategy. American naval leadership theorized that in order to eliminate the threat imposed by the U-boats, they had to be neutralized, not destroyed. To counter the German Navy's unrestricted submarine warfare strategy, the Allies adopted a convoy system that used a screen of warships to protect the merchant vessels crossing the Atlantic. By November of 1917, less than one percent of the ships traveling in convoys were lost.

Following World War I, the United States learned new lessons about the changing nature of naval combat. The sea war in Europe profoundly influenced America's naval policy. President Woodrow Wilson issued a directive designed to make the Navy equal to the most powerful force maintained by any nation of the world. Unlike World War I, the new Navy was to be comprised of all types of ships to reduce the emphasis on building large ships of the line. The policy was accompanied by specific recommendations and plans for an unprecedented build-up of battleships, cruisers, destroyers—and submarines. However, naval strategy was still largely based on the Mahanian model of structure, and although the Navy was better prepared for World War II than it was for World War I, naval planners and politicians controlling the purse strings made the mistake of paying little concern to the utility of submarines when assembling the fleet components. The political influence went beyond local funding issues. International treaties limiting the sizes and types of ships – creating parity among the world powers – kept most aggressive naval building programs in check.

The advent of another war in Europe in 1939 accelerated the pace of American shipbuilding. In June 1940, Congress authorized additional submarines to be built, and after the fall of France Congress passed the "Two Navy Act" authorizing another increase in the number of submarines to be built. Even as President Franklin D. Roosevelt emphasized antisubmarine warfare when he established the neutrality patrols in 1940 and 41, American war planners continued to disdain the strategy of commerce raiding. At the time of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the US Navy had only 51 submarines stationed at forward bases in the Pacific.

The Japanese commander of the carrier task force that wrought so much damage at Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941 missed a golden opportunity to knock out the US Navy's most effective warships by limiting his target selection to aircraft carriers and battleships. The ships that were sunk or severely damaged in the attack at Pearl Harbor could not have operated effectively in the far western Pacific theater for many months even under the best of circumstances, and their loss to the Navy proved only temporary when they were eventually refloated and repaired. The Japanese Naval High Command knew the strategic importance of knocking out the dockyards, the above-ground fuel supplies and the airfields, but they underestimated the value of other ships, which were left untouched in the attack.

Fortunately for the United States, the Japanese failed to destroy the submarine base in Hawaii, preserving intact the supplies, facilities and fuel that were needed so that the only branch of the service capable of bringing the war to the enemy through immediate offensive actions could begin its combat operations. It was the submarine force that carried the load until the great

industrial activity of America produced the weapons needed to prosecute the war against Japan. From 1941 to 1945, 249 US submarines conducted sorties against Japanese shipping. Because over three-quarters of Japan's requirements for basic raw materials and foodstuffs needed to support the war came from overseas sources, through their unique brand of warfare the submarine force was able to wage a devastating campaign against the Japanese Merchant Fleet. American submarines sank almost half of the merchant tonnage available to Japan. Even so, the hunter-killer aspects of submarine warfare demonstrated only a part of their strategic importance to the overall Allied war effort.

American submarine warfare operations, both conventional and unconventional, in the Atlantic were severely hampered by the successes of the Allied convoy system. In the first six months of 1943, the war in the Atlantic turned decisively in favor of the Allies after they had sunk 150 German U-boats. The American submarines that had previously patrolled a wide area of ocean were shifted to patrol positions off Norway and North Iceland. After several months it became apparent that those submarines were not being used to the best advantage – not for any operational deficiencies, but because there was a serious lack of targets. Accordingly, the American submarine squadron in the Atlantic theater was returned to the United States for refit and reassignment to the Pacific Fleet.

There are hundreds of books written that document submarine combat operations during World War II, but most of those are narrowly focused on the individual accomplishments of a handful of officers or concentrate on the "find 'em, shoot 'em, sink 'em" aspects of submarine warfare. This may be due to the fact that submarine service was a highly personal experience, filled with the memories of the smell of sweat and oil, the pounding concussion of exploding depth charges, the controlled chaos of emergency deep operations, the quick peeks through the periscope made to verify the sinking of another target and the tension of submerged attacks in enemy waters. The destruction of the Japanese Merchant Fleet was the submarines' primary mission, but they also had significant influence in conducting secondary missions like transporting guerrillas and raiders, carrying supplies to guerrillas behind enemy lines, and performing reconnaissance duties. The historiography of World War II submarine warfare is treated almost as a separate conflict that pitted the US Submarine Pacific Fleet against the merchant shipping and naval forces of Japan – a sort of war within a war.

Submarines performed numerous special operations in the Atlantic theater, but most of those were conducted by British naval assets. The most well known of those submarines, was the *HMS Seraph*. In between the numerous encounters with German shipping, the *Seraph*, under the command of Lieutenant N.L.A. Jewell, conducted topographical and military reconnaissance of the Algerian and Sicilian coasts prior to the invasions of Africa and Italy, and rescued French General Henri Honoré Giraud right from under the noses of the Gestapo. Even those special operations performed by the *HMS Seraph* that proved to be so important to the Allied war effort, were treated by her captain and crew as mundane and counter-productive to their primary mission as hunter-killers. The diary entry of Lieutenant Jewell emphasized his indifference toward secret missions where he wrote:

For us aboard the *Seraph*, there ensued the hardest part of any operation, land or sea—the thumb-twiddling business of waiting in fretful idleness while the

other fellows are off having the fun [of sinking ships]. If a fat Italian freighter had happened along just then—oh, I suppose I'd have let her pass rather than jeopardize our mission, but it would have been a close squeak for the freighter.

That indifference toward the special operations aspects of submarine warfare was also present in the attitudes of American submarine captains. The numerous personal diaries that were published after 1945 by those who served onboard submarines during World War II have under-reported the special missions that were accomplished by the crews of those ships.

The only special mission that is covered in any detail was the **Spyron Operation**, which supported the resistance efforts of American-Filipino guerilla warriors throughout the Philippine Islands after the fall of Corregidor in 1942. Two books were written about Spyron – an operation that was supported solely by American submarines specifically assigned to the mission – but neither of those books gives credit to any submarine by name. They are only mentioned in vague descriptions or to clarify the organizational and operational actions of Commander Charles "Chick" Parsons, the leader of the Spyron mission. The following excerpt is typical of how past historians have interpreted and documented the Spyron mission:

By 1943 the government in Tokyo, Japan realized that a mysterious "Mr. X" was operating in the Philippines. Arriving by submarine, he was supplying the American-Filipino guerrilla forces with medicine, ammunition and arms. By early 1944 Tokyo had established his identity, and from then on, there was a reward of \$50,000 for the capture of Commander Charles Parsons – dead or alive. Through a secret organization called "Spyron," "Chick" Parsons helped to organize and supply one of the most successful undergrounds the world had ever seen – the American-Filipino guerrilla movement of World War II. Parsons, however, was an unconventional military leader, fighting an unconventional war. During the many months that he lived behind enemy lines, he never carried a weapon or fired a shot. Rather, he was a collector of psychological and political warfare – a shadowy will-of-the-wisp figure, who sought to remain invisible. By the end of the war, however, he had become one of America's most decorated heroes. It was at that time that Chick Parsons received his highest award – the Medal of Valor, bestowed with gratitude and affection by the Philippine Government and the Philippine people.

The Filipino-American guerrilla movement would have been impossible to arm or supply, and their combat effectiveness rendered impotent, without the support of America's Pacific Submarine Fleet.

It must be said that American submarines in the Pacific, with but limited help of a few British and Dutch boats, played a major role in the defeat of Japan. They decimated that country's Merchant Fleet, choked off essential supplies and prevented material support for the Japanese war effort. Most historiographies of submarine warfare have focused on the destruction of enemy

shipping by describing every aspect in locating, stalking, determining a firing solution, attacking and sinking a target. There is also an emphasis on trying to recreate the atmosphere that pervaded all submarine combat action – the talking in whispers and movement in stocking feet to reduce unnecessary noise that might be emitted through the hull, and the everyday life in cramped quarters that became even more suffocating when submariners faced the terror and uncertainty of survival while enemy depth charges relentlessly rattled their boat. What is lacking in the history of submarine combat actions during World War II is a summary of all the special operations that were conducted in between the "find 'em, shoot 'em, sink 'em" aspects of submarine warfare. Although the commerce raiding conducted by submarines was their most obvious contribution to the war effort, the secondary role of the submarine as a "shadow warrior" used in covert operations was equally important, and had far greater influences on the peripheral elements of warfare that contributed to the defeat of the Japanese military.

Pearl Harbor set into motion a succession of rapid and extensive Japanese conquests that carried their armed forces to Malay, Burma, Indonesia, the Philippines and the western Pacific until they threatened India in the west, Australia in the north, and Midway and Hawaii in the east. Against the rush of those Japanese conquests, Allied strategic planners theorized that no action could be brought against the enemy until the lines of communication were secured against the loss of America's battleships and the shifting of naval assets to support the priority assigned to the defense of the Panama Canal and Caribbean seaports.

The fall of France at the hands of the Nazis in 1940 had an immediate significance for the United States. The Germans had already established active and influential communities from Brazil to Argentina. If the Nazis occupied the French colonies and seaports in the Caribbean, the Axis Powers would be a stone's throw away from the Panama Canal, Puerto Rico, Guantánamo, Cuba and the Gulf of Mexico. The fear of a German presence in the Caribbean was a definite threat to international commerce as the fuel-hungry German Navy would surely covet the unprotected Dutch oil refineries in Aruba and Curacao. Through diplomatic measures, Roosevelt convinced the governments of the Latin American Republics to adopt a policy of neutrality that stressed a doctrine of noninterference by Europe in the territories of North and South America. The intention was to deny the German military machine any access to, or domination of, "American" skies and water. With the US Navy's largest warships reassigned to protect the Panama Canal and guard against enemy mines and submarines, American military planners were forced to rely on the submarine force to carry the fighting load in the Pacific until the nation's industrial power could be fully mobilized.

Similar strategic problems affected the Dutch government in her East Indian colonies. After Pearl Harbor and the quick defeat of Dutch troops in the Indies in March 1942, the Dutch government quickly realized that an intelligence network had to be established to prevent the Japanese from cutting off the East Indian colonies from the rest of the world. Immediately following capitulation, some preparations for guerrilla warfare were made, but the number of troops involved was reduced from several hundred to a few small units whose sole mission became establishing communications between the East Indies and the Netherlands. The initial guerrilla campaigns on Java failed as did the establishment of a network of communications units. Part of the continuing problems that plagued the Dutch resistance efforts was the general hostile reception from the local population. Most of the Dutch guerrillas were betrayed by the local population soon after their infiltration.

A larger part of the problems that the Dutch encountered in trying to establish a sustained guerrilla campaign against the Japanese was due to the shortage of available special mission submarines. Most special missions had to be postponed or cancelled due to the lack of reliable transportation. As the head of the Dutch intelligence organization, Charles Olke van der Plas, stated in 1943, the problem with the intelligence/guerrilla movement in the East Indies was first of all one of "submarines, submarines and once again submarines." In general, the military value of the Dutch intelligence gatherers proved to be of no use to the Allied war effort in the Pacific theater. The only Dutch-sponsored special mission that achieved any positive results – codenamed "**Flounder**" – was supported by the US submarine Searaven, which delivered a landing party off the coast of Java in late 1942.

Despite the historical significance and importance of the specialized warfare roles of the submarine forces during World War II, those missions were viewed by the sailors who carried them out as time taken away from their primary function of conducting unrestricted warfare against the enemy. Fleet-type submarines were designed for one mission – to sink ships – and there was little patience for anything else. Doctrine and tactics combined to limit the effectiveness of American submarine attacks in the early days of World War II.

Following the Japanese attack of Pearl Harbor, the Chief of Naval Operations issued the first US fighting directive with the one-line message, "EXECUTE UNRESTRICTED AIR AND SUBMARINE WARFARE AGAINST JAPAN." Neither by training nor by indoctrination was the US Submarine Force ready to carry out the order to fight an unrestricted war against Japan. Submarines had been trained to fight a different kind of war – one that stressed action against enemy warships in between routine scouting missions. Submarine commanders were imbued with the idea that they were to observe ethical tactics based on the rules for sea conflict. Those rules were established by international treaty and imposed many legal limitations on submarines. Chief among the restrictions impressed on the memory of every submarine skipper was the provision that any naval vessel found guilty of any violation of the rules in the treaty could be hunted down and captured or sunk as pirates.

Several other factors limited the effectiveness of submarine warfare in the opening months of the war. With limited prewar training experience in shallow-approach attacks, submarine commanders concentrated on attacking warships from deep beneath the sea. Surface attacks, even at night, were officially discouraged. Poor organization, a lack of aggressive leadership and material defects resulted in the majority of submarine patrols ending with no ships sunk.

Leadership problems were not only limited to individual submarine commands. At the start of the war, there were considerable problems of leadership at the flag level with regard to submarine deployment and tactics. The submarine force was not formed into separate squadrons from the rest of the fleet. Submarines were under the authority of the Commander of the Pacific Fleet and assigned to individual battlegroups. Commanders of the individual groups deployed the submarines as they saw fit. While some squadron commanders deployed their submarines as advanced scouts or allowed them to act as commerce raiders, far too many boats were under-utilized because some squadron commanders simply did not understand the principles of submarine warfare.

The submarine organizational and tactical problems were further exacerbated by the fact that all naval operations fell under the authority of the theater commander, General Douglas MacArthur, who believed submarines were best used in support of guerrilla operations as they had proved during their support missions to Corregidor. Since there were only a handful of poorly led and organized guerrilla operations in the Philippines at that time, submarines spent weeks in port waiting for orders from MacArthur rather than operating in enemy waters and destroying Japanese merchant traffic.

In April 1942, Admiral Charles Lockwood was placed in charge of the Asiatic submarine force in Fremantle Australia and immediately began overhauling the command structure. Lockwood reorganized his submarines into squadrons and put them under his direct command. He established rest camps for submarine crews returning from patrol, standardized communications procedures between submarines and their bases and formulated training exercises that stressed aggressive attack plans. He met with each submarine commander and crew and gave pep talks while noting their comments in order to determine why the submarines had not done a better job of stopping the Japanese in the Philippines and Java. Lockwood determined that part of the problem was bad command decisions – the boats were never in the right place at the right times – but that more of the trouble was found inside the submarines. Submarine commanders were too cautious and failed to close with the enemy at a range that would increase the chances for a successful sinking. They also displayed little initiative or killer instinct and insisted on the reliance of by-the-book firing solutions, and when they did attack an enemy ship the torpedoes in use at the time ran ten feet below their selected settings and were plagued with faulty magnetic and contact exploders. As a result, one-third of the submarine skippers were relieved of their commands in the first year of the war.

Without leaders in place who were willing to take risks and to formulate unorthodox methods to accomplish what seemed to be the impossible, special mission operations and commerce raiding patrols would have developed into disasters. The "mustangs" Lockwood chose to replace the old operational conservative submarine commanders proved to be more willing to take chances, and more accurately reflected the warrior spirit of their crews. The first mustang assigned to command a submarine was Slade Cutter, who was described by Lockwood as being able "to find Japanese ships in Pearl Harbor." Under Cutter's command, the *USS Seahorse* sank nineteen enemy ships in its first four war patrols. Of all the changes this new admiral made to improve the combat effectiveness of America's submarines, the most significant change was made out of fear. In order to remain on friendly terms with MacArthur, he put into place a fixed submarine operational schedule with the specific task of supporting special operations.

The principles for special operations are simple: A submarine operating in enemy territory must not be seen, but must still accomplish its mission. It succeeds at this by doing the unexpected thing. Whether a submarine was to land, extract or supply a guerrilla force with needed provisions, or reconnoiter an enemy stronghold, stealth and surprise were the keys to its success. At best the distribution of submarine patrol objectives had to be a compromise measured by long-range strategies concerning effective damage to the enemy. Frequently the consideration of direct and immediate damage had to be by-passed in favor of rescuing endangered personnel or rushing relief to a beleaguered intelligence or resistance outpost. If a submarine was going to

make contact with the enemy, it had to attack on its own favorable terms. And after the attack, the submarine had to disappear, continuing the illusion that an unknown force had engaged the enemy.

The special missions were never easy. They usually demanded multiple penetrations of enemy territory – which were far more hazardous than normal war patrols. A submerged attack was an evolution that could be practiced. Failure was frustrating but seldom fatal and success was generally a matter of hit and run tactics. The landing of a shore party on an enemy-held beach, or the extraction of personnel from a port under fire called for a great deal of resourcefulness and courage.

As the war raged on, submarines were called upon to undertake all kinds of special missions that were divided into several general types: reconnaissance, supply, evacuation or rescue, transportation of coast watchers and intelligence agents, lifeguarding, mining, weather reporting, support of commando raids and serving as lighthouse beacons for surface ships. Any submarine assigned to special missions might perform more than one of those tasks.

The first missions executed by Pacific Fleet submarines involved carrying supplies to the defenders of Corregidor. Transportation of intelligence agents to and from enemy-held territory soon followed, but what proved to be the most valuable of those early special operations was the submarine's ability to relay information of enemy ship movements by coast watchers. From the Battle at Midway to the Battle of the Philippine Sea, submarines provided tactical information to other sea and air services in preparation for coordinated attacks. As part of their everyday duties, and when not under orders to maintain radio silence, submarines reported the weather, tides, available navigation aids and enemy force structure in their operating areas. Special Operations missions were never undertaken without a large degree of risk, but the dangers of those first missions into the unknown were magnified by lack of experience and precedent.

The most unusual of the early special operations was performed by the submarine *USS Trout* in January 1942. The boat delivered 3,500 rounds of desperately needed anti-aircraft ammunition and medical supplies to the US Forces on Corregidor. After unloading tons of supplies, the overall weight of the submarine was too light to dive without additional ballast. The commanding officer of the *Trout*, Lieutenant Commander Mike Fenno, requested twenty tons of sandbags or cement to provide the needed ballast, but sandbags were too valuable to the defense efforts of the Army and cement could not be spared either, so his request was denied. Fenno reported in person to Admiral Rockwell's headquarters in Corregidor and asked for assistance in finding the needed temporary ballast that would allow the submarine to dive and return to her base in Australia. The unusual solution to the problem came courtesy of the Philippine government. The bank vaults at Manila had been emptied, and their contents moved for safekeeping so as not to fall into the hands of the Japanese forces. All of that gold, silver and currency was in Corregidor. *Trout* was ordered to take two tons of gold bars and eighteen tons of silver, paper currency and other securities back to Pearl Harbor. Loaded with the contents of the entire Philippine treasury, *Trout* left Corregidor and headed to Hawaii. Along the way on her 57 day voyage, the submarine sank two Japanese freighters. Commander Fenno was hailed as a hero upon the ship's arrival in port at Pearl Harbor, but when the cargo was unloaded he wasn't sure whether he would receive a medal or a court-martial. He had signed for five hundred eighty-three

bars of gold, each worth \$14,500, but only five hundred eighty-two were accounted for during their removal. After a frantic search of the submarine's spaces, the missing bar was found in the galley where one of the cooks had been using it as paperweight.

About the same time the *Trout* was loading gold bars, another submarine, *USS Seadragon*, was in Corregidor where she picked up, transported and delivered 19 members of a naval radio intelligence unit, an Army major, 23 torpedoes, 3,000 pounds of radio equipment and two tons of submarine spare parts to Soerabaja in the Dutch East Indies. This mission was in support of the first of many attempts by the Dutch government to establish an intelligence network in the East Indies in preparation for the anticipated Japanese occupation. A few months later, the submarine *USS Sargo* returned to Soerabaja where she evacuated what was left of that same intelligence unit and picked up over one-million rounds of .30 caliber ammunition that was delivered to the Philippine forces fighting on Mindanao.

As the American situation on the island of Corregidor began to look hopeless, more and more high-ranking Filipino government officials had to be evacuated. The Japanese knew that the Americans were getting supplies to the island, and increased their own naval presence around the Philippines in an attempt to form a blockade. US Submarines were still able to slip through gaps in the Japanese defenses. In February 1942, the *USS Swordfish* snuck into a harbor at Corregidor and brought out the president of the Philippine Commonwealth, Manuel Quezon, and several other members of his government. By the end of the month, the American battle for the Philippines and the Dutch battle for Java were virtually over and the Allies had lost. For all practical purposes, the US submarine force was the only element of the Asiatic Fleet that remained to fight the Japanese, but the experience the submarine crews had learned while performing special missions paid huge dividends in the guerrilla and resistance operations throughout the South Pacific.

Shortly after departing the Philippines in early 1942, General MacArthur began looking for a means of harassing the Japanese in preparation for his promised return. Early attempts to contact and organize the bands of guerrillas operating throughout the Philippine Islands were complicated by the fact that the majority of guerrilla forces were little more than roving bandits with no allegiances to any central authority, and whose raids were uncoordinated and accomplished for personal gain. Within a few months of trying to organize the guerrilla effort, it was clear that there was no way to provide the needed outside support, and there was a woeful lack of leadership among the natives despite their apparent loyalties to America.

The performance of America's submarine force in providing military aid to the troops on Corregidor convinced MacArthur that those same submarines might be able to provide the supplies and equipment necessary to carry out a sustained guerrilla movement. However, two seemingly insurmountable problems had to be resolved before any covert operation began. Contact had to be made with the guerrillas in the Philippines in order to organize and coordinate their actions, and the Navy had to be convinced to provide the submarines necessary to support the operation. For several months, a powerful radio tracking and monitoring station in San Francisco had been receiving shortwave transmissions for Panay, the sixth largest of the Philippine Islands. The sender of the messages identified himself as Macario Peralta, a major in the Philippine Army who had assembled a large guerrilla force in the hills. According to Peralta,

his forces were well-armed, well-organized, fighting to restore their country's freedom – and he was requesting American aid in that effort. Washington notified MacArthur, who needed to find a reliable and well-respected leader who could rendezvous with the guerrilla leader.

The answer to that problem came in the form of Charles "Chick" Parsons, who had escaped from the Japanese in the Philippines a few months earlier. He was also a Lieutenant Commander in an intelligence unit of the US Naval Reserve who had remained behind in the city to collect intelligence on the Japanese occupiers. Fluent in several of the over 70 native dialects, intimately familiar with the islands, and a good friend of MacArthur from their days together in Manila, Parsons was just the man the general was looking for to act as a go-between with the Filipino guerrillas.

In late February 1943, Parsons was transported to Labangan aboard the submarine *USS Tambor*. His mission was to deliver \$10,000 in cash and two tons of ammunition to one of the guerrilla leaders in the region. Parsons also delivered radio equipment for use in setting up his spy network. Parsons' first clandestine visit back to the Philippines lasted until July 1943. During that time, he crisscrossed several islands on foot, horseback, and canoe, always at great personal risk of capture or death by the Japanese, meeting and coordinating with guerrilla leaders, setting up coast watchers, taking part in ambushes, or rendezvousing with other submarines to pick up supplies and additional men.

The weapons, food, clothing and communications that Parsons delivered on a regular basis was sorely needed by the Filipino guerrillas, but one of their more unusual requests for supplies came from the Catholic priests on Mindanao. The lack of available flour on the island meant that there was a dire shortage of religious wafers. The priests were also forced to ration their ceremonial wine supplies. Parsons contacted the Catholic Church in Australia and had hundreds of "Padre's Kits" packaged in burlap and delivered to the island. In addition to the required wine and Communion wafers, the packages contained religious medals and other items considered useful to the priests.

The Spyron Operation was so valuable to the Allied war effort that two transport submarines, *USS Narwhal* and *USS Nautilus*, were dedicated to the mission on a permanent basis. In late July, *Nautilus* was ordered to deliver one Navy officer, 22 enlisted men, and 10 tons of supplies to Mindoro; two Filipino Army enlisted men and 30 tons of supplies to Bohol; and two US Army enlisted men and 30 tons of supplies to Leyte. At dawn on the very first morning of her mission, radar detected an airplane at five miles and closing. The plane was immediately recognized as friendly, but the pilot was less observant. He dove towards the submarine and dropped a bomb, which luckily landed harmlessly in front of the ship. His ensuing strafing attempt was also unsuccessful, missing his target by 100 yards. With that, the pilot inexplicably broke away, and was never seen or heard from again.

At first, most submarines on secret missions to the Philippines delivered supplies and military personnel before heading off to perform more traditional wartime patrols in search of Japanese ships to sink. In the spring of 1944, this changed as pressure from the United States pushed the Japanese back into the western Pacific. The push to secure the Pacific islands kept many other submarines too busy to supply the guerrilla movement in the Philippines.

In one of the more humorous submarine special operations, the *USS Crevalle* was ordered to pick up 25 evacuees on Negros on the return leg of a deployment. Upon arriving at the designated location, the submarine made contact with the expected 25 evacuees in one boat, plus 16 others with baggage in another. Many children were among those escaping the island, and the crew accepted both boatloads. During the return trip to Australia, the refugees were fed in the galley, requiring them to pass through the control room for each meal. The children were fascinated by the lights and switches there and couldn't resist trying to play with them. In the words of the ship's commanding officer:

The Chief of the Watch solved this by putting a sign on the switchboard reading, 'Any children found in the control room without their parents will be shot.' The mothers read this gravely to their kids, who seemed to take it as a matter of course. Considering that some of them could not remember when they were not fugitives, perhaps this is understandable.

In addition to the new underage menace within the ship, *Crevalle* and her passengers still had external threats to worry about before reaching the safety of Australia. After being forced to dive twice by aircraft, the submarine detected a large Japanese convoy. They set a course to cut off the last ship in the group, but the convoy suddenly changed course and bore directly down on *Crevalle*. As the convoy passed 90 feet above the submarine without incident, the Officer of the Deck ordered the boat to level off and maintain depth. Moments later, two groups of two depth charges exploded close aboard, knocking out the sonar in what Walker described as the worst depth charging he had experienced. When the sonar was fixed, the crew found the attackers still searching directly above them, and the submarine crept away as quickly and as quietly as possible. Although heavily damaged by the depth charge attack, *Crevalle* reached Australia with all hands.

Parsons' network of spies and coast watchers proved invaluable not only to the liberation of the Philippines, but also to the Pacific war effort as a whole. The coast watchers were the first to alert Southwest Pacific Headquarters in Brisbane, Australia, to a massing of Japanese naval power in the islands. This information led to a submarine net being thrown around the Japanese, tracking their every move, and eventually resulted in the US Navy gaining a major victory in the Battle of the Philippine Sea – also called Marianas Turkey Shoot.

Submarines involved in these special missions to aid the Filipino guerrilla effort waited offshore until a pre-arranged signal was made at the landing site. Often this signal was nothing more than a series of fires, or a set of disks mounted on a bamboo pole. Sometimes a Morse code indicator was transmitted by occulting a fire with a blanket or sheet – nothing more complex than a few dashes or dots was used. Typically, the guerrillas appeared at the submarine's sides in banca boats or bamboo rafts in order to offload the cargo. The lucky few who got to board the craft were often treated to a cup of real coffee, a Coke, or a sandwich. At least once or twice a guerrilla or two "stowed-away" aboard the submarine because the sudden appearance of a Japanese destroyer necessitated an unexpectedly rapid departure. The vast majority of these clandestine operations were handled with professionalism and mutual respect between the

submarine crews and Filipino boatmen, but not all of the missions went smoothly.

One particular incident caused grave concerns for the officials at MacArthur's headquarters with lasting implications to the other special mission's submarines. It was an unloading operation that was carried out so poorly that some Filipinos were bodily thrown overboard and a significant portion of the cargo was lost. It resulted in a most sarcastic response written to MacArthur from the guerrilla leader in the Philippines.

On June 10, 1944 the *USS Narwhal* left Port Darwin and started her 11th War Patrol. At Lipata Point, Panay, in the Philippines, several representatives of Colonel Peralta's guerrilla army came aboard the submarine after the proper security signal was given and arranged for the transfer of *Narwhal's* cargo to the Filipino bancas. Two guerrilla officers were left to help supervisor the operation.

The *Narwhal's* deck log noted the ideal conditions for the unloading of supplies – water calm, no wind and a short run for the boats that would carry the cargo to shore. In the ship's patrol report, it was noted that the boatmen refused to load [their boats] to capacity, and when the boats were only about 15% loaded, the boatmen complained about the weight of their loads and shoved off for the shore. Arguing with the boatmen did not provide satisfactory loading results and eventually one sailor was placed in each boat to make sure they were loaded to capacity. Supplies were even unboxed and loaded loose in order to save space. The two guerrillas in charge of the procedure had no control over the boatmen, who seemed not to care about the cargo. According to one sailor, the guerrilla officers were so busy trying to get to the cigarettes and clothes in the boxes that they did not have time to supervise the job. When the small boats returned to the submarine for additional loads, they were filled with sightseers who were left on deck while the boats that brought them returned to shore.

Sometime early in the morning before 0330 hours, the American officer in charge of the operation assigned two Filipino men to each drum of gasoline that was to be unloaded and indicated that they had to swim the drums ashore. Hearing this, the two guerrilla officers left on the first available banca. At this point, almost half of the cargo remained on deck plus the gasoline drums. The patrol report stated, "By 0335 the last boat had been loaded to capacity, about 15 tons, over the strenuous objection of the 'Patron.' Most of the shore party was put in the boat but about 20 men would not go willingly. After pushing a dozen or so overboard, the rest got the news and jumped, leaving all equipment behind." Shortly before 0400, the ship's commanding officer ordered the remaining gasoline drums and boxes of carbines jettisoned as the *Narwhal* started moving out of the bay. About 30 tons of cargo were lost; the war report writer said it was 15 tons lost. On July 11, 1944, General MacArthur received the following radio, from Col. Peralta:

Please inform your sub captain I thank him for the kindness, courtesy displayed to my half-starved rather forward officers. Value of such cannot be estimated as they help allay possible hard feelings on their part and is excellent proof of American generosity and sympathy. What those men will say around counts more than one ton of printed promises.

General Charles A. Willoughby, a close personal advisor to MacArthur, summarized the event and provided the background information to other submarine commanders who were assigned to special missions in the area as a precautionary note:

Peralta's attitude, from his message and other evacuee reports, appears to be generally obstreperous. He is young, resourceful, competent and able. His organization on Panay has seemed to be good. His intelligence coverage of his own and other areas is of greater value than that of other MD commanders and in the past his attitude has been tolerated for this reason. His hostility towards Americans has been confirmed by numerous reliable evacuees from Panay. Since Peralta's sources are valuable no action is recommended at this time, though future deliveries of supplies by Navy might be affected by these adverse reports. However, commanders of forces reentering the Philippines should be advised of Peralta's attitude, for appropriate action.

The Panay incident between Peralta's guerrillas and the captain and crew of the Narwhal proved to be the exception to the overall successful special missions performed by other submarines involved in the Spyron Operation.

In every radio broadcast he made from Australia to the Japanese-occupied Philippines, General MacArthur had famously insisted, "I shall return," a morale-boosting promise heard by many Filipinos on radio equipment brought to the islands on "guerrilla" submarines. When the tide of the war fully turned in favor of the Americans, and MacArthur was finally able to liberate the Philippines from the Japanese, it was the American submarine force that played the key role in making MacArthur's promised return a reality.

There is little doubt that the commerce raiding abilities of American submarines altered Japan's maritime strategy. The most obvious effect of the submarines' presence was the rate at which the tankers and freighters of Japan's Merchant Fleet were sent to the bottom. By 1944, American submarine warfare aimed at Japan's Merchant Fleet resulted in the cessation of all north-south ship movement. The intense American submarine activity in Japanese waters also had a secondary effect on the Japanese military. Submarine warfare forced the curtailment of essential aircraft at-sea training operations, which exacerbated Japan's difficulty in providing experienced pilots as the war progressed.

One of the most important strategic values of America's submarine force had nothing to do with commerce raiding, underwater warfare, or special operations. The Japanese could never be sure that a submarine was not operating off their coasts, and antisubmarine measures had to be maintained at all times. Early in the war, *Life Magazine* published an article about the *USS Guardfish* that claimed the submarine had penetrated so far into the Sea of Japan that the crew was able to watch a horserace that took place on the island of Honshu. In actuality, the submarine's skipper had commented on being able to see a set of railroad tracks that may have been taking passengers to a racetrack that had been identified on their navigational chart. The story was blown out of context and became more embellished at every retelling. The New York

State Racing Commission sent the submarine's commanding officer an honorary membership as a result of the story. What the story did not report was that the submarine had considered firing a torpedo at the trestle that supported the train, but after waiting offshore for most of the day without seeing the train the submarine left the area. Since an American magazine had reported the story, it was obvious to the Japanese that no city was safe from a possible submarine attack and anti-submarine measures were strengthened throughout the empire. Any troops or enemy resources that were diverted in defense of the Japanese homeland against phantom submarines were unavailable for use against the Allies in other hostile areas. American propaganda played a big part in advancing the stealth characteristics and unique warfare abilities of the submarine force. Just the possibility of using submarines to attack Japanese coastal facilities provided the Allies with a powerful psychological weapon.

Submarines had to be prepared to carry out special missions at any time during a war patrol. Most missions were identified to the submarines' commanding officers prior to deployment, but many of the original missions were cancelled or altered as wartime priorities and strategic circumstances changed. Such was the case for the submarines *USS Searaven* and *USS Amberjack*. Preparing for her third patrol, *Searaven* drew a highly explosive mission. She was to transport over 50 tons of dual purpose, high explosive anti-aircraft shells to Corregidor. Prior to arrival at the final destination, *Searaven* was informed that Corregidor had fallen to the enemy. The submarine received new orders to proceed to the island of Timor and rescue some Royal Australian Air Force personnel who had destroyed the communication towers, the landing strip, ammunition and fuel oil storage prior to the Japanese overrunning the island. The Aussies then took off to the jungle seeking a means of escape. Their headquarters in Australia had informed them that a rescue was impossible because all of flying boats had been destroyed by Japanese bombings. They were on their own in a wild jungle, pursued by the Japanese Army.

Arriving off the shores of Timor, *Searaven* reconnoitered the beach and surrounding jungles by periscope during the day, hoping to find evidence of the survivors or a visual signal from them. Surfacing later in darkness, they approached the vicinity of the rescue position as close to the beach as possible where a signal fire was seen. Three sailors volunteered to paddle a raft to the beach and bring the Australians back to the submarine. Landing on shore, the rescue party located the Aussies. The Americans were horrified by the sight of 33 Australians in various stages of near-death. Most of them suffered from malaria and malnutrition, and many had tropical ulcers under their armpits or between their legs. Three of the survivors were stretcher cases so it was decided the healthy men would go out to the submarine first, and the wounded and sickly would wait until the second trip. When the small boat reached the submarine, dawn was not too far away. The passengers were lowered below decks, given first aid, bowls of hot tomato soup, sandwiches and cigarettes. The remainder of the party was still on the beach, and the submarine was forced to wait until the next night to rescue them.

While on a routine patrol to lay mines and perform photo reconnaissance near the Japanese stronghold at Truk, *Amberjack* was recalled for a special mission. The submarine was ordered to transport 9,000 gallons of aviation gasoline, 15 Army fighter pilots and two hundred 100-pound bombs to Guadalcanal in order to assist the Marines who were hard-pressed for air support. Enroute to Guadalcanal, the submarine was redirected and ordered to deliver its cargo to Tulagi, where the Japanese were attempting to recapture an Allied airstrip. U.S. submarines transported hundreds of members of "Carlson's Marine Raiders" to both Guadalcanal and Tulagi, and those

same submarines made regular deliveries of ammunition and food that helped make the Island Reoccupation Campaigns of the Marines such a success.

As Allied war planners began to formulate a strategy for the upcoming Gilbert Islands campaign, the admiral in charge of air operations contacted Admiral Lockwood and asked him if he could spare any of his submarines to serve Lifeguarding duty. Lockwood wasted little time in responding affirmatively to that request and set up a routine submarine schedule to support the air operations. Submarines were assigned specific stations in the area of air operations and were provided a unique call sign that linked them to that area. Pilots who had to ditch their planes in the ocean were instructed to send an un-coded radio message with the call sign that corresponded to their assigned area. That call sign alerted the submarine in the area that a pilot was in trouble and sent it on its way to make the recovery. In the event that the identification system was ever compromised, to prevent the Japanese from sending false rescue messages the call signs all featured the liberal use of words that started with the letter "L" – such as "Lonesome Luke," "Little Lulu" and "Lollipop" – all linguistic phrases that tongue-tied the Japanese.

The submarine *USS Finback* rescued future U.S. president George Bush. Lieutenant Bush was returning from an attack at Chichi Jima when his plane was shot down by Japanese fire over the Bonin Islands. He and his crew waited in a rubber raft for four hours until the submarine surfaced nearby and rescued them. All totaled, 86 American submarines participated in lifeguard missions and rescued 504 Allied airmen. Of all the at-sea rescues accomplished by U.S. submarines, none was more difficult or satisfying than the rescue of British and Australian prisoners who survived the sinking of the Japanese ship that was transferring them from Singapore to Formosa in 1944.

The Japanese POW transport ship, *Rakuyo Maru*, was sunk by the submarine *USS Sealion* in the South China Sea. Four days after the sinking, another submarine, *USS Pampanito*, was on lifeguard duty when a bridge lookout sighted some men on a raft. The men were covered with oil and filth, and the crew was unable to determine if they were friend or foe. A rescue party determined that there were 15 men in the raft, all in bad shape. The War Patrol Report of the *Pampanito* stated:

As the men were received on board, we stripped them and removed most of the heavy coating of oil and muck. We cleared the after torpedo room and passed them below as quickly as possible. Gave all men a piece of cloth moistened with water to suck on. All of them were exhausted after four days on the raft and three years imprisonment. Many had lashed themselves to their makeshift rafts, which were slick with grease; and had nothing but lifebelts with them. All showed signs of pellagra, beri-beri, malaria, immersion, salt water sores, ringworm, etc. All were very thin and showed the results of undernourishment. Some were in very bad shape ... A pitiful sight none of us will ever forget.

The crew of the *Pampanito* spent four hours rescuing as many survivors as could be found. The final tally of survivors added an additional 73 men to the submarine's already cramped complement of 79 enlisted men and 10 officers. Some of the men who were rescued were

critically ill, so *Pampanito* cut short her patrol and transferred the survivors to the hospital on Saipan.

Although it took them away from their primary mission of sinking Japanese ships, lifeguard duty was the one special operation submariners truly enjoyed. It gave them an immediate sense of accomplishment, allowed them plenty of time for routine training and evolutions, and crews were free to pursue any target of opportunity that happened their way while on station. Several submarines demonstrated their creativity in defining "targets of opportunity," but none more so than the submarines, *USS Barb*, *USS Bluegill*, *USS Spot* and *USS Bowfin*.

The *Barb* was no different than any other submarine that fought in the Pacific theater, but the ship's commanding officer certainly was. Lieutenant Gene Fluckey, nicknamed "Lucky Fluckey" by his crew, had earned a reputation as a risk-taker and master of underwater warfare techniques. Under his command, the *Barb* had compiled an enviable war record in sinking 34 Japanese merchant ships and several Imperial warships, including the Escort Carrier *Unyo Maru*.

After completing a refit in Pearl Harbor in late 1944, the submarine returned to the Western Pacific to continue terrorizing the Japanese Merchant Fleet. However, always the innovator, while in Hawaii, Fluckey had the shipyard equip his submarine with a portable rocket launcher. Waiting for merchant targets to wander into the *Barb's* patrol area was not going to be a problem anymore. Fluckey intended to attack ships at anchor in Japanese harbors. The installation of the rocket launcher was endorsed by COMSUBPAC, who theorized that a submarine's ability to circumvent Japanese coastal defenses made it the perfect platform to attack the enemy where the least expected. When the *Barb* arrived at its assigned patrol area in the La Perouse Strait near Hokkaido, Japan, there was a severe shortage of shipping targets. The submarine patrolled the shore line of Karafuto Island where the crew noticed a much-traveled railway system was transporting Japanese troops and equipment on a regular schedule. Fluckey and his crew went to work on a plan to blow-up the train. Eight volunteers were chosen for the mission in a ship-wide lottery. Those who won were offered as much as \$200 to sell their billets. Everyone wanted to be the first American warriors to set foot on Japanese soil.

That night, two rubber boats were loaded with the saboteurs along armed with hundreds of pounds of high-explosives and several makeshift contact exploders. The landing party traveled almost a mile into Japanese territory where they went to work planting the explosives on the tracks. Several trains passed them before their work was completed, forcing them to hide in the bushes until it was safe to proceed again. After the charges were placed and the circuits were connected, the team headed back to the *Barb*. Before they were safely aboard, a sixteen-car train roared down the track where it exploded in a tremendous flash of light. A prisoner taken a few days later said that the Japanese newspapers reported the wreck was caused by an aircraft bomb. The Silent Service had struck again.

Not content with "sinking" a train, Fluckey took the *Barb* to a small island in the Sea of Okhotsk where the Japanese Government maintained a seal rookery. He had observed the island on an earlier patrol and noticed that it was only staffed by a few unarmed civilians. Fluckey planned to capture and occupy the island, but his preliminary periscope survey determined that it was well garrisoned and was protected by numerous machinegun emplacements, one 3-inch field piece

and several concrete pillboxes.

With his eight-man commando team unable to overcome the Japanese defenses, Fluckey ordered a rocket attack. For the first time in US naval history, the order, "MAN BATTLESTATIONS ROCKETS," was made prior to the *Barb's* attack. Three rounds – of twelve rockets per round – were fired at the island. The damage report verified the destruction of the rookery, and the destruction of a nearby fish processing factory. In addition to the numerous Japanese flags – representing the submarine's successful sinking of an enemy ship – the *Barb's* final battleflag also depicted the image of a train and several rockets. *Barb's* crew received more medals for its wartime accomplishments than any other U.S. submarine, culminating with the Medal of Honor for Commander Fluckey.

The *Bluegill* used its idle time while assigned to lifeguard duty to attack and invade Pratas Island, located 150 miles off the Chinese coast. The island served as a radio and meteorological station for the Japanese after the Allies recaptured the Philippines in 1944. Several members of *Bluegill's* crew armed with machine guns and cutlasses, along with two commandos from the Australian Z-Force who were embarked on the submarine, stormed ashore and captured the radio station. The Japanese had abandoned the facility a few days earlier so the "Pirates of Pratas" met no enemy resistance during their invasion. The radio equipment and printed messages that the Japanese left behind were taken back to the submarine. The two Z-Force members destroyed the radio towers and burned the meteorological facility. Before leaving, the crew of the submarine hoisted the American flag over the island in an appropriate ceremony, and renamed it "Bluegill Island."

Finding poor hunting in her assigned patrol area in the East China Sea, the *Spot* proceeded to the Korean coast where she sighted an enemy radio station atop a 200-foot cliff on the island of Kokuzan To. The submarine surfaced less than a mile off shore and opened fire on the radio station with her deck gun. *Spot's* gunners confirmed 42 hits on the facility. The aim of the gunners was particularly effective in the attack as they also destroyed an oil storage facility. The resultant fire from the attack on the oil tanks left several barracks in flames as *Spot* submerged and retreated back to her home base in the Mariana Islands.

Shortly after her release from lifeguard duty around the area of Okinawa, the *Bowfin* sighted a three-ship Japanese convoy headed to its port in Minami Daito Jima Island. The submarine followed the convoy right into the harbor and commenced a submerged attack. *Bowfin* fired three torpedoes at a range of 1,750 yards. Two of the torpedoes hit their targets, but the third ran deep and wild. The errant torpedo hit the ship repair facility and destroyed a cement pier, a large crane and a busload of Japanese soldiers that was on the pier when the torpedo hit it.

By the summer of 1945, the submarine force had run out of targets, and the boats could go almost anywhere they wished to accomplish special missions. In the closing months of the war, submarines equipped with rocket launchers regularly bombarded military and industrial targets in northern Japan. The rocket launches made earlier by the *Barb*, and classified as special missions, became just one more weapon in the repertoire of US submarines. Photographs of enemy positions taken from the periscopes of submarines were unheard of at the start of the war. However, by war's end that type of information became so valuable, that Allied war planners

were unwilling to devise definitive operational plans without it. The overall effects of submarine warfare were so obvious that some American planners believed that the economic collapse of Japan made an invasion of the home islands unnecessary.

Like all other elements of the American military, the submarine force was unprepared for the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Beginning the war with no combat experience and limited numbers, the submarine force seemed to live up to its nickname as the Silent Service. The heavy demands made on the submarines to attack the Japanese fleet were flawed by poor equipment, doctrine and tactics that limited the effectiveness of submerged attacks, and officers in command who refused to take risks or press the offensive.

Despite all of their early shortcomings, the American submarines accomplished something that the German and Japanese forces did not – they had destroyed the enemy's ocean commerce. The submariner's designation for all of the non-routine tasks they were assigned was special missions. This applied to hundreds of missions that deviated from their primary missions of sinking ships and included: evacuating nationals, the landing of coast watchers, agents and commando, carrying aviation gasoline, participating in shore bombardments, lifeguarding, acting as beacon ships for landing forces, carrying out photo reconnaissance, conducting beach and reef surveys, weather reporting and destroying enemy minefields.

From their first special missions running ammunition and supplies to the defenders of Corregidor, to the well-planned and organized support of the Philippine guerrillas through Chick Parsons' SPYRON Operation, US submarines were vitally important to the Allied war effort in every phase of its conduct. The supplies and trained personnel delivered by the submarines played a major role in organizing the scattered remnants of guerrillas throughout the Philippines into formidable effective combat units and reconnaissance operations. As the war continued and the submarine's versatility was more widely recognized by all branches of the service, the undersea warriors were called upon to undertake all manner of special missions. The joint operations culminated in a mutual respect between the men in the field and the men on the boats, and increased the likelihood of the success of every special mission. Because they seldom afforded an opportunity to sink enemy shipping, many of those missions were disliked by the men who accomplished them. Although difficult to measure in terms of cold facts or statistical parameters, their value in promoting the ultimate defeat of the enemy was immense.

After the war, the Joint Army-Navy Assessment Committee (JANAC) of the Strategic Bombing Survey verified the rightful force and unit of every Japanese ship sunk in the Pacific theater. In many cases, verification was impossible as there were no survivors or witnesses. The JANAC figures significantly altered the battle scores in terms of tonnage sunk for many of the submarines force's best skippers. Nevertheless, the report was published and made official in 1947. No matter how the figures were computed, the evidence clearly showed that the US submarine force played a major role in the Allied victory over Japan. The JANAC report had no statistics for rescued aviators, but it noted that every airman who survived the crash of his plane at sea was rescued, thanks in large part to the submarine lifeguard league.

It is the opinion of many old submarine sailors that submarines do not receive enough credit for their role in helping to win World War II. While there are many written accounts delineating the

accomplishments of America's submarine force in destroying enemy shipping, little attention is given to the special missions of those same submarines. The reason for the oversight in this element of submarine historiography may be due to the very nature of the submarine service itself. Submarines have always been a relatively small and secretive group. Those who served onboard were not supermen, nor were they endowed with a supernatural propensity toward heroism. They were average Americans, well trained, well armed and serving on superb ships.

The twenty submarines that supported the guerrilla operations in the Philippines as part of "MacArthur's Navy," successfully completed 41 missions in which 472 persons were evacuated, 331 persons were delivered, and 1,325 tons of supplies were unloaded. All of the special missions were accomplished in the enemy's backyard at great risk to the safety of the submarine and her crew. Given the strategic circumstances of some of the tasks, the variety of operations that were performed and the hazards involved, it is more appropriate to designate those operations as "extraordinary missions." As if the danger imposed on a submarine by the enemy were not enough, many boats conducting special missions during World War II were attacked by friendly forces. One of the first submarines assigned special missions, the *USS Seawolf*, was sunk in a case of mistaken identity during a depth charge attack by an American destroyer.

Most people will never know what the submarine force accomplished in World War II. In the other services, the territory that was captured was represented on maps. That was not the case with submarines. No flag was raised over the spot where an enemy ship was sunk indicating the submarine responsible for that sinking. Submarines had to disappear as quickly as they had struck. Stealth and surprise were never more needed than during the accomplishment of special missions. Yet for all of the special missions they accomplished, submarine service in the Pacific was a highly personal experience marked by combat operations against enemy ships. That action was filled with memories of the smells of sweat and oil, the bone-shattering concussion of exploding depth charges, the controlled chaos of an emergency dive, the tension of a submerged attack and the quick peek through the periscope at a flaming tanker, but most of all, there was a deep sense of accomplishment.

The pre-war strategists who saw submarines as secondary naval units limited to torpedo attacks were surprised by what the boats left untouched in the attack on Pearl Harbor were able to accomplish with only four years of combat experience. The employment of submarines in extraordinary special missions, combined with the ingenuity of submarine commanders and their crews, made impossible tasks realities, and proved that through initiative, teamwork, leadership and ingenuity, America's submarines were the most valuable assets of World War II.

[Source: <http://www.militaryhistoryonline.com/wwii/articles/shadowwarriors.aspx> Jun 2011 ++]