

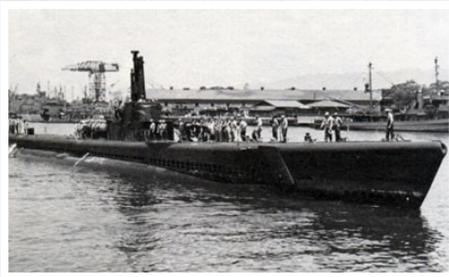
FINAL MISSION: THE USS TANG SUBMARINE EXPERIENCE

In the new **US Freedom Pavilion: The Boeing Center**, The National WWII Museum recreates for visitors the final mission of the USS *Tang*, the most successful submarine in US military history. Below is a brief summary of submarine warfare in WWII and the *Tang*. *Look up any words you don't know and write down their definitions.*

Submarine Warfare in WWII

Comprising only 2% of the US Navy, American submarine crews were responsible for 90% (by tonnage) of Japanese merchant and naval losses in the Pacific. Since WWI, submarine technology—including radar, sonar, hull design, engines and torpedoes—had greatly improved. Submarine tactics had also changed. US submarines employed surface engagement when attacking Japanese supply convoys, resulting in devastating losses to Japanese shipping. But with increased effectiveness came increased vulnerability to Japanese anti-submarine fire. Serving on a WWII-era submarine was cramped, smelly, dangerous work that required a special brand of sailor.

The USS Tang



The USS *Tang* (named, like all American submarines, after a fish) first slipped into the water in 1943, launched and commissioned at Mare Island Naval Shipyard in California with Lt. Cdr. Richard “Dick” O’Kane commanding. With a crew of up to 10 officers and 80 enlisted men, the Balao-class fleet submarine sank 33 Japanese ships during its five war patrols, earning two Presidential Unit Citations and four battle stars for its World War II service.

USS *Tang* was equipped with 10 torpedo tubes — six at the bow; four at the stern. Like all US fleet submarines during the war, USS *Tang* was diesel-electric. When on the surface, diesel engines powered the ship and charged electric batteries that drove the sub when submerged.

O’Kane was already well-known in the “Silent Service,” as the submarine force was called. He previously served under Commander Dudley W. “Mush” Morton aboard the USS *Wahoo*. The New Hampshire native was chosen to command USS *Tang* even before it was commissioned. O’Kane inspired fierce loyalty and pride in his crew. The sub sank 20 ships on her first four patrols and broke a record at the time by rescuing 22 downed airmen on one patrol.

The Fifth Patrol

On her fifth patrol, USS *Tang* sent an unprecedented 13 enemy ships to the bottom. Tragically as she fired her last torpedo of her last patrol before heading home, it broached and began a circular run towards the sub. Captain O’Kane frantically attempted to move the 312-foot submarine out of the way, but the torpedo slammed into the port side, sinking the vessel. O’Kane and a handful of his crew were washed from the bridge into the water, while several other men managed to escape the sunken vessel using a mechanical breathing device known as a Momsen lung. A total of nine men managed to survive on the surface, only to be taken prisoner by a Japanese patrol craft. The survivors languished in POW camps until being liberated in 1945. The rest of the crew perished in the USS *Tang*, which came to rest 180 feet below the surface.



A Momsen lung demonstration

For his conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in battle, President Harry Truman awarded Captain Richard O’Kane the Medal of Honor, the highest honor available to an American service man.

On Eternal Patrol

A total of 52 US submarines sank during WWII, sending 3,630 submariners on “eternal patrol.” At a rate of 22% killed in actions, the submarine service had the highest proportional fatality rate in the US military.



Learn more about the USS *Tang*: <http://www.nationalww2museum.org/us-freedom-pavilion-the-boeing-center/>