

Virginians at War WWII: Submarines Resource Packet

Contains: Glossary, Images, Discussion Questions,
Additional Resources

Program Description: Virginians at War: WWII - Submarines tells the unique story of Americans in submarines fighting against the Japanese in World War II. Technology is a major focus of the film, while addressing codebreaking, torpedo failures (and successes), and strategy. Discover the conditions of living on a submarine while under attack and losing air, and the innovation that went into surviving the waters of the Pacific.

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Length: 20:50

Streaming link: <https://vimeo.com/367249032>

Featured Speakers:

ENS Alvin V. Anceravage, Annandale
QM2 Alexander M. Drewry, Portsmouth
CDR George C. Mahler, Richmond
LCDR Will "Randy" Myers, Fairfax
MoMM2 Clarence E. Padgett, Glen Allen
ST3/C Walter Patrick, Amelia
RADM Maurice H. Rindskopf, Fort Belvoir
RADM Donald "Mac" Showers, Arlington
TM1/C Arthur G. Smith, Alexandria
LT William B. Spencer, Petersburg
CDR James R. Swanbeck, Middlebrook
CDR Verner Utke-Ramsing, McLean
CAPT Roy W. Werthmuller, Virginia Beach
RMCSS William R. Wolfe, Norfolk



GLOSSARY

IMPORTANT TERMS

- **Acoustic torpedo:** a self-aiming torpedo that uses sonar to find its target
- **Conning tower:** the structure at the top of a submarine that contains the periscope
- **Convoy:** a group of ships traveling together
- **Crush depth:** the depth at which a submarine will collapse due to the external pressure of the ocean
- **Depth charge:** a type of anti-submarine warfare weapon that explodes underwater and causes damage to a submarine primarily through shockwaves, which rapidly bend and break the hull of the submarine
- **Litter:** a type of stretcher or rescue basket used to move injured people
- **Merchant ship:** a cargo or trade ship
- **Periscope:** a tube filled with mirrors that allows submerged submarines to see above the ocean's surface
- **Silent running:** a tactic used by submarines to avoid detection by sonar; non-essential systems are turned off and the crew restricts speaking, moving, or making any other loud noises
- **Skipper:** an informal term for "captain"; commanding officer of a ship
- **Submarine:** a ship that is fully operational underwater

NOTABLE SHIPS

- **USS Archerfish (SS-311):** submarine with the largest single victory in terms of tonnage; sank the Japanese carrier *Shinano* on its maiden voyage (59,000 tons)
- **USS Pigeon (ASR-6):** the first ship to be awarded a Presidential Unit Citation during WWII; saved sister submarines *Sealion* and *Seadragon* during a Japanese air raid at Cavite Naval Base in the Philippines
- **USS Seahorse (SS-304):** a submarine that sank 20 ships (72,529 tons); best known for its skipper, CDR Slade D. Cutter
- **USS Tang (SS-306):** the most successful U.S. submarine during WWII; sank 33 Japanese ships (116,454 tons); sunk October 25, 1944 on its fifth war patrol by its own flawed torpedo (78 dead, nine survived including LCDR Richard H. O'Kane)
- **USS Tautog (SS-199):** "The Terrible T"; sank 26 Japanese ships (72,606 tons); completed 13 war patrols during WWII
- **USS Wahoo (SS-238):** a submarine that sank 20 ships (60,038 tons), best known for its second skipper, LCDR Dudley W. "Mush" Morton; sunk October 11, 1943; earned six battle stars and one Presidential Unit Citation

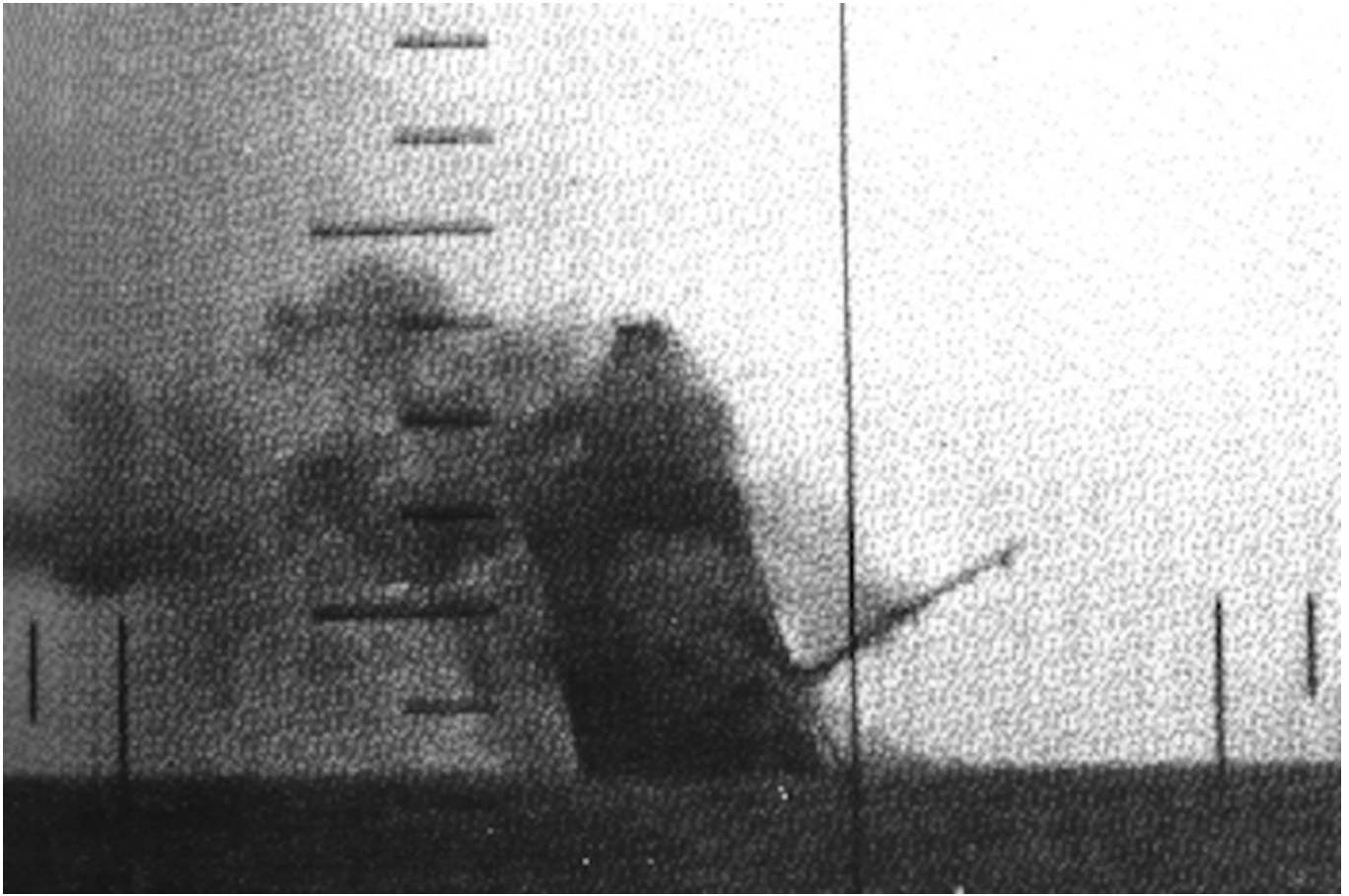
GLOSSARY

NOTABLE SKIPPERS

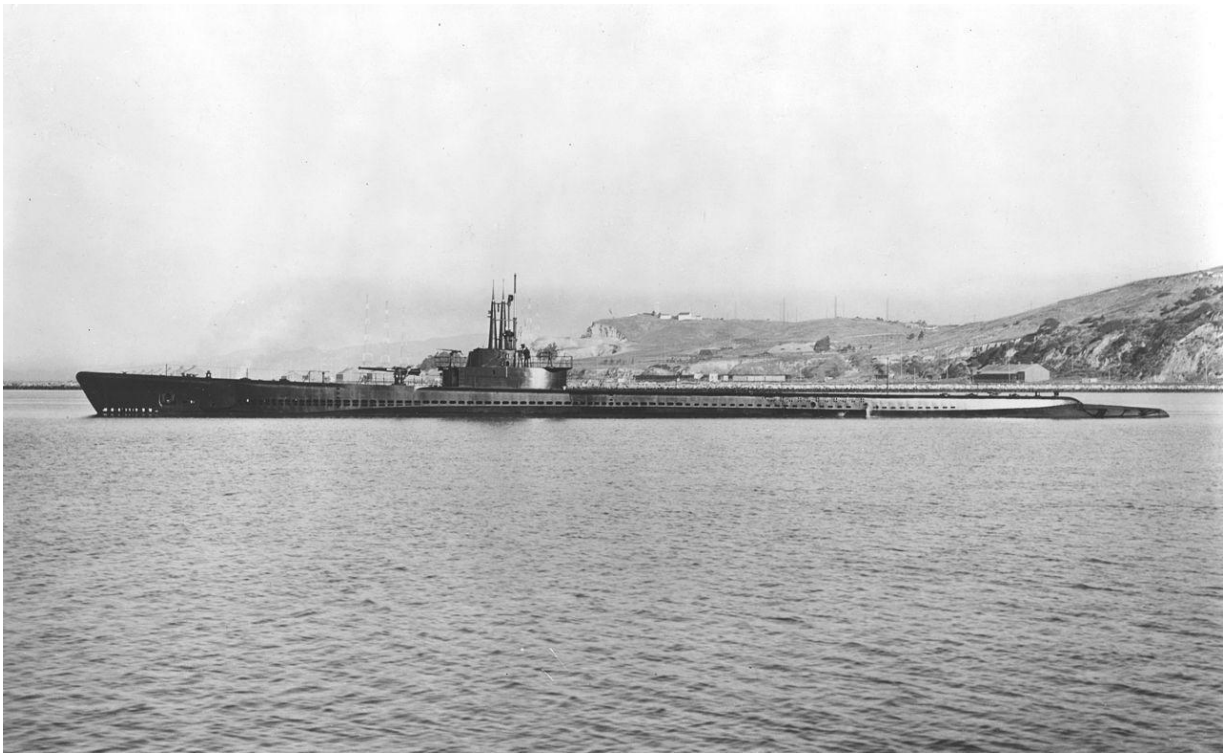
- **CDR Slade D. Cutter:** served as LCDR of the USS *Seahorse* from October 1943 to July 1944; carried out four war patrols in the Pacific aboard USS *Seahorse*; sank 19 ships (71,729 tons); awarded 4x Navy Cross, 2x Silver Star, Bronze Star Medal, Presidential Unit Citation
- **LCDR Dudley W. “Mush” Morton:** “Mushmouth” or “Mush the Magnificent”; served as the commanding officer of the USS *Wahoo* from December 31, 1942 to October 11, 1943; carried out five war patrols in the Pacific; died aboard the USS *Wahoo* when it was sunk by Japanese antisubmarine aircraft depth charges; awarded 4x Navy Cross, Distinguished Service Cross, Purple Heart and various other awards
- **RADM Richard H. “Dick” O’Kane:** served as the Executive Officer of the USS *Wahoo* under LCDR “Mush” Morton for five war patrols; served as LCDR of the USS *Tang* from October 1943 to October 25, 1944 (survived); captured as a Japanese POW and held at Omori POW camp; sank more ships than any other skipper of WWII (33 ships – 116,454 tons); awarded the Medal of Honor, 3x Navy Cross, 3x Silver Star, Legion of Merit with “V” device, Purple Heart, and several other awards

AWARDS

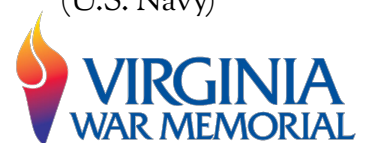
- **Bronze Star Medal:** a military decoration awarded to members of the U.S. Armed Forces for either heroic achievement, heroic service, meritorious achievement, or meritorious service in a combat zone
- **Distinguished Service Cross:** the U.S. Army’s second-highest military award for extreme gallantry and risk of life in combat with an enemy
- **Presidential Unit Citation:** a military decoration awarded to units for extraordinary heroism in action against an armed enemy on or after the attack on Pearl Harbor
- **Navy Cross:** the U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps second-highest military decoration awarded for valor in combat
- **Medal of Honor:** the highest U.S. military decoration awarded for “conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of life, above and beyond the call of duty”
- **Purple Heart:** a U.S. military decoration awarded to those wounded or killed while serving
- **Silver Star:** a military decoration awarded to a member of the U. S. Armed Forces for either heroic achievement, heroic service, meritorious achievement, or meritorious service in a combat zone



View from the periscope of the USS *Wahoo* as Japanese *Nittsu Maru* sinks, March 21, 1943
(U.S. Navy)



USS *Tang*, December 1943
(U.S. Navy)





LCDR Dudley "Mush" Morton
(U.S. Navy)

Photo # 80-G-702334 Commander Richard H. O'Kane, USN, 1946



RADM Richard H. O'Kane
(U.S. Navy)



Submariners on USS *Wahoo*, July 1943

(U.S. Navy)



Coast guardsman setting a depth charge, October 8th 1942

(National Archives)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why were submarines so crucial after Pearl Harbor for the United States' operations in the Pacific theater?
2. What were major issues with the submarines? How were these issues solved?
3. How did submarine crews locate their targets? What were the challenges to be surmounted in order to accomplish their task?
4. How did submarine crews avoid being hit? What were they avoiding?
5. What roles did "Guerilla Boats" play?
6. How important were the submarines for winning in the Japanese theater? In what ways were they effective?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

To learn more about the experiences of Virginians in World War II, view *Virginians at War: WWII Nurses* and other films at vawarmemorial.org. Looking to do more research? Check out the links below.

- <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/research/library/online-reading-room/title-list-alphabetically/j/japanese-naval-merchant-shipping-losses-wwii.html>
- <https://maritime.org/doc/subsinpacific.htm>
- https://www.public.navy.mil/subfor/underseawarfaremagazine/issues/archives/issue_06/silent_victory.html
- <https://www.britannica.com/topic/naval-warfare/Guerrilla-war-at-sea-the-submarine>
- <https://archive.org/details/clearbridgewarpa0000okan>
- <https://www.defense.gov/Explore/Features/Story/Article/2114035/submarine-warfare-played-major-role-in-world-war-ii-victory/>