

Tape #~~000~~ Oral History

Pintado Rescue of Airmen by Fred Hassenplug

This is December 29, 1985. I am H. Fred Hassenplug, born 5/5/21 in Melton, Pennsylvania.

My most exciting event in the Pintado was picking up a B-29 crew and the Colonel who was riding along off the coast of Japan during my first war patrol. I do not know which patrol this was for the Pintado. It happened this way. We surfaced about ten a.m. some 30-50 miles off the coast of Japan. In the distance was an airplane. I supposed this to be our dumbo, that is our plane that would cover us and chase off any Japanese airplanes, however such did not turn out to be the case. After many calls we decided that he must be a Japanese plane and not on our frequency. Shortly thereafter our dumbo did turn up. As I recall, and this may not be correct, there was a B-24 which circled overhead for four hours while the raid was going on. Suddenly we had an IFF, identification friend or foe, on our radio. Our dumbo overhead vectored in to the location of the IFF and escorted the plane off the coast of Japan.

The colonel who was in charge of the group and riding along in that particular B-29 that day and the captain were arguing on who was going to be the last to jump from the plane that day. Of course, by tradition the captain of the plane was the last to leave the plane just as the captain of the ship is the last to leave the ship. The colonel and captain were arguing when suddenly they looked at the altimeter which read about 1,000 feet--they both jumped. I do not recall they ever settled the argument as to who left the ship last.

We were on the surface and had our periscope up and could see quite a distance, miles as a matter of fact. We saw in the middle of the string an airman who could not get his Mae West, life raft inflated. We steamed up to pick him up first since he seemed to need the help most. The airmen we were passing by were not happy at this as they thought we were leaving them off the coast of Japan helpless and of course American flyers were not too popular in Japan at this time.

We got them all aboard -- you've seen the film I hope. We had a short cargo net strung over the starboard side. Pulled the men up and stripped them down. Now the strip down was for two reasons, one of which we admitted. The strip down was to see if anyone was physically injured and also we must admit to find souvenirs. Only one man, an airman, thought that he had been hurt. He must have fantasized about the radar dome on the B-29 coming forward as he jumped and he claimed this is what happened to him. However, our pharmacist's mate examined him and found no such evidence.

I graduated from the Naval Academy in June of 1944. My first shipboard duty was in the USS Osun SS-68. SS-68 means 68 submarine hull commissioned in the U.S. Navy. On 7 Jan 29 '45 I was ordered to the Pacific by NATS Naval Air Transport Service to Pearl. Further air via COMSUBSOUWESPAC, Commander Submarine South Western Pacific personal plane. He had just been relieved and was reporting to Pearl for reassignment and his pilot said he would take us to Australia. We ended up on the east coast of Australia and flew across to the southwestern part of Australia to Perth Freemantle where a submarine base had been established. Early in 1945 we left by submarine tender Uraley and returned to Pearl. Learned of Franklin D. Roosevelt's death while at sea. I was assigned to the USS

Pintado SS-387 on 24 May 1945 and was detached 24 November 1945 exactly 6 months to the day.

I was in the Pintado for one and one-half war patrols. You probably ask "What is one-half of a war patrol?" After we had picked up the crew that I previously described and transferred them to another boat and came back to Guam for R&R and had our US Air Force and US Navy party, we went out on another war patrol off the coast. We were number one in the lifeguard league right off the coast of Japan. But, the war was winding down, they dropped the bomb and the Japanese sued for peace. When we got word of the cessation of hostilities, the skipper was not trustful, he said that perhaps there were Japanese submarine units which had not gotten the word, so he made us steam directly away from the coast of Japan for 24 hours, then everybody lined up for drink of depth charge whiskey.

I had rye and water--the best drink I ever had in my life. But, to this day, I hate rye.

Two incidents you might be interested in. In my first war patrol I was standing junior officer of the deckwatch I the stern part of the bridge when suddenly the port lookout said "Torpedoes, torpedoes, torpedoes". Of course, we did not know at the time that it was the port watch and he should have added -- port, port, port. If the crew on the wheel had known which said they torpedoes were on he would have thrown the wheel to parallel their course. However, both the OD, OOD and I swung our binoculars over and saw that these "torpedoes" were broaching the water and actually they were three dolphin approaching the ship. They came to within 50 yards and the fish started to parallel our course and disappeared.

My first war patrol lasted approximately 45 days. We never fired any torpedoes. By the time I got out there, the previous submarines had sunk most of the Japanese merchant and war ships so we had been assigned to this lifeguard duty. Lifeguard duty--there was a string of submarines from the coast of Japan down toward Guam and we were number 1, that is we were right off the coast of Japan./ Number 2 would be next, etc. down toward Guam. This was so that if any B-29s got in trouble and had to splash we could help.

There was one incident that I've never seen reported. We were notified that the cessation of hostilities would be at date so and so, hour so and so, we were breaking other messages for other boats which is illegal but we had to do something to keep our interest going. On submarine skipper reported that he had a contact on his radar, and our radar was better than their radar, in other words we could get them on radar while they could not get us because of technical capabilities of their radar. He reported this to COMSUBPAC, that is Commander Submarines Pacific. They came back that there were no Allied ships or submarines in the area. The skipper wanted to be darn sure that he did not sink an American or Allied ship so he questioned COMSUBPAC again -- are there any Allied vessels in this area?. COMSUBPAC came back and said --negative, negative, negative. Within the hour the CO of the submarine reported that he had sunk an enemy vessel presumably a submarine.

I was detached from the Pintado 24 Nov 1945 at Pearl, I believe. At this time they were planning the Bikini atomic experiments and various officers were trading duty. Some wanted to go on that duty, some did not. I decided to go home to be married. I had met a Civil Service girl from Iowa