

During WWII USS *Pollack* departed Pearl Harbor on her seventh war patrol May 10, 1943 with a new skipper, Captain Lewellen and a new executive officer Lt. George Grider. (Later in the war George Grider, as captain of *Flasher*, made one of the best patrols of the war sinking four 10,000 ton tankers and helping make *Flasher* the top tonnage boat of WW II. He is also the author of the book *War Fish* covering his wartime service.) This was my first patrol as diving officer and completed a largely new firing party.

*Pollack* made her first contact of the patrol with a freighter in the Marshall Islands on May 18. The freighter was later determined to be the ex-gunboat *Terushima Maru*. Captain Lewellen fired three torpedoes and observed two hits before the escort forced us to deep submergence. The escort was less than 1,000 yards away when we went deep and was able to lay down an accurate depth charge pattern. The first explosion was the closest of the seven depth charges but there was no serious damage. The escort soon stopped dropping depth charges but maintained contact with us until evening. When darkness came we surfaced. The escort was in sight but we escaped undetected. The sinking was later confirmed and the identity of the target established, however, she was only 2,110 tons.

We next patrolled off *Jaluit Atoll* for several days with no contacts except aircraft. One morning while standing the periscope watch I sighted a patrol vessel leaving the Southeast Pass of *Jaluit Atoll*. Captain Lewellen immediately came to the conning tower and took over the periscope. He suspected the patrol vessel might be sortieing to meet an inbound ship and proceeded to trail it. Soon another patrol vessel appeared patrolling the entrance to the channel. Things began to look promising as the Japanese were giving away a clue that they expected a ship. Sure enough, we soon made periscope contact with a large ship inbound to *Jaluit*. The subsequent attack was one of *Pollack's* more interesting.

George Grider, our new executive officer, had begun a campaign as soon as he came aboard, to be the officer manning the periscope during submerged attacks. His argument was the great success of having the executive officer man the periscope on the submarine *Wahoo* where he had previously served. *Wahoo* executive officer Dick O'Kane used the periscope for submerged attacks and Mush Morton the Commanding Officer conned the boat and fired the torpedoes based on the information from the XO. Captain Lewellen was skeptical but finally agreed to let George man the periscope on this submerged attack which turned out to be on *Bangkok Maru*.

George's attack was textbook perfect with a 90 degree track and a range of about 1500 yards. *Pollack* made three hits for the four torpedoes fired. George Grider saw all three hits through the periscope and reported that one explosion blew pieces of the targets stern 300 feet in the air. As soon as the torpedoes were clear of the forward tubes Captain Lewellen started swinging the ship to bring the stern tubes to bear for firing on the Chidori escort vessel.

The escort was good though and headed for us at high speed before we could swing around to a firing course. The order "*take her deep; rig for depth-charge and silent running*" came quickly from Captain Lewellen. The depth charges were going off around us before I could get the boat to our test depth of 250 feet. The first depth charge attack was close and very damaging. The bow planes jammed on hard dive, a leak was reported in the after battery, and the main motor contactors were knocked out causing complete loss of power. There was a shower of paint chippings resembling

snow throughout the boat. A final surprise was that the auxiliary electric contactors jumped in and started all the pumps in the engine room while we were trying to run silent. Fortunately we were able to correct all these problems without losing depth control. The two escorts were tenacious and stayed over us for hours, dropping a total of 21 depth charges. Luckily none of the follow up attacks were as close as the first one.

When *Pollack* was finally able to surface we discovered the hydraulic line to number 7 main ballast tank flood valve had carried away during the depth charge attacks. All the oil had been lost from the system so we undoubtedly were leaving an oil slick trail during most of the depth charge attacks. Apparently after all the oil was out of the system the oil slick stopped and we were able to shake our attackers.

Clay Blair in pages 454 and 455 of his book "*Silent Victory*" describes the attack as follows. *A most interesting part of the sinking is that Bangkok Maru, a converted light cruiser, carried 1,200 troops and thousands of tons of supplies intended to reinforce the Island of Tarawa.* The Japanese troops that survived the sinking were taken to *Jaluit* and none made it to *Tarawa*. The ammunition and war supplies intended for *Tarawa* went down with the ship. This sinking undoubtedly saved the lives of a great number of U. S. Marines in their *Tarawa* attack a few months later. The battle for *Tarawa* was close and at one point our commander reported the issue was in doubt. The 1,200 Japanese troops in *Bangkok Maru* and the thousands of tons of defensive armaments lost in the sinking could have been the deciding factor in winning or losing the battle of *Tarawa*. This attack was probably the most important contribution towards winning the war in the Pacific ever made by *Pollack* and one of the more important attacks made by submarines during the war.