

The sub that committed suicide

by Norman and Madelyn Carlisle

DURING WORLD WAR II, the officers and men of the U.S. Navy's submarine *Tang* had a proud boast. Their sub, they crowed, rarely wasted a torpedo. In less than a year of combat, the 1,525-ton *Tang* mowed down Japanese transports, freighters and tankers with deadly accuracy. But it was her fantastic fifth patrol from September 27 to October 24, 1944, that gives the *Tang* a unique place in the annals of submarine warfare.

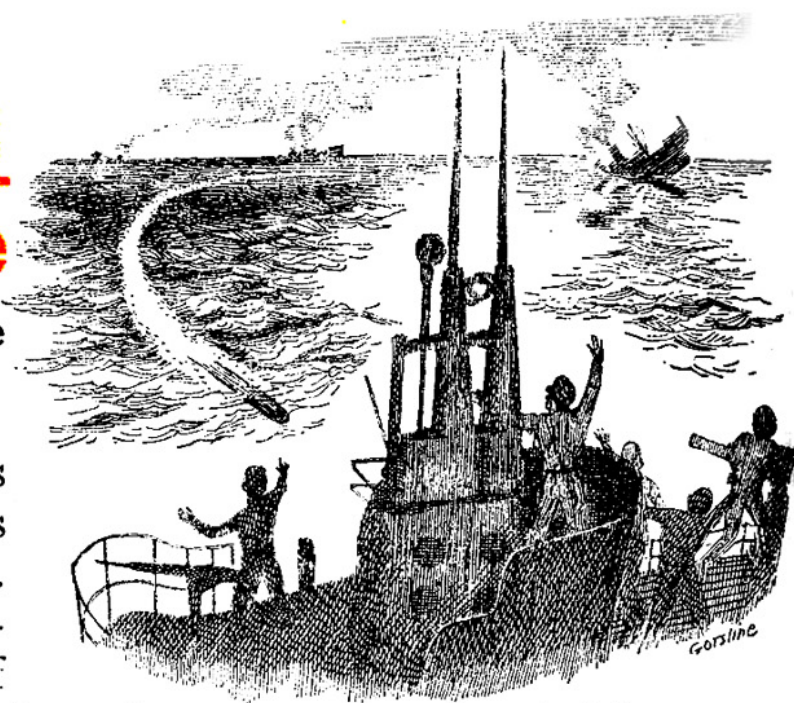
Hardly had the *Tang* started on this venture into Formosan waters than her commanding officer, Commander Richard O'Kane, sank two Japanese freighters. Then O'Kane boldly took the *Tang* right into the midst of a Japanese convoy. Down went three tankers, another freighter and a transport. Twenty-four hours later, while surfaced, O'Kane encountered another convoy. It didn't seem possible that they could repeat their amazing feat, but O'Kane was eager to try. He sent four torpedoes sliding away; all were direct hits! Then three more!

Now vengeful Japanese destroyers were bearing down on the *Tang*. O'Kane noticed that a transport previously hit was listing but not sinking. The *Tang* wasn't going to run off with any of its destructive power unused. He ordered the two remaining torpedoes fired. The next-to-last projectile swept out of its tube. Right on target. Now the last one. . . .

O'Kane froze. The torpedo he had just fired was turning, wheeling in a wide circle that would take it right back into the *Tang*. A hoarse cry leaped from his throat: "Full speed ahead. . . . Emergency. . . ."

The 312-foot submarine quivered from the thrust of her engines as the whole scene blazed before O'Kane's eyes in nightmarish slow motion. The burning ships, the sound and sight of exploding shells, the Japanese boring in for the kill . . . and at the center of it all, a white arc curving back toward the *Tang*. Seconds later a new explosion rocked the violent night. The gallant *Tang* lay dying—destroyed by her own torpedo.

O'Kane and eight others lived through that strange disaster and were captured by the Japanese. After the war, the Navy awarded a citation for heroism to the *Tang* and her crew. The survivors looked back with awe at the suicidal end of the *Tang*. Some of the more superstitious crewmen mused that she had used her last torpedo to take her own life, rather than meet death at the hands of the enemy.



Coronet

Endless Variety in Stories and Pictures

February, 1960

p. 166

OldMagazineArticles.com