



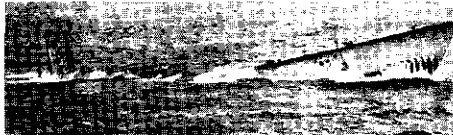
**Adm. Thomas Fargo, Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet departs Kamehameha**

\_\_\_\_ USSVI \_\_\_\_

## THE USS BAYA (SS 318)

By Art Randall

A little after ten on a cold and wintry January 2nd morning, the command was given to release the timbers holding the Ways at the Electric Boat Company's shipyard in Groton, Connecticut. The three-hundred and eighteenth submarine to become commissioned in the United States Navy, with its crew standing at attention on its deck, slowly slid, rather quietly down to the Thames River



amid the playing of emblematic anthems by a Navy band and the patriotic cheers of those gathered dockside.

Authorized by the US Congress to be built some seven months after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the keel was laid on April 8, 1943. With it, came a legacy of American submarine technology dating back to the Revolutionary war when David Bushnell and Phineas Pratt built the first submersible designed to attack an enemy warship, proven to be an effective strategy some 88 years later when the CSS Hunley sank the Housatonic.

It also carried with it down those ways, the inventive genius of Robert Fulton, Simon Lake and John Holland. The latter two would, arguably, be the founding fathers of an industry that would eventually lead to the launching of the USS *Baya* on that cold 1944 day and its successful role in helping bring an overpowering victory for the US Forces in the Pacific and the ultimate demise of the Empire of Japan and to the Nautilus some nine years later.

A few minutes before its launch, the new submarine was christened the "USS *Baya* (SS 318)". It had been named for a brown fish of the grouper family, found along the shores of Mexico's Pacific Coast from Baja California to the Gulf of Tehuantepec. As the speaker in the ceremony intoned, "May the fate of Japanese sea power, fall prey to the USS *Baya* and its crew, as the *Baya*'s prey, half its size, surrenders to its voracious appetite for a kill as its large mouth consumes that prey with ease!" Its appetite would wait four and one-half months to begin devouring the Japanese merchant and war ship fleet, as its commissioning date was set for May 20, 1944.

It was the 34th boat of the *Balao* Class

Fleet Submarine to be built. Its length was a formidable 311 feet eight inches overall, with a beam of 27 feet three inches and a surface displacement of 1,526 tons. Its maximum operating safety depth was 400 feet. Its surface speed was nearly 21 knots and its maximum speed submerged was a little less than nine. Its standard crew compliment was six officers and 60 enlisted men.

It came armed with twenty-four torpedoes, that could be launched through 10 torpedo tubes. Topside, its armament consisted of one 5 inch/25 deck gun, one 20 mm and one 40 mm anti-aircraft gun, and two 20 caliber machine guns.

Its first Captain, CDR Arnold H Holtz, began sea trials following its commissioning, and on June 25, the *Baya* sailed through the Panama Canal to Pearl Harbor, joining the arrivals of, on the average, two newly constructed boats every month. Final trials having been completed on the 23rd of August, 1944 the *Baya* sailed from Pearl heading on its first war patrol teamed with the USS *Becuna* (SS 319) and *Hawkbill* (SS 366). At Saipan, the "Pack" refueled and headed to Palau where they played a role in the Island's invasion.

Few contacts were made in the ensuing month, but on the night of the 2nd of September, while on patrol in the Luzon Straights, the *Baya* was driven down by a plane. Thirty minutes later she surfaced with all hands at Battle Stations as the XO, Engineering Officer and the Quartermaster went up to the bridge. The seas were rough but seemingly no different than on other nights. Suddenly a wall of water came crashing down upon them from the stern, enveloping the *Baya* with its main induction and conning tower hatch open.

As the crew drained the conning tower and blew the ballast tanks, the *Baya* went to 45 feet, sweeping the three men off the bridge. Twenty-minutes later the men washed overboard had been rescued, the only loss being one life preserver. Several months later a Japanese radio broadcast announced the sinking of the *Baya* based upon the found preserver.

The *Baya* saw her long awaited first torpedo action on the night of October 7, while on patrol in the middle of the South China Sea. Radar had identified a target as a large 8,400 ton passenger/cargo vessel with two destroyer escorts. At the same time, the *Hawkbill* also made contact and was pursuing the chase. After two hours, the two moved to the attack. The *Hawkbill*'s first was unsuccessful.

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