

War Era Story Project 2012

Submitted by: Ralph Lucas

Current home town: Houston, Texas

Age: 88

I graduated from Roger Bacon High School in Cincinnati in June, 1942, and joined the U.S. Navy in February, 1943, with the rating of Torpedo man Third Class. I volunteered for submarine duty and I transferred to the submarine school at New London, Connecticut. From there, I was assigned to the crew of the *USS Marlin* at New London, which had the duty of training prospective commanding officers. My main station was in the Forward Torpedo Room, but I also served as lookout, helmsman and operator of the diving planes in the Control Room.

In June, 1944, I was assigned to the *USS Sea Owl* which was under construction at the Portsmouth Navy Yard in New Hampshire. The *Sea Owl* made three war patrols, of fifty-seven, fifty-eight and seventy-one day durations, in the East China and South China Seas. The first patrol resulted in the sinking of a Japanese destroyer and patrol craft. The patrol craft was sunk with an acoustic torpedo, the *Sea Owl* being the first of our submarines to accomplish this feat. Normally, torpedoes were fuel powered/engine driven and fired from the tubes by high-pressure air.



USS Sea Owl

On the second patrol, the *Sea Owl*, with two other submarines, surfaced on March 26, 1945 and, with our deck guns, bombarded a radar station at Pirates Island, south of Formosa, now Taiwan. On April 18th, we sank Japanese submarine RO-46 near Wake Island.

The *Sea Owl's* third patrol was in the East China Sea where we sank a destroyer south of Nagasaki. A second destroyer and a patrol craft hunted the *Sea Owl* and, over an eight-hour period, they dropped eighty-four depth charges, with no serious damage to our boat. On July 2nd, at about noon, we received a communication that six U.S. Navy airmen were adrift after their PBM patrol plane had crashed one hundred twenty miles away. Traveling at our maximum speed of twenty knots, we reached the airmen at dusk and took them aboard. They had been in the water four days. During World War II, our submarines rescued over four hundred airmen, including future president George Bush.

After the third patrol, *Sea Owl* was ordered to Pearl Harbor for overhaul and rest camp, and was there when the war ended on August 14th. We returned to the mainland in the Fall of 1945 and, after a stop at Tampa, Florida as part of Navy Day celebrations around the country, we ended our journey at the submarine base in New London, Connecticut. I left the *Sea Owl* in January, 1946 and was discharged from the Navy at Lido Beach, New York on February 7th; I was promoted to Torpedo man second class on the third patrol.

I have many fond memories of those adventuresome and maturing years, and I still communicate with four former shipmates. Regrettably, many of my shipmates have "rested their oars."



Picture taken at Rollman's Dept. Store in Cincinnati on Oct. 15, 1945 when I was home on leave.