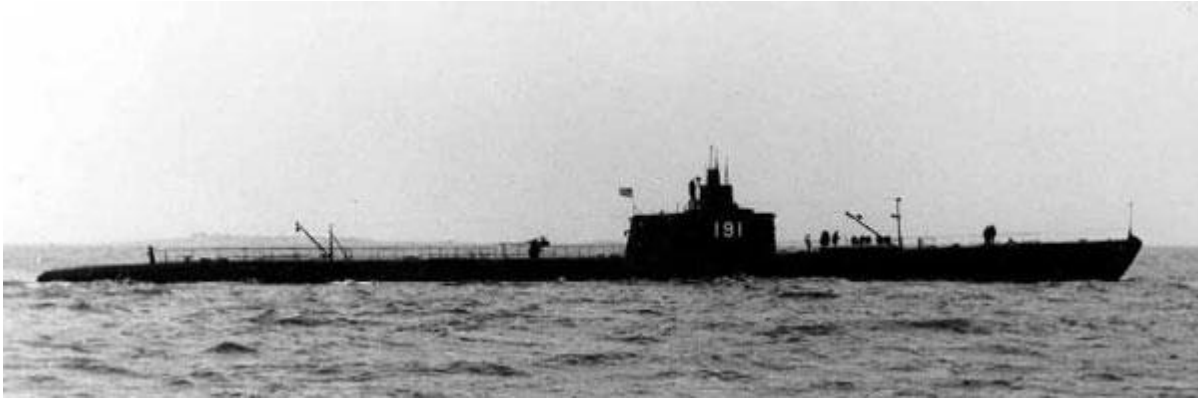


The USS Sculpin (SS-191)



On the night of November 18, 1943 the USS Sculpin (SS-191), a Sargo-class submarine on its ninth patrol, made radar contact on a Japanese convoy and managed to make an end around for what promised to be a successful approach for a dawn attack. However, during the morning attack phase, she was detected by a Japanese destroyer and forced to go deep. While Lt. Commander Fred Connaway and the Sculpin crew listened, the enemy convoy zig-zagged toward her. About an hour later, believing they were in the clear, the submarine rose to periscope depth in hopes of catching the enemy convoy before it moved out of range, but immediately dove again after realizing they had surfaced just 6,000 yards from a destroyer that was lagging behind the convoy.

Depth charges ensued from the Japanese destroyer, the Yamagumo, and after hours of being attacked and searched for, by noon it was believed that they had shaken the enemy. An inspection determined that the Sculpin received only minor damage and was fundamentally sound. The diving officer tried to bring her to periscope depth but the depth gauge stuck at 125 feet so the Sculpin surfaced rather abruptly. Once again, Commander Connaway found himself staring at the destroyer headed straight for him.



From the conning tower, Connaway screamed for an emergency dive, slammed the hatch behind him and the Sculpin dove deep. The Yamagumo dropped 18 depth charges in close succession, one of which impeded the submarine's ability to control its depth. As the sub rapidly dove past her maximum depth of 250 feet, she began to leak as the rivets and seams began to give due to the pressure, the steering and diving plane gear were damaged, and she was badly out of trim.

To stop their descent, Connaway and his crew pressed on through the water at full power. However, this brought about two scenarios:

1. It gave the Japanese sonar-men more noise to target, which increased their opportunity to deliver a fatal hit.
2. The sub would eventually run out of fuel (or the engines would be damaged beyond repair) and it would stop, sink, and everyone inside would be crushed by the pressure.

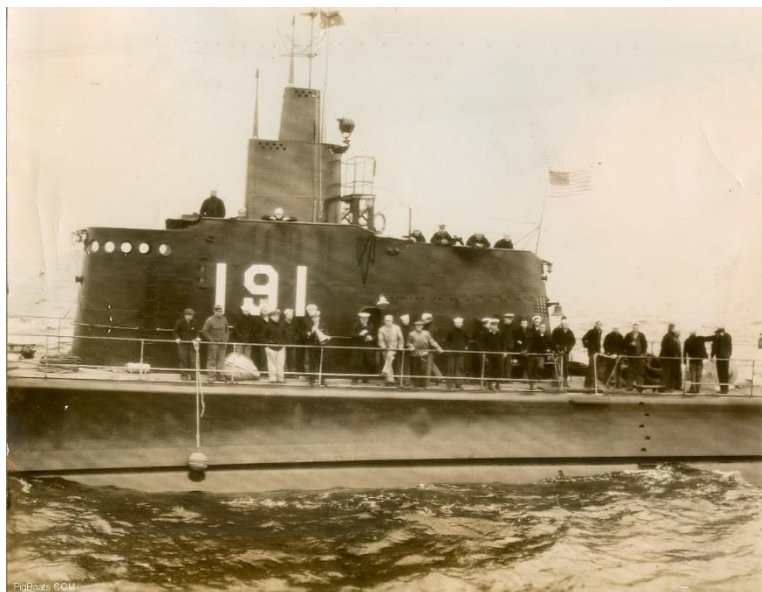
Commander Connaway decided to surface and fight so when the Sculpin blew her ballast tanks and surfaced, she went to gun action. Connaway and the Gunnery Officer were on the bridge and the Executive Officer was in the conning tower when the destroyer placed a shell through the main induction and one or more through the conning tower, killing the officers and several men. Lt. George Brown succeeded to command, decided to scuttle the ship, and gave the order "all hands abandon ship."

As it happened, below deck there was a Captain who also had a decision to make. Captain John P. Cromwell was aboard as a wolf pack commander who was to take charge of a coordinated attack group (Sculpin, Searaven, and Apon) if formation of the group was directed by dispatch. Possessing vital information (such as detailed knowledge of the coming invasion of Tarawa, the position of most subs in the Pacific, and that the Allies had broken many of the German naval codes and the primary Japanese code) which might be compromised under torture, Captain Cromwell elected to stay with the Sculpin. For this action, Captain Cromwell posthumously received the Congressional Medal of Honor.



After giving the “all hands abandon ship” order for the last time, the USS Sculpin dived at emergency speed by opening all vents. Dive officer, Ensign W.M. Fiedler, also elected to remain on the sub with Cromwell to make sure the Sculpin did indeed sink. In all, about 12 men (many already severely injured) rode the ship down north of Oroluk Island near Truk. The USS Sculpin earned eight battle stars for her service in WWII and the Philippine Presidential Unit Citation.

Forty-two men abandoned ship and were taken prisoner by the Japanese destroyer, Yamagumo, but one was thrown back overboard because he was severely wounded. The remaining 3 officers and 38 enlisted men were transported to Truk and questioned for 10 days. Then they were divided into 2 groups and loaded onto two carriers (21 on one, 20 on the other) headed to Japan. On December 31, 1943, the Japanese aircraft carrier, Chuyo, which was carrying 21 Sculpin survivors, was torpedoed multiple times over several hours and finally sunk by the USS Sailfish. Only one American escaped. (Ironically, it was the USS Sculpin crew that helped in the rescue of 33 men on the Squalus, later recommissioned Sailfish, when she sank off Portsmouth, New Hampshire in 1939.) After more questioning at Ofuna, the 21 survivors of the USS Sculpin were finally allowed to register as prisoners of war and sent to work in the copper mines of Ashio. On September 4, 1945, they were released by American forces.



Sources:

<https://www.history.navy.mil/research/library/online-reading-room/title-list-alphabetically/u/united-states-submarine-losses/sculpin-ss-191.html>

<https://www.warhistoryonline.com/history/uss-sculpin.html>

<https://pacificwrecks.com/subs/SS-191.html>