

# Lost Submarines Listings

*By Jim Christley (Rev 2/20/2003)*

Counting the losses incurred by the US Naval Submarine Force in World War II and arriving at a firm number for use in memorial ceremonies, speeches, presentations and writing should not be difficult and the number should be easily agreed on. Such is not the case. The number normally used is 52. This has been the traditional number used since the end of World War II. It is useful to the discussion to understand where that number came from.

In 1949, the Preliminary Design Branch of the Bureau of Ships issued a multi-volume work which formalized the "lessons learned" in ship design in World War II. This work detailed damage to selected submarines and listed "Depth Charge, Bomb, Mine, Torpedo and Gunfire Damage including Losses in Action". The 52 submarines listed in the "Losses in Action" became the core listing for US submarine losses.

The criteria for what constituted a loss is generally straight forward. It included:

1. Submarines lost at sea by enemy action with or without personnel loss.
2. Submarines lost by stranding & foundering regardless of personnel loss.
3. Submarines lost at sea by collision with personnel loss.
4. Submarines lost for unknown reasons.
5. Submarines lost due to material or operational causes with or without personnel loss.
6. Submarines lost due to scuttling.

The period for actions for which a lost submarine could be listed in this report was that of the U.S. declared involvement in WW II, 7 December 1941 to 15 August 1945. The portion of WW II from September 1939 to December 1941 was not included even though we lost several ships including one submarine during this period. The list only accounts submarines that were lost while under US flag during the stated period.

Using the criteria above and expanding the time to cover the entire history of our submarine force, a corrected total for our submarine losses may be

obtained.

## **Sixty Five Submarine Losses since establishment of the U.S. Submarine Force. (53 in Wartime, 12 in Peacetime.)**

### **Total Losses in Wartime: 53 Submarines:**

The two declared wars in the 20th century were World Wars I and II. World War I period of US involvement was from August 1917 to November 1918. The USS F-1 (SS-20) was lost on 17 December 1917, during World War I, by collision at sea (Criteria 3). This boat's loss plus those lost during WW II bring the total of submarines lost by our submarine force in wartime to 53. These are:

USS F-1 (SS-20), USS S-26 (SS-131), USS Shark (SS-174), USS Grunion (SS-216), USS Argonaut (SS-166), USS Amberjack (SS-219), USS Grampus (SS-207), USS Triton (SS-201), USS Pickerel (SS-177), USS R-12 (SS-89), USS Runner (SS-275), USS Pompano (SS-181), USS Grayling (SS-209), USS Cisco (SS-290), USS Wahoo (SS-238), USS Dorado (SS-248), USS Corvina (SS-226), USS Capelin (SS-289), USS Scorpion (SS-278), USS Grayback (SS-208), USS Trout (SS-202), USS Gudgeon (SS-211), USS Herring (SS-233), USS S-28 (SS-133), USS Golet (SS-361), USS Growler (SS-215), USS Robalo (SS-273), USS Harder (SS-257), USS Escolar (SS-294), USS Shark (SS-314), USS Seawolf (SS-197), USS Albacore (SS-218), USS Scamp (SS-277), USS Barbel (SS-316), USS Swordfish (SS-193), USS Kete (SS-369), USS Trigger (SS-237), USS Snook (SS-279), USS Lagarto (SS-371), USS Bonefish (SS-223), USS Bullhead (SS-332), USS Sealion (SS-195), USS Perch (SS-176), USS Grenadier (SS-210), USS S-44 (SS-155), USS Sculpin (SS-191), USS Tullibee (SS-284), USS Flier (SS-250), USS Tang (SS-306), USS S-36 (SS-141), USS S-27 (SS-132), USS S-39 (SS-144), and USS Darter (SS-227).

### **Total Losses in Peacetime: 12 Submarines**

The portions of the 20th century not included in WWI and WWII are considered, for the purposes of this discussion, peacetime. This is a point of semantics and it will be argued by participants and historians for many decades to come.

- Criteria 1: 0 Lost  
During these peacetime periods we lost no more due to enemy action.
- Criteria 2: 1 Lost  
By stranding and foundering, we lost USS H-1 (SS-28).
- Criteria 3: 4 Lost  
By collision we lost USS O-5 (SS-66), USS S-51 (SS-162), USS S-4 (SS-109) and USS Stickleback (SS-415).
- Criteria 4: 2 Lost  
Losses for unknown reasons we lost USS O-9 (SS-70), and USS Scorpion (SS-589).
- Criteria 5: 5 Lost  
Due to material or operational causes we lost USS F-4 (SS-21), USS S-5 (SS-110), USS Squalus (SS192), USS Cochino (SS-345) and USS Thresher (SS-593)
- Criteria 6: 0 Lost  
We lost no more boats under Criteria 6.

There are indeed other criteria that could be used to count a loss. One could count those submarines which, by action of the enemy or by accident, became "constructive total losses" and add Salmon, Nathaniel Greene, Bonfish and others. However, those boats and others like them were brought home by their crews and the decommissioned alongside with appropriate ceremony.

The decision whether the boat's structure would be repaired or discarded was made not by the sea, enemy or others of those things beyond our control, but by a considered process with the boat in port and the remainder of the crew safely ashore, which is why they are not reflected in the totals above.