



ORAL HISTORY SPOTLIGHT

Calvin Barrick QM3c

USS *Tang* (SS-306)

Born on a farm near Mount Gilead, Ohio, Calvin Barrick grew up a long way from the Pacific Ocean. After the attack on Pearl Harbor and graduating from high school in 1942, Barrick decided to join the Navy because, "Their recruiting office was closest! I had to go somewhere and I liked the idea of going to sea, even though I had never been anywhere near an ocean before." After basic training at Great Lakes Naval Station, Calvin was sent to Quartermaster school. While there, he heard about the submarine service and volunteered. "It sounded interesting and exciting, and it didn't hurt that we got hazardous duty pay either!"

His first assignment was to help commission a brand new submarine that was still under construction, the soon to be legendary, USS *Tang* (SS-306). "I was aboard her when she was launched as part of her commissioning crew. It was pretty neat to be aboard her as she first touched the sea."

The Commanding Officer of the *Tang* was Commander Richard H. O'Kane, already a legend in the "Silent Service", as the submarine force was called. He previously served under Commander Dudley W. "Mush" Morton aboard the USS *Wahoo* (SS-238). "Captain O'Kane was incredibly intelligent, and a great leader. He could be stern at times, but we all respected him, he



treated everybody fairly and went out of his way to watch out for his crew. We loved him for that."

After completion of sea trials and shakedown, *Tang* headed for war. With Barrick aboard, she set off for her first patrol off the Caroline and Marianas Islands. With a skipper like O'Kane in command, *Tang* was bound for success and many of the men aboard knew it. "My battle station was at the helm in the conning tower right beside the Captain. I was proud to be in that place in the boat, near a man like that in time of battle. We all knew we were headed for danger but with 'Killer O'Kane' in command, we felt confident."

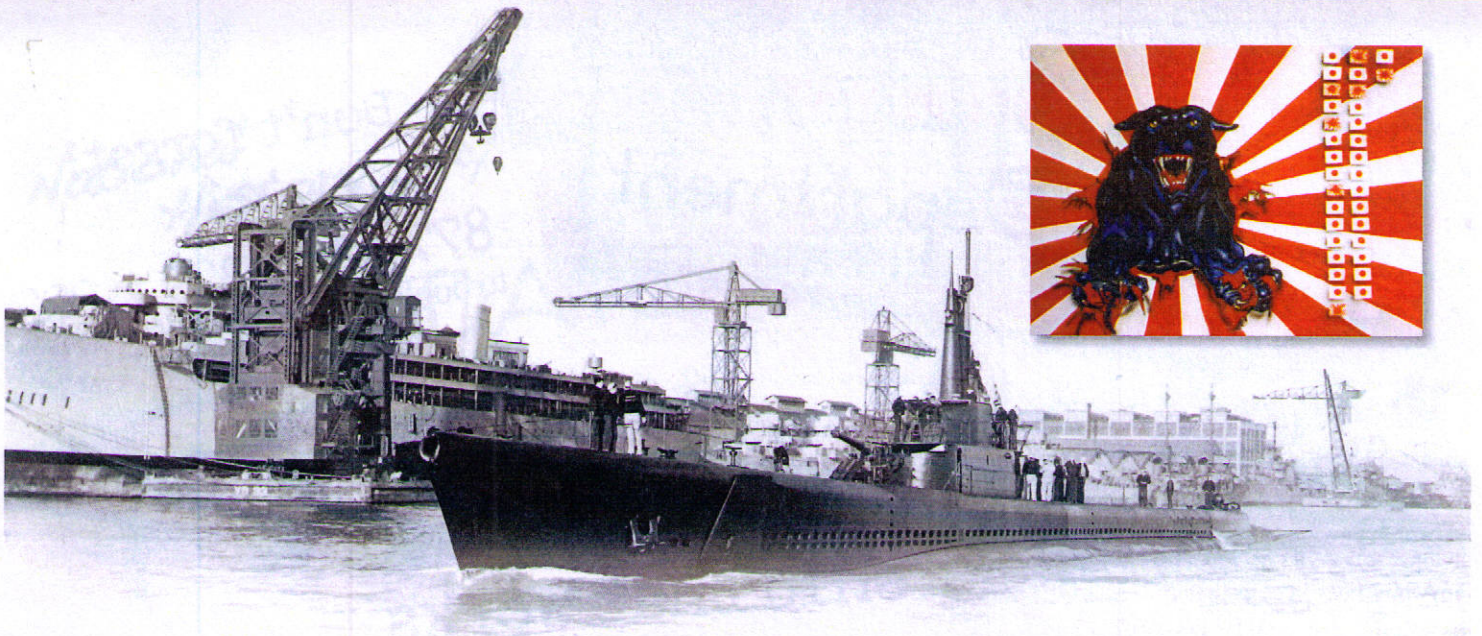
Tang sank the first of many ships, a Japanese freighter, on February 17, 1944. After the

attack, she was depth charged for the first time by the enemy. Barrick recalls, "It was a little unnerving. It wasn't as bad as in the movies but it did shake you up a good bit." Under a depth charge attack a submarine would often "Rig for Silent Running." He explains, "They would shut off everything that wasn't mandatory to keep steerageway. Steering went to manual control, and I'll tell you, that was work. The worst part was the heat though. The temperature would soar as soon as they shut off ventilation." Temperatures inside the submarine would skyrocket to around 120-130 degrees Fahrenheit. While under attack, a submarine could stay silent and submerged for hours, making the heat almost unbearable.

After several weeks of patrolling, *Tang* set course for Midway Island submarine base with a kill tally of five Japanese ships, an unheard of feat for a new submarine on her first patrol.

On her second patrol, *Tang* was called upon to perform lifeguard duty near Truk Island. Captain O'Kane and his crew rescued a total of 22 downed American naval aviators, setting a record for lives saved by a single vessel at that time. The submarine arrived back in Pearl Harbor to a hero's welcome. "I remember pulling into Pearl and the press was everywhere. It was quite a show. We





were famous I guess you could say. Our ship was in all the papers all over the country.”

For her third patrol, *Tang* set off to the East China and Yellow Seas, close to Japan in “Empire Waters.” “I knew where we were going. I could see the chart sitting there on the navigation table right in front of me. We were proud to be going out there. They only sent the best subs and the best crews to Empire Waters for patrols.” Best sub indeed, *Tang* had the most successful patrol of any submarine to that point. Making one of his trademark surface attacks, O’Kane fearlessly conned *Tang* straight into the middle of an escorted Japanese convoy on the surface at night. *Tang* and her crew sank four Japanese ships in a matter of minutes before escaping the Japanese destroyer escorts. “Killer O’Kane” and his crew would go on to sink six more Japanese ships and return to Midway Island.

While at Midway, Calvin was ordered to the Navy’s V-12 program to take college courses in order to become an officer. Calvin recalls how he escaped *Tang*’s tragic ultimate fate, “*Tang*’s Executive Officer Murray Frazee told me that if I didn’t get to go to school I could catch *Tang* back at Pearl Harbor. Well, I didn’t get to go to school and I went back to Pearl to get back aboard the *Tang*. I missed her by two days. She had left two days before I arrived to go on her fifth and final patrol. I was *that* close to being aboard her when she

went down. That was one of my lucky days. It made the hair stand up on the back of my neck when I found out a few weeks later that *Tang* was overdue and presumed lost.”

On that patrol, *Tang* sent an unprecedented 13 enemy ships to the bottom. Tragically as she fired her last torpedo of the patrol, the torpedo broached and began to boomerang back towards *Tang*. Captain O’Kane frantically attempted to move his 311-foot submarine out of the way. She swung too slow and her own torpedo slammed against the port side, immediately sinking the surfaced submarine. O’Kane and three others were washed from the bridge into the water. The men, along with five others who were able to escape the sinking sub, were taken prisoner by a Japanese patrol craft. The survivors languished in POW camps

until being liberated in 1945. The rest of the crew would perish in the USS *Tang*, which came to rest 180-feet below the surface.

Dick O’Kane was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions aboard *Tang*, becoming one of the most decorated servicemen in the war. O’Kane also earned three Navy Crosses, three Silver Stars, Legion of Merit with “V” for Valor, Purple Heart, three Presidential Unit Citations and numerous other service medals. In her short nine month career, USS *Tang* sank an incredible total of 33 enemy ships, the highest scoring submarine in United States Navy history, making O’Kane the most successful sub skipper of all time.

After the war, Calvin came home, went to work and started a family like millions of other returning veterans. He put his memories of the war and serving aboard the most successful submarine in United States Navy history behind him. “I didn’t stay in touch with any of my surviving shipmates. I just got on with my life. Thinking back on it now, 66 years later, I am proud to have served aboard USS *Tang* under a man like Dick O’Kane, alongside so many great men who weren’t as lucky as I was and now lie at the bottom of the Pacific.”

Calvin Barrick was interviewed by Manager of Research Services, Seth Paridon, at his home in Mansfield, Ohio on June 1, 2010.



Museum Accepts 100,000th Artifact

Items from the submarine USS *Tang* to be displayed in new Pavilion

The Museum has been collecting artifacts that tell the story of World War II since the 1990s, long before the first building opened its doors. We reached an important milestone this year by accessioning the 100,000th artifact into the Museum collection. This artifact, a telegram to the family of a crewmember on the USS *Tang*, tells a part of the submarine's tragic story.

Radioman 3rd Class Roy Joseph Miletta, served in the Pacific on the *Tang*, a *Balao*-class submarine, which saw considerable action. She went on five war patrols and sank thirty-one ships. But on October 25, 1944, it was her own torpedo that caused the submarine to sink. Only nine men survived and were taken as prisoners of war by the Japanese.

Miletta's family, just like many others, received a telegram from the Navy informing them that their son was missing in action. However, it is a second telegram, our 100,000th artifact, that brought welcome news to his family. This telegram confirms that Roy was transferred to shore before the *Tang* began her fifth and final patrol.

A log book kept by Miletta records the fateful event that would require his transfer off the submarine. In an entry dated September 25, 1944, he writes, "Underway as before, today I had a little accident, got the end of my thumb cut off, got caught in a water tight door, looks pretty black, may get transferred at Midway."

The telegram, along with the journal and several other items from Miletta's service will be displayed in conjunction with an immersive USS *Tang* submarine experience in the United States Freedom Pavilion.

The Museum continues to collect items that help to tell the story of the American Experience in the war that changed the world. For more information on artifact donation, visit www.nationalww2museum.org or call 504-528-1944 x 601.



SEPT. 25, 1944

Underway as before today I had a little accident, got the end of my thumb cut off, got it caught in a water tight door, looks pretty black may get transferred at Midway. Sure hope not. Laid down all day and took it easy my hand is very numb and sore.

WESTERN UNION
A. N. WILLIAMS
PRESIDENT

CLASS OF SERVICE

This is a full-rate Telegram or Cablegram unless its deferred character is indicated by a suitable symbol above or preceding the address.

The filing time shown in the date line on telegrams and day letters is STANDARD TIME at point of origin. Time of receipt

PR H 815 Am

123 Govt

Washington DC 332 Am Nov 30-1944

Mr and Mrs Bruno

Reno Miletta

Route Box 49

Gervais Oreg.

Replay your telegram 27th november 1944 concerning the status of your son Roy Joseph Miletta radioman third class USNR further investigation of your sons record indicates that he was transferred ashore about the first of October 1944 this bureau believes that your son is therefore alive and well investigation as to his whereabouts is being made and you will be informed of the results the anxiety caused you by the previous telegram is deeply regretted the navy department joins with you in the hope that your son is well and that you will soon hear from him to prevent possible aid to our enemies and to safe guard the lives of other personnel please donot divulge the name of his ship or station.

Vice Admiral Randall Jacobs, Chief of Naval Personnel.