

JAPAN'S SEA MONSTERS

An increasingly desperate Japan planned to use the huge I-400-class submarines to destroy the Panama Canal. Instead, they wound up as chess pieces in the new Cold War

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Japan's I-400-class *Sensuikan-Toku* (special attack, typically shortened to *Sen-Toku*) aircraft-carrying submarines were weapons well ahead of their time — one that could have had an impact on the war had they been deployed when the conflict's opening salvos were fired. In hindsight,

these submarines' destructive capabilities could have been used in a number of catastrophic attack scenarios — such as dropping nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons on American cities but, thankfully, that never came to pass.

Although there had been aircraft-carrying submarines prior to the *Sen-Toku* boats, the I-400-class special attack subs were unlike anything previously seen. Admiral Yamamoto ordered 18 of the type in 1942. They were huge by any standard and could hold enough fuel so they could cruise on surface at 14 knots and have a range of 37,500 miles — one and one-half times around the world! Each *Sen-Toku* submarine carried three Aichi M6A *Seiran* floatplanes, capable of delivering either one Type 91 aerial torpedo (fitted with a 518-pound warhead) or an 1874-pound bomb.

The *Sen-Toku* submarines were approximately 400 feet long, with a beam of 39 feet three inches, and a draft of 23 feet. The subs displaced 5700-tons submerged, and carried a crew of 21 officers and 170 sailors.

Looking at the I-400-class' statistics shows that each of these submarines were longer than the US Navy's most numerous destroyer type

— the 376-foot long *Fletcher*-class, of which 175 were built — and they were 100-feet longer than the majority of American WWII fleet submarines. It would take the US Navy until 19 August 1958, to eclipse the length of the *Sen-Tokus*, when the radar picket boat *Triton* (SSRN-586) was launched.

The three *Seiran* (translates roughly to "Clear Sky Storm") aircraft were carried in a centerline hangar, stowed with their wings folded and without floats. The centerline hangar required that the conning tower be offset; designers placed it to port of the centerline, making the conning tower more than 30 feet tall when measured from the submarine's deck.

Floats for the aircraft were carried in under-deck compartments and installed prior to launch should the mission profile call for the plane to return to the ship to be reused. In attack scenarios, the *Seirans* would be launched without landing gear or floats and upon return the fighters would be ditched and the pilots picked up by the submarine and subsequently returned to duty.

The first of the *Sen-Toku*

I-401 in Tokyo Bay during September 1945. IJN Submarine Squadron One, consisting of I-13, I-14, I-400, and I-401, was commanded by war criminal Tetsunosuke "The Butcher" Ariizumi. He was responsible for the murder of Allied seamen whose ships he sank while commanding I-8 during 1944. Shamed by Japan's unconditional surrender and terrified of being convicted as a war criminal, he managed to get a pistol, place it in his mouth and pull the trigger shortly before I-401 arrived in Japan. The sub's crew somehow managed to bury him at sea while avoiding notice of the American prize crew. However, some historians believe this is a false story, and Ariizumi, later branded as a coward as well as a murderer, somehow managed to slip into the Japanese civilian population where he lived a long life. (USN)