

TANG'S WAR

THE BALBO-CLASS SUBMARINE USS TANG (SS-306) WOULD ESTABLISH ONE OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR'S GREATEST COMBAT RECORDS. YET, IT WOULD BE A RECORD FILLED WITH TRAGEDY AND DISASTER

BY TOM GOODALL

On 15 January 1943 at the Mare Island Navy Yard, the USS *Tang* (SS-306) was laid down. To illustrate the speed of war-time production, *Tang* was launched on 17 August of that year and commissioned on 15 October. Her fitting out was completed at Mare Island and the sleek sub slid out of the northern California waters and headed to San Diego for just over two weeks of extremely intensive training. The new sub's commander was L/Cmdr. Richard H. O'Kane and

he was a demanding skipper that wanted his crew to operate like a fine Swiss watch.

Crossing the Pacific, *Tang* arrived at Pearl Harbor on 8 January 1944 for two more weeks of active training with exercises aimed at combating a skilled and deadly enemy. On 22 January, *Tang* stood out from Pearl and headed for the Caroline-Mariana Islands in search of the Japanese and O'Kane was determined to bring the war home

to the enemy in the most graphic way possible.

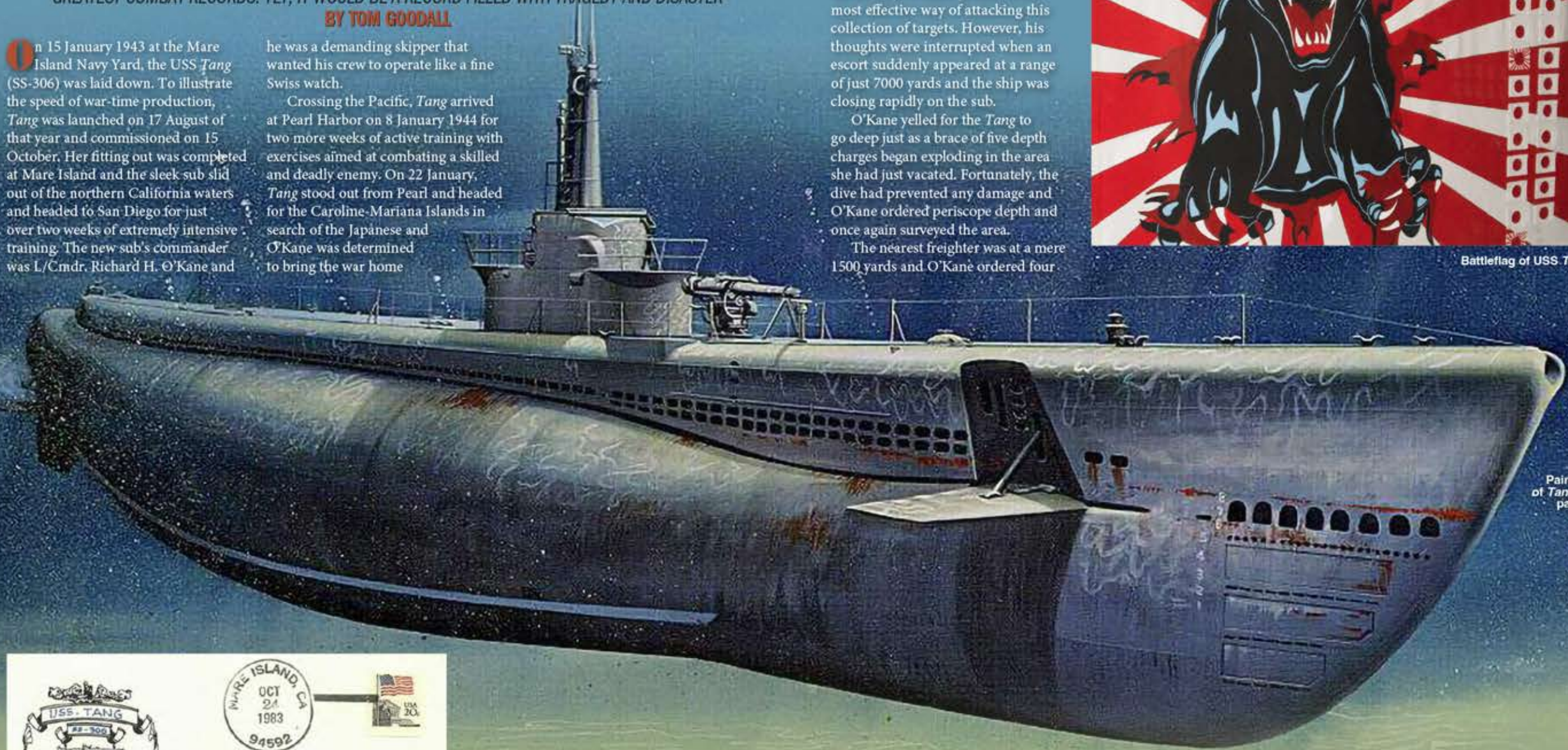
After a frustrating patrol looking for targets, O'Kane got exactly what he wanted. Raising his periscope, he was greeted with the sight of a Jap convoy — two transports, some escorts, and five smaller ships. Tracking the convoy, O'Kane pondered the most effective way of attacking this collection of targets. However, his thoughts were interrupted when an escort suddenly appeared at a range of just 7000 yards and the ship was closing rapidly on the sub.

O'Kane yelled for the *Tang* to go deep just as a brace of five depth charges began exploding in the area she had just vacated. Fortunately, the dive had prevented any damage and O'Kane ordered periscope depth and once again surveyed the area.

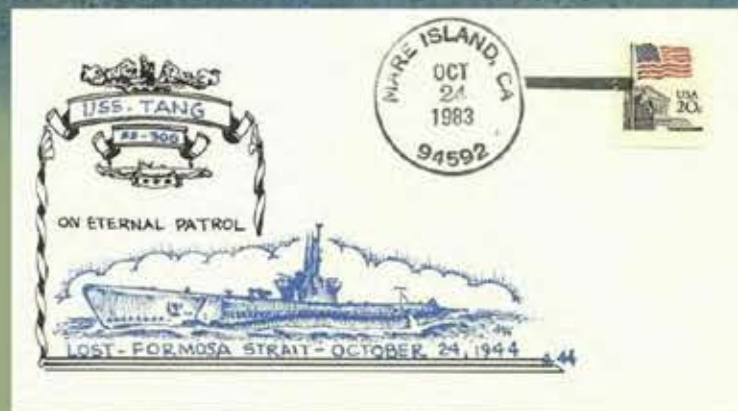
The nearest freighter was at a mere 1500 yards and O'Kane ordered four



Battleflag of USS *Tang*.



Painting of *Tang* on patrol.



Commemorative cover honoring the men of the *Tang* on eternal patrol.