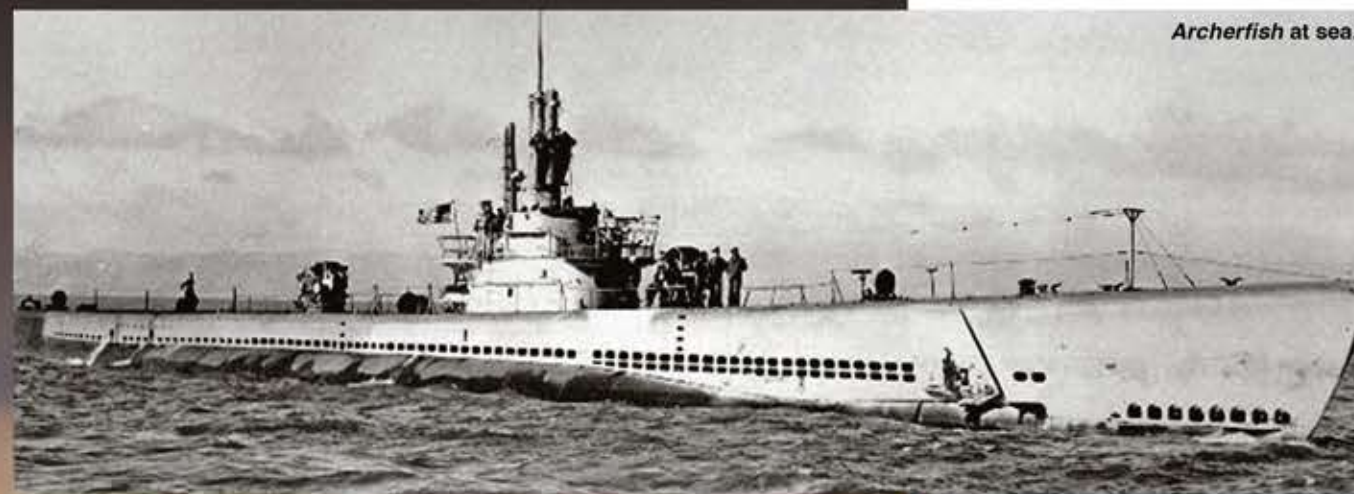


ATTACK OF THE ARCHERFISH

AFTER FOUR UNSUCCESSFUL WAR PATROLS, THE CAPTAIN AND CREW OF THIS SUBMARINE WERE WORRYING THAT THEY WOULD MISS THE WAR. LITTLE DID THEY KNOW THAT THE FIFTH WAR PATROL WOULD BRING THE BIGGEST TARGET EVER

BY KELLY BELL



USS Archerfish (SS-311) departs the area after a brace of its torpedoes slammed into the Japanese super carrier IJN *Shinano* that was on her maiden voyage on 29 November 1944 just 160 miles southwest of Tokyo Bay. This was the largest ship to be sunk by a submarine during WWII.

The first torpedo struck farthest aft. Over the next 30 seconds, three more warheads detonated against the massive carrier's hull, working their way forward. The explosions and instant flooding immediately killed scores of men, many asleep in their bunks. As tons of seawater cascaded into the wounded colossus, men below deck could see the extent of the damage, were seized with panic and stampeded for the deck. The missiles had hit ten feet below the water line and, on the bridge and upper levels, the commander and his officers were not yet aware of how sorely they were hurt. Many had survived earlier torpedo attacks — and on less-formidable vessels. Even as their gargantuan ship began to list they remained optimistic.

As 1944 neared its end, the tottering Japanese Empire toiled terribly to find ways of holding off the naval and air fleets of the American superpower it had goaded into war three years earlier. Land forces of the United States under Gen. Douglas MacArthur were resolutely reclaiming their Philippine possessions from the Imperial usurpers.

Waves of Boeing B-29 Superfortress bombers were beginning the destruction of Japan's major cities but perhaps most devastating were the omnipresent US Navy submarines that were sweeping Japanese shipping from the Pacific. Yet if the Imperial Navy could produce a single monster of a warship it might at least temporarily stem the steady advance of the enemy. Maybe this floating mega-weapon could even check or turn back the Philippine liberation and abort the anticipated attack on Okinawa, which