

DISCOVERY OF A FORGOTTEN HERO

IT TOOK OVER EIGHT DECADES BEFORE THE REMAINS OF A ROYAL NAVY T-CLASS SUBMARINE WERE DISCOVERED

BY ADAM STANTON



Insignia for HMS Trooper.

HMS Trooper heading out on a war patrol. The T-class submarines saw considerable action in the Med — and suffered accordingly.



Skipper Johnny Wrath (center) was well-liked by his men.



Today, the Second World War history of combat fought in and around Greece is basically forgotten by most of the world. However, some of the most ferocious fighting to take place during WWII happened in those environs. There are dedicated individuals that still seek out the history of those long-ago combats and one such person is Kostas Thoctaridis and his research recently brought closure to a Royal Navy mystery.

During the 1930s, British military planners knew that Nazi Germany was rapidly arming while most of Europe simply ignored that fact. In the Royal Navy, planners realized that if war did indeed come, then submarines would play a vital part in combat. Special consideration was given to Japan's increasing naval presence in the Pacific and in an attempt to create a more modern submersible, design of what would become known as the T-class (also Triton-class) began during 1934 to replace Q-, P-, and R-class submersibles. These three classes had been beset

with problems. They were slow, large, overly complicated, and mechanically unreliable. Besides these important failings, the Washington Naval Treaty of 1921 demanded that this trio of classes be retired after 13 years of operation.

Then came the 1930 London Naval Treaty and this restricted the Royal Navy submarine fleet to a total tonnage of 52,700 tons, a maximum standard surfaced displacement of 2000 tons for any boat, and a maximum gun armament of 5.1-inches. These were extremely confusing times and at the 1935 London Disarmament Conference, the United States proposed a limit of 1200 tons but the British Admiralty rejected this figure since it would exclude the large Grampus-class of mine-laying subs. The British countered the American proposal with a limit of 2000 tons. This was done with the false hope that rival naval powers would build fewer but large subs, which would be easier to hunt than more numerous smaller subs.

We often wonder how certain decisions can alter history but, at this time, the Conservative government of Stanley Baldwin came up with a proposal that, if enacted, would have greatly changed the course of the coming war. Baldwin and his followers proposed banning submarines altogether! If this did not work, then they had a back-up plan that would restrict displacement to just 250 tons. However, this did not (fortunately) happen and the Admiralty came up with the "Repeat P" (or "Replace P") class of subs that would lead directly to the T-class.

Numerous designs were considered, redesigned, and considered again. Rear Admiral Noel Laurence, a daring WWI sub officer, influenced the designs by pressing for a heavy torpedo armament. Studying Japanese naval tactics and policies, he reasoned that when attacking a strong Japanese surface force, British submarines would have difficulty penetrating the destroyer

screen without being able to launch a large torpedo salvo to ensure required hits at long range.

During May 1935, the final design was agreed upon and on 24 June, the "Repeat P" designation was dropped by the Admiralty and that the new submarines would all bear names beginning with the letter T. On 3 September, the name Triton was selected for the lead ship of the class and final approval was given on 13 February 1936. After examining proposals from the ship-building companies, the contract was awarded to Vickers Armstrong.

Design of the T-class was dictated by the requirement for the very large forward torpedo salvo capability and the long patrol endurance dictated by operations in the Pacific. To accommodate the external forward torpedo tubes, the majority of the T-class had a very distinctive bow — an

T-class submarines were not things of beauty as illustrated in this view of HMS Thorough being launched. The bulbous front end was required for the heavy torpedo armament. Thorough survived the war and was scrapped in 1962.

