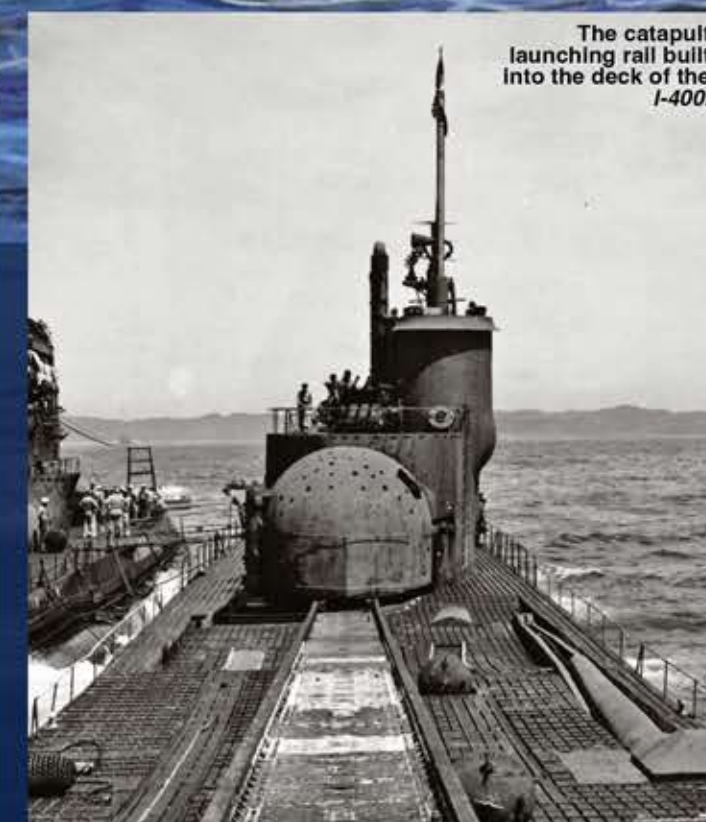


TARGET AMERICA!

THE IMPERIAL JAPANESE NAVY'S I-400-CLASS OF SUPER SUBS HAD AN ORIGINAL MISSION OF ATTACKING MAJOR AMERICAN WEST AND EAST COAST CITIES. THIS WAS CHANGED TO AN ATTACK ON THE PANAMA CANAL. WHEN THAT OPERATION WAS CANCELLED, A DESPERATE ATTACK ON THE US NAVY AT ULITHI WAS PLANNED. WOULD ANY OF THEM HAVE WORKED?

BY KELLY BELL

Artist concept of the I-400 preparing to launch a floatplane. Assembling the aircraft and getting it fueled, armed, and placed on a catapult was a difficult task but the Japanese developed skilled crews that could carry out the task in little time. During this stage of operation, the I-400 was extremely vulnerable to Allied air and surface attack.



The catapult launching rail built into the deck of the I-400.

The story broke on 3 December 2013, just after researchers from the Hawaii Undersea Research Laboratory located a massive metal hull on the ocean floor just off the coast of Oahu, Hawaii. It was the corpse of the Imperial Japanese submersible I-400 and she was a surprise.

"Finding it where we did was totally unexpected," said lab operations director Terry Kerby. "All our research pointed to it being farther out to sea."

Decades earlier, she had indeed been intended as a surprise to

Americans.

At 400-feet in length, and displacing 6670-tons Japan's I-400-class submarines were the largest constructed during the Second World War. Although they carried and could fire torpedoes like other subs, they were mainly undersea aircraft carriers, each capable of transporting three Aichi M6A *Seiran* warplanes to any desired target around the world. Using an on-deck catapult they could surface, shoot their planes aloft and dive, perhaps before being noticed.

Hoping to damage American morale, the commander-in-chief

of the Japanese Combined Fleet Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto proposed, immediately after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the construction of 18 mammoth, plane-toting subs to launch aerial attacks on US cities along both the western and eastern seaboard. He ordered Captain Kameto Kuroshima to make a feasibility study. Kuroshima quickly completed his assignment, and Yamamoto submitted the proposal to fleet headquarters on 13 January 1942.

The plan envisioned a force of 18 massive subs with range sufficient

to make three round trips to the US West Coast without refueling. They would be capable of transporting two or three attack aircraft able to carry a torpedo or an 1800-pound bomb apiece. General design plans were finalized on 17 March, and construction commenced at the Kure Dock Yards on 18 January 1943. Yamamoto would not live to see the commencement of this project for which he had such enthusiasm. In April 1943, he was killed when American P-38 Lightnings shot down the Betty bomber in which he was being transported over the

Solomon Islands. Still, preparations to attack the American mainland moved forward.

Only three of the super-subs would be completed. Each was propelled by four 2250-horse-