



AMERICAN SUBMARINE USS *SEA OWL* (SS-405)



Cover Image: USS *Sea Owl*, March 1951.

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USS *Sea Owl*, Figure 1, was a Balao class submarine in the United States Navy, laid down on 7 February 1944, launched three months later on 7 May by the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, based at Kittery in Maine, and commissioned on 17 July 1944, an impressive building programme.

Steel hulled with a nominal operating depth up to 122m, the submarine displaced 1,526 tons surfaced and 2,391 tons submerged. It was 95m long with an 8.31m beam and was designed operationally to carry 10 officers and 60 enlisted crew. Fitted with diesel-electric reduction gear, four Fairbanks Morse diesel engines with four Elliot Motor Co. electric motors with capacity 2,740shp driving two screws, it also had two 126-cell main storage batteries. This motive power, together with a 116,000-gallon (96,590 imperial gallon) fuel tank, offered a speed of 20.25kts surfaced and 8.75kts submerged, gave a cruising range of 11,000 miles surfaced at 10 kts, and a submerged endurance for 48 hours at 2kts.

It was equipped with ten 21" (c. 53.34cm) torpedo tubes arranged six forward and four aft, 24 torpedoes, one 5"(c.12.7cm)/25 deck gun, one single 40mm gun mount, one single 20mm gun mount, and two 0.50 cal. machine guns. The submarine, following trials, arrived at Pearl Harbor via the Panama Canal and, after exercises, commenced in November 1944 its first war patrol in the East China Sea, sinking one Japanese destroyer then arrived at Guam in mid-January 1945. Two war patrols followed, firstly in the Luzon Strait and South China Sea sinking a Japanese submarine, and then in the Yellow and East China Seas during which it sank a Japanese destroyer and rescued six aviators who had ditched. The Japanese surrendered on 15 August 1945 when *Sea Owl* was in Pearl Harbour. Five battle stars were awarded to USS *Sea Owl* in the Second World War.

Thereafter, assigned to the Atlantic Fleet, *Sea Owl* exercised in the Caribbean and assisted in submarine training with further exercises until June 1949 when it underwent a refit then resumed exercises, now in the Atlantic. Over the summer of 1951, *Sea Owl* was converted to a fleet snorkel submarine, which with the addition of more effective sonar, significantly enhanced its operational capability. Thereafter, it resumed exercises in the Caribbean and Atlantic. In 1953, *Sea Owl* departed with the 6th Fleet on a 3-month tour, taking in Spain, France, Italy, Greece and Turkey. 1954 to 1956 in Atlantic and Caribbean waters was spent training submarine school students, also reserve personnel, and then it was engaged in special operations during winter 1956/57 and later in NATO exercises in the Northern Atlantic. Exercises and training continued, including with British, Canadian and Dutch navies. July 1965 heralded a

four-month deployment to the Mediterranean. A goodwill tour to northern European waters was undertaken in 1967, including a visit to the Holy Loch, Scotland.

On 30 June 1969, USS *Sea Owl* was reclassified as an auxiliary submarine (AGSS), undertaking one final Mediterranean tour and then on 15 November 1969, it was decommissioned, removed from the US Navy List, and scrapped. During its service, *Sea Owl* had 14 commanders.

The Shipwreck Centre and Museum includes one artefact related to the submarine, a decorative plaque shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2: USS Sea Owl decorative plaque