

# VS-57 AND THE SIN SUBMARINE I-17

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*Kingfishers* from New Caledonia on routine sector searches to ensure the safety of shipping in the area. On 19 August 1943, one of these searches turned out to be anything but routine.

Lieutenant (jg) Robert J. Clinton received a visual message sent by the New Zealand corvette *Tui* indicating that it had established a submarine contact and dropped depth charges. Clinton landed alongside the gunboat to verify the contact and took off for the unseen objective. Fifteen minutes later, Clinton sighted the telltale periscope cutting the waves and dove to attack.

Two depth charges exploded dead ahead of the periscope. Clinton's marksmanship was excellent, and down went the big submarine, a trail of bubbles and oil marking her path. But submarines die hard. This one bobbed up five minutes later, bow first, at a steep angle. Clinton dove in to strafe, his machine gun spraying the deck of the large submarine in hopes of keeping the crew from manning the heavy deck gun. But this success was short lived. When his machine



In 1943, the threat that Axis submarines posed to Allied shipping and shore operations in both the Pacific and the Atlantic oceans was a primary concern to the war effort. As a result, convoy escort and antisubmarine efforts were a key component of the Navy's presence in both theaters. One of many Navy squadrons stationed in the Pacific, Scouting Squadron (VS) 57 flew OS2N-1

gun jammed, the enemy reached their gun stations and filled the sky with antiaircraft fire. Clinton hovered high above to keep an eye on his wounded prey and called for assistance.

Four more seaplanes came in for the kill. The surfaced submarine, circling wildly, was out of control, but her large forward gun and antiaircraft guns blazed deadly fire. Not a breeze stirred, leaving the undersea raider shrouded in her own smoke. Behind this cover, pilot Lieutenant Robert L. Gittings maneuvered unseen into position astern to launch the second attack. Two depth charges dropped swiftly to their mark, but neither exploded.

Ltjg. Knut W. D. Lee came in to finish the job, dropping a depth charge that exploded 30 feet aft of the conning tower. As the sub's gunfire increased in intensity, Lee turned and dove again. His second

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charge hit home, within 10 feet of the starboard beam. The blast sent a spurt of water geysering 50 feet upward, and in less than 60 seconds the giant sub disappeared for good.

Interrogation of the six survivors revealed that the *Kingfishers* had sunk the notorious Japanese submarine *I-17*, which had shelled Ellwood, Calif., on 23 February 1942. This sub and the scouting seaplane it carried had annoyed Allied forces at sea

and ashore around New Caledonia for many weeks preceding its sinking. But the efforts of VS-57 ensured that *I-17's* mission that day was her last, leaving one less enemy under the sea. ✈

Chief Carr retired from the Navy after 24 years of service, which included flying as a combat aircrewman in the Pacific in WW II.

Special thanks to Robert L. Gittings for his assistance with this article.



Facing page, an OS2N-1 *Kingfisher*, shown here with floats, could also be equipped with conventional landing gear. Top, the *I-17* was a *I-15* class Japanese submarine. This image was derived from an Office of Naval Intelligence publication produced in WW II. Above, officers and men of VS-57 pose with one of their sturdy *Kingfishers*.