



Australian Battle Group Inc.

A Big Gun Fighting Warship R/C Club

Submarine vs Destroyer: The Story of the Urakaze

By any criteria or estimation, HIJMS URAKAZE was one of the crack destroyers of the Imperial Japanese Navy. A modern, well-armed unit of the KAGERO Class manned by an able crew, URAKAZE was a worthy member of Desdiv 17 -- from beginning to end the Empire's top destroyer division -- and more often than not it's flagship. With Desdiv 17 she steamed always in the forefronts of the Pacific War, from Pearl Harbor to Midway, up the Solomons chain, and across the broad Pacific to and beyond Leyte Gulf. And in none of these many desperate battles lost and won was URAKAZE ever seriously damaged.

But one of a destroyer's most important roles is that of antisubmarine platform, and in this area URAKAZE's record would fall from superior to fatally flawed. In fact, during the last year of her career, URAKAZE would set a most unenviable record, probably unmatched by any other escort in any man's navy, for combat tonnage torpedoed out from under a destroyer's escort, including in the end URAKAZE herself.

The first two years of URAKAZE's war were relatively submarine-free, or at least none got the better of her. As the war moved north from those island passages and inner seas into bluer waters, URAKAZE dutifully moved ever more into the role of shipping escort, if only with that same reluctance and disdain for antisubmarine warfare shared by the entire Combined Fleet. In the months of April through October 1943 she successfully covered at least ten convoys (most of them valuable troop movements to New Guinea) and another half- dozen major fleet movements with few if any losses. And then the worm began to turn.

Commander Yoshida Shooichi had been in command less than three months, and Captain Miyazaki Toshio (Comdesdiv 17) had just come aboard in October, when URAKAZE weathered the U.S. carrier attacks on Rabaul of 5 and 11 November 1943 with only minor strafing damage. URAKAZE and Desron 10 flagship AGANO quit Rabaul for Truk early on the 12th, but had not gone far when they were attacked by submarine USS SCAMP (SS-277). The cruiser was struck squarely amidships by a torpedo and left immobilized with 90 dead. Aided by a glassy sea, URAKAZE was able to frustrate the sub's further efforts to finish the job, and later removed an injured Rear Admiral Osugi Morikazu from crippled AGANO. This incident heralded a new and tormenting chapter in URAKAZE's career, as American submarines would harry her mercilessly for the remainder of her days. And the next such instance was not long in coming....

Urakaze (Kagero Class Destroyer)

Displacement: 2,490 tons

Dimensions: 389 (length) by 35.5 (beam) by 12 (draught) feet

Machinery: 2-shaft geared turbines: 52,000 SHP; 35.5 knots

Radius: 5,000 miles at 18 knots

Armament: 6 x 5"/50 cal. DP guns (3 x 2); 4 x 25 mm. AA guns (2 x 2); 8 x 24" torpedo tubes (2 x 4); 36 depth charges

Complement: 239 (308 at time of sinking)



The story continues...

A task force comprising light carrier ZUIHO, escort carriers UNYO and CHUYO, heavy cruiser MAYA, and destroyers AKEBONO, SAZANAMI, USHIO and URAKAZE departed Truk for Yokosuka on 30 November 1943. American code-breakers got wind of this important sailing -- so heavy in flat-tops -- and directed USS SAILFISH (SS-192) onto the Japanese course. The sub found the task force on the evening of 3 December as they steered into the teeth of a typhoon, and promptly put a torpedo into CHUYO. Heavy seas and communications foul-ups slowed URAKAZE's response to the stricken carrier's signals, and CHUYO had been brought to a halt by a second SAILFISH torpedo by the time URAKAZE and MAYA arrived alongside several hours later. Even then their screening efforts were futile, and persistent SAILFISH finally finished CHUYO off in a third attack launched a full ten hours after the first. Japan's submarine commander would later cite SAILFISH's skill and tenacity as examples to be followed by his own submariners.

Over the next five months URAKAZE continued her escort duties with another nine convoys and three fleet movements. At this time the Empire's carrier air arm was all but destroyed on 19 June 1944, losing most of its aircraft and aircrews to their U.S. opposite numbers in the "Marianas Turkey Shoot." Two of Japan's biggest aircraft carriers were also lost that black day, but to U.S. submarines rather than aircraft -- and one of them was URAKAZE's charge.

As befitted its veteran status, Desdiv 17 accompanied Admiral Ozawa's own flag group (Force A) of three fleet carriers, and its destroyers were engaged in planeguard duties connected with the launch of air strikes on the Americans when USS CAVALLA (SS-244) attacked. It has been recorded that URAKAZE seemed completely oblivious to this threat until a salvo of six torpedoes actually went boiling past her stern, and three of them slammed into carrier SHOKAKU. URAKAZE's counterattack caused only slight damage to CAVALLA, but for mighty SHOKAKU the end had finally come. The Pearl Harbor veteran burned and exploded for three hours, gradually settling by the bow before finally capsizing in mid-afternoon.

After retreating from Philippine waters and the battle of Leyte Gulf to Brunei on Borneo's north coast and licking its many wounds there for two weeks, Admiral Kurita was ordered to return with his fleet's remnants to Japan. Desdiv 17 left Brunei for the hazardous return voyage on 16 November with YAHAGI and battleships YAMATO, NAGATO and KONGO. Small destroyers UME and KIRI of Desdiv 43 also escorted the fleet as far as Formosa, which was passed on the 20th. And then early the following morning URAKAZE's misfortunes with enemy submarines reached their final and fatal nadir.

The submarine this time was USS SEALION (SS-315), which tracked the Japanese for several hours before going in on the surface under cover of darkness to launch salvos of six and three torpedoes. Possibly three of the former struck KONGO, which initially continued on seemingly little affected. But KONGO was torn apart several hours later in a massive explosion, and thus became the only Japanese battleship to be sunk by a sub during the war. HAMAHAZE and ISOKAZE were able to save but 13 officers and 224 men.

SEALION's second salvo was also aimed at a battleship, but missed and found ill-starred URAKAZE on the far side of the fleet instead. One of the torpedoes apparently touched off a magazine, for the resulting explosion was fearsome and the sinking swift. URAKAZE's crew had grown to 308 during the war from its original 239, and every last man of them, of course including Captain Tanii and Lieutenant Commander Yokota, were lost with their ship.

This and other stories can be found at www.combinedfleet.com/kaigun.htm

Battle Report: Armidale, Saturday 6th November 2004

We had a meeting in Armidale on the 6th of November where Marcus Champ and Stuart Calvert came down from Brisbane, and Mark Strong and the Venerable old Bill Kirwan travelled up from Canberra for a days' battling. Bill and Mark arrived first at my place where we partook of Pizza and they consumed copious quantities of Bundy and cola. They left walking (Ed: staggering!) at 9:30pm and retired to their motel room to scheme for the next day. Marcus and Stuart arrived around 11:00pm and had a cuppa then retired for the night.

We had been worried about the weather due to rain for a week before hand but the day dawned with beautiful weather and we were on! We went to Richard's place to check on him on Saturday morning and as we walked through the gate we immediately received a 1 gun salute (actually an "explosion" occurred in his shed as he dropped a CO2 bottle due to its valve being open as he went to fill another bottle), "Boom Boy" is still living up to his name!.

Off to the dam where we quickly set up and Richard was first on the pond with Clemencau and he waited until we put a freighter on then ran about shooting it. I cant remember all of what transpired as we didn't score and sides consisted of one warship defending the freighter and the others attacking. I ran the Huntington hills with Mark protecting me while the others attacked. A disappointing situation for Mark as he wanted to sink her but couldn't. Huntington hadn't been re-sheeted since June and was looking a little tatty and couldn't stop a mosquito from penetrating but try as they could the combined efforts of Bill, Marcus, Richard and Stuart couldn't put her under. As they all re gassed and re armed I didn't bother to patch her such was my confidence in my abilities.

Out they came again and Mark had Marcus pumping soon, then the Huntington started pumping (thanks to Stuart), Marcus pulled in for repairs but I ran Huntington for a photo op in front of the port until she sank. At this point mark and Stuart decided to attack Clemencau and soon she started pumping too then down she went within 4m of shore. At this point I tried to run Skippio against Bill for practice on torp runs. The procedure is Gas, load balls run out, try to hit him, run home start again. Unfortunately Bills eyes came good (new specs I think) and Skippio brought a few balls home with water too! I got one good hit on him making a hole about 15mm triangle but also 20mm above the waterline so Bill didn't worry. I gave up at this point and brought Lion out. Mark decided that the time was right and so Marcus and I took on Stuart and Mark. We were doing well as Richard and Bill would come out making it a 3 way fight at times UK, US, Frog. Unfortunately I got a bit close to Mark and he put a great shot into Lions bow. 40mm long 15mm high and exactly 20mm below the waterline on the bow. I made it 5 meters to the shore and sank! Stuart and Mark ran around KGV and peppered her to the point where she was pumping well and getting rather roly (just like Lion, must be a punch drunk British thing) and came home full as a goog.



Left: Marcus's KGV, Bill's Dunkerque, Stuart's WW2 South Dakota slug it out with Mark's WWI So Dak coming in for another go...

Battle Report: Armidale, Saturday 6th November 2004

Things got nasty very soon with Stuart and Mark slinging off at each other to the point where the Nevada's skipper used his ejection seat and escaped. Soon after she went down just off the shore in 4000feet of mud! Stuart was soon on the bottom in the same area and we managed to fish him out, his pump providing an extra knott or 2 as he ran under. Marcus tried his hand running the Oakman as KGV was out of gas. Lion and Strasbourg hunted him, Nevada tried to protect him, Mammy came hunting too.

Unfortunately she turns well and was a real pain to catch. Marcus took her into the weeds of death where Lion, Nevada and Mammy had all gone down. Lion followed and got weeded up but Oakman ran away. He was trapped near port and wouldn't take a chance to get out so we forced him onto a concrete pallet support where he became stuck and we shot him up (Serves him right for being such a smarty turner!) we then pushed him off so that he could sink in a proper depth of water.

Oakman took this as the moment to loose control and ran in circles further out into the pond until she sank. (No rescue boat) We attached a line to Richeliu and Richard manoeuvred her until he could catch the float (haha we laughed, he was trying to manoeuvre a Richeliu class, very funny) Huntington took over without patches from the morning sortie and almost sank twice trying to get her in but eventually got the Oaky home. It was getting late, we were out of Gas and tired so we went home. Marcus and Stuart went to Richards to pull things apart, Bill and Mark went to the Motel to make themselves pretty (should be there still) then came over to my place. Marcus and Stuart took the opportunity to run for home at this point, 5hr driving to get there and Bill and Mark lobbed in for dinner and more alcohol (brought and consumed a bottle of Bundy between them) My thanks to Stuart and Marcus for providing the excuse for a battle, and to mark and Bill for the mammoth drive to get here and for sinking me! Lion and Huntington will be re-skinned for January and Skippio will be even better with practice.

Hope to see as many of you in Canberra as possible.

Cheers

Michael Raue

Below: Demise of another of Grimmace from weight of water those pesky transport thingy's... in ship...and back breaking.... Mark's handiwork I think...



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Captain Bill Black's Battle Advice

Greetings, I have been asked to help you land-lubbers hit the barn door and sink some tonnage. Just send in your requests for advice and I will give you some well deseved advice and do my bit to ensure more hulls make it to the bottom of the pond.

Captain B.B.

Dear Captain Black

I keep going out and blazing away but don't seem to hit anything and come back full of holes...if I come back at all. What am I doing wrong?

Anon

Dear Anon

Sounds to me like you are a beginner letting fly at anything above the waterline. When you get out there take your time and choose your targets wisely...don't just blaze away like a man possessed. Wait until you see the black of there waterline...then let go with your broadside. As for the holes issue I have only one word for you...Dodge!

Captain B.B.

Some more pictures from Armidale in November...



Above left: Exchanging braodsides...note the BB's; Right: Mark closes in for the kill.



Next Issue

- ⇒ Letter from our friends in the Mid-West Battle group
- ⇒ January Nationals and AGM
- ⇒ More R&D and much more...

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