



Great Ships of The U. S. Navy

U.S.S. Thresher

by Mike Prero

First, a word about the insignia of the Navy's Submarine Service—a submarine flanked by two dolphins. Dolphins or porpoises, traditional attendants to Poseidon, Greek God of the Sea and patron deity of sailors, symbolic of a calm sea, are called the "Sailor's friend." This insignia is found on many submarine covers.

Thresher was laid down on 28 May, 1958, by the Portsmouth (NH) Naval Shipyard; launched on 9 July, 1960; sponsored by Mrs. Frederick B. Warder; and commissioned on 3 August, 1961; Comdr. Dean W. Axene in command.

Following trials, the nuclear attack submarine took part in Nuclear Submarine Exercise (NUSUBEX) 3-61 off the northeastern coast of the U.S. from 18 to 24 September. On 18 October, the submarine headed south along the east coast. After calling at San Juan, she conducted further trials and test-fired her torpedo system before returning to Portsmouth on 29 November. The ship remained in port until the end of the year and spent the first two months of 1962 evaluating her sonar system and her Submarine Rocket (SUBROC) system. In March, the submarine participated in NUSUBEX 2-62, and exercise designed to improve the tactical capabilities to nuclear subs, and in anti-submarine warfare training with Task Group ALPHA.

Off Charleston, the ship undertook operations observed by the Naval Antisubmarine Warfare Council before she returned briefly to New England waters whence she proceeded to Florida for SUBROC tests. However, while mooring at Port Canaveral, the sub was accidentally struck by a tug which damaged one of her ballast tanks. After repairs at Groton, CT, the ship returned south for more tests off Key West. *Thresher* then returned northward and remained in dry-dock for the early spring of 1963.

In company with *Skylark* (ASR-20), *Thresher* put to sea on 10 April, 1963, for deep-diving exercises. In addition to her 16 officers and 96 enlisted men, the sub carried 17 civilian technicians to observe her performance. Fifteen minutes after reaching her assigned test depth, the sub communicated to *Skylark*, appraising the submarine rescue ship of difficulties.

Garbled transmissions indicated problems. Suddenly, listeners aboard *Skylark* heard a noise "like air rushing into an air tank...", then, silence. Efforts to reestablish communications failed, and a search group was formed. Rescue ship *Recovery* (ASR-43) subsequently recovered bits of debris, including gloves and pieces of internal insulation. Photographs taken by bathyscaph *Trieste* proved that the submarine had broken up, taking all hands on board to their deaths in 1,400 fathoms of water, some 220 miles east of Boston.

Thresher was officially declared lost in April 1963.

