

✓ A mysterious submarine sinking in WWII

2-2-90
HISTORY
READER JOHN E. Shaw of Santa Cruz writes that he is one of the last ones left to tell the story of the "Japanese submarine" that was sunk off Santa Cruz County early in World War II.

He was a volunteer in the "Aircraft Warning Station," a shack built on Gianone Hill, up above the McCrary lumber mill near the northern county line, that day in '42.

He said the shack was built in early 1942. He took his turns, usually with his wife, in two-hour shifts, observing the coastline, until he went into the service in 1943.

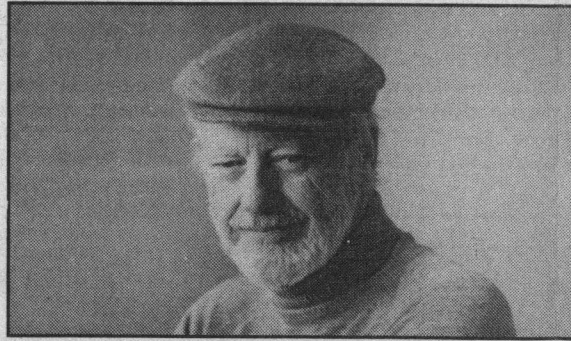
"We had a telephone which we used to report aircraft to Monterey. If we reported surface craft, we phoned San Francisco.

"A spyglass was loaned to the post by Mr. Theodore Hoover of Rancho Del Oso, near Waddell Creek. The post was manned by young and old of both sexes.

"I recall two interesting afternoons on duty. One, my wife and I had just sat down in front of one of the observation windows. I raised Hoover's powerful telescope and had it in focus on a surface submarine, with a destroyer escort. Boy, did we ever stir things up. We weren't supposed to see this event but with the powerful telescope we could read the numbers on both ships.

We heard afterward that it was an American submarine loaded with gold and silver from the Philippines — as Corregidor and Bataan had just recently fallen to the Japanese.

"The other event is as clear in my mind today as it was that afternoon so long ago. I can still



Wally Trabing

point out the exact spot.

"Again, my wife and I had just come on duty about 2 o'clock in the afternoon in the spring of '42.

"Once again, with Mr. Hoover's spyglass to my eye, I spotted what appeared like the conning tower of a submarine up the coast in a sort of bay near Año Nuevo Island.

"Its prow headed into shore but it was sitting stationary.

"A steady, flickering, bluish light such as from arc welding was seen around the conning tower.

"We reported the sighting to the proper authorities.

"I may add at that time in the war, a company of coast artillery was stationed in Davenport.

"Soon an Army truck towing a field piece hove into sight below us on Highway 1.

"The soldiers from Davenport quickly set up the piece. The lanyard was pulled.

"A big splash in the water, but far short of the

sub. "A second round was fired — but again way short. The gun was again attached to the truck and returned to Davenport," Shaw writes.

A strange turn of affairs.

"My wife and I stayed on duty until relieved at 4 o'clock. Nothing had happened since the artillery had returned to Davenport. The apparent welding on the submarine had continued all during this time. We decided to stick around until something else occurred, or it got too dark to see anything.

"About 5 p.m., a blimp from Sunnyvale put in an appearance.

"It floated over the stalled submarine and dropped either a bomb or a depth charge."

Shaw said he saw an explosion of fire, then seconds later, heard the noise and the submarine sank.

"I have never heard another word about the event. A short time later, my wife and I were driving up the coast to Pescadero and picked up a coast guardsman from the Pigeon Point Light Station. We talked a bit and he told us he was on duty at the station when they sighted the sub at about the same time we had and that it was an enemy sub and that it had been destroyed.

"Of those who manned that station not too many remain alive. My wife died in the flash flood of Little Creek in Swanton Dec. 23, 1955. Dick West is in Washington. Mr. and Mrs. Thorton Smith are gone.

"My wife's mother and father, Mr. and Mrs. Chas. West, have been gone for years. The two McCrarys are about the only ones who live in that vicinity.

Shaw thought the sub may have been the one

that bombed an oil field near Santa Barbara in early '42. I called that city's historical museum and learned that a sub officer from this one later told a Milwaukee paper that the sub moved up the coast, past San Francisco to Mendocino, torpedoing several ships, then returned to Japan. But many enemy subs prowled the California coastline.

Does one of them rest on the bottom near New Year's Island? Why was a blimp used to knock out the sub? Why was the news not reported?

A mystery.

Wally Trabing's column appears in the *Sentinel* Tuesday through Friday, and Sunday.



Dick West at observation post.