



Atule (SS-403)

Submarine of the Balao class



Class	Balao
Pennant	403
Built by	Portsmouth Navy Yard (Kittery, Maine, U.S.A.)
Ordered	8 Jun 1942
Laid down	25 Nov 1943
Launched	6 Mar 1944
Commissioned	21 Jun 1944
End service	6 Apr 1970
	Decommissioned 8 September 1947. Laid up in the Atlantic Reserve Fleet. Recommissioned 8 March 1951.
History	Decommissioned 6 April 1970. Stricken 15 August 1973. Transferred to Peru in July 1974 being renamed Pacocha (S 48).

Following a month of shakedown training along the east coast, the submarine departed New London, Connecticut, and headed south to join the action in the Pacific. During a 15-day stopover at the Fleet Sound School in Key West, Florida, she sharpened her diving skills and fighting techniques. After transiting the Panama Canal, *Atule* steamed to Pearl Harbor with USS *Jallao* (SS-368), training intensively en route to reach a peak of combat readiness. Upon her arrival at Pearl Harbor, *Atule* underwent voyage repairs and torpedo training into October.

On 9 October, *Atule* departed Pearl Harbor on her first war patrol in company with USS *Pintado* (SS-387) and USS *Jallao* (SS368). Under the command of Commander Bernard Clarey in *Pintado*, the three boats formed a wolf pack known as "Clarey's Crushers". *Atule* trained with *Jallao* and *Pintado* as they traveled westward. On 11 October, *Atule* picked up two radar contacts, tracked them, and maneuvered around them before identifying the contacts as USS *Plaice* (SS-390) and USS *Thresher* (SS-200). The pack arrived at Tanapag Harbor, Saipan on 21 October, refueled, made minor repairs, and departed early the next day. On 25 October, the wolf pack made its first score when *Jallao* hit light cruiser *Tama* and sent her to the bottom. That Japanese warship already had been damaged in the Battle of Cape Engaño and was part of the broken Japanese carrier-centered fleet retiring to the north. The wolf pack then spent two more days vainly searching for enemy vessels crippled during the Battle of Leyte Gulf. The boats then set course for their patrol sectors in Luzon Strait and the South China Sea.

Over the next few days, *Atule* made but lost several ship contacts. Shortly after midnight on 1 November, she established surface radar contact on a fast-moving escorted transport and moved in for the kill. Despite rain squalls and heavy seas, *Atule* was able to close the transport and fire six torpedoes. The first hit caused a terrific explosion which threw flaming material high in the air. When one of the transport's escorts began to close the submarine, she began a crash dive but still managed to hear a second explosion as she submerged. Nine depth charges exploded in the vicinity, but none was close enough to damage *Atule*. The crew in the submarine heard loud breaking up noises and upon surfacing, found a large oil slick and much debris. *Atule* was later credited with sinking the *Asama Maru*.

Atule continued her patrol, covering the Hong Kong-Manila traffic lane in the South China Sea and occasionally breaking off to investigate a contact report or to take special scouting dispositions by order of the pack commander. On 3 November, *Jallao* reported a five-ship force heading south, and the wolf pack moved to intercept. The contacts were moving at 20 kn (37 km/h), and *Atule* was never able to come within range for attack. However *Pintado* had better luck. That submarine's target was thought to be a large escorted oiler (actually the aircraft carrier *Junyo*), but before her torpedoes could strike the oiler *Akikaze* crossed their path and disintegrated in a tremendous explosion which was seen and heard on board *Atule*. The smoke screen provided by the ensuing fires protected the target, and *Pintado* was forced to withdraw.

During the next ten days, the wolf pack occasionally sighted ships or aircraft, but was unable to attack. On 13 November, *Jallao* reported an enemy ship. *Pintado* and *Atule* altered course to intercept the contact, and at 0850, *Atule* sighted what appeared to be the foretop of a battleship. At 1000, the enemy contact was established as an aircraft carrier, a heavy cruiser, and one destroyer. *Atule* maneuvered to approach the force as closely as possible, hoping that the enemy ships would initiate a "zig-zag" course

which would bring them within range of her torpedoes. The Japanese force indeed did begin to "zig-zag", but, instead of making them vulnerable, the maneuver took the force out of range. At 1115, contact was lost.

Later that day and throughout the next, the submarine played a game of hide and seek with Japanese planes equipped with radar and magnetic detection devices. During this hunt, the Japanese covered all of the wolf pack's radio frequencies and intruded in Japanese as well as English, asking the Americans to "come in, please" in their best imitations of American aviators. *Atule* was forced to dive, zigzag, and run to evade these planes which dropped 14 depth charges. None came close to *Atule*, but Halibut (SS-232) was severely damaged. After a circuitous route to avoid Japanese planes, *Atule* began patrolling her assigned scouting station west of Formosa.

There, until after midnight on 20 November, she made only aircraft contacts. The submarine then sighted a slow moving surface vessel and moved in to attack. The night was dark, and the sky, clear. The enemy, identified later as *Minesweeper Number 88*, was protected by a squall during the early phase of *Atule's* approach, but was perfectly silhouetted against a clear horizon when the submarine fired four torpedoes. The third torpedo hit at the forward stack with a terrific explosion. The target was down by the bow, and, less than three minutes after the hit its stern reared up as the ship slid under, depth charges exploding as she went down.

On 24 November, *Atule* sighted by periscope one transport with three escorts heading northeast toward Sabtang Island. The submarine surfaced at dark and set course to intercept the transport shortly after midnight. As she set her sights on the target, one of the escorts also moved into view. *Atule* fired six bow tubes and two stern tubes at the overlapping targets, scoring two hits on each. The escort, later identified as *Patrol Boat Number 88*, was claimed destroyed but later found to have survived the attack; and the transport, a 7,266-ton cargo ship named *Santos Maru*, went dead in the water. *Atule* moved out of range of the other two escorts which were wildly searching the area. The transport disappeared from view and from radar and the submarine returned to patrol.

On 27 November, a radar contact and subsequent visual sighting of a ship at anchor between Dequey Island and Iuhos Island gave *Atule* another chance for action. Approaching from the north of Dequey Island, *Atule* closed the transport to 2,000 yd (1,800 m) and fired four torpedoes. The four hits spread the length of the ship; and, in the ensuing fire, the port side was seen to be blown almost completely away. The ship was racked by violent oil and ammunition explosions, and the flames were visible 15 miles away. One hour and eight minutes after the first hit, the ship blew apart. However, *Atule* was never officially credited with this sinking, because a postwar study of Japanese records did not substantiate the loss.

On 28 November, the submarine left her patrol station and headed for Majuro Atoll for refit alongside USS Bushnell (AS-15). Arriving on 11 December, *Atule* ended a highly productive first patrol in which she accounted for almost 27,000 tons of enemy shipping destroyed.

Atule spent December in upkeep and training, including a six-day coordinated convoy exercise with USS Spadefish (SS-411), USS Pompon (SS-267), and *Jallao*. On 6 January 1945, she departed Majuro

in company with these same ships, Commander Gordon W. Underwood in *Spadefish* as group commander. En route to Saipan, "Underwood's Urchins" conducted training dives, emergency drills, and radar tracking exercises.

After a brief stop in Tanapag Harbor alongside USS *Fulton* (AS-11), *Atule* headed for her patrol area in the Yellow Sea. Since *Pompon* and *Jallao* were delayed she sailed in company with *Spadefish*, USS *Bang* (SS-385), and USS *Devilfish* (SS-292). Prior to her arrival in the patrol area, *Atule* took part in a fruitless search for downed aviators. Reports of sightings of the survivors were not in agreement, and the approximate location could not be determined. The search was abandoned on 17 January. *Pompon* joined the pack on 20 January, and, the next day, they entered the Yellow Sea.

While on patrol, *Atule* sighted many sampans and fishing boats, but could not strike a blow at the Japanese fleet until 24 January. On that afternoon, she commenced tracking a merchant ship. At periscope depth, the target was lost in a snow squall, so *Atule* came to radar depth to regain contact, closed for a stern shot, and fired four torpedoes. Two hit their marks, one abreast the stack, the second near the aftermast. The ship settled rapidly by the stern. The crew hastily abandoned the ship in time to see the stern break off and disappear. The forward section of the ship bobbed like a cork, so *Atule* surfaced to finish off the freighter with gunfire. The freighter returned fire, and the submarine fired another torpedo which missed the target. *Atule* retired to await nightfall, when she again failed to sink the hulk with gunfire. She loosed another torpedo, which hit amidships, and the freighter began settling by the bow. *Atule* left the empty hulk in a vertical position with the midship section high in the air. After the war her victim was identified as *Taiman Maru Number 1*.

Atule was assigned to patrol in the northern part of the Yellow Sea. The seas were heavy, and the snow and wind combined to create blizzard conditions. After four days, she shifted to the southwest corner of the sea between Korea and China. On 27 January, *Pompon* reported a convoy contact and, together with *Spadefish*, attacked. *Atule* was too distant to join in, but heard several explosions. Early the next day, she gained contact on a medium transport trying to escape the area of the attack of the previous day, and she gave chase until shoal water and the presence of an enemy escort forced her to veer off.

Floating naval mines became *Atule's* new targets. During the rest of her patrol, she sighted 29 mines, 23 of which she sank by gunfire, and one which bounced harmlessly down the submarine's side. *Atule* patrolled the Chinese and Korean coastlines and traffic lanes until 22 February, when she headed for Saipan where she once again moored alongside *Fulton*. On 28 February she left Tanapag Harbor bound for Midway Island, where she moored on 7 March.

After refit alongside USS *Pelias* (AS-14), *Atule* conducted extensive drills in multiple fire torpedo attacks, gunfire, sound training and evasion exercises. On 2 April, she departed Midway, bound for Guam. After one day alongside USS *Holland* (AS-3) in Apra Harbor, the submarine departed on 12 April for her patrol area off Bungo Suido. USS *Gato* (SS-212) covered the east entrance and *Atule* the west. The patrol consisted almost entirely of lifeguard duty and mine destruction. On 4 May, she sighted an enemy submarine but it escaped before *Atule* could close for attack. On 5 May, *Atule* and a B-29 Superfortress "Dumbo" plane—which carried an airborne lifeboat for air-sea rescue operations conducted a coordinated attack on two Japanese planes. *Atule* acted as "fighter" director and vectored

the Superfortress to the Japanese planes. She then submerged and watched as one plane fled and one was shot down in a very unusual dogfight. *Atule* rescued one badly burned Japanese flier from the wreckage. The war patrol ended on 30 May when *Atule* arrived at Pearl Harbor for a three-week refit by USS Euryale (AS-22).

After a week of drills, *Atule* departed Pearl Harbor on 3 July bound for a lifeguard station in the Nanpō Islands. After nine days with little action, the submarine proceeded to her patrol area in Empire waters east of Honshū as part of an attack group which also included *Gato* and USS Archer Fish (SS-311). On 12 August, *Atule* gained contact on two ships, later identified as *Coast Defense Vessel Number 6* and *Coast Defense Vessel Number 16*, steaming along the coast. Shallow waters and poor visibility caused *Atule* to set a course to intercept in the vicinity of Urakawa Ko rather than to attack the contacts under such adverse conditions. With the targets overlapping, *Atule* fired six torpedoes. The closer of the two ships — *Coast Defense Vessel Number 6* — exploded with an orange flame and much flying debris. The second target disappeared from radar, but it is not known whether she sank or escaped. On 15 August, *Atule* heard the news of the Japanese capitulation and headed for Pearl Harbor, where she arrived on 25 August. On 30 August, she departed Pearl Harbor via the Panama Canal, bound for New London, Connecticut.

While in New London, *Atule* was assigned to Submarine Squadron 2 (SubRon 2) and engaged in training operations for the Submarine School and the Prospective Commanding Officer's School located there. Following Navy Day ceremonies in Washington, D.C, she proceeded to the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Maine for an overhaul which was completed on 3 February 1946.

Post-War

On 4 July 1946, *Atule* headed for the frozen north as a member of Operation Nanook. The purpose of this mission was to assist in the establishment of advanced weather stations in the Arctic regions and to aid in the planning and execution of more extensive naval operations in polar and sub-polar regions. In company with Norton Sound, Whitewood, Alcona, Beltrami and Northwind, *Atule* was to transport supplies and passengers, conduct reconnaissance of proposed weather station sites, train personnel, and collect data on Arctic conditions.

Atule rendezvoused with *Northwind* and *Whitewood* off the southwestern coast of Greenland on 11 July 1946 and put into Melville Bight, Baffin Bay, on 20 July, while a PBY Catalina reconnoitered Thule Harbor and the approaches to the harbor. Following engine trouble, the Catalina made an emergency landing, and *Atule* was dispatched to recover the plane, becoming the first ship of the operation to enter the harbor. *Atule* then conducted tests and exercises in Smith South-Kane Basin with *Whitewood*. During one such exercise, she reached latitude 79 degrees 11 minutes north in the Kane Basin, at the time a record for the United States Navy. *Atule* had been equipped with the first upward-beamed fathometer for measuring ice thickness overhead. On 29 July, *Atule* departed Thule, having completed all of her scheduled projects, stopped at Halifax, Nova Scotia and reached New London late in August to resume her former duties.

On 27 February 1947, *Atule* arrived at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, for overhaul and inactivation. On 8

September 1947, she was placed out of commission, in reserve, with the New London Group of the Atlantic Reserve Fleet. After three years in "mothballs," *Atule* was towed to the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard for reactivation and conversion to a Guppy IA type submarine. Outfitted with a snorkel to permit use of her engines while submerged and a smooth streamlined superstructure for added speed, *Atule* rejoined the fleet a stronger, more versatile warship. On 8 March 1951, the submarine was recommissioned with Lieutenant Commander Benjamin C. Byrnside, Jr. in command.

Assigned to SubRon8 in New London, *Atule* conducted a shakedown cruise in the Caribbean Sea and then participated in Fleet and NATO training exercises in the Atlantic and the Caribbean. On 9 February 1952, she departed New London for a tour of duty in the Mediterranean and participation in NATO Exercise Grand Slam. During the deployment, she visited Gibraltar, Malta, and Marseille, before arriving back in the United States on 29 March.

After several months of extensive training and preparations *Atule* participated in LANTSUBEX I from 15 September-11 October. During this operation, she found herself battling the high seas and 100 kn (190 km/h) winds of Hurricane Charlie which at one point rolled her more than 60 degrees to port, washing the officer of the deck and the lookout off the bridge. With safety belts attaching them to the bridge, they were able to climb safely back on board.

On 19 November, *Atule* entered the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard for an overhaul. After the yard work had been completed she got underway on 4 April 1953 to resume normal operations. During LANTSUBEX II in October, she suffered a serious fire and lost propulsion for approximately six hours in very heavy seas. The submarine arrived in New London on 27 October for repairs, leave and upkeep. She recommenced operations late in January 1954, by sailing to St Thomas, United States Virgin Islands, for the annual Operation *Springboard* exercise. Late in February *Atule* departed St. Thomas for the return trip.

But for a two-week visit to the Fort Lauderdale, Fl., area to provide services to the Naval Ordnance Laboratory Test Facility, she remained in New London for five months. Upon her return to New London *Atule* operated in the local area until February 1955, when she entered the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard for an extensive overhaul which was completed in August. The submarine then resumed training and operations in the New London area. In July 1957, *Atule* cruised to the Mediterranean Sea and operated with the 6th Fleet until October. She entered the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard in January 1958 and departed in July, sailing to Key West, Florida, where she was assigned to SubRon 12.

During the fall of 1958, *Atule* became familiar with her new operating area by working with the Operational Development Force assisting in the development and evaluation of new submarine techniques and equipment. She also acted as a target in surface and air antisubmarine exercises. After a Christmas leave period, *Atule* conducted local operations until April 1959, when she participated in an Atlantic Fleet exercise and then resumed local drills.

In July 1960, *Atule* again cruised to the Mediterranean Sea for surface-subsurface training with NATO forces which lasted until October, when she returned to the United States and entered the Charleston Naval Shipyard for a six-month overhaul. After completion of the yard work in April 1961, *Atule* spent

18 months alternating duty at Key West, Florida, with service at Guantanamo Bay supporting training for the destroyer force in antisubmarine warfare.

In October 1963, the submarine entered the Norfolk Naval Shipyard for an overhaul which ended in February 1964. She returned to Key West, Florida, and operated from her home port until July when she sailed for the Mediterranean Sea to operate with the 6th Fleet. She returned to her home port in November for routine operations.

In August 1965, *Atule* departed Port of Spain, Trinidad, in company with other United States warships for a goodwill cruise during which she circumnavigated the South American continent. Known as Operation *Unitas VI*, this operation promoted cooperation between naval forces of the United States and the participating South American countries. *Atule* drilled with ships of the navies of Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Chile as she transited the Panama Canal and headed south along the coast. On 16 October, the submarine entered the Strait of Magellan and arrived at Punta Arenas, Chile, the southernmost city of South America. As she headed north, *Atule*'s crew became ambassadors of good will in port calls to Puerto Belgrano, Mar del Plata, Rio de Janeiro and San Salvador before disbanding the UNITAS VI task unit in Trinidad on 1 December. The submarine then sailed for home and arrived there on 6 December for a leave and upkeep period that lasted into 1966. She remained in nearby waters for training and routine operations until 5 July when she moved to Charleston, South Carolina, for another overhaul.

Atule left the shipyard on 26 January 1967 and during the year was assigned to duties at the Prospective Commanding Officers School and Fleet Training Group at Guantanamo Bay as well as continuing local training. In February 1968, she headed for the Gulf of Mexico and New Orleans, Louisiana, to train naval reservists and to celebrate Mardi Gras. The submarine returned via St. Petersburg, Florida, to her home port, where she continued general operations until 1 October when she got underway for her last Mediterranean Sea deployment. After almost four months of exercises with the 6th Fleet, *Atule* returned to the United States on 3 February 1969 and resumed her duties in the local area. On 29 August, *Atule* departed Key West for Philadelphia where she was placed in commission, in reserve, on 15 September. Re-designated with the hull classification symbol **AGSS-403** on 1 October, *Atule* was decommissioned on 6 April 1970 and her name was struck from the Naval Vessel Register on 15 August 1973. She was sold to Peru in July 1974.