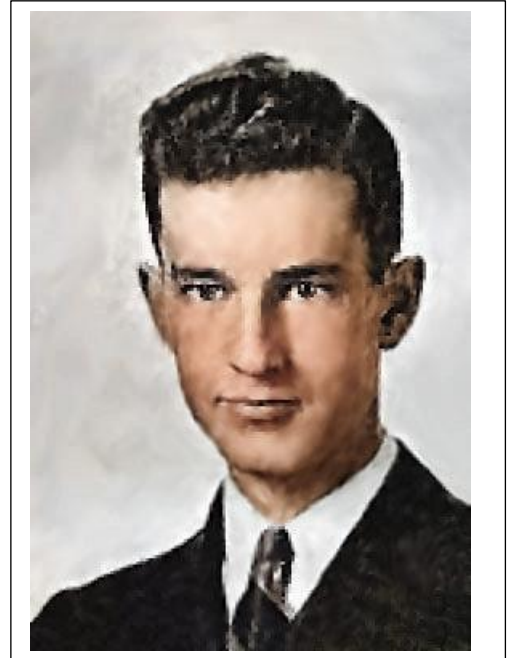


A fictionalized and resequenced version of the ramming attack by *Growler* on her fourth patrol features prominently in the [John Wayne](#) movie [Operation Pacific](#).

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## Robert Louis Chamblin, Jr.



Rank/Rate	Quartermaster, Second Class
Service Number	648 09 57
Birth Date	April 16, 1921
From	Minneapolis, Minnesota
Decorations	Purple Heart
Submarine	<a href="#">USS Growler (SS-215)</a>
Loss Date	November 8, 1944
Location	South China Sea
Circumstances	Probably sunk by depth charge attack
Remarks	Robert was raised and educated in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.





## Growler (SS-215)

Compiled by Paul W. Wittmer and Charles R. Hinman,

with editorial notes by Robert H. Downie, originally from:

U.S. Submarine Losses World War II, NAVPERS 15,784, 1949 ISSUE

A fictionalized and resequenced version of the ramming attack by *Growler* on her fourth patrol features prominently in the [John Wayne](#) movie [Operation Pacific](#).

**Early in November 1944, GROWLER, HAKE and HARDHEAD were operating together west of the Philippine group as a coordinated search and attack group under command of CDR T. B. Oakley, Jr., Commanding Officer, GROWLER. The patrol was GROWLER's eleventh. On 7 November, GROWLER reported having made temporary repairs to her SJ radar, which made it usable, but that she urgently needed spare parts for it. A future rendezvous was arranged with BREAM for the purpose of delivering the parts.** *(Editor's note: According to the official investigation into Growler's loss, Growler was directed to advise ComSubsSeventhFlt of the desired rendezvous position. This she failed to do. Strictly speaking, then, the rendezvous was never "arranged.")*

**In the early morning hours of 8 November, GROWLER, then in 13° 21'N, 119° 32'E, made SJ radar contact on an enemy target group, and reported it to HARDHEAD. Commander Oakley directed HARDHEAD to track and attack from the convoy's port bow.** *(Editor's note: Hardhead's patrol report states that she was directed to attack from the starboard bow. However, due to radical target maneuvers in the final stages of the approach, she actually fired from the port bow.)* **Shortly thereafter, HARDHEAD made contact with both the target group and GROWLER. After about an hour had passed HAKE heard two distant explosions of undetermined character, and HARDHEAD heard an explosion, which sounded like a torpedo. At the same time, the targets zigged away from GROWLER. Shortly after, HARDHEAD heard three distant depth charges explode.** *(Editor's note: At 1:42 a.m. on November 8, Hardhead made radar contact on three or four ships-- one large, the others small-- eight miles to her east, on a northwesterly course. Minutes later, Hardhead and Hake received a contact report on these same ships from Growler. All three submarines changed course to intercept. A subsequent message from Growler notified her pack mates that she was tracking the target group from the port bow. At 2:32, Growler directed Hardhead to strike from the starboard bow. This was the last communication ever received from Growler. Twenty minutes later, crewmen on Hake heard two distant explosions. Those aboard Hardhead heard a single explosion,*

possibly a torpedo, followed by three depth charges. These sounds suggest that Growler had some sort of encounter with the convoy at about 3:00.)

A little over an hour after these explosions, **HARDHEAD** attacked the target from the port bow, obtained three or four hits, and **HAKE** saw a tanker sink. **HARDHEAD** was subjected to a severe counter attack from which it emerged undamaged, while **HAKE** was worked over thoroughly later in the morning. (Editor's note: According to Hardhead's patrol report and the official investigation, Hardhead herself got off relatively easy with eleven depth charges falling astern of her and damage limited to broken light bulbs aft. The remaining charges were "well astern", "far astern", and finally "distant" as she cleared to the southwest.) All attempts to contact **GROWLER** after this attack were unsuccessful, and she has never been seen or heard from since. The rendezvous with **BREAM** for the delivery of SJ spare parts was not accomplished. Since **GROWLER** had tracked targets by radar for at least an hour, it appears that her temporary SJ repairs must have been satisfactory.

Although Japanese records mention no anti-submarine attacks at this time and place, it is evident that depth charges were dropped in the vicinity of **GROWLER**, but in the absence of more conclusive evidence the cause of her loss must be described as unknown. The Japanese admit that a tanker was sunk that night, which checks with **HARDHEAD**'s sinking. **HARDHEAD** was heavily depth charged following her own attack and later that morning **HAKE** was expertly worked over presumably by the same escorts. (Editor's note: Again, this overstates the case as to Hardhead. Hake, in contrast, was held down for fourteen hours and received 134 depth charges, most of them close. Her crew definitely thought they were up against an experienced group. Someone in the crew's mess cracked, "These guys are graduates of the Tokyo Sound School." Skipper Hayler agreed that the Japanese indeed had their first team on the field.) This leads to the belief that if **GROWLER** were sunk by depth charging it was at hands of a skillful anti-submarine group.



Crew of the USS Growler SS215- All 90 hands lost at Sea around 3:00 AM, November 8, 1944



# Legendary Sub 'Growler' Overdue, Presumed Lost

By JACKSON S. ELLIOTT

Washington, Feb. 2.—(AP)—If words are written by the unseen hands that guide the destiny of ships, then the end of the U. S. S. Growler's fighting life must have been signalled by these:

"Take her down!"

For it was these that made the gallant submarine most famous, despite a battling career against the Japanese navy.

Thursday the navy announced the Growler overdue and "presumed to be lost."

She had last been skippered by Comdr. Thomas B. Oakley, jr., of Los Angeles, had a personnel complement of about 65 officers and men.

It was a routine communique and followed the announcement that three other vessels had been lost by enemy action. These were the minesweeper Palmer, commanded by Lt. William E. McGuirk of Bellport, L. I., N. Y., and the Hovey, commanded by Lt. Ben N. Cole of Charlotte, N. C., the LST 749, whose skipper was not immediately named.

Of the two minesweepers it was known immediately only that the commanders were saved. Of the Growler's personnel, the navy disclosed nothing.

Casualties among the Growler's complement once had numbered Comdr. Howard S. Gilmore who won laurels for the sub and died so that Comdr. Oakley and their men and the Growler could win some more.

She did, but it was her feats in the spring of 1943, that made her and Gilmore a part of the navy legend.

It was on the south Pacific and it was night.

The Growler, as ever, was be-

deviling the enemy, and that night she had sunk one Japanese merchantman and seriously damaged another.

In the darkness, an enemy gunboat spotted the surfaced sub and attempted to ram her. But Gilmore guided his ship out of the path, rammed the attacker instead, and burst wide her plates.

Then, from the gunboat came the chatter and blast of gunfire and the Growler's men above decks were the targets.

Gilmore ordered them below, prepared to follow.

But suddenly a burst of bullets struck him to the deck, out of reach of the men and out of reach of the hatch.

The sub was in imminent peril of being sunk by the gunboat. The men moved to come after their skipper, but Gilmore stopped them with the only order that could have saved the Growler and the crew.

"Take her down!" he commanded, and the Growler dived, carrying the wounded Gilmore to his death.

A navy man from Sioux Falls, Robert L. Chamblin, jr., QM 2/c, was a member of the crew of the U.S.S. Growler, and is presumed to be lost. He is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Robert L. Chamblin, 1717 South Walts ave.

In addition to his quartermaster duties, Chamblin served as a signalman aboard the submarine. Enlisting in the navy in January 1942, Chamblin first saw action aboard the U.S.S. 28, a submarine later reported lost when he was at an island base.

Chamblin is a graduate of Washington high school and attended Augustana two years before entering the navy. He spent his last leave at home in May, 1942.

# Sailor Likes Sub Duty

## *Danger Offset By Advantages*

By BOB JONES

Men of Uncle Sam's submarine service are not talkative. Facing death hourly over long periods of time, in cramped quarters from which there can be no escape, they learn not to make any statement which might endanger buddies.

But some conception of underseas warfare can be gained by a conversation with Bog Chamblin, quartermaster second class, son of Mr. and Mrs. R. L. Chamblin, 1717 South Walts ave.

### On First Furlough

After an extended period of active duty in the Pacific war zone, Chamblin is now in Sioux Falls on furlough, his first leave in this country since February, 1942.

The navy man likes the sub service, staffed entirely by volunteer crews. Indeed, he plans to spend the next 20 years underseas, "whether the war ends or not."

**He admits, of course, that there is considerable nervous tension in dodging depth charges.**

But compensating factors are . . . the high morale among enlisted men . . . the informality of officers, as contrasted with the rigid discipline aboard a surface vessel. . . .

And the food—"There is always an open icebox, and if you don't like the food, you can always cook your own."

### Jap Bombers Miss

Aerial bombs are the greatest danger faced by submarine crews in the Pacific war zone, and Chamblin has a simple answer when questioned about the accuracy of Jap bombardiers. It is: "We got back."

**Equally graphic is his comment on warfare against surface vessels—"There are not as many**

**Jap ships out there as there used to be."**

Battle zone cruises are of approximately a month's duration, with each submarine having a definite assignment.

In actual conflict there is no confusion, as every man has been thoroughly drilled to accomplish a specific task. Neither is there time for speculation as to possible consequences if a depth bomb should come too close.

When the mission has been accomplished, and the sub is safely away, there is time for much good talk, largely about things to do when the crew "returns to the beach."

### Calendar Kept

On each underseas vessel, a calendar is maintained. A numeral is crossed out each day of the cruise, and when a circle is reached it means the sub can leave the battle and head back for port, the patrol ended.

"We can't get around very quickly, and that's a disadvantage," Chamblin said. "But they can't see us, and that's an advantage."

Chamblin's assignment on his sub includes navigation and keeping necessary records. And standing watch.

**"Most of our exercise is comprised of standing on the bridge, jumping up and down to keep warm," Chamblin said.**

Despite cramped quarters and exacting routine, morale is high on a sub. Men must be on the alert at all times, and the danger of attack is an ever-present reality.

When a sub leaves port, men know they have a definite objective on the patrol.

"Of course, if we encounter anything else on the way, we take care of it," Chamblin said.