

## Russian Sub

By Captain Ace Trask, USN, (Ret)

Years ago I told myself that I never wanted duty onboard a Destroyer. That was after being educated in the Merchant Marine Academy, where ships sail alone in the ocean. At the time I thought, "who in their right mind would want duty onboard a tin can?" And I kept repeating that to myself as I walked up the gangway, saluted the colors, then saluted the quarterdeck watch and said, "Lt. Trask reporting for duty!!" And so it was, I was to be the OPS Officer of the USS Richard E. Kraus (DD-849), homeported in Norfolk, VA. Previously, I had been the 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant and Gunnery Officer onboard an LST, and OPS Officer and XO onboard a patrol boat, the USS Brattleboro (EPCER-852).



The "Kraus" was an experimental DD testing future equipment to be accepted or rejected by the U.S. Navy after testing at sea. The commanding officer was an ex- submarine officer. How he ended up being the CO of a destroyer I don't know. We were working with a U.S. submarine off the East Coast testing some underwater sound equipment. On the third day of operations, via the underwater sound equipment, the sub informed us there was a Russian sub at his depth and only about 200 yards from him. In a situation like this we would let our sub maintain contact with the Russian sub and we, the DD, would establish a "fence" around the sub at about 3,000 yards and maintain contact also. We would also notify Task Group ALPHA or BRAVO. One of them was always at sea off the East Coast of the U.S. due to Russian subs snooping along our coast. The game plan was always to hold him down until he had to surface, and then take pictures to embarrass not only the sub but the entire Russian Navy. After contacting Task Group Alpha, they immediately headed our way to take over the situation. The Task Group consisted of six destroyers and aircraft carrier with ASW aircraft. It would take them about 20 hours to get to our location.

Our Captain was the senior officer and after about 12 hours he decided we should be "on top" and the sub would go to the "fence" position. Both I and the USN sub CO tried to tell him that having our sub next to the Russian sub was the best plan by far to maintain contact. He disagreed. So we, the DD, moved in to take the "on top" position and our sub went to the "fence". All went well for about 4 to 6 hours but the Russian sub pulled a maneuver and we lost him, and along with it, an opportunity to embarrass the Russians in the days of diesel submarines.



**Note:** USS Richard E. Kraus was named in honor of USMC Private First Class Richard E. Kraus (1925–1944) who was awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously for "conspicuous gallantry" during the Battle of Peleliu. While trying to evacuate a wounded comrade from the frontlines, he threw himself on an enemy grenade saving the other members of his patrol. PFC Kraus was 18.

Photo provided by the USMC History Division.

### **Pilot Down**

By Captain Ace Trask, USN, (Ret)

Same ship, same Captain. Because our normal daily operations were independent ops testing new equipment for the fleet, the CO decided we needed experience in task group operations. Thus we found ourselves enroute to join-up with Task Group Bravo.

We were about one hour away from joining up with the task group who had been operating along the East Coast of the U.S. with the primary mission of finding Russian subs. Our ship was the "outsider" about to join the real pros hunting for subs. We had all the appropriate radio circuits up when over "Pri-Tack" came a message "Pilot Down." This happened just before we joined the task group and miraculously, the plane came down between us and the task group.

Meanwhile, on the radar screen in the Combat Information Center (CIC) we noticed a strange "blip" for one or two sweeps, and then it disappeared. The Captain called into CIC, "Give me a course to the pilot!!" He must have thought we had a crystal ball in CIC but in reality, we were starting to get small "blips" on the radar screen. I told the CIC watch officer to give me a bearing to the largest blip and passed that along to the bridge. And I will be damned if it wasn't the pilot hanging onto a part of the wing of the plane blowing his whistle when we arrived on station. We put a cargo net over the side of the destroyer with two seamen hanging on to it. They climbed down and took hold of the pilot and all three climbed back up the net to get safely aboard. This was a nighttime rescue operation, so the fact the pilot kept blowing his whistle until firmly in the grasp of the seamen greatly assisted his recovery.