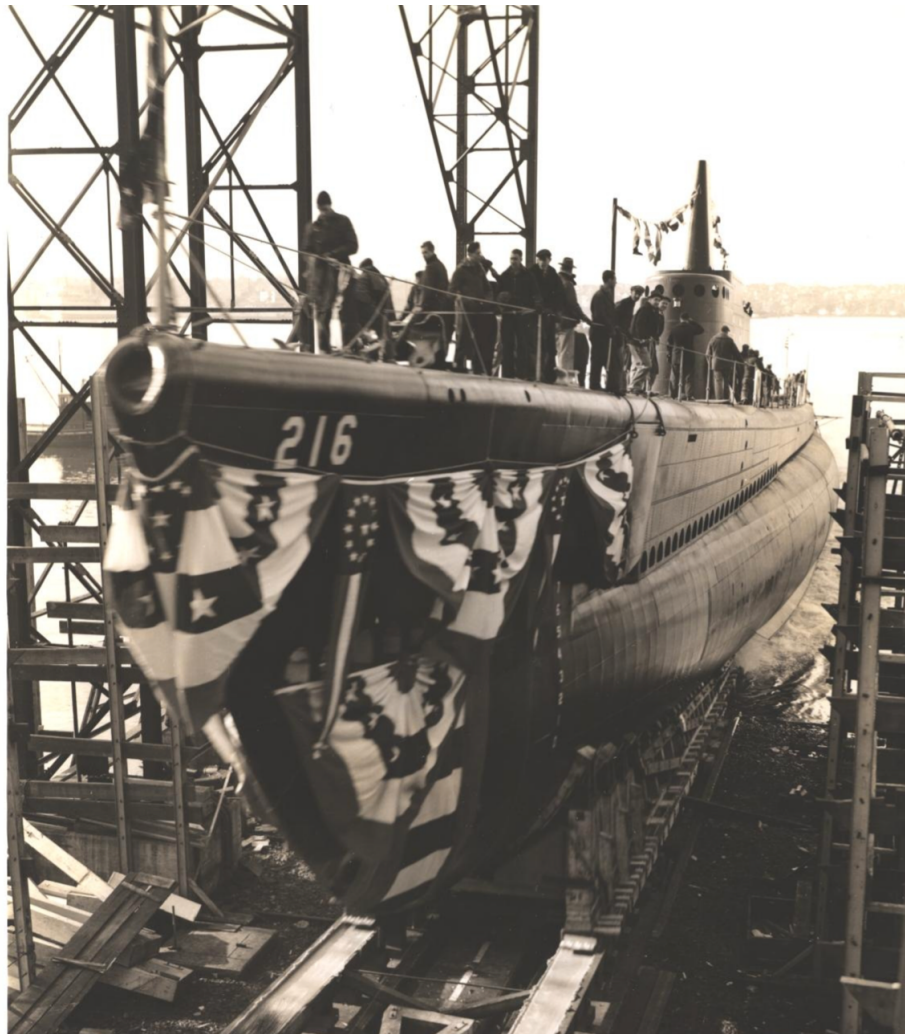


USS Grunion

Her First War Patrol



Susan and Bruce Abele

USS Grunion, Her First War Patrol has been created for participants on the Valor Tour, June 2017. The introduction is part of a longer manuscript, *USS Grunion, On Eternal Patrol at Kiska*, targeted for publication in 2018.

The second part, the story of Grunion's launch, first war patrol, and the legacy of that event, excerpted here, is not only the story of the loss of a submarine, it is also a transcendent story of collaboration and reconciliation.

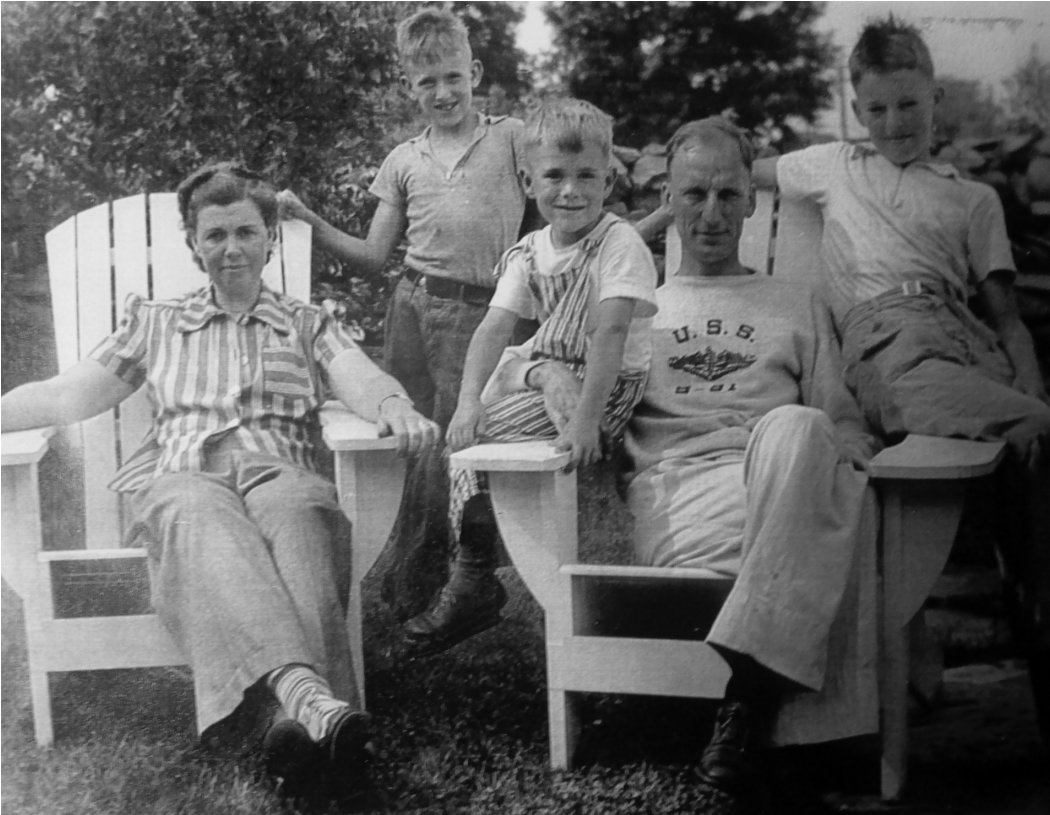
Comments and Corrections Welcome

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The Abele family in the summer of 1941, six months before the attack on Pearl Harbor. From left to right, Kay and Jim, and their three sons, Brad, John, and Bruce, ages 8, 4, and eleven.¹¹



This dolphin pin, prized insignia of the submarine service, was sent to Kay Abele after the loss of *Grunion*. On the the back it is inscribed:

Roll of Honor

M.L. Abele Grunion

Introduction

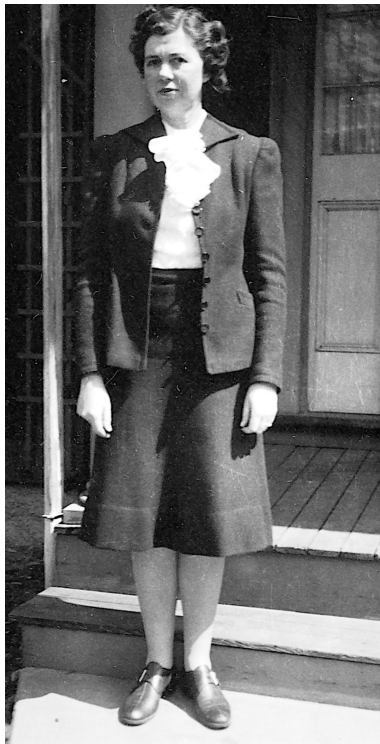
Six months after Pearl Harbor and President Roosevelt's order to "execute unrestricted air and submarine warfare against Japan," Jim Abele and his crew took USS *Grunion* through the Panama Canal to join the Pacific fleet. They arrived in Pearl Harbor on June 20, 1942, and after 10 days of pre-patrol training, *Grunion* departed for her first war patrol in the "area westward of Attu Island on routes between the Aleutian Islands and the Japanese Empire." Sister boats *Growler*, *Triton*, *Finback*, *Trigger*, *Gato*, and *Tuna* also took part in the Aleutian war patrol. While on station USS *Triton* sank the DD *Nenohi*, and USS *Growler*, commanded by Jim's Annapolis classmate Howard Gilmore, sank DD *Arare*. *Grunion* made five reports of action during the month of July, and sank two Japanese Sub Chasers outside Kiska harbor at the tip of the Aleutian Islands.

Grunion made her last report on July 30. Later that day the naval operations center at Dutch Harbor ordered her to return to port to prepare for re-assignment. She did not return. She disappeared without out a trace and to this day, remains "on eternal patrol" at Kiska.

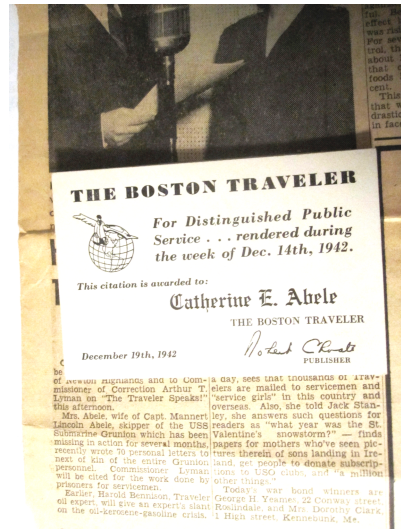
At the end of September Jim's wife Catherine received news of the loss: *The Navy Department deeply regrets to inform you that your husband Lieutenant Commander Mannert Lincoln Abele United States Navy is missing following action in the performance of his duty and in the service of his country....* A second telegram stated, ... *no proof has been received that it was the result of enemy action.*



Headlines in Jim's hometown newspaper, the *Quincy Patriot Ledger*, October 5, 1942..



Catherine "Kay" Abele in front of her home in Newton Highlands, Massachusetts, and notice of the award for distinguished public service from *The Boston Traveler*, December 19, 1942.



A few days later, the Navy's public announcement that the USS *Grunion* was "overdue in the Pacific...and must be presumed to be lost" was headline news across the country. In Jim's hometown of Quincy, Massachusetts, the *Patriot Ledger's* headline read "Sub Overdue, Abele Missing." Through the Navy grapevine, the Abeles eventually learned that *Grunion* was in the Aleutians, but missing was all that the Navy could say. It was not a matter of hiding anything. She had not returned to base and the Navy did not know what had happened to *Grunion*. For Catherine, and for Jim's sons Bruce, Brad, and John, not knowing added to their burden of fear and grief, a burden shared by every family whose loved ones serve in time of war.

Several months later, a press release in the *Army and Navy Register* reported the unusual and unexpected contribution of one Navy wife: *Wife of Commanding Officer of USS Grunion, Submarine overdue in Pacific, writes families of Husband's shipmates*. In the absence of her husband, Jim's wife Catherine had assumed responsibility for the *Grunion* family. She wrote condolences to each crew member's family in letters that spoke of pride, of courage, and of faith. And the families wrote back with thanks, hoping for more information, and sure that an officer's wife must know something, but as one of the officer's wives' said—all were "in the dark."

The mystery of *Grunion's* loss would haunt the families for more than 60 years. The collected letters would become a resource for rediscovering the *Grunion* family, each letter contributing to a unique narrative, a first person view of the families – mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, and newborn children who would never know their fathers.

Grunion was the fifth fleet submarine lost in the Pacific, her career cut short, her potential unrealized. Posthumously, Jim received the Navy's second highest honor, the Navy Cross "For extraordinary heroism...during an aggressive and successful submarine war patrol." In May of 1943 Catherine wrote again to the families, sharing that honor as she felt that her husband would have wanted her to do. She also shared the one story she

could tell – the story of *Grunion*’s rescue of the survivors of the USAT *Jack*, sunk by a German U-boat near the Panama Canal. Ever conscious of the fear that “loose lips sink ships,” she concluded “Please do not let this letter be published...I am writing only that I may share what news I have with you. Keep busy and your head high. We have a special reason to be very proud.”

The first contemporary history of the war, *United States Submarine Operations in World War II*, written by Theodore Roscoe and published in 1949, compiled an operational history of the submarine service. In the foreword to Roscoe’s book, former Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz framed the story in words that Navy officers still use today:

When I assumed command of the Pacific Fleet submarines were already operating against the enemy, the only units of the Fleet that could come to grips with the Japanese for months to come. It was to the Submarine Force that I looked to carry the load until our great industrial activity could produce the weapons we so sorely needed to carry the war to the enemy. It is to the everlasting honor and glory of our submarine personnel that they never failed us in our days of great peril....The world will now learn from the following pages how well they did their work in spite of real hardships and heavy losses.

The hardships of war were many, but without her War Patrol Report, *Grunion* could never tell her story. Hollywood movies would dramatize the actions of fictional submarines in war. Firsthand accounts by captains who returned disclosed personal stories, including experiences with defective torpedoes and the “Great Torpedo Scandal” of WWII, which was not resolved until the fall of 1943. Based on scant information, Roscoe wrote “Either GRUNION was the victim of an unrecorded attack, or her loss was operational...She was in the fight. She did not come back.” Acknowledging the harsh reality of the loss, he recalled these lines from a poem by Walter de la Mare: “Her requiem remains in the mourning of northern winds and the ‘solemn surge of strange and lonely seas.’” (Roscoe, 139-40)

Journalist Robert Casey, observing war-time activity in Pearl Harbor wrote

colorfully, but with awe and respect, about the men of the Silent Service, noting that “It was tradition in the Navy that only the most intelligent applicants were ever selected for the submarines, that only the men without fear volunteered for the duty, that only the strong survived.” (Casey, 15) But in the submarine service, all did not survive and strength had a deeper meaning. On her fourth war patrol, *Growler* was damaged in a collision with a Japanese gunboat. To save his sub, the injured captain, Howard Gilmore, gave an order from the bridge to “take her down.” “In giving up his life for his ship... Gilmore followed the highest traditions of naval service.” (Roscoe 206-207)

Pacific Fleet submarines accounted for more than half of all enemy shipping sunk during the war, a significant accomplishment considering the size of the force. The number of American sailors serving in submarines was less than two percent of the Naval force and loss of life was highest among men of the Silent Service. More than 3,500 submariners died and 52 U.S. Pacific Fleet submarines remain “on eternal patrol.” (Blair 269)

For officer’s families, a Naval career meant moving roughly every two years. Jim was posted to Hawaii, Washington DC, New London, and Harvard University, where he taught Naval Science for a year, before returning to sea duty in September 1940. The Abele family then moved to Mystic, Connecticut, near the submarine home base in New London, for the two years before *Grunion*’s departure for war in late May 1942. With each move, Catherine shouldered the responsibility of establishing a home and caring for their children during Jim’s long absences.

It is not surprising that after *Grunion*’s loss it seemed natural for her to include care for the crew families. Today we must remember those mothers and wives, sisters and sweethearts who never forgot, who bound up the wounds, and carried on the best they could; and we support sons and daughters who never stopped searching for answers.

Catherine’s strength and positive attitude were expressed in a prophetic letter written to Jim on August 5, 1942. Not knowing that *Grunion* had been lost six days

before, she told her husband that she had found a house to rent in the Boston suburb of Newton Highlands, within walking distance to good schools for the boys and quite the best house they ever had. She wished a million times that he could be there to enjoy the house before his next posting, but ended “we will carry on, and I believe do it happily there.” And carry on she did. As the years passed, the memory never dimmed, but information about *Grunion* would not be forthcoming in her lifetime. But when it did come, Jim’s three sons, grown men with families of their own, would seize the chance to search for their father’s submarine. Succeeding in unimagined ways, they experienced international cooperation and compassion, and an extraordinary opportunity for reconciliation between two families, separated by war, but alike in love of family and love of country. They stretched themselves, even as Catherine had done, to bring information to the *Grunion* family, and by sending pressed flowers—“Kiska petals”—to the wife of Ishmu Shinoda, whose sub chaser had been sunk by *Grunion*.

“Sunday Historian,” Yutaka Iwasaki, was key to unlocking the mystery of the disappearance of USS *Grunion*—his contributions—the first of many remarkable occurrences within the unfolding story. A faded blue print of a wiring diagram from the *Kano Maru*, a Japanese transport ship that had been in the battle at Midway, posted on a Japanese history website by retired U. S. Air Force Lt. Colonel Richard Lane, elicited an unexpected response. Pointing to an article published in a Japanese magazine in the 1960s, Yutaka posted a summary of a report by the commandant of the *Kano Maru*, that placed his ship outside Kiska Harbor in late July 1942. Commandant Seiichi Aiura reported being torpedoed by an unseen enemy submarine, a submarine later identified by Japanese Vice Admiral Nakazawa as the USS *Grunion*. Aiura’s report, buried for over 60 years in a Japanese archive, would show us the way to Kiska. Yutaka’s discovery was republished on the Navy’s ComSubPac website and seen in 2002 by Jim’s sons. To some degree, the post solved a 60-year-old mystery—but there were still many questions. In 2005, Bruce, Brad, and John began to explore the possibilities for an actual search with

Robert Ballard, an underwater explorer best known for his discovery of the *Titanic*. The Abele brothers wanted to begin the search the following summer, but Ballard had other commitments. Devoting themselves to the project, the brothers found a boat and a search team, and not unlike their father said, “we can do this ourselves.”

The Abele family’s search for *Grunion* took place in two successive summers, 2006 and 2007. Other searches were underway in the Pacific around the same time. *Grunion* was in exciting company as dive teams found four other World War II submarines—*Perch*, *Lagarto*, *Wahoo*, and *Flier*. In wartime, when there were agonizing rumors and few answers, there was a brief association with the loss of the *Perch*, sunk off the coast of Java shortly before the loss of *Grunion*. The damaged *Perch* was scuttled to keep operational documents out of enemy hands. The Japanese captured the crew, sending them to a prisoner of war camp, and some months later staged a taunting news conference. The mother of *Grunion* crew member Arnold Post captured the scrambled details from that news conference in a letter to Catherine Abele.

... do you know if there was a boy on the sub from a place called Charlevoix Michigan I here (sic) from a friend of this family they have a boy that is captured and this was sneaked out...and was broadcast over a New York station and in that way his parents learned about it and he said his whole crew was taken.

Many including Post’s mother had fixed on the idea that the crew of *Grunion* might have been taken prisoner and would return after the war. Mrs. Post also sought information from a clairvoyant, who took shameless advantage of the grief-stricken mother. Her desperate prayers were futile. Experiencing the loss through her words brings fresh grief with each reading. The mothers and all but three of the wives would never learn what happened to their loved ones. Carolyn Surofchek, whose husband joined the *Grunion* crew at Pearl Harbor, would be one of the lucky ones.

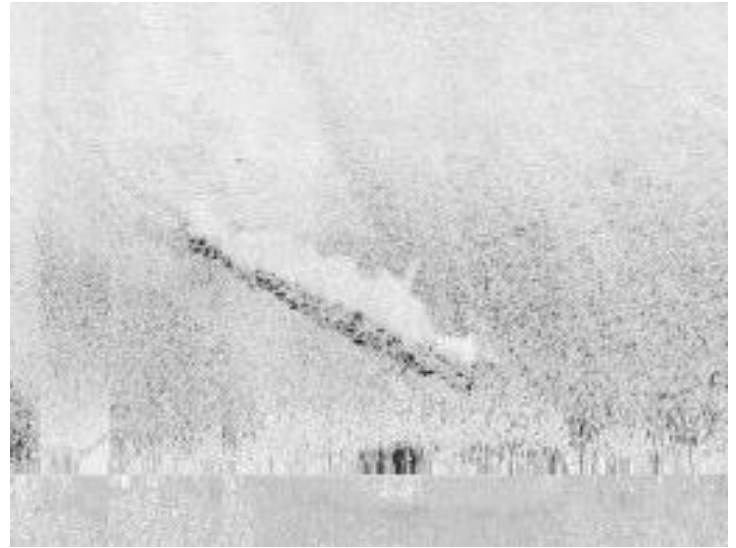
In August of 2006, as *Aquila*, a crab-fishing boat turned research vessel, started for Kiska, a second search intensified – the search for the *Grunion* crew descendants. Three ladies, amateur genealogists and savvy Internet users, who never met in person,

were each looking for their own relatives. When they heard about the Abele family's search plans, they joined forces, broadening their searches. We began to call them the "Sub Ladies." Rhonda Ray, Vicky Rogers, and Mary Bentz were phenomenally successful. They found family contacts for all including the ship's cook Surofchek. They filled in crew lists on the "Eternal Patrol" website, and collected photographs for all but two crew members — two African Americans who had served as mess attendants. "Sub Lady" Mary Bentz went further, publicizing *Grunion's* discovery in every man's hometown newspaper, and with her husband Dick, writing a book of collected biographies, *We Remember Them*, self-published in 2014.

The physical search was not without its own drama. The ad hoc team faced many real time challenges, but succeeded admirably. Some doubted the sonar images from the first phase of the underwater search, massed black and white points on a computer screen, that appeared to reveal the outline of a credible target—a possible submarine to some, a surface ship to others. In 2007, *Aquila* returned to Kiska with a remote operated vehicle (ROV). It relocated and photographed the wreck of USS *Grunion* in 3000 feet of water at the base of an extinct volcano. The combat report of Seiichi Aiura, commandant of the Japanese transport ship the *Kano Maru*, supplied by Yutaka Iwasaki, supported and confirmed the work of the search team. Photographs taken by the ROV provided definitive identification of the sub. The details of *Grunion's* war patrol from the Dutch Harbor War Diary, which contained five contact reports from *Grunion*, Airua's report, and photographs of the wreck, provide a foundation for ongoing work; thoughtful analysis, from a host of interested parties, continues to contribute to the discussion of what caused *Grunion* to sink. Was it the 84 shot from an 8cm gun on the *Kano Maru* mentioned in Airua's report, a possible circular torpedo run, jammed dive planes, or something else. We hypothesize, but it is unlikely that we will ever know all the details.

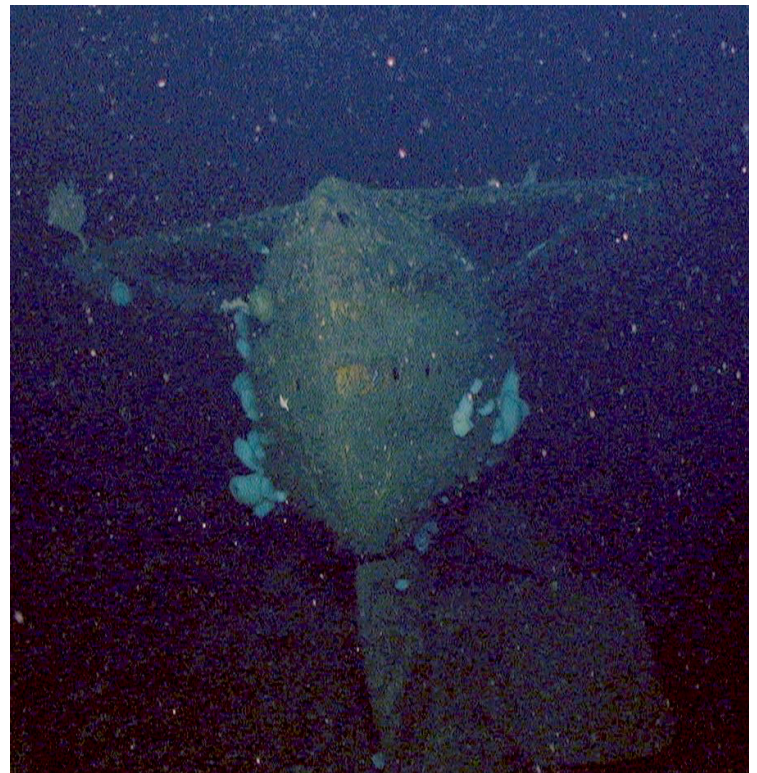
Celebrating the success of the search, the Abeles and members of the newly found *Grunion* family including Carolyn Surofchek, gathered at the USS *Cod* Museum in

The first sonar image of USS *Grunion* appeared to some to be that of a surface ship. Not known at the time, was that 50 feet of the bow had broken off as the sub slid down the side of an extinct, underwater volcano to rest approximately 3000 feet below the surface of the Bering Sea.



Above, the prop guards can be seen in 1941 construction photograph.

On the right, HD video shows prop guards that allowed us to make a definitive identification of *Grunion*.





Grunion's Bell was discovered in the Visitor's Center in Greenville, Mississippi.

Dr. John Fakan, director of the USS *Cod* museum, and Paul Farace, after installation of the bell on the USS *Cod* in preparation for the Memorial Service in Cleveland in 2008.

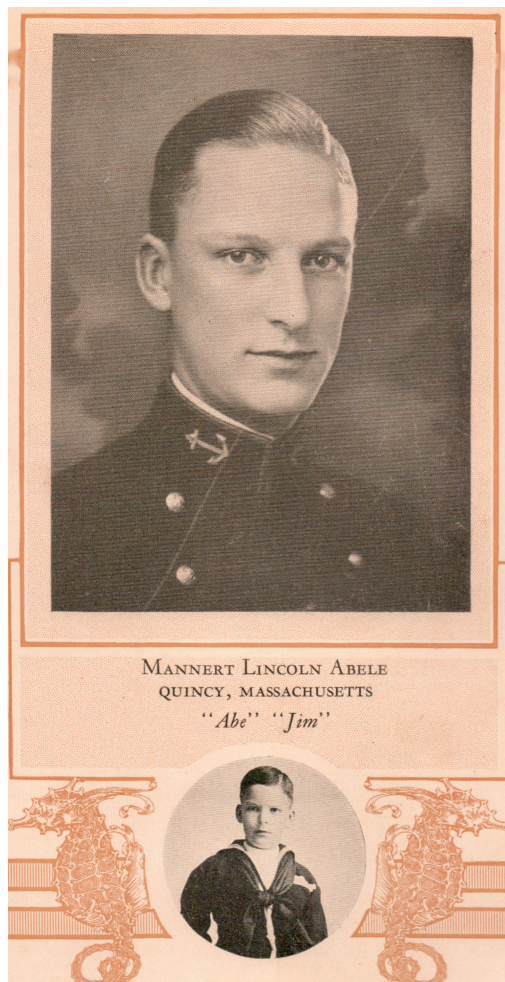


Cleveland for a memorial service in October 2008, a service attended by more than 200 people. *Grunion's* sister ship, the USS *Cod* commissioned in June 1943, a year after *Grunion's* departure for the Pacific, had survived seven successful war patrols. Thirty years later, she made her way through the St. Lawrence Seaway, to begin a new career as a floating memorial and museum on the shores of Lake Erie. She is unique among submarine memorial museums, her visitor experience true to that of a 1940s sailor. Some vintage submarines have a visitors entrance cut into the side of the hull, but visitors to the *Cod* enter through a 26-inch diameter hatch and straight down a ladder, just as every crew member would have done.

At the ceremony, Rear Admiral Douglas Biesel, Commander, Navy Region Northwest, read the Navy's announcement publicly confirming the discovery of USS *Grunion*, which had been described with the help of former NASA scientist Dr. John Fakan, museum director at the USS *Cod*. Rev. Mary Abele read Psalm 107, verses 23-31, verses that began "*They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; These see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep.*" Unimaginable coincidence had brought USS *Grunion's* bell to Cleveland and on that sunny day in October 2008, that bell, often thought of as the heart of the boat, tolled for each of the 52 boats still on eternal patrol. Of all the so-call improbable discoveries, that of the bell is among the most wondrous and who can say how it came to be.

Grunion's story is more than a war story of torpedoes fired, ships sunk, lives lost, and it is not the story of the very real horror of incomprehensible world-wide conflict, ended in the Pacific by the atomic bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. *Grunion's* story is a human interest story of love in time of war, a story of one man who joined the Navy and qualified for submarines, a story of a woman who never forgot, and sons who set out to find their father. More important, it is a story of collaboration and the unexpected opportunity for reconciliation and healing. The odyssey set in motion by a chance post on the Internet by Yutaka Iwasaki was transformational. It reached around the globe,

bridging the chasm of war and in so doing, solved a 60-year-old mystery. And it all began with 8-year-old Jim Abele, who wrote to his uncle, “*When 1922 doth come, I go to Annapolis by gum....*” and came full circle with discovery of USS *Grunion*, on eternal patrol at Kiska.



“The Lucky Bag,” the 1926 Annual of the Regiment of Midshipmen.

USS Grunion's Launch

For those who knew her, the USS *Grunion* would become more than a submarine. The “new construction crew,” the so-called “plank holders” helped to build her. She was their trusted home in deep waters, their pride in battle. With her loss, she would become a haunting spirit for those left behind and the object of a 60-year search. On land, the dull gray boat sitting high up in the construction ways—cylindrical to withstand extreme water pressure, sleek to move through water without drag, dwarfs the workmen around her. She is a proverbial fish out of water. Launched and leveling off in deep water she assumes her rightful place, riding low, skimming the surface—well crafted for the role she must play.

On December 22, 1941, 15 days after President Roosevelt’s declaration of war against the Empire of Japan, Electric Boat Company in Groton, Connecticut launched the USS *Grunion* (SS-216). She was a fleet submarine, the fifth in the Gato-class— “Gato,” being a fish and an apt name for a class of submarines, and “Grunion” a small species of silver fish found on the Pacific coast. Fleet subs were significantly larger than earlier classes of submarines and had a longer cruising range. They also had the speed to keep up with surface craft, which gave them a long-sought expanded role in fleet actions. *Grunion* was 312 feet long; her cruising speed was 20.25 knots on the surface and 8.75 knots submerged.

A reporter from the New London newspaper set the scene: Perfect weather, cold but sunny, made the spectators “relatively comfortable.” Workers on lunch break gathered to watch; the Electric Boat Company band played while the coast guard continued to patrol the harbor. Red, white, and blue bunting trimmed *Grunion’s* bow, and a string of pennants snapped in the breeze.

At launch-time, Jim’s assignment was as Prospective Commander for USS *Grunion*. He was on deck and rode the boat into the Thames River. Catherine and the boys, watched from the sponsor’s platform as Mrs. Stanford C. Hooper, wife of Rear Admiral Stanford C. Hooper,

Lt. Mannert L. "Jim" Abele aboard the newly commissioned, USS *Grunion*, April 11, 1942.



smashed the champagne bottle against the bow, christening the boat. Workers had burned away the steel plates securing the hull; 12-year-old Bruce remembers being fascinated as crews sawed away the wooden beams (chalks) holding the ways in place, and watching the sub slide into the river to float free of the ways that were then pulled ashore to be reused for the next new construction.

Grunion's commissioning took place four months later. A memorandum, signed by Jim, outlined the "Schedule and Procedure for Commissioning of U.S.S. GRUNION (SS216)." Officers and crew identified as taking part in the ceremony included the Executive Officer Lt. Milliner Weaver Thomas and his orderly first petty officer of the deck S. A. Templeton. E. T. Schumann stood by colors aft, J. S. Irons by the commission pennant, and F. E. Alexander by the forward jack. L. D. Cooksey took the below deck watch. All but J. S. Irons sailed with *Grunion* when she departed for the Pacific.

The brief ceremony began at 10 a.m. Captain Cutts, Mr. Bullard of Electric Boat, and the Navy Chaplain met the Prospective Commanding Officer, Lt. Cmdr. M. L. Abele and boarded the boat. After reading his instructions, Captain Cutts accepted USS *Grunion* from Mr. Bullard of Electric Boat. The Executive Officer ordered about face, the bugler sounded "attention" and "to the colors," as the colors, jack, and commission pennant were "smartly" hoisted. The Chaplain then offered a prayer and Lt. Commander Abele read his orders. He then requested that the Executive Office "set the watch." Ending the brief ceremony, the commissioning party left the ship and dismissed the crew from quarters

Besides the Captain, *Grunion* would eventually carry a complement of five officers and sixty-four enlisted men when she departed for her first War Patrol. The five officers—Ensign Cuthbertson (Duty Officer), Lt. jg. Dighton, and Lieutenants Kornahrens (Gunnery Officer), McMahon (Engineering and Diving Officer), and Thomas, the Executive Officer, were in their late twenties and early thirties. Among the enlisted men, Chief Master Machinist's Mate Danny Cullinane at 47 was the oldest and the only man in the crew to have seen combat. Merritt Dayton Graham, age 42, was Chief of the Boat. Cullinane and Graham, were among the "plank-holders"

who had re-enlisted and shipped out with her when she went to war. Younger men in their twenties and thirties filled the ranks as machinists, electricians, firemen, gunners, torpedo men, signal men, and radio men. There were also two cooks, two mess attendants, and a pharmacist. Some of the crew members were just boys, not yet 20: Daniel Emery Allen, 19, Signalmate 3rd class was from Indiana, Herbert Arvan, 18, was a Mess Attendant second class born in Louisiana. Leon Frank, 19 Seaman 1st class grew up in New York, and Richard McCutcheon, 19, Torpedoman's Mate 3rd class was from Michigan. All sailed with *Grunion* from New London. Loyal Ryan, 17 Seaman 2nd class, came on board at Coco Solo. At the last minute, seven new crew members, also under 20 would transfer to *Grunion* at Pearl Harbor.

Two days after commissioning, the Officer of the Deck (OOD) recorded a mishap in the deck log. While attempting to moor at pier 7, the S-48 struck *Grunion* on the starboard side. "A test of the stern planes immediately thereafter did not indicate damage." There were no reported problems on subsequent dives, yet this incident would become a part of *Grunion's* history.

Grunion was at sea for the next few weeks, training with other fleet boats at New London including the *Finback*, commanded by Jesse Hull, and *Growler*, commanded by Howard Gilmore. Both men were Jim's classmates from Annapolis, class of 1926. *Grunion's* deck log provides only brief notations of training activity, as *Grunion* alternated berths between the sub base and Electric Boat, testing and calibrating new equipment, diving, and test-firing torpedoes. After two months of training, *Grunion* received her orders. On May 20 she entered marine railway at Electric Boat for final checks and on May 23 returned to the submarine home base in New London prior to departure.

Grunion was ready for war. Jim's middle son Brad was 9 years old when the *Grunion* slipped quietly out the Thames River on her way to the Pacific. Many years later, he recalled that day in a memoir that he titled *Jim*.

It was a bright clear day, a bit on the cool side, that Sunday, the 24th of May 1942. Jim had been working long hours, often several days on end for months now to get his new command, the newly launched and commissioned fleet submarine Grunion ready to go to sea...[that] morning

he had been home and suggested that the whole family join him for Sunday dinner at the officer's club at the submarine base in New London, Connecticut. This was not unusual for us since our family had [often] gone out for Sunday dinners at the "club" ...over the past few months. I remember the "club" as being rather special...it had an air of exclusivity about it and the tables were all set up with white table cloths, shining silverware and glistening china. Also, in the back of my mind I remember the friendly rattle of a ping-pong game being played on the tables on the lower level. Our family of five was shown to a table at the right rear corner of the dining room overlooking the Thames River. There we ordered our dinner and enjoyed an hour of desultory conversation. When we got up to leave, Jim announced that he would have to stay at the base as he had some more important work to do so my mother would have to drive us all home in our one car...Later that afternoon, we received a phone call from one of the wives of the other five officers attached to the Grunion, that she had seen the boat going out of the river that afternoon... We weren't particularly surprised, as I remember. We all knew that Jim, as a naval officer...would be in the thick of things as soon as he could get his boat ready to go to sea...as things turned out it would be the last time we were ever to see him.

Wartime secrecy meant that Jim and other members of the crew could not say goodbye to their families on that Sunday afternoon before *Grunion* sailed from New London on May 24, 1942. Later in the day, Kay received a call from another Navy wife saying that she had seen the boat going down the river and the next day she received a handwritten note, self-censored, as all future letters would be.

My dear Kay,

Just a note to say we are on our way. Sorry I couldn't give you more definite information...

You have been grand to me and I have enjoyed the time with you particularly the last few weeks. I feel terribly that you find yourself with so many problems of moving etc. that I can't help you with but I know you can handle them — but don't get over tired. I am sure Collins, or Hensel or any of the other office friends around here will be glad to do what they can for you.

Good luck dear, and I will hope to see you before too long.

Love to you and the boys, Jim

Other letters would follow, but as Jim said in one, “there is next to nothing that one is permitted to say...” Details of *Grunion*’s voyage were sparse and cryptic as well. On board the *Grunion*, the Officer of the Deck recorded routine details of the voyage—orders, speed, weather, as well as possible sightings of enemy vessels on the Atlantic seaboard. In all, details of the transit from New London to Pearl Harbor were routine except for the story of the rescue of sailors from the USAT *Jack*. War Diaries from Pearl Harbor, and later Dutch Harbor, pick up the story after the departure from Pearl Harbor, but complete details from *Grunion*’s first War Patrol to the Aleutians are unknowable as she could not write her War Patrol report. Remarkable details of the Aleutian War Patrol, would come unexpectedly from Japanese sources, but that information would not come for many years.

Grunion departed New London, “underway independently,” as a unit 6 of Task Force 25. As she headed out past Montauk, at the eastern end of Long Island, and then southerly toward the Caribbean, she noted several ships, including a possible tender for Axis subs, but did not engage in offensive actions. In the Caribbean on May 31, in high seas, she sighted a life boat from the USAT *Jack*, which had been sunk by a German U-boat. George Drew, First Engineer of the *Jack* was among the survivors listed in *Grunion*’s Deck Log and subsequent reports to the Secretary of the Navy. On November 5, a month after the loss of the *Grunion* became headline news, George Drew wrote a letter of sympathy to Mrs. Abele that gave a first hand account of the rescue.

On May 27, I was on a US Army transport in the Caribbean when we were torpedoed by a German submarine. We were twenty three men on a life raft and a very leaky lifeboat. Sixteen of us were in the life boat and seven on the raft. After the first night adrift we became separated -16 of us in the boat and seven on the raft. We were in the lifeboat from Wednesday until Sunday afternoon, 5 and a half days. I was the first engineer on the ship and on watch when the torpedo struck, and I had a severe cut in the head and a bad gash on the chin with no first aid of any kind until I was taken on board the Grunion by Capt. Abele. I have spent quite a few years at sea and I have never seen such wonderful seamanship as he executed when he rescued us from the lifeboat as there was a very

heavy sea and rain...He was cruising on the surface at the time and he saw the lifeboat before we saw him. Needless to say the men on the Grunion all had on oil skins and we thought it was the German sub who had sunk us... we tried to throw everything that wasn't made fast in the boat at them, and the names we called them and his men wouldn't be fit to write in this letter. But when he got up alongside of our lifeboat he ordered the good old stars and stripes hauled up to let us know that he was an American ship. I am sure had it not been for the most wonderful care Captain Abele and his pharmacists mate Mr. Paul Sullivan gave us, quite a few of us would not have survived...quite a few of the boys has severe sunburn and saltwater poison, and had bruises that had been infected with salt-water poison. He couldn't have possibly done anymore for us while we were on board the Grunion. He and all of his men took up a collection when he put us ashore at xxx. You see we had lost all our earthly belongings and had nothing in the world except what he and his officers and men gave us.

Grunion dropped the survivors of the *Jack* off at Coco Solo, a sub base on the east coast of Panama on June 4 and three days later passed through Gatun Lake and the locks of the Panama Canal, taking departure from channel buoy #1 on route to Pearl Harbor. Thereafter she served as unit 7.8.7 in Task Force 7 of the Pacific Submarine Fleet, commanded by Rear Admiral R. H. English. The deck log recorded the secret dispatch directing her to Pearl Harbor.

Far from Coco Solo, Jim and the men of the *Grunion* would have been unaware that on June 4 a major battle had begun at Midway Island, a tiny atoll in the North Pacific. During the three days *Grunion* was in Panama Japan attacked Midway Island, suffering a dramatic defeat—the first of the war in the Pacific. Far to the north of Midway, the Japanese also attacked several small islands at the western end of the Aleutians, bombing Dutch Harbor on June 3 and unexpectedly occupying Kiska and Attu islands on June 6 and 7. The men of the *Grunion* could not have known that the eventual American response in the Aleutians would figure in their first war patrol.

Sixteen days later, after an uneventful crossing, *Grunion* arrived at Pearl Harbor. The charred, twisted wreckage of American battleships in the harbor was a stark reminder of the horrific Japanese attack. Little had been spared, but in a quirk of fate the submarine docks were untouched, and the submarines, which according to Nimitz were “the only units of the fleet that

could come to grips with the Japanese for months to come,” would play an unexpected role in the conflict.

At home, the American public knew next to nothing about naval action in the Pacific. Observing the submarine community at Pearl Harbor, war correspondent Robert Casey later reflected on the evolving mystique of the Silent Service.”

In the days when, with other war correspondents, I loitered about Honolulu, waiting with polite skepticism for the Pacific Fleet to work its miracle, submarines held interest only as mysterious gadgets that had no real part in the war we lived with. We would see them slide into the harbor occasionally, salt caked, battered and ugly-looking-long, black sewer pipes covered with patches of white. We were struck by the pomp and circumstance of their arrival, with a busy-looking four pipe destroyer ahead and sometimes another behind them. We had heard the legend of how one of them had to work for two days to get the channel patrol to quit dropping depth charges on it, so we weren't surprised at the escort.

Of the men, Casey wrote with touching respect:

For a long time submarine men were as rare in our jittery little community as visitors from Mars. After a while when we came to see more of them we marked them instantly as creatures apart. They were, for the most part, pale and nearly always thin, young men who walked quietly aloof with others of their kind. High-Hat, some of the gobs from the surface ships called them, but they said it without resentment or unkindness. If these lads considered themselves a special breed of Navy man, well, so did everybody else. The boots looked at them with obvious awe, the older men with grave respect. For, whatever the current status of the submarines as warships, nothing had lessened their hold on the imagination of men in the less secret services. It was tradition in the Navy that only the most intelligent applicants were ever selected for the submarines, that only the men without fear volunteered for the duty, that only the strong survived.

Within the Silent Service, there was anything but silence. The strong spoke up, but they did not all survive. Protests circulating within the submarine community suggest what in some respects may sound like typical grumbling in the ranks; in fact, the protests provide insight into what commanders perceived as their superior's rigid “by-the-book approach,” and the rationalization of the mounting evidence of technical problems related to the MK14 torpedoes, which came to be known as the Great Torpedo Scandal, 1941-1943.

Art Taylor, the captain of the USS *Haddock*, who was in the fourth Prospective Commanding Officers (PCO) class with Jim at New London, arrived in Pearl Harbor on July 16, several weeks after *Grunion's* departure. His poem *Squat Div One*, lampooned the Division One staff, exposing the Admiral's staffers who second-guessed war patrol reports that determined the success or failure of the patrols in evaluations or "endorsements." The humorous indictment was deadly serious.

Squat Div One

*They're on their duff from morn till nite;
They're never wrong, they're always right;
To hear them talk they're in the fight—
Oh, yeah?
A boat comes in off a patrol,
The skipper tallies up his toll
And writes it up for all concerned.
He feels right proud of the job he's done,
But the staffies say he shoulda used his gun!
Three fish for a ship of two score ton?
Outrageous! He should have used but one!
A tanker sunk in smoke and flame—
But still he's open wide to blame.
His fish were set for twenty right—
That proves he didn't want to fight!
Oh, yeah?
The freighter he sunk settled by the stern—
With depth set right she'd split in two!
So tell me, what is the skipper to do?
He's on the spot and doing his best,
But that's not enough by the acid test.
The staff must analyze his case
And pick it apart to save their face.
Just because you sink some ships
Doesn't mean you win the chips
You've got to do it according to Plan;
Otherwise you're on the pan!
So here's to the staff with work so tough
In writing their endorsement guff—
Whether the war is lost or won
Depends entirely on "Squat Div One."
Oh, yeah?*

Grunion had had 10 days in Pearl Harbor to prepare for her first war patrol. According to the Deck Log, on June 22, she received two exercise torpedoes from the sub tender USS *Fulton*, and spent four days of target practice in the Pacific submarine sanctuary, defined and protected from friendly fire. She also spent three days working with destroyers to practice avoiding sonar detection.

The “two exercise torpedoes” were most likely MK14s, outfitted with unarmed, water-filled warheads. The new MK 14s were costly (\$10,000 in 1942) and in extremely short supply. A large stockpile at Manila had been destroyed by the Japanese, and budget cuts had reduced production. For a time in the spring of 1942, with inadequate supplies stockpiled at Pearl Harbor, Admiral English ordered captains to restrict their use. The MK14 were faster (10 knots) and heavier (1000 lbs) than earlier models. Equipped with a new, and highly secret magnetic impulse exploder, designed to trigger an explosion as the torpedo passed below a target, a single well-placed “fish” could break the keel—the structural spine of a ship. Using one torpedo instead of the traditional spread of three, would be a significant saving, especially in light of scarce resources, but faulty performance, premature explosions, not exploding on contact, and running below the set depth, were a major problem. Captains complained, but complaints were stonewalled, and blame placed back on the captains.

In training, an unarmed “exercise torpedo” was fitted with a water-filled warhead. The course, distance, and speed of the target entered in the torpedo data computer (TDC) programmed the bearing of the “fish” to the target. After firing, 450 feet from the sub the torpedo would arm and a gyroscope would follow the programmed bearing to the target. The warhead was fitted with a special valve that caused the water to be discharged at the end of the run and it would float to the surface for easy recovery and reuse.

During practice, men lined the rails of the target ship and watched for the bubble trail. They considered the run successful if the torpedoes’ bubble trail passed below the ship. In real time, a torpedo must pass below the target ship at a specific depth in order to detonate; if the depth was properly set, but more important, the magnetic detonator functioned properly, the

explosion would break the keel of a battleship. Initially, discrepancies in depth settings and the fact that latitude affected the magnetic exploder went unrecognized, resulted in the failure of many runs. In addition, it was later determined that a torpedo hitting the side of a ship at a 90 degree angle would not explode, while the torpedo's bubble trail, revealing the sub's location, left it open to retaliatory depth charges. The impact of these problems becomes clear in Art Taylor's gritty bit of doggerel, *Squat Div One*.

On June 25 and 27, *Grunion* took on eight new crew members including 32-year-old Steven Surofchek, a ship's cook. The others were young recruits: Richard Harry Carroll, 18, Kenneth Edward Hall, 21, Arnold Charles Post, 19, Byron Allen Travis, 17, Edward Earl Knowles, 19, David Nathaniel Swartwood 19, (all Seamen 2nd class) and Bernard Joseph Pickel 18 (Torpedo man's mate 3rd class). *Grunion* sailed with a compliment of 70 men; in one of the many remarkable threads of the crew stories, the story of Edward Knowles and the *Grunion*'s bell, left in storage at Pearl Harbor, would come together more than 60 years later in Greenville Mississippi.

On the June 28 *Grunion* received a full load of torpedoes from the *Fulton*. Fueled and provisioned, painted a dull black and without markings, from here on in, she would become the Navy's "*Sea monster; creeper through the middle waters...a thing of terror and a loyal friend....* But we know little of *Grunion*'s actual battle experience as we have only a few cryptic reports to the command headquarters at Dutch Harbor.

On June 30, 1942, *Grunion* pulled away from her berth in Pearl Harbor and began the long voyage to her "assigned area westward of Attu Island on routes between the Aleutians and the Japanese Empire." On July 4 *Grunion* made a three-hour stop at Midway with orders to "fuel to capacity." Jim's last letter to Kay was posted from Midway.

My dear Sweetheart,

This letter is a surprise one in that it is unexpected. There is no telling where it is from. Furthermore, I have no idea when you will get [it] ...

Darling, I miss you like the very dickens but I guess we are all in the same boat. Many

whom I have seen haven't seen their family for over a year. I love you dearly and am only looking forward to the end of this war. I can hardly see prospects for it to last more than a couple of years at best. Although news seems to show ups and downs I am very confident things will come out all right in the end... it will be a trying time for all. Rest assured all our friends are doing their job well.

Tell the boys I appreciate their letter and only due to rush of things have not answered them...

Grunion's Aleutian War Patrol

Grunion's war patrol to the Aleutians was one of the US Navy's first retaliatory campaigns in the Pacific. In June, Admiral Richard English dispatched seven fleet boats including the *Grunion* to the Aleutian front. Nine older, smaller S-boats including the *S-31*, which Jim had previously commanded, were already in Aleutian waters.

According to Clay Blair in *Silent Victory* (1977), intelligence had indicated that a large number of Japanese ships were in the area, but that "They found no major Japanese vessels," and in Blair's words, the results of this first patrol were disappointing. Most of the submarine attacks were against Japanese destroyers or patrol vessels and "one fleet boat was lost." That fleet boat was USS *Grunion*. Limited intelligence regarding targets was unfortunate and failure to account for the dismal performance of the MK14 torpedoes, which most certainly was a factor in *Grunion's* loss, misses crucial details in the story of this war patrol.

The fleet subs began arriving in Dutch Harbor at the end of June. *Growler*, arrived on June 28, followed by *Triton* and *Finback* on the 3, *Trigger* on the 5. *Grunion* on the 9, followed by *Gato* and *Tuna*. Together they constituted task force 8.5, under Commander O. S. Colcough.

On July 4, *Triton* sank the Japanese DD *Nenohi*; on July 5 *Growler* sank DD *Arare*. (Roscoe 138-139) *Grunion* reported sinking three destroyers and at least four other confrontations. Notice of one possible sinking could not be evaluated in post-war reports, as Dutch Harbor never received one of the reports. The War Diaries, which recored all communication to and from the command center at Dutch Harbor, and War Reports submitted by *Growler*, *Triton*, *Trigger* and others, tell their stories. U.S.S. *Grunion* left no record of her final

encounter. She could not tell her story and her War Patrol Report would go unwritten. Historians, including Theodore Roscoe, Samuel Eliot Morison, and Clay Blair and others could not tell the story, but by reporting our discoveries, we can add a new chapter to the story of *Grunion* and the Aleutian war patrol.

On July 10, the Dutch Harbor command assigned *Trigger* to the area north of Attu and *Grunion* to the area north of Kiska. Between 15 July and 30 July, *Grunion* sent at least five coded messages to Dutch Harbor (here after DH), four of which were recorded in the Dutch Harbor War Diaries. One to DH did not decode fully; another, which also did not decode fully, never reached DH. The message that never reached DH was overheard and decoded by Edward L. Beach, communications officer on the *Trigger*.

Dutch Harbor War Diary – July 15:

On July 15 *Grunion* “reported being attacked by ASASHIO class DD (destroyer) 35 miles NW of Kiska.” *Grunion* fired three torpedoes. Two did not explode, the third exploded astern the DD. In light of reported difficulties with the torpedoes, the explosion of the third torpedo near the DD, suggests the first two may have passed so far under the destroyer that the magnetic impulse exploder was not activated.

Based on information that we received in 2008, we now know that on July 15, *Grunion* also attacked three Japanese sub chasers, sinking two, and causing the third to flee. This first-hand information came from a letter written by Minoru Matsushima, commander of sub-chaser #26 to Chiyo Shinoda, wife of the commandant of sub chaser 27, describing the attack outside of Kiska harbor. Matsushima witnessed the explosions that sank two sub-chasers and took evasive action to avoid a salvo of torpedoes streaking towards his ship. He later returned to the site to search for survivors, but found only debris. The three sub chasers are identified as destroyers in the following record.

Dutch Harbor War Diary – July 19:

On July 19, Dutch Harbor acknowledged *Grunion*'s report describing the sinking of three destroyers on July 15, but commented “unable to decipher *Grunion* message #151245

believed to contain details of sinkings.” The DH dispatch of July 19 also requested *Grunion* “state number of torpedoes remaining.” (Post-war analysis determined that the destroyers were in fact the sub chasers described by Matsushima.)

The transcribed summary of the DH War Diaries does not cite message numbers for individual records. Did message #151245 report the sinkings, or was message #151245 a follow-up message “believed to contain details of sinkings?”

On July 21 and 24 of July, Commander Task Force 8.5 again requested details of July 15 attack, but received no further information. Dutch Harbor would not receive any new reports from *Grunion* until July 28.

Edward L. Beach published the following message from *Grunion* in his memoir 1952 *Submarine!*. The message is undated, but the phrase “all torpedoes expended aft...” indicates that it was sent sometime between July 19 and July 28. Beach comments that the message decoded perfectly up to a point and then become a jumble, and we do not know whether any torpedoes were expended from the forward compartment as a result of the action described.

**X ATTACKED TWO DESTROYERS OFF KISKA HARBOR X NIGHT
PERISCOPE SUBMERGED X RESULTS INDEFINITE X BELIEVE ONE
SANK AND ONE DAMAGED X MINOR DAMAGE FROM COUNTER ATTACK
TWO HOURS LATER X ALL TORPEDOES EXPENDED AFT . . .**

[Beach, *Submarine!* p. 10]

Dutch Harbor War Diary – July 28:

On July 28 *Grunion* reported an attack on “unknown ships” six miles from Sirius Point at the northern tip of Kiska Island. Bearing by sound indicated ship movement around Sirius Point, in a westerly direction. Visibility was 300 yards; at 2300, she fired two torpedoes by sound from the forward torpedo room. There were no hits. *Grunion* reported being depth charged, but no damage. Unable to visually confirm a target, *Grunion* had to rely on sonar to calculate bearing, distance and speed needed for input to the torpedo data computer (TDC).

A subsequent dispatch from Dutch Harbor directed *Triton*, *Grunion*, and the S-32 to

guard the exit from Kiska Harbor after dark. The dispatch also requested the *Grunion* state the number of torpedoes remaining.

Dutch Harbor War Diary – July 30:

Grunion made her final known report to Dutch Harbor at 03:35 on July 30. She reported echo ranging ships near Sirius Point and stated that she was being depth charged. At this time, she reported “10 torpedoes forward remaining.”

Grunion carried 24 MK14 torpedoes, 10 aft; 14 forward. Tracking the expenditure of torpedoes, based on these reports provides circumstantial detail, but the incomplete message stream creates difficulties for the actual assessment. The undated Beach message states “all torpedoes expended aft,” but in the un-decoded section may or may not have accounted for torpedoes remaining in the forward compartment. If *Grunion* fired two torpedoes on July 28, that leaves two unaccounted for, and “10 torpedoes forward remaining.” Six of these would be expended in her encounter with *Kano Maru*. This action would be fully described by Sechii Airua, commandant of *Kano Maru*; we would not learn about the action with *Kano Maru* until 2002, more than 60 years after the attack, which took place on July 30, U. S. time. That same day, the command center sent orders to *Grunion* to return to Dutch Harbor for reassignment. On August 1, Dutch Harbor again directed *Grunion* to return to port, and in a twist of fate “to be ready to depart for a new station on August 3.” On August 4, she was instructed to attempt communications via the *Finback*. August 5, *Finback* began patrolling the area north of Sirius Point and Simichi Island, “This action taken because of failure to contact *Grunion* formerly assigned these areas.”

August 6, USS *Casco* reported six unsuccessful attempts to contact *Grunion*. August 16, the Commander of Task Force 8 reported to “Cincpac” (Commander in Chief Pacific) Admiral Chester W. Nimitz “that loss of *Grunion* must be assumed in face of failure of all attempts to communicate with her since July 30. October 5, 1942, the Navy announced to the public that *Grunion* was overdue and “must be presumed lost.”

Finback, Trigger and others with friends on *Grunion* returned to Pearl Harbor. In his memoir, *Sub Duty*, Grover McLoud from the *Finback* remembered his friend, *Grunion* crew member Al Ulman, commenting that one Aleutian patrol was enough and that he hated it because “we left *Grunion* up there.” All mourned her loss. [*Sub Duty* p 192-3]

Lt. Cmdr. J. J. Crane, an Annapolis classmate of Jim’s wrote to Kay once the loss of *Grunion* became known. The letter is a courageous expression of what it meant to serve in a time of war; it reflected the professionalism and commitment to the task, and the friendships and respect that strengthened the naval community. In his letter, John Crane asks, “who may be next?” Crane died in a plane crash along with Admiral English in January 1943 in an aborted landing in San Francisco, not in action as he might have wished

Dear Kay,

To express in words what is really in my heart is so difficult. I saw Jim off here on the trip to Alaska and later had a note from him after his arrival there in which he thanked me for the work that we had done for him while the Grunion was at Pearl Harbor.

When I last saw him he was in gay spirits and so proud of his new boat as well he might be. He did a marvelous job as you know and sold his life dearly. It breaks my heart to see men like Jim...and so many more giving their lives in this struggle. Who knows who may be next?

Our American men are fighting and dying bravely as did their fore-fathers so that their children and their children’s children may live a free and happy life. In our sorrow, we are proud to know them and to be able to do a small part in the struggle.

There is no use in my trying to tell you not to mourn Jim’s loss, you’ve shared too much of life together and your loss is great, but we, your friends, also share in that sorrow and loss.

May God bless you and the children, Kay and keep you always.

Please let me know if I can do anything for you.

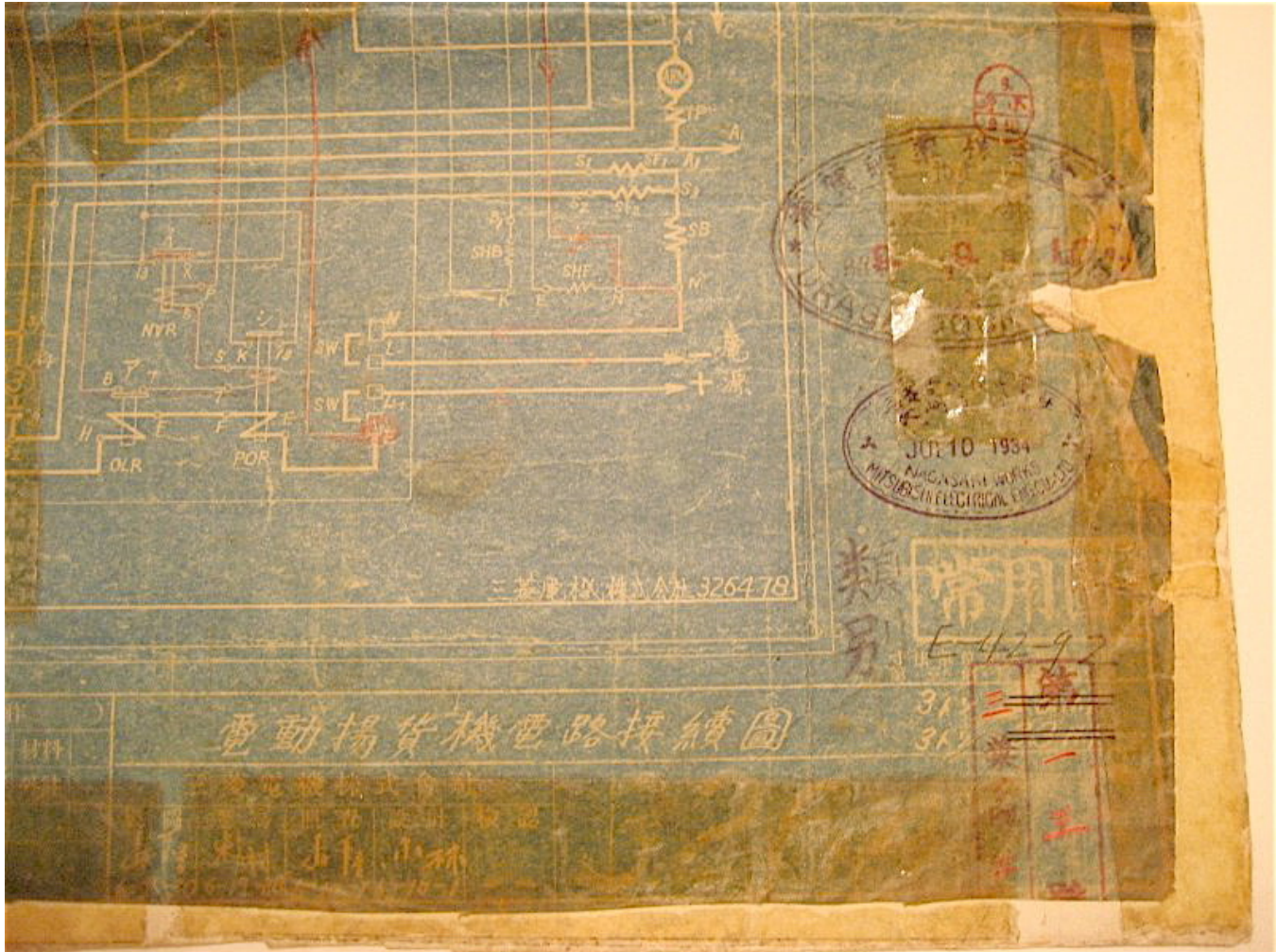
Yours, John

“I pray for the repose of your father’s soul”

In 2002, the name *Kano Maru* suddenly assumed great importance, but so too did the name Yutaka Iwasaki. Bridging the chasm of war, Yutaka Iwasaki’s first words to John Abele—*Sincerely, I pray for the repose of your father’s soul*—opened a door. The fierce conflict of one generation became a humanitarian collaboration in the next generation and with those words, Yutaka laid the groundwork for a remarkable odyssey—the search for USS *Grunion*. Where language had limited the flow of information, the Internet opened the way, and with Yutaka’s help, we became wiser beyond measure about the potential of the human spirit.

Yutaka Iwasaki, born in 1957, grew up in Kōchi, the southern coastal prefecture of Japan, on the island of Shikoku. He graduated from Osaka University in 1981 with a master’s degree in Naval Architecture. Naval history and model shipbuilding became a passion, and a particular interest in Japanese merchant shipping prepared him to play a key role in the search for *Grunion*.

Yutaka has made several visits to the Abeles in Newton. Over time, in telling his story he began with mention of a famous countryman, Nakahama “John” Manjiro, whose own unexpected mid-19th century odyssey brought him to Fairhaven, Massachusetts, at a time when Japan was still a closed society. On his improbable voyage to Fairhaven, as he struggled to learn English, Manjiro became fascinated with the process of navigation and years later he would make a Japanese translation of Bowditch’s *American Practical Navigator*, the single most important book after the Bible for nineteenth-century seafaring men. Navigation,—more broadly “way finding,”—would fascinate Yutaka as well, leading him to archives and libraries, and to reports and diagrams at Japan’s National Institute of Defense Studies (NIDS). In July of 2006, as tears filled his eyes, these documents “flew from the library” to Kiska, aiding modern day navigators to discover the location of the *Grunion*.



The *Kano Maru* wiring diagram was translated by Yutaka Iwasaki. His added comment that he knew what had happened to USS *Grunion*, triggered an explosion of activity

More than a hundred years after Manjiro began to learn English, Yutaka also began to study English, eventually reading classics in American literature, stories that he often refers to in order to convey deep thoughts when he cannot quite put all the English words together. Philosophically, not unlike Manjiro, Yutaka learned to “navigate” beyond the shores of his Japanese homeland, to transcend language barriers, and to express deeply-held values about human relationships.

The Abeles unexpected introduction to Yutaka began in a Colorado Springs consignment shop. In 1994, Lt. Col. Richard Lane purchased a faded blueprint—creased and folded many times, and held together with dried, brittle scotch tape. The document appeared to be a wiring diagram for a winch on a Japanese ship called the *Kano Maru*, a ship that Lane knew had been at Midway during the Japanese attack. Lane paid one dollar for the blue print, took it home and forgot about it. Seven years later, rediscovering the document and finding scant information about the *Kano Maru* on the Internet, he posted a copy of it on J-Aircraft.com, a site in English for “Japanese Aircraft, Ships, & Historical Research.”

Yutaka saw the post and responded, translating the text and authenticating *Kano Maru's* history. Yutaka was particularly interested in the blueprint because he knew that after the war, the Japanese government had microfilmed and destroyed vast collections of war-time documents. In addition, he was curious to know how this surviving blueprint had ended up in the United States. We know now, that in 1995 a newspaper reporter left the diagram along with other documents at the consignment shop, but that man had died by the time we tried to track him down.

Yutaka knew that the *Kano Maru* had been damaged in July of 1942 by an unknown submarine and later beached on Kiska in the Aleutian Islands. In an article first published in 1963 by Seiichi Aiura, the military commandant of the *Kano Maru*, described an attack on his ship by an unknown submarine. A later source suggested that the unknown submarine was the USS *Grunion*. Believing that American records must be

superior to Japanese records, Yutaka assumed that the identification of USS *Grunion* was not credible, but nevertheless, he thought it would be advisable to mention the confrontation to Lane, thinking it might increase the value of his documents by a few dollars.

Yutaka's amazing response surprised Lane, who forwarded the information to Darrell Ames, the public affairs officer for the Commander, Submarine Forces, Pacific Fleet (COMSUBPAC). In his communication, Yutaka quoted directly from Seiichi Aiura's report, but to elaborate on his point, edited the quotes to show USS *Grunion* as the previously "unidentified" submarine. This information was subsequently posted on COMSUBPAC's Web site. In 1981, Vern Miller, writing in the British journal *Warships* had also referred to Aiura's report, and in 1998, Commander John Alden reviewed the same information in the journal *Submarine Review*. Despite these two English language sources, until Yutaka's 2002 post the information about USS *Grunion* remained unknown to those most affected—the Abeles and the families of other *Grunion* crew members.

Half a world away from Yutaka, Brad Abele's memoir of his father that we called the "Jim Book" was circulating within the Abele family, but it was not until March 2002, that our soon-to-be daughter-in-law Alicia Hale showed the book to Ronald Vartanyan, her boss at Qwest, a Colorado-based telecommunications carrier. Intrigued, Vartanyan searched a number of U.S. Navy history sites, including COMSUBPAC and passed all links on to Bruce. Sixty years before, 12-year-old Bruce had said to his mother "wouldn't it be wonderful if Jim would surprise us all and walk in." The 12-year-old boy would be disappointed and his life forever changed, but imagine Bruce's astonishment when Yutaka's post popped up on the computer screen. Finding a clue to the loss of the *Grunion* was an emotional high for Bruce and his brothers. The Navy Web sites were all familiar from previous research, but none of the brothers had seen this new post. After reading Yutaka's comments on the COMSUBPAC site, John searched a 72-page thread on J-Aircraft.com and eventually found what he guessed to be Yutaka's address. He sent

the following email on March 16, 2002:

Dear Yutaka Iwasaki,

I found your web address in an e-mail discussion about building models of WWII Japanese Cruisers...

My name is John Abele, and I am a son of Mannert L. Abele, the commander of the submarine U.S.S. Grunion which was reported lost off Kiska in 1942. My brothers and I have been attempting to discover the fate of the Grunion for many years and the posting of your name and translation of documents from someone on the Kano Maru to the U.S. Navy files as an "Update" was very exciting for us. We would like to know more...

*With respect and appreciation,
John E. Abele
Founder Chairman
Boston Scientific Corporation
Natick, MA 02160*

In a prompt and transformative response Yutaka wrote:

Dear Mr. Abele,

*It's me. Sincerely I pray for the repose of your father's soul.
I have translated my posted information from these two books.
1. Shinshichiro Komaiya "Wartime ship history," private issue 1991.
2. Jiro Kimata "Submarine attack," 2000*

...last July, I found an article in a magazine...written by Kano Maru's supervisor, first published in March 1963. Both S. Komamiya and J. Kimata seemed to quote this article for their writing. This article is by Seiichi Aiura who was navy captain and Kano Maru's supervisor....

Sincerely yours, Yutaka Iwasaki

Yutaka's unexpected post and many of the subsequent discoveries have been called "improbable," but success in solving the mystery of the loss of *Grunion* cannot be attributed to dumb luck. At this moment, the true power of the Internet became evident, and as the search developed, the yet to be defined concept of "crowdsourcing" would gather people from around the world who would follow *Grunion*'s story—"way-finding" in the digital age.

Seiichi Aiura's Report

Seiichi Aiura was the military commandant (or superintendent) of the *Kano Maru*, a supply transport ship commandeered for wartime service. The *Kano Maru* had supported the Japanese forces at the battle of Midway in June, but in the face of defeat retreated to Truck, home base for the Imperial Japanese Navy, to regroup. By the end of July *Kano Maru* had been reassigned and was heading towards Kiska Island.

The International Date Line runs north/south through the Pacific Ocean at 180 degrees longitude, deviating to the west at the end of the Aleutian Island chain to incorporate the islands of Kiska and Attu, situating them in the U. S. Eastern Time zone. Aiura's report reflects that fact that Japanese calculated their reports by Tokyo time, roughly 24 four hours later.

On July 30 (July 29 by U.S. time) the *Kano Maru* approached Kiska Island with a sub chaser escort. (This would have been Matsushima's ship, CH-26) As night came, the *Kano Maru* lost contact with the sub chaser and went on alone in the fog. On the following day, 20 miles off Kiska Island they waited in the fog, on alert for an enemy sub attack. At 04:40 they were able to chart their position by astronomical observation. Between 05:47 and 06:10, they came under attack by an unidentified submarine that fired six torpedoes. The first torpedo missed, the second hit and exploded, disabling *Kano Maru's* engines. The third went low, four and five bounced off and did not explode. A sixth torpedo passed off the stern. Aiura, believed that a shot from their 8cm deck gun had sunk the sub and sent a confrontation report to headquarters of the Japanese Fifth Fleet. At the time, *Kano Maru's* assertion of the sinking of an unidentified enemy submarine received little attention and no public notice.

Twenty-one years later, the Japanese trade magazine *Maru* (*Maru* are commercial, not navy ships,) published Aiura's report. The headline and title for the article read "We Have Sunk U.S. Submarine." "Transport *Kano Maru* 8 cm gun Got the Target." In 2001,

Maru issued a special edition of their magazine and reprinted Aiura's report. By then Vice Admiral Nakazawa, who was in command of the fifth fleet at Kuril, had determined that *Grunion* was the unknown submarine as he knew she was the only U. S. fleet boat lost in Alaskan waters at that time.

Yutaka made the following translation of Aiura's report. It is the first of two documents that describe unknown details of *Grunion*'s first war patrol.

July 30 08:00: *We reached the north side of Kiska Island, about 20 nautical miles from the shore, but the dense fog prevented our approach and we were forced to drift and wait for the fog to lift. We could do nothing but wait. Throughout the day, the fog would thin and then become dense again, and we were impatient.*

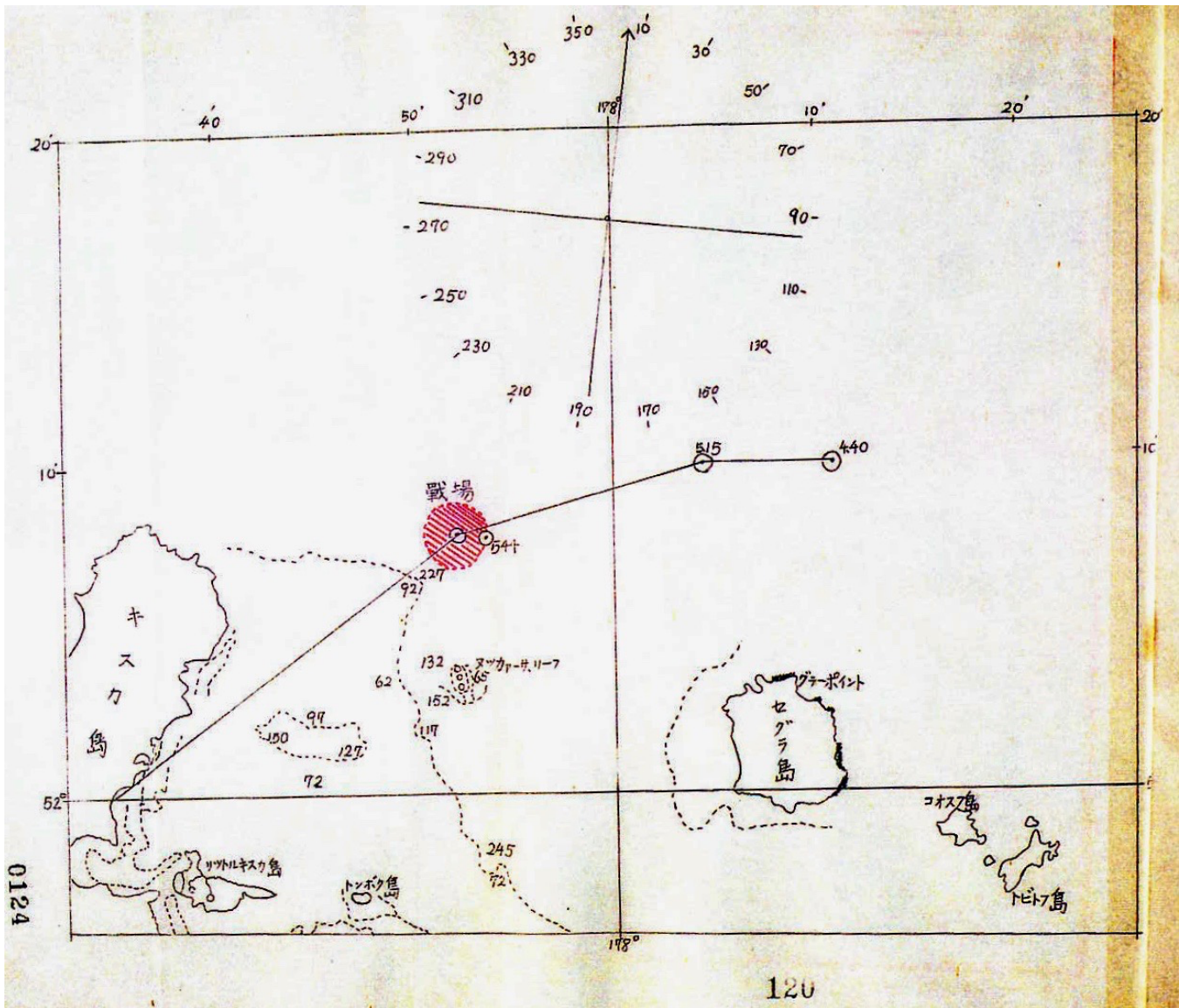
5:30: *A friendly seaplane fighter ditched near us. We picked up the plane and the pilot. The pilot was so young, a new graduate from the air school and almost the same age as my son. I was impressed by his intention to do his duty in the Northern sky. It was fortunate that our ship saved him. I was so glad that we could help him. That evening the fog was still dense, and we were on alert for an enemy submarine attack.*

17:15: *We began to maneuver in the open ocean, at 15 knots on a zigzag course, planning to enter Kiska harbor next morning.*

July 31, 04:40: *By early morning we were [northeast of] Kiska harbor but the fog was still dense. We were drifting and waiting. The fog became a little thin and we got our position by astronomical observation. We confirmed the altitude and latitude and fixed the course toward the Kiska.*

05:15: *We were avoiding "MacArthur's reef" and were at 158 degrees and 12 nautical miles distance from Segula Island. We changed course toward 255 degrees.*

05:47: *Suddenly the signal master, First Sargent Wakisaka shouted. "Torpedo!"*



Seiichi Aiura drew this sketch map showing the location of the attack on *Kano Maru* by an unseen enemy submarine, July 30, 1942. Kiska Island is in the lower left side of the plan.

starboard fore!” I saw two torpedo wakes overlapped at 1000 starboard fore in the course crossing 45 degrees with us, and rapidly approaching. At once, I ordered “Full turn starboard.” As Kano Maru went fast and with the rudder hard right, the ship changed the course rapidly toward right. I prayed to God and got tense for a few second. That was the most intolerable moment in my life. One torpedo wake passed aft the stern. We could avoid it, but other one hit the machinery room starboard side. There was a large explosion and sound occurred that was like a rumbling of the hell ground.

At the same time the main engine, instead of its usual rhythmical sound, turned over two or three times and stopped. I was shocked by the force from the bottom and unconsciously seized the handrail and the base of compass. In a moment the machinery room was flooded and the main engine lost power. We could not go anymore. The generator, radio communication equipment, and other auxiliary machines absolutely stopped. I was disappointed but there was nothing I could do. The crew and soldiers were not afraid and began to prepare vigorously for anti-submarine combat and attempted to launch the seaplane.

This time we found the periscope of the submarine at very near right fore. Immediately the 8cm gun and 13mm machine gun started shooting. The 8cm gun had less possibility to hit the submarine, but we thought the sounds of the gun were the only way to tell of the Kano Maru’s crisis to the Kiska base. The 13mm machine gun fire was useless against the sub under the water, but the splash aided the aim of the 8cm gun crew. Furthermore, the 8cm gun on the aft poop deck was disabled because of the heavy shock of torpedo explosion. The periscope that had been right fore, gradually moved to right aft.

05:57: From the right 157 degree 300m distance the sub shot second salvo. One torpedo wake line from right aft passed below the ship bottom at about the bridge. It did no damage. How lucky we were. We planned as the last resort to use the seaplane that we had picked up yesterday to transmit our crisis to the Kiska base. The plane was still hooked under the derrick.

The periscope sometimes appeared and moved from the stern to the portside.

***06:07:** From the left 135 degrees very near, the sub shot third salvo. Three torpedo wakes came toward us. Perhaps the sub shot the rest of the torpedoes in the tubes and intended to finish us. I gave up hope, thinking the torpedoes must finish Kano Maru. It was hard to breathe for more than 10 seconds. Two torpedoes hit! but nothing happened! One torpedo struck the bridge fore, No.2 cargo hold. But unexpectedly it didn't explode. It lost its head and the torpedo body floated on the water tail down and about 0.5m part dry. The next torpedo struck amidships portside, but it was also a dud. The last torpedo passed away off the stern of the ship. How lucky we are! I thank God for protection.*

***06:10:** Then we find the periscope at left 135 degree about 400m distance. Our forward 8cm gun and 13mm machine gun again started the fire. The sub kept the periscope up and moved calmly ignoring damaged Kano Maru. We clenched our fists but had no way to do anything. Then the sub seemed to begin to surface. The conning tower made a ripple on the surface and waves began washing the conning tower. I think the sub was unable to sink Kano Maru by torpedos (reloading the torpedo tubes take many minutes) so it intended to finish the Kano Maru with its deck gun, thinking that Kano Maru could not do it any harm. Just then a 8cm gun shot hit the washing wave, made water column and dull explosion sound. We saw the swell of heavy oil. The entire crew shouted 'BANZAI!'*

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In 2006, as we prepared to launch the search for *Grunion*, Commander John Alden, a noted submarine historian, cautioned that battle reports such as Aiura's were notoriously inaccurate and that distances in particular could be deceiving. But for the most part, Aiura's report would prove remarkably accurate. The washing wave, a shot from the 8 cm gun, a rod shooting up, a dull thud, and an oil slick are important observations, but we believe that the part of the report that describes seeing portions of the sub, i.e. the conning tower, was speculative, as



After being disabled by a torpedo from *Grunion's* first salvo, *Kano Maru* drifted and several days later was beached at South Cove, about a mile and a half from Kiska Harbor.
Frank Rosse Photograph, c. 1945



The search ship *Aquila* sits at anchor in Kiska Harbor in 2007. Scattered debris from sub chasers lies outside Kiska harbor. *Grunion's* resting place lies about ten miles north and east in the infinite distance.

it is inconsistent with other facts now known about the situation. In addition, we would come to a different conclusion about evidence of the rod, the dull thud, and the oil slick. Nonetheless, the location details of Aiura's first-hand account provided valuable primary evidence.

Examination of wreckage of the *Grunion* combined with analysis from a knowledgeable World War II submariner Cmdr. Charlie Tate, indicates that the most credible hypothesis is quite different from Aiura's. Tate believes that the submarine was not attempting to surface and that the sixth torpedo passed to the stern of *Kano Maru* and then circled back towards *Grunion*. Detected by the sonar operator, the sub would have been put in a hard dive in an attempt to avoid the incoming torpedo. It did not succeed. The torpedo struck, severely damaging the structure that holds the periscopes. Like the previous two torpedoes it was a dud. It did not explode. Evidence shows massive damage to the structure that holds the periscopes. The hypothesis is that the impact bent the structure severely, allowing powerful stream of frigid water into the control room which in turn prevented a leveling of the dive planes. The result was that the submarine's down angle rapidly increased and *Grunion* plummeted down, passing crush depth and imploded. The washing wave that the crew of the *Kano Maru* shot at was created by the air escaping from the imploded sub. Duds and circular torpedo runs are both characteristic of problems with the MK16 torpedo that were largely ignored by those in command until the fall of 1943.



Watercolor sketch of the wreck of USS *Grunion* made in 2008 by Jim Christley.

A Japanese Sub Chaser of the type that was in action at Kiska in 1942.



Kiska Harbor with WW II dock built by the American forces.

That day when your husband was KIA, we were going to do anti-submarine sweep because enemy submarines appeared in front of the harbor. Minoru Matsushima

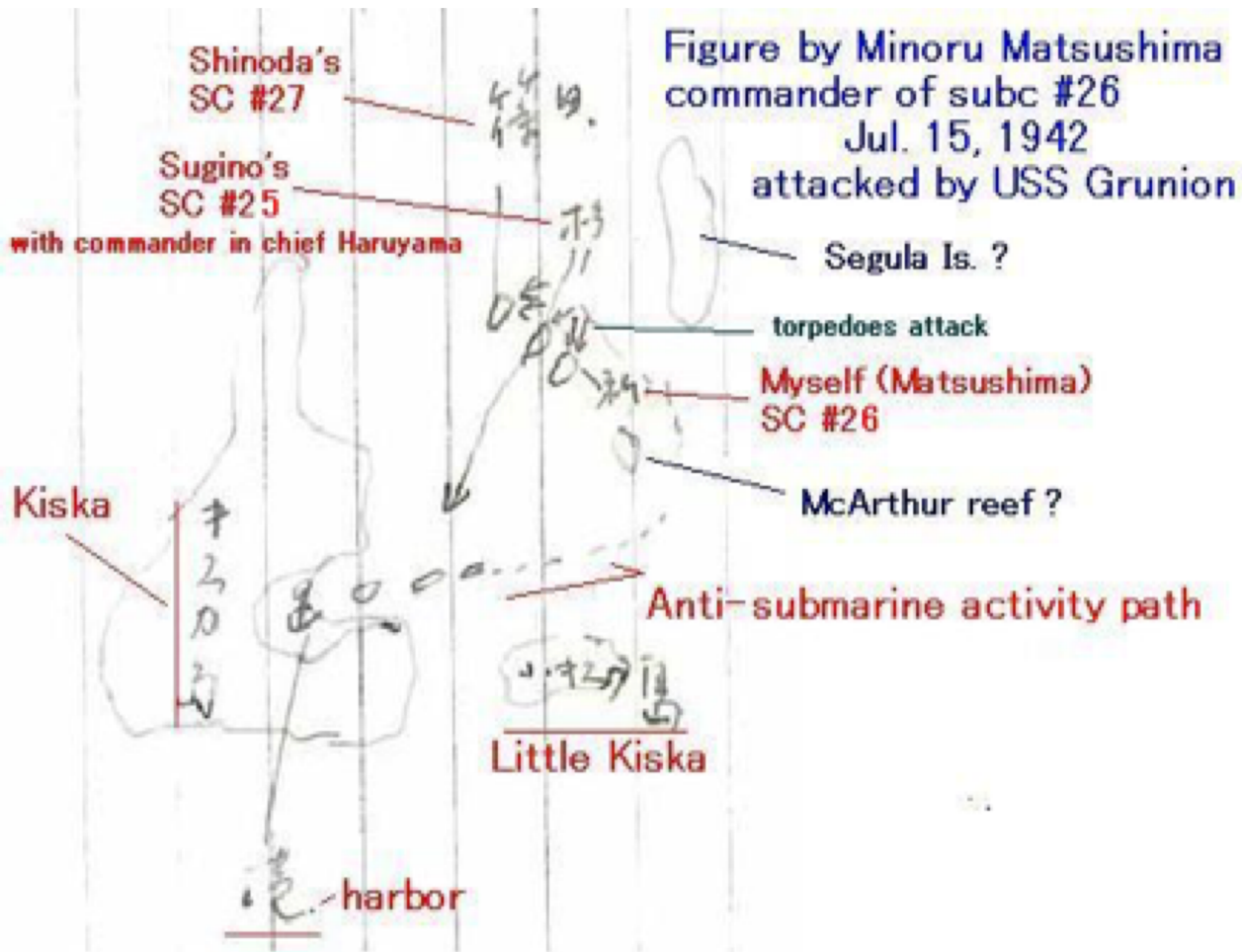
“friend and foe alike at the North Sea under falling ice”

In a reflective letter, written shortly after the Japanese war trials in 1946, Minoru Matsushima, commander of Sub Chaser #26, described *Grunion*'s attack on the sub chasers on the morning of July 15 (U. S time). His letter to Chiyo Shinoda, wife of Isamu Shinoda, commanding officer of the Sub Chaser #27, provides a full contemporary description of the attack from a Japanese navy officer's perspective, the second of two instances where we have an authentic voice to describe the war-time events connected to *Grunion* during that first Aleutian Patrol. In Matsushima's letter, which we did not see until 2008, we hear the human voice of “the enemy” and experience brutal events from a different perspective. His words “friend and foe alike at the North Sea under falling ice” and his prayer for peace resonate over time.

To Mrs. Chiyo Shinoda from Minoru Matsushima

How are you since my last letter? There are such rapid change in our society in these last 2 or 3 years that we never expected. We, all had been upset and lost any thought, but after long days we have recovered calm mind a little. Those who lost their husbands must have renewed the thought when hear the words 'defeated war' or 'demobilization.'

I also remember the days when I trained with deceased Mr. Shinoda at SAEKI to KURE, then we departed to war front vigorously. That day when your husband was KIA, we were going to do anti-submarine sweep because enemy submarines appeared in front of the harbor. It was Mr. Sugino's turn on the duty so his vessel had already departed. Mr. Sugino (sub chaser #25) departed first. My ship (#26) and Mr. Shinoda's (#27) were tied side by side. At 8:00 am we joined up with Mr. Sugino (#25) and made an anti-submarine sweep. As we entered the final course, I saw a horrible water column envelop #25. I was astonished. Mr. Sugino's ship disappeared. I saw three torpedoes coming towards my ship, and turned away at high speed. I watched as yellow smoke and fire by explosion enveloped Mr. Shinoda's ship. We found only an oil slick and no remains. We search until sunset and the next day the same. Our vessels were small craft loaded with gunpowder and ammunition. They exploded instantly and sunk with all hands lost.



Matsushima had made this sketch of the attack by USS *Grunion* on the three sub-chasers— numbers 25, 26, and 27. Notations in red, were made by Yutaka Iwasaki. Matsushima’s graphic description of the action added credibility to the story, telling heretofore unknown details about *Grunion*’s first war patrol.

“...our three vessels were torpedo attacked at this Figure’s position. Only my ship could escape.”

We search until sunset and the next day the same. Our vessels were small craft loaded with gunpowder and ammunition. They exploded instantly and sunk with all hands lost.

That morning my ship and Shinoda's were tied side by side until 7:30 a.m., and we had talked that let us have a rest at HOKKAIDO hot spring on our return trip to homeland. At 8:00 a.m. we had departed and the three vessels joined together. After we had continued anti-submarine sweep, we made transverse formation and entered toward the final course [perhaps to the harbor] just when Sugino's [#25, middle position] was enveloped by horrible water column. After the water column disappeared, also the Sugino's no more can be seen. I could think nothing but astonished, at the same time I saw Shinoda's [#27, most right] was enveloped by yellow smoke, also three torpedoes came toward my ship closely. I had escaped with full speed and watched Shinoda's. I saw the fire by explosion enveloped his ship again from bow direction. After I had escaped from the torpedoes, I returned to both ships sunk position to rescue the survivors. But I saw only a little oil, no wood chips nor dead body. The search until the sunset was vain. Next day was the same. Our vessel was small craft with full of gunpowder and gun bullet, so the torpedo hit lit instant fire and sunk with all hands immediately.

At those days everyone were puppet operated by a professional soldier drunk with dream, under the slogan 'We will win and win, these are crusade and crusade.' And we have needlessly lost husbands and parents, country be perished, given incomparable war disaster to the human in the world. Truly the crusade was not crusade, it is very and very regretful that the dead had passed away like a dog as result. The Military Tribunal reveals the behavior of the military authorities, that let the deceased be regretful. Though, Mr. Shinoda did his best and achieved his ordered mission. Even though the war was not the crusade. Above is the situation of those days. I suppose, now they both friend and foe alike at the north sea under falling ice, must be hoping the peace and reconstruction of home country, also praying the fortune of families, are smiling how we were so unwise that fought such war.

I wish you will be vigorous for your children. Now, it will be getting cold. Take care of your health. My wife also wants to send her best regards to you.



Yutaka Iwasaki (wearing a *Grunion* ball cap), Kazuo Shinoda and his mother Chiyo on Chiyo's 100th birthday.

Epilogue: Kiska Petals

The search for *Grunion* culminated in the depths of the Bering Sea in the summer of 2007, but the story did not end there. In a parallel effort, we also found family members for all of *Grunion*'s 70-man crew, answering for all the haunting questions about *Grunion*'s disappearance. Equally important, we would find that the legacy of our search would reach around the world, the effort, in John Abele's words, "humbling." Yutaka first opened the door to a world we did not know, enabling the epic search for *Grunion* and helping to tell the story in Japan. Because of stories in the Japanese press, the Shinoda family would discover us, an event that can only be felt as a "grace note" to the terrible dirge of war. We would get to know Kazuo Shinoda and his mother, Chiyo, wife of Isamu Shinoda and the story of "kiska petals." From Matsushima's letter to Chiyo, we would learn how the lives of the Shinoda family and the Abele family collided in a fateful moment on July 15, 1942. Survivors of those united in death, we would find compassion and friendship. As Yutaka had bridged the chasm of war to set us on the path to finding *Grunion*, the sons of Catherine Abele would send fresh petals from Kiska to the wife of Isamu Shinoda. That is the story of "Kiska Petals."

We first learned of the Shinoda family from Takuya Asakura, a reporter from a Japanese newspaper *The Asahi Shimbun*, who sent the following email shortly after the *Grunion* Family Memorial in Cleveland in October 2008.

Dear Bruce,

*I recently had a contact by a Japanese man whose father was a commander of submarine chaser No. 27 of the Japanese Imperial Navy, which was sunk by the USS *Grunion*.*

Mr. Kazuo Shinoda, 75, said he received a letter after the war from the commander of sub chaser No. 26, who managed to survive the battle, which described detail of how the battle was like and how his father died. He said he did not find my article until recently. He was interested in writing you e-mail but seems to hesitate doing so because of his poor English.

Just to inform you of this wonderful relationship you have made.

Takuya's email was almost as surprising as Yutaka's first contacts in 2002. Yutaka was



Chiyo Shinoda and Kazuo, 1935



Isamu Shinoda and Kazuo, 1941.

I send flowers of this place to you with my heart.
From “husband at war front.”



equally surprised and began to correspond with Kazuo Shinoda. He followed up with this message to Bruce.

Hello Mr. Abele

I have received e-mail from KAZUO SHINODA, son of sub chaser No.27 commander. He is age 75, and marvelously his mother, widow of captain ISAMU SHINODA is alive and fine at age 97. He is retired engineer of IHI (Ishikawajimaharima heavy industry), designer of oil hydraulic machine. Also he lives in GIFU prefecture where my parents live. His home is about one and half hours car ride from my house. He had printed a booklet before, "My father's memory"; in it the letter from sub chaser #26's commander is included. He is going to send the booklet to me. As soon as I get the article, I will send to you the translation. Also, this month or next, I will visit Mr. SHINODA (when I visit my parents) and interview with him. He is hoping to communicate with US bereaved families not to forget his father and crews.

Sincerely Yutaka Iwasaki

“My Father’s Memory” recounts details of Isamu Shinoda’s youth and his Naval service; Kazuo’s youth, the strength of his mother, and the suffering of the Japanese people during the war. “My Father’s Memory is online at http://www7a.biglobe.ne.jp/~navy_yard-iwa/KiskaPetals.html (In quotations from this and other documents translated from Japanese, I have preserved the sometimes uneven rendering of the English translation, in part because stopping to think about the words often leads to deeper feeling for what is being said.)

Of special interest are two letters from “husband at war front” to his “dear wife Chiyo” that tell of Isamu’s love for his family and for his country, and of the Kiska petals.

May 28, 1942.

Today is tenth day we had been apart...I am very fine and full of fighting spirit. This letter possibly will become the last letter, but never mind...Please pray for me to have much military fortune. Now I have...nothing but the self-devotion to our country...

July 7, 1942

Tomorrow it will be just one month since I came here...This island was chilly and covered with pure white snow cap when I arrived...now is surround by bright fresh green grass full of flowering plants, white, yellow and red-purple...This beautiful landscape is the

only pleasure for us...It is prohibited to write any details...I shall tell you only I am safe and end this letter...When you have time, let me know how the children are...

Tell KAZUO to study much. I send flowers of this place to you with my heart.

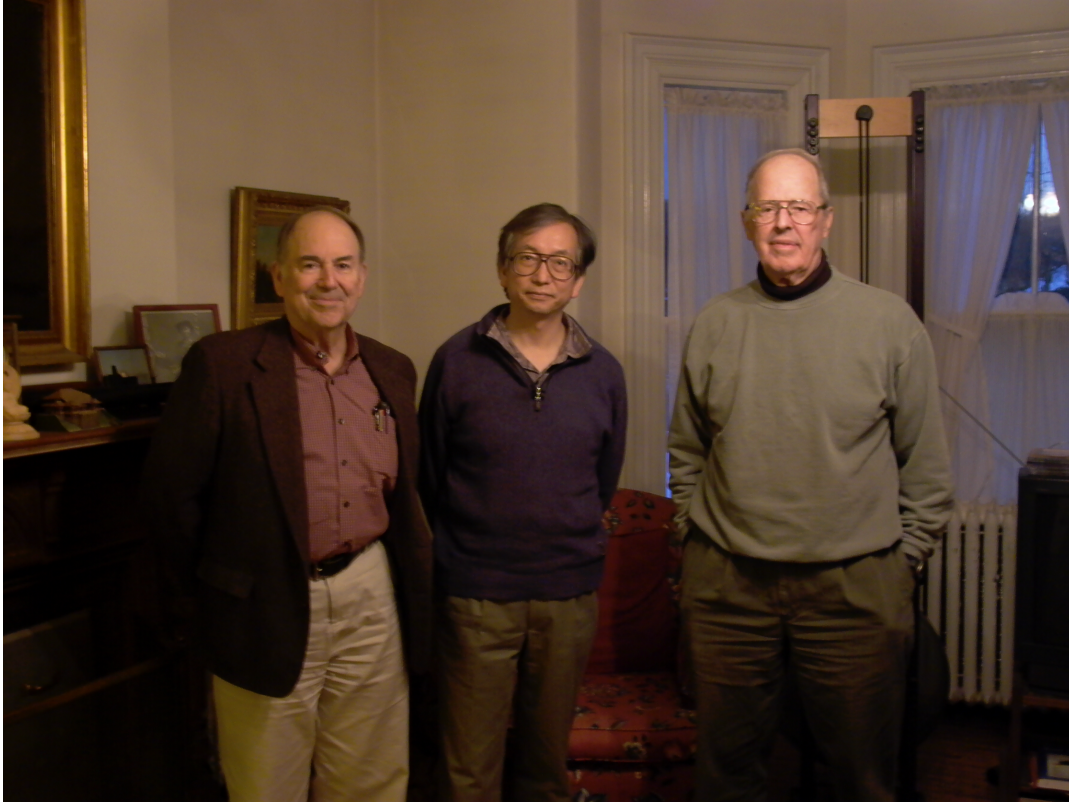
Kazuo did study “much.” He graduated from university and played his part in the rebuilding the homeland, while creating a respected place for himself and family in the community. Chiyo, who lived to celebrate her 100th birthday in 2011, preserved and treasured the “flowers of this place.”

In the memoir, Kazuo goes on to consider Matsushima’s comments about the needless loss of “husbands and parents,” the “destruction of the homeland,” and the “incomparable disaster” to humans around the world. Kazuo agreed “that the war must make human unhappy” and says that “we have a duty to hand down to our descendants that the peace of the world and peace of the human are incomparable high and must be kept.”

As Isamu went off to war, he told the family “If I meet unexpected fate I would guard all of you from the heaven.” Isamu was a guiding presence in Kazuo’s life. And in concluding the memoir, Kazuo said “I have no suitable word to thank to my mother...(she) was helped by relatives, and brought up three children. Now she has seven grandchildren and one great-grandchild. I wish she may live long and happy...”

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In 2002, no one could have imagined how this story would unfold.



**Yutaka Iwasaki, with John and Bruce Abele in Newton, MA,
January 2008.**

Dear Mr. Abele,

*Before I was virtual member of this effort....But now after visit to Boston I feel I
become substantial member collaborating with many other Americans. I feel I can
do something and I must do.*

Sincerely,

Yutaka Iwasaki

Appreciation

Yutaka Iwasaki laid the ground work
for this remarkable odyssey
and with his help we became wiser beyond measure
about the potential of the human spirit.



Kiska Island 1942 and 2007.

Half hidden, stone steps lead to the site of a Shinto shrine built during the brief occupation by the Japanese. Rusting artifacts of war litter the island, and unseen, lost ships and a submarine, lie outside Kiska Harbor and in the deep waters of the Bering Sea. The flowers of the brief Alaskan summer—Kiska petals—bloom every summer in the wild and deserted place.

This shrine was built by the Japanese on Kiska Island in 1942. *Life Magazine*, September 1943.



“Kiska petals.”





Occasional visitors have the rare opportunity to visit Kiska. They search for meaning in the scrapheap of war as nature heals the scars.



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