

= Ralph Waldo Christie =

Ralph Waldo Christie ( 30 August 1893 ? 19 December 1987 ) was an admiral in the United States Navy who played a pivotal role in the development of torpedo technologies . During World War II , he commanded submarine operations out of the Australian ports of Brisbane and Fremantle .

A 1915 graduate of the United States Naval Academy , Christie served on a variety of warships beginning with the battleship New Jersey in 1915 . He was trained in torpedo design and implementation and became one of the first members of the Submarine School at New London . In 1923 Christie graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology with a Master 's degree in Mechanical Engineering , specializing in torpedoes . During the 1920s , he was involved with project G @-@ 53 , a highly secret program to develop a magnetic influence exploder for torpedoes . The result of this was the development of the Mark 6 exploder and the Mark 14 torpedo . Christie also developed a design for an oxygen torpedo , designated project G @-@ 49 or " Navol " .

After the United States entered World War II , Christie was posted to Brisbane and commanded submarine operations during the Solomon Islands campaign . He then returned to the U.S. as Inspector of Ordnance at the Newport Torpedo Station . In January 1943 , Christie returned to Australia as commander of submarine operations in Fremantle . Despite growing evidence of problems with the Mark 6 exploder and the Mark 14 torpedo , he remained convinced of their effectiveness . During 1944 , he accompanied war patrols on the submarines USS Bowfin and USS Harder . In November 1944 , Christie was relieved of command of submarine operations at Fremantle by Vice Admiral Thomas C. Kinkaid and returned to the United States , where he commanded the Puget Sound Navy Yard . He retired from the Navy in August 1949 with the rank of vice admiral .

= = Early career = =

Ralph W. Christie was born in Somerville , Massachusetts on 30 August 1893 . He graduated from the United States Naval Academy in 1915 and served on a variety of warships beginning with the battleship New Jersey . Aboard the cruiser Montana in 1916 , he was trained in torpedo design and implementation . Christie was one of the first students of the Submarine School at New London . He went on to command the submarines USS Octopus in 1918 , USS R @-@ 6 in 1920 , USS S @-@ 1 in 1923 and USS S @-@ 17 in 1924 . Christie served as Commander , Submarines at Cavite from 1925 to 1926 . In 1923 , he graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology with a Master 's degree in Mechanical Engineering , specializing in torpedoes .

= = Development of the Mark 6 magnetic exploder = = =

In 1922 , as Christie was completing his graduate studies , the Bureau of Ordnance initiated project G @-@ 53 , a highly secret program to develop a magnetic influence exploder for torpedoes . In the summer of 1926 , Christie became intimately involved in the project , and was substantially involved in the technical development of the weapon system . By 1926 , the exploder was far enough advanced to permit its first test . On 8 May , the obsolete submarine USS L @-@ 8 was used as a target , and destroyed with an influence torpedo . Despite this early success , the influence exploder , which would become the Mark 6 , needed significant refinement .

Christie urged the Navy Department to allocate a target ship for extensive field tests of the torpedo and exploder . The Chief of Naval Operations authorized the use of the obsolete destroyer USS Ericsson , but placed so many restrictions on its use , Newport was forced to decline the offer . As a result , neither the Mark 6 exploder nor the Mark 14 torpedo ever underwent a live test , and their shortcomings would not become apparent until the outbreak of hostilities . It would be twenty months before the problems were corrected , over Christie 's objections .

= = Development of the oxygen torpedo = = =

During the 1920s and 1930s , Christie carried out experimental work on an oxygen torpedo with the Ordnance Laboratory , in Alexandria , Virginia . Designated project G @-@ 49 or ? Navol ? , this torpedo used hydrogen peroxide instead of compressed air . Christie ? s design had the experimental torpedo propel a 500 lb ( 230 kg ) warhead at 50 kn ( 93 km / h ; 58 mph ) to a maximum range of 15 @,@ 000 yd ( 14 @,@ 000 m ) . The Navol design was subsequently designated Mark 16 for submarines and Mark 17 for surface ships . The hydrogen peroxide system was test fitted to a Mark 14 torpedo in the mid @-@ 1930s , where Christie ? s design propelled a 500 lb ( 230 kg ) warhead to a range of 16 @,@ 500 yd ( 15 @,@ 100 m ) at 46 kn ( 53 mph ; 85 km / h ; 53 mph ) .

Despite the promise of the design , many operational officers were opposed to the use of volatile hydrogen peroxide aboard ship . Ultimately , the Mark 16 went into limited production while work on the Mark 17 was suspended in 1941 , but resumed in 1944 . Admiral Ernest King favored focusing research efforts on electric torpedoes so work on the oxygen system was downgraded . As such , the U.S. Navy made no combat use of the oxygen torpedo design during the Second World War .

By May 1938 , Christie was head of the Torpedo Section at BuOrd and involved in providing torpedoes to the fleet . He would take command of Newport Torpedo Station in 1943 , shortly before the death of Admiral Robert English on 21 January 1943 .

= = = Other pre @-@ war assignments = = =

In 1939 , Christie was given command of Submarine Division 15 , consisting of all six Salmon @-@ class submarines . By 1941 , Germany and the United Kingdom were engaged in the Battle of the Atlantic . Although the United States was neutral , President Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered the U.S. Atlantic Fleet to enforce the Neutrality Patrol to assist UK @-@ bound convoys . As part of secret agreements with Britain , the United States agreed to provide the former with submarines under Royal Navy control , should America enter the conflict . Admiral Richard S. Edwards , Commander , Submarines , Atlantic Fleet ( ComSubLant ) , selected the now Captain Christie as tactical commander for the proposed submarine force in British waters . Christie wanted the new Tambor @-@ class submarines to be assigned to the Atlantic Fleet , but was overruled by Admiral Harold R. Stark , who selected the older S and Barracuda classes instead . As war seemed increasingly likely toward the end of 1941 , Christie placed his boats on full war footing .

= = World War Two service = =

= = = Brisbane = = =

At the outbreak of the Pacific War , remnants of the United States Asiatic Fleet fled to Australia , on orders from Washington . The S @-@ boats from the Philippines were organized into a fighting force at Brisbane , and Admiral Ernest King ordered S @-@ boats from the Atlantic Fleet to supplement the force in Australia . Christie went along , arriving in April 1942 , just in time for the Battle of the Coral Sea . During the Solomon Islands campaign , he ordered his boats to patrol around harbors which , while being key points for shipping , also tended to be heavily patrolled by aircraft and anti @-@ submarine craft . In step with then @-@ current U.S. Navy submarine doctrine , he made capital ships the prime targets , rather than have his boats focus on merchant shipping .

Almost as soon as the war began , submarine captains indicated there were problems with the Mark 14 torpedo and the influence feature of the Mark 6 exploder . Torpedoes would fail to explode , or explode prematurely . Despite these reports , Christie was not fully aware of the impact of the situation , because his S @-@ boats used the older Mark 10 torpedo , with a contact @-@ only pistol . Christie acknowledged Mark 14s were running deeper than set , but attributed the failures to poor maintenance and errors on the part of the captain and crew . He was convinced the Mark 6 was satisfactory , and ordered all fleet boats to continue to use it . In November 1942 , Christie was ordered to return to Newport as Inspector of Ordnance at the Torpedo Station . Newport had

become a bottleneck for torpedo manufacture , and the Bureau of Ordnance wanted to advance development of the Mark 18 electric torpedo . Christie resisted leaving his command at Brisbane , but was considered of more use to resolve the torpedo issue . He was replaced by Captain James Fife . For his service at Brisbane , Christie was awarded the Legion of Merit .

Christie was promoted to rear admiral as part of his move back to Newport . In January 1943 , however , Rear Admiral Robert English , Commander , Submarines , U.S. Pacific Fleet , was killed in a plane crash . Christie hoped to get the position but the job went to Rear Admiral Charles A. Lockwood , commander of submarine operations in Fremantle , and the Bureau of Personnel selected Christie to take over Lockwood 's old command . Christie lobbied Vice Admiral Arthur ' Chips ' Carpenter , Douglas MacArthur 's Commander Allied Naval Forces , to allow him to replace Fife as commander of the larger submarine force at Brisbane . Carpenter refused , and Christie went on to Fremantle . Nevertheless , Christie continued to try for some time to take the Brisbane force under his control .

By the middle of 1943 , Lockwood had received enough reports from submarine officers to convince him the Mark 6 was significantly flawed . On 24 June 1943 , he formally ordered all submarines operating out of Pearl Harbor to deactivate the magnetic influence feature . However , Christie was still committed to the exploder , and ordered Fremantle boats to continue using the influence feature . Submarines operating between the two commands were required to either enable or disable it , depending on which command area they were in . This difference of opinion strained relations between the two admirals .

In November 1943 , Carpenter was replaced by Vice Admiral Thomas C. Kinkaid , who ordered the final deactivation of the Mark 6 in all combat commands . Christie abided by the order , commencing on 20 January 1944 , but was still convinced the Mark 6 had potential . He had Commanders Chester Nimitz , Jr. and James McCallum continue technical studies of the Mark 6 and to develop improvements , but these revised exploders were just as unreliable as the earlier versions .

= = = Fremantle = = =

It was common for Christie to greet a returning submarine at the pier , and to award decorations to the crew on the spot . This bypassed naval award boards , and annoyed Kinkaid and Lockwood , possibly because confirmation of sinkings was accomplished by Ultra , the reading of coded Japanese radio traffic , and news of awards given so quickly could constitute a security breach . Complicating the matter was the fact MacArthur awarded army decorations to naval personnel ; like Christie , he took it upon himself to authorize the decorations rather than to go through the standard review procedures . These events compelled Kinkaid to forbid Christie to give pierside awards , and to keep Christie from recommending the award of army medals to navy personnel . These events would ultimately contribute to Christie 's dismissal as Commander of Submarines in Fremantle .

In early 1944 , Christie decided he wanted to make a war patrol and selected to ride with Walt Griffith in USS Bowfin . The admiral joined the boat on 29 January 1944 and , during the patrol , conducted standard duties such as standing watch . He departed Bowfin after an active 29 @-@ day patrol . In June 1944 , Christie decided he wanted to make a second patrol , and selected USS Guitarro . However , that boat was having engine troubles , so Christie decided to go in USS Harder , commanded by Samuel D. Dealey . Dealey had just finished up Harder 's epic fifth war patrol , in which he was credited with sinking five Japanese destroyers ( reduced post @-@ war to three destroyers ) . Despite the fact the crew was exhausted , Dealey agreed to extend his fifth patrol and take Christie on board . When Harder returned to port on 3 July 1944 , Christie was concerned about its commander . Dealey was one of the leading submarine skippers but , having completed five war patrols , he was showing signs of strain . The admiral believed Dealey should step down from command of Harder , but Dealey felt he should make one more patrol before leaving the boat .

After Christie 's return from his second combat patrol , Admiral Chester Nimitz recommended he and Lockwood meet in Brisbane and discuss joint submarine operations . During the visit , Lockwood and Christie discussed technical issues , as well as the establishment of advanced bases in Mios Woendi and Saipan . However , the meeting also resulted in some kind of personal rift

between the two men . They had already clashed over the Mark 6 exploder and the Mark 14 torpedo , and some of Lockwood 's staff believed Christie 's ride in Harder was a risky and unnecessary stunt . After meeting with Lockwood , Christie met with MacArthur and related the events of Dealey 's fifth war patrol to the general . MacArthur then decided to award Dealey a Distinguished Service Cross , and Christie the Silver Star . Additionally at this meeting , Christie found out his earlier recommendation for an army decoration to Griffith had apparently been blocked by Kinkaid . Despite Kinkaid 's order regarding army decorations , MacArthur insisted on granting medals to the two men . Although Christie did not request the decorations , he was put on the spot and felt compelled to report the entire affair to Kinkaid . In the end , the general awarded the medals , displeasing Kinkaid .

On 5 August , Dealey took Harder out for a sixth patrol . His former executive officer , Frank C. " Tiny " Lynch , believed Dealey was mentally exhausted . Christie also had reservations , but Dealey seemed to recuperate while Harder was being refitted in port . The admiral therefore allowed Dealey to retain command . On 24 August , Harder was sunk with all hands off Dasol Bay . Dealey 's loss was a great shock to Christie , and the event worsened his relationship with Kinkaid . Christie recommended Dealey for the Medal of Honor for Harder 's fifth patrol and the supposed sinking of five Japanese destroyers . Kinkaid turned down the recommendation on the grounds Dealey had already received the Distinguished Service Cross for the same patrol . Christie was angered by this , and sent dispatches to Admiral Edwards , MacArthur , and Kinkaid himself . The radio dispatch to Kinkaid was sent in a low @-@ grade code that was easily decipherable ; it criticized Kinkaid and urged him to reconsider . The message was so blunt and public , it was viewed as bordering on insubordination .

In October and November 1944 , Christie received intelligence regarding German plans to operate a wolfpack of U @-@ boats in Australian waters . He directed Allied forces to detect and eliminate the threat , resulting in the Dutch submarine Zwaardvisch ( swordfish ) sinking U @-@ 168 on 6 October near Surabaya and USS Flounder 's sinking of U @-@ 537 on 10 November near the northern end of the Lombok Strait . Another U @-@ boat disappeared en route while a fourth , U @-@ 862 , evaded searchers to slip around the south coast of Australia and sink a Liberty ship south of Sydney in late December .

In November 1944 , Kinkaid relieved Christie of command of submarine operations at Fremantle , and assigned the position to Fife commencing 30 December . Although no specific reason was given , Christie was convinced it was because he pushed Kinkaid too hard for Dealey 's Medal of Honor , and for his process of awarding decorations in general . However , Christie 's losses , which included Dealey and Kinkaid 's nephew , Lieutenant Commander Manning Kimmel in USS Robalo in July 1944 , may have also influenced Kinkaid 's decision .

Christie returned to the United States , and went on to command Puget Sound Navy Yard . Now that he was no longer under Kinkaid 's command , Christie renewed his push to get Dealey awarded the Medal of Honor , this time by getting the endorsement for the decoration from MacArthur . The general agreed , and Dealey was posthumously awarded the medal .

= = Post @-@ war career = =

After the war , Christie attempted to get command of operations for Atlantic submarines , but that job went to James Fife instead . However , Christie was given command of naval forces in the Philippines . He retired from the Navy on 1 August 1949 , with tombstone promotion to the rank of vice admiral . He sold life insurance and dabbled in other ventures for some time . In his final years , he lived on the west coast of the United States and in Hawaii . Christie died in Honolulu , Hawaii on 19 December 1987 at the age of 94 . His wife , LaRene , joined him at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific following her death on 31 May 2002 . His papers are in the Library of Congress .