

NOVA: Killer Subs in Pearl Harbor

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01/07/10 — By Robin Rowe

The Season 37 premiere of NOVA dives beneath the waters of Pearl Harbor to trace the mystery of Japan's secret weapon of WWII: the midget submarine, tonight on PBS **** four stars

Killer sub bow torpedo tubes and Pisces V submersible

– “It carried two type 97 Long Lance torpedoes specially made

for this midget sub,” says Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force commander Masanori Andou. A hit from a Long Lance torpedo, about twice the size of torpedoes dropped by the Japanese aircraft that bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7th, 1941, would not merely sink a battleship. It would turn it upside down.

At the start of World War II, the Japanese Imperial Navy sent five midget submarines to attack ships at Pearl Harbor. Four were captured or destroyed by American forces. “The fifth one was a mystery,” says NOVA expedition leader and historian Park Stevens. “Historians differed on what it could have done or where it ended up.”

The area three miles outside Pearl Harbor is an underwater museum of WWII debris. “We found wrecks of airplanes and vehicles and pier parts and lots of junk,” says NOAA/HURL director of operations and submariner Terry Kerby. He also noticed what looked like a sunken submarine's conning tower. Kerby had discovered the wreck of a midget submarine, but was it mysterious submarine #5 of the December 7th attack or one of many later submarines?

“Technically speaking, the Japanese midget subs were far superior to their counterparts produced by British, German and Italian navies,” says Nation Defense Academy of Japan historian Haruo Tohmatsu.

With a top speed of twenty knots, they were twice as fast as American submarines. The midget subs had electric motors only, not the diesel engines of larger WWII submarines.

Japan’s secret weapon submarines were so secret they were produced in sections and assembled later. Japan would eventually produce hundreds of them. After being released from the back of a larger submarine near an enemy coast, the midget submarine sneaks its way through anti-submarine nets using net-cutters then attacks ships as sitting ducks in the harbor.

Severed into three pieces and in 1,200-foot-deep water outside of the harbor, closer inspection would be necessary to determine if this was the long lost sub. Why had it come to rest so far from the harbor? What had happened to its two-man crew?

In this 1-hour television program, NOVA’s team of expert investigators journey to the seafloor to explore the wreckage of the most mysterious of midget subs. Did this attack submarine and its two-person crew make it into Pearl Harbor and fire the ship’s two torpedoes? NOVA solves the puzzle with unprecedented access to the remains of the U.S.S. Arizona and other unique evidence of the Pearl Harbor attack, including aerial photos taken by Japanese aircraft and the accounts of U.S. and Japanese veterans who witnessed the attack.

A must see for those interested in history, secret weapons, submarines and fans of the NOVA series.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/killersubs/>

NOVA: Killer Subs premieres on January 5th on PBS at 8pm. Consult local listings.

When to watch this episode in Los Angeles:

* Tuesday, January 5 at 8:00pm KCET and KCET HD

* Thursday, January 7 at 9:00am KCET World

* Thursday, January 7 at 3:00pm KCET World

* Thursday, January 7 at 8:00pm KCET World

* Friday, January 8 at 1:00am KCET World

* Saturday, January 9 at 7:00am KCET World

* Saturday, January 9 at 7:00pm KCET World

* Wednesday, January 20 at 1:00am KLCS

Next week on NOVA, Building Pharaoh's Ship, researching an ancient Egyptian sea voyage 3,500 years ago, with an attempt to replicate and sail it.

Main image credits: NOVA

About the author:

Jeffrey Jolson is Hollywood Today founding editor-in-chief and a RushPRnews partner and contributor since 2006. Jeffrey, of the Al Jolson family, also founded HollywoodReporter.com and Grammy.com. Hollywood Today reporters have written for Vanity Fair, Rolling Stone, Forbes, Variety, The Hollywood Reporter, the New York Times, the Boston Globe, The San Francisco Chronicle, AP, E!, Popular Science and Popular Mechanics.

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