



“Overdue and Presumed Lost.” In World War II those were the most feared — and perhaps also most ambiguous — words the families of a submarine crew could hear.

On July 30, 1942, the USS Grunion was in the Aleutian Islands of southwestern Alaska. It was a new submarine on its very first war patrol. It reported “heavy antisubmarine activity,” was sent orders to head for the port of Dutch Harbor, Alaska, and was never heard from again. On August 16 it was listed as overdue and presumed lost. 70 crew members died.

And that would have been, as in too many other cases, the final, desperately sad end to the story, if not for the determination of some of the crew’s children — in particular, the sons of the Grunion’s commanding officer.

Lt. Commander Mannert Abele left behind three boys, Bruce, Brad and John, and they decided to search for the Grunion. Unlike most other families, they had the means to mount a search on their own; John Abele was co-founder of Boston Scientific, a well-known maker of medical devices.

The brothers did extensive research, talked to Japanese naval historians, and organized search expeditions. In 2006, using side-scan sonar, they located a wreck a mile down, off the island of Kiska, Alaska. Now the Pacific Command of the U.S. Navy has put out word confirming it is the Grunion.

“We hope this announcement will help to give closure to the families of the 70 crewmen of Grunion,” said Rear Adm. Douglas McAneny, Commander, Submarine Forces Pacific Fleet, in a statement.

But, of course, closure can be elusive. Brad Abele has passed away since the find was made. The Grunion was probably sunk by fire from a Japanese ship, but the Navy says it cannot confirm what happened. The wreck, like many others, will remain on the ocean floor.

The Naval Historical Center put out a statement that said in part, “no amount of analysis or speculation will change or alter the fact that families lost fathers, husbands, uncles and brothers...the Navy and the nation will always be grateful for their service and their sacrifice.”



USS Grunion in 1942
