

## USS Parche (SSN-683)

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**Sturgeon Class Attack Submarine:** Laid down, 10 December 1970, at Ingalls Shipbuilding Corp, Pascagoula, MS.; Launched, 13 January 1973; Commissioned, **USS Parche (SSN-683)**, 26 January 1974; *Parche* was decommissioned Oct. 20, 2004. Final Disposition, laid up at Puget Sound Naval Shipyard awaiting disposal through the NPSSRP (Nuclear Powered Ship and Submarine Recycling Program) at Puget Sound Naval Shipyard, Bremerton, WA.

The picture above of the USS Parche is the second United States ship to bear the name of the small, gorgeously colored, four-eyed butterfly fish, the chaetodon capistratus. Butterfly fishes are found among tropical reefs around the world but are concentrated in the Indo-Pacific oceanic region. Butterfly fishes are deep-bodied and thin from side to side, with a single dorsal fin and a small mouth with tiny, bristle like teeth. The butterfly fish mates for life and therefore you will often see two of them. The four-eye gets its name from the large, dark spot on the rear portion of the body.



This spot is surrounded by a brilliant white ring. This spot acts as a false eye. A black, vertical bar on the head runs down the true eye, making it nondescript. This may result in a predator confusing the back end of the fish for the front end. The four-eye's first instinct when threatened is to flee, putting the false eye spot closer to the predator than the head. Most predators aim for the eyes, and this false eye spot tricks the predator into thinking that the four-eye will flee tail first. When escape is not possible, the four-eye will sometimes turn to face its aggressor, head lowered and spines fully erect, like a bull about to charge. This may serve to intimidate the other animal or may remind the predator that the butterfly is much too spiny to make a tasty meal. Butterfly fishes usually frequent shallow inshore waters, where they feed on a variety of crustaceans and on coral polyps. The Parche is known for its uncanny ability for swimming in and around coral heads and reefs. The fish is able to find its way through the most intricate passages by swimming on its side or upside down.

Oil on canvas painting by the artist Jim Christley entitled "*Trailing*".

During the Cold War the US Naval Submarine Force was tasked with keeping tabs on Soviet Naval movements in particular, the Soviet Submarine Force. Submarines of the **Sturgeon Class** were well suited to this task and often trailed Soviet submarines for days reporting on their movements and recording noise signatures. In this image, such a trailing has turned into a close aboard encounter as a Soviet **Viktor III Class** has turned to port to check his baffles (to listen to see if anyone is immediately astern). A trailing **Sturgeon** has stopped his screw and gone quiet. Extending far behind the US submarine is its towed array sonar which assists in giving a clear picture of the ocean's acoustics

Photo & text courtesy of [subart.net](http://subart.net).



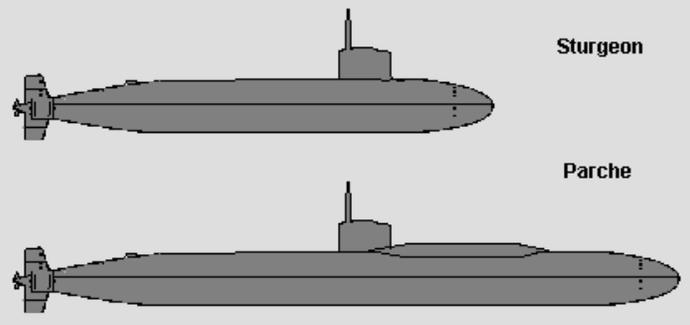
**Specifications:** Displacement, Surfaced: 3,640 t., Submerged: 4,640 t.; Length 302'; Beam 31' 8"; Draft 28' 8"; Speed, Surfaced 15 kts, Submerged 25 kts; Depth limit 1,300'; Complement 108; Armament, four 21" torpedo tubes amidships aft of bow, MK 48 Torpedoes, UUM-44A SUBROC, UGM-84A/C Harpoon, MK 57 deep water mines, MK 60 CAPTOR mines; Combat Sensors, Radar, BPS-14/15 surface search, Sonars, BQQ-5 multi-function bow mounted, BQR-7 passive in submarines with BQQ-2, BQS-12 active 7, TB-16 or TB-23 towed array, EW Systems, WLQ-4(V), WLR-4(V), WLR-9 ; Propulsion System, one S5W nuclear reactor, two steam turbines, one propeller, 15,000 shp.

The keel of the USS *Parche* (SSN 683) was laid in December 1970 at Ingalls Shipbuilding Division of Litton Industries, Pascagoula, Mississippi. USS *Parche*, namesake of one of the most highly decorated subs to serve in the Pacific Fleet during WWII, was commissioned in 1973 and served as a unit of Atlantic Submarine Force until 1976 before transferring to SUBPAC. Once arriving at its new homeport at Mare Island, California, *Parche* received ocean engineering modifications.

From 1987 to 1991, *Parche* began the extended overhaul at Mare Island Shipyard. The boat was refueled and modified for "research and development" -- adding a one hundred foot extension to its hull just forward of the control room and sail, to bring her total length up to just over 401 feet, and submerged displacement to 7,800 tons. The extended hull is readily noticeable when the submarine is surfaced. *Parche* resumed Pacific Fleet operations in 1992 with a new mission as part of Submarine Development Squadron 5, and was transferred to its new homeport at Naval Submarine Base Bangor, Washington in November 1994. *Parche* is scheduled to decommission in 2003.



The "research and development" function of the extended hull includes intelligence gathering and underwater salvage. Reportedly, the *Parche* can support covert intelligence-gathering operations similar to IVY BELLS and HOLYSTONE, and a remote grapple extended through a hatch in the submarine's keel can salvage relatively small items from the ocean floor (such as missiles, nuclear warheads, satellites, etc.) Like all the *Sturgeon*-class submarines, *Parche* is of ice-strengthened construction, with reinforced sail incorporating diving planes capable of pivoting 90 degrees (vertical) to avoid damage when the boat crashes through ice to surface. Besides her bow-mounted sonar (in that location to isolate it the maximum distance from her screw), she mounts short-range navigational sonars (both upward and forward facing) plus armored spotlights and closed-circuit television cameras for under-ice operations.



USS *Parche* (SSN 683) is the second United States ship to bear the name of the beautiful French butterfly fish. The first *Parche* (SS 384) was built in Portsmouth, New Hampshire and commissioned in 1943. One of the most highly decorated ships of the famous World War II Pacific Submarine Force (SUBPAC), she made six war patrols, earning five battle stars and two Presidential Unit Citation (PUC) awards. USS *Parche* (SS 384) was decommissioned in December 1948 and its proud name stricken from the naval records. The boat's conning tower and superstructure remain enshrined at Naval Submarine base, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

From: <http://www.fas.org/man/dod-101/sys/ship/ssn-683.htm>



A starboard beam view of the nuclear-powered attack submarine **Parche (SSN-683)** underway off San Diego, 1 Feb 1991.

The structure on the boat's aft section was a lock in-lockout chamber used to send divers out to tap Soviet undersea telephone cables. This was a highly classified operation called "*Ivy Bells*" and provided the U.S. government with invaluable intelligence on Soviet naval activities. The existence of this operation was revealed in the best selling book "*Blind Man's Bluff*" by Sherry Sontag and Christopher Drew. The Navy went to great lengths to keep this operation black, even to labelling the chamber "*DSRV Simulator*" in large letters to throw off observers as the boat left or entered port.

USN photo # DN-ST-91-05709, by PHC Jones, from the Department of Defense Still Media Collection, courtesy of dodmedia.osd.mil. & submitted by Bill Gonyo. Text courtesy of David Johnston (USN).

## USS PARCHE DECOMMISSIONING



## A silent warrior's final day

By Chris Barron, Sun Staff  
October 20, 2004

On a dark and gloomy rain-filled day, a shroud of secrecy permeated the air on the Bremerton waterfront.

It was the perfect setting for the final day in the top-secret career of the Bangor-based USS Parche, one of the world's most prolific spy submarines.

By the time its life ended Tuesday in a decommissioning ceremony at the Bremerton naval base, the Parche was the most highly decorated ship in Navy history - even though most Americans have never heard of it.

Commissioned in 1974, the Parche spent 30 years and 19 deployments as America's top espionage sub, reportedly tapping the undersea military communication lines of the Soviet Union during the Cold War, plucking lost Soviet weaponry from the ocean floor and gathering intelligence on other enemies afterward. The Parche (pronounced PAR-chee) was officially designated by the Navy as a "research and development" submarine. And it did plenty of that, testing new sonar and undersea warfare technologies. But its highly classified missions, none of which have ever been officially confirmed, are the most intriguing aspect of its history. Many of those missions were deemed to be of "vital importance to U.S. national security," earning the submarine an unprecedented nine Presidential Unit Citations. The vast majority of ships never receive even one.

For being the most decorated ship ever, shouldn't more people be made aware of what it accomplished? "Those that need to know, know," said a matter-of-fact Rear Adm. Ben Wachendorf, who commanded the Parche from 1988 to 1993. Wachendorf, now U.S. defense attach in Moscow, traveled from Russia to be at Tuesday's ceremony. "I wouldn't have missed it for anything," he said. "It means a lot to be able to say goodbye to an old friend." In fact, all but one of the Parche's nine former commanders were present at the Parche's decommissioning. In addition, about 130 former crew members, most belonging to the USS Parche Association, were on hand to witness the sub's inactivation.

Those who returned to see their sub one last time said it was not only the camaraderie of submarine life that made Parche special, but also the exotic and extremely challenging missions it completed, which often involved excruciatingly long periods spent submerged with dwindling food and supplies. "It's the end of the life cycle," said Manchester resident Will Longman, chairman of the Parche Association. "It's very meaningful. The camaraderie does not go away. And the uniqueness of Parche imparts its own special camaraderie. The Parche also was the last of the Navy's 37 Sturgeon-class fast attack subs to be deactivated - though it barely resembled any of the other ships of that class.

That's because its hull was extended by 100 feet to accommodate extensive classified modifications in a four-year stay at Mare Island Naval Shipyard near San Francisco in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In 1994, the Parche and its crew of 190 moved from Mare Island to Bangor. It had already earned six Presidential Unit Citations by that time and earned another three after its transfer to Bangor, including a ninth for its final deployment that ended in late September. The Parche's final resume also included 13 Navy Expeditionary Medals and 10 Navy Unit Commendations - all unprecedented numbers. "Parche has had a career unmatched in the annals of submarine history," said Rear Adm. Paul Sullivan, commander of the Pacific Fleet submarine force.

"Parche has gathered enough citations that are just truly remarkable .. based on her superb performance in critical national tasking. "She now ranks among the most legendary vessels to ever have sailed under our flag." Sullivan compared the Parche's storied past to other historic Navy vessels, such as USS Constitution, USS Monitor, USS Missouri and USS Nautilus. "And now there is Parche," he said. The ship figured prominently in "Blind Man's Bluff: The Untold Story of American Submarine Espionage," a nonfiction book published in the 1990s, which described how it spent its Cold War days spying on the Soviet Union.

It's also been reported the sub, with a claw-like device, was able to pick up lost Soviet missiles or bombs from the sea floor. Later, it reportedly deployed unmanned drones to complete many of the espionage tactics. Following the Cold War, the Parche continued its highly classified missions, with many observers citing an even higher sense of secrecy. It's said the Parche spent plenty of time in the Persian Gulf, gleaning intelligence on Iraq and Iran, and traveled through the Western Pacific keeping tabs on China and North Korea. Capt. Richard Charles, the Parche's first commander, traveled from Mobile, Ala., for Tuesday's ceremony. He took command while the sub was being built and went on its first deployment, a five-month journey in the Mediterranean Sea. After that, the sub transferred to the West Coast and began its spy missions a few years later. "Those guys in the Pacific had all the fun," Charles joked. "I just built it."

"It's always sad to see a ship retire, but after a while, they are like you and me; they wear out." Ironically, the name of the Parche's last at-sea commander, Capt. Charles Richard, was a mirror image of the sub's first. Richard was relieved in a change-of-command ceremony Tuesday after leading the Parche on two post-September 11th deployments, including one that lasted 122 days in 2002. "Being commander of this ship was an extraordinary experience and I was fortunate to be given the experience," he said. "I hope that each man who has served aboard this ship will look back and swell with pride knowing that he answered his country's call."

Following the ceremony, the Parche, probably one of the least known subs to the general public because of its highly classified missions, silently shifted over to Puget Sound Naval Shipyard. There, it will be torn apart and recycled over the next few years. And it's probably the first time in the Parche's history that its whereabouts will be known. "That just proves our success that nobody knows what we do," said Bremerton resident Curt Mathews, who retired off the Parche last year. "It's kind of fun. People say, 'The Parche? I never heard of it?' Well, that's good. "And we like it that way and that's why we were successful in all of our missions

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