

G H O S T B O A T

By Dan Gillcrist

The Discovery

Mark Casey made his way up the starboard ladder to the operations room from which the various contractors conducted their experiments and tests. He had a computer, a desk and a filing cabinet like the other seven guests on the ship. They were not members of the crew but paying passengers with some scientific purpose. Woods Hole, like several other institutions, had oceanographic research ships capable of blue water ocean activity, which were very expensive to operate. So, various institutions and manufacturers of oceanographic equipment and the like would share the costs of operating the ship so that they could conduct their particular open ocean activity.

After breakfast he would check his emails and then follow his plan for the day. Time was very costly in such an arrangement, so he typically put in 14-hour days. Since there was nothing else to do aboard this ship but eat, work and sleep, 14-hour days were the norm. Part of each day was often spent waiting and watching while other experiments were conducted.

On this cruise there were two men from Scripps Institution of Oceanography doing something involving the continental shelf which they could only do off the East Coast; a meteorologist from Stanford; three guys and a woman, sponsored by the Smithsonian, studying the effects of oil industry seismic exploration on marine mammals, and, of course himself. He had written new software for underwater remotely operated vehicles (ROVs), which he could only test at sea. He hoped it would improve both maneuvering and the use of the manipulator arms. His company made these vehicles, which were structurally and mechanically pretty effective, but a bit limited in their actual use. This naturally affected the Navy's and oil industry's interest. He thought he had figured out a way to make these ROVs, particularly the tethered ones, more effective through software modifications. His particular test day was two days away.

Several emails were from his girlfriend, some of it was spam and the last one was from his boss in Baltimore;

Mark. We have been requested, as a favor, to investigate what is presumed to be an object, which happens to lie on the bottom near your ship's course back to Norfolk. Our Navy friends at the Blockhouse have a location of what they believe to have been either an explosion, or an implosion. Their SOSUS hydrophones recorded, three days ago, something far exceeding their usual energy threshold. As you know, they record everything, but the stuff that exceeds the normal activity is flagged for closer scrutiny. They have eliminated all the usual suspects of maritime traffic blade counts, seismic sub-bottom profiling, etc. They lean toward an implosion at this point, which is probably more hunch than data. This event does not correspond to any Navy activity in the area of the sound. No submarines were in the area, and besides, all their boats are accounted for. There is a remote possibility that it was a foreign sub but they think that is doubtful. They ran the sound pattern against their data base profiles of all sorts of sounds, and the closest match was the sound from U.S.S. Scorpion imploding, which is a pretty grim thought when you think about it. I'm sure they never wanted to hear that sound again ☹.

What we need is a side scan sonar search to see if we can locate and then identify the source then let me know what develops. Do you think you can prevail on the Scripps people to help out on this one? Aren't they using side scan sonar for their project? I seem to remember that.

Get back to me so I can let our friends know what's up. They have been good to us and maybe they'll buy your new stuff.

Bob Patton

Mark thought how peculiar it was to have a boss like Patton who was phobic about being underwater and yet he was in a business associated with diving, ROVs, submarines and other underwater stuff. Personally, he would love to be a diver or operate a manned underwater vehicle – instead he had somehow gotten on the software tract. He thought there was practically not much difference between what he was doing and writing an accounts payable program for Eetna or State Farm Insurance. He was close to the action and yet miles away. The best lecture in his entire college career was about, of all things, debris fields given by a world-renowned oceanographer named Don Walsh. He could nearly recite the whole lecture – it was fascinating:

...debris fields are like a fingerprint of a disaster – the clues of what became of a sunken vessel. They are all different, yet they can tell us a lot about a sinking. Surface vessel's bulkheads are designed to withstand and hold back seawater at surface pressures. So when a surface vessel sinks, its bulkheads collapse at pretty shallow depths. The energy produced by the collapse spreads the compartment's contents around – throws it out into the surrounding sea where it all either floats up to the surface, or sinks to the bottom. In the case of a submarine, whose bulkheads are designed to withstand the considerable pressures of, say a depth of 900 feet or so, when they finally implode the energy released is huge. So, to begin with the first big distinction is the type of vessel that sinks.

Now when the contents of a compartment, which are heavier than water, start to sink, they sink at much different rates and that, Ladies and Gentlemen, is very significant. Take a T-shirt and a typewriter. The T-shirt is going to sink very slowly because it is not much heavier than water, plus it has a whole lot of drag. The typewriter is going to go down almost like a rock. The key to the debris field is how long the stuff blown out of the compartment is in the current in that particular area and at that depth. If the current is one knot, the T-shirt is going to be influenced by that current far longer than the typewriter. If you imagine the shirt taking maybe a week to sink to, say 10,000 feet depth, while the typewriter maybe took 45 minutes, you can immediately see that a debris field will have the lightest stuff with the most drag at the farthest point and the heaviest stuff closest to the hull itself. Keep in mind that there are often cross currents at different depths so the fields do not always end up in a straight line.

Many places in the ocean have particularly swift currents. Straits and other narrow places where water is always moving fairly fast, are going to have fields spread out in length. That T-shirt we talked about is going to be way out there and may not even be in the field at all. On the other hand there are places, particularly in very deep water, where the debris will sink uninfluenced by anything except time. The T-shirt and that typewriter will be in close proximity on the bottom. The only difference is that shirt will take much longer to arrive.

Mark sat back in his chair and stretched, remembering how interesting Walsh's lecture was. One of the things he missed on these trips was a good run. He was a triathlete and was

hooked on conditioning. Being at sea ten or twelve days threw his schedule off so much, that it took a few weeks to get back to normal. He thought to himself, 'I'll go find those two geeks from Scripps. They'll probably let me take a few passes at this 'object' with their side scan sonar. I'll have to bullshit them a bit, which shouldn't be too hard. What do they care? It's not going to cost them anything to let me use their gear. I can't believe they still use pocket protectors.' He started to laugh to himself. 'I wish it were that girl from the Smithsonian instead of these two. Man has she got legs. Damn! Those legs ought to be **IN** the Smithsonian instead of hanging off that outstanding tush she has working for her. Jesus! I've been at sea too long. How the hell do those sailors go to sea for so long anyway?'

Mark was surprised at how easily the two agreed to his use of their side scan sonar rig. He actually felt bad about his condescending thoughts toward them. It seems that part of their prior test was contaminated by something, and had to be done again anyway. "We've got to scan something, so it might as well be your 'object'. It will be fun, actually looking for something instead of just calibrating the equipment. We're actually on this afternoon. They squeezed us back into the schedule. Can we be over this thing this afternoon?"

Mark took his source's coordinates to the ship's master, told him the story so far, and asked if they would be over the source by mid-afternoon. The master did a quick look at the chart and said,

"Probably be about 1700 hours Mark. What are you going to need?"

"Ideally, I'd like to do a box search say, five miles by five miles. You know, just pass back and forth until we pick up the source."

"That's going to take more time than we've got. Can't you narrow it some? I'd agree to a three-mile box Mark. Will that do?"

By 2:30 AM Mark was feeling guilty about imposing upon the Scripps guys generosity with their side scan sonar. "God I feel bad about all this work you are doing for us. Can I do anything for you two? I really thought this would be a lot shorter search. Ten hours is a bitch. I'm really sorry."

"Hey, no problem. All we'd be doing is sleeping anyway. We got all our calibrating done hours ago though, but this is a good cause." The two Scripps guys just looked at each other leaving Mark with the impression that they'd rather be in their bunks than staring at a green screen when the one at the console shouted, "HELLO." On the side scan sonar display, the unmistakable image of a WWII submarine appeared. Mark had two small buoys ready and he quickly went to the port side and dropped one over the side and came back to look at the screen. He thought the image was remarkable. It was very clear and they had gotten lucky in that they were almost perpendicular to the sub's port side. It was also clear that the sub was sitting on the bottom nearly upright. Another thing, which was clear and unmistakable, was the damage to the after part of the sub. All three of them said almost simultaneously, "DAMN, that's unbelievable!" Mark's enthusiasm was understandable since he really didn't have too much experience with this sonar stuff, but he was impressed that the two 'geeks' were wowed by the image and he felt doubly bad about his disparaging thoughts about these two. He stepped out of

the room to the rail again and dropped the second buoy and headed for the bridge to inform the master. The buoys marked the course for the last pass.

“Hey, thanks so much you guys. Really, you were a lifesaver. I couldn’t ask for better images than we’ve got. Can I email them to my boss right away?” He was very excited and hoped Bob Patton would be in the office early. He wanted to dive on this sub and get real pictures of her and maybe try to look down a hatch or something. He didn’t have to wait long for a response to his email since Patton, ‘Ever the optimist’, had spent the night in his office

Mark. Nice Job! Those images are outstanding! I’m stunned! I didn’t know those things were that good. I have just forwarded your email and attached images to our friends. I think they may ask us to get up close and personal with your vehicle. Surely they will want to know which sub that was, or if it was maybe a U-boat and not one of ours. Film everything. Don’t hold back. Ask the captain if we can squeeze in some time. You can do it tonight since you don’t need natural light, particularly at that depth. If it goes well with your software, then you can blow off the scheduled tests tomorrow or whenever they are. Let me know what he says and if it will involve more money. I doubt it will since you won’t be using any more time really. Either way, I think we should explore the wreck. It will be a good test for your software anyway. Is the weather holding up?

Standby

Bob Patton

He was out on deck getting his vehicle prepared when Miss Smithsonian said,

“Hey Mark. I thought you were scheduled for tomorrow or the next day for that contraption.” She was smiling at her little joke,

“We found a WWII sub down there an hour ago! They rescheduled me for this evening. I can do what I do in the dark.” He thought he detected a little reaction and just a hint of a smile, which he found to be the most scintillating experience of the entire cruise. “You ought to look at those images. They are fantastic! Go ask the Scripps guys if they’ll let you look at them.” Mark smiled and stared at her tight Patagonias as she walked forward, and thought, ‘The chances that those two geeks from Scripps *would not* let a girl with a tush and legs like hers, particularly in today’s little grape colored Patagonia standup shorts number, see their images, would be measured in exponential terms.’

Back in Norfolk the phone rang in Bob Patton’s office,

“Patton.”

“This is Captain Hurlocker over at SubLant. Our mutual friend Commander Wilson forwarded the images to us since it was a submarine. Does your man out there have a deep submergence vehicle aboard? Oh, and what is the depth of the boat? We know generally, but I’d like to know specifically.”

“His other message said it was at 550 feet. He does have a vehicle aboard. In fact, that is why we are out on this trip, to test something. What do you want us to do here Captain?”

“Well, it’s surprising really. We all stared at the images and knew right away that it was a Gato class boat. There is a retired guy who works up here as a volunteer a couple days a week - a former Chief of the Boat. Anyway he looked at the images, and went into our little library. He came back within 20 minutes and told us it was *Cutterfish*. Can you imagine? Apparently there

were only four boats of that class with a particular modification, which we all missed entirely, but not this guy. The modification was clear in the images you sent. Two of the four boats survived the war and one was sunk off of Tulagi and - you guessed it - one was lost off the Mid-Atlantic coast in June 1942.”

“Jesus! That gives me the creeps. I don’t know how you guys go down in those things. It would scare the shit out of me! Has the Navy determined what made the sound you picked up?”

“The consensus is that the submarine sank in shallow enough water to have had a compartment survive. You know, not get crushed by the pressure. But after 50 years of corrosion, all that pressure, at that depth, finally caused the failure. Because of the lack of external damage forward, my guess is that one of the forward bulkheads failed as opposed to the pressure hull caving in. Had it been the pressure hull, the damage would have been very obvious in the side scan sonar images.”

“Captain, I’m going to go ahead and tell my man, his name is Mark Casey by the way, to do what he can to sort of confirm your deduction, shoot plenty of tape, look around and maybe bring back a memento from the debris field. Maybe you can send him a nice ‘Attaboy’ letter when this is all done. He’d love that.”

“I’ve got a better idea Bob. We’ll take the both of you for a ride on a fast attack boat. You know, a day trip out of Norfolk for some ‘angles and dangles’.”

“No thanks Captain. I believe I’ll be busy that particular day. But Mark would probably love to go.”

“I didn’t tell you which day we’d go out.”

“I know.”

The next email came in surprisingly fast. Mark couldn’t believe how this thing was taking on a life of it’s own;

Mark. Congratulations. This is really splendid work on your part and we are proud of you. I’ll tell you what. The Navy is about to pee their pants at your discovery. I told them you’d send down the ROV (Remotely Operated Vehicle) and have a look. I even told them that you might bring back a memento from the boat. Maybe the debris field will still have something, although it feels a bit morbid, knowing that there must be 80 or 90 guys on that thing. Incidentally they deduced what the boat’s name was, or rather is...I wonder how those guys view that stuff? U.S.S. Cutterfish is supposedly the name of the boat. See if you can confirm that although with 50 something years of saltwater, maybe you can’t. The good thing is that they can close the case on this sub. From your pictures, they’ll probably know just what sank her. That is a nice thing when you think about it. We’re directly helping all those families put some closure on the death of a loved one. Probably not too many loved ones left though. Too bad it took this long.

Part Two of this is to see if you can tell what imploded to made that big noise. I think they may have already figured it out. Sounds like an intact compartment finally imploded after all these years. I know that 550 feet is deeper than the test depth of those old boats, but knowing the government, it is probably less than their crush depth. I’ll bet you anything on that. The boat was hit by something obviously, but it evidentially had a compartment survive both the attack and when it hit the bottom. If you get enough tape, they’ll be able to figure out a whole lot. Nice work!

Bob Patton

Mark was at the controls of the ROV just inside the main workroom the contractors used, and liked what he was seeing of his new software. He had not used the manipulator arms yet, but the directional control was clearly better. He was thinking about just how he was going to go to the head, when he saw the submarine over to the right. The systematic search for the boat had taken four and a half hours. The first view was the after part of the boat, which seemed badly damaged. As he moved forward up the starboard side, he noticed that the rest of the boat was in surprisingly good shape. He thought it must have sunk by the stern, and when the stern struck the bottom the forward part of the boat probably slammed against the sand. There were some parts of that round tank-like things near the forward torpedo room, which had sprung out, but otherwise it looked pretty sound. As he passed the side of the bridge he looked for a hull number but could not tell anything visually. He got close and panned up and down the length of the hull twice. Then he did the same for the sail and bridge area. His plan was to exit the area after taping every single square inch of this sub, and then go back down the debris field if he could find it, and bring the vehicle back up.

For some reason he stopped the ROV and stared at the forward room upper hatch. He wanted to test the new software as it related to the manipulator arms and said to himself, ‘What the hell.’ With that, he positioned the arm so he could grab the dog wheel in the center of the hatch and tried to move it. To his surprise, it moved easily, so he kept doing it until the hatch appeared to pop up a bit. He positioned the opposing arm under the lip of the hatch and moved it to the vertical. Then he moved the vehicle around to the other side of the boat where he noticed there were no lifelines to get tangled in, and got close enough to actually look into what he thought was the escape trunk submariners used to get out of their boats in an emergency. He expected to see rust and destruction, but what he saw was orderly but moldy. The room below was obviously flooded otherwise he could never have opened the hatch but otherwise everything he saw looked orderly – nothing like he expected a blown up sub to look like. Then he noticed the rusting, once battleship gray, metal toolbox and he knew he had his memento. He reached into the bottom of the escape trunk, barely making it given the length of the arms, and very carefully picked up the toolbox. He had a very strange feeling, which reminded him of Harrison Ford in *Raiders of the Lost Arc*. A feeling that he had something very special and sacred.

A Chief Petty Officer met the Woods Hole research ship at the pier in the commercial port of Newport News, and boarded her as soon as the brow went over to the pier. He did not salute or perform any of the formalities of a Navy ship. He thought to himself, ‘These here are just a bunch of skimmers, and civilian skimmers to boot! Merchant ships give me the creeps. Full of goddamn foreigners. I can’t wait to get off this ship.’ Then he saw Miss Smithsonian in her khaki Patagonias and said, “Hmmm.” She had a tall civilian flat belly next to her with a toolbox that had to be what he came for.

“Chief Reader?”

“Yeah.”

“I’m Mark Casey. Here is the tool box and the *Cutterfish* log I told my boss about.” Reader took the toolbox and started back down the brow saying nothing, when Mark shouted out,

“Say, Chief. Take real good care of that log, will you?” Reader waved over his back and said “Yeah sure.” He got into the ‘duty, gray pickup truck’ with the serial number on the doors and took off back to where he was most comfortable...U.S. Navy property - The Submarine base at Norfolk, Virginia.

‘Greek’ Reader was a crusty Senior Chief Petty Officer who had been Chief of the Boat on three fast attack submarines. He had a little too much old navy in him to suit a majority of the Navy’s hierarchy. He was apolitical and suffered fools and incompetence poorly. ComSubLant liked him ever since they served together years ago on U.S.S.*Pogy*. When Reader’s name popped up for shore duty the Admiral made only one call and Reader was on his staff. Chief Reader’s desk was now located in the outer office of ComSubLant where he was in charge. The Admiral often sent him on missions he either wished to keep secret or errands he had to have done properly. The other staff officers depended on him as well, since they all knew that, as the ad said, ‘...if it absolutely, positively has to be there tomorrow, call Federal Express.’ They all just substituted Senior Chief ‘Greek’ Reader in place of that carrier.

Reader walked into the office and asked Commander Vandergrif, the Admiral’s aide, “Is the Admiral in Sir? He wanted me to show him this.” He held up the log not even slowing down.

“Yes Chief. Go ahead in he is expecting you.” Vandergrif smiled and shook his head and returned to shuffling papers.

“I got the log Admiral, and I got an idea of how to dry it out so you can read it. Can I tell you the idea Sir?”

“Let’s hear it Greek.”

“Well Sir, you mentioned having the city or the State Police crime lab do it. But I think that would take time and you may not want them reading it. My guess is that this is probably very personal stuff Sir, maybe those feather merchants shouldn’t be reading it.”

“I agree. So what’s your idea?”

“I’ve got two female sailors with nothing to do so I’m sending one back to their barracks for their hair dryers. I figure that within one watch they’ll have it all dried out. I’ll bet they have it ready for you to take home with you this afternoon Admiral.”

“Do it Chief, I’m very anxious to read it. Thanks.”

Admiral Murray told his wife he was going to stay up and read something so she went to bed. He was old enough and salty enough to know that this log, apparently written by dying men, would be tough for an old submariner to read. So, he got a big glass of Bushmills and sat down with a yellow pad at his side. When he finished he wrote a letter and made some notes in the pad and retired. He got very little sleep that night. He got up very early and went to the office.

Commander Vandergrif, like most aides, got to work very early so as to be there before their boss, but also to catch up on the workload during the quiet hours. He was a bit shocked to walk into the office and see the Admiral already there. The Admiral waved him in,

“Wally, I read that log last night. I couldn’t sleep the rest of the night it was so disturbing. I realized that the author is the father of an old friend who taught me at Sub School. He retired a Captain a few years ago. I have kept in touch with him from time to time. Here is what I want to do on this.” Admiral Murray handed over a list:

- #1 - Get the attached letter typed up for me.
- #2 - Have the Chief make a real good copy of the log for us to keep. I'm going to give the original to Captain Pierce.
- #3 - Prepare the paper work for a Purple Heart and Bronze Star for Butch Pierce the COB - he is the man who wrote this.
- #4 - Prepare the paperwork for the PUC (Presidential Unit Citation) for *Cutterfish*
- #5 - There were two others in that compartment who I want the same thing for; (Get their full names) Shorty Freeman and Tex Bullock
- #6 - Call Captain Pierce and set up an appointment for me to go to his house. I'd like Chief Reader to drive me out there.
- #7 - Try and locate the kin of the other two men. I want them to know about the awards.

Whenever the Admiral was driven by Senior Chief Reader, he sat in the front passenger seat. He was actually friends with the chief and he felt sort of pompous sitting in the back. Reader always felt honored by this and would chuckle to himself at the reactions of the Marines at the Main Gate every time he and the Admiral left the base in the gray sedan they were assigned. The trip out to the Pierce home was fairly short as were the introduction among Dan and Joanie Pierce and the Admiral and the Senior Chief. They didn't even sit down.

"Dan, we can only stay a minute. I wanted to personally drop the log and a letter for you. I thought you would probably want to read the log privately." He handed over two medal boxes, the logbook and his letter.

"I need to get back for a meeting so we'll shove off. It was nice meeting your daughter. Bye Dan, let me know if I can do anything for you." They all shook hands and suddenly Dan Pierce and his daughter Joanie were alone. He decided to read the letter first.

Commander Submarine Forces Atlantic
Naval Base Norfolk
Norfolk, VA 32205

Dan Pierce, Captain U.S. Navy (retired)
2103 Farragut Drive
Norfolk, VA 32201

Dear Captain Pierce,

Sometime around the third week of June 1942 U.S.S. *Cutterfish* was operating off the Virginia coast when she engaged a German U-boat on the surface. German WWII records indicate that they lost U-136 at the same time and in the same area where *Cutterfish* was recently discovered. Evidence from witnesses aboard the U-boat's target, a merchant ship, suggests that both submarines launched torpedoes and both boats sank.

Because of the courageous and aggressive conduct of the captain and crew of *Cutterfish*, I am recommending the submarine for the Presidential Unit Citation (PUC). Additionally, each member of the crew (see attached) is awarded the Purple Heart.

Only because of the extraordinary discovery of the log written by Chief of the Boat Butch Pierce, do we know about the circumstances of the survival of *Cutterfish's* Forward Torpedo room and the conduct of the three crewmembers left alive following the sinking. Because of the manner in which they conducted themselves under extremely difficult conditions, TM-2(SS) Willard 'Tex' Bullock, TM-2(SS) William 'Shorty' Freeman and Chief Petty Officer Butch Pierce are awarded the Bronze Star.

I am compelled to add to this commendation a comment prompted by the extraordinary discovery of Chief Pierce's log.

During WWII the Submarine Service lost 52 boats and suffered the highest death rate among all branches of the US Forces. I proudly add that despite the fact that our submarine force amounted to less than 2% of the Navy, it's efforts accounted for the destruction of more than 50% of Japan's combined naval and merchant fleets. This extraordinary feat was even more effective since the war in the Pacific was maritime in nature. In nearly every case, the 52 boats sank with all hands, so we have no evidence of the final hours of the lives of all those

gallant men. Personally, as a submariner, I have always known in my heart that those thousands of submariners conducted themselves admirably in their final moments. Because of the log your father kept we now have evidence confirming my feelings.

This letter accompanies the original logbook written by your father which I feel you and your family should have.

With the Greatest Respect,

Captain Dan Pierce sat and looked at the logbook on the coffee table in front of him. Finally he picked it up, opened it and read the first five words. "My name is Butch Pierce..." Even though he knew that it was the *Cutterfish* log, he was completely unprepared for this. He felt as if a bus had hit him. A great audible sob erupted within him and he sucked in deep gulps of air over and over. It was instant human grief. He could neither control it, nor explain it. His father had died 51 years ago. After all this time, why was this happening? His wife died when their daughter Joanie was six. He could still see the doctor in his scrubs coming through the door at the New London Base Hospital to tell him his wife had died trying to bear their second child. He had been grief stricken then, but this was something different - not so much worse than different. Joanie got up from her chair across from her father, not speaking for fear of coming undone herself, and put her arms around him as he sobbed.

When his wife had died he had Joanie to care for, funeral arrangements to make and his job as a student at Nuclear Power School. He could not afford the luxury of the grief he was now experiencing. Maybe this was grief for both his dad and his wife - he could not tell, but it was overwhelming. Now, at this moment, except for Joanie, all the people he loved were gone. He had no responsibilities for his Dad's burial; the sea had taken care of that. And his daughter was now in her thirties. He was completely free to grieve now, and he fervently hoped that this would be his last.

Joanie did not know how long she had held her father when he stopped sobbing and backed away from her,

"I'm sorry Joanie. God, I don't know what came over me. That's never happened to me before...ever."

"I'm glad Dad, that needed to happen. It needed to come out. You had to go through this. You know, I was just thinking that when Mom and you were told about your Dad, it was sort of gradual really. First it was, 'The boat's over due but they could have a broken radio, or be maintaining radio silence.' Then, after awhile it was, 'Presumed lost', but you were never sure and always hopeful. You two never had closure like most people have when loved ones die. I think that this is the good part of this - the healthy part. I'm no shrink, but I believe this Dad."

"I'm making some coffee Joanie - I need to move around a bit. Want anything?"

"You have a bottle of water?" She was an athlete and didn't pick up any bad habits at Stanford, partly because of her roommate's wholesome policy of not eating anything 'nasty'. She would never knowingly eat stuff with ingredients ending in 'ase', 'ate' or 'ite'.

Joanie got up, went to his liquor cabinet, got out a bottle of Jameson's Irish Whiskey and put it on the coffee table next to the log and hoped he'd have some of it. When he came back out of the kitchen he poured some in his coffee, took a sip to make more room for more Jameson's and sat there looking at the log. His daughter sensed his apprehension and volunteered to read the log to him. She opened the logbook and began to read,

“My name is Butch Pierce...”

CUTTERFISH

Tex Bullock had the topside watch and was a little irritated about it. He was a Second Class Torpedoman and he thought a TM2 ought to have more important things to do than stand a watch he didn't even think was necessary on a submarine. He figured if there had to be a watch at all, at least give it to some new guy. He understood the watch was needed on the bigger ships, like cruisers and even destroyers, since they had stuff going on constantly. People coming and going all the time, visitors galore and all sorts of ceremony, like bells, boatswain's pipes, flag hoists - stuff like that. He thought, 'Hell, some of them have over a thousand people.' But on a fleet boat, with fewer than 80 crew and officers, nothing much went on. Guys went on liberty; the married guys went home for dinner and to be with their families. But apart from loading torpedoes, which they did only once in awhile, or loading stores occasionally, topside was mighty quiet on the boats. Naturally, they did need to keep track of where everyone was all the time. And, of course, security - after all it was 1942 and we were at war. He thought that he may want to re-think this topic completely, 'Hell, maybe it makes sense...Christ I don't know.'

There was one extenuating consideration. On Cutterfish for the last several days and nights, all the enginemen and auxillarymen had been doing major repairs, which could not be done at sea. Therefore all their junior seamen were not available for topside watches. All this at a time when the torpedomen had virtually nothing to do. Tex already felt better about COB's decision to put all the torpedomen on the topside watch roster. Tex looked at the topside log resting on the wooden lectern, which the carpenter shop made for them in exchange for a bunch of luncheon meats, and noted that it was June 11, 1942. He thought time did indeed fly. He recalled joining the Navy seven years earlier, and was pleased with himself that he had made TM2 so fast. But, this war had speeded everything up, including advancement. He figured the Navy had probably grown twice as large as it had been in 1935 when he joined - maybe even more than that.

Just then he noticed the skipper, at his usual fast pace, coming down the pier about a hundred yards away, so he flipped his cigarette over the side and scrambled up the ladder to the bridge, keyed the IMC, and announced, "*Cutterfish* arriving. *Cutterfish* arriving." This particular custom of announcement of the captain's arrival was one he totally agreed with. Letting the duty officer and the duty section know the captain was coming back aboard made sense in an otherwise relaxed shipboard routine. At least things were relaxed while tied up to some pier - they never were relaxed at sea. Tex thought, 'Too damn many things to go wrong and kill you at sea.' There was a bar in Norfolk he frequented which catered almost exclusively to submariners, which had a plaque with a quote by some long dead author he'd never heard of, which said, "To be at sea is to face the enemy." Tex liked that because it was particularly applicable to the boats. Subs were dangerous, 'Lots of ways to get killed on a sub.' He said it again as he met the skipper at the brow with a hand salute, mumbling it to himself, 'Lots of ways to get killed on a submarine.'

Chief Petty Officer and Cutterfish's Chief of the Boat (COB) Butch Pierce, was at that moment, having a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and a glass of milk at the little base housing apartment he shared with his wife Lynn and his boy Danny. One thing about being the COB was that nobody ever questioned where you were. The Captain or the officers might need to talk to

him and so they'd say, "Get hold of the COB, I need to talk to him, quick as he can get here." But nobody would ask him to account for his time since it was assumed that wherever he was, it was important for the boat. The COB was the leading enlisted man aboard a sub and the liaison between the skipper and the crew. The man given that position always took it very, very seriously. Pierce was very proud of it as well.

His Dad had been well off and had sent him off to college as a young man, but he got caught in the stock market crash of 1929, lost everything, had a heart attack and died. Pierce had just finished up his sophomore year and did not wish to burden his family further. He also had developed a hatred and mistrust of business in general and the Navy seemed to be a perfect option for him.

Butch Pierce knew that nothing requiring his attention was going on aboard Cutterfish so he took the time for a quick lunch at home. He had this ominous feeling that he'd damn well better enjoy the little windows of time he had with his family while he could. This war, while it had been pretty quiet for the Atlantic Fleet so far, was going to heat up and he'd wish he had seen more of his family. Plus, he was only 15 minutes away from the boat and everyone knew how to track him down. He had his mouth full when the phone rang, so Lynn answered knowing it would be for him. She knew almost no one in Norfolk except the wives of a few of the married crew and her immediate neighbors. "Hello? Yes sir, he is right here." She put her palm over the phone and said, "It's the XO." Butch quickly washed down the latest bite and took the receiver.

"Yes sir, Pierce"

"COB, we need you at a meeting in the Ward Room as soon as you can get here."

"Be there in fifteen sir."

He kissed and hugged his wife thinking how really good she felt, and how great their sex was. Danny was at his last day of school, and thought to himself how nice it would be to just stay home and make love that afternoon. He headed for the door thinking that easily more than half the times he felt like this, some higher priority, usually the boat, took control.

He stepped from the pier, stopped for an imperceptibly short instant in the middle of the brow, faced aft, saluted the ensign on the short pole at the very end of the after deck and headed for the escape trunk door just beneath the main deck. He stepped down the first two rungs, and dropped the rest of the way onto the Torpedo Room deck plates. Tex had been relieved from the "8 to 12" topside watch and was standing talking to his buddy and fellow torpedoman, Shorty when they heard Pierce hit the deck plates,

"Hey, COB, home for a matinee again? You married pukes got it made you know that? Ain't that right Shorty?...married guys get it as regular as clockwork."

By this time Pierce had one leg through the watertight door into the next compartment when he stopped and sat on the steel combing,

"The thing about you right arm rates is that you are always thinking about sex. Who would marry a couple of ugly deck apes like you two, with your knuckles dragging the deck? I'm gonna' ask the Captain if he'll let the two of you out of the Navy, so you can go to work in Hollywood in one of those Lon Chaney horror movies. He'll probably give me a medal for gettin' rid of you."

The Ward Room curtain was tied back and Pierce slid into the banco, which circled the table in a U shape. The seating couldn't hold more than maybe six or seven officers. Pierce fit

right into the picture in his pressed khakis. His uniform was identical to the officers' except for the collar devices. He poured a cup of coffee from the ever-present urn and, like the others, waited for the Captain. They heard, "That will be all." from the passageway as Captain Keiffer dismissed the steward and entered the tiny room.

"Good afternoon everyone. Hi, COB, everything all right at home?"

"Family is fine Captain, thanks for asking."

"Glad you could join us. I just got back from Squadron and have some orders. Those German U-boats are really raising hell along the Virginia and North Carolina coasts. They said the average was one merchant ship every eight hours over the last three months, which sounds a little high to me. But, as you well know, I am just a simple submariner, trying to do his job." They all smiled at the irony since he was anything but a 'simple submariner'. The one with the widest grin was the Captain.

"We've sent out a couple destroyers and some of those commandeered rich people's yachts with results you might expect. So, nothing is happening while our fellow Americans sit on the beach at night on the hoods of their cars, and watch the tankers burn off shore. Evidentially, Admiral King's strategy is to hold us back for more important things in the Pacific with the Japs. I don't understand that, and neither do the boys at Squadron. Squadron has come to the conclusion that we could use some 'on the job training', and I've got orders to get underway and "train" off the Virginia and North Carolina coasts for a few weeks. Are you getting the picture?"

"Bill, are your torpedoes and ordinance ready?"

"Yes sir, we got the two Mk14's back from the Torpedo Shop last week, and we pretty much stay current on shells for the deck gun and small arms. We're OK."

"How about you Paul? Are we stored up for, say, three weeks? Crew's all in town?" He was looking at his executive officer (XO), Lt.Cdr. John Thomas Walter, and thinking how lucky he was to have this man. If he had a fault, it was that he seemed a bit stiff - almost too serious. He was one of the best ship handlers he'd run across and he was great under pressure. 'Under pressure' - he smiled to himself at his little submarine joke.

"I'll just need 24 hours on that Captain. COB and I will talk to Foster and see what fresh stuff he'd want for three weeks and we're topped off on diesel fuel. 'Doc' Hosea is the only one out of town. He went to DC for a refresher course on independent medical duty, and is due back on the boat this evening actually."

"COB you have anything to add? Any hold ups from your end?"

"All set as far as I can see Captain. When can I tell the crew?"

"Tell them now if you like. Give them a little time to retrieve their laundry and go to the exchange."

"Aye, Captain."

"OK, gentlemen we'll sail at 0800 on the 12th. Lets get cracking."

Pierce headed forward through the very narrow passageway and stepped into the forward room. Tex Bullock was drinking a mug of coffee and leaning against the port mine table when he saw Pierce coming,

"Hey COB, any new skinny from the Ward Room?"

“Yeah, we’re sailing in about 20 hours, so the two of you better get your gear together and maybe go ashore if you don’t have the duty. And go ahead and spread the word so the crew has a bit more time to prepare.”

The uniform of the day in Norfolk was still dress blues, even though it was a little warm for the wool. There was a temperature range window for all sailors when it was too hot for blues and too cool for whites.

Tex and Shorty climbed the ladder in their blues and came out on deck just in front of Jim Dresser, a Quartermaster 3rd class, who had the topside watch. Shorty feigned some sympathy for a shipmate, who was not going on liberty his second to last night in port and said with a chuckle,

“Real sorry you got the duty Dresser - too bad. Gimme’ ten bucks and me and Tex will get laid for you - it’s as close as your gonna’ get.” Tex and Shorty thought this was hilarious and were laughing as they crossed the brow, throwing a hand salute in the general direction of the flag. Dresser had his chin sticking out, and responded in the usual unmilitary fashion of submariners,

“Yeah? Well fuck you Freeman and the horse you rode in on. I hope you get the clap!”

Shorty loved liberty, even though he usually had very little money to throw around on the beach. He stepped out in front of Tex as they headed up the pier, turned around and walked backwards as he bobbed and weaved like a fighter throwing jabs at Tex who paid him no attention. They were the boat’s odd couple - most boats had a pair like them. Shorty was five feet four inches tall and Tex was six two and they nearly always went on liberty together. More than once Shorty’s screwing around got them into trouble. This night, since they had only five dollars each, borrowed from the boat’s “slush fund” at the usurious rate of “five for seven” (on payday), they decided to simply go to the Acey Ducey Club right there on the base. They both knew that their chances of meeting a willing female in Norfolk were virtually nil, and beer cost a lot more in town.

One thing on both of their minds was the fact that *Cutterfish* was top-heavy with torpedomen at a time when Electric Boat Company was building subs as fast as they could. All those new boats needed crews, and they knew they’d get split up soon and be assigned to other boats. Shorty had told Tex he had heard that in Pearl Harbor every boat coming in from a war patrol had at least a 25% turnover. Neither one would bring up the fact that a lot of them did not return at all.

The Acey Ducey Club was for first and second class petty officers. Beer and everything else was the same price as the Enlisted Men’s Club, but the advantage was that there were fewer amateurs. The older sailors tended to steer clear of the younger guys ashore. Since the war began, it seemed that half the Navy was now completely inexperienced, 18 year olds from places like Iowa. Drinking with sailors with ten years in the Navy was usually a lot more civilized.

Butch Pierce stayed aboard late, supervising the working party passing stores by hand from the truck on the pier down the After Battery hatch. Foster, the first class commissaryman was kept very busy trying to find places to stow all the food. He was slower than the human conveyer belt and soon the boxes of food just stacked up everywhere in the crew’s mess.

“Ptomaine” Tucker Foster was a really great cook who took his job very seriously. He had the creativity of a chef along with the temperament. The more senior of the crew took pleasure in teasing him and getting him all worked up. Foster knew that the difference between

good chow and crap was not so much the ingredients since all the boats got the same stuff, but it was the proper preparation and attention to detail that made all the difference. He taught his subordinates rather than supervising them. The result was that Cutterfish was known as a good food boat.

After a short time the Crew's Mess was really a mess with boxes stacked high on every table and bench. Only the passageway was free for traffic and Foster knew he and his mess cooks would be up all night spreading the food throughout the boat. There simply was not enough room in the After Battery compartment for the food consumed by the crew for anything over a couple weeks. Every nook and cranny in the sub was crammed with boxes and #10 cans. COB marveled at how Foster knew where everything was.

The boat's chief engineman, Tom Monahans stepped into the Mess and looked around at the chaos and right away knew he had an opportunity to tool Foster around in all this excitement,

"Hey Foster, have one of your guys clear a table and a place to sit for me - I'd like to have a cup of coffee and maybe play some checkers." Foster stood there sweating looking at Monahans in disbelief,

"What?"

"I want to sit down in the crew's mess here and you've got all this shit stacked everywhere. Where the hell am I supposed to sit down?"

"Go back to the goat locker where you belong, you old fart, and stop bothering working people!"

"Foster, I don't think you understand the situation here. I'm a chief petty officer in the United-by God-States Navy and I'm entitled to unlimited coffee, three hots and a flop. That's what the recruiter told me. God damn it Foster, it's regulations for Christ's sake!"

Foster was smart and knew when he was being tooled around because his tormentors nearly always made their demands during impossible times like this and even though he knew it, he still got all excited and took them about halfway seriously.

"Monahans? I'm telling you this once," As he pointed, "there is the coffee machine, there are the mugs. Get your fucking coffee and clear out of my compartment!"

"OK, God damn it, that's enough! Where is the COB? I don't have to take this shit from some cook!"

"He's topside you jerk, handing down all this shit. Come on, I'll escort you up there so you can tell him your problem. I want to see him kick your oily ass over the side...probably leave a slick. Then he'll put a lazy ass, son-of-a-bitch like you on the working party!" By now Foster was laughing so hard, he had to put down the box he was holding, while Monahans tried to keep a serious face on, looking pained as he turned with his fresh mug of coffee and headed aft,

"I may have faults, but by God I know when I'm not wanted." Monahans was laughing as he stepped through the watertight door into the Forward Engine Room. The engines were running and the third class on watch, in charge of the battery charge, leaned to within one inch of the chief's ear and asked what was so funny. Enginemen were completely comfortable somehow able to communicate while standing between two running 1800 horsepower Fairbanks-Morse diesels set five feet apart. Only enginemen knew how they did it. They were a whole breed apart on the subs, going on liberty and sticking together. Tex once told Shorty that he went on liberty

with four enginemen one time and he'd never do it again. He said, "Next time I have that urge, I'll just walk out the main gate and go straight to the Shore Patrol offices and just turn myself in. I'll save a lot of time and money that way."

Pierce watched as the last box of stores went down the hatch and scampered down after it. He finally found Foster who was only six feet away hidden by boxes.

"You going to be OK Tuck?"

"Yeah COB, we'll be fine. It will take all night though, and breakfast may be a little hairy but we'll get it done. I like doing this part myself so I know where the catsup is if you know what I mean." Tucker smiled when he said this

"How the hell do you remember where everything is anyway?" Both he and the COB knew the answer to that one - Foster was just one smart son-of-a-bitch.

It was 2300 hrs. when Tex and Shorty stepped back on the brow and waved at the watch. They had about all the beer, pickled hardboiled eggs, Frank Sinatra and Glenn Miller they could stand. They knew when to get back aboard because they took getting underway seriously, particularly during wartime.

The Engagement

Cutterfish

All four main engines were already running with their deep-throated rumble, by the time Shorty Freeman made it topside with a set of sound powered phones on his head. The IMC had only a minute earlier sounded, "Now station the Maneuvering Watch. Station the Maneuvering Watch." He plugged in near the #1 line and faced aft to see that the Captain and the XO were already on the bridge. Behind them, one on the lookouts was climbing up into the shears taking care not to bang his 11 x 50 binoculars. One thing lookouts took real good care of was the binoculars they scanned the horizon with for hours at a time. Shorty remembered standing lookout watches before the war when he was a seaman, and wondered how it must be now. He figured that there must be a lot more pressure on these young kids.

"Take in #2 and #3 lines. Single up #1 and #4", came over Shorty's headset. He relayed this to the other two guys assigned forward with him. The four lines were numbered #1 in the bow to #4 at the stern.

"Take in #4 line." This was for their counter parts at the stern. From the bridge he heard the XO shout, "All back one third - left 15 degrees rudder." Then, over the phones again he heard, "Take in #1 line." Shorty waved to the sailor on the pier who had already started to lift the eye splice off of the bollard, tossing it into the scummy water of Norfolk harbor as they slowly backed out of the slip. Shorty's two line handlers covered their ears with the palms of their hands - everyone forward did. The ship's air horn was in the leading edge of the bridge, not 45 feet away and was about to sound three short blasts - the signal for every ship within a mile or two that somewhere, some ship was backing away from a pier. They were underway.

Once underway, the watch began to tidy up, stowing lines in the line lockers, bolting down their brow and stowing the capstan wrench. They would remain on deck until the XO determined that they were relatively free of collision danger in the crowded harbor. In the event that steering control was lost, Shorty's little party was also there to drop the anchor. The maneuvering watch was unusually long in Norfolk since it was a big place with a long channel out into the Atlantic.

In spite of the time of year they were all a bit chilly by the time "Secure the Maneuvering Watch" came over Shorty's headset. They all headed below being careful to properly dog down both the escape trunk hatch and door behind them. Neither would be touched again until they were coming back into port.

Most of the crew had not yet eaten breakfast except for the first of the underway watches who, to a man, had eaten earlier knowing they would not get another chance until noon. Tex told Shorty to eat first knowing that all he'd do would be to assemble his usual bacon sandwich - a dozen slices of bacon crushed between two slices of white bread. Breakfast never took Shorty more than three minutes. Tex, on the other hand, thought eating a meal like that was barbaric and always allowed him the "entire experience" as he called it. That was loosely defined and more than simply nourishment. Eating for Tex included all the accompanying bullshit and banter unique to the crew's mess of a United States submarine. He stepped up to the half door of the tiny galley and ordered his usual breakfast,

“Six scrambled soft with cheese, bacon, one jockstrap and make it snappy.” He thought that was pretty funny in spite of having used it at least a hundred times on *Cutterfish* alone. The junior cook doing breakfast paid no attention. Monahans, on the other hand was having his usual breakfast of coffee and cigarettes.

“Jeeze Tex, work on some new material will you? We’re underway, what? an hour? and you’re already starting to get on my nerves.”

“I’m just trying to cheer up the joint Monahans - it’s like a damn wake in here for Christ’s sake. Y’all are acting like we’ll never make it back.”

It didn’t take long to adjust to the underway routine. Nearly every crewmember was put on the watch bill. You could be the trim manifold operator in Control Room, or the radio operator, but you had the “12 to 4” for the entire cruise. This meant that you had to adjust your eating and sleeping habits to accommodate the watch you’d stand everyday from 12 noon to 4 in the afternoon and from 12 midnight to 4 in the morning. It was four on and eight off. You occupied the off hours with eating, sleeping and taking care of the equipment associated with your particular rate and training such as pumps, radios or torpedoes. Sailors also used the time for movies, reading, acey-duecy or just plain bullshitting over coffee and cigarettes.

U-136

“Permission to come up Sir.” The First Watch Officer who had been in the middle of a conversation with the Captain, leaned across the bridge to look down the tower hatch. Looking up expectantly, with his hands on the ladder, was Dieter Winter, U-136’s new diesel stoker.

“Granted”, was all Guenther Offerman said before turning his attention back to Herr Kaleun. He once saw an American movie and everyone called the captain of that movies’ ship, ‘Skipper’. He much preferred Herr Kaleun (the abbreviation of Herr Kapitaenleutnant). ‘Skipper’ was much too familiar and, he thought, even a bit feminine. The captain of a ship, even an American ship, should not be skipping around for God’s sake. The thought did occur to him that maybe he had, after all, lost something in the translation. That thought brought a smile to his very young face.

“As I was saying Guenther, our orders are to return to the North Carolina coast, but to choose a route where we are likely to encounter some shipping. The problem is that we need to head northwest, but I want to stay well clear of Ireland. So when you go below, plot such a course and show it to me. I’ll tell you something Guenther, the fucking Englanders have an awful lot of planes patrolling, and I don’t want to be inside their range if I can help it. We were nearly sunk on our way back from the last patrol, did you know that?”

“Yes, of course Herr Kaleun. The starboard bridge guard,” - and he said this loud enough to be heard by both of the men on lookout watch, - “must have been asleep on his feet, or playing with himself. And the watch officer...he must have been a little embarrassed as well.”

“Well, everyone on board was very tired from the patrol and we were only a couple days out from St. Nazaire and everything was far too lax...my fault really when you think about it. However, ‘embarrassed’ is not exactly the word I’d have chosen Guenther. That attack scared the living shit out of us actually. The patrol plane came out of nowhere, so low that when he dropped the depth charge,” at this, he pointed close off the starboard bow, “**it actually hit about there and instead of sinking, the goddamn thing skipped way over to port. Had it hit conventionally we’d all be dead.”**

They had only been underway out of the submarine base at St. Nazaire, near the mouth of the Loire, for 24 hours. The weather had been accommodating so far and the crew was happy about it.

The weather in The Bay (Bay of Biscay) was normally bad. Kapitaenleutnant Werner Hardegen turned to their bridge visitor, the new diesel stoker. "So, how do you like our little U-boat Dieter? Have you ever gone to sea on a Type VII boat before?" The captain used the first names of the crew when he could. He knew that in the rest of the German military such familiarity was frowned upon. He did not want the distance most officers had between themselves and their sailors or soldiers, and he figured that since he could very well die along side this great bunch of men, he was, by God, going to treat them with respect. It was no secret aboard U-136 that Werner Hardegen thought there were far too many (in his words) pompous ass holes among his fellow German officers.

"No, Herr Kapitain, I just got out of sub school, so this is my first patrol."

"Aahh, that's right, that's right. I read that in your record. And where are you from again Dieter?"

"Abtenau, Herr Kaleun. It's in the mountains south of Salzburg. It's pretty small really. Very few people have ever heard of it. My mother runs a small Gasthaus." This was said in obvious modesty. Dieter now wished he had not come up to the bridge for a smoke after all.

The captain wryly thought, 'the kid has got that right - I never heard of the place. How does a kid from the Alps end up on U-boat? I'll bet he never saw the ocean until he got to sub school. He probably never lived lower than 1500 meters altitude! I have a feeling it's those romantic horse shit stories that fucking cripple Goebbels spins out.' He felt the beginnings of a beard with his hand and thought, 'I'd like to bring one of those fairies from the Propaganda Ministry out on a war patrol for a month or two - see what kind of story he'd write then...if he even got back.'

He knew that this profession he had chosen was very hard and unforgiving, yet he knew that nearly all the officers and men he had served with loved it. He figured that it was probably the same way with the fighter pilots or the panzer men. 'To each his own.' he thought.

"Guenther, I'll take the conn. I want you to plot that course right now, if you would. I don't like steaming around the North Atlantic by the seat of my Lederhosen." The First Watch Officer was laughing as he asked permission to go below and dropped down the tower hatch, followed by Dieter Winter who all of a sudden felt uncomfortable up there with only the bridge guards and the captain.

Cutterfish

They were underway four days, watching commercial shipping plying the waters off the Virginia and North Carolina coasts. Cutterfish watched the ships pass without incident, submerged during the day and on the surface at night.

"We're making 4 knots on course 090 and basically waiting 'til that freighter catches up. Here have a look Jim." As he said this, Lt. Jefferson Davis Hamlin spun the #1 periscope to a position toward the starboard quarter, then stood behind it so his relief Lt.jg. Jim Geiger, could have a look at the freighter Cutterfish had been watching for the last two hours. "The Skipper wants to run parallel to the freighter all night and see what happens." Geiger noticed two things through the scope at once. One was that at 2000 hours the sun was getting real low on the Western horizon and the other was the freighter would be getting close to them within half an hour. He figured he'd be told to surface about the time the freighter caught up to them and the sun set. "OK Davis, I've got the Conn. Thanks."

Davis went by his middle name to avoid getting ribbed. His parents raised him calling him Jeff and in fact still did, but in the prep school he attended in the north he started from day one introducing himself as Davis so virtually all his adult friends called him that. He had graduated

from The University of Virginia six years earlier and had gone into Navy OCS, mainly because he still did not know what he wanted to do for a living. His entire life he had seen his Dad go to a job he disliked, and Davis was determined that would not happen to him. As it turned out he really loved the Navy and considered that one of his better decisions along with marrying his wife, Emily.

“Ebeening sir,” Ferdinand Ibarra, the Ward Room’s Filipino second class steward said as J. Davis Hamlin slid into the green banco that served as the tiny dining room’s seating.

“What’s for dinner Ferdy? Anything left for a sorry old engineering officer?” He looked over the table and there was no evidence whatsoever of what was on the menu since Ferdinand, as usual, had cleaned up after the earlier diners. Davis thought, ‘He may be a second class steward but he is a really first class waiter/chef type.’ The OOD standing the ‘4 to ‘8 watch was nearly always the last to eat.

“Bee got broil trou tonigh Meester Hamlin. You wann? Also son rice we fry ownyens. Eet is like we do in the Pillapeens.”

“Well bring me all of the above please. I’m hungry tonight Ferdy and that sounds great.” As Ferdinand disappeared through the passageway curtain, Davis got a glimpse of the Skipper heading aft to the Control room.

The skipper, Lt. Cdr. Coley Keiffer, cautiously looked up into the Conning Tower before mounting the ladder. His head and shoulders had been stepped on too often as a junior submarine officer not to develop that habit. It was also in character for him to look before he leaped. He was a cautious and very thorough engineer.

“Evening Captain. The freighter is close and the sun is nearly down.” Geiger told him.

“Very well Jim, prepare to surface while I have a look around.” He then took over the periscope that had remained up for the last half-hour. Normally they would not leave a periscope up that long but they wanted to track the freighter and felt no threat from her and besides it was almost dark and they were about to surface anyway.

“OK Jim, after you surface I want you to catch up and run a parallel course about a thousand yards abeam to her port side. That will keep us between her and the beach. It’s where I want to be.”

“Aye Captain.” Jim Geiger leaned over and keyed the 1MC and said, “Prepare to surface, prepare to surface. Start all four main engines,” He nodded toward the Quartermaster, who hit the klaxon three times,

AAAAOOOOGGGGHHHHAAA,
AAAAOOOOGGGGHHHHAAA,
AAAAOOOOGGGGHHHHAAA.

Geiger keyed the 1MC again and said, “SURFACE, SURFACE, SURFACE.” This not only put the surfacing sequence in the Control Room in motion, but also alerted the entire boat. The enginemen and Maneuvering Room watch had plenty to prepare for.

The roll of the boat told them that the conning tower hatch was clear of the surface and Geiger told the quartermaster to crack the hatch. The usual amount of seawater poured in as he cracked the hatch, but it was obvious that they were on the surface and so he opened it up fully. Opening the Conning Tower hatch and letting in fresh, cool, moist, sea air was one pleasure only submariners fully appreciated. That pleasure was multiplied when the four 1800 horsepower

Fairbanks Morse diesel engines lit off because until the boat was fully on the surface, they left the Main Induction valve shut so the engines breathed all their air through the only hull opening, the Upper Conning Tower hatch. Geiger scamper up the ladder feeling the rushing air and hearing the waves and was, as always, exhilarated. He thought being a submariner for the U.S. Navy was like dying and going to Heaven. He loved his job and didn't want to do anything else. He always wanted to be associated with the sharp, hard working, dedicated and well-adjusted officers and men typically found on Uncle Sam's diesel boats.

By the time he was on the bridge the helm had been shifted from the Control Room to the Conning Tower and he shouted down the hatch, "Left full rudder, all ahead two thirds, come left to course 035."

"Left full rudder, all ahead two thirds, come left to course 035, aye." The helmsman answered, repeating all commands from the bridge. It was an excellent system, as old as ships, which minimized miscommunications.

"Steady on course 035."

"Very well."

"Bridge, this is the Captain. See if the lookout can get a name off the stern of that freighter before we get too far abeam."

"Captain, Bridge. We already got it Sir, she is Chenango out of Panama"

"Bridge, this is the Captain again. Do what you need to do to maintain station 1000 yards abeam to her port."

"Bridge Aye."

U-136

This would be the second patrol to the Eastern Sea Frontier (ESF) for U-136. The first one was fairly productive with four freighters sunk. The U-boats in the North Atlantic convoy sea-lanes usually did better than that, but for the Mid-Atlantic coast four good sized freighters sunk wasn't bad. They had gotten additionally lucky because in March 1942, while they were on their previous patrol, there was a big American bomber raid on their sub base at St. Nazaire. Dieter Winter had been there, awaiting the return of his new boat when the raid occurred. He concluded, incorrectly, that being ashore was just as dangerous as being on patrol. Adding to this misconception was the sense he had of safety aboard U-136, surrounded by a crew of highly competent, friendly U-boat men, and of course, a 35-millimeter thick, Bremen steel pressure hull.

By their fourth day out U-136 had skirted the Irish coast by a comfortable margin. The Second Watch Officer Hans Ostermann was on the bridge and happened to be looking straight over the bow at the western horizon when he picked up a glint from the rising sun aft. He notified the captain, who arrived on the bridge almost instantly.

There were many similarities among American and German submariners. The most obvious was the fact that, at sea, they seldom undressed, rarely changed clothes and almost never bathed. A sub captain of either navy, when summoned from a deep sleep would be on the bridge in well under a minute. Little of their precious space was taken up with storing clothing and none of their time was wasted changing. They all slept in their different uniforms.

"What have you got for me Hans?"

"We have a contact dead ahead on the horizon, Herr Kaleun. So far it is just masts up."

“He won’t see us for awhile so lets track him and see what his course is before we dive.” Kapitain Hardegen put both elbows on the bridge splinter shield to steady the Zeiss binoculars his wife had given him as, of all things, a wedding present. He never took his eyes off of the target. After 20 minutes the bearing had not changed noticeably, indicating that the U-boat and the target seemed to be on reciprocal courses.

“Let’s dive the boat Hans, he seems to be coming our way.” Hardegen said as he dropped down the tower hatch.

“Prepare to dive.”

“ALARM, ALARM” Hans waited to shout this until the second bridge guard was in the tower hatch.

Since Dieter Winter was an extra diesel stoker - and the torpedo men were short a hand, his battle station was in the Bow Compartment. With the entire complement of crew at only 50 men, there was a lot of filling in and overlapping of functions. Dieter didn’t mind since he really liked the torpedomen, particularly Heinrich Schultz, the senior man. He bunked up there and they had even included him into their poker games.

The crew had been at battle stations for 40 minutes and had become their usual restless selves. In the Conning Tower Werner Hardegen raised the periscope again, turned his ever-present crushed ‘white’ bridge cap around so the bill wouldn’t interfere with looking through the periscope eyepiece. Since nothing aboard a U-boat was white for very long, the color of his hat was more on the order of battleship gray. He was thinking of the odds that two ships encountering one another at sea would be on reciprocal courses, ‘Were the odds 360 to 1 or two times 360 to 1?’ He was always working out numbers in his head. Guenther Offerman was up in the Conning Tower to help on the approach.

“Guenther, we are still on a collision course with this fellow. I don’t like these shots but we don’t have any choice. Flood tubes #1 and #2.” Guenther repeated the order to the torpedomen.

“Open torpedo doors on #1 and #2.”

“Range. Mark.” Guenther read the back of the scope.

“Eleven hundred meters.”

“Bearing. Mark.”

“Zero one one.”

Guenther announced, “Tubes one and two ready to fire.” He had barely gotten the words out of his mouth when the Captain saw the frigate trailing the target. He knew that there was no way he was going to attack with the frigate there. He thought, ‘He may already know we’re here.’ His orders were to get to the Eastern Sea Frontier (ESF) and engage targets of opportunity. ‘This is an opportunity all right,’ he thought, ‘an opportunity to get us sunk.’

“Make your depth 70 meters. Left 10 degrees rudder. Ahead two thirds. Close the outer doors. Gunther lets get the hell out of here. I just hope that frigate doesn’t know we’re here.” He waited until a full hour after the target’s noisy screws faded to nothing before coming to periscope depth. Hardegen did a quick 360-degree spin with the periscope, saw nothing and gave the order to surface and resume their westerly heading toward North Carolina.

They saw no further contacts and stayed on the surface day and night until they were about 200 miles off the Mid Atlantic Coast of their enemy the United States of America. At this point U-136 did an orderly, leisurely dive and began a routine of being submerged during daylight hours and surfaced at night. His 20 June 1942 log entry noted their arrival at the ESF and the institution of the new routine.

At dusk on 21 June the U-boat was well into the ESF when the watch on the periscope saw a ship to their southwest. Gunther Offerman had the conn and watched the distant ship for a minute before calling Kapitain Hardegen to the conning tower. They quickly determined the target's course and plotted their own course to the Northeast in hopes of intercepting what looked like a freighter. It was only a matter of 40 minutes before Kapitain Hardegen felt it was dark enough to surface.

"Gunther, surface the boat and continue on course 320. Go to ahead full when we get up. Let's get a charge started as well. I would like to be there waiting for this target." He then went back to the chart table and calculated that if the target kept its course, and if they made 18 knots on this new course, they would intercept the target at about 0130 hours.

As U-136 approached the intercept point, the port bridge watch saw the freighter off of the port quarter. Hardegen decided to dive at that moment, confident that he could easily maneuver for a shot submerged. Within 45 minutes the target was only 4000 meters away and they began the firing procedure,

"Open outer doors on tubes #1 and #3."

"Range - Mark" Gunther read off of the rear of the scope, "3800 meters."

"Bearing - Mark" Again Gunther read from the upper bezel, "270"

"Make the depth two meters."

Cutterfish

The XO, Lt. John Thomas Walter had decided that if anything was going to happen other than just shadowing this freighter, it probably would happen at night so he again put himself on the watch bill as OOD for the '12 to 4' watch. The Gulf Stream was hospitable and friendly for an April day, and the weather conditions were as good as the Atlantic gets as far as Tom Walter was concerned. They had been maintaining station on the freighter since dark and all was well. He was looking over the freighter for maybe the hundredth time it seemed, when both he and the starboard lookout saw the flash followed, three seconds later by the KARRUMP sound of an underwater explosion. The freighter had just taken a torpedo on its starboard side. He tore himself away from the sight to key the IMC,

"CAPTAIN TO THE BRIDGE, CAPTAIN TO THE BRIDGE."

Both the lookouts and the XO watched as the fire started by the blast lit up the whole area.

"Keep a sharp eye out up there for that U-boat. It has got to be to the East somewhere."

"Aye Sir, I'm not seeing anything. Maybe it's directly on the other side of the freighter. Maybe that's the reason."

The Captain had obviously been sleeping in his khakis because he got on the bridge in less than 15 seconds.

"I've got the Conn. Let's hear it!"

"The freighter got hit on the opposite side - it has to be a torpedo, not a deck gun." The Captain shouted down the Conning Tower hatch,

"Right full rudder, all ahead full." He then keyed the IMC and said, "Battle Stations Torpedo, Battle Stations Torpedo."

"Right full rudder, all ahead full aye," was the reply from a very excited helmsman, if his voice was any indication.

“OK, Tom, go below and make ready for a run as we clear the stern of the freighter. I want the tubes flooded, outer doors open and get ready to fire two MK14’s from tube #1 and #3.” If the U-boat is on the surface we’ll stay up too; if we can’t see him on the surface we’ll dive right away. I’ll be making the approach from the TBT (Target Bearing Transmitter), up here. Get going.”

The XO dropped down the hatch and the Captain saw he was about lined up on a course to clear the freighter’s stern which was by now 800 yards away,

“Rudder amidships, make your course 125”.

“Rudder amidships, steer 125 aye.” The helmsman repeated.

The Captain leaned over and shouted down the hatch after the XO who was still in the conning tower, “Tom, I want to be able to shoot as soon as we clear the stern. You got everything ready yet? Tubes #1 and #3; outer doors open; TDC fired up; control from up here.” It was both a statement of intent and a question.

U-136

Kapitaenleutnant Werner Hardegen had decided to surface his Type VII U-135 immediately after he saw his torpedo hit the target. He liked being on the surface at this point during an attack. He was a lot faster on the surface and far more maneuverable. Battle awareness was far better as well, with four or five sets of eyes up on the bridge rather than one eyeball through a periscope, and he could use his deck gun if necessary. While no place was really safe for a U-boat on the surface, Hardegen felt being 70 miles southeast of Cape Henry, away from the naval bases in Norfolk and Charleston was some consolation. After looking over the situation, he decided to fire one more of his precious torpedoes and not attempt using the deck gun. Everything was set and the outer door of #2 tube was open. The first torpedo had not done enough damage to sink the target quickly and he was in no position to wait around, right off the coast of North Carolina, while it sunk. Sometimes targets took many hours to finally sink and occasionally crews were able to stop the flooding and actually save their ships.

He had the solution entered into his TDC (Torpedo Data Computer). The bow of the U-boat was pointing toward the dying freighter and the boat was making only two or three knots heading toward the ship at a range of 2000 yards, when the port lookout excitedly shouted, out,

“SUBMARINE, SUBMARINE, JUST ASTERN OF THE TARGET.” He didn’t get the whole report out of his mouth before the others on the bridge saw Cutterfish coming right at them still heading to starboard from her turn. The U-boat captain swung the TBT (Target Bearing Transmitter) to the left a few degrees and shouted.

“BEARING - MARK! RANGE 1800 YARDS. Same depth setting. SHOOT.” He hit the stopwatch he always had hanging around his neck during torpedo approaches, and marked the time on his own watch at 0317 exactly. He always wanted to make precise log entries when everything was over with.

Cutterfish

As *Cutterfish* passed the stern of the freighter, it was several seconds before the lookouts and Captain Keiffer saw the U-boat. The light from the burning freighter was just bright enough to help them see it and the Captain swung the TBT onto his target,

“BEARING – MARK. RANGE 1400 YARDS.” He knew he did not have much time and dispensed with everything but ‘shoot’. “SHOOT.” As was his habit too, he hit his stopwatch and noted the time - it was 0319 as the two Mk14s left their tubes. He knew he’d remember that for his log.

“CLEAR THE BRIDGE, CLEAR THE BRIDGE.” Watching the second lookout drop down the hatch was his last act on Earth. The German torpedo struck *Cutterfish* on the port side at the bulkhead separating the Forward and After Engine Rooms, flooding both, killing all within them and blowing the captain up over the bridge’s splinter shield and into the water to starboard. He hit the water mortally wounded but conscious enough to see his beloved sub quickly sink by the stern, bow out of the water. He began to sink along with her, not resisting in anyway because his last conscious thought was not fear of dying but the complete and profound despair God reserves for a ship’s captain at the loss of both his ship and her crew. He finally dreamed of his wife.

U-136

The five people on the U-boat’s bridge cheered as they saw the eruption of their torpedo and the American sub rise up in the middle with a broken back then sink quickly by the stern. Kapitain Hardegen suddenly had a feeling of intense and deep foreboding as he realized the American could have had time to get off a torpedo of his own. He turned cold at the thought. The reflection on the water from the burning freighter was such that there was no way a torpedo wake could be seen by them.

“LEFT FULL RUDDER. ALL AHEAD FULL. CLEAR THE BRIDGE. CLEAR THE BRIDGE.” He too watched as his crew dropped down the hatch. This too was his last act on Earth. One of the American torpedoes exploded just aft of the bridge, at the Motor Room bulkhead on its starboard side instantly killing everyone from the Motor Room aft. The force of the blast threw him against the bridge splinter shield knocking him unconscious. He drowned as the boat sank.

The diving officer, Leutnant Hans Ostermann quickly secured the badly damaged after door of the Control Room, but not before several tons of seawater had surged into the compartment. He then only managed to slow the flooding through the damaged door and the compartment began to fill with seawater. Hans Ostermann, bleeding badly from his head, ordered an up angle on the Bow Hydroplanes and a blow on all ballast tanks. He was not yet aware that the Motor Room had flooded as he also ordered “all ahead full” on the screws. When no one answered the Motor Room sound powered phone, and the boat took a large up angle, they all realized it must have flooded, and they could not power the boat toward the surface.

The Chief Navigation Bosun and Control Room Assistant Peter Schnakenberg, holding on to the gyro table, quickly realized that it was hopeless, with everything aft of the Motor Room flooded and water up to his waist and rising fast. In spite of his overwhelming fear, he noticed how bitterly cold the water was. The Control Room party; Leutnant Ostermann, the bosun, the hydroplane operators and the manifold operator all just looked at one another. The planesmen seemed frozen to their wheels. The young one on the bow planes began, “Our Father who art in Heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be...” The salty old bosun said, “You’re all good men and

I'm proud to serve with you." They started to tread water as their heads began hitting the overhead. In the few short seconds they had been breathing the compartment's remaining air, compressed by the incoming seawater, they had become intoxicated with nitrogen narcosis. It was a Godsend. Each took one deep breath - his last. There was no place to go - no salvation. In the dim light of a battle lantern, each of them finally exhaled and stopped thinking of home. Only the opened, terrified eyes of dead men in the Control Room could have seen the boat's main depth gauge pass 200 meters, its official "test depth".

Dieter Winter was at his battle station in the Bow Compartment. The boat now had an up angle of 25 degrees due to the flooding aft. He was unspeakably terrified, but said nothing. The room had lost contact with the rest of the boat. The lighting was very dim, supplied by battle lanterns - one on the after bulkhead and one up between the tubes. No one screamed, there was no flooding in their compartment, and they each expected and had faith that the now dead diving party aft in the Control Room would somehow turn the situation around. They waited in silence holding on to whatever they could to keep from sliding aft. The old chief torpedoman, Heinrich Schultz, was the only one to notice the depth gauge between the torpedo tubes passing 150 meters. He too knew it was hopeless, but chose not to say anything to the others.

They had no way of knowing, but U-136 was sinking at nearly 60 kilometers an hour. They struck the 550 foot deep sea floor with the force of a train wreck rupturing the inner torpedo tube door on tube #2, flooding the room instantly with enormous force.

Seventy five hundred kilometers east, in a little town in the Alps, just south of Salzburg, a pretty 38 year old woman sat bolt upright in her bed - she knew not why. Clutching the sheets to her breasts she cried out, "Oh, God in Heaven!"

550 Feet of Water

His first sensation was one of awful pain. As a freshman in college he had been operated on and this reminded him of coming out from under the anesthesia. Nothing really working very well, beginning with his brain. He knew he was alive, but could not comprehend why. It felt like the recurring dream he used to have where someone was beating the hell out of him, and he could not move a muscle to respond - it was painful and frustrating at the same time. He had been up in the Forward Torpedo Room briefly just after the Captain made his approach on the U-boat. He recalled that much at least. Then there was the explosion aft. Now the boat was not rocking from wave motion, but how could that be? He was sure they were not on the surface. He was doubtful that they were maneuvering around submerged since the bow plane hydraulic motor, mounted in the overhead was not running. The pressure on his face, he finally realized, was some sort of clothing or maybe a mattress cover. He pushed it aside with his right hand. He then thought he'd better take inventory of his extremities, so he began with moving his arms, lifting his head and then his legs. The conclusion was that everything was sore, but only his left leg didn't work. It hurt like hell. A battle lantern somewhere in the room gave him some orientation and he attempted to sit up but it hurt so badly, he let out a yell. Then he heard another voice and he began to realize that he was not only alive, but also not alone, and his predicament was not some sort of ghoulish preamble to hell.

"Who is there?" Butch Pierce croaked out,

"It's me COB, Tex. That explosion must have knocked me out. I'm really confused COB, where are we? We ain't moving, I know that."

"Tex, are you busted up or anything?"

"I don't think so, I just feel like I did after that liberty I took with them enginemen that time." Butch Pierce managed a grin in spite of the pain from his left leg. As he looked up he saw Tex in the dim light.

"Your leg is broke COB, we need to get a splint on it. Let me look around for something to use." The next thing Pierce realized was that Tex was back and doing something to his leg.

"Easy does it Tex," COB grimaced as Tex began to sit him up.

"Look COB, there ain't nothin' around we can use for a splint, and we really need to immobilize that leg so it will be less painful. I got this idea though."

In the chaotic jumble of stuff in the room created by their 60 mile per hour collision with the ocean floor, Tex saw that Pierce was now sitting next to an empty bunk rack of inch and a quarter aluminum piping which had ended up on the deck right next to the chief. Each side had two pipes about three inches apart. He figured he could use it as a splint.

"Why don't I just lash your leg to the edge of this rack right here COB? You won't be able to walk around or nothin' but you ain't goin' anywhere. I'll tear up some fart sacks into strips and get you squared away."

"Thanks Tex. Do what you have to. That's a good plan. Is anyone else left? Oh, and Tex, if it is possible to get a look at the depth gauge up between the tubes, read it and sing it out will ya?"

“Yeah, OK. Shorty is a little aft and knocked out I guess. I’m headin’ back to try to see to him. He’s under some stuff. I’ll get him out and drag him up next to you COB. Then I’ll check the gauge. I think we’re sittin’ on the bottom COB and I think we’re in big trouble.”

“First job is to see to the other guys Tex. Better see if you can get at that medical locker on the after bulkhead. I wish I could help you Tex - looks like you’re a working party of one.” Pierce heard Tex moving things and trying to rouse his running mate Shorty. When he heard Shorty respond groggily, he was elated and tried to look over there but when he did, the pain shot up his leg and he yelled out.

“Who was that? Sounded like COB” Shorty asked. Tex simply nodded. “Jeez, Tex, if there were two guys in the whole fuckin’ Navy I could pick to be with when the shit hits the fan, it would be you and COB, you know that?” Shorty was a little disoriented and talked to Tex as if Pierce was not there. The next thing Pierce saw were Shorty and Tex standing in front of him, with Tex supporting him a bit. The sight made him feel much better and, ironically, safer.

“Tex, go check that depth gauge and Shorty check everyone in the room will you? We need to take muster - see who’s dead and who we can help.”

“Didn’t Tex tell you? There are three guys dead under a Mark 14 that came loose from the port skid; I guess when we hit the bottom. I figured we hit hard COB. We’re on the bottom ain’t we?”

“Yeah, Shorty. We’ll figure something out. Now go check for survivors.” He could hear both men shifting stuff and grunting with the effort, saying things like ‘Get that end!’ and he found himself holding his breath in anticipation, but neither sailor spoke. Finally, they knelt in front of him. Tex had an armload of medical supplies. Pierce could see that Shorty’s right arm was broken. He looked at Tex who nodded.

“Shorty, sit down with COB and I’ll look around for something’ to splint that arm. Don’t move, OK. I’ll be right back.” Tex began to rummage through the torpedo room looking for something he could use. Since there is virtually nothing made of wood on a submarine, he had his work cut out. He was back in a few minutes with what looked like a strip of heavy canvass from one of the mattress covers. He’d cut it about 14 inches wide and wrapped it pretty tightly around Shorty’s arm. Pierce waited for him to cry out with the pain, but there wasn’t a peep. Pierce was amazed, but said nothing, doing a bit of reassessment of Shorty’s character.

Tex finished up by wrapping Shorty’s new splint with marlin line. He then sat down and looked at the deck as if he had bad news. He did.

“OK, COB, here is the skinny.

-Everybody’s dead except us. All five of the others look to me like they died pretty quick, thank God. If there is any good news in this fuckin’ lashup, that’s it.

-The depth gauge between the tubes says 550 feet. Over 100 feet below our test depth! I’m sorry I looked to be honest with you.

-You just saw me throw that emergency buoy release lever in the overhead and I didn’t hear nothin’. That buoy didn’t release COB. I heard one go up once back on the *Sculpin* during a test years back, and it makes a lot of noise. I mean you know when it works because of the big spool of cable lettin’ go as the buoy rises. I’ll screw around with it some more, but maybe somethin’ landed on top of it and is still there, or maybe it got jarred or pinched or stove in or somethin’ when we sank, but I don’t think we ought to put too much hope in that.

-At 550 feet I think we're way too deep for them Momsen Lungs COB. Hell, there are half a dozen ways we could die just on the way up - includin' freezing to death. We're in the hurt locker COB, let's face it."

Butch Pierce just sat there and stared at his broken leg. He was thinking about the crew and the officers. They were his guys - his shipmates - he knew every one of them - they were his friends too, and they were all dead except for the three of them. The whole thing couldn't have taken three minutes. He thought to himself, 'I hope the two fish we got off hit those fucking German sons-of-bitches!' He felt heartbroken but he realized that he was now in charge of his two friends, and had to exhibit confidence - take command - even though he felt hopeless. It was what he had to do for Tex and Shorty.

"Shorty, how does the arm feel?"

"Hurts like a sonofabitch COB, probably about like your leg."

"Tex, are they're any pain killers in that medical kit?"

"Yeah, APCs, COB!! A - *fuckin'* - PCs. Can you imagine that? Why don't they have real painkillers for Christ's sake? This ain't a hangover, it's a fuckin' disaster and they give us aspirins! We're at war for God's sake not some Boy Scout Jamboree. I feel like leavin' a note for those assholes COB" Tex's voice went low and theatrical, 'Dear SUBLANT sir, thanks for the APCs, they really helped my buddies with all them broken bones so, when you finally find your goddamn brain, rethink these shitty first aid kits you put on the boats.'" That remark was a real tonic and gave Butch Pierce a good laugh plus an idea.

"Tex, try and find that torpedo maintenance log book you guys pretend to keep, will you? Your idea of a note is a good one. By God, we're leaving a *Cutterfish* log." Shorty looked like he woke up with COB's remark,

"What do you mean, 'pretend to keep' COB? Me and Tex are near religious about keeping up with all the maintenance shit, honest." Shorty smiled for the first time and his smile made Pierce feel great.

"Don't try and bullshit me about gundecking maintenance logs Shorty. What do you think? I came into the Navy on the '4 to 8' watch this morning? Hey, it never bothered me because I know a lot of those procedures they ask you to do are chickenshit. Some are important though."

"We didn't come in on no '4 to 8' neither COB. Me and Tex know the difference between important stuff and chickenshit too."

Pierce looked at Tex who was working like a Trojan, and he looked at Shorty who managed to have a sense of humor in spite of their dire situation and thought, 'Dying is awful, but dying with these two guys...' he didn't know how to finish that thought, but he felt good for the first time.

"Here you go COB" Tex handed over the log, "I already cut out all them gundecked pages so you can start fresh. There's plenty of pages left though." Tex looked sideways at Shorty and then back to Butch Pierce and they all laughed. In fact they nearly couldn't stop laughing. Shorty finally wiped his eyes and said, "Jesus, here we are, the three of us with our dicks in a wringer and we're laughin'! We'll be OK though, we'll be OK." He kept nodding without conviction as he stared at the deck until Pierce spoke,

“OK, I’ve been thinking about a couple things we need to do. One is to check to see if there’s pressure in the fresh water system so we can get something to drink. The other is we ought to be banging on the hull every so often, in case there is someone looking for us on the surface. So, one of you two find somewhere you have access to the hull, peel back the cork and bang it once in a while. We got a hammer or a maul up here? Oh, and one of you go aft and look through the little window in the door to the Forward Battery and see what you can see.” The banging seemed like a waste of time to Pierce since he was convinced that the chances of a rescue, even if they were found, were somewhere between slim and none. He was trying to keep the other two’s spirits up. What he neglected to consider was that they were very smart submariners and they knew the odds just as well as he did.

Tex handed Pierce a coffee mug full of water, which he drank in one motion. “Thanks, I guess it works.” Tex nodded and added. “I know you COB, we’re your men and you want to do something about this...this, situation we’re in. I appreciate that and so does Shorty, but here is the reality. We got maybe 24 hours worth of air you’d want to breath, mainly because there’s not but three of us. You two are in a lot of pain and all’s we got are APCs. Even if they found us they’d be a week trying to grapple for us and get a rescue bell down here. The odds stink COB and you know it, and me and Shorty know it too. I think you better get started on that log.”

Butch Pierce had been writing continuously in his new log for nearly an hour when he began to get cold. Neither Tex nor Shorty, both of whom were cold as well, mentioned the fact. Pierce asked, “Tex do you think you can round up some blankets? We’re going to need them. I had a friend in Norfolk - a diver - who lived next to us and once we had a discussion about water temperature. I remember his saying that at test depth here it’s about 45 or 50 degrees. We can’t control much of what’s happening to us, but we can do something about keeping warm.

“Tex, I’ve been thinking. Your not busted up like Shorty and me. If you want to try getting out the escape trunk, then you ought to try. Shorty and I can look after each other.”

“Yeah, Tex. I’ll help you if you want to give it a shot. What can you loose? Stayin’ in here is...” Shorty didn’t know how to put it. He knew they would all die, but he couldn’t get the words past his lips. “Do you remember the drill Tex? Get in the escape trunk, flood it and equalize to the outside pressure, open the side door and go.”

“I’ve thought about it and I think I’ll stay with you.” He had thought it might work - a very long shot - but it might work. Then he thought of his shipmates and decided he could do them some good. Maybe be of some comfort. Both Shorty and Pierce knew his thoughts and both insisted he give it a try, even though they too knew it was a truly long shot. Pierce began to write again and after a long silence Tex said, “OK.” That was it - “OK” and they both knew he had decided to try the escape trunk.

“Don’t either of you move. I don’t need any help. I’ll climb up on the fish and I can get into the trunk from there.” When he was in the trunk he shouted down to his friends, “See ya around.”, and then shut the lower hatch and dogged it tight. Shorty and Pierce in a few minutes heard the flood valve open up and the sound of water under high pressure enter the trunk.

After Tex had shut the hatch, checked his life jacket and Momsen lung, he opened the flood valve and was stunned at how fast the water entered. He was also stunned at how cold the water was. By the time the level of water had quickly risen to his stomach, he was shivering uncontrollably. He had never been in 45-degree water and quickly discovered that it was

paralyzing. He could neither feel nor could he control his legs. He then began to hyperventilate with rapid, very shallow breaths and realized there was no way he would make it out the trunk side door much less to the surface 550 feet above, and ripped the Momsen out of his mouth. He shut the flood valve, never having gotten to the pressure equalization step. Once he had stopped the flow he opened the drain valve and the freezing water drained away. He put his two feet to either side of the hatch and undogged it. It was all he could do to bend and open the hatch. Below in the dim light his last two friends on Earth looked up and smiled at him.

“Let me give you a hand Tex. Wait, I see the ladder. I think I can get it. Wait a second.” Shorty one handed the narrow steel forward room ladder into place and Tex descended shakily back into the room.

“I couldn’t do it. Too cold. I began to hyperventilate, you know when you take a real cold shower?, only a lot worse. I figured that Momsen lung wouldn’t work with me breathin’ like that.”

“Shorty, wrap him up in these blankets. We got to get him warm. Here, sit him right next to me. Maybe that will help.” Within 25 minutes Tex had settled down and was somewhat comfortable when Butch Pierce made an announcement,

“I’ve been giving something a lot of thought. And I want to tell you my conclusion and get your thinking on this. You know, we’re supposed to try to stay alive and keep each other alive as long as we can. It’s human nature, especially if it involves your family or your friends. But here is the problem. Tex went through the situation, ticking off all the problems a while ago, but he left out a couple things. We could spread out that CO2 absorbent and bleed more air into the room from those torpedoes and maybe air from some other sources. We would be able to stay alive another day maybe. Here is the bottom line - I’m just speaking for myself here, OK? I’m in a lot of pain and I know Shorty is too. I know we’re going to die - there is simply no way to get out or get rescued. Frankly, I don’t want to live an extra 24 hours just so I can be in bad pain and watch Shorty suffer too. How do the two of you feel about what I just said?”

Tex and Shorty looked at each other - old and close friends who knew the other’s thoughts without asking. Tex, through some imperceptible signal, was the spokesman,

“We’re with you COB.” That was all he said. Pierce had tears in his eyes for the first time. He couldn’t even respond for several minutes. Then he continued,

“I’ve got a suggestion. I think we ought to have a memorial service and a going away party for the crew of *Cutterfish*. I don’t want to have this sound irreverent or anything, but the only pain killer we have is all that gilly.” Torpedoes are fueled by pure alcohol, which the sub sailors named ‘gilly’. There were two saddle tanks to port and starboard, squeezed between the frames just aft of the tubes. They were full of straight alcohol about 190 proof. Neither Shorty nor Tex had thought of the gilly even though they both had been known to nip at it on occasion.

Pierce had thought of the idea hours ago, but said nothing since he didn’t want them to start too early. In his mind, the ideal was to die from suffocation while they were ‘sleeping it off’. Pierce was far less worried about his own pain and death than he was to watch Tex or Shorty suffocate before his eyes. He didn’t think he could take that, and visibly shuddered at the very thought. Tex, snuggled in next to him, felt the shudder and said,

“You cold COB? Here let me give you another blanket. We have a bunch of them.”

“I’m fine Tex, thanks. I think with this starboard list we have on, your better off draining the gilly from the port tank, don’t you think?” Tex nodded, got up and started looking for a suitable container while Butch Pierce continued to write in the log. Pierce thought of how much pain he was in and how stuffy the air was becoming. He looked sideways at Shorty who had not made any comments lately and was simply staring across the room. Pierce knew that Shorty, just as he had been, was dealing with the pain of his broken left arm. He thought to himself, ‘That’s it God damit! That’s enough pain for Shorty and me.’ He had once read some old naval histories, British as he recalled, where when an old sailing ship appeared to be doomed by a storm, battle damage or some other disaster, the crew usually broke down the door to the rum supplies and quickly consumed as much as they could in the belief that being drunk would ease their deaths at the hands of the sea. ‘I think those guys were right’, he thought, ‘got drunk as Lords and lost their fears and numbed their pain. Pretty smart when you think about it.’

Tex returned to their spot against the short lockers just behind the starboard mine table. He had scrounged up a pail, which he had filled with water, two more coffee mugs with their finger holes missing and another pail half full of what they always called ‘torpedo juice’ - the alcohol that fueled their Mk14s.

“Nice work Tex. Come, get under the covers. It’s freezing in this room.” Shorty said, “And them steel deck plates are so cold they are makin’ my ass hurt.”

“Yeah, let me get a mattress and we’ll use it to sit on. Shorty, help me slip it under COB. It’s gonna’ be a bit tricky with that rack tied to him though. I don’t know how we’ll do that without hurtin’ you COB.”

In a rare departure from his usual demeanor Pierce responded,

“Fuck the rack and cut me loose from the damn thing. I want to sit on a mattress too. I don’t plan on moving around, so I don’t need a splint. Plus it’s cutting off some circulation.” Tex and Shorty with his one good arm, managed to finally slip the mattress under the chief, but not without causing him to yell out in pain. Tex noticed that COB’s face had sweat all over it in spite of the cold. He wished to lighten things up a bit and said,

“May I offer you gentlemen a beverage? Aaaahhhh, we have straight alcohol, we have torpedo fuel and, oh yes, we have some gilly.” Shorty spoke first,

“Barkeep, I believe I’ll have, aaah, what kind of fuel did you say that was?” Tex took a mug and dipped it half full of gilly and then carefully submerged the mug in the bucket of water just enough to fill it. Shorty took his seaman’s knife out of its little scabbard and stirred his drink with the blade. He was already getting better at using only one hand.

Tex looked at Pierce and noticed he’d stopped sweating from the pain of moving him and asked, “What’ll you have sailor? Same as this other sailor down the bar?” Pierce nodded with a hint of a smile.

All three of them, the last three, of *Cutterfish’s* crew sat on their new, comfortable mattress, drank their gilly and said not a word. Each knew he was attending his own wake. COB spoke first as he drained his first mug,

“Another round if you will Tex. I’d like to propose a toast when you’re done.” When they each had a second mug, Pierce continued;

“Here’s to our fallen comrades. I almost included the word ‘absent comrades’ except that we know where they are...just aft of where we now sit. So lads, drink to gallant submariners,

brave shipmates and good friends. We'll never know any better." All three had tears in their eyes with the thought of their friends aft and none dared speak for a good ten minutes. Pierce was going to use himself as a gauge of gilly consumption. His first goal was to numb the pain and he noticed it was beginning slowly to take its effect. Whatever worked for him surely was working for Shorty Freeman's pain. Shorty said,

"Come on Tex, how about a drink? I'll tell you what COB, Tex wouldn't make it out on Hotel Street as a bartender. Them Pearl Harbor bubbleheads would be jumpin' over the bar and servin' themselves. I actually seen that happen once...no shit."

Pierce picked up the log and made himself a little note to write about the fact that all three seemed far more moved at the deaths of their shipmates than they did about their own deaths just hours away. 'What makes us like that?' he thought, 'Why is a friend dying, or a child, or a wife dying, worse than our own deaths to the three of us? Are we unusual? Or is that what all good people would do in these circumstances. For me, I am terribly saddened that these two great guys are about to die, and that my wife and son will be without me, but honestly, I'm not sad that I am dying here in this room.'

"What's the matter with you two. Where are the toasts? The two of you are Irish, right? This is a damn wake so let's have some fun."

"I ain't good at that stuff COB. Tex and me ain't eloquent like you. You always know the right thing to say, so you do mine. I'll just listen, agree with you and drink torpedo fuel here."

"Nonsense Shorty. You have feelings so express them. It's just Tex and me here remember?"

"OK, let's see. Here's to the Captain, he was always fair to us, I think he loved his crew. He sure loved this boat, I know that. He was a fighting sub officer and one smart son-of-a-bitch." Tex was sort of getting into it and shouted, "Here, here!"

"Tex, it's your turn. Make a toast. Oh, and then I think you both may want to write something to your kin. Probably nobody will ever find this log but it might make you feel good to write something."

"Since you insist COB, here goes. Here's to the United States of America. She's gonna' beat Germany and those Nazi bastards like stepchildren. My only regret, and I mean this you guys, is I won't be around to see it. Then she's gonna' beat them sneaky little Jap bastards so bad they won't know what hit them." Shorty and Pierce both told Tex what a good toast that was. Pierce took a deep breath to see how rank the air was getting. This did not escape Shorty who did the same thing and, in an attempt to lighten it up said, "Smells like a Mexican gas chamber after a frijoles party COB." Pierce and Tex began to laugh and they nearly couldn't stop. Tex crossed it off to the tension of their situation not to Shorty's oddball sense of humor.

"Tex, give me a few minutes to write, and then I want you to empty the toolbox over there to make room for the log, and put it in the escape trunk. Can you do that for me please?" He took more than a few minutes to write the last of the log. Meanwhile Tex and Shorty had another mug of gilly and water. They were getting pretty drunk. Shorty mentioned that a lot of his pain had disappeared, and he was feeling pretty good. He was actually having fun. COB was one of his heroes and he'd seldom had the chance to just sit around with him and drink and bullshit. COB was a married man and never went on liberty with the crew.

Tex and Shorty got up and nearly fell down on the slanted deck trying to get the toolbox up into the escape trunk. Being drunk didn't help. At one point they were actually laughing at something Pierce could not see. It made his heavy heart soar to hear these friends laughing. He thought of the supreme irony that these two wonderful guys were enjoying themselves when they knew they were about to die. He couldn't recall the book, '...or was it a poem...probably somebody like Tennyson, referring to laughing in the face of death. It had to be some Englishman', he thought. Finally Tex got the toolbox up into the escape trunk, returned to the mattress and got back under the blankets.

Pierce asked Tex for one more mug. Tex handed it over and made a slurred toast, "Here's to Butch Pierce, the best Chief of the Boat in the Navy and a great friend to us. He always looked out for all of us on *Cutterfish*. I can't think of any two guys I'd rather die with. I can't imagine dying alone, but with you two guys it ain't so bad. So, God Bless COB, God Bless America and God help us." Pierce had all he could do to keep his composure. All was silent for a while until he heard the two of them begin breathing in a deep sleep. He knew they would never wake. He knew he would never speak with them again and he knew he felt profoundly alone and wept silently until he too fell asleep.

The End