



Commander Submarine Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet

USS Squalus (SS 192)

May 23, 1939 - 26 Men Lost

USS Squalus (SS-192) was lost on 23-May-1939 with a loss of 26 officers and men when it flooded and sank off Portsmouth, NH.

- Keel laid down by the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, Portsmouth, NH 18 October 1937;
- Launched 14 September 1938; Sponsored by Mrs. Thomas C. Hart;
- Commissioned 1 March 1939; Lt Oliver F. Naquin in command;
- Sunk 23 May 1939; Decommissioned 15 November 1939;
- Recommissioned as USS SAILFISH I (SS-192) 14 May 1940.

May 23, 1939 -- With the calm of deep water, in the murky depths to which only the last feeble rays of sunlight filter from the heaving surface far above, all is quiet with a stillness that is filled with a quality of ageless, invisible motion. It is the cool world of the small fishes through which an occasional larger form slides noiselessly with outlines distorted in shimmering patterns of sunlight on its curving back.

Thus the stage is set when, from the limit of underwater vision, there appears a shadow against the lightness of the ocean's surface. Nearer it comes until the dark underside of the fish-like craft can be distinguished in a frame of foamy brightness with a seemingly inadequate flutter of propellers under its stern. It appears progressively larger but its increasing size seems to signify more than decreasing distance. A rounded hull, a pair of fin-like projections and darker shadows reveal the unmistakable characteristics of a submarine coming down in a dive. A swirl of churning water and a cloud of bubbles follows its wake as the Conning Tower and the deck structures come under. In the shimmering light the number "192" painted in white under the bow identifies the USS SQUALUS (SS-192), a newcomer in the ocean's depths. Inside are men. The ports of the Conning Tower gleam dully and serve only to emphasize the blind faith of those men who put their trust in a man-made machine.

USS Squalus (SS 192)



Down, down; a graceful diving slant under control. But wait! Too many bubbles belch in a cloud around the after part of the boat. It wavers; its forward motion is lost; the angle changes but its progress downward accelerates as the stern falls. The heavy steel walls hide swift drama inside and, as in a picture on a silent film, the stricken submarine sinks noiselessly to the bottom coming to rest in a cloud of churning mud. Tragic bubbles still issue from the undersea giant whose 299-foot length is mocked by the infinite sea.

A moment of inaction -- stunned indecision -- while riled mud settles and bubbles continue to rise from a depth that never before has seen air. The fallen craft with its cargo of trapped survivors seems to stir as clouds of mud rise from the outlets of the valves under the bow with the outward rush of water from the ballast tanks. The long gray ship shows no other sign and the struggle to increase buoyancy ceases as air spurts from the muddy valves. Another moment of thought; inside, probably a conference, and a small movement can be seen in the middle of the forward deck. Lazily at first, but gathering speed rapidly, there rises from a small hatch a bobbing float which struggles upward on the end of the small cable still attached to the boat. It breaks the surface and the foundered SQUALUS can do no more. To those at the bottom the smoking beacon of the buoy released is in another world, a world of air and sunshine, calling for help.

Who can record what is said as minutes pass within that long black hull? Who can picture the tension of the officer waiting at the receiver of the telephone leading to the buoy above? Who can be said to have been the first to sense the approach of another long, black shape gliding on the surface with a frame of foam and the stur of its beating propellers? The approach of another undersea boat duplicates the image of the silent shadow which disturbed the sea at the

USS Squalus (SS 192)

start of the ill-fated SQUALUS dive. As though in answer to the call of family, the sister-ship USS SCULPIN I (SS-191) has been drawn to the spot and from the smoking beacon discovered the plight of the craft below. Above the surface intense activity must be starting and, in this other world of sunshine and air the alarm is already spreading to shock into purposeful action the resources of the American Navy. The lives of a crew of trapped men has become, in an instant, the major concern of a nation.

Silent hours pass. The gradual darkening of the ceiling above the inert submarine indicates the fading of daylight. Those above have established the fact that life still exists in the sunken hull and the gently rocking sister-ship stands by at the upper end of a slender anchor chain which slants through the murky depths to the ocean's bottom.

May 24, 1939 -- Lighter and lighter grows the greenish tint of the water's surface and deeper and deeper into the profound darkness penetrates the light of dawn. The shadowy shape of the sunken craft is discovered still held in the grip of the sucking mud. Darkness saturated with fear and uncertainty must certainly still grip the souls of the hidden men who cover their desperation by mocking it with ribald story and song. Through the floating space a bulky figure with spouting helmet dangling on the end of his lifelines has come from one of the many surface craft whose bottoms are clustered around that of SCULPIN. The slender telephone line to the surface has been repaired. The water makes no record of the stimulating and encouraging pleasantries that pass over that "private line" to SQUALUS.

The light is high and small craft have shuttled endlessly in and out of the range of vision until a larger, more sturdy prow cleaves a path for a throbbing hull whose purposeful approach gives mute evidence of its race from a distant base. Unheard cheers resound in the stuffy compartments of SQUALUS as the news the "FALCON: has arrived is relayed. Unheard by these survivors are the words that crackle through the atmosphere to the millions of the world who wait by loudspeakers, "the FALCON has arrived!"

With a celebrity born of experience FALCON throws out a circle of anchors which maintain its position over the wreck. A diving stage comes overside and, after a short drop through the green water, discharges the figures of divers who slide to the deck of the submarine each dragging his lines and his inseparable swirl of helium-oxygen bubbles. It is a scene of fantastic unreality. To a certain point on the forward deck the diver directs his efforts and at some signal, a cable slides down the guide line on a weighted loop. A moment of crouching and this cable is firmly fastened to a bulging hatch on the submarine. The thud of leaded feet on the deck has been cheerful accompaniment to the frenzied nonsense of the trapped men whose talking has prevented serious thought and the knowledge that no one has even been saved from a disaster of this type. In spite of this, there is an uplifting faith in comrades of the navy

USS Squalus (SS 192)

and in the resources of a nation whose experts, military and civilian alike, will not rest until rescue is accomplished.

Thus starts the climax of a chapter in history. Breaking the surface alongside FALCON there appears a strange bell-like shape. After bobbing about for a minute, the cable from the under surface of the bell to the submarine hatch tightens, the bells pulls itself under and starts downward trailing a row of violent bubbles and hose connections. Gently it settles on the deck of the submarine with the flattened end at the apex of tapering sides guided by the diver. Inertly it stays there like a growth marring the sleek lines of the hull. Varying degrees of bubbling surround the bell as the only evidence that its chambers are being blown out of flooded to accommodate the passage of men from the Torpedo Room of the submarine to the bell.

Finally the bell stirs. It moves and, under the tug of its cables above, it begins to rise with its freight of survivors. It breaks the surface at the end of the journey and it is known by the world that this task has been accomplished for the first time in history. Down again; up again; down again; up again; two more trips go smoothly -- so smoothly that tension grows. The last trip down. Darkness has fallen and the action can only be occasionally glimpsed by the flash of underwater lights. The last trip up. Castastrophe -- almost! Snagged by the tangled downhaul cable the bell hangs suspended unable to break away from the inert wreck and hanging by a frayed cable above. Desperate action to clear the foul consumes four dreadful hours but is at last rewarded. In the last load comes the Commander of the ill-fated SQUALUS to become the only Commander to have survived a submarine disaster.

Up above, the survivors. Every man not lost at the time of the accident is saved. Down below, the lonely tomb; further challenge to the FALCON that accomplished the greatest rescue in the history of the world.

Shipmates on Eternal Patrol in USS SQUALUS (SS-192):

James Andrew Aitken, FC3 / John James Batick, EM1 / Joshua Casey, FN / John Allan Chesnutt, MMC / Robert Lyle Coffey, EM2 / Elvin Leon Deal, MM2 / Lionel Hugh Fletcher, EM3 / Kenneth Ross Garrison, MMC / Robert Franklin Gibbs, TM1 / John Plesent Hathaway, FN / Eugene Arthur Hoffman, MM1 / Alexander Biggs Keegan, SN / John Joseph Marino, SA / Huie King McAfee, EM2 / J.H. Patterson, ENS / Alfred Charles Priester, TM2 / Frank Henry Schulte, MM1 / Bascom Slemph Scyphers, EM1 / Sherman Luther Shirley, TM1 / Don Smith, Civilian / Jack John Strong, MM1 / John Laurise Thomala, MM1 / Robert Preson Thompson, SC3 / Marion Lawrence Ward, RM3 / Robert Ross Weld, FA / Charles M. Wood, Civilian Electrician

USS Squalus (SS 192)

Survivors:

Lieutenant Oliver F. Naquin / Lieutenant W. T. Doyle, Jr. / Lieutenant (jg) R. N. Robertson / Lieutenant (jg) J.C. Nichols / Blanchard, Roland, fireman, second class / Bland, Judson T., electrician's mate, first class / Boulton, William D., seaman, first class / Bryson, Allen C., fireman, first class / Booth, Authur L., radioman, first class / Campbell, Roy H., chief torpedoman / Coyne, Gavin J., machinist's mate, second class / Cravens, Eugene D., gunner's mate, first class / Elvina, Feliciano, mess attendant, first class / Fitzpatrick, William, J., torpedoman, second class / Gainor, Lawrence J., chief electrician's mate / Galvan, Basilio, mess attendant, first class / Issacs, William, ship's cook, second class / Jacobs, Theodore, signalman, third class / Kuney, Charles S., yeoman, second class / Maness, Lloyd B., electrician's mate, third class / McLees, Gerald C., electrician's mate, second class / Medeiros, Leonard de, torpedoman, third class / Murphy, Francis, Jr., quartermaster, first class / O'Hara, Raymond P., pharmacist's mate, first class / Persico, Donato, seaman, first class / Pierce, Carol M., machinist's mate, second class / Powell, Carlton B., machinist's mate, second class / Powell, Charles A., radioman, second class / Prien, Alfred G., machinist's mate, second class / Washburn, Robert L., seaman, second class / Yubas, Charles, machinist's mate, first class / Smith, Warren W., signalman, second class / Preble, Harold C., Naval Architect