



Commander Submarine Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet

USS Cochino

August 26, 1949 - 7 Men Lost

USS Cochino (SS-345) was lost on 26-Aug-1949 when it was sunk in Norwegian Sea after onboard fire. (One man from Cochino and 6 men from USS Tusk were lost in the rescue operation).



- Keel laid by the Electric Boat Company, Groton, CT, 13APR44;
- Launched 20APR45; Sponsored by Mrs. Mortimer E. Serat;
- Commissioned 25AUG45 with Cdr William A. Stevenson in command;
- Lost 25AUG49.

Not much can be said about USS COCHINO (SS-345). Her career was stopped so short. Not by a foreign enemy under combat conditions, but by the ocean she was born to travel through, under simulated combat conditions, to test equipment and train her crew in the North Atlantic.

No member of her Naval crew was lost, but a civilian engineer riding aboard was, but not while aboard. There were six Submariners lost, but from another boat, USS TUSK (SS-426), coming to assist.

Everything that happened that August, in 1949, could have happened to any other submarine under similar conditions. Everything that could have or should

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have been done, was done by the Submariners in her and aboard TUSK. That's what they train for -- that's what they dread.

- 13 AUGUST 1949 1700: Atlantic Ocean, due West of Ireland.
- COCHINO steams on the surface 600 yards astern of TUSK. The bridge area and decks of both GUPPY-conversions are clear as both boats slid beneath the waves, snorkel masts raised. Both boats commence a wide turn to the North with right rudder. With the exception of those two head valves, the cold, gray North Atlantic appears empty once again.
- 24 AUGUST 1949 1500: 400 miles North of the Arctic Circle, the weather report comes in ... "POLAR STORMS WITH HIGH WINDS AND SEAS."
- The crews in COCHINO and TUSK didn't need a weather report to tell them it was rough on the surface. At snorkle-depth moderate seas were normally ridden out smoothly. Not so at the moment. The crews could feel the seas and the constant heavy motion was beginning to take its toll. The Diving Officers were constantly working along with the planesmen to maintain depth, but the seas were causing both boats to broach one moment and dive below snorkel depth the next.
- 25 AUGUST 1949 0300: Storm intensifying.
- Ventilation poor and hydrogen gas from the battery wells building up as the head valve aboard COCHINO continues to cycle.
- 25 AUGUST 1949 0745: Aboard COCHINO.
- Head valve cycling, ventilation decreasing, hydrogen gas up to 2% concentration with 4% the Danger Point.
- 25 AUGUST 1949 0801: Aboard COCHINO.
- Hydrogen gas at 4% -- smoking lamp is out -- too late -- explosion and fire in After Battery!
- All vents shuts -- ready to surface -- "SURFACE, SURFACE, SURFACE!"
- "Blow Bow Buoyancy, Blow the Forward Group, Blow the After Group, Planes to Full Rise!"
- Message to TUSK ... "HAVE FIRE ABOARD ... COMING UP!"
- On the surface COCHINO now has not only explosions and fire to fight, she also has the weather to contend with.
- Below decks the problem is a variety of short circuits. The explosion caused fire, there is smoke and the After Battery is generating hydrogen ... the compartment is abandoned. Those forward are passing out or becoming groggy from the gas ... Cdr. Benitez, skipper of COCHINO, orders all hands forward topside ... quickly!
- The bridge is designed for 7 men, there are 60 coming topside. One is unconscious and five are barely able to move on their own as a result of the gas and their injuries. Those that can continue out on the deck and are lashed to the sail of the boat ... 47, some in their underwear, some with life-jackets.
- Gas forward -- hydrogen continues to build-up -- another explosion imminent unless the short-circuit can be found and eliminated -- there are 18 men below decks aft of the After Battery.

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- Those topside won't last but a couple of hours -- if left below they wouldn't last a couple of minutes.
- A wave drives the stern of COCHINO under and ... "MAN OVERBOARD!!" He's seen ... no response ... only his life-jacket keeps him afloat.
- TMC Rauch disrobes and leaps in the water after CSC Morgan. Ten minutes go by and they are alongside. Rauch is too weak now and is losing his grip on Morgan. "Red Dog" Balthrop goes over the side and takes hold of Morgan while 5 other men pull Rauch aboard.
- 25 AUGUST 1949 0836: Aboard COCHINO.
- Massive explosion below aft -- 5 of the 18 below badly injured. Balthrop clings to limber holes while holding Morgan between his legs. The next wave brings them both aboard.
- 25 AUGUST 1949 0841: Aboard COCHINO.
- EM1 Martinez, working below meanwhile, has located the short circuit -- Battery #3 is shorted out to Battery #4. The only way to clear it is to disconnect the batteries -- from in the After Battery!
- No one is forward to enter the compartment and Lcdr. Wright, the X.O. decides to go in from the Forward Engine Room -- another explosion from the After Battery. If this continues, the hull could rupture. With an OBA donned and rubber gloves on his hands he uses his two hundred pounds to muscle the hatch lever and it opens.
- White flash turns to orange flame, flinging Wright to the deck of the Engine Room. His clothes were flung somewhere else. Exploding hydrogen gas causes flames to engulf him and the others in the Fire Party. Fires start throughout the Engine Room.
- With no skin on his hands, Wright throws himself against the WT door and wrestles it shut and secure. The entire compartment is engulfed in flames.
- From the bridge, Cdr. Benitez listens as the engines whine with speed and thudding with explosions. He knows that hydrogen gas has entered the fuel mixture. The runaway diesels are ready to disintegrate at any moment. Enginemen Fedon and Payne, although badly burned, react quickly and shut off the fuel supply.
- Wright is the last man out of the Engine Room and secures the hatch behind him, turns and collapses into the arms of ENC Spanne and TM1 Davis in Manuevering. His skin is gone, muscles are clearly visible where the skin used to be, his arms charred stumps. Only the area behind the OBA is left unseared.
- Another "thud!" -- "AUXILIARY POWER IS GONE!" The after diesels have shut down, nothing is running now. No electricity, no propulsion, no steerageway -- COCHINO is adrift in the North Atlantic at the whim of winds and waves.
- The men remaining aft begin to complain of headaches -- gas has traveled aft!! Help has to be gotten to the men aft, especially the injured.

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- LT(jg) Cushman takes a line aft across 100 feet of open deck. 8 or 10 feet at a time between waves, he reaches the ATR hatch and secures the line. "Doc" Eason can now reach the After Torpedo Room via the lifeline. Just as another explosion can be heard and felt below, Cdr. Benitez sees TUSK approaching. He decides to transfer all the injured to TUSK and keep just enough men aboard to get COCHINO back to port. But it won't be right away, for over an hour TUSK attempts to approach COCHINO but the seas won't have it.
- "Doc" Eason informs Cdr. Benitez he needs medical supplies as his are in the After Battery. With no power, CT1 Austin, supported by LT(jg) Clifford, Ens. Shelton and ET-striker Sherman, and muscling against the fury of the wind, uses semaphores to get the word to TUSK.
- A blur of men topside on TUSK -- a rubber raft being made ready. More scrambling on TUSK and a line is sent to COCHINO. The raft, with the desperately needed medical supplies is on its way. The line from TUSK parts, but the line from COCHINO holds and the raft arrives. Seaman Whitman takes the supplies and fights his way aft to the Torpedo Room hatch.
- Word has to get back to TUSK about conditions aboard COCHINO, and semaphores aren't going to do it. Ens. Shelton will be the one to pass the word, taking the raft back to TUSK.
- Another line from TUSK is received and bent on the raft. As Shelton makes his way to the raft, Robert Philo, the civilian engineer, has received permission from the Captain to voluntarily go along. As the raft enters the water it capsizes and both men hang onto the side straps as it is hauled back to TUSK. The 100 yard journey takes ten minutes.
- Five men aboard TUSK attempt to get Shelton and Philo aboard with the raft -- not enough. More TUSK crewmembers come down to assist. Ten men form a chain with the one on the end hanging over the side -- Philo is grabbed by the wrists, but he's knocked lose by a giant wave -- TUSK rises, heels over, smashes down on Philo who flops limply into the water, face down.
- Although he can't swim, Seaman Walker jumps overboard and puts a line about Philo. It comes loose and Philo bangs against TUSK's hull again, but Walker has him between his legs and holds on to limber holes. The human chain grabs them and they are hauled aboard.
- Shelton, in the meantime, is swept away from TUSK after being knocked out of the raft by the same wave that took Philo.
- As TUSK comes up on him he gains the raft, still secured by a line. He's thrown a line and hauled aboard after securing it around his waist.
- When TUSK surfaced at 0803, Cdr. Worthington in command saw COCHINO wallowing like a derelict off the port quarter, apparently without power, but not knowing what had happened. Then he saw the crew of COCHINO begin to come topside and being lashed to the sail, meaning there was fire or gas or both below.

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- Preparations are made topside to come alongside COCHINO. TUSK comes right at ahead two-thirds to approach from windward and aft. TUSK comes to within 20 yards of COCHINO drifting with the wind. Line handlers are just about to send lines across when COCHINO is picked up by the sea and yaws towards TUSK ... "ALL ENGINES BACK FULL!!!" -- Narrow escape from COCHINO's stern. Worthington makes four more attempts to approach with no luck. Squadron Commodore, Benson, tries and does no better and Lcdr. Cook, TUSK's X.O. accomplishes the same thing. So, TUSK backs off a few hundred yards and then sees COCHINO's signal for medical aid.
- When all's ready aboard TUSK, Worthington brings her back to within 200 yards. "Doc" Riley is prepared to go with the medical supplies, but Worthington thinks better of the idea when he sees the raft fifteen feet below deck level one moment and 10 feet above the next.
- By the time Shelton came aboard from the return trip of the raft, the two boats have drifted about a mile apart. TUSK is moving ahead at all ahead standard, her rudder is left 10 degrees to close and -- a huge wave breaks over the forward deck and slams fourteen men into the port lifelines that had been rigged earlier. Another wave sweeps the deck leaving only four of those in sight -- the stanchions had sheared at the base. RM1 Sonnessa still clung to the one that remained; TMC Costa's foot was wedged into a deck recess and EM1 Andrus and EN3 Olsen held onto the grab rail with smashed hands. Costa's foot comes loose and there were eleven ... "MEN OVERBOARD!!"
- "ALL ENGINES BACK FULL!"
- "MAN OVERBOARD, MAN OVERBOARD!"
- "MANUVERING STANDBY TO ANSWER EMERGENCY BELLS!"
- They came to the surface one-by-one. They gathered and then dispersed. All, that is, except Philo, who had disappeared.
- It wasn't going to be easy maneuvering the boat in these seas while keeping an eye on the men in the water and they weren't going to last long there.
- "ALL ENGINES BACK FULL!"
- "ALL ENGINES STOP!"
- "ALL AHEAD TWO-THIRDS!"
- "RIGHT FULL RUDDER!"
- "ALL STOP!"
- A line over ... caught ... GM3 Ingalsbe back aboard!
- COCHINO sends semaphore ... "May have to abandon ship!"
- "STARBOARD BACK FULL -- PORT AHEAD TWO-THIRDS" ... Morgan's next.
- A raft is thrown over -- Seaman Readon climbs aboard, the wind carries him away.
- Costa, in the water for 20 minutes now, rides aboard on a life jacket secured to the end of a line LT(jg) Penninton aboard not a moment too soon ...

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- Seaman Readon to be next ... TUSK nudges the raft ... a line goes over ... it's tossed away ... the sea tosses the raft along with Reardon who ends up head down, feet up. EN1 McFarland jumps in but can't reach the raft ... Seaman Shugar leaps in, makes it, secures line to Reardon, Reardon hauled aboard with Shugar close behind.
- Seven left ... nowhere in sight ... it's been over two hours since ... "May have to abandon ship!" ... TUSK heads for COCHINO.
- 25 AUGUST 1949 1350: Aboard COCHINO.
- After receiving acknowledgement of her signal COCHINO watched as TUSK pulled away out of sight. No one aboard knew of the desperate attempts TUSK was making to save her own crew. COCHINO is without electricity and has no propulsion. Benitez decides the men below the bridge had to be brought up else they'd perish. Forty-seven men had to be squeezed in somewhere -- forty-seven men were.
- From the stern -- "thud, thud" -- not hydrogen explosions this time -- it was the diesels lighting off -- the Electricians had auxiliary power restored and the engines in the After Engine Room were back online, but no rudder power. COCHINO was alive again, but would have to make her way by steering with the engines -- 200 miles to the nearest land. Just then TUSK comes into view!!
- 25 AUGUST 1949 1528: At sea, North Atlantic.
- COCHINO falls in behind TUSK travelling at COCHINO's speed. All that was necessary now was to make landfall before the hydrogen explosions tore through COCHINO's hull. Everytime the wind would take COCHINO's bow off course, she'd have to make a wide circle to return. 10 minutes of making way -- 20 minutes of turning. Then from Manuevering -- "Hand Power to Rudder!!"
- 25 AUGUST 1949 2039: Aboard COCHINO.
- More dull thuds from After Battery. Smoke billowing out of the Snorkel Mast, then ... "AFTER ENGINE ROOM ON FIRE, COMPARTMENT ABANDONED!!"
- "ALL HANDS TOPSIDE!"
- TUSK is turning -- TUSK approaches -- TUSK is 50 yards off on an opposite course -- TUSK stops and secures to COCHINO.
- 25 AUGUST 1949 2155: After Torpedo Room in COCHINO.
- All hands have moved topside as orderd, except the XO and "Doc" Eason. With incredible effort, the badly burned XO gets halfway up the escape trunk and decides to quit. Then realizing Eason can't get out with him blocking the trunk, he goes with Eason's help and they're both out. COCHINO is barren.
- A plank has been put over from TUSK, but no one is crossing, too dangerous. Lcdr. Wright moves forward to the plank and crosses. The other wounded are sent across.
- Just then TUSK's bow line parts and the two boats are held together only by TUSK's stern line. COCHINO's stern is rapidly flooding and settling. The entire crew of COCHINO is aboard TUSK with the exception of Cdr.

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Benitez who doesn't want to lose his boat. He reaches down, touches the deck and finally races across to TUSK just as the plank disappears between the tanks of the two boats ... the entire crew is safely aboard TUSK.

- The after line to COCHINO is cut and she begins to turn slowly as she stands on her tail with bow pointing skyward.
- "ALL ENGINES, BACK EMERGENCY!"
- COCHINO starts to slide ... TUSK pulls clear ... COCHINO disappears on her last patrol with a blast of spray

On Eternal Patrol with USS COCHINO (SS-345):

Robert Wellington Philo, Civilian Engineer... and shipmates with her from USS TUSK (SS-426):

Robert Francis Brunner, Jr., FN(SS) / John George Guttermuth, EMC(SS) /
Melvin Buck Henneberger, Jr., SA(SS) / James Robert Miller, EN2(SS) / Robert
Lee Pinney, SN(SS) / Wilson Manley Shafer, Jr., LT(jg)