



Commander Submarine Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet

USS Thresher (SSN 593)

April 10, 1963 - 129 Men Lost

On the morning of April 10, 1963, the ship proceeded to conduct sea trials about 200 miles off the coast of Cape Cod. At 9:13 a.m., the USS Skylark (a surface vessel assigned to assist Thresher) received a signal, via underwater telephone, indicating that the submarine was experiencing “minor difficulties, have positive up-angle, attempting to blow.”

Shortly afterward, the Skylark received a series of garbled, undecipherable message fragments from the Thresher. At 9:18 a.m., the Skylark’s sonar picked up the sounds of the submarine breaking apart. All 129 hands were lost—112 military and 17 civilian technicians.

The submarine community, the Navy and the nation were stunned. Thresher was the best of the newest. The ship was built at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery, Maine and was the first of a new class of submarine, designed for optimum performance of sonar and weapons systems.

Thresher was able to dive deeper and run quieter than other submarine at that time. She was launched on July 9, 1960, and was commissioned by the Navy on August 3, 1961. Two days after the disaster President Kennedy issued Executive Order 11104, ordering U.S. Flags to “be flown at half-staff on all buildings, grounds and naval vessels of the Federal Government in the District of Columbia and throughout the United States and its Territories and possessions,” from April 12th to 15th.

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To the Navy, the disaster meant more than the loss of 129 crewmembers and civilians. Thresher had been the most advanced submarine in the world, capable of reaching depths and speeds unimaginable a decade before. The Navy's investigation concluded that while the Thresher was operating at test depth, a leak had developed at a silver-brazed joint in an engine room seawater system, and water from the leak may have short-circuited electrical equipment, causing cascading casualties. The submarine was unable to surface.

Navy officials swore Thresher crewmembers would not die in vain. After the investigation, the Navy embarked on an extensive review of practices and procedures in effect during the Thresher's overhaul. The reviewers determined that existing standards at the time were not followed throughout the re-fit to ensure safe operation of the submarine. Four issues were of particular concern: design, construction, quality assurance and procurement. The lessons learned by the Navy from the Thresher tragedy were to ensure a safer submarine force. Because of improvement in submarine design, construction and repair, further disasters have been avoided. Perhaps the most appropriate legacy for Thresher is the fact that being a submariner in the U.S. Navy today is a lot safer than it used to be.

"Some good came out of the tragedy," said Neal Collier, son of Thresher's, LT Merrill Collier, onboard in preparation of relieving the Engineering Officer. "My father died on Thresher," added Collier, "but the tragedy had a positive effect in the submarine program, nuclear power and national defense."

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At a memorial ceremony in 1988 in Norfolk, VA., marking the 25th anniversary of the loss of Thresher, Vice Admiral Bruce Demars, the Navy's Chief submarine officer at the time, had this to say. "The loss of Thresher initiated fundamental changes in the way we do business...changes in design, construction, inspections, safety checks, tests, and more," said the Admiral. "We have not forgotten the lessons learned. It's a much safer submarine force today," he added.

Shipmates on Eternal Patrol in USS THRESHER (SSN-593):

Tilmon J. Arsenault, ENC / Ronald C. Babcock, Lt(jg) / Ronald E. Bain, EN2 / John E. Bell, MM1 / Edgar S. Bobbitt, EM2 / Gerald C. Boster, EM3 / George Bracey, SM3 / Richard P. Brann, EN2 / Richard J. Carkoski, EN2 / Patrick W. Carmody, SK2 / Steven G. Cayey, TM2 / Edward Christiansen, SN / Larry W. Claussen, EM2 / Thomas E. Clements, ET3 / Merrill F. Collier, Lt / Francis M. Cummings, ST2 / Samuel J. Dabruzzo, ET2 / Clyde E. Davison, III, ET3 / Donald C. Day, EN3 / Roy O. Denny, Jr., EM1 / Michael J. DiNola, Lcdr / Peter J. DiBella, SN / Don R. Dundas, ET2 / Troy E. Dyer, ET1 / Raymond P. Foti, ET1 / Ellwood H. Forni, STC / Larry W. Freeman, FT2 / Gregory J. Fusco, EM2 / Andrew J. Gallant, Jr., HMC / Napoleon T. Garcia, SM1 / John E. Garner, YNSN / Pat M. Garner, Lcdr(XO) / Robert W. Gaynor, EN2 / Robert H. Gosnell, SA / John G. Grafton, Lt(jg) / William E. Graham, STC / Aaron J. Gunter, QM1 / Richard C. Hall, ET2 / John W. Harvey, Lcdr(CO) / Norman T. Hayes, EM1 / Laird G. Heiser, MM1 / Marvin T. Helms, MM2 / James J. Henry, Jr., Lt(jg) / Leonard H. Hewitt, EMC / Joseph H. Hoague, TM2 / James P. Hodge, EM2 / John F. Hudson, EN2 / John P. Inglis, FN / Brawner G. Johnson, FT1 / Edward A. Johnson, ENC / Richard L. Johnson, RMSA / Robert E. Johnson, TMC / Thomas B. Johnson, ET1 / Richard W. Jones, EM2 / Edmund J. Kaluza, ET2 / Thomas C. Kantz, ET2 / Ronald D. Keiler, IC2 / Robert D. Kearney, MM3 / George J. Kiesecker, MM2 / Billy M. Klier, EN1 / George R. Kroner, CS3 / Norman G. Lanouette, QM1 / Wayne W. Lavoie, YN1 / John S. Lyman, Jr., Lcdr / Templeton N. Mabry, Jr., EN2 / Frank J. Malinski, Lt(jg) / Richard H. Mann, Jr., IC2 / Julius F. Marullo, Jr., QM1 / Douglas R. McClelland, EM3 / Donald J. McCord, MM1 / Karl P. McDonough, TM3 / Sidney L. Middleton, MM1 / Ronald A. Muese, CS2 / James A. Musselwhite, ET2 / Donald E. Nault, CS1 / Walter J. Noonis, RMC / J.D. Norris, ET1 / Chesley C. Oetting, EM2 / Guy C. Parsons, Jr., Lt(jg) / Roscoe C. Pennington, EMC / James G. Peters, EMCS / James F. Phillippi, ST2 / Dan A. Philput, EN2 / Richard Podwell, MM2 / John S. Regan, MM1 / James P. Ritchie, RM2 / Glenn A. Rountree, QM2 / Pervis Robison, SN / Anthony A. Rushetski, ET2 / James M. Schiewe, EM1 / Benjamin N. Shafer, EMCM / John D. Shafer, EMCS / Joseph T. Shimko, MM1 / Burnett M. Shotwell, ETSN / Alan D. Sinnett, FT2 / John Smarz, Jr., Lt / William H. Smith, Jr., BM1 / James L. Snider, MM1 / Ronald H. Solomon, EM1 / Robert E. Steinel, ST1 / Roger E. VanPelt, IC1 / Joseph A. Walski, RM1 / David A. Wasel, RMSN / Charles L. Wiggins, FT1 / John J. Wiley, Lt / Donald E. Wise, MMC / Ronald E. Wolfe, QMSN / Jay H. Zweifel, EM2 ... OFFICER OBSERVERS: Philip H. Allen, Lcdr /

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Robert D. Biederman, Lt / John H. Billings, Lcdr / Robert L. Krag, Lcdr ...
CIVILIAN OBSERVERS: Fred P. Abrams / Daniel W. Beal, Jr. / Robert E. Charron
/ K.R. Corcoran / Kenneth J. Critchley / Paul C. Currier / Richard R. Des
Jardins / George J. Dineen / Richard K. Fisher / Paul A. Guerette / Maurice F.
Jaquay / D. Kuester / Henry Moreau / Franklin J. Palmer / Robert D. Prescott /
D. Stadtmuller / Laurence Whitten