

Looking Back by Charlie Roberts (20)

I had an interesting adventure on my first submarine, USS Remora (SS-487), based in Hawaii. I had just completed submarine school and had been onboard only three months when the Cuban Missile Crisis took place in October 1962. We immediately took on a full load of warshot torpedoes and food and headed north, not knowing what was going to happen. I had recently read "On the Beach" by Neville Shute about nuclear war, and that added to my concern. Our patrol station was near the Soviet submarine base at Petropavlovsk on the Kamchatka Peninsula. Our task was to determine if the Soviets were preparing for war by deploying their submarines. Sonar reported what sounded like a submarine and we headed in that direction at periscope depth. I had just completed my diving officer watch, inspected the boat, and reported to the conning officer that all was well. He suddenly ordered "Right full rudder, 200 feet." He had spotted another periscope, very close and passing down our port side. It wasn't long before we detected Soviet destroyers and helicopters in the area and realized that we were in the midst of an ASW exercise. Fortunately, we were able to quietly slip away from the area, and I don't believe our presence was detected by the Soviets.

When the book "Blind Man's Bluff" by Sontag and Drew was published in 1998, the story about what happened to USS Gudgeon (SS-567) reminded me of what could have happened to Remora. In August 1957, Gudgeon was patrolling near the Soviet submarine base at Vladivostok. It was late in the afternoon, her batteries nearly depleted, and the air in the boat was foul with the odor of diesel. Suddenly she was detected by the Soviets and pursued, with small grenades being dropped on her during the chase. This went on for about 48 hours with Gudgeon going as deep as possible. Finally, the skipper had no choice but to surface to charge her batteries and clear the air. He sent a message to the Soviets saying, "We are going to Japan." The Soviets ordered her to get away from Soviet seas, and then said, "Thanks for the ASW exercise."

When Remora's patrol ended in December we headed back to Hawaii. Running on the surface early one morning we picked up an electronic signal from an aircraft. We submerged and I became the diving officer. Both engine rooms reported water coming in through the induction lines and I needed an up-angle and standard speed to stay at periscope depth. We surfaced, drained the induction lines, and dove again with the same result. We surfaced again and the

skipper told me to put on a safety harness, go out on deck, and work my way back around the sail to check the main induction valve. That 36" diameter valve was wide open and filled to the brim with water, which meant that the 22" induction lines running back to the engine rooms were also full. The pin connecting the operating rod to the valve had sheared, so the operating rod moved, and the indicator gave us a "green board" on the control room panel indicating that it was safe to submerge.

By coincidence I had done a term paper at the Naval Academy in 1960 about USS Squalus (SS-192). During a test dive off Portsmouth, New Hampshire, in 1939 her main induction valve did not close. The after half of the boat flooded and she sank to the sea floor in 240 feet of water. Using the McCann Rescue Bell, the Navy managed to rescue the captain and the other survivors in the forward part of the boat, though that wasn't easy. I interviewed the officer who had been in charge of the rescue and later the salvage of Squalus, VADM "Swede" Momsen and one of the Navy divers who received the Medal of Honor for the rescue.

Remora was in at least 12,000 feet of water, and it would have been very difficult to locate her remains on the sea floor or figure out what had happened to us. So, I am most grateful to be here today to tell the story.

In my article "Looking Back" in the March 2020 *The Submarine Review*, I mentioned that I did a term paper at USNA in 1960 about how USS Squalus (SS-192) sank during a sea trial off Portsmouth, NH, in May 1939 due to a failure of her main induction valve. There is more to that story, with an ironic twist to it. I mentioned that I interviewed VADM Charles "Swede" Momsen while doing research about the rescue of Squalus crew members. Momsen was known for the development of the Momsen Lung, a rebreather used to escape from submarines on the bottom in relatively shallow water. It was replaced by the Steinke hood. Momsen also developed the rescue chamber used in the rescue of the 33 survivors in the forward part of Squalus, which was improved by Lcdr. Allan McCann and bears his name.

When Squalus sank in 243 ft. of water, her after half flooded and the 26 men in the after-torpedo room, both engine rooms and the crew's quarters died. The survivors forward of that, including the skipper, Lt. Oliver Naquin, fired a red flare and released the forward escape marker buoy. USS Sculpin (SS-191) was

operating nearby, saw the flare, and located the marker buoy. Using the phone attached to the marker buoy they spoke briefly with Lt. Naquin and learned about the survivors in the forward compartments. Then the buoy cable parted, and it was intended to be attached to the McCann Rescue Bell on a submarine rescue vessel (ASR). Fortunately, Sculpin knew the location of Squalus and that there were survivors. When the Fleet Tug USS Wandank (AT-26) arrived at the scene, she dragged a hook across the sea floor and managed to catch a line on Squalus near the forward torpedo room hatch, which was fortuitous. A diver was then sent down to attach a new downhaul cable from the rescue bell on USS Falcon (ASR-2) to the torpedo room hatch. The bell made 3 trips down to that hatch and rescued 26 men. On the way up on the 4th trip, with Lt. Naquin in the bell, the cable jammed. The bell operators flooded the air tank in the bell until it was just slightly negatively buoyant, and it was lowered to the sea floor with the men inside. A diver was then sent down to cut the cable that was attached to the torpedo room hatch, and the crew members on USS Falcon then pulled the rescue bell to the surface by hand and rescued the last 7 survivors. The bell's cable was then attached to the after-torpedo room hatch and the bell operators made one more very dangerous dive, opening that hatch and determining that the torpedo room was flooded. The diving operations were so dangerous that 4 of the Navy divers, including the one that I interviewed, Douglas Badders, were awarded the Medal of Honor,

The salvage of USS Squalus was a complex operation, but she was brought to the surface using cables and buoys and towed to Portsmouth in Sept 1939. After considerable work she was renamed USS Sailfish (SS-192) and departed Portsmouth in Jan. 1941 for the Panama Canal and operations in the Pacific. Some of the crew members called her "Squailfish," but the captain threatened a court martial if he heard anyone saying that.

USS Sculpin also went through the Panama Canal and was operating in the Western Pacific on 19 Nov. 1943 when she was attacked by the Japanese destroyer Yamagumo. Sculpin was badly damaged but managed to surface, and 42 of her crew members were picked up by Yamagumo. After about 10 days of questioning, they were transferred to two Japanese aircraft carriers to be taken to Japan. On 4 Dec. 1943 the carrier Chuyo, carrying 19 of the survivors, was torpedoed and sunk by USS Sailfish. One Sculpin crewman, George Rocek, managed to survive by grabbing a ladder on the side of a passing Japanese

destroyer. So, 20 of the Sculpin crewmen died when Chuyo was sunk by the submarine that was named USS Squalus when Sculpin helped to save her survivors in 1939. An ironic turn of events.