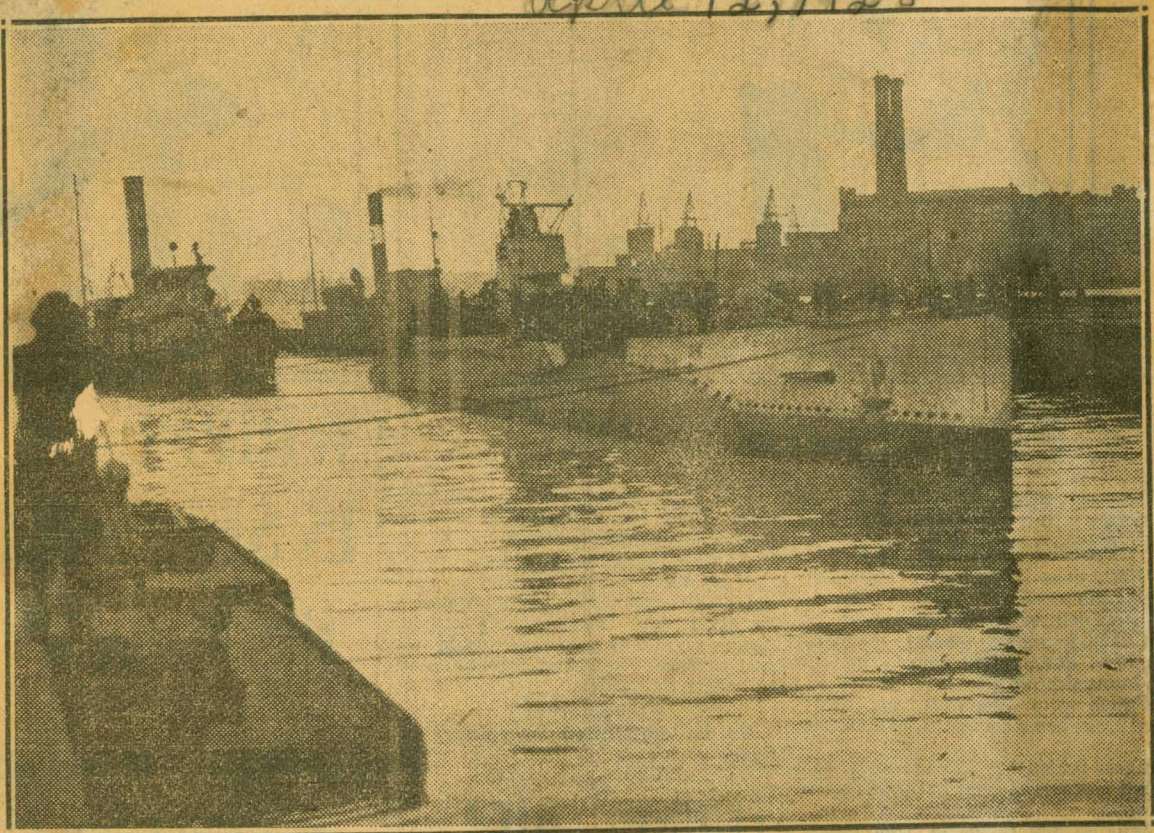


Submarine S-4 Floated Out of Drydock at Charlestown Yard

April 12, 1928



SUBMARINE S-4, TOMB OF 40, FLOATED AGAIN

Guided by tugs, the submarine S-4 was floated out of the drydock at the Charlestown navy yard yesterday afternoon, the jagged hole in her side repaired and the submarine once more considered seaworthy. The S-4 was tied up at a pier, awaiting instruction from Washington.

The S-4 was floated out of drydock at the Charlestown Navy Yard yesterday afternoon with ease. Work of flooding the dock began at 12:40 and shortly after 2 o'clock the sub was tied up to a berth alongside Pier 7 where it will remain until further instructions are received from Washington. During the time the S-4 was in dock more than 15,000 visited the yard to see her.

Cape End Skippers Pleaded Chance To Save 40 Men Trapped In S-4

Provincetown was tense, spoke in whispers and walked slowly, almost on tiptoe, during those anxious hours following the sinking of the S-4 by the Coast Guard destroyer Paulding, 23 years ago. Fishermen and their folk, eager to do all in their power to save the 40 men trapped in the submarine, railed at the inaction and stupidity of Washington. They offered the combined strength of their draggers to pull the stricken craft into shallow water where the outgoing tide would enable rescuers to bring out the men before they suffocated. Joe Berger, author of the Cape Cod Pilot and "Bowleg Bill," formerly and for years a resident of Provincetown, writing under the name of Jeremiah Digges, tells the story, graphically and often with ill-concealed disgust.

Here it is:

Off Wood End the submarine S-4 was rammed and sunk on the afternoon of December 17, 1927, taking the lives of forty men.

Provincetown, long hardened to wrecks, now witnessed horror such as she had never known before. Slow suffocation within steel walls, 110 feet below the surface, went on for days, while divers struggled to save the men with whom they could exchange messages by tapping in international code.

On the day of the accident, the Coast Guard destroyer Paulding had come across-bay from Boston to comb the vicinity for rum runners. Through lack of coordination between the two branches of the service, she was unaware that the submarine was at that time undergoing submerged trials in the deepwater course outside Provincetown Harbor. At the same time, storm warnings were flying, the wind was northwest — the worst possible weather for that particular stretch — and white water was already making over the submarine's projected course.

Rum Runners

The Paulding, finding no rum-running craft in the outside waters, rounded Race Point and headed for the harbor, steaming right into the submarine's testing ground. Meanwhile the submarine had been put through several dives, and at the moment was proceeding with only a few feet of her periscopes showing. A heavy sea was running, but the periscopes would have been clearly visible to any alert observer aboard the destroyer. They had been seen and recognized from ashore by Frank Simonds of the Wood End Coast Guard Station. Boatswain Gracie, coming up to the observation room, asked Simonds what he had seen offshore. The lookout said, "Not much. But there was a submarine on the test run not long ago." Gracie anxiously

took the telescope. Near the end of the measured mile he caught the little foaming wake of the periscopes. "Good God, there's going to be a collision!" And he ran down to get his lifeboat ready for launching.

The S-4 was just slanting to emerge, and her conning tower was half out of the water when the speeding destroyer struck. She smashed her stem into the battery room of the submarine, just forward of the conning tower, on the starboard side. The hole was only a foot across, but the impact and the leak it caused was enough to send the steel shell reeling to the bottom.

Radio Message

That the Paulding had been unaware of the S-4's presence in those waters is clear from the radio message she sent out: RAMMED AND SUNK UNKNOWN SUBMARINE OFF WOOD END PROVINCETOWN.

From New London sailed the Falcon, the Navy's only salvage ship in the Atlantic, and from Newport came Divers Eadie, Carr and Nichols. From Portsmouth came the mother-ship, Bushnell. From New York were sent pontoons—in tow of hopelessly slow tugs.

The collision occurred at 3:37 o'clock on a Saturday afternoon. The Falcon did not arrive on the scene until 7 the next morning. Meanwhile Boatswain Gracie of the Wood End Coast Guard Station, venturing out in his surfboat, spent twelve harrowing hours in a big sea, whipped by the nor'wester. He had found the submarine with his grapnel — and lost her again—before the Falcon arrived! Trying it once more, he struck at 10:45 o'clock Sunday morning, and about three hours later Diver Tom Eadie went down the grappling line.

Coming down with lead shoes

on the steel hull, Eadie caught an answering signal from within. Forward, from the torpedo room, it came to him unmistakably — six taps — six men still alive! Aft, there came no answer.

The S-4's conning tower was equipped with two emergency connections to the outside, one for an air line reaching crew compartments, the other for a line to the ballast tanks. It was now up to the rescue operators to decide which of these connections to make, for the divers could only take one line down at a time.

Air Line Down

When Eadie came up, Diver Carr went down with an air line. He did as he had been instructed: instead of coupling it to the S-4's crew compartment connection, which would have enabled the surviving men to breathe, he attached

it to a connection designed to blow ballasts, with the object of raising the submarine herself. But two compartments were flooded and the ballast system was broken, and the result was that instead of lifting the S-4, the pumps at the surface were merely blowing air into the Atlantic Ocean through her punctured lungs.

Upon discovering that they had guessed wrong, the officers ordered Diver Michels down to make the other connection. But the sea was now so great that diving itself looked like suicide. Michels went anyhow, became fouled in some wreckage, had to be rescued by Eadie, and was brought up three hours later in a serious condition. At this stage all vessels but the Falcon ran into Provincetown Harbor for shelter from the gale.

The prostrated diver was kept in the Falcon's recompression tank. Monday morning the Falcon left the scene, going all the way to Boston to put Michels in a hospital. It was explained by those in charge that further diving would be impossible until the storm abated. When the salvage ship returned, diving was still out of the question.

Tapping Continues

Meanwhile communication with the imprisoned men had been continued by Morse signals sent on an oscillator. On Sunday evening the Falcon sent down the query: "How many are there?"

"There are six." And the taps from below added, "Please hurry."

The next night the Falcon relayed a message to Lieutenant Fitch in the submarine:

"Your wife and mother constantly praying for you."

No answer came and through the night the message was repeated. Still there was no answer. Then, on Tuesday morning, from the sunken ship at last came