Black Clouds Shroud Watery Grave Of Sub

EDITORS NOTE: UPI newsman Michael G. Schofield returned Thursday night from a flight over the Atlantic where the search is being conducted for the nuclear submarine Thresher. This is his story.

By MICHAEL G. SCHOFIELD
United Press International

BOSTON (UPI) — A constant drizzle ran down the windows of the Navy P2V Neptune patrol bomber droning over the storm-tossed Atlantic.

Black squall clouds hung like a shroud over the watery grave of the nuclear submarine Thresher and the 129 men aboard.

Below the plane we saw a small armada of warships searching for bits of wreckage of the doomed sub. Visibility was near zero at times in the cold, damp fog and intermittent rain squalls and hail.

Battle Mountainous Waves

The ships, bobbing like corks, battled mountainous 30-foot waves and gusty, 60-knot winds to hold station in a tight search pattern about 275 miles due east of Boston.

The black weather was like the pessimism of the crew of the P2V assigned to Patrol Squadron 10 at Brunswick, Maine Naval Air Station. Their pessimism was there even before Navy Secretary Fred H. Korth ruled the Thresher and all aboard lost.

Lt. (jg) Thomas Vigorito, 26, of Brooklyn, N.Y., tactical navigator on the bomber noted that some of the search ships were heeling as much as 50 degrees from port to starboard.

Anchor Chain Useless

"No ship has an anchor chain 7,000 feet long," he said, remarking on the water depth in the search area.

"It's bad enough when you have to look for something like this," said Lt. (jg) Herbert Ducey, "but it's downright grim with weather conditions like this."

Ducey, 25, of Maplewood, N.J., is another navigator aboard the plane piloted by Lt. Cmdr. Harley D. Wilbur, 36, of Rochester, Mich.

The search for the Thresher and the submariners went on.

In the distance, two deep-sea fishing trawlers, sails flapping in the breeze, made their way slowly carrying men who seek sustenance and their livelihood from the same sea.

Bathyscaph May Solve Cause Of Sub Sinking

P5A BATHESCAPH 2-24-2 .Rhoi

SAN DIEGO, Calif. (UPI)—The Navy held hopes today the bathyscaph Trieste could determine the cause of the Thresher disaster, if the submarine is found.

No rescue operation could be attempted by the deep-sea diving craft, but it will carry one movie camera and three still cameras as an aid in determining what caused the disaster. The Navy said it also would take along radiation measuring equipment.

The Trieste crew worked around the clock to ready it for shipment on the dock landing ship Defiance.

The 13,250-ton ship, which will carry the Trieste on a football field-sized open deck designed for landing craft, is expected to depart late Sunday or early Monday. The Navy said the 4,900 nautical mile trip to New London, Conn., by way of the Panama Canal will take 10 days.

There was little hope the Trieste would be of use in the search for the missing submarine as it has practically no maneuverability except up and down. But if the Thresher is found wrecked on the ocean bottom, the Trieste could make observations, take photographs and be of aid in determining what caused the tragic mishap.

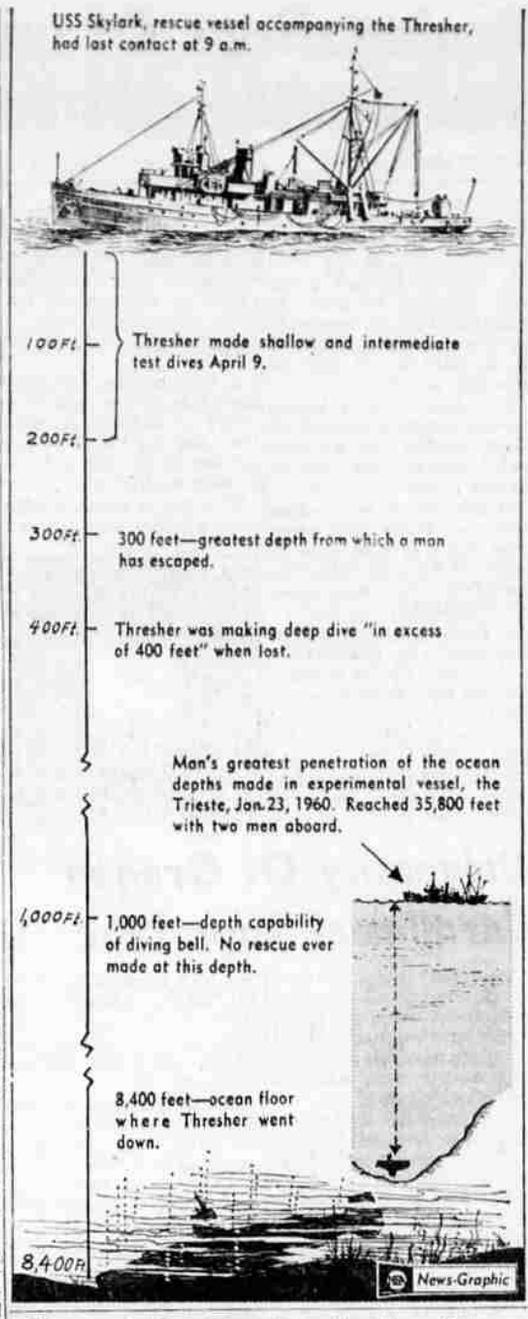
The 60-foot Trieste could easily reach the 8,400-foot depth where the Thresher presumably sank. The deep-diving craft made a record 35,800 descent in the Pacific in 1960.

The research vessel can remain submerged for 48 hours. Two windows are designed to provide visual observation of the ocean and the craft also is equipped with a mechanical arm for picking up ocean specimens, mercury-vapor flood lamps and a telephone for talking with persons on the surface.

CROWD RUNS RAMPANT

MANAGUA, Nicaragua (UPI)—Four persons were killed and at least nine others injured Friday when a crowd of spectators pushed onto a road during a motorcycle race.

USS Skylark, rescue vessel accompanying the Thresher, had lost contact at 9 a.m.



Piccard Ready To Probe Sea

LAUSANNE, Switzerland (UPI)—Veteran underwater explorer Dr. Jacques Piccard said today he would be "ready and willing," if asked, to man the bathyscaph Trieste in a search for the wreckage of the submarine Thresher.

"There is no question but that I would drop everything and go to help man the Trieste for this search, if the U.S. Navy asked me to," Piccard told UPI in an interview. "So far, however, I have received no such invitation.

"In any case the Navy has several fully qualified pilots who are perfectly able to handle the Trieste without me."

Piccard said he felt the bathyscaph, in which he set a world depth diving record in the Pacific last year, would be "invaluable" in the search for the Thresher, which disappeared off Cape Cod Wednesday with 129 men aboard.

Thresher Disaster Recalls 1927 Sub Sinking

By BOYD LEWIS

NEW YORK (NEA)—The sea has embraced the Thresher with merciful finality.

Only those who lived through agonizing days when the Navy struggled to save a handful of men in the torpedo room of the S-4 on the bottom off Provincetown, Mass., 35 years ago last December, can truly understand why the Thresher's fate must be called "merciful."

Such a one was this writer, then a reporter out of Boston for the United Press. To have lived through those frantic hours when divers sought vainly to carry air to the men faintly tapping . . . tapping . . . tapping in the sunken hull; to have lived through those painful, wintry months of frustrating salvage efforts after all hope of life was gone; to have lived through weeks of painstaking trial and naval inquiry—to have lived through this is to remember "S-4" as the symbol of a mighty ordeal.

And this is why one must say the Thresher's silent final plunge to the Atlantic deeps took her to a merciful end.

The Thresher closed its log on a test run; so did the S-4. There all similarity ends.

The S-4, carrying 40 officers, men and civilian engineers, was making speed tests along a measured mile course on the tip of Cape Cod. She had two periscopes, one of which was fixed on black and white wooden targets which visitors to the Cape can still see towering over the dunes. The other was supposed to be used to scan the horizon for shipping, which was not scarce near the entrance to that famous fishing port.

The S-4 ran the mile and tilted its bow to the surface. Unseen by the men of the S-4 control room was a Coast Guard destroyer, an ancient four-stack "tin can" which the Navy had turned over to the Coast Guard to hunt rum runners, for it was then the time of Prohibition.

The Paulding's watch officer spotted a suspicious motorboat scuttling just inside the Cape. The destroyer put on full speed ahead, black smoke pouring from its funnels.

Moments later the bow of the S-4 shot out of the waves directly under the bow of the Paulding. There was a grinding crash. The submarine rolled over and disappeared from sight. The Paulding, its fragile bow sheared back to the last safety bulkhead, came to a halt, down at the head but afloat.

Naval salvage crews were mobilized. Tugs headed for the scene towing great pontoons. Divers were summoned from Navy Yards at Charleston, Mass., and Brooklyn.

A bald Navy eagle with the wings of a flier on his chest, Capt. Ernest King, later to be Chief of Naval Operations, was in direct charge of the salvage task force from the tug Falcon. A Navy commander named Edward Ellsburg, later to gain fame clearing the ports of Eritrea in World War II and as a writer of sea fiction, also was flown in.

Newspaper reporters, still and newsreel cameramen and a small army of the curious swarmed down the winding highways of the Cape that sub-zero 17th of December. I hailed a cab outside my office in Boston and said: "I want to go to Provincetown—as fast as possible."

The Portuguese fishermen became our ferrymen on the grim run out to the salvage scene. At $100 a trip it was better than hauling in cod.

The first divers down found the S-4 resting 105 feet deep, a deep gash near her conning tower.

At first there was no sign of life. Then at midnight came a call from Cmdr. Ellsburg for some of us to get out to the Falcon.

Three of us chartered a lobsterman and chugged across the black pit of the harbor to the Falcon, where Ellsburg revealed that he had been down in a diver's suit, had heard faint Morse code-like tapping on the wall of the forward torpedo room and had gotten to the surface with difficulty after his suit sprang a leak.

Navy officers estimated six men were in the forward torpedo room. Their air could hold out at most about three days.

Divers went down in relays in frantic, futile efforts to get an air hose into the torpedo room before the air became poisonous. The sea was choppy and bitterly cold. One after another the brawny divers were hauled out with the "bends" and were placed in the Falcon's decompression chamber to get the deadly nitrogen bubbles out of their veins.

The taps went on for a while, steadily fainter and more erratic. By the third day there were no taps and there was no more hope. The S-4 job had become mere salvage.

Eventually the salvage crews got great chain slings under the hull and wrapped them around the sunken pontoons. On a bright day just three months from the sinking, the pontoons were pumped dry and the S-4 was brought to the surface.

I stood on the after deck of the tug Sagamore with my watch in hand. The sea boiled and the rusted bow of the S-4 broke the surface. I looked at my watch. It was three months to the minute since the submarine had gone down.

DEATH SUB ARISES — Flag flew at half-mast on hte hulk of the S-4 in Charleston Navy Yard in March, 1928. She had been brought to the surface three months after the disaster.

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