The morale was high and our daily routine more or less normal. We had entered the Arctic Circle some time before and had been pronounced members of the "Order of the Bluenose" as all mariners who have ventured in Arctic waters are titled. We had been told our training cruise would be an important one and we would be in the North Atlantic. The North Atlantic as you know covers a vast area. However, as our temperature gauges and indicators began steadily dropping it was obvious we were approaching the polar regions. The days were getting longer and it was strange to hear that it was daylight at one o'clock in the morning. Those observations were reported by personnel who manned the bridge during our cruising on the surface. After gathering technical data and a supply of fresh air (which was a little too cold for comfort) our submerged cruising would resume. Such was life aboard and from the standpoint of success, between our operation versus the Arctic conditions -
we were on top.

I woke up at 0645 on the fateful morning of the 25th. The first thing I noticed was the deep quietness which indicated we were below the surface. I washed my face and brushed my teeth -- and combed my hair. Strangely enough all sailors comb their hair at sea. Just one of those things I'd say. At 0700 I ate a hearty breakfast of ham, scrambled eggs, bread, butter and coffee. Not to mention our daily vitamin tablet called "Sunshine dose" since it was to supplement our lack of sunshine. I was feeling fine.

At 7:20 AM I went to my station and relieved the electrician at the Main Motor Control Board. My two partners RP Kendell and RH Jones were with me. All of our meters and indicating equipment showed normal conditions. We handled all speed and engine combinations efficiently. Such changes were routine and there was not, up to this time, an abnormal condition of the main propulsion system. After cruising for a while on our main storage batteries, we received orders to run on our diesel engines while still in the submerged condition. The Snorkel system is used for that purpose, since it provides an air supply from the surface to the engines and also an exhaust system from the engines back to the surface. It's more complicated than it sounds as it incorporates a number of safety features for its proper operation.

After a lapse of time, we discontinued "snorkeling" upon the alarm to do so, which was originated by our diving officer in the Control Room. We at the main Control Board in the maneuvering room, carried out our orders in the prescribed way. After shifting our propulsion back to battery and noting normal conditions, we stood in silence for a brief moment -- as the main motors hummed and we moved gracefully under the water -- zero hour was fast approaching.

At 10:46 AM, the first explosion took place. It was a deep solid noise accompanied by a rocking concussion effect. Our indicating instruments in the Main Control board showed an intermittent direct short in the after battery group. The ship was now in a state of emergency. Second and third similar explosions immediately followed the first one. The general alarm was now on -- the speaker system blaring the state of emergency as "fire in the after battery" at which time the crew evacuated said compartment. At the moment just prior to the second explosion, I had ordered "clear the board" and our usual sequence of operations for that situation were carried out -- principally that of isolating the affected battery from supplying power for the ship.

We worked in perfect coordination and with speed which was the utmost importance in such a case. At this moment the damage control parties in the forward part of the sub were sealing the compartment and fighting what seemed to be a flameless fire, characteristic of an electrical fire. At frequent intervals explosions took place within the sealed compartment, our indicating meters still registered intermittent short circuits. The after compartment was filling with a strong whitish smoke. We had to stay at the Control Board since we were propelling the ship with power from the forward battery group.

Another explosion -- one of greater intensity than the previous ones took place, this tore up the heavy conductors of the battery and caused a condition where one battery started charging the other at a tremendous rate. Such a state meant the generation of hydrogen gasses by the battery being charged and the accumulation of such gasses. Since ventilation was lacking therefore a major hydrogen gas explosion was now imminent. It was now a matter of minutes before a dangerous concentration built-up near the already existing arcs of the short circuited cables which originally started the fracas. Time was precious at this moment. As soon as I noticed the conditions of the batteries from the instruments at the Control Board, I appointed an electrician to stand by the controls.

I then rushed through the engine rooms to the scene of the damage control fight adjacent to the sealed compartment. Mr. Wright, our executive officer and second in command of the ship was
there. He spotted me and didn't hesitate two seconds in asking me what we could do to check the chemical action of the two batteries. I told him there was but one thing to do -- and that was to throw the main cable disconnect switch to "Off". It was the only means of separating the groups of batteries. But to enter the compartment even with rescue breathing apparatus was an extremely dangerous mission. Mr. Wright, a tall husky man with a strong dominating character made a split second decision and told us he was going in. As other personnel prepared his breathing apparatus, I rushed to the Maneuvering Room in search of a pair of rubber gloves, specially built for handling high voltages. I found them and took them to Mr. Wright. The party was now ready to attempt the only possible means of saving the ship. They had one chance in a thousand, but they were determined to do it. I retreated to the Propulsion Control Board.

A few seconds lapsed, they seemed like hours. Then -- a violent explosion took place at the forward engine room where the damage control party was fighting frantically to enter the effected space. We felt a weakening effect at the moment of the blast, as our thoughts centered on total defeat of our plans and -- loss of our men. Thanks God oxygen was being circulated by one engine at the time of the explosion. Our nearly doomed party regained consciousness and staggered back past the Maneuvering Room to the Torpedo Room to safety. They formed a grotesque aspect with their faces and hair burned. The skin falling from their hands and arms.

A first aid station was organized and all were coated with Vaseline petrolatum and some even with ball bearing grease since our medical supplies had run out. Five men were injured in that explosion; Mr. Wright being the most seriously burned. Through our communication system, which never failed during the disaster, we found out that the forward part of the ship had been evacuated on orders of the Captain, due to the escape of hydrogen gases from the effected main battery. Therefore, all the crew with the exception of the 18 men that were trapped in the last three compartments were crammed on the bridge and the periscope shears, dodging the piercing cold air and the waves as they overlapped the entire weather deck. Thanks to our streamlined design the periscope bridge housing offered a good shelter from the waves, but was very cold.

The overall condition of the ship at this time was at its grimmest point. The forward section being evacuated, the mid section of two compartments raging with fire and generating explosive gases due to their chemical action of the batteries, and in the after section of three compartments, we found ourselves helpless since we had lost auxiliary power during the last major explosion. We had our after engines in running condition but lacked electric power for the electric pumps that supplied them with fuel. Our main propulsion motors were also in running condition but lacked their auxiliary equipment such as cooling and lubricating systems. We were now dead in the water and with little or no hope of getting under way again.

It was during this period that our sister sub the TUSK was carrying out a mercy operation of sending us the badly needed medical supplies we had requested for our wounded. They were confronted with a rough and dangerous situation. It was miserable. The waves lashed with tremendous force and the wind whipped constantly. They succeeded in reaching us with the supplies, of which the morphine and other vial aids were administered to the wounded immediately. It was not until the latter part of the ordeal that we knew the price they paid to accomplish such a mission. They had lost six men.

Up to this time we had one obstacle after the other from reaching our goal of maintaining the ship underway. This time it depended on the crew in the after section to provide means of supplying the engine and motor auxiliaries with power. It was in particular the electricians move -- and we had an answer to the situation. Even though we were practically exhausted and suffering a constant headache, which we later learned was due to the battery gases, we managed to gather some tools and get started. Electricians Kendall and Kramier and myself worked steadily for 20 minutes which actually seemed much longer.
We had to hook up emergency leads to our only source of power, and with great caution and eyes wide open I entered the Main Control cubicle to connect the leads. Kraimer connected the other leads to the distribution power panel. I was now ready to test our polarity. The connections were correct. We had power at last! We notified the Captain and acquired permission to get underway on two engines, I heard later that every man down to the lowest seaman managed to crack a smile when they heard our engines roar even though it was bitter cold up there. We weren't licked yet and at this moment we were headed to the nearest port. Things seemed rosy, We were steering with the screws at first as we encountered some difficulty with the steering system. It was not long after that when the rudder was operated as well. Torpedoman Davis had been working with it till he succeeded.

I was very tired and exhausted. It was now about 9 o'clock at night. I had been at my station for 14 hours straight. Electrician Fantango came to me and claimed he couldn't sleep due to headache and said he would relieve me. I agreed and decided to lay down and relax even though I also had a terrible headache. My exhausted condition dominated everything and after saying my prayers -- I slept.

Conditions remained unchanged for the next two hours or so. However, an extremely dangerous gas pressure was being built up gradually in the affected compartments. We realized that by noting the condition of the batteries.... there was nothing we could do. Therefore, we hoped and prayed it would not ignite.

A terrific explosion woke me up. It didn't take me but a few seconds to awaken completely and realize that the situation was bad. Everybody was moving about and smoke and gas prevailed. I asked the electrician who had taken my post what had happened. His face was stern and in clear words said "The battery compartment blew up, we're licked." I sensed tragedy and together with the rest of the men began adjusting my life jacket as I waited for the abandon ship order. It came right after and our next move was to seal the empty compartments and move to the after torpedo room. The escape trunk hatch was opened. Men began on their journey up the ladder as the sea drenched them with water since the sub was so low and the sea was heavy.

Lt. Cmdr. Wright, who was seriously wounded was wide awake and he ordered everybody to go before him. At that time he must have had intentions of staying with the ship. My turn to go up the ladder came and I headed upward my life jacket already inflated. A huge wave greeted us as I reached the top. It ran down my neck and onto my chest. The rest of the water poured down my side into the compartment. The water was so cold (47 degrees F) that it almost paralyzed me. I remember staying motionless for a few seconds. My will to proceed propelled me up. I reached the weather deck and started the long dangerous walk towards the bridge as the sub swayed and the waves pounded on our sides.

I was shivering by now. The wind was hitting my wet clothes and it seemed I was in ice. Making sure of every footstep I reached the bridge and huddled with the rest of the men. I saw the Captain for the first time. He was shivering and his face was blue. He had given his boots and weather cap to crew members and was doing his best to cheer the crew. He spotted me and asked me -- "Martinez, how are conditions back aft?" I answered -- "Very bad sir, we lost all available power due to the last explosion." He nodded and continued giving orders to our signal man. At this time he was informed of Mr. Wright and two others who were still in the after compartment. He immediately organized a rescue party and they were brought out. All the crew was now on top deck. The internal condition at this time was a raging inferno and getting worse every minute.

We were prepared to board the TUSK, which was now attempting to come alongside, or to jump into the sea if our sub sank. It was a race with time. it was now 12:30 AM the morning of the 26th. The fury of the heavy sea never decreased its tempo. The TUSK had decided and was determined to come alongside to our rescue regardless of the danger involved. The TUSK, even though in full control of its propelling equipment, pitched and rolled as it approached our port bow. The men were
ready with mooring lines -- knowing the feat they were to accomplish was practically an impossibility. The two subs got closer and the two crews braced as tons of steel clashed. Should any of our torpedoes exploded due to heavy shock -- you never would have read this story, as it would have meant the instant loss of both submarines. After completing the most dangerous and adverse job in seamanship, the TUSK was now ready to rescue us.

The Captain ordered the wounded off the ship first. Then came a phase of extreme danger, as the gangway could not be secured to any ship due to its length. Therefore, as the ships would roll away from each other the gangway would fall by its lines and render it useless for passage to the TUSK. The crew had to use it only at such times when the two ships met. It was a problem of keeping in step with the sea -- and a most difficult task at that. Should a man be crossing when the gangway swung on its lines, he would certainly fall -- and to instant death, as the hulls of the ships slapped each other with tons of force. I volunteered to hold one of the lines of the gangway and with the aid of a big German army knife which I had bought in London, managed to manipulate the gangway from one position to the other as our crew kept crossing it in the sequence we had established. Most of the crew had crossed. Only four of us remained on the COCHINO.

I heard someone yell "now you go Martinez." I got ready, noted the condition and dashed across. I was safe, thanks God. The other three followed -- the Captain, in the tradition of a true skipper was the last man to leave. We were hurrying down into the TUSK -- as the COCHINO gave her last dying cough, settled to starboard and gently settled into her grave, stern first. God had performed a miracle -- the last man had left the COCHINO two minutes before she disappeared forever.

I stood for a moment on the deck of the Forward Torpedo Room of the TUSK and heard about the COCHINO sinking. With my clothes dripping and my life jacket still strapped on me -- my mind wandered. I stared as I felt a deep weakening feeling go through me in common whenever something dear departs from me. The COCHINO had been my home, we had gone through many an adventure together and had always come through. It didn't seem possible that we had parted in this desolate miserable part of the world. It was only natural for us to feel hurt and deeply touched knowing we wouldn't come home together. The crew remained in silence with such thoughts reeling through their minds. I could tell by their faces -- I know because I've experienced this tragic situation before. All sailors love their ship.

The TUSK crew demonstrated the highest level of loyalty and comradeship tradition in our Navy. They cared for us in every respect. Our wounded were given complete first aid. We were assisted in changing our clothes then received their own clean clothes. They handed us cigarettes which they had neatly stored in their lockers for their own use. They filled pitchers with hot coffee and went around giving it to us. It was really something to witness -- the saga of two American crews helping each other like brothers. They had saved our lives, and had paid dearly in so doing, yet their spirit never gave out, their devotion was but to help the distressed.

As I sat on a bunk, feeling the warmth of clean clothes and socks and enjoying a cup of coffee -- I thanked God and asked that the souls of those who left us be received in heaven. I thanked Him from my heart for everything.

We headed for the port of Hammerfest, Norway making full speed. it was not long before we saw the snow covered mountains of Norway. We entered the fjord and slowly approached the town in the distance. The countryside was deep green, the water deep blue and with its mountains it formed a majestic sight -- it was like moving into a picture card. It was there that our wounded received adequate medical care from a Norwegian doctor, and an American doctor was flown from Oslo.

The next day we left Hammerfest and proceeded to Tramso, about 120 miles south. Tramso, a picturesque and prosperous town, demonstrated great hospitality and courtesy, traditional with the Scandinavian people. First of all, arrangements were made for us to send cablegrams home. I could
hardly wait to do so. I feared the Navy would reveal the sinking and omit the fact that the crew was saved. Such a shock would be terrifying to my dear wife and family. Shortly after we received notice that the Navy did reveal the disaster, stating that the crew was saved and the loss of six men from our rescue submarine. Our loss of life was a civilian technician who accompanied our party sent out in a rubber raft to seek medical supplies. That being the only way to exchange such and since the sea was too rough for the TUSK to come alongside.

The Norwegian Air Force and Navy took us in custody and treated us very nice. They provided us with berthing facilities, excellent food, and their best beer -- which I must say tasted very good after our ordeal. Our wounded were flown to London, enroute to the US. Wright, who was in no condition to travel, was taken to a hospital in Tramso until he could better withstand the journey home by plane.

Our departure from Tramso had a memorable and inspiring moment -- it was an honor rendered to our most seriously wounded shipmate, Mr. Wright. According to plan he was seated at a window of the hospital facing the beautiful fjord at the near distance. As we passed by, the COCHINO crewmen lined the deck and waved at him. Our ship whistle sounding a mournful good-bye. He waved back, giving us a deep feeling of that warm friendship so typical among fighting units of the U. S. Submarine Service. We headed directly home glad -- but yet depressed, we had lost the battle -- no true soldier is proud of that.