

Chapter 1 > The Mission

Subase Bangor

Cold, Pacific Northwest drizzle added to the tearful scene on the Delta pier as crewmembers from the USS Alaska said goodbye to their wives and children. The gray skies seemed to blend in with the dark water and black submarines. One hundred and eighty sailors from the Blue Crew were departing for a seventy-day strategic deterrent patrol. Alternating Blue and Gold crews ensured continuous operations for America's Trident fleet. With twenty-four submarine-launched ballistic missiles each, professional submariners kept their nuclear arsenal at-the-ready in order to deter other countries from attacking the United States.

Captain Connery's twelve-year old daughter, Caroline, hugged him tightly. She knew it was almost time for him to lead his crew on another undersea mission.

"Dad, when are you going to get out of this submarine business?" a tearful Caroline inquired.

"I've lived half my life without you around."

"This is my last patrol, I promise. After this, I'm accepting an Admiral's post here at the base.

We'll see each other so much you'll get sick of me."

"So you'll finally be an Admiral like Granddad?" Caroline smiled.

"Don't sound so surprised."

“I’m happy for you, but this better be the last patrol,” retorted Caroline. “Don’t make me come after you. I’ve got super powers, you know.”

Just down the pier, the Alaska’s Weapons Officer, Lieutenant Wyatt, bumped fists with his son Nick as he crossed the gangplank onto the flat missile deck of the sub. “I expect you to take out all the aliens in Halo by the time I get back.”

“You know it, Dad,” Nick yelled back as he ran down the pier. “I can handle any creature or boss they throw at me.”

Nearby, Mike found himself face-down on the pier with a grimace on his face.

“I keep telling you, those untied shoelaces are going to trip you up one day,” Sonarman Timbers said as he helped his son off the deck.

“Sorry, Dad.” Mike looked up. “It’s always dark when I get up for school and my eye-hand coordination isn’t at its best when I’m tying my shoes.”

Petty Officer Timbers pulled a plastic glow stick off his life vest and put it in Mike’s hand. “The next time you need some light, just bend this tube, and it will start glowing brightly.”

“Thanks Dad.”

“Hey Mike, give me a ping,” laughed Annie as she walked by with her best friend Chrissie.

“Without my dad the Quartermaster, you bubbleheads wouldn’t know where to go.”

“Oh yeah, well, without my dad, the Alaska would be flying blind.” Mike gave the girls a quick comeback.

“Without the Radioman, the sub wouldn’t receive emergency action messages,” Chrissie chimed in. “You’d be cut off from the rest of the world without my dad.”

“I’d like to see your dad climb outside the submarine and fix a radio antenna while submerged,” shot back Mike.

“Enough arguing.” Sonarman Timbers broke things up. “Your dads are all important and we’ve got to get this show on the road. We’ll see you back here in a few months.”

The somber group of officers and men made their way down the escape hatches into the large ballistic missile submarine. The families and loved ones of the men who wore silver and gold dolphins on their chests consoled each other as they headed back to shore from the triangular Delta Pier. It’s a scene that’s been repeated hundreds of times since America began guarding its shores by patrolling the ocean depths with her most powerful weapon.

“Hey Caroline!” shouted Nick. “Let’s get everybody together and meet at my tree house. I think everyone’s safely below decks by now.”

“Sounds like a plan. I’ll text the others and see you guys over there.” Caroline climbed into her mom’s Suburban.

Once the last man dropped below decks and closed the remaining open hatch, the Officer of the Deck picked up a microphone and barked, “Station the maneuvering watch.”

The crew scrambled to man their posts in preparation for getting underway. The idea of getting almost two hundred men from their bunks to their assigned stations in less than five minutes is easier said than done. The cramped quarters, narrow passageways, steep stairs, and small

watertight doors of a submarine pose quite a few challenges to a sailor trying to get somewhere fast. Thanks to years of training, the engine room, torpedo room, missile control center, sonar shack, maneuvering, radio room, and control room were all manned and ready to go with seconds to spare. The Captain, Officer of the Deck, and two lookouts were stationed up in the sail to lead the way as the eyes and ears of the sub.

It might come as a surprise to know that submarines require the help of tugboats when navigating through rivers or narrow channels and when arriving and departing from a port. This time was no different as a large tugboat, tied to the port side of the Alaska, gunned her engines to pull the submarine away from the pier.

“Ahead one-third,” the Captain called down to the Helmsman driving the sub.

“Ahead one-third, aye,” replied the Helmsman as he twisted the Engine Order Telegraph to the right.

Back in the Maneuvering section of the sub, the one-third bell rang. This alerted the nuclear engineer on watch to apply enough steam to the sub’s turbines to attain the requested speed, the slowest. The Petty Officer gradually moved the large wheel to release the steam created by the nuclear reactor, and the propeller shaft began to turn.

The USS Alaska made its way northward through the Hood Canal. Often mistaken for a river, the Hood Canal is the largest fjord in North America. Twenty minutes later, safety cross-arms were lowered on the Hood Canal Bridge to stop civilian car traffic. Built by the military, the Hood Canal Bridge was designed to open so submarines could pass through and reach the

Puget Sound and the Strait of Juan de Fuca. The strait is basically a large, nautical freeway between the US and Canada where ships and subs travel from the Puget Sound to the Pacific Ocean. It's common to see cargo ships, oil tankers and cruise ships coming and going through this Inland Passage.

The submarine spent several hours transiting through the strait. This was a real treat for the sailors who were outside on watch in the sail. The beautiful Olympic Mountains lay to the south and Vancouver Island to the north. Finally, the Captain gave the word to move the bridge down from the sail and into the control room. The USS Alaska was emerging from the western mouth of the strait, and the Pacific Ocean was opening up before it.

"Something feels different this time," the Captain thought to himself as he stared at the never-ending horizon of dark blue water. "You've got to keep it together for the sake of the rest of the crew." He gazed one last time at the lighthouse at Cape Flattery on the port side of his sub. With a final puff on his cigar, he climbed down the ladder and closed the hatch above him.

"Diving Officer, submerge the ship." The Captain dropped from the ladder onto the deck of the control room.

The control room is the nerve center of the sub and a very busy place. Here you find the Helmsman and Planesman who drive the sub, the Quartermaster who navigates, the Chief of the Watch who maintains the ship's buoyancy, the Fire Control Technician who launches torpedoes and missiles, the Diving Officer who maintains depth, and the Officer of the Deck who orchestrates everyone's activities.

At the Captain's direction, the Chief of the Watch called out, "Dive, dive!" on the 1MC microphone and then sounded the claxon.

Large vents on the hull of the sub opened and released air from the ballast tanks. Someone observing this from afar might mistake this for a whale spraying air and water from its blowhole. As the tanks filled with water, the Alaska became less buoyant and slipped beneath the waves to enter the Pacific Ocean.

"Dive, make your depth four hundred feet," the Officer of the Deck ordered.

"Make my depth four hundred feet, aye," replied the Diving Officer.

With that, the crew began its normal watch rotation for their seventy-day patrol. It was business as usual for America's latest generation of submarine warriors. One-third of the crew was on watch, and the other two-thirds were working, reading, playing video games, taking college courses, watching movies, or sleeping. Most were unaware of the secondary mission in store for some of their shipmates.

Captain Connery met with his senior officers in the Wardroom, a small room in front of the Galley where officers eat their meals and hold meetings.

"Gentlemen," the Captain called everyone to order.

"As you know, we have a secondary mission that will commence in a few hours from now. The logistics of this mission require us to rendezvous with the Navy's newest and most advanced Deep Submergence Rescue Vehicle, the USS Omaha Beach. It's currently waiting for us, one hundred nautical miles off the coast of Washington State and is manned by a single pilot. The

Weapons Officer and three senior Petty Officers representing sonar, radio, and navigation will be joining me for this operation. When we transfer to the Omaha Beach, the Executive Officer will be in charge of the Alaska and it's his job to keep her safe."

The Captain glanced at the XO with a wry grin. "I'm not really sure what we're getting ourselves into here. All we know is that a cruise ship disappeared in the same area where our satellites detected an unusual heat anomaly coming from the bottom of the sea. Some think it's a new Bermuda Triangle and others speculate it's an underwater volcano. XO, I'm preparing for the worst, so I want you to keep the Alaska at a safe distance while monitoring our activities."

"So how will I know what a safe distance is, Captain?" asked the XO.

"Stay ten miles away and monitor us with passive sonar. The Omaha Beach will send you continuous telemetry data via High Frequency Internet Protocol (HFIP) so you'll always know our status. If things start to go badly for us on the Omaha Beach, I want you to get the Alaska out of harm's way at flank speed. Mr. Wyatt, assemble the rest of the team and meet me at the aft escape trunk in thirty minutes. We're adjourned here."

USS Omaha Beach

Out of the murky darkness of the North Pacific, a bright, silvery object slowly converged on Alaska's position as it arrived at the rendezvous point.

The Omaha Beach represented a radical departure from deep submergence rescue vehicles (DSRV) of the past. Looking more like a futuristic space ship than a miniature submarine, the Omaha Beach boasted its own small nuclear reactor to provide it with years of electricity and

propulsion. The steam from its next-generation reactor could spin its propellers fast enough to achieve submerged speeds in excess of 100 knots. This enabled it to outrun almost any of the world's fastest torpedoes. Its flexible, titanium-composite hull allowed it to reach depths greater than 5,000 feet below the surface. Rather than having a giant bubble of glass in the front to see out of, the Omaha Beach was covered with tiny sensors and cameras. What appeared to be a wall of glass to anyone inside the sub was really a flexible Organic Light Emitting Diode (OLED) display designed to replace the typical forward viewport. This was safer than glass and allowed other information to be layered on top of the underwater view. Crewmembers could make hand gestures in front of the display to move pictures, text, video and other items from one part of the screen to another.

The Omaha Beach attached its docking collar over Alaska's aft escape trunk with a thud. Captain Connery spun open the hatch and greeted the Omaha Beach's pilot. The rest of Alaska's away team made their way into the high tech sub and manned their respective stations to begin the mission. The pilot undocked the DSRV from the Alaska and it began to hover. Quartermaster First Class Love entered the coordinates of the mysterious heat anomaly into Omaha Beach's navigation system.

"I heard the best minds from DARPA and US Navy research created this sub." Captain Connery surveyed the interior of the sub with the amazement of a child.

"Yes, sir," replied the Pilot.

"Then it's time to show me what this thing can do. Pilot, make best speed to our target."

Everyone felt themselves pushed back in their seats as the sleek Omaha Beach quickly accelerated to 100 knots and raced towards its destination.

Radioman First Class Grant created an HFIP link with the Alaska to send her telemetry data about vital systems and the surrounding environment. "Wireless is online," Grant announced to the rest of the team. "Everyone can now remotely control their stations from their personal devices and communicate with the Alaska via Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP), instant messaging and email."

"Knowing my daughter Caroline and all your kids the way I do, I've got to believe they would love this futuristic sub," the Captain remarked to the rest of the crew.

"I second that!" Petty Officer Love had an excited look on his face.

"It's nothing short of taking command of the Millennium Falcon or the Starship Enterprise," added Petty Officer Timbers.

"I've never travelled at 100 knots per hour underwater before." The Weapons Officer pointed at the digital speedometer. "I'm sure our kids would think they'd made the jump to light speed."

A short thirty minutes later, the Omaha Beach closed in on the source of the heat signature. The sub's compass moving erratically was the first clue that something wasn't quite right. To make matters worse, the DSRV began to be pulled downward by an invisible force.

"Captain, I'm losing depth control," exclaimed the Pilot. "At 100 knots per hour, this should be next to impossible. I've got the diving flaps on full rise - with no effect. "

“Everyone run a full diagnostic test on all ship’s systems,” the Captain ordered.

“All systems nominal,” reported the team members one by one as their results were displayed.

“All stop,” barked Captain Connery to the Pilot.

“All stop, aye,” the pilot replied.

As the Omaha Beach’s forward movement slowed, its downward momentum increased dramatically.

“Radio, send a distress signal to the Alaska and the Commander of the Pacific Submarine Fleet!”
the Captain exclaimed.

THE OMAHA BEACH HAS ARRIVED AT THE COORDINATES OF THE HEAT

ANOMALY AND IS BEING PULLED TOWARD THE BOTTOM OF THE OCEAN.

DEPTH CONTROL IS LOST.

The message quickly went out to the Alaska and was routed to COMSUBPAC in Pearl Harbor via Extremely Low Frequency radio.

“Omaha Beach, this is the Alaska. What’s your current status?” the XO asked over the underwater connection.

“XO, we are accelerating toward the sea floor and it seems like there’s nothing we can do to stop it. You should be receiving our complete ship’s status via the telemetry feed.”

“It doesn’t make sense, sir. We’re seeing the data, and your sub is in perfect condition,” replied the XO. “Everything we’re receiving shows that the Omaha Beach is operating within normal parameters.”

Suddenly, the various display panels around the DSRV began to flicker and show distortion.

“Omaha Beach, your telemetry readings are starting to break up.” The XO’s choppy voice echoed through the DSRV. “I’m no longer receiving your complete stream of data. I’m also noticing some inconsistencies between your ship’s compass and the inertial navigation system.”

Unexpectedly, the sunken cruise ship appeared on the large display on the front of the Omaha Beach control room. Captain Connery spread his hands apart causing the image of the cruise ship to zoom-in and fill the entire screen. She appeared to be perfectly intact with no structural damage.

“Alaska, we’ve found the cruise ship on the bottom of the ocean.”

“Copy that, Omaha Beach,” replied the XO.

“I’m going to go out on a limb and speculate that there could be large pockets of air trapped inside the vessel.” The Captain stared at the ship on the display. “If there’s air, there could be survivors.”

Suddenly, the crew of the DSRV felt periodic thuds, as the lifeless, floating passengers of the cruise ship struck the hull of their sub. They looked on in horror as they saw hundreds of bodies floating toward them as they grew closer to the sunken luxury liner. Most were disfigured and half-eaten by sharks. All of them were wearing clothes that told the story of

what they were doing just before realizing they were on the Titanic. A Hawaiian shirt on a shuffleboard player, swim trunks on a swimmer, an evening dress on a woman dancing, a silk shirt and gold chain on a high-roller, and a bikini on a sunbather.

“Oh my God, it looks like we’re flying into an asteroid field of bodies!” exclaimed Petty Officer Love. “What could’ve caused all this?”

“It’s like nothing I’ve ever seen or imagined,” the Captain replied. “Whoever’s behind this, they might be trying for a repeat performance with us. It feels like we’re being pulled toward the bottom by a tractor beam out of Star Wars, and I don’t want us to end up like those poor souls floating outside.”

“Captain, I’m picking up an increase in seawater temperature,” said Sonarman Timbers.

“Luckily, it’s nowhere near the level of heat that was detected by the satellite or we’d be getting pretty toasty by now.”

Suddenly, a giant, glowing pyramid revealed itself in the distance beyond the cruise ship. The water all around it shimmered in a distorted way because of the heat it was generating.

“What in God’s name is that thing?” the Weapons Officer uttered.

“It looks like a glass pyramid sticking out of the seabed,” replied the Captain. “There’s some kind of radar or satellite dish next to it, as well. Sonar, send out a ping to determine our range to the unidentified target.”

“Verifying range to target, Captain,” said Petty Officer Timbers.

A loud, clanging sound enveloped the submarine as the Sonarman sent out the ping.

“Captain, we’re roughly 5,000 yards away from the target. I can’t get an exact reading because heat emanating from the pyramid has created a protective thermal layer.”

“Very well,” replied the Captain.

“One more thing, sir,” the Sonarman added. “Our range to target is decreasing rapidly. It appears the tractor beam is reeling us in.”

“Alaska, this is the Omaha Beach, do you read?” Captain Connery spoke into his headset.

“Omaha Beach, this is the Alaska,” replied the XO. “Your signal is breaking up. Telemetry readings are all over the map. We see the images of the glowing crystal. We have no intelligence data on this. Treat as hostile!”

“Whatever foreign power is behind this, we can’t let the technology in the Omaha Beach fall into their hands,” the Captain declared aloud. He began to feel sweat trickle down his neck.

“Weapons, plot a solution and fire a torpedo at that thing on the double.”

“Captain, the fire control computer is unresponsive,” responded the Weapons Officer.

“Not like this,” the Captain uttered under his breath. “If we can’t shoot this thing and we can’t get away...”

You could hear a pin drop as the crew of the Omaha Beach looked at each other in stunned silence and disbelief. Everyone onboard knew what the Captain meant.

“Petty Officer Grant, send the following message to the Alaska and COMSUBPAC.”

USS OMAHA BEACH CAPTURE BY ENEMY POWER IS IMMINENT.

BEGINNING SELF-DESTRUCT PROCEDURE.

“XO, this is the Captain,” Captain Connery announced into his headset. “All electronic systems onboard the Omaha Beach are behaving erratically. We’re only a thousand yards away from the ocean floor near a crystalline pyramid structure and some kind of radar dish. We cannot let the top secret systems onboard the Omaha Beach fall into enemy hands. We will therefore scuttle the ship before all our systems fail.”

Captain Connery paused for a moment.

“It’s been the greatest honor of my career to serve as your Captain. Please tell my wife and daughter that they’re the best things that ever happened to me. Have the Alaska depart the area at best speed so you don’t share our fate. XO, you’re the Captain now.”

“Mes_sage recei_d,” replied the XO. “Th__ ca_’t be hap___ing!”

“Weaps, quickly initiate our self-destruct procedure before it’s too late,” the Captain ordered.

“Aye-aye sir,” responded the Weapons officer.

Back onboard the USS Alaska, the XO sprang into action. “Helm, make your course zero-nine-zero. All ahead flank cavitate! I don’t care how much noise we make.”

“Making my course zero-nine-zero, all ahead flank cavitate helm, aye.”

Back in Maneuvering, the nuclear engineer spun the wheel as fast as he could to bring the Alaska to flank (top) speed without regard for the extra noise created by air bubbles from accelerating too fast.

The USS Alaska quickly departed the scene to avoid the inevitable shock waves that would come from a self-destructing sub.

Back on the Omaha Beach, Captain Connery spoke softly to his team. "I'm sorry, but you've got thirty seconds to compose a digital family gram and get it to the Radioman for transmission."

Everyone onboard the Omaha Beach turned to their computer screens and quickly typed farewell messages to their wives and children back home.

Quiet sniffing and even some whimpering could be heard in the control room.

"Did you father ever have to face death like this?" the Weaps asked the Captain.

"Admiral Connery was just a kid when he served on World War II submarines." The Captain looked him in the eyes. "But he faced death every day."

The Captain and the Weapons Officer removed special keys from around their necks and inserted them into the main control panel. They both turned their keys to the right and the Captain poised his finger over a large red button.

Petty Officer Grant quickly transmitted the digital family grams to the crew's loved ones. An electronic message seemed to be an expedient, yet horribly impersonal way to convey the death of a service member. Those unwelcome knocks on the door, so feared by the spouses of

America's fallen heroes throughout many wars, will arrive long after the bad news is already known this time.

"None of you deserves this ending," uttered the Captain. "I'm so sorry..."

Captain Connery had trained his entire career to push a button that would rain down nuclear missiles on America's enemies. Now he was pushing a different kind of button that would extinguish his own life and the lives of his crew. "What am I doing?" he thought to himself. His hands shook violently as he depressed the glowing red button with his index finger.

An eternity seemed to pass on the Omaha Beach as crew members sat with their eyes closed and their hands over their ears. Slowly, one by one, each member of the away team opened their eyes to see if they'd made it to Heaven.

The sub had gone dark and there was no explosion.

"What happened?" asked the Weapons Officer.

"It appears that we've lost power," the Captain replied. "Without power, the electromechanical features of the self-destruct system can't set off the charges."

"Yes!" yelled out Petty Officer Timbers as he high-fived Petty Officer Love.

Sighs of relief and laughing began to spread around the room.

With a little more conviction than before, Captain Connery pushed the self-destruct button several more times, to no avail.

“Let’s not get carried away with that button pushing, Skipper,” said the Pilot. “You might accidentally get that thing to work.”

“Being alive feels pretty good.” A relieved Petty Officer Grant spoke out in the darkness. “I’m sure whatever happens next couldn’t possibly be as bad as being blown to bits.”

Just as the Omaha Beach was about to land on the ocean floor, the strange radar dish reversed its magnetic beam and pushed the DSRV toward the pyramid. The sub eventually settled down next to the glowing structure with its occupants shrouded in darkness, due to the electrical disruption from the magnetic beam.

An accordion-like tube extended from near the tip of the crystal pyramid. It reached out to the Omaha Beach, arched over the top, and sealed itself to the upper escape hatch. The sailors onboard watched in disbelief as the hatch slowly opened and an infrared light washed into the main compartment. Several humanoid creatures dropped through the open hatch and landed on the main deck with a thud.

They looked like astronauts in black, spacesuit-like outfits and helmets. Peering out at the sailors from behind the curved, glass face-shields were ultraviolet, glowing eyes.

This turn of events quickly put the crew of the Omaha Beach on the defensive and everyone took slow steps backwards away from the intruders.

“This was definitely not in the Navy recruiting brochure when I signed up.” A nervous Petty Officer Love tried to make light of this new situation.

“I think we just made first contact with an Alien civilization,” added the Weaps.

“If you want to live, you’ll come with us and you won’t try anything stupid,” one of the strange humanoids announced to the group.

“I guess they don’t come in peace,” uttered Petty Officer Grant.

Without warning, the Pilot pushed through the group towards the Aliens. “I don’t take orders from freaks like you!” shouted the Pilot. He hit one of the creatures over the head with a fire extinguisher, knocking it to the ground.

Without skipping a beat, one of the other humanoid creatures reached out and clutched the Pilot’s face with its hand. Intense heat shot out from its fingers and seared his skin.

The Pilot screamed in anguish as his face began to burn.

“You’re killing him!” the Captain shouted. “Stop, and we’ll do what you ask.”

“It’s a little late for that, Overworlder.” The creature released his grip and the Pilot’s lifeless body collapsed to the deck. “Consider yourself warned. Now get moving!”

“Oh my God, he’s dead.” The Weaps picked up the smoldering remains of the Pilot. “We can’t just leave him here.”

“Oh, you will,” remarked one of the creatures with an outstretched hand.

The Weaps suddenly felt an invisible burning sensation, causing him to drop the Pilot on the deck. “Okay, okay, I’ll do what you want,” the sunburned Weaps muttered to the creatures.

The terrified crew climbed out of the upper hatch, and the creatures forced the sailors through a translucent tube into an opening in the pyramid. After walking down a short corridor, the

sailors were pushed into an airtight compartment and sealed inside. Everywhere they looked, they saw the red glow of infrared lights being used for illumination. With the crewmembers locked in their new underwater prison, the humanoids removed their suits and helmets to reveal their bald heads, hairless bodies and translucent skin.

“You’re being quarantined in this containment cell to ensure we don’t become infected by your Overworlder diseases,” barked one of the humanoid creatures.

“Who are you and what right do you have to capture our sub and hold us prisoner?” Captain Connery shouted.

“We have every right, Overworlder scum!” A new creature with an ancient Egyptian headdress emerged from the shadows. “Did you think you were the only intelligent life on this planet? Did you really think you had this whole place to yourselves? We’ve lived under the continents and the ocean floor for centuries. We were once like you until our ancestors were pulled underground several millennia ago when the waves of the Red Sea crashed in all around them. They believed they had descended into Hell. But our surviving forefathers learned how to thrive deep beneath the Earth’s surface. Our advanced race adapted to this subterranean world in a way that none of the Earth’s other primitive cultures ever could. Over the centuries, our bodies and eyes evolved to better suit our underground surroundings. Constant exposure to radioactive elements has mutated our genes so that we have the power to project heat from our hands. Today, we are one billion strong and we control the world beneath your feet!”

“Why show yourselves now, and why did you sink the cruise ship and kill all those innocent people?” Captain Connery retorted.

“That’s simple,” replied the Underworlder. “Your technology is becoming advanced enough to threaten our civilization. You may not realize it, but we’ve been closely monitoring you for the last hundred years. We’ve tapped your undersea phone lines and fiber optic cables. We’ve watched you create great societies and technologies, only to destroy them with greater and greater ferocity. I only wish your barbaric cultures would have wiped each other out by now. Like some kind of runaway virus, you keep multiplying and consuming all the Earth’s resources. Your world and ours are linked by a few miles of rock and ocean and we want those resources for ourselves. To that end, we’ve decided that your civilization has forfeited its right to exist on this planet. Consider the dead Overworlders on the cruise ship your first casualties in this new war. But for now, I have something different in mind for you.”

“Commander, begin the wrapping process on the prisoners!”