

As a history buff of anything and everything concerning U.S. submarines in World War Two, I was elated as my neighbor, who had responsibility for the dry dock at the local shipyard called.

"We have a submarine due to be dry docked tomorrow. Its number is SS310, and it is called the *USS Batfish*. Would you like to come down to the shipyard and see it?"

Would I? You bet! And it just so happened that I knew something about the *Batfish* from the book *Submarine* by Edward L. Beach. I knew that the *Batfish* was quite famous in a very special way. It seems in World War Two, subma-

rines were not considered much good at stalking and killing other submarines, until the *Batfish*, that is! She sank three Japanese subs in a little over three days, and started the Navy thinking about what are now called "hunter-killer" subs.

Yes, I was very interested in the *Batfish*, although I wasn't sure why she was to go on the dry dock.

Since I teach, among other subjects, communications courses including photojournalism, I always take my Nikkon, strobe and my 28mm wide angle lens, along with my other lenses. When I arrived at the dock where the *Batfish* was being readied for going on the dry dock the next

day, I saw a rusty old World War Two fleet submarine that had seen better days. After years in the Orange, Texas mothball fleet, the poor veteran was hardly a pretty sight. My neighbor told me that there was still a considerable amount of diesel fuel in the starboard tanks. This accounted for the boat's observable starboard list. Battered and rust-eaten plates were a common sight everywhere. Wires, cables, hoses and other assorted shipyard equipment wandered in a haphazard and seemingly random manner from bow to stern.

Now, lights have been strung through the submarine, and I received permission to explore her. I enter through the forward torpedo room hatch ladder and climb down past the escape trunk which, is also part of the hatch. I step off of the hatch ladder to the floor of the largest torpedo room in the sub. There in front, I can see the six round doors closing the torpedo room's six tubes. Various other valves, handles and levers are there in profusion. But the use of all that machinery is over. It, like the sub, is dead! Where once men lived, laughed, cursed, fought and in other subs died, is now only a cave-like quiet emptiness. A place of memories and if you look quickly enough, perhaps you can see a ghost or two. How easy it was to close my eyes and imagine the alert crew tensing for the "fire" signal, which would unleash one or more of their 21" diameter mechanical fish. But reality shows only an empty and somewhat foreboding torpedo room.

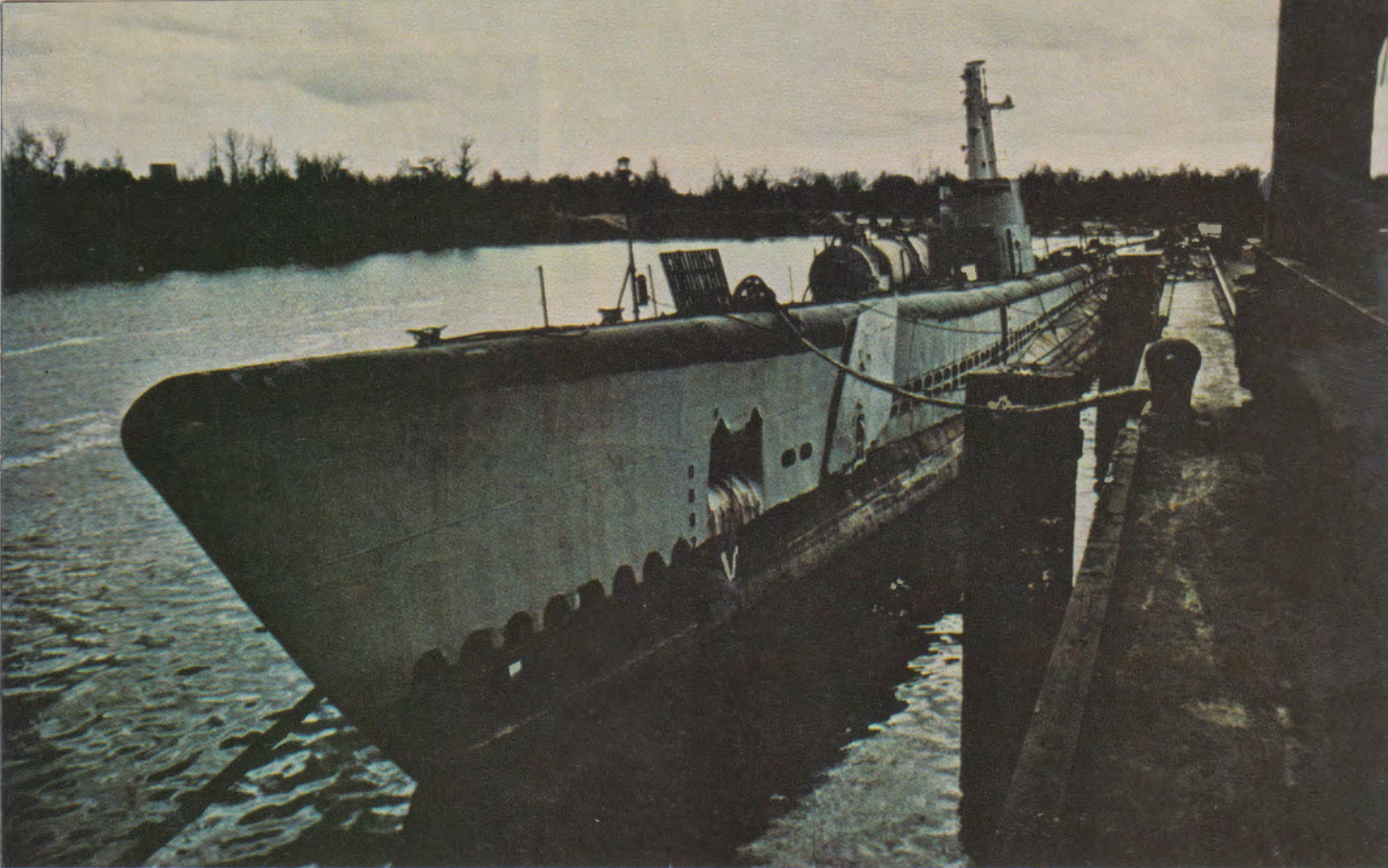
The next compartment aft is the forward battery and crowded officers' wardroom. As I pass through the door, I think about the men of the ill-fated *Tang*, trapped in about ninety feet of water in a sunken sub off Formosa. A fire raged on the

BACK FROM
THE FORGOTTEN:

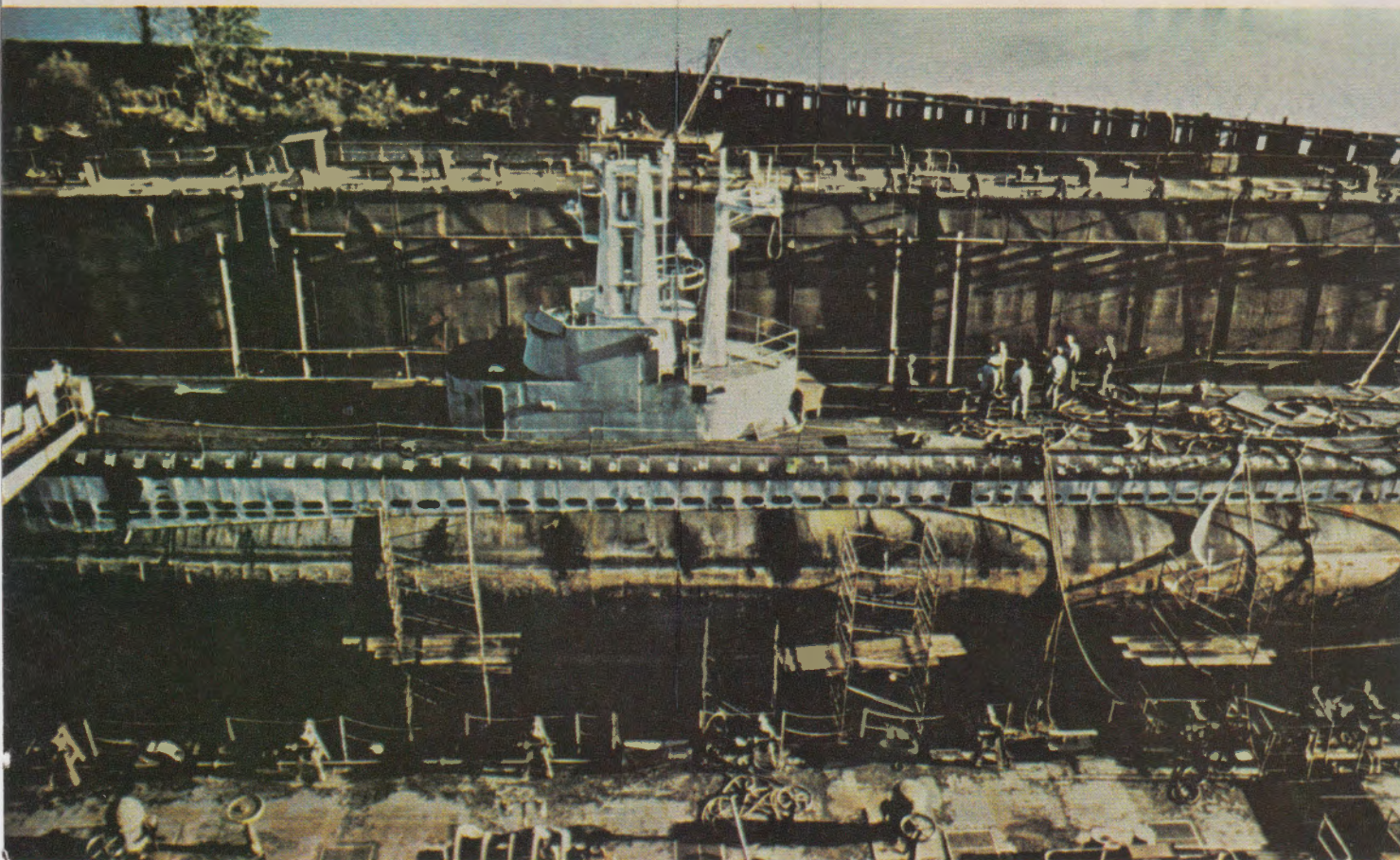
The U.S.S. BATFISH

The USS BATFISH (SS-310) is one of the most historic warships still afloat, but during the initial phase of her restoration she looked more like a forsaken derelict than the once proud fleet sub she was in World War II . . .

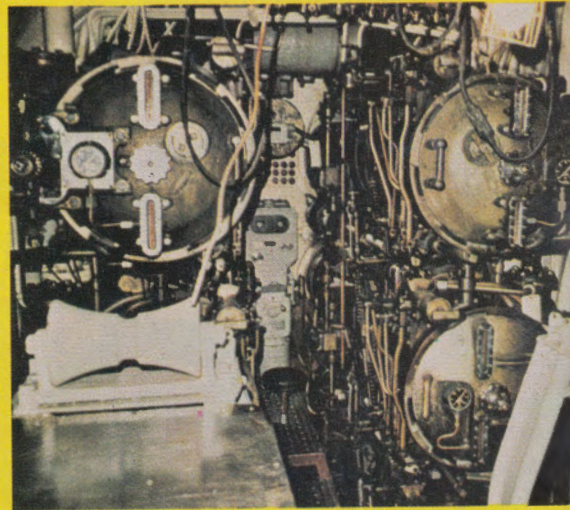
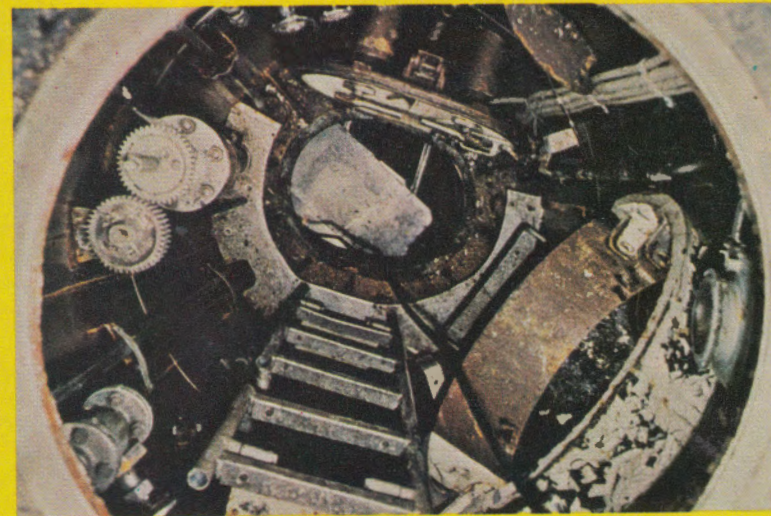
By Dr. Edward R. McIntosh



Diesel fuel still in her tanks made the BATFISH list at dockside.

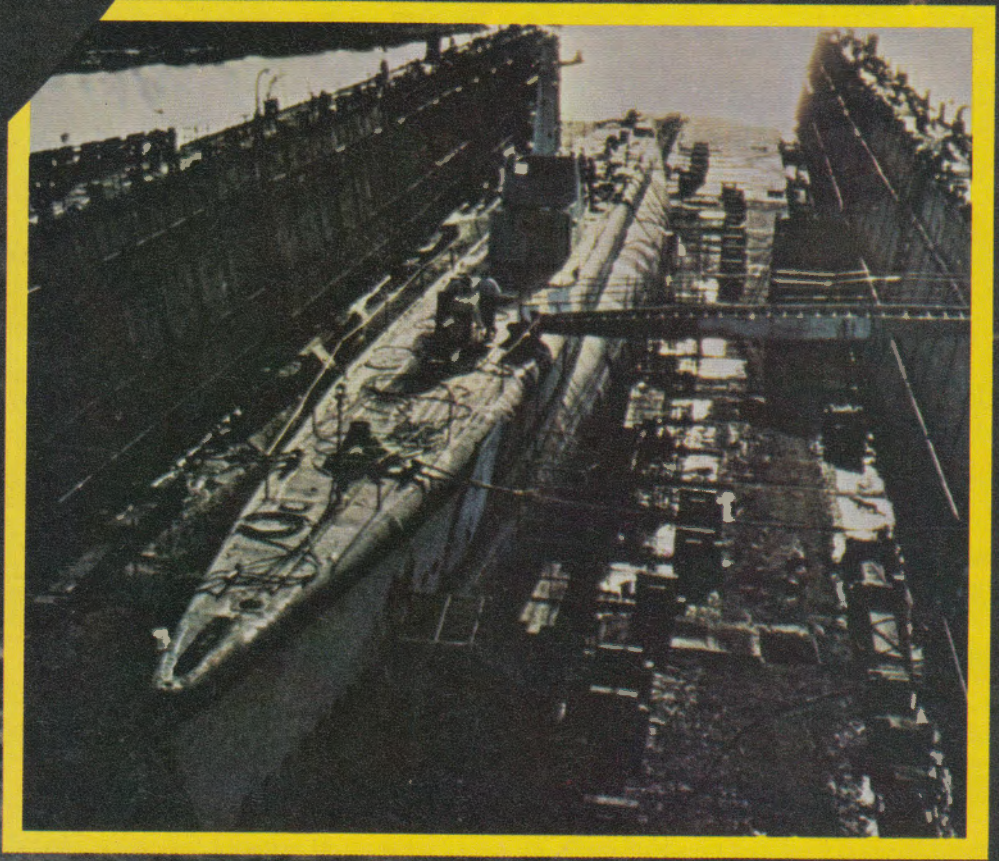
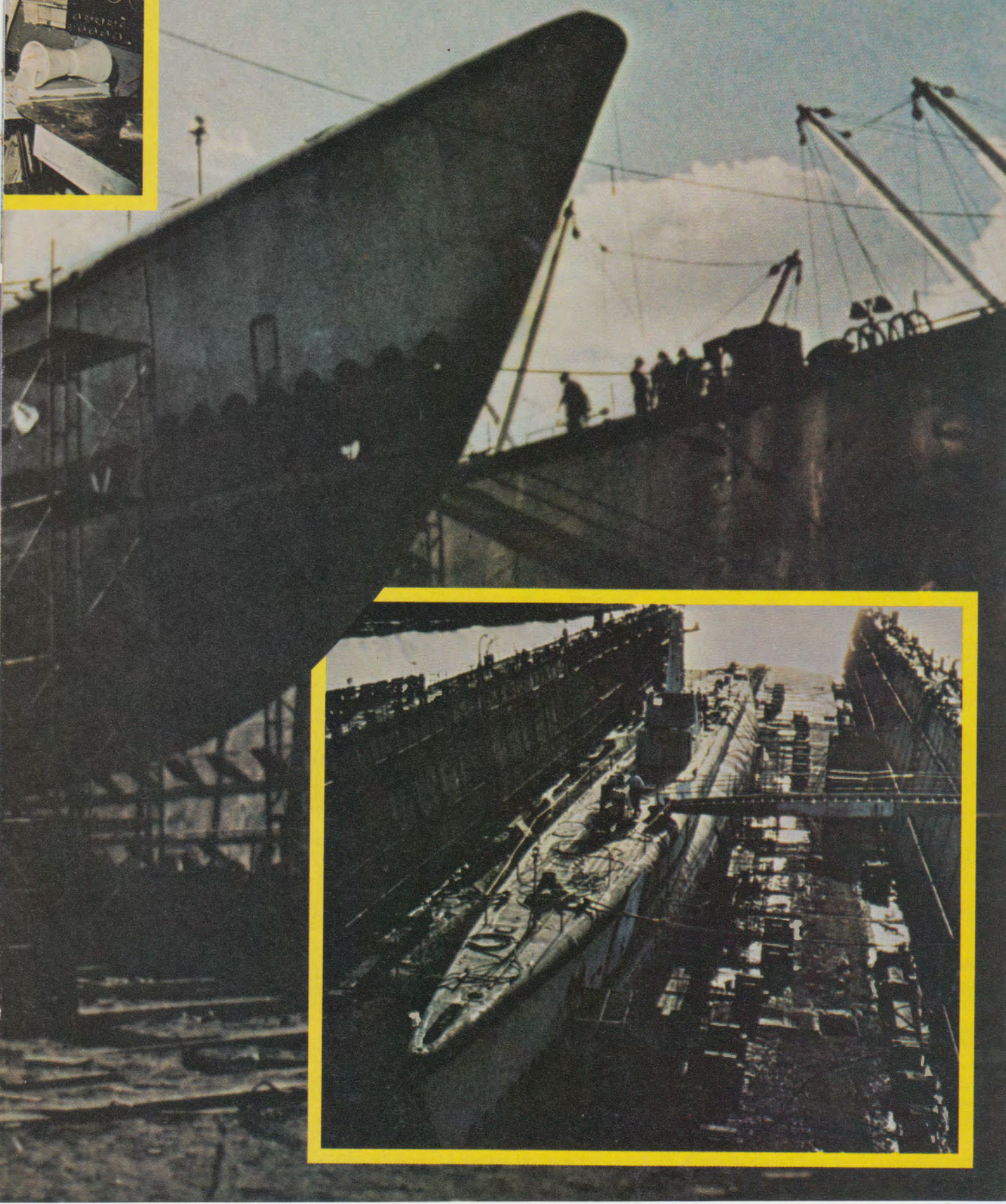


The BATFISH's conning tower once carried 20mm and 40mm anti-aircraft guns which were removed for peacetime service as an AGSS.

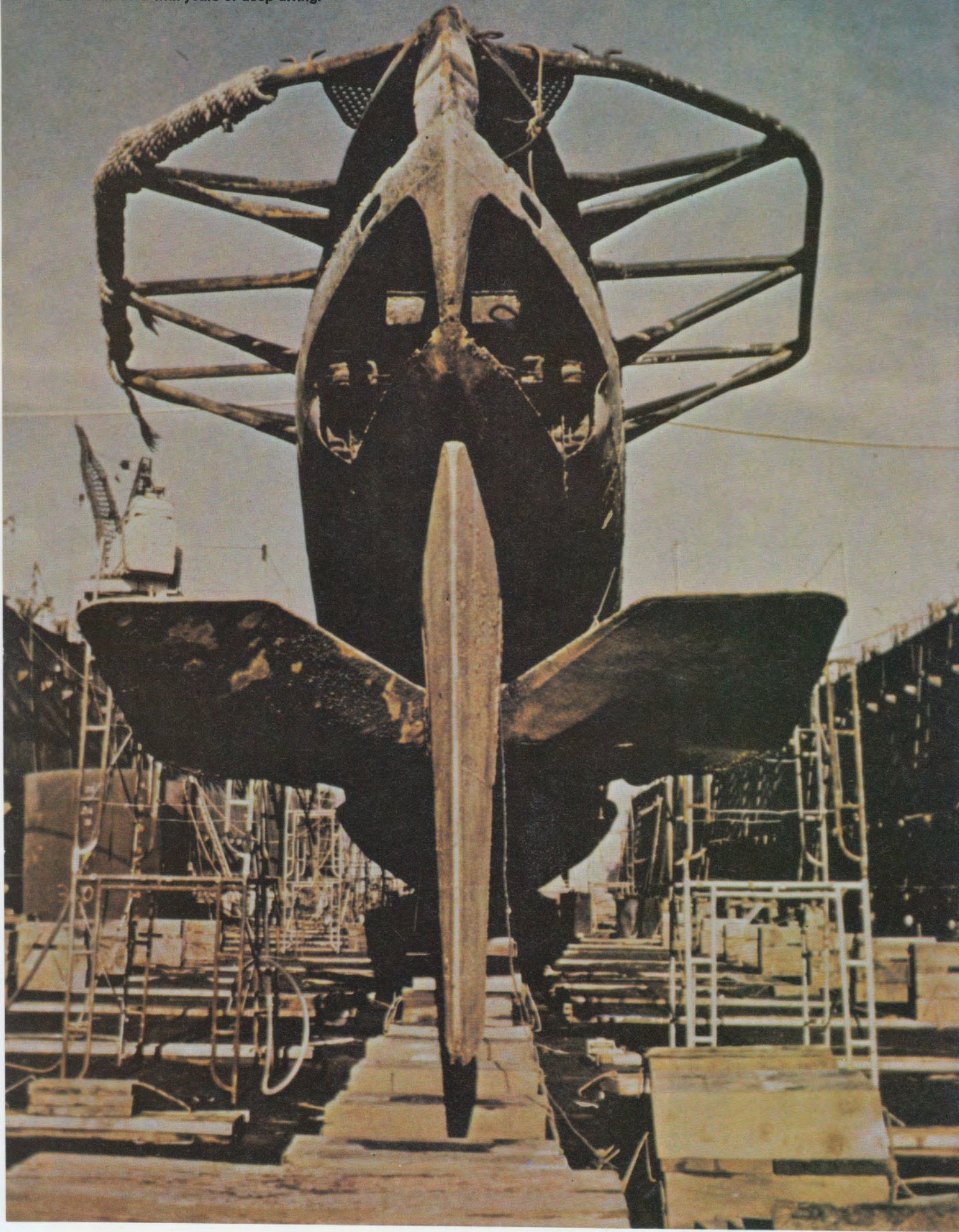


The ghostly interior created harsh visions of what wartime service in the submarine force must have been like. The forward escape hatch and trunk led the author into his journey back through time.

The USS BATFISH racked up an impressive war record by sinking three Japanese submarines and thereby launching the concept of killer submarines. She was built in 1943 as one of the large number of Gato class fleet subs displacing 2,415 tons. BATFISH served the Navy until she laid up in 1962 in the Orange, Texas, mothball fleet.



The battered and rusted hull shows the effect of hard wartime use combined with years of deep diving.



battery room side of that door, filling the torpedo room with smoke and finally causing their deaths. Now the forward battery room is empty. The wardroom seats are in poor repair, and the table shows tattered neglect. Back I go past the captain's small stateroom and other staterooms for the boat's officers. All are empty and depressing. The lonesome brooding feel of the forward battery area makes me hurry aft to the control room. Now there is even more dials, levers and piping. Valves stick out in all directions, as do levers, gauges, wires all too numerous to catalog. As I face aft, the "Christmas tree" is on my right and the air manifold on my left. Also, on the right (starboard side), are the two large diving wheels. Just ahead, is a well-worn ladder going up. I climb up into the conning tower, but it is small, narrow and depressing, so I return to the control room. Aft again, through another important door. This is the one between the control room and after battery room. It was this door on the *Squalis*, when she flooded aft, that a heroic crewmember slammed shut, thus saving everyone forward, but condemning all behind the door to death. Still, it had to be done. The after battery was the crew's quarters, a busy, generally happy place. Now, it too, glowers in its melancholy gloom and emptiness. Finally I move to the forward engine room. It is a sad sight. Trash is scattered around. Seats are falling apart and the two powerful engines, which used to almost wake the dead with their chattering clatter and provided a warmth (sometimes too warm) and an "alive" feeling which reached throughout the sub, are now cold and silent. Further aft still, the aft engine room is a sad disheveled carbon copy of the first.

The maneuvering room is the next to the last compartment. Here are the slip-slide controls for directing the electrical power generated or selected from the batteries into the two large electric motors, which provide main propulsion. A good electrician's mate would make the setting of these electrical controls look easy. But doing it wrong could destroy essential equipment, cause electrical fires and otherwise have serious results.

Finally all the way aft, is the rear torpedo room. It was this room and the maneuvering room forward of it which were destroyed on "*Tang*," when her own torpedo made a circular run and sank her. But the aft torpedo room on the *Batfish* looks even more forsaken than the one up forward.

The whole boat needs lots of work before it can be opened as a war memorial. And that is what the dry dock crew does, in part. Before the *Batfish* can be moved up the Mississippi River, special fittings must be welded to the hull so that the boat can be partly lifted by special barges. But that is another story.

After another look around the somewhat cluttered torpedo room, I look at the four after tubes. It was from these that some of the shots which destroyed the Jap subs, were fired. By this time, the empty, lonesome, ghostly feeling has gotten to me, and I cannot wait to climb out of the after hatch.

The next day, I was able to go on the dry dock and walk around under the *Batfish*. Here also, rust and neglect show all too clearly. As I walk beneath the sub, welded patches through which various maintenance jobs were done can be seen. Also, the

caved-in effect of many of the hull plates show the effect of deep dives, and too much combat. The stern is badly rusted, even in comparison with the rest of the sub.

Finally, a sky-hook trip over the sub shows a totally different view. From above, the rust, flaws, and faults seem to fall away, and the old *Batfish* almost looks like a real submarine again, perhaps refitting to race back in time to World War Two.

Now the *Batfish* has been moved to Muskegee, Oklahoma, and has been cleaned, painted and has become another proud memorial to all the American subs of World War Two. The *Batfish* may have been down, but she wasn't out. She has a new life thanks to the dedicated subvets and others who have returned her from the dead to the valuable and educational memorial she is today. ⚓

