

IN THE DARK OF THE SEA

by FREDERICK C. PAINTON

The German sub U-74 was out to ruin Mediterranean shipping, and its commander, the “Fox,” was famous for his cleverness. It was up to Carney to stop him—Carney and his listener at the hydrophones—and it meant close, quick work. Dolph Schmidt was that listener, and he knew things—but said nothing.

THE CHIEF OF STAFF of the sub-chaser squadron operating in the Mediterranean, old “Fuss-box” Carney, pattered in his nervous fashion along the deck of the mother ship, *Halcyon*, to the cabin of his superior, Captain Jules Hagar. Old Carney always wore an expression of impending calamity, but this morning his worried face was even more foreboding than usual.

He barely acknowledged the salute of the deck officer, and that young ensign wondered if the Germans had won the war—Carney looked as if they had. In his hand the elderly lieutenant-commander clutched a decoded radio message just come from London. Because of its import he had hastily abandoned his trip ashore to Corfu, the base of the sub-chaser squadron.

With a meticulous preliminary knock he entered the cabin. “Good morning, sir,” he said. If his ship had been sinking under his feet old Fuss-box would have observed the naval proprieties.

Captain Hagar, ten years younger than his chief of staff, looked up from the clutter of papers on his desk. “Oh, it’s you, Carney. Good morning. I thought you were still out on your overgrown, stinking dinghy. For an old barnacle dragged out of retirement by the war, you certainly show plenty of pep. You look worried—what’s up?”

“Here’s a serious message from London, sir.”
Hagar took the flimsy and read it.

“U-74 under command Lieutenant Jacob Schmidt known as quote Fox unquote has abandoned Irish coast base bound for Mediterranean stop his objective is to torpedo transports carrying British and French re-enforcements to Italian Front stop Transport *Caronic* carrying fifty-five hundred troops now at sea stop necessary you cooperate with British at Malta

in protecting this destroyer and others abandoning other patrols temporarily if necessary stop Fox is most capable and shrewdest of U-boat commanders with thirty-seven sinkings including transport *Glasgow* stop our Intelligence informs that he is planning to refuel at Austrian base in Adriatic and then intercept *Caronic* stop last known location sank freighter *Winchester* May fifteen fifty-five miles south-southeast Balearics on Algiers lane stop report result of mission.

Seaton, London.”

Captain Hagar pursed his lips in a silent whistle. Fuss-box nodded as if that expression could be taken for his own.

“Well,” said Hagar, “it’s about time they realized that if they don’t support that Italian line the Germans will make peace in Rome. But that doesn’t take away from the fact that they’ve handed us a large order.”

Fuss-box wagged his over-large head, on which his uniform cap perched so airily that a strong breath would knock it off.

“I’ve heard of this ‘Fox,’ sir. The cagiest of the lot—and not the usual type from all accounts. Wasn’t he the chap that ran alongside the Red Cross ship *Britain*, gave them a wave and submerged again?”

Hagar nodded. “Yes. Told them to cut out the propaganda about him sinking defenseless ships. I guess he’s O.K. The freighter crews all testified he gave them plenty of time before he blew up their ships. In one case gave them some water.”

“We’ve got a job, sir. I remember now—he’s the bird that tied one of those British Q-boats into knots, gave them the merry hah-hah and sank a freighter fifteen miles away before they could get within range. A shrewd bird.”

There came a knock at the door. A radio operator entered and handed the captain another message.

“More bad news, I suppose,” grumbled Hagar, and fell to work decoding it.

When he had done he read it aloud.

“Freighter *Carlisle* sunk 4.45 A.M. to-day twenty miles due west Malta stop crew permitted to escape in small boats submarine commander Schmidt stop our destroyers dropped depth bombs no evidence to show hit believed enemy craft making for Adriatic Admiral Sandhurst requests in name his Britannic Majesty’s government you cooperate destroying this menace our tactical plan will he communicated late to-day.

Rollingham, R.N.”

Hagar looked up and could not repress a smile. “By God, Carney, you certainly have to take your hat off to that fellow. Right under the noses of the British at Malta! I wouldn’t have believed it possible.”

“Malta,” murmured Fuss-box. “He’s undoubtedly making for Fiume.”

Captain Hagar studied the chart that lay before him on his desk, his attention focused on the Straits of Otranto, that narrow passage of water, about twenty-five miles wide at its narrowest point, which separated the heel of the Italian boot from the Dalmatian coast.

“If we’re going to do anything, Carney, it’s got to be done in Otranto.”

The older officer nodded. Then both relapsed into silence to digest the startling news and scheme a plan to meet the menace. Keeping the timid Austrian submarines bottled in the Adriatic was one thing; destroying the bold, shrewd Fox was entirely another.

In his deliberate fashion, so at odds with the rest of his nervous make-up, Fuss-box lit and slowly consumed a cigarette.

Presently he spoke. “If he tries to go through the Straits, he’s my game. I’ve been working on a new tactic, using four chasers, that I think will bag him. And I’ve got a man on the 54 who can hear a clam eat in fifty fathoms—the best listener in the squadron. He’ll land the Fox for us.”

“What’s the plan?”

Carney took a piece of paper, and using technical language explained how he would use four chasers as the corners of a huge square, the sides four miles in length, the interior of the square being sixteen square miles.

“I’ll use Schmidt, the listener, to pick up the submarine with his phone. Others will get it, too, but Schmidt can tell whether the signals get stronger or weaker. I’ll take a bearing on a given spot. Each ship’s bearing is bound to meet another’s. Where these

bearings cross, there will be—or should be—the Fox. Then we’ll give him a prescription of ash-cans.”

Hagar followed the involved plan closely, nodding at frequent intervals. “It ought to work, Carney. Say, by the way, you said Schmidt. You mean your listener?”

“Yes. Funny they should have the same names—the Fox and his, I mean.”

Hagar nodded. “But then, it’s a common name—like Smith in our country. Haven’t I heard you mention this listener before?”

“Probably. Quite likely, in fact, as I mentioned him in dispatches. Perfect wizard with the hydrophones. Both the Austrian subs we got are owing to him. I was on the 54 when we got the first. The Austrian was trying to sneak out in rough water. And it was rough—worst I’ve ever been out in, some swells breaking over the superstructure. Schmidt is no sailor; he gets sick every time we have a heavy ground swell. But he sat there, violently sea-sick, but with his hydrophones on, and between spasms giving us the dope. We dropped five ash-cans on the fellow and he stayed on the bottom.”

“This Schmidt must have plenty of courage.”

“It’s more than that. It’s a sense of duty. The other time I wasn’t along, but Wilkes told me the details. Schmidt picked up the sub’s engine-room bell. Our unit had hung on the fellow’s trail so long he had to come up and take a chance on refilling his air tanks. He started to shoot it out, but through Schmidt we had the jump, and the fellow surrendered.”

Hagar nodded and smiled. “I remember. We got a lot of credit over that—the first captured sub.”

“Well, Schmidt was the man responsible. Now, on the other thing, I suppose it’s all right for me to go ahead, Farnsworth can look after the routine, patrols and convoys. I think we’ve got a good chance to grab this fellow when he comes into the neck of the bottle.”

A husky giant, clad only in undershirt and white-duck bell-bottoms, leaned against the three-inch, semi-automatic Hotchkiss on the forward deck of the SC-54, ripping open the envelope of a letter from home. His broad face, bronzed by the tropical sun, was wreathed in a glad smile, and his placid blue eyes were filled with an eager glow.

A gunner’s mate, Hankins by name, passed, and threw him a friendly smile. The crew of the SC-54 liked the yellow-haired giant from Wisconsin. “News from the old U.S.A.?” he asked.

Dolph Schmidt grinned, revealing a mouthful of strong white teeth. “From my mother,” he replied.

He unfolded the stiff, crackling paper. It was hard

to decipher his mother's cramped writing; and an occasional German word cropped out, for she had been born in Saxony.

"*Mein lieber son:*

I was overjoyed to get your letter of April vier. You must be very, very far away when it takes a letter so long to get here. Sometimes two and three come in a day, and many days none come at all.

Unser vater is well. The wheat exceeds all our hopes, and we shall get a good price for it. I would be happy if only this terrible *krieg* was ended. Many nights I cry very much. *Unser vater* is disturbed, but he does not let any one but me know it. We have hung out a flag on the porch—from the post you used to climb. *Unser vater* has bought many bonds. He hopes the Allies will hang the kaiser. But for him, he says, Germany would be all right.

He made a speech at the sohoollhouse the other night. He said: 'I left Germany because there was no liberty. America has given me liberty and happiness. I am not a hyphenate, I am an American, and my son is an American fighting in our navy to down the man who wants to rule the world.' They all clapped their hands for him. He is a good man, *unser vater*.

We have not told any one about Jacob. It would do no good. *Unser vater* is very stern when I speak of Jacob. We have heard nothing from him since 1916.

Oh, God, it does not seem right that my two sons, my *lieber kinder*, should be fighting each other. *Unser vater* blames Jacob but I do not. He could not know when he enlisted in the German navy in 1914 that America, too, would go to war. He was just adventurous, like those who went into the British and French service. I am sure he will not fight America. He loved America. He simply wanted to go to sea. I pray to the gentle Christ each night that you will be kept apart.

Ah, our hearts are torn, our eyes red with weeping. *Unser vater* says the war will make Germany a republic. I know nothing of such things, but such a horrible man as the kaiser should not be permitted to rule.

Mein lieber son, I caress you. I send you kisses. Wherever you are I pray to the good God to watch over and protect you. Thine own,

Mother."

Dolph's good-natured face had grown grave as he read the trembling lines and imagined the heartaches of his mother, torn by the realization that fate had placed her two sons on opposing sides.

"Poor mother," he muttered. "They talk about us having it tough."

His mind reverted to Jake, his elder, reckless brother, and he wondered where he was. Like all younger brothers, Dolph had worshipped at Jake's shrine. Flashes of himself riding picki-back, playing catch, hide-and-go-seek with Jake crossed his mind.

He had been heart-broken when Jake had run away to sea in 1912. He had boasted proudly to the other boys when he learned that Jake was a petty officer on a North German Lloyd liner.

Then, like an evil black cloud, had come the war, and when the British blockade became effective, news of Jake had been pitifully meager. All was silence for two years until Captain Paul Koenig had startled the world by bringing the submarine *Deutschland* across the Atlantic. The craft brought a letter from Jake which said among other things that he had been commissioned in the German navy.

Dolph could understand this. He had a great admiration for his brother's wizardry with machinery. "All hands to load ship," came the call.

Ten minutes later the depressing thoughts had flown from Dolph's brain in the swift work of preparing the SC-54 for sea. T.N.T. charges, called ash-cans because of their steel receptacles, came carefully aboard and were lashed tight. Extra ammunition for the Hotchkiss, vast numbers of fuel-oil drums—surely a protracted patrol.

And as if this were not enough, old Fuss-box Carney himself came aboard, and the news was quickly out that the 54 was his flagship. The four ensigns that commanded the chasers held a conference with him; they came out eyes flashing with excitement. Carney established himself, with the radio operator on one hand and the engine-room telegraph on the other. It didn't take a half an eye to see that something big was brewing.

Shortly after dusk the Diesels began to throb; in tight formation the four chasers chugged from the harbor. The lights of Corfu fell astern and the 54, in the lead, took a course north by north west.

Morning found them, four white chips on a tideless expanse of blue.

Dolph had just gone off watch when Cooper, a third class quartermaster, passed him the word: "Old Fuss-box wants to see you."

Dolph found the old man poring over a chart. He looked up as Dolph knocked and entered, and peered at the young sailor over his thick-lensed glasses.

"Ah, yes, Schmidt. Stand at ease. I want to talk to you."

While Dolph relaxed and regarded him curiously out of his calm blue eyes, the old officer lit a cigarette in his methodical way. After a few slow puffs, Fuss-box began.

"I'll have to take you more or less into my confidence, Schmidt, because I'm relying mostly on

you for the successful completion of this mission. I've heard a lot about your skill as a listener. Upon that skill I'm depending to rid the seas of the most dangerous submarine that ever cleared Kiel."

He paused and glared at the sailor. Dolph was all attention, just the least bit flattered by the older man's words. Fuss-box was not given to compliments about any one or anything.

"First of all, I'll make the situation clear. The Austro-German drive, as you may possibly know, broke through completely on the Piave Front. But for the necessity of pausing to reorganize and widen the gap, the enemy could easily have passed Venice. That was a serious blow, almost a fatal one. And we are not safe from it yet.

"If a renewed enemy offensive destroys what is left of the effectiveness of the Italian army, it might conceivably lose the war for the Allies. Nothing could stop the enemy from marching on Rome and dictating her own peace terms as she did with Russia. Italy being removed from the war, Austrian troops would be released for reenforcing the Western Front. By superior man-power the Germans might break through there, too."

Fuss-box scrubbed out the coal of his cigarette and in his dry, precise fashion, resumed. "I want you to get that clearly, for it shows just how vital our present mission is, how much weight is placed on your skill.

"To get on: The Italian army, undermined by enemy propaganda and shot through with communism, cannot and will not successfully resist the new blow the enemy will launch. Thousands of men laid down their arms in the recent Austrian offensive and refused to fight. Their morale is low, beyond our comprehension.

"Yet, properly strengthened with good quality Allied troops, a bulk of the army would resist strongly and save the situation. France knows this; England knows it, and don't forget for a minute, the Germans know it.

"Hence, the Allies have arranged to ship reinforcements to the Italians. One ship is already at sea; others will follow. Unofficially, I am told that a couple of American regiments have been included in the drafts.

"The Germans, aware of this endeavor, and knowing how vital it is to prevent such reinforcements from arriving before she has struck the death blow, will use every means in her power to prevent the safe arrival of those transports.

"If she succeeds at this time, other reinforcements will arrive too late. She will have struck, gouged her way through the disorganized Italian army, and through open, defenseless country will march on Rome.

"Thus, the issue right now is this: We want the transports through; Germany does not.

"One of her opposing steps has been to dispatch to the Mediterranean her most brilliant submarine commander to torpedo the transports. Our business—your business and mine—is to prevent him. If he wins, Germany wins, and never fear, my lad, if he does win we shall see German troops in America one of these days.

"In short, thousands of lives depend upon our efforts. I emphasize this so that you will do your duty as you have never done it before. In cold fact, we can say that we hold the fate of the war in our hands. We must kill or destroy this Schmidt as an effective instrument."

Dolph started, looked blank at the name. Fuss-box did not notice. "Who did you say, sir?"

"Schmidt, Jacob Schmidt. Because of his shrewdness in avoiding traps, and in torpedoing shipping, the British have nicknamed him the Fox. He is the most dangerous enemy we have ever faced."

He looked up at Dolph's dumfounded and suddenly pale face.

"Funny his name should be the same as yours. No kin, of course. Well, to get on, I have a scheme worked out which I think will neatly bag this Fox."

While the blood drummed in Dolph's ears, Fuss-box explained as much of his plan as involved Dolph. Too dumb to answer, Dolph merely nodded when Fuss-box asked him if he understood.

When Carney had done, Dolph in some fashion found the door and backed out. He shivered, though the air was warm and the sun hot. The shock had temporarily dulled his brain. All he could think of was Jacob Schmidt, Jacob Schmidt.

His throbbing heart took up the refrain. Presently he found himself leaning on the machine gun aft, his elbow on the protecting tarpaulin, his hands cupping his face.

Jacob Schmidt! Jake!

Panic struck deep in him. Fuss-box had said no kin, but Dolph knew better. Try as he might to disbelieve it, he knew that the U-boat commander was his own brother.

His usually placid brain seemed in chaos at this

horrible crisis; for minutes odd phrases from Fuss-box's talk combated with visions of good old Jake for supremacy. "The fate of the transport was the fate of the war. Vital—important—grave, supreme necessity, critical, his paramount duty." These adjectives glowed in his mind. And there also were visions of Jake, laughing, good-natured Jake.

Fuss-box had been so worked up over his own story that he had ceased to be his usual fussy, fuming self, in itself an indication of how urgent the situation was.

What could he do? What could he do? The, phrase ran though his mind like a chant. What could he do? He shook himself vigorously like a dog after a bath, in an effort to bring his brain into some sort of order, to review the situation logically.

"Well," said his brain, "you can do your duty. Maybe Jake will escape. If you do hear him, lie—then Jake can get away."

Fuss-box's words flooded his mind to combat this solution. Victorious German and Austrian hordes descending like an avalanche on Rome. A million men or more released to fight on the Western Front—perhaps oppose, and kill American troops, his own comrades.

"But," said his brain, "they can't expect you to kill your own brother. Refuse to give the signals."

A stern voice within challenged this. "You would be a traitor."

Dolph squeezed his head, a pitiful groan escaped him. Must he then be the cause of his brother's death, or himself be a traitor? There was no escaping it; that was the issue, clear-cut.

"You can pretend to be sick, or lie to Fuss-box," said the cunning brain.

Instantly that other inner voice responded. "You are pledged to your duty. You must go through with it or be a traitor."

An expression of abject despair swept Dolph's face, a short time ago round and smiling, now so bleak and white. For minutes, it seemed, he listened to the battling of these mental voices; it was as if he were a referee hearing arguments before making a decision.

Gradually his despair was replaced by anger, anger that grew to rage, to the white-heat of fury. There was no justice in placing him in such a position. They should have left him at the Great Lakes training station. No oath of allegiance called for being the cause of slaughtering his own flesh and blood.

"And by God, I won't!" he muttered aloud. "Not if they shoot me for it."

Within him the stern voice cried: "Traitor! Traitor! You are a traitor."

"Then if I am," said Dolph, "let me be one. Blood is thicker than water."

Then and there he made up his mind that he would give false information if the chasers flushed their quarry. If it lay within his power, Jake would escape unharmed. After that, let what happen that would.

The SC-54 chugged a steady course through a cobalt sea. Off the port bow lay Brindisi, a dark gray haze on the horizon. Overhead a hot sun beat down on the snow-white deck of the little one hundred and ten footer. Four miles behind that graceful white wake kicked up by the chaser's churning screw, a white speck danced on the sparkling sea. Directly to starboard, four miles distant, another chaser plowed. Yet another could be seen, a white chip, at the other corner of Fuss-box Carney's square.

The tactic was working. Sixteen square miles of ocean were being combed for the invisible Fox. And above and below the neck of Otranto sixteen square miles represented a large amount of ocean. Once let the Fox stick his head into the Straits and Fuss-box would have him.

The SC-S4 was making ten knots.

The elderly lieutenant-commander stood by the quartermaster at the wheel, his beagle eyes on the chronometer. Never before had he so much resembled a hound on a hot scent. The black hands within the polished brass stood at one minute to ten, four bells in the morning watch.

Slowly the seconds ticked off, and each man of the crew felt the tenseness within him grow as it does when something momentous is about to happen.

The bell of the chronometer struck musically four times.

Instantly the engine-room bell clanged. The burbling exhaust of the Diesels ceased abruptly; and the 54 coursed ahead with only the gush of her bow-wave to break the utter silence.

Dolph Schmidt sat with something like ear-muffs fastened to his head by a circular piece of steel. These were hydrophones, so sensitive that a throbbing propeller could be detected at a distance as great as fifty miles. In order that there would be no confusion or false clues, a "silent time" had been ordered to begin at ten o'clock; and every piece of Allied shipping within the map squares shut off their turbines at that precise second. Only the enemy, unaware of the trap, would continue to cruise during the period.

Dolph leaned forward alertly, every line of his big body indicating his intense concentration. He seemed suddenly old, deep lines running from nose to mouth, the usually placid blue eyes bits of chilled blue steel. He had hoped that his decision would still those internal voices; but it had not; they still wrangled, and took his attention away from the crackling noises the phones brought to him. Yet he knew there was nothing resembling a propeller beat, and his hopes rose high.

Fuss-box's eager eyes sought the young sailor's face. He frowned, then raised his eyebrows inquiringly. Dolph shook his head.

But even as he made this gesture of negation, his heart dropped to his boots. A new sound came through those thin wires, a familiar sound. Instinctively he craned still further forward, his body tense. Fuss-box caught the movement. His eyes gleamed joyfully like the hunter who sights the prize.

"Got something?" His beady old eyes bored into Dolph's blue ones.

Dolph made no reply, but listened intently.

Chung-chung-chung-chung!

It was the monotonously regular beat of a propeller. For a wild second he thought it might be a ship disobeying the silent regulation. But he knew this could not be; the order was too stringently enforced. An Austrian submarine? Hardly.

And now, though Dolph had thought his problem settled, it arose like a grinning skeleton and danced before him. He had hoped against hope he would not be put to the test. But now that test was starkly here.

He was torn by conflicting emotions. But no matter how he mentally wriggled, he could not escape the horrible fact that down in those murky waters, slipping through shadows a sun would never dispel, was his brother, navigating a sinister piece of steel that sought to outwit those who battled in the sunshine. The test had come.

The radio operator sat poised, fingers on key. Fuss-box leaned forward, a frown on his old face. "What is it?" he asked sharply. "You heard something—I could tell."

Still Dolph made no reply. His dry tongue cleaved to the roof of his mouth; he could not even swallow; a thousand images danced in a brain that seemed on fire. Reinforcements—danger—lost war—thousands killed—flag—country.

The thrumming of the unknown propeller now thundered in his ears. Each concussion of sound seemed to call him traitor.

A vision of his father's stern face rose before him, the old house in which he had been born, the flag floating in the breeze from the porch. Against the smiling countenance of Jake that floated through his mind, there also came a memory of himself raising his right hand to take the oath, administered by a serious-faced man uniformed in blue. From somewhere out of his subconscious recollections there recurred to him two lines of a piece he used to chant with the other pupils in grammar school.

"I swear allegiance to my flag, And to the country for which it stands."

Those who stood tensely watching him saw his bent figure relax as if a load had been removed. The inclined blond head raised, the cold blue eyes gazed into those of Fuss-box.

"Submarine, sir. Signals strong."

Fuss-box's traplike mouth opened in an exclamation of delight. His hand moved on the engine-room telegraph. The Diesels roared, the 54 lurched under way. He barked an order at the radio man, and white bow waves suddenly appeared at the cutwaters of the other chasers.

The 54 curved a white line against the blue as she took the bearing which Fuss-box's pencil had marked on the unrolled chart before him. These, intricate maneuvers continued for full twenty minutes. Then once again the motors ceased to roar, and Dolph applied himself to listening.

"Signals stronger, sir. Just a minute." The submarine throbbing had stopped. This he reported to Fuss-box.

"By the lord Harry, he's heard us!" exclaimed Fuss-box. "He's laying doggo on the bottom."

The intricate problem drew to its end with continuing pencil lines on the chart. Presently the gray lines crossed. Here Fuss-box planted the pencil point viciously. Radioed orders flashed to the other chasers.

"We're on him, by God! He's ours."

The brazen beat of the motors thundered. Like dancers executing a difficult dance formation, the chasers plowed through the waters. At the stern, under Hankins, the gunner's mate, the ash-can crew stood at their posts. A steel cylinder loaded with its terrific charge of T.N.T. lay in the cradle. Wilkes stood expectantly to transmit Fuss-box's will.

The old officer finished his intricate mathematical problems, and looked out at the other three chasers that were bearing down, even as the 54, on the given spot where Carney calculated the submarine lay.

Carney's hand rose and fell. Wilkes yelled, the steel

cylinder slipped with a splash into the boiling wake of the 54. On raced the 54.

Boom!

The thundering roar of that detonation carried over the sunlit sea. A geyser of water shot skyward; the 54 trembled with the shock. As accurately as arrows the other three terriers of the sea crossed the marked spot and discharged their cargoes of destruction. Explosion followed explosion, the water became at that spot a seething cauldron of white, sharply visible against the surrounding blue. Once more the four ships sped over the route and added four more ash-cans to their total.

The SC-54 turned abruptly, almost within her own length; Fuss-box sharply scanned the disturbed waters for visible signs of the havoc wrought below.

“No oil, damn it!”

While he waited and watched the water gradually calmed itself of the man-made storm, its surface sweet and placid, disturbed only by a gentle ground swell. The engine-room bell clanged and the motors stopped.

“See what you can get,” Carney ordered Dolph.

Dolph had not needed the order. The instant the beat of the Diesels stilled, his ears strained for a message from that opaque blackness below.

Starkly he knew that far down in those depths where the light of the sun had never penetrated, a sinister black monster rested. Had the steel skin been shattered, had the icy sea rushed in and engulfed the crew, drowning them like rats in a trap? Or had they escaped the terrific destruction launched at them?

He heard nothing at first and so reported to Carney. The latter cursed in disappointment.

“He can’t have gotten away—can’t!”

An expectant hush followed this outburst, every eye trained on Dolph’s face, so singularly impassive yet yellow under the bronze.

Presently a sound came to him; he leaned forward and tried with every faculty to identify it.

Thud-thud-thud-thud!

Then he recognized it, the sound of steel on steel, a hammer was being beaten against something; he could catch the echo of the impact. They were alive—some of them.

The hammering increased in frequency, a sort of frenzied effort.

“There is hammering from below, sir. I think the submarine is disabled. They’re trying to fix her.”

Fuss-box chortled in glee. A few snapped orders and the four chasers scurried over the chart-spot.

Once again the ocean leaped like a wounded monster and belched high in agony. Once again the sea boiled white like a festering spot.

Then at length it was over. The Diesels stilled their drones, the four chasers gently rose and fell like four white chips.

Dolph seemed immune to further hurt. Mercifully the very torture had dulled his nerves to further sensation. He sat erect only by the strength of some inward power that pushed him on. His keen ears hearkened intently for some clue as to what had happened down there on the ocean floor.

Minutes passed in acute silence. Then a faint, discouraged hammering came into the sensitive hydrophones. At length, this, too, died away as if frantic men buried in a cold black tomb in the ocean depths had made their last effort.

Dolph was just about to report this cessation of effort when a new sound came to him. Those watching saw him straighten and a startled, horrified expression cross his cold, hitherto impassive face. Into the black shells on his ears had come a sinister noise, a sharp crack, a fainter echo. He knew it could be but one thing—a pistol shot.

The sound was repeated, and yet again. One after another he counted nineteen shots. Then all was silence. Strain as he might there was only hopeless, desolate silence.

“Nineteen shots, sir.”

Fuss-box glared in astonishment at this. His ferret mind pictured the utter abandonment of hope conveyed by those nineteen ominous shots. The last action of half-clothed men, cold and groping in utter darkness inside a steel coffin, wishing to die mercifully and quickly instead of horribly and madly with strangulation clutching at their throats.

A strained silence followed. Then there was a loud thumping sound. Dolph had toppled from his seat, face downward on the deck. Men leaped to aid him. Big strong Dolph had fainted.