

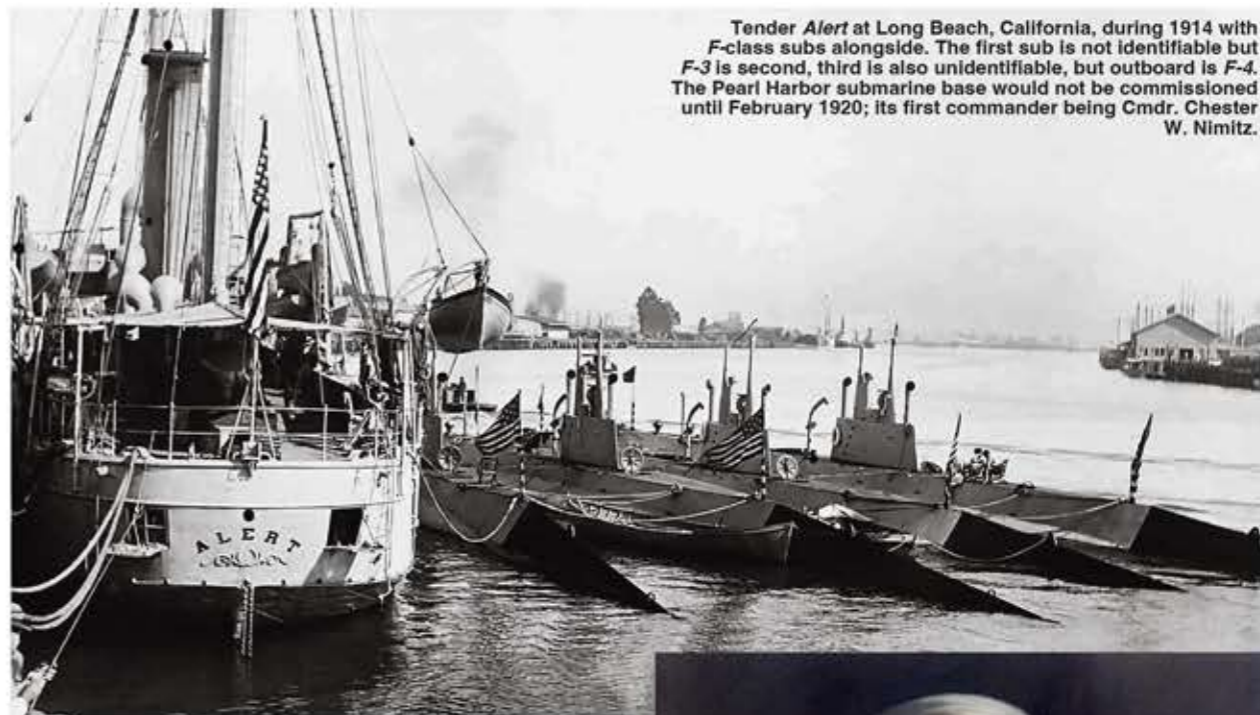
THE LAST DIVE

OFF HAWAII, THE NAVY SUBMARINE F-4 DISAPPEARED IN 305 FEET OF WATER. WORKING AGAINST OVERWHELMING ODDS, RESCUERS ACCOMPLISHED THE NEAR IMPOSSIBLE – ESTABLISHING A RECORD FOR DEEP SEA SALVAGE THAT WOULD STAND FOR MANY YEARS

BY ALFRED W. HARRIS



F-4 tied up at dock. Note the raised lettering on the hull.



Tender *Alert* at Long Beach, California, during 1914 with F-class subs alongside. The first sub is not identifiable but F-3 is second, third is also unidentifiable, but outboard is F-4. The Pearl Harbor submarine base would not be commissioned until February 1920; its first commander being Cmdr. Chester W. Nimitz.

Cutting through the waters of the Pacific a short distance off Honolulu, the United States submarine torpedo boat *F-4*, engaged in a training exercise, began to move along a course from Barbers Point toward Diamond Head. Gradually, the gray hull slipped beneath the surface leaving the small conning tower slicing through the waves for just a moment before it too disappeared from view. It was about 9:15 on the morning of 25 March 1915.

From his vantage point at the lighthouse on Barbers Point, the lightkeeper watched *F-4* as she maneuvered about and finally submerged. A moment later he was startled by what seemed to be an underwater explosion... an explosion that seemed to originate near the area where *F-4* had just submerged. It left him with a growing feeling of uneasiness.

A little later that morning, the Officer of the Deck of the submarine tender *Alert* was bothered by a similar feeling that all was not as it should be. Earlier that morning *F-4*, under the command of Lt. (jg) Alfred L. Ede, had left the *Alert* in company with her sisters, *F-1* and *F-3*. The two sister boats returned, but the failure of *F-4* to appear caused the OOD to grow increasingly apprehensive.

It was more than two hours after

F-4's dive, that a motorboat from *Alert* left to begin a search for the overdue submarine. Soon several more motorboats and *F-4*'s three sister boats were crisscrossing through the waters where the morning's training exercise had taken place.

Finding exactly what they all hoped they would not find — air bubbles and an oil slick were sighted just after noon. The air bubbles and oil were clear evidence that *F-4* lay below and that her hull was no longer watertight. There was no way to know the true condition of *F-4* and her crew, but the situation did not engender optimism.

In order to calculate as closely as possible the location of *F-4*, careful observation was made of the course taken by the stream of bubbles as they came to the surface. Using this information and their charts, the searchers concluded that the *F-4* was



Lieutenant (jg) Alfred L. Ede was in command of the *F-4* at the time of the disaster.

lying in about 50 fathoms of water. The would-be rescuers' hopes were immediately buoyed, for at this depth there was an outside chance *F-4*'s hull may have held, and there was at least a faint possibility of rescue. The situation called for immediate action, for the limited amount of oxygen available left only hours of life for any crewmen that had survived thus far. A victory would be hard to come by, for the odds were heavily stacked against man in this battle with the sea but, nevertheless, the battle would be fought. *F-4* would