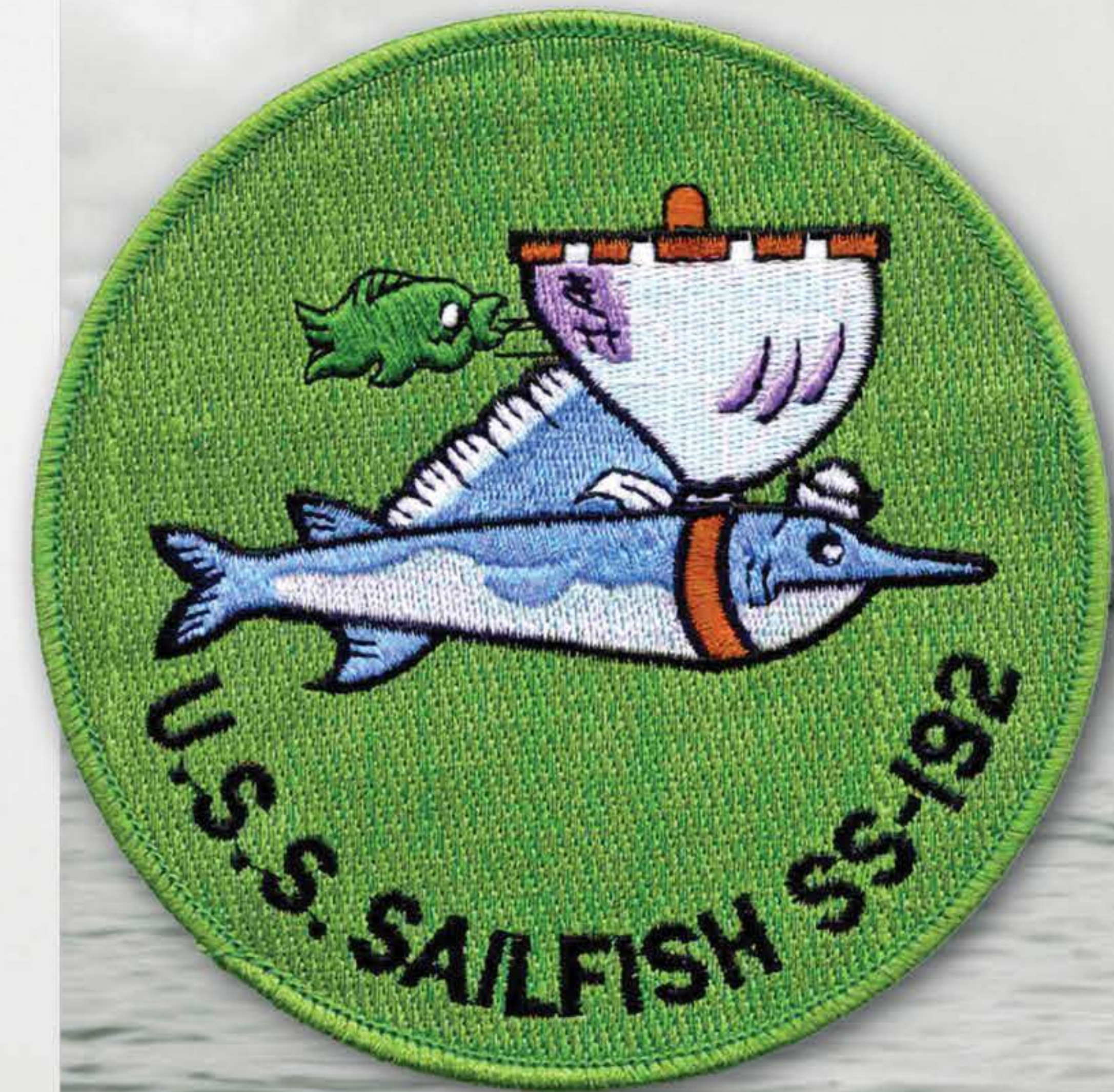


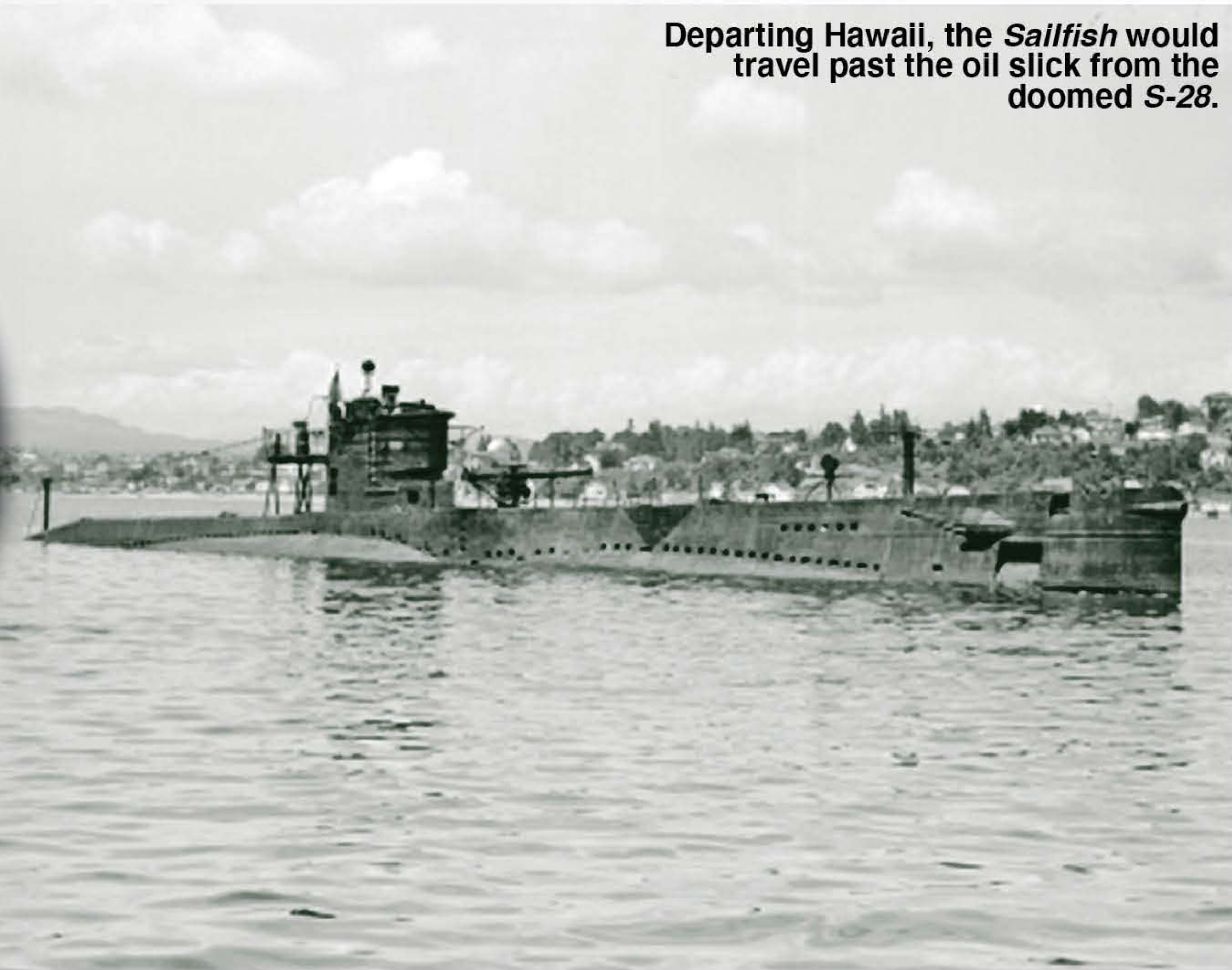
# DIVE TO DOOM

ABOARD THE USS SAILFISH, A STANDARD DIVE IN HAWAIIAN WATERS TURNED INTO A TERRIFYING RIDE TOWARDS DAVY JONES' LOCKER  
BY STEPHEN L. MOORE

Departing Hawaii, the *Sailfish* would travel past the oil slick from the doomed S-28.



Insignia for USS *Sailfish*.



Few US Navy submarines have a stranger history than the USS *Sailfish* (SS-192). The *Sargo*-class sub was built as USS *Squalus* but during test dives off the coast of New Hampshire on 23 May 1939 she sank, claiming the lives of 26 sailors. A massive rescue effort saved the lives of 33 sailors — the first time that a successful rescue operation with the McCann Rescue Chamber had been undertaken with a sub. Since the sub was in relatively good condition, she was rebuilt as USS *Sailfish* and would go on to earn nine Battle Stars. The *Sailfish* was photographed departing Mare Island Navy Yard during April 1943.

The tenth war patrol of the submarine USS *Sailfish* was an historic event. Battling the effects of a Pacific typhoon, the fleet boat had utilized classified Ultra dispatches to intercept an important Japanese warship convoy. Lieutenant Commander Bob Ward's crew had made history on 4 December 1943, in becoming the first US Navy submarine to sink a Japanese aircraft carrier, following eight hours of repeated torpedo attacks.

Radioman Bill Dillon, then a teenager who hailed from Pennsylvania, had manned *Sailfish's* radar and sonar gear throughout his boat's vigilant assaults. Today, Dillon at age 99 is the last surviving crewman who participated in the sinking of the carrier *Chuyo*. It was only after World War II

that Dillon would sadly learn the carrier his submarine destroyed had been carrying POW survivors from *Sailfish's* sister submarine, USS *Sculpin*.

In this excerpt from *Strike of the Sailfish*, just months after their carrier sinking, Dillon and his shipmates endured a tragic mishap that nearly cost them their own lives.

### 9 JULY 1944, ON BOARD USS SAILFISH

Seven months after completing her prior patrol, *Sailfish* (SS-192) was finally heading out on her eleventh war patrol. A bright sun warmed the skies as she stood out from the sub base with *Billfish*, *Greenling*, and their surface escort. Freshly painted in a gray war scheme, *Sailfish* eased through the harbor, continuing on past Pearl's

entrance buoys and beyond Diamond Head. Near the huge cliffs of Diamond Head, the Coast Guard cutter *Reliance* and other naval vessels continued to search over the area where the lost S-28's oil slick had appeared. "We who were topside in reverence removed our white hats," recalled John Good. (EDITOR'S NOTE: Completed in 1922, the S-28 had completed seven war patrols by the time she returned to Pearl Harbor in November 1943. After overhaul, the sub would remain in the Hawaiian area for seven months while undertaking training missions. On 3 July 1944, S-28 began anti-submarine warfare training operations off Oahu in conjunction with USCG Cutter *Reliance* and this extended into the night of 4 July. At 1730, the last exercise of the day started but contact between

the two vessels became fragmentary and at 1820, the cutter made a last contact with the sub. Further attempts at communication failed. Other ships quickly arrived in the area and a search began but it was not until 6 July that a large oil slick was spotted in the area in which the sub had been operating. However, the ocean at that location was extremely deep and exceeded all available rescue equipment. A court of inquiry was unable to determine the cause of the loss of S-28. On 20 September 2017, Tim Taylor led an expedition that discovered the wreck of S-28 off Oahu at a depth of 8500 feet.)

Shortly after passing over S-28's watery grave, Ward gave the word for all hands to prepare for a standard trim dive as Hawaii faded from view. More than two dozen men were making their

first war patrol, and serious business was at hand. For her eleventh patrol, *Sailfish* had a full load of two new types of torpedoes. In her after room, she carried the new, slower-speed electric Mark 18s, first introduced in the summer of 1943. In the forward room was another new variety, Mark 23 torpedoes, a steam-propelled variety that had longer range than the earlier Mark 14s.

Shortly out from the islands in the late afternoon, *Sailfish* would make her first trim dive of the patrol to determine the boat's balance from stem to stern. For the veteran sailors on board, it was a casual affair, one they had experienced hundreds of times. But working against the "norm" this day was the fact that the new diving officer, Lt. (jg) Joe Sahaj, was unaware that four torpedoes had been



Souvenir ribbon of the *Sailfish* when the sub was in port.