

## **Rise**

by Ed Miracle

At 07:30 on a blustery winter morning you have dressed, as ordered, in your swimsuit and flat-soled canvas sneakers, with no socks. The rain outside is not making you nervous. Because you stand on a metal grate, shoulder-to-shoulder with four other young men, similarly attired, inside an 8-foot steel sphere. There are two small doors, many pipes, gauges, and valves, but no windows. You don't know these guys, they are from other boats, but one of them, the instructor, spins a wheel and seals the outer door.

A single bulb overhead and another near your feet provide the only illumination for your huddle. You listen to the others breathe while the instructor opens a flood valve and water begins to fill the chamber. He instructs you and explains what's going to happen, but mostly you notice the water rise slowly over your feet and up your legs, swirl around your hips, chill your stomach, and reach coldly for your shoulders. When there's just enough space for all heads to bow together in a snug dome of air, he shuts the valve and stops the flow. Everyone shivers and hugs their arms, while he tells you to get ready.

Because then he opens a compressed air line that wails and roars, though you are not listening. You are wiggling your jaw, blowing your clamped nose, pounding the side of your head, anything to equalize the pressure that is stretching your eardrums so painfully. Abruptly the noise and the air stop, and everyone relaxes a bit. Two things have happened: you have all made it (no bloody noses or burst eardrums), and wisps of steam now sail the tiny lake that laps against your chins. Both air and water have turned toasty warm.

Underwater, with his foot, the instructor nudges the inner door, which opens into a six-story cylinder that resembles a grain silo, also filled with water. Your chamber, called a trunk, is welded to it near ground level, so anyone who steps through the door has fifty feet of water above them.

You will be the first vic—trainee to exit. All of you must depart in a few short minutes, to prevent nitrogen narcosis—the painful and sometimes fatal "diver's bends." Around your neck and snugged to your waist is an inflatable life preserver with a special hood that traps breathing air. You tug the hood over your head, pull the toggles that inflate your vest and find the lanyard with the clip on the end. You reach down through the open door and pass the clip to a waiting scuba diver, who attaches your clip to a taut guy wire that stretches from the door to the surface, five stories above. You stick one leg into the big tank and force yourself against the buoyancy of your vest, down and out, under the crown of the door.

The water is cold again, but you don't care. Raising your hands over your head and looking up through the flexible plastic hood, you begin shouting, "Ho, ho, ho," and the diver releases his grip on your arms. He has clipped your lanyard to the guy wire, to keep you from careening into the walls. You rise quickly, in a cloud of bubbles, gaining speed as you shout, "Ho, ho, ho," a dazed, demented Santa. This apparent nonsense assures everyone that you are exhaling all the way to the top. If you stop ho-ho-ing, or they can't hear you, another diver will drag you to the safety of an interim trunk, where quick re-pressurization may prevent pulmonary embolisms from killing you.

It seems a long way to the surface, but now you are rising faster than the bubbles that vent furiously from your vest and hood. As you break the surface, you shoot half out of the water, still ho-ho-ing, and fall back with a splash. Two swimmers rush to assist. One un-clips you from the wire and the other tows you to a ladder.

Shaky and shivering again, you climb the ladder to a wooden platform, where you peel off your hood and leave it in a wire basket. As the next trainee shoots out of the water, ho-ho-ing vigorously, somebody hands you a towel and points you to the elevator. They take your name and check you off their list, but nobody shakes your hand. You have just escaped from a (simulated) sunken submarine.

Downstairs in the first-floor dressing room, you change back into your white hat, your dungarees, and your black Wellington boots. Then you return through the rain to your ship, where it's just another workday. If you ever need to do this again, out in the open ocean, there will be no divers or guy wires. But now everyone—and especially you—knows for certain you can do it.