

Farewell to a man of the sea

This is in remembrance to a pioneer and patriot. His name was Edward Ellsberg, from Denver, with forebears from Czarist Russia.

He was honor man at the Naval Academy, class of 1914, and he was so far ahead of the No. 2 midshipman that when a show of temper cost him several hundred demerits, it was laughable.

He earned a master's degree at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and went on to win an international reputation as a submarine salvage expert — the Navy's first.

His first real opportunity came in 1925, when a freighter rammed and sank the submarine S-51 off Block Island, R.I. He prevailed upon the Navy to try to raise her rather than yield her to a civilian firm.

When he got the assignment, under Capt. Ernest J. King, later fleet admiral, he decided to learn to dive at the advanced age of 34. That way he could accompany his men below.

On one dive he came close to dying when he fell and was buried in mud, but he kept his head and worked clear by manipulating his air hose.

He developed an underwater torch for the S-51 and eventually floated the sub with pontoons.

Ellsberg wrote of the exploit in his first book, *On the Bottom*. He wrote 10 more books over two decades, several of them Book of the Month Club selections and best sellers.

In 1926 he resigned because the world's navies were being reduced and he felt his future as a Navy engineer was limited.



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But a year later, when the S-4 sank off Provincetown, Mass., Ellsberg was back. He started training naval personnel and obtaining equipment for future emergencies, which paid off when the Squalus sank off Portsmouth, N.H., in 1939.

They saved several men from the Squalus with a diving bell. If a severe storm hadn't forced salvage team members ashore, they might have saved more. One of the most poignant moments came when they had to tap that news to the trapped men and the answer came back: "We understand."

In the late 1930s Ellsberg resigned again to write and lecture about the threat of a resurgent Germany under the Nazis.

But on Dec. 7, 1941, he was on a night train to Washington to volunteer a third time. He hoped to go to Pearl Harbor, but the Navy put him in charge of salvage operations at Massawa, on the Red Sea, where the Italians had scuttled more than 20 ships.

When that job was done — under enormous handicaps, including temperatures that soared to 165 degrees — he went to England to help plan artificial harbors using sunken ships for the Normandy invasion.

Ellsberg retired as a rear admiral to live on the Maine coast in summer, the Florida

coast in winter.

In October 1947, he helped coordinate forces fighting the Bar Harbor fire. As townspeople gathered at the dock for evacuation, a last-minute wind shift turned the fire and spared the town.

In the late 1950s, after the Andrea Doria sank, a rubber company hired him to develop a plan to raise the ship with dirigibles. The job lasted all of one day. Ellsberg studied the problem and said there was no way this would work.

He didn't look like an admiral in his sailboat, with old clothes and a floppy white hat. But at the tiller he was a no-nonsense skipper, in full command of his craft.

At his Maine home — "Windswept" — he made quite a lecturer, gesturing furiously with one hand, a glass of sherry bobbling in the other. He was a superb story teller who enjoyed refigting World War II or debating current events.

In the mid-1970s he lost his only child, a daughter, to cancer. Then he lost his wife a few weeks after they celebrated their 60th anniversary. In his last years he was a lonely man.

Last summer we missed connections. He was feeling poorly after an exploratory operation revealed he had cancer. Two weeks ago it claimed him at 92.

He is survived by two grandchildren, of whom he was immensely proud. He is also survived by a nephew, Daniel, of Pentagon Papers renown. Only once did I hear him talk about Daniel — briefly.

To a man who believed, like MacArthur, in duty, honor and country, it hurt too much.