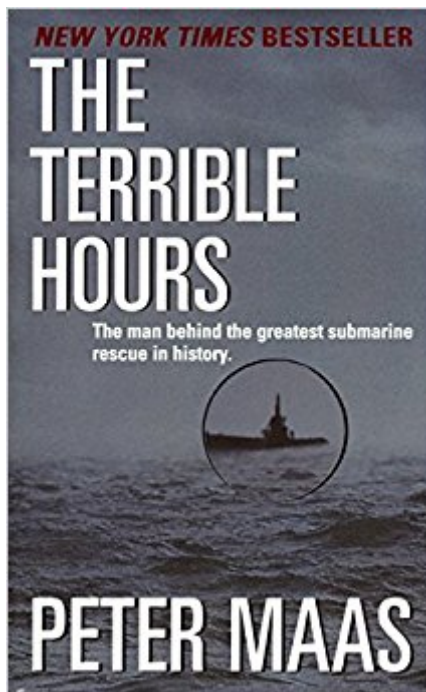


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The Terrible Hours



Synopsis

On the eve of World War II, the Squalus, America's newest submarine, plunged to the bottom of the North Atlantic. Miraculously, thirty-three crew members still survived. While their loved ones waited in unbearable tension on shore, their ultimate fate would depend upon one man, U.S. Navy officer Charles "Swede" Momsen -- an extraordinary combination of visionary, scientist, and man of action. In this thrilling true account, prize-winning author Peter Maas vividly re-creates a moment-by-moment account of the disaster and the man at its center. Could he actually pluck those men from a watery grave? Or had all his pioneering work been in vain?

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Like a tough old salt holding forth in a dockside pub, Kevin Conway narrates this riveting maritime drama in a raspy voice well-weathered by sea spray and Lucky Strikes. Chronicling the true story of 33 American sailors trapped aboard a sunken submarine just prior to World War II, author Peter Maas uncovered the unsung hero behind their attempted rescue, Navy officer Charles "Swede" Momsen. A deep sea visionary, Momsen's unorthodox theories and unproven inventions represented the lost men's only hope. "For someone whose formal education had shaped him for duty as a line officer in the US Navy, Momsen was getting into pretty deep water." Conway does an excellent job of portraying the various crew members without turning character into caricature and knots the nerve-wracking, claustrophobic tension of this ill-fated mission in the back of your throat. (Running time: 6 hours, 4 cassettes) --George Laney --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Maas, best known for his chronicling of the urban underworld (Underboss, Serpico, etc.), takes readers underwater for a thrilling account of the world's first rescue of a submarine. Before WWII, submariners were second-class citizens. Worse, until Charles "Swede" Momsen came along, it was standard procedure to treat downed subs as irretrievable. Fortunately for 33 men aboard the Squalus, Momsen had developed and tested pioneering rescue equipment (often at the risk of his own life) and was ready with his crew when the sub sank to a depth of 243 feet off Portsmouth, N.H., on May 23, 1939. While the captain of the Squalus kept the air slightly toxic so that his crew stayed drowsy and therefore docile, Momsen lowered his huge pear-shaped diving bell until it made contact with the sub's deck, then began to bring the men up in groups. Bad weather threatened, and then, on the last ascent, the cable tangled, and the final group of men had to be lowered to the ocean floor again and there await repairs. To the amazement of the surface crew, who had telephone contact with the occupants of the bell, they maintained morale by singing "Old MacDonald Had a Farm." Unfortunately, 26 men had been drowned in the first few minutes of the sinking, and their bodies were not retrieved until the Squalus was recovered 113 days after the mishap. Maas anchors the gripping story in Momsen, whom he portrays as a larger-than-life hero, a brainy, brave iconoclast of the kind one associates with action movies. It's a white-knuckler of a read. But it's not for the claustrophobic. (Sept.) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.

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Pretty gripping stuff from Mr. Maas. A straightforward account of the first successful operation to save the lives of submariners stuck in a sunken submarine off the east coast of the USA. Mr. Maas relays to us in a chronological order the sub's ill-fated dive all the way through the successful extraction of 33 men and onto the salvage operation that got the sub back into dry dock. Fantastic effort on the part of the rescuers. Interspersed with the operation is the story of "Swede" Momsen who, almost single-handedly, had designed, tested and fought for a submersible bell to be used specifically for submariner rescue. I was amazed at "Swede's" almost obsession with submarine rescue and his devotion to it. He also painstakingly researched the various gasses humans could breathe at various depths. Also he tested all his theories on himself as well as willing volunteers. Such leadership from an amazing man. This is an enjoyable book given the dark nature of the story. I was captivated by Maas' writing and held for the duration. I've also read his other works: Serpico and Underboss and his writing is consistent. Summary: Well worth your time.

OMG, we couldn't put it down! What an INCREDIBLE story! And it's all true. Who needs fiction, with books like this, when real life is even more awesome than something an author dreams up?! Without giving it away, the whole story keeps you on the edge of your seat, and you literally cannot put the book down. "I have 5 more minutes before I have to leave for my appointment, I can get 5 minutes of reading in!" Seriously. While I've always been fascinated by submarines, after reading this book, I can honestly say I am now grateful that I never became a submariner. It's frightening, shocking, amazing, suspenseful -- what more could you want in a book? We enjoyed it so much that we ordered "Blow All Ballast!" (which is also about the Squalus, written right after it happened). Although out of print and very expensive, it's well worth it to us; we can't get enough. This story is fantastic. You want suspense? Here it is -- and it's all TRUE!

I've long been a fan of the late Peter Maas. I liked *Serpico* and *Underboss*, and now this riveting military history about the Squalus submarine. This is a satisfying story as well, not just because of the successful rescue operation but because the good guy ("Swede") prevailed. Swede's leadership as portrayed by Maas was stunning. I think almost anybody would appreciate this book.

VERY interesting; and worth the read!

Full disclosure: I used to work in submarine rescue for the US Navy so this story is near and dear to my heart. That said, it's a well written historical nonfiction book that reads like fiction. It's not too technical and it makes you want to keep reading to learn the fate of the sailors stuck in the submarine at the bottom of the North Atlantic... Momsen is an amazing man and the submarine rescue program on a whole owes so much to his ingenuity, insight, drive, and determination. Without him a submarine rescue capability would not exist. For anyone interested in Naval history this is a wonderful read!

Good book; arrived on time.

The story of Charles "Swede" Momsen is another one of those that few people know of, but should. This book is really more about the life of Momsen and not just the rescue of the Squalus. Though it was one of the crowning achievements of his extraordinary life, and perhaps his proudest moment, the rescue of the Squalus started well over a decade before the ship was even built. Momsen's tenacity in developing diving, and submarine rescue devices for years before the sinking is what

made the rescue possible at all. The Terrible Hours does an excellent job at informing you of the history of the development of the tools and techniques that were used by Momsen and his crew to rescue the 33 survivors of the doomed (without Momsen) sub. Not given near the coverage of Squalus rescue, but probably an achievement that saved much more than 33 lives, was Momsen's work on torpedo exploders and submarine attack techniques that had to have saved hundreds or thousands of American lives in WWII. The book is an excellent read and I highly recommended to fans of submarines, diving, and rescue. If those things don't interest you, the humanity of the story will.

This is a relatively short book, considering the topic. That and the writing style limit it. Regarding the overwrought style consider some 'purple prose' from page 33: "everyone in the control room froze, hypnotized...

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