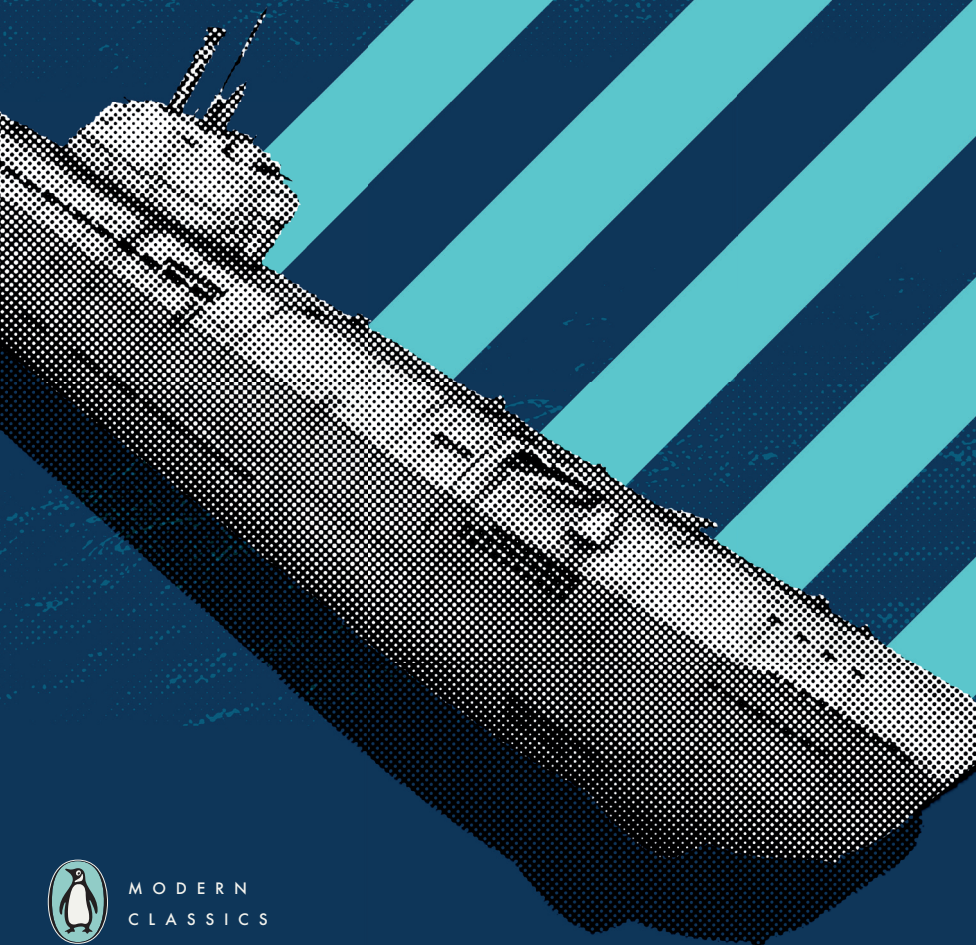


Len Deighton Horse Under Water



MODERN
CLASSICS

Horse Under Water

Len Deighton was born in 1929 in London. He did his national service in the RAF, went to the Royal College of Art and designed many book jackets, including the original UK edition of Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*. The enormous success of his first novel, *The IPCRESS File* (1962), was repeated in a remarkable sequence of books over the following thirty or so years. These varied from historical fiction (*Bomber*, perhaps his greatest novel) to dystopian alternative fiction (*SS-GB*) and a number of brilliant non-fiction books on the Second World War (*Fighter*, *Blitzkrieg* and *Blood, Tears and Folly*).

His spy novels chart the twists and turns of Britain and the Cold War in ways which now give them a unique flavour. They preserve a world in which Europe contains many dictatorships, in which the personal can be ruined by the ideological and where the horrors of the Second World War are buried under only a very thin layer of soil. Deighton's fascination with technology, his sense of humour and his brilliant evocation of time and place make him one of the key British espionage writers, alongside John Buchan, Eric Ambler, Ian Fleming and John Le Carré.

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LEN DEIGHTON

Horse Under Water



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Penguin
Random House
UK

First published 1963

First published in Penguin Classics 2021
001

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Set in 10.5/13pt Dante MT Std

Typeset by Jouve (UK), Milton Keynes

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

The authorized representative in the EEA is Penguin Random House Ireland,
Morrison Chambers, 32 Nassau Street, Dublin D02 YH68

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-0-241-50541-0

www.greenpenguin.co.uk



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I cannot tell how the truth may be;
I say the tale as 'twas told to me.

SCOTT

Perhaps the worst plight of a vessel is to be caught in a gale on a lee shore. In this connection the following . . . rules should be observed:

1. Never allow your vessel to be found in such a predicament . . .

CALLINGHAM, *Seamanship: Jottings for the Young Sailor*

CENTRAL REGISTER.

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House of Commons.

London, S.W.1

Sunday 26th January,
1941.

Dear Walter,

I shall ask you to burn this the moment you have read it. Tell K.E.F. that he will have to supply anything from the factory in Lyon that you ask. Remind him that it wasn't the French Resistance that have paid his wages for the last ten months. I want the chimneys smoking again at the earliest possible moment or I will sell the whole plant.

Would your Wehrmacht people be interested in buying the place? Should you be interested I will appoint you as the agent at the usual rate. Surely a factory in the Vichy Free Zone could be useful in the light of this 'Trading with the Enemy Statutory List'?

I think these people here are beginning to realize which way the wind has blown and already a little of the bravado has disappeared. You can mark my words that should your fellows actually come into conflict with the Soviets we British will not be long in understanding what must be done.

Our plant in Latvia has gone down the drain now that they have been subverted by the Bolshies and I can only say how glad I am that the plans for the Bukovina place didn't materialize.

I am forming a 'Brains Trust' (as they say these days) of people who see eye to eye with me on these points so that when the country finally comes to its senses we will be in a position to do something about it.

You are right about Roosevelt's crowd: now that he's safely in for the third time they will foment the spiteful retaliatory attitude of the socialist mob here. However, Roosevelt isn't America you know, and as long as your people don't do anything foolish (like dropping a bomb on New York) only a small number will be willing to pick up a gun if it means putting down a cash register.

Burn this now,

Yours,

Henry -

Horse Under Water

Secret File No. 2

Sweet Talk

Marrakech: Tuesday

Marrakech is just what the guide-books say it is. Marrakech is an ancient walled city surrounded with olive groves and palm trees. Behind it rise the mountains of the high Atlas and in the city the market place at Djemaa-el-Fna is alive with jugglers, dancers, magicians, story-tellers, snake-charmers and music. Marrakech is a fairy-tale city, but on this trip I didn't get to see much more of it than a fly-blown hotel room and the immobile faces of three Portuguese politicians.

My hotel was in the old city; the Medina. The rooms were finished in brown and cream paint and the wall decorations were notices telling me not to do various things in French. From the next room came the sound of water dripping into the stained bath tub and the call of an indefatigable cricket, while through the broken fly-screens in the window came the musical sound of an Arab city selling its wares.

I removed my tie and put it over the back of my chair. My shirt hung suddenly cold against the small of my back and I felt a dribble of sweat run gently down the side of my nose, hesitate and drop on to 'Sheet 128: Transfer of sterling assets of Government of Portugal held in United Kingdom, Mandates or Dependencies to successor Government'.

We sipped oversweet mint tea, munched almond, honey-sticky cakes, and I took comfort in the idea of being back in London inside twenty-four hours. This may be a millionaire's playground, but no self-respecting millionaire would be seen dead here in the summer.

It was ten past four in the afternoon. The whole town was buzzing with flies and conversation; cafés, restaurants and brothels had standing room only; the pickpockets were working to rota.

‘Very well,’ I said, ‘availability of thirty per cent of your sterling assets as soon as the British Ambassador in Lisbon is satisfied that you have a working control within the capital.’ They agreed to that. They weren’t delirious with joy but they agreed to that. They were hard bargainers, these revolutionaries.

Old Solution

London: Thursday

The W.O.O.C.(P) owned a small piece of grimy real estate on the unwashed side of Charlotte Street. My office had an outlook like a Cruikshank illustration to *David Copperfield*, and subsidence provided an isosceles triangle under the door that made internal telephones unnecessary.

Dawlish was my chief. When I gave him the report on my negotiations in Marrakech he laid it on his desk like the foundation stone of the National Theatre and said, 'Foreign Office are going to introduce a couple of new ideas for tackling the talks with the Portuguese revolutionary party.'

'For *us* to tackle them,' I corrected.

'Top marks, my boy,' said Dawlish, 'you cottoned on to that aspect of their little scheme.'

'I'm covered in the scar tissue of O'Brien's good ideas.'

'Well, this one is better than most,' said Dawlish.

Dawlish was a tall, grey-haired civil servant with eyes like the far end of a long tunnel. Dawlish always tended to placate other departments when they asked us to do something difficult or stupid. I saw each job in terms of the people who would have to do the dirty work. That's the way I saw this job, but Dawlish was my master.

On the small, antique writing-desk that Dawlish had brought with him when he took over the department – W.O.O.C.(P) – was a bundle of papers tied with the pink ribbon of officialdom. He riffled quickly through them. 'This Portuguese revolutionary movement . . .' Dawlish began; he paused.

‘*Vós não vedes*,’ I supplied.

‘Yes, V.N.V. – that’s “they do not see”, isn’t it?’

‘“*Vós*” is the same as “*vous*” in French,’ I said; ‘it’s “you do not see”.’

‘Quite so,’ said Dawlish, ‘well this V.N.V. want the F.O. to put up quite a lump sum of money in advance.’

‘Yes,’ I said, ‘that’s the trouble with easy payment plans.’

Dawlish said, ‘Suppose we could do it for nothing.’ I didn’t answer. He went on, ‘Off the coast of Portugal there is a boat full of money. It’s money that the Nazis counterfeited during the war. English and American paper money.’

I said, ‘Then the idea is that the V.N.V. boys get the money from the sunken boat and use it to finance their revolution?’

‘Not quite,’ said Dawlish. He probed the hot pipe-embers with a match. ‘The idea is that *we* get the money from the sunken boat for them.’

‘Oh no!’ I said. ‘You surely haven’t agreed to that. What do F.O. Intelligence Unit* get paid for?’

‘I sometimes wonder,’ agreed Dawlish, ‘but I suppose the F.O. have their troubles too.’

‘Don’t tell me about them,’ I said, ‘it might break me up emotionally.’

Dawlish nodded, removed his spectacles and dabbed at his dark eye-sockets with a crisp handkerchief. Behind him on the window ledge the sun was rolling dusty documents into brandy snaps.

In the street below a man with a twin horn was dissatisfied with the existing disposition of traffic.

‘V.N.V. say that off the Portuguese coast there is a wrecked ship.’

Dawlish could never tell you anything without drawing a diagram. He drew a small formalized ship on the notepad with a gold pencil. ‘It was a German naval vessel en route to South America in March 1945. Inside it there is a considerable amount of excellent counterfeit currency, sterling five-pound notes, fifty-dollar bills and some genuine Swedish stuff. It was for high-ranking Nazis

* Foreign Office Intelligence Unit, part of M.i.6.

seeking exile, of course.' I said nothing. Dawlish dabbed his eyes and I heard the traffic outside begin to move again.

'The V.N.V. want us to help them retrieve these items. For "help them retrieve" you can read "present them with". F.O. see this as a way of supporting what they think is an inevitable change of power, without implicating us too deeply, or costing any money. Comment?'

I said, 'You mean the Portuguese revolutionaries are to use the counterfeit U.S. money and the genuine Swedish stuff to buy guns and generally finance a political Paul Jones, but the English money they can't use because the design of the fiver has been changed.'

'Quite so,' said Dawlish.

I said, 'I'm cynical. Do you have the name of the ship, charted position of the wreck and German bills of lading from Admiralty Historical Department?'

'Not yet,' said Dawlish, 'but I have confirmed that there have been a fair number of counterfeit fivers in that region. They may have come from a wreck. Also V.N.V. have a local fisherman who is confident about locating it.'

'Item 2,' I continued, 'the idea is that we mount a subversive operation in Portugal, which is a dictatorship whichever side of the dispatch box you rest your feet. This in itself is a tricky enterprise, but we are going to do it, in cooperation with, or on behalf of, this group of citizens whose openly avowed aim it is to overthrow the government. This you tell me is going to cause H.M.G. less embarrassment than planting a few hundred thousand into a bank account for them.'

Dawlish pulled a face.

'O.K.,' I said, 'so don't let's have any false ideas about motivation. It's a way of saving money at a considerable risk – our risk. I can see the working of the P.S.T.'s* eager little mind. He is going to organize a revolution while the Americans have to finance it because there are so many counterfeit dollars turning up all over the world. But Treasury are wrong.'

* Permanent Secretary of the Treasury: Head of the Treasury and therefore holds the title 'Head of H.M. Civil Service'.

Dawlish looked up sharply and began tapping his pencil on the desk diary. The twin horn had nearly reached Oxford Street. 'You think so?' he said.

'I know so,' I told him. 'These Portuguese characters are tough guys. They have been around. They will get rid of the British stuff all right, then the Treasury will be all long faces and little pink memos.'

We sat in silence for a few minutes while Dawlish drew a choppy sea above his drawing of a boat. He swivelled his chair round so that he could see through the dingy windows, jutted his lower lip forward and beat it with his pencil. In between this he said 'Ummm' four times.

He turned his back to me and began to speak. 'Six months ago O'Brien told me that he knew of one hundred and fifty experts on world currency. He said there were seven who knew all the answers about moving it, but when it came to moving and changing it illegally, O'Brien said that you would be his choice every time.'

'I'm flattered,' I said.

'Perhaps,' said Dawlish, who considered illegal talent a dubious virtue; 'but Treasury may have second thoughts, if they know how strongly you are against it.'

'Don't sell tickets on the strength of it,' I told him. 'What F.S.T.* will pass up a chance of saving perhaps a million pounds sterling? He probably has the College of Heralds designing a coat of arms already.'

I was right. Within ten days I had a letter telling me to report to the R.N. Instructional Diving School (Shallow Dive Course No. 549) at H.M.S. *Vernon*. The F.S.T. was going to get an earldom and I would get an Admiralty diving certificate. As Dawlish said when I complained, 'But you are the obvious choice, old boy.' He inscribed the numeral 'one' on his notepad and said, 'One, Lisbon 1940, many contacts, you speak a bit of the lingo. Two,' he wrote 'two',

* Financial Secretary to the Treasury, who deals directly with the Prime Minister and directs the Treasury to implement decisions of the Government.

‘currency expert. Three,’ he wrote ‘three’, ‘you were in on the first contacts with the V.N.V. in Morocco last month.’

‘But do I have to go on this frogman course?’ I asked. ‘It will be wet and cold and it’ll all take place in the early hours of the morning.’

‘Physical comfort is just a state of mind, my boy, it will make you fighting fit; and besides,’ Dawlish leaned forward confidentially, ‘you’ll be in charge, you know, and you don’t want these blighters nipping below for a crafty smoke.’ Dawlish then uttered a curious polyphonic sound, rather high-pitched at first, ending in a vibrating palate and terminated by the distribution of tobacco ash throughout the room. I stared incredulously; Dawlish had laughed.

Undersea Need

There is a point on the A3 near Cosham at which the whole of Portsmouth Harbour comes suddenly into view. This expanse of inland water is a vast grey triangle pointing to the Solent. The edges are sharp serrated patterns of docks, jetties and hard enclosures the colourless water.

A penetrating drizzle had been leaking through the low cloud since I had joined the A3 at Kingston Vale about 6.45 a.m. Window-display men were junking polystyrene Xmas trees and ordering gambolling lambs. On their way to work people were sneaking a look at shop windows to see how much their relatives had paid for the presents they had received.

The snow had been around a long time. Layer upon layer had crystallized and hardened into abstract shapes. Now it sat like a delinquent child glaring at passers-by and daring them to try moving it. The ground had absorbed so much cold that rain made a slippery layer on the ice. I slowed as crowds of factory and dockyard workers swarmed across the streets. I turned into the red-brick gate of H.M.S. *Vernon*. A rating stood there in oilskins that gleamed like patent leather. He waved me to a halt. I walked to the porch where half a dozen sailors in damp saggy raincoats sat huddled together, hands in pockets. From the brittle Tannoy came a message for the duty watch. I knocked at the counter.

A young rating looked up from the assorted parts of a bicycle bell that lay before him on the table.

‘Can I help you sir?’

‘Instructional Diving Section,’ I said.

He asked the operator for a number and sat, eye-glazed, waiting

to be connected. On the notice board I read about the Q.M. of the watch being responsible for boilers when there were men in cells. Under it hung a copper bugle with highly polished dents. I signed into the visitors' ledger 'Time of arrival 08.05', a drip of rain splattered on to the page. Inside the office were the highly polished lino and blanched belts that go with military police systems everywhere in the world. A two-badge seaman took over the phone and clobbered the receiver rest a few times. A P.O. emerged, holding a brown enamel teapot. He looked at my Admiralty authority.

'That's all right – take him over to Diving.' He disappeared still holding the teapot in both hands.

The rain hammered the concrete roadways and paths and large freshly painted ships' figureheads dribbled pensively. The Instructional Diving Section was a barn-like building that echoed to the noise of metal drums being moved. Behind a wire screen was a hardboard counter and a muscular rating.

'Course 549?' he asked.

'Yes,' I said. He eyed my civilian raincoat doubtfully. Over the Tannoy came the clang of one bell in the forenoon watch. A tall one-stripe hooky exchanged a Gauloise cigarette for half a cup of dark-brown tea and I warmed my hands on the enamel sides of the mug. I knew it would all take place in the early hours of the morning.

The grey winter light and wet fog crept through the tiny windows and illuminated the rigid lines of school desks, engraved with hearts, patterns, and initials. I looked around the classroom. At the other desks were quiet, smooth-faced N.O.s with carefully dirtied gold stripes wrapped around brushed blue worsted. They talked quietly together in a well-bred clubby sort of way. I found my cigarettes and lit up. Behind me someone was saying '... and the bedrooms will be all G-Plan too ...'

'Here we go,' someone else said. The door clicked open. With a smooth legerdemain perfected amid the tyranny of gunrooms the class came to attention on half-smoked cigarettes.

The golden arm of a senior officer waved us back to relaxation and gave us some 'team spirits', some 'work hard and play

hards', one 'welcome aboard' and then gave us Chief Petty Officer Edwards.

C.P.O. Edwards was a pink man. His face was the same shade all over, neither more pink at the lips nor less pink around the eye sockets. He clasped a pink right hand inside a pink left hand and thrust them floorwards as though trying to cope with an almost unmanageable weight. His hair was short and the colour of 'tickler' and he was anxious to find out how high he could lift his chin without losing sight of his class.

'Seeing how this is an officers' course some young gentlemen may feel that the due care and attention in respect of hours of commencement need not be observed. I would like to correct this impression right away. Late arrivals will not, repeat not, enter the classroom after the door is closed but will report to the Lieutenant-Commander's office. Third door on the right down the corridor. Any questions. Right.' There could be no questions.

On the lapel of C.P.O. Edwards's serge jacket was a star, a diver's helmet, a crown of red thread, and a small C. C.P.O. Edwards was a professional diver, an expert, a 'Clearance Diver'. He walked to the rear of the class and put large cardboard boxes on each desk. 'Don't you dare touch till you are told to,' he shouted to the young paymaster lieutenant in the front row, adding, some moments after, 'sir.' A couple of the officers grinned at each other but I didn't see anyone start opening a box.

'Right, have-your-notebooks-ready-and-I-don't-want-anybody-asking-for-a-pencil,' he said, probably for the thousandth time. 'This is your kit, check it; sign for it. I don't want anybody asking me for a spare hood. Look after your gear and it will look after you. Lose something and come and tell me about it and you know what I shall do? Do *you*, sir? Do *you* know what I will do?' The Chief was talking to the officer with the G-Plan bedroom.

'I'll larf, sir, that's what I will do; larf.' The Chief gave no sign of laughing either now or at any future time: I thought for a moment that LARF was some strange nautical verb.

There are lots of different degrees of diving skill. The first dives are done with the divers on the end of a leash like a well-bred

poodle taking a dip. At the end of three weeks we would be shallow-water divers – the lowest form of submarine life. We were training to be amateurs.

Any member of ship's crew could volunteer for this course and become the one to do inverted press-ups on the barnacles to discover a foreign limpet of destruction. Others might stay here at *Vernon* to shake off the leash of authority and swim alone in the dark sea as a Free Diver; but it was the Clearance Divers who spent long professional years to learn the whole box of tricks from copper helmet to rubber flippers. C.P.O. Edwards was such a man.

Finally we were allowed to open the big brown boxes while the C.P.O. sang the contents to us.

'Combinations, blue woollen, one. That's it, son. A blue woollen man knitted by an old maid. Frocks, white woollen, one. That's it – I know it's a roll-neck pullover but you sign for a Frock. I'm not responsible for Naval Nomenclature. Helmet, blue woollen, one. Keep your head warm – one of the first rules of diving. Right. Mittens, free flooding, one pair. Right. Neck ring, one. No, that's your neck *seal*. A neck ring is metal.' He made a clucking noise in the throat and walked across the room, in tacit protest at an appalling state of ignorance. 'Right. Neck clamp, one. Metal, son, the thing that fits on your neck ring. Right. Neck seal, one. Well where did you put it? Look, he's got it on *his* desk,' then in a louder voice, 'look after your gear, already you are mixing it all up. I'm telling you, the rating divers on the other course will pounce on you lot like a jaunty onto a Crown and Anchor game.'

By now everyone was examining the gear like kids on Christmas morning. There were the one-piece black rubber suits, with two-way stretch and tight-fitting wrists, and the belt and the undersea knife. By now the classroom looked like a war-surplus store.

'Do we have the rest of the day off, chiefie?' someone asked.

'There's a couple of things on the agenda,' said C.P.O. Edwards. 'Muster at the sick bay for a medical, half an hour with the recompression chamber and a quick dip into the tank for all of you.'

'Today?' said G-Plan. He looked out of the window; across the

roads of the depot the rain was bouncing back up and making a thick pile carpet of wetness.

‘Yes, you’ll be snug and dry in the tank,’ said Edwards. ‘It’s no depth, son, do you the world of good. Next. Instruction period Two: (a) dealing with wet gear, (b) stowing wet gear and (c) underwater signals.’

‘We aren’t going to have much time for lunch,’ said G-Plan. The chief relished this moment. He smiled a calm old-fashioned smile.

‘Lunch will be served at the diving position, sir. ‘Hot coffee and sandwiches.’ There was a bustle of comment. ‘It’s better in the long run you’ll find,’ the Chief said to no one in particular. ‘You won’t be running up a lot of mess bills and if you are going to be divers it’s not a lot of good to you all that drinking at the wardroom bar.’

If one pressed flat against the wall, which I was learning to call a bulkhead, only a small portion of the heavy rain hit you. Behind us the Artificer Divers were welding and hammering at the benches. After we had been in the tank they would resume the same tasks under water. The diving tank was a grey-painted gasometer, reinforced with crisscross girders. Above us in a boiler suit ‘dhobied’ almost white was the tall one-stripe hooky. He called down to us, ‘Ready for number four.’

The sub-lieutenant with the G-Plan bedroom shuffled forward, awkward in the flippers. The wind cut a thin rasher of water from the top of the tank and slopped it over the side. It hit the concrete with a crack and splashed around our black rubber legs. Number four was at the top. The tall leading seaman mouthed instructions that were kicked aside by the wind and swept across the harbour. Number four nodded and began to descend the ladder into the tank.

I looked through one of the glass panels. It was the size of a large TV screen. The sea water inside was cloudy green and small flecks of animal and vegetable matter swayed in neutral buoyancy. I watched number four stumbling across the floor of the tank. The suit suddenly ejected a stream of bubbles from the relief valve on his left shoulder. He had allowed the counter-lung to build up too

much pressure. In wartime such a mistake could cause instant death. They were tricky to use, these oxygen sets, but skilfully operated no tell-tale bubbles ever reached the surface. The diver breathes in and out of the rubber bag using the same air over and over, topping it up with oxygen while absorbing the CO₂ by means of the absorbent canister. Number four was learning how to move under water now, leaning forward as though in a powerful headwind, but his over-inflated rubber lung had lifted him clear of the floor. He was almost horizontal before he had gripped the metal ladder. Now the sailor on the ladder tapped a signal and G-Plan began to haul himself upward.

Soon he was back under the leaky lean-to, dripping wet, smiling and wiping the back of his hand across his face before putting a cigarette in it. He drew on the fag and breathed out of an open mouth, revelling in the dirty warmth of the smoke. We awaited his verdict.

‘Nothing to it,’ he said. ‘My kid could do it.’

‘That officer there,’ the voice of C.P.O. Edwards came effortlessly along the whole length of the jetty, ‘neglecting his diving gear.’ The whole place sprang to life, the sibilant sound of fags being doused, equipment tidied and welding torches lit echoed around the hut.

‘Leading seaman Barker. Get these trainees on the ladder.’ Edwards’s sentences ended on an authoritative high note, and the leading hand almost toppled into the tank in his haste, as Edwards’s metal-tipped heels moved ever closer.

‘Number eight, please,’ said the leading seaman rather plaintively. Our numbers were painted across each and every metal part of the equipment. ‘Eight,’ I heard the hooky say again. I looked at my own absorbent canister. I was number eight. ‘The civilian officer, sir, who is always late.’ I was No. 8.

‘Nice and cosy,’ the L.S. made sure the square wraparound mask was watertight, and the mouthpiece between my teeth, then gave me a gentle slap on the arm. Through the eyepiece everything was enlarged and I found difficulty in even locating the ladder’s top step. The water was dense and very cold. Only when one’s eyes descend below the waterline is one suddenly under water. A few large

white bubbles sped upward past my eyes, escaping from the folds of the rubber suit. The water closed upon me like a green trapdoor and light shimmered and danced as the wind's rough file tore notches in the smooth surface.

'Wanch Wanch.' The noise of the air rattling around the breathing bag was deafening. I touched the soft black rubber of the counter-lung across my chest, and, deciding it was too soft, turned the brass tap of the bypass. The compressed oxygen roared through the reducing valve and an explosion of white bubbles rushed past my left ear. Too much. It was tricky. Still listening to my breath I noticed that I was breathing faster just as the instructor said everyone did. I deliberately held my breath for a moment. Shallow breathing didn't give the CO₂ absorbent enough time to do its job and could result in CO₂ poisoning, which in turn causes one to breathe shorter until intoxication, giddiness and blackout occur. I must stop even thinking about such things. By holding one's breath the slight sound of the wind upon the water, the creak of the metal, and the noises of the people outside became audible. I went close to the vision panels. I felt the pressure of the water constricting my arms and legs. The rain still swept across the jetty. I breathed out, the air clattered like a bundle of firewood. Across the floor of the tank the light made patterns of green and white.

My right sock had wrinkled underfoot. I raised my leg and found I could lean forward on the water. I walked two steps but the density prevented me making progress. I bobbed. I leaned forward again and made a paddling motion. I noticed how clear my hands were. They and everything else around me had taken on a new interest and wonder. I studied the small scar on the palm of my right hand. It was like seeing a colour transparency of it. I looked up at the surface of the water and tried to guess how deep I was. It was difficult to judge shape, size or distance down here.

I wondered what the time was and walked back to the glass panel to try to see the dockyard clock. Two 'art divers' were standing in the way. I decided to 'guff up' again and gave the bypass valve a little twist. It was a better attempt and although I bounced a couple of feet off the bottom little or no air came out of the relief