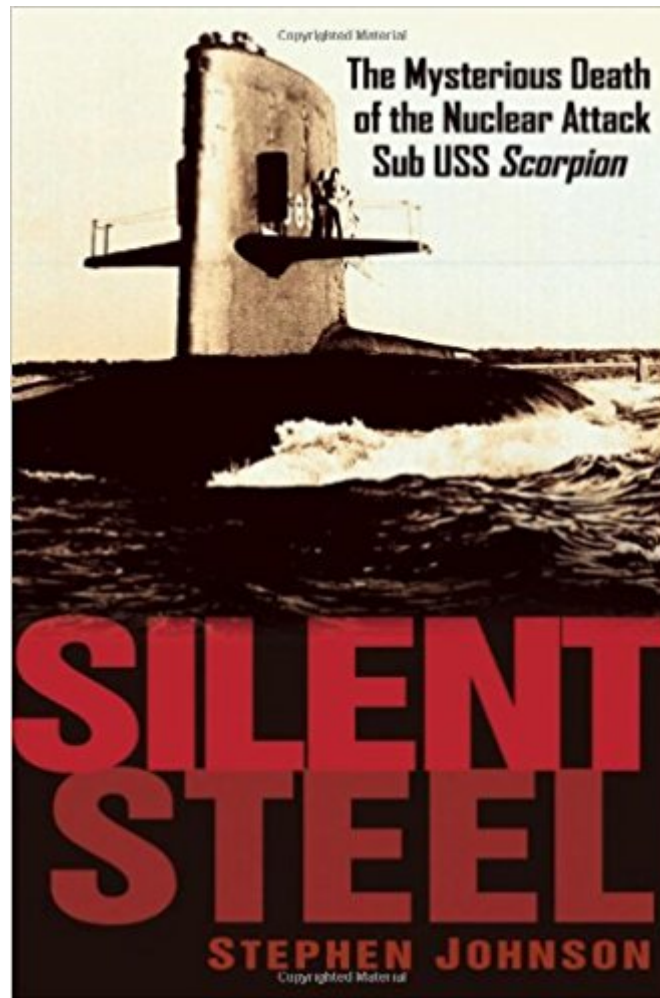




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Silent Steel: The Mysterious Death Of The Nuclear Attack Sub USS Scorpion



Synopsis

Praise for *Silent Steel* "The magnitude of the tragedy of the USS Scorpion is matched only by the depth of the mystery surrounding her loss. Stephen Johnson has done a remarkable job of shining new light on this dark moment in U.S. submarine history." --Sherry Sontag, coauthor of *Blind Man's Bluff: The Untold Story of American Submarine Espionage* "What happened to the USS Scorpion? The question has vexed submariners for almost four decades. Now, with meticulous research and incredible attention to detail, Stephen Johnson examines and dissects one of the most tragic and mysterious submarine accidents in U.S. Navy history." --Douglas Waller, author of *Big Red: Inside the Secret World of a Trident Nuclear Submarine* "Stephen Johnson has crafted a forensic masterpiece that leads the reader back through time to unravel the gnawing enigma of the tragic 1968 loss of the nuclear attack submarine USS Scorpion. Sifting through a maze of conflicting theories, he meticulously lays out a tale of undersea detectives searching for conclusive evidence to one of the most baffling mysteries of the cruel sea." --Rear Admiral Thomas Evans, author, analyst specializing in submarine history and operations, and former officer on the Scorpion "The manuscript arrived with yesterday's afternoon mail. I finished reading it by nightfall. It's that good! Thoroughly researched, impeccably documented, with an appealing and literate style, *Silent Steel* should become essential reading for submarine enthusiasts and for anyone else who enjoys an engaging and informative yarn." --A. J. Hill, author of *Under Pressure: The Final Voyage of Submarine S-Five*

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Customer Reviews

Johnson painstakingly details the last 18 months of the Cold War's era fast-attack nuclear submarine U.S.S. Scorpion, which disappeared with all hands on May 22, 1968, in the mid-Atlantic. Commissioned in 1960, the Scorpion tested nuclear sub warfare tactics in exercises around the world until its final voyage following four months of duty with the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean. When the ship didn't emerge at its homeport of Norfolk, Va., on its scheduled arrival date of May 27, 1968, the navy launched its largest search in U.S. naval history and reported the ship and its 99 crewmen officially dead on June 5. Four months later, the navy located pieces of the ship's hull in more than 10,000 feet of water. Further investigations came to no definitive conclusion about what caused the demise of the Scorpion. Was it a Soviet attack? Did one of the Scorpion's torpedoes accidentally detonate? Did its hull crack due to poor maintenance? Did its main storage battery explode? Mining navy documents and first-person testimony, Johnson's deeply researched effort explores these and other possible explanations, but concludes that the ship's end will remain an enigma. (Jan.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

On February 15, 1968, nuclear attack submarine USS Scorpion left Norfolk, Virginia. On May 22, 1968, the Scorpion, with 99 men aboard, was lost in the Atlantic. After 37 years, a court of inquiry, and three undersea investigations--the latter two headed by Dr. Robert Ballard, best known for his discovery of the Titanic--why the sub sank has not been determined. Johnson offers a very readable account of the very tragic mystery, complete with sketches of crew members and a well-delineated picture of the naval and submarine culture of that time. While he describes the evidence generated by all three investigations, the question of what caused the Scorpion to implode and smash with such force on the floor of the Atlantic is still a controversy. Frieda Murray Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

Well researched, well written and well edited. Thankfully absent some of the excess dramatics of *Blind Man's Bluff*. Much of the book focuses on the search for the submarine and then the search for the cause among competing theories. One thing that's clear is that the Scorpion suffered from both design and maintenance problems in the midst of a critical period of the Cold War. The Navy had lost control of the construction and maintenance operations of its attack submarines. Vboney in *Dark Waters* provides some much stronger insights near the end of his book when he is working at Electric Boat. Thanks to management deficiencies and very militant unions the work on the submarines lacks planning and management is performed in a very inefficient manner thanks to

union rules. both the cost and time budgets are consumed without fully preparing the boats for their difficult missions. Silent Steel notes the problems but not the cause. While the subs are desperately needed at sea and need better maintenance to operate effectively and safely they are receiving less maintenance and repair due to the inefficiencies ashore. At some point you simply run out of luck and deferred maintenance takes a toll on airplanes and ships. From the author's accounts the Scorpion was plagued with problems relating to its critical hydraulic and cooling systems in addition to a variety of other issues including a shaking like vibration. The inability to obtain quality construction or repairs lead to the deferral of completion of critical safety work that had been mandated after the loss of the Thresher. The alternative to longer time in the shipyards and higher costs, both of which were unacceptable was to put the ships to sea with problems and deferred work and depend on the crews to keep them going. It's a timeless recipe for disaster and for new operating procedures, written the the cold blood of those who were lost to gain the wisdom. In the long run the overall cost was probably higher than to have done it right the first time. Perhaps part of the problem is that for political or other reasons the Navy just tried to push too much work through too few shipyards. Another nuclear shipyard located in a different area might have provided some much needed competition to both the Electric Boat Company and their unions. However, it's easy to be a Monday Morning Quarterback. Within the tragic story is the highly successful story of how the submarine was located and surveyed over a number of years. It is a triumph of engineering, leadership and achievement spread across many commands. The book would be highly recommended for these sections alone, but there is more. In the end the author presents the evidence and leaves the reader to either accept the Navy's official explanation or embrace the position of Craven or others. Overall a very good book and highly recommended. Lots of interesting photos.

Mr. Johnson's "Silent Steel" deserves an extra star, but I had to highlight just five that showed up. I have been involved with this tragedy, this mysterious saga, since day one. That all began when I received, as a radiomen stationed in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba (at that time) the distress call from "Brandywine," SSN 589. I heard those faint, garbled calls three, perhaps four times, and worked the circuit for the next two hours, hearing nothing more. Since then, and knowing what happened, in part knowing, I have lived with the ghosts of these 99 men on eternal patrol. Reading "Silent Steel" somehow gave me closure, but I don't know how to explain this comment. It just did. Mr. Johnson writes an intelligent, thoughtful, and very sensitive account, if not outrageous in some ways due to the failure, in my view, of entire Navy Department that should have taken better care of its attack

sub force, especially the USS Scorpion that was long overdue for an overhaul. I have the other tomes on this tragedy, indeed wrote my own yarn, but none compare to the erudite handling of the myriad details one reads in "Silent Steel." He can't tell us what caused the sinking of the Scorpion, then again no one can. There are many theories, but it's just too much drama, too much speculation, and certainly insensitive in some ways. Sure, we played 'tag' with the Ruskies in those years, their boats or our boats playing dangerous interference games, but to think, as one book's author attests, a Soviet helicopter killed the Scorpion with an ASW torpedo and we did nothing about it. . .that, folks, is a huge yarn. And Dr. Craven's theory espoused in "Blind Man's Bluff" of the Scorpion destroyed itself with one of its own torpedos, possibly an MK-37. . .hugely nonsense. The fact is something went terribly wrong onboard the Scorpion, perhaps the entire battery sector exploded, which set up a domino effect that could not be stopped. Mr. Johnson merely sites the many systems and mechanical problems that plagued the Scorpion even before its final deployment to the Med in 1968. He doesn't presume to say any more. What he does say, however, is what we have never been told before, especially the families and friends of the USS Scorpion's crew: there were potential killer problems on that boat, and it all happened inside the hull, and not from somewhere beyond. So thank you, Mr. Johnson, for an excellent read and take on this story that seems never to go away. You have told the story the best way possible. There may also be no final verdict as to what caused the Scorpion's final dive, yet somehow there is closure for the boat and her stalwart crew. As a thought, you are all inextinguishable, indestructible. Dream other dreams, and better. RK Alleman

A rather informative book, it covered a lot of bases on the events leading up to the disaster as well as most of the theories as to why the boat was lost. It's the kind of book you will read again.

the best book written about the USS Scorpion! it never strays off into conspiracy theory territory and tells a straightforward and well documented book about a tragedy which will remain a mystery for years to come. much of the information is obtained from former sailors and command officers who left the boat before it met its tragic end and allows the reader to understand how other "conspiracy" books are great fiction but do NOT tell the true story of a fatally flawed boat that was pushed beyond the limits any submarine should be subjected to. this one will give you the best and truest account of the accident and allow you to conclude that the boat should have been better maintained by the navy and the story of trading the lives of 100 men for in order to avoid a WWII is absolute hokum!

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