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Descent into Darkness: Pearl Harbor, 1941, A Navy Diver's Memoir

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Of course, to appreciate fully the author's discussions on salvage diving, one must have some knowledge of it. For example, Raymer discusses a drowning death that occurred during the final salvage of USS *Oklahoma*, caused by an explosion that momentarily dazed the diver, who was working several decks down without a direct ascent route to the surface. The diver's canvas suit filled with air ("blew up") stretching the arms of the diving suit to the point that the diver was unable to reach his air control valve. This led to a loss of buoyancy control, causing the diver to float up to the overhead of the flooded compartment. In this situation, the diver will likely end up in a horizontal or slightly head-down attitude, his helmet will begin to flood, panic sets in, and he ultimately drowns. Earlier, the author pointed out this particular diver's choice to work without weighted shoes and with an only partially weighted belt. It is left to the reader to recognize that these features are designed to assist the diver with the buoyancy control and attitude control problems, and that his choice might well have cost him his life.

While reading this book, I came to realize that the divers described were pretty much like those Navy divers I worked with through the 1980s (the

extent of my experience). The use of kapok to plug holes during a pumping operation, the invention of the oxygen arc cutting technique, and the use of explosives to remove a screw from a floating vessel are a few examples of their ingenuity.

The final chapters deal with the author's duty on USS *Seminole* in the South Pacific and his return to Pearl Harbor, where he worked on the final salvage of USS *Oklahoma*. The epilogue attempts to set straight the role of the *Seminole* and its divers, and it closes the case on each major salvage job.

Descent into Darkness is descriptive, and beautifully so. It is not instructive, nor does the book attempt to provide a complete explanation of any salvage job. The reader will not learn how to don a hardhat rig, formulate a salvage plan, or appreciate the stability problems faced when raising a sunken battleship. If the author had attempted such a feat the book would have lost much of its charm. As it is, it is readable by divers and nondivers alike. It measures up well to the author's intent to provide a description of what it was like to work on a sunken battleship.

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