

Greetings Club Member

From deserts to tropical islands, settings come in all shapes and sizes – and I'd like to have one last word on the topic by focusing on what's been the most unique to me: submarines.

Part of the action in *Darkness Shall Cover You* plays out aboard a U-Boat. (Spoiler: a nuclear-powered sub appears in Book 3 of the McGavell series, too.)

Researching World War 2-era submarines was an eye-opener.

First thing I learned? The team that dreamt up the term *unterseeboot* (literally 'undersea boat' shortened to U-Boat) never got the memo. These subs spent most of their time on the surface, only diving for short periods to hunt or to hide. Crews endured weeks battling brutal weather, heaving swells and exposure to the elements. (Anyone wanting a glimpse into the lives of WW2 sailors should get hold of a copy of Nicholas Monsarrat's, *The Cruel Sea*. It's jaw-dropping.)

Inside? Even rougher. Imagine 80 men confined in an airtight steel tube with only two toilets – one of which doubled as a food locker early in the voyage. An atmosphere so putrescent that loaves of black bread were nicknamed 'rabbits' because of their coats of white mold. And if the pumps failed? *Mein Gott* – the crew would wade through bilge water of diesel, seawater, urine and worse. Much worse.

Now, I preach about visiting places I write about. But touring a sewer pipe filled with valves wasn't on the cards.

I boarded the *NRP Barracuda*, though – a Cold War-era sub-turned-museum in Lisbon Harbour. Here I experienced first-hand the cramped corridors, the bulkhead doors and hot bunking; a tiny galley that churned out 150 meals daily, the torpedo room and endless rows of control panels, dials and pipes. And at the heart of it all? The control room with its plotting table and periscope – like something straight out of a thriller.

Want to see what that looked like? Click here for photos from my visit:

[NRP Barracuda](#)

I can't talk about 'submarines as a setting' without mentioning, *The Hunt for Red October*. Tom Clancy's Cold War epic that gave us Sean Connery as Captain Ramius with his curious Russo-Scottish accent. Or *Das Boot*, which set the standard for undersea drama and still has a devoted fan base 50 years on.

Let me leave you with two fun facts. Sir Arthur Wilson (1st Sea Lord of the Royal Navy) is alleged to have said submarines are 'underhanded, unfair and damned un-English.' Apparently he also regarded their crews as pirates who should all be hanged. This started a tongue-in-cheek tradition of submarines hoisting the Jolly Roger (skull & crossbones) when coming into port after a mission.

US Navy submarines also lash a broom to the periscope when entering port to signify sweeping the seas clean of enemies.

That's it for now.

Colin Grieve

colin@colingrieve.com

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