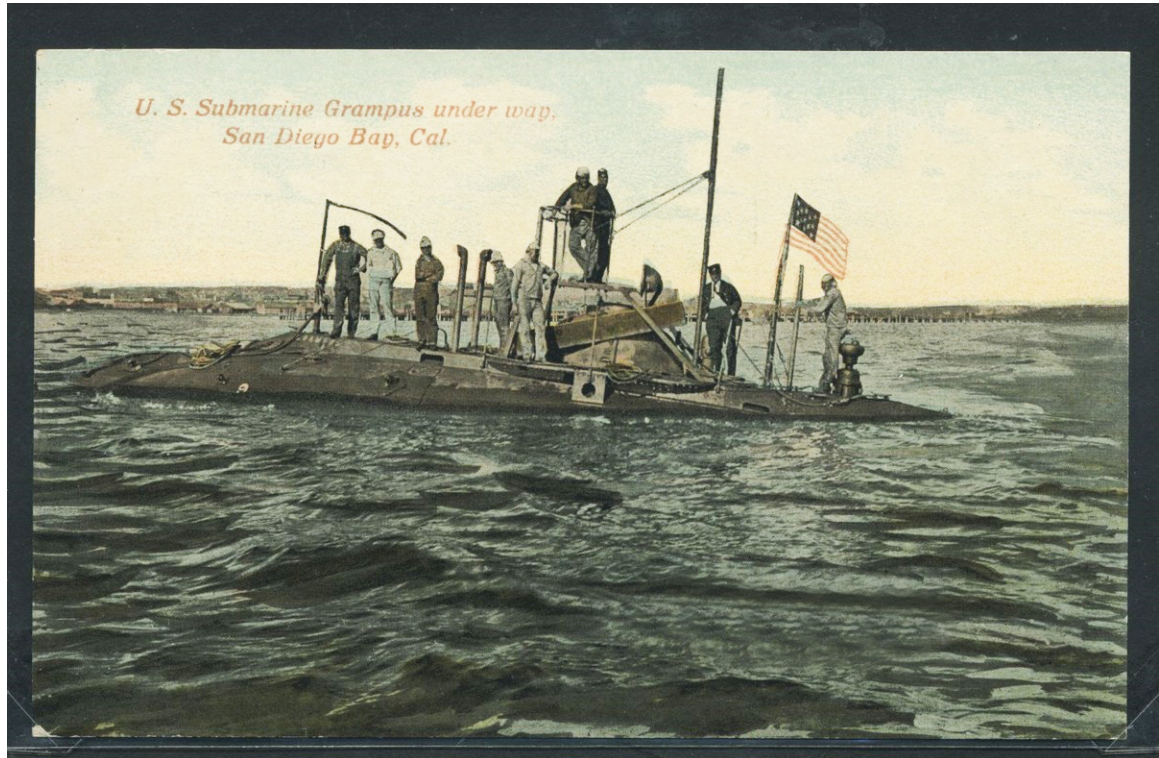


## Field Guide to Coronado History:

### The Submarines of Coronado

By Bruce Linder



Early in 1911, the captain of Coronado ferry boat *Ramona* abruptly threw his rudder hard right, startling his passengers who looked with shock at a dark, foreboding shape of what looked to be a whale rising wet and gleaming close aboard. Although whales were still frequent visitors to the bay in the early twentieth century, this denizen was a submarine of the United States Navy, based in Coronado.

Submarines were in their infancy – dramatic new weapons of war, but still experimental and largely unproven. *Grampus* (A-3) and *Pike* (A-5) were members of the first full class of submarines (seven boats in all) built for the Navy. From the summer of 1910 to the spring of 1911 these two submarines (representing the entire submarine force of the Pacific Fleet) were based at the Torpedo Flotilla piers in Coronado, about where Peohe's Restaurant is today.

The Navy used these Coronado piers for two divisions of torpedo boats and destroyers as well as the support tender *Iris*. With the arrival of the submarines an equipment warehouse was built there and a repair building planned. Most of the crews found housing in Coronado.

Built at the Union Iron Works in San Francisco, *Grampus*, *Pike* and their two support vessels had made the 560-mile trip down the coast to San Diego Bay (the longest trip ever by a submarine), arriving June 28, 1910. Each had a crew of 2 officers and 10 enlisted and could carry 5 torpedoes. Although a tiny 63 feet in length, they could dive to 60 feet and could make a top speed of 8 knots. The San Diego press colorfully labeled the submarines as “demon divers” and “war demons.”

The crew earned an extra \$5 a day for hazardous pay plus a \$1 bonus for each dive. This was good work.

With Tent City well into its eleventh season, the submarines put on their own show in San Diego Bay for tourists as they practiced diving, maneuvering, firing torpedoes and operating with the destroyers of the Torpedo Flotilla. Many times their operations were announced in advance and crowds of onlookers stalked First Street beaches. Visitors could visit the subs on weekends.

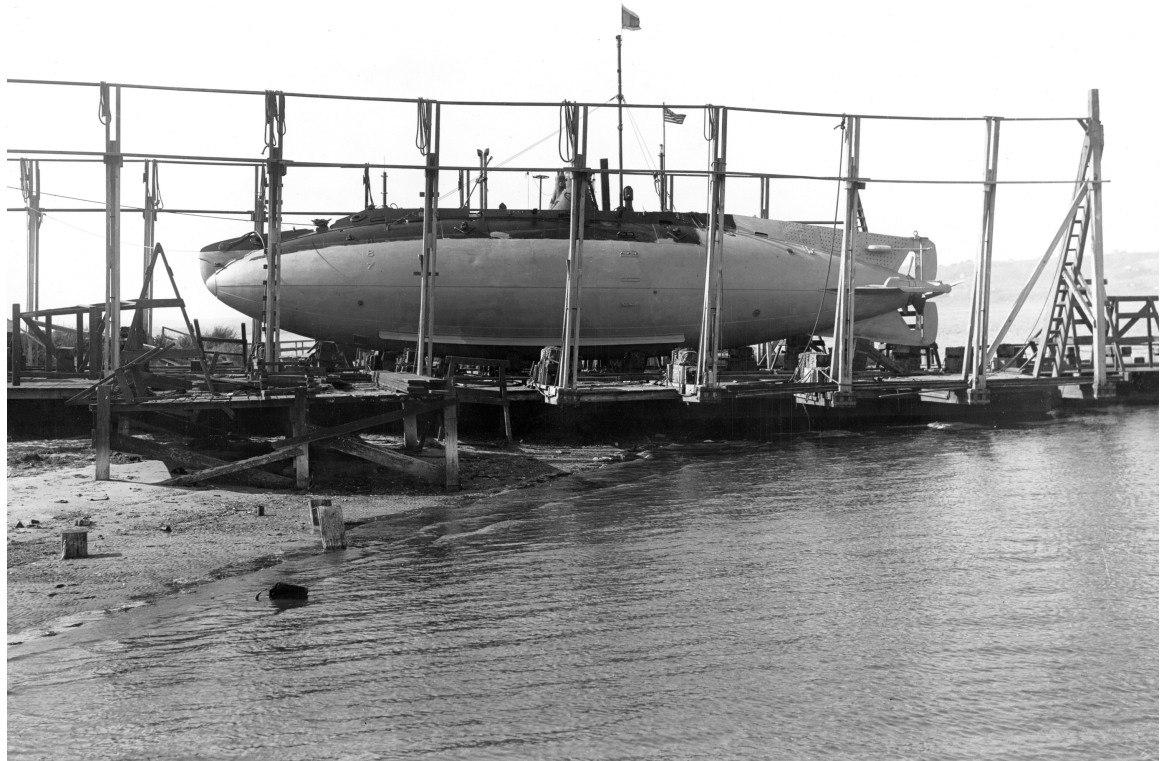
On December 9, 1910, the *San Diego Union* reported, “the deadly little *Grampus* made a sensational dive yesterday, running under water from the submarine station at Coronado down the channel and out past Point Loma to the Pacific, a total distance of about eight miles.” Her captain navigated with the help of a new invention called the periscope (Coronado’s subs were the first class designed for the retracting periscope).

During their stay both *Grampus* and *Pike* were drawn out of the water at the Spreckels Marine Railway on North Island for maintenance.

*Grampus* and *Pike* returned to Mare Island during the spring of 1911 but not before their crews witnessed Glenn Curtiss’ novel first flights of his hydroaeroplane in San Diego Bay. For just a moment in time,

Coronado (and only Coronado) rested at an intriguing intersection of history. Standing on the slippery decks of Coronado's submarines one could gaze aloft and sense the future, a future with both of the two most important naval warfare breakthroughs of the millennia.

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**CAPTIONS:**

- (1) Submarine *Grampus* under repairs at the Spreckels Marine Railway on the tip of North Island (today's carrier piers), 1910. *Coronado Historical Association*
- (2) Submarine activities attracted so much local attention in Coronado that postcards were made for sale to residents and tourists such as this one of *Grampus*. *Coronado Historical Association*