

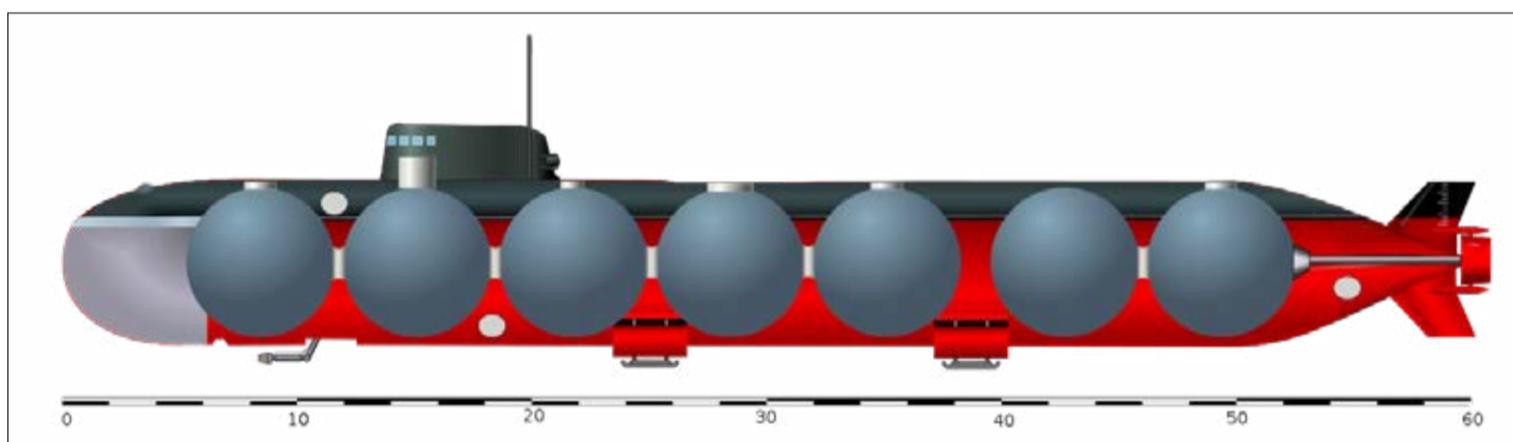


For Those in Peril Under the Sea

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying passages from the *Barents Sea Independent Observer* discuss the recent fire onboard a Russian nuclear-powered submarine (the *Losharik*) in the Arctic, during underwater research activities for the Russian Navy. As the first passage notes, this was the biggest accident in the Russian Navy since 2008.

A fire in a submarine is a frightening-and in this case, tragic event. Fourteen submariners including seven senior captains and five captains died. The other two victims were officers as well. A vessel normally might have one senior captain assigned, so an assemblage of this many senior submarine officers was evidently for a special event or mission. There are indications that this was an all-officer crew. The *Losharik* is a small, submersible, deep-sea craft transported by (slung under) a larger submarine, in this case the *Podmoskvye*. Evidently, the *Podmoskvye* was involved in the recovery and transport of the *Losharik* to home port. The stretch submarine Belgorod is under construction and will also be a carrier for such small submersible craft. (Also see “Cruising in a Stretch-Submarine” in the June 2019 issue of *OE Watch*.) **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

“On the 1st of July, a fire started onboard an underwater research vehicle that was engaged in biometric research activities of the Arctic seabed for the Russian Navy” according to a statement from the Russian Armed Forces. Fourteen submariners died from smoke inhalation. The fire was extinguished by the crew and the submarine is now located in Severomorsk, the headquarters city of the Russian Northern Fleet.”



Possible internal configuration of the Russian submarine *Losharik*.
Source: Heribeto Arribas Abato via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Losharik_interno.svg, CC BY-SA 4.0

Source: Atle Staalesen, “Fire onboard nuclear-powered submarine, 14 sailors killed: the *Losharik* started burning during underwater research activities in Russian territorial waters,” *Barents Sea Independent Observer*, 2 July 2019. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2019/07/fire-nuclear-powered-submarine-14-sailors-killed>

It is the biggest accident in the Russian Navy since 2008 when an accident in the Nerpa nuclear powered sub killed 20 sailors off the Russian Pacific coast...The Losharik is nuclear-powered and normally based in Oleniya Bay...about 100 kilometers east of the Norwegian border. The vessel is operated by the Main Directorate for Deep Sea Research, nicknamed GUGI, a branch directly under General Staff of the Armed Forces. From the Oleniya base, the Directorate operates a fleet of nine nuclear-powered submarines and a few surface vessels that frequently sail out on special missions. Little is known about the nature of those voyages, except reports of significantly increased activity along subsea cables which carry global electronic communication.

The Losharik has one reactor...It is believed that the vessel can be carried by the Podmoskvye, a rebuilt Delta-IV class submarine. The Losharik can reportedly submerge to 6,000 meter depths and does not carry weapons. It is believed to be able to deliver - or remove - small devices ...on the sea floor....Such devices can be noise-makers to distract foreign submarines when Russian submarines sail out from the Kola Peninsula to the North Atlantic. Other listening devices can detect sounds made by the propellers of enemy ships. The submarine can launch and recover unmanned subsea vehicles.

Source: Atle Staalesen, “Report to the President: super-secret submarine *Losharik* will be repaired and taken back in service,” *Barents Sea Independent Observer*, 4 July 2019. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2019/07/report-president-super-secret-submarine-losharik-will-be-repaired-and-taken-back>

According to Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, the special purpose submarine can be fully restored and taken back in service. Shoigu met with President Putin following his trip to Severomorsk, the Northern Fleet headquarters. “The constructors of the vessel and industrial representatives have been engaged in order to estimate the work volume and time period needed for the restoration of the ship” Shoigu told the President. “Our first assessment shows that repair is possible, [and] in our case it is not only possible, it is absolutely required”....He also made it clear that the reactor compartment is unaffected by the accident. “The crew did all required measures to protect the installation, it is in a fully workable condition, and this gives us hope that the vessel can be restored in a short time.”

The fire onboard the Losharik (AS-31) broke out in the evening of 1 July. A total of 14 sailors died. Among them were two highly decorated Heroes of Russia, seven Captains First Rank and three Captains Second Rank. The crew included some of the most experienced men in the Russian Navy.... The Ministry of Defense released the list of the dead. The Losharik was commanded by ship captain Denis Dolonsky, Captain First Rank and Hero of Russia....