K19 Widowmaker

0. K19 Widowmaker - Story Preface

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Photograph of the Russian Submarine *K-19*. Image online, courtesy dynamicscience.com/au website.

It seems that what really determines the choices a man makes in critical, life-threatening situations is still his inner conviction, his sense of responsibility for the events around him, his personal conscience.

Nikolai Zateyev
Commander of the Soviet Submarine *K-19*

The 4th of July, 1961, was supposed to be a triumph for the crew of the Soviet Union's first nuclear-powered, ballistic-missile submarine. *K-19*, not yet dubbed "Hiroshima" by her crew, was under the command of Captain First Rank Nikolai Vladimirovich Zateyev.

Finished with naval exercises in the North Atlantic, *K-19* was returning home from her first patrol voyage for the Soviet Northern Fleet.Unknown by Zateyev (who is the basis for the character "Captain Alexei Vostrikov" in the film), *K-19* had three potentially fatal strikes against her on that summer day.

The ship, a "Hotel 1" class (Project 658) submarine, had a design flaw in her steam plant. Moreover, the ship's power source, two liquid metal nuclear reactors, had no emergency backup system to prevent reactor overheating in the event of a malfunction. And there was something else neither the captain nor his crew knew. A welder had failed to follow safety procedures when he installed the reactor's primary cooling loop pipelines.

As *K-19* made her way in the Norwegian Sea, not far from the island of Jan Mayen, the submarine's early morning routine was disrupted by the screeching of an alarm. The worst possible event was unfolding: Reactor Number Two had experienced a sharp drop in pressure in its cooling loop.

Unless clear thinking and courageous action intervened, the reactor's core (including its nuclear fuel) could meltdown. And if THAT happened, a nuclear explosion would likely follow.

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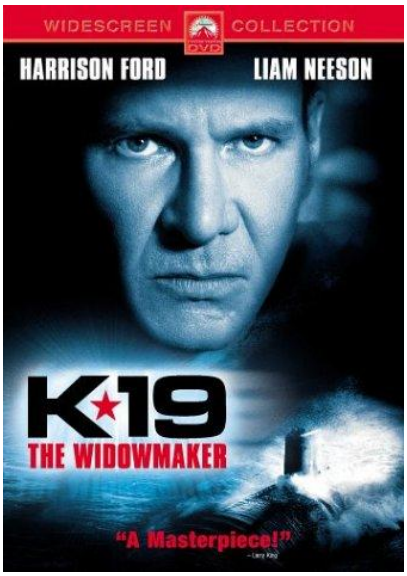

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