

SEALAB

AMERICA'S
FORGOTTEN
QUEST
TO LIVE
AND WORK
ON THE
OCEAN FLOOR

BEN HELLWARTH



SIMON &
SCHUSTER

SEA

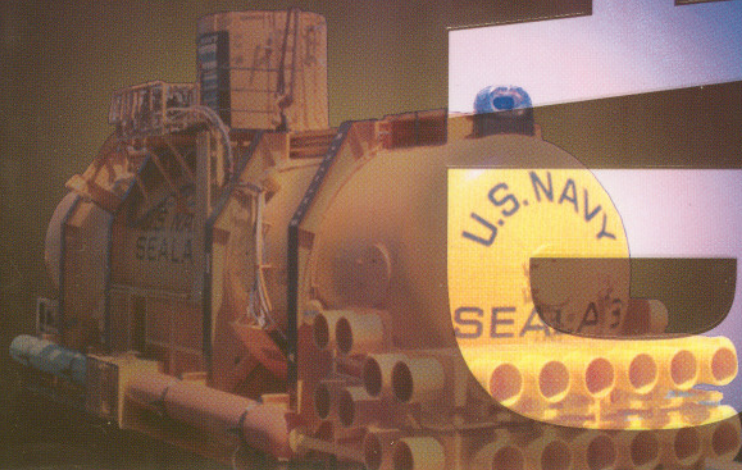
LAB

BY

BEN HELLWARTH

THE

BOOK



PRAISE FOR SEALAB

"A thrilling, true-life adventure that transports the reader to a place as foreboding, exciting, and dangerous as outer space. Ben Hellwarth's *Sealab* is more than a great history of unsung American explorers. It is a tale of man's deepest desires and grandest ambitions, and his willingness to risk it all for dreams as vast as the ocean floor itself."

—ROBERT KURSON, author of *Shadow Divers*

"*Sealab* is a must read for anyone who wants to know the true story behind America's Man-in-the-Sea Program, complete with all of its triumphs and tragedies."

—DR. ROBERT D. BALLARD, Deep Sea Explorer and author of *The Discovery of the Titanic*

"I grew up with Sealab and Conshelf. Our decision makers need to focus on the importance of one of our vital life-support systems—the ocean, 70% of our planet. This incredibly detailed, precise book should be read by those who care about our future so they can start planning by basing their passion and decisions on solid foundations."

—JEAN-MICHEL COUSTEAU, founder and president, Ocean Futures Society

"A remarkably stirring narrative filled with an awe-inducing cast of scientific adventurers who risked life and limb to not only explore the ocean's depths, but to make them their own. What Tom Wolfe revealed in such riveting detail of the space program in *The Right Stuff*, Ben Hellwarth matches here for underwater discovery."

—NEAL BASCOMB, author of

The Perfect Mile and *Hunting Eichmann*

SEALAB

BEN HELLWARTH

HISTORY/MILITARY

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SEALAB is the underwater *Right Stuff*: the story of how a U.S. Navy program sought to develop the marine equivalent of the space station—and forever changed man's relationship to the sea.

While NASA was trying to put a man on the moon, the U.S. Navy launched a series of daring experiments to prove that divers could live and work from a sea-floor base. When the first underwater "habitat" called Sealab was tested in the early 1960s, conventional dives had strict depth limits and lasted for only minutes, not the hours and even days that the visionaries behind Sealab wanted to achieve—for purposes of exploration, scientific research, and to recover submarines and aircraft that had sunk along the continental shelf. The unlikely father of Sealab, George Bond, was a colorful former country doctor who joined the Navy later in life and became obsessed with these unanswered questions: *How long can a diver stay underwater? How deep can a diver go?*

Sealab never received the attention it deserved, yet the program inspired explorers like Jacques Cousteau, broke age-old depth barriers, and revolutionized deep-sea diving by demonstrating that living on the seabed was not science fiction. Today divers on commercial oil rigs and Navy divers engaged in classified missions rely on methods pioneered during Sealab.

Sealab is a true story of heroism and discovery: men unafraid to test the limits of physical endurance to conquer a hostile undersea frontier. It is also a story of frustration and a government unwilling to take the same risks underwater that it did in space.

Ben Hellwarth, a veteran journalist, interviewed many surviving participants from the three Sealab experiments and conducted extensive documen-

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tary research to write the first comprehensive account of one of the most important and least known experiments in U.S. history. His compelling narrative covers the story from its scrappy origins in Dr. Bond's Navy laboratory, through harrowing close calls, historic triumphs, and the mysterious tragedy that brought about the end of Sealab.



SPENCER WEINER

BEN HELLWARTH grew up in Los Angeles and began reporting, writing, and editing for papers in the Bay Area after graduating from the University of California, Berkeley. He won a number of notable journalism awards in the 1990s as a staff writer for the *Santa Barbara News-Press*, then part of The New York Times Regional Newspaper Group. He currently lives with his family in western Pennsylvania. *Sealab* is his first book.

visit the author at www.benhellwarth.com

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