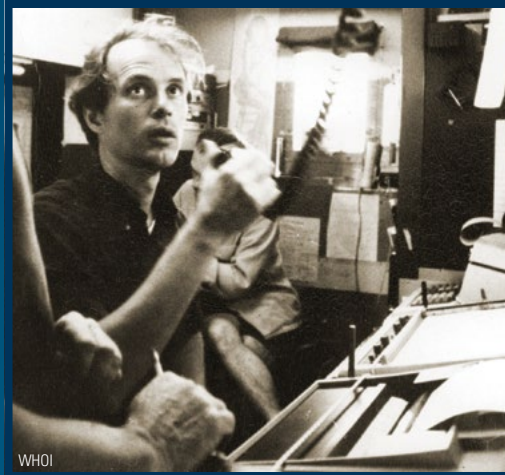


Alvin Fun Facts

AMAZING, BIZARRE, AND JUST PLAIN INTERESTING

Has *Alvin* ever gotten stuck?

Yes. Once in 1975, *Alvin* drove into a fissure. Before the pilot could tell that the fissure's walls were narrowing, the submersible became wedged in the crack. Initial attempts to maneuver out failed. Finally, the pilot backed out, to the relief of *Alvin*'s passengers and the ship's crew.



Has anyone famous traveled in *Alvin*?

Yes. Walter Cronkite (the late broadcast journalist); Rita Colwell (former director of the U.S. National Science Foundation); William Broad (Pulitzer Prize-winning writer for *The New York Times*); Gary Comer (founder of the Lands' End clothing company); Vinod Khosla (venture capitalist); Ann Curry (above, television news journalist).

What do divers do on the way down?

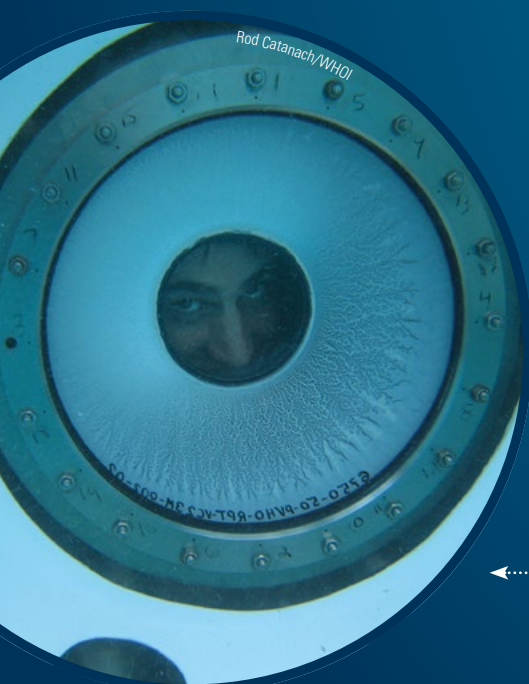
The pilot and two observers prepare notes, data sheets, and recorders for logging research information. They layer on hats and sweatshirts (it gets colder the deeper you dive) and listen to music (typically chosen by the pilot).

How did *Alvin* get its name?

The submersible is named for Allyn Vine, a WHOI engineer and geophysicist who helped pioneer deep submergence research and technology.

How many people have been *Alvin* pilots?

Since 1964, the job of driving *Alvin* has gone to just 38 men and one woman. Compare this to 74 space shuttle commanders.





Is there a bathroom in *Alvin*?

No. On a wall inside *Alvin*'s support ship *Atlantis*, there is a sign that reads "PB4UGO." Experienced divers urge newcomers to take the sign seriously. If divers absolutely must go, they have to use a bottle.



A long-distance phone call?

On January 26, 2007, the first-ever phone conversation between inner and outer space took place. NASA astronaut Sunita Williams, orbiting Earth on the International Space Station, chatted with WHOI biologist Tim Shank in *Alvin*'s sphere on the seafloor on the East Pacific Rise.

What is the temperature in *Alvin*?

The average temperature outside the submersible is usually around 35°F. Inside the sub with all the heat emitted by electronics and three people, it gets down to 45° to 50°F.

Do *Alvin* pilots have any special traditions?

Most people receive flowers, plaques, or speeches to honor a special achievement. Seagoing folks have their own, sometimes quirky, rituals. Upon their return to the surface, people who dive in *Alvin* for the first time are greeted with a bucket of ice-cold water on the deck of the research vessel *Atlantis*. Engineering assistant Phil Santos gets his traditional frigid baptism after his first dive in March 2014. When a pilot makes his or her first dive, they are initiated into their small fraternity by being doused with mud from the seafloor.



WHOI Archives

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