

BRAVE SHIPMATE— ROBERT HAMILTON

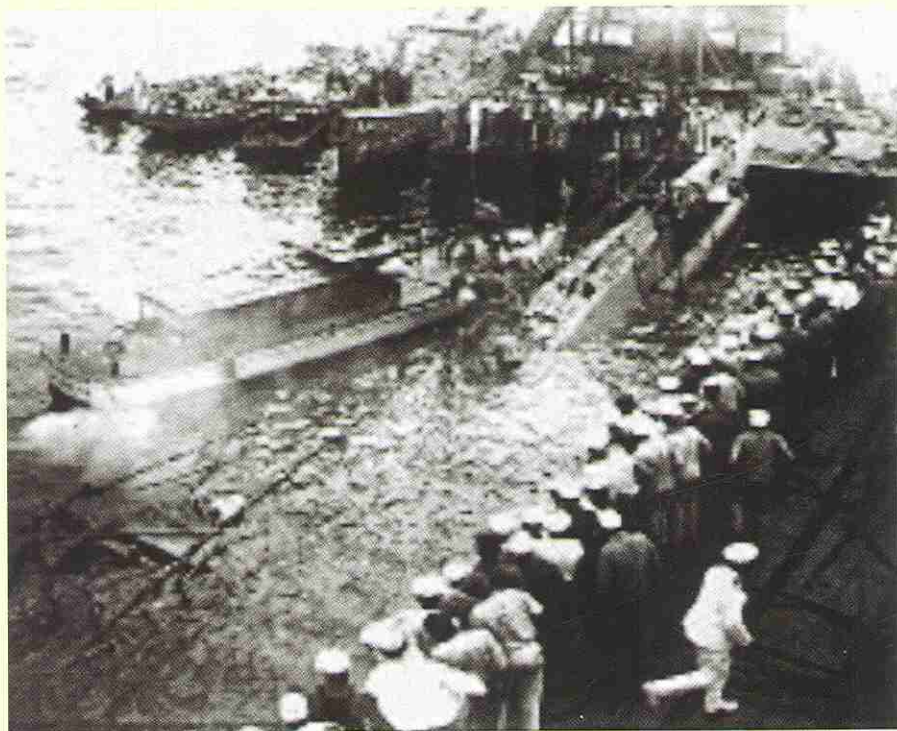
On 28 October 1923, USS O-5 (SS 66) was crossing Limon Bay toward the entrance to the Panama Canal. SS Abangarez struck O-5, opening a large hole and causing massive flooding. The submarine started sinking rapidly stern first. Some of the crew who were topside were thrown into the water, and a few others made their way topside and were saved. In all, sixteen of the crew were rescued. Five were missing. These included Chief Electrician's Mate Lawrence T. Brown and Torpedoman's Mate Second Class Henry Breault. Breault had been working in the torpedo room when the collision occurred. He headed up to the main deck, but realized that Chief Brown was below—asleep. Instead of going over the side, Breault headed back below to get Brown. He shut the deck hatch over his head just as the bow went under and water started to pour in. The submarine settled to the bottom in 42 feet of water. Breault found Chief Brown and together they fought their way through the rising water in the battery compartment to the torpedo room. Having shut the watertight door, they waited in the darkness for rescue, which they hoped would come before their air ran out.

The water was only 42 feet deep that close to the port of Cristobal, but the only way to rescue the men was to lift O-5 out of the mud using pontoons or cranes. However, the nearest pontoons were more than 2,000 miles away, and the only two cranes capable of the job were on the canal, trapped inland by a mudslide that had closed the waterway for the first time in seven years.

As diver Sheppard Shreaves, a civilian employee of the Panama Canal Company, worked to prepare O-5, other crews cleared the landslide from the canal. Almost eight hours passed before one of the cranes could make it past the obstruction, and it would take hours more to make it to the accident site. Shreaves worked with a firehose to cut a trench in the mud of the harbor floor so he could pass cables under O-5. As he worked, Shreaves tapped on the hull to let the crewmen know work was still underway. Breault and Brown knocked back, but as the hours passed and the air grew stale, the knocks grew weaker.

The morning after the accident the crane was in place and the cables were ready. The teams took up the slack; however, the weight of the boat and the suction of trying to pull it clear was too much, and the 4-inch cable snapped. They slung another harness, but it snapped as well. Finally, on the third try, thirty-one hours after Breault had sealed himself in with Chief Brown, O-5 pulled free and lifted toward the surface.

Breault, who had served four years in the British navy before joining the U.S. Navy in 1920, received the Medal of Honor from President Calvin A. Coolidge for his selfless act. Shreaves was honored with the Congressional Lifesaving Medal and a gold watch from the Coco Solo Submarine Base, where O-5 was homeported. Breault remained in the Navy after the accident and even sought a waiver to remain in the service when he was diagnosed with a serious heart condition. He died at the age of 41 a few days before the United States entered World War II.



The bow of USS O-5 (SS 66) is hoisted to the surface by barge-mounted heavy lift cranes near the entrance to the Panama Canal. A collision with SS *Abangarez* sank the submarine. Henry Breault shut the hatch, which is seen just above the water's edge, to save a shipmate as the bow went under. Thirty-one hours later the bow was raised freeing Henry Breault and Lawrence Brown from a slow death.

*MEDAL OF HONOR
CITATION FOR
TORPEDOMAN'S MATE
SECOND CLASS
HENRY BREAUT*

For heroism and devotion to duty while serving on board the U.S. submarine O-5 at the time of the sinking of that vessel. On the morning of 28 October 1923, the O-5 collided with the steamship Abangarez and sank in less than a minute. When the collision occurred, Breault was in the torpedo room. Upon reaching the hatch, he saw that the boat was rapidly sinking. Instead of jumping overboard to save his own life, he returned to the torpedo room to the rescue of a shipmate whom he knew was trapped in the boat, closing the torpedo room hatch on himself. Breault and Brown remained trapped in this compartment until rescued by the salvage party thirty-one hours later.



Torpedoman's Mate Henry Breault receives the Medal of Honor from President Calvin Coolidge.