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## E-Mail Shows Toll of Crash on Submarine and Sailors

By CHRISTOPHER DREW

The nuclear submarine that ran aground Saturday in the South Pacific hit so "incredibly hard" that about 60 of its 137 crew members were injured and the sailor who died was thrown 20 feet by the impact, according to internal Navy e-mail messages sent by a top admiral.

The messages said the submarine's hull was severely damaged after the head-on crash into what Navy officials believe was an undersea mountain that was not on the navigation charts. One message said the submarine, the San Francisco, was traveling at high speed, and the impact practically stopped it in its tracks and caused flooding in parts of the bow.

The messages were written by Rear Adm. Paul F. Sullivan, the commander of submarines in the Pacific. They paint a more dire picture of the accident, which occurred 360 miles southeast of Guam, than had previously been disclosed. They also hint at the extensive efforts to steady the vessel and save the sailor who died.

The e-mail indicated that the Navy had tried to evacuate the fatally injured man, Machinist Mate 2nd Class Joseph A. Ashley, within hours after he had been thrown forward and hit his head on a metal pump, which knocked him unconscious.

Petty Officer Ashley's father, Daniel L. Ashley, said in an interview he had been told that as a helicopter hovered over the choppy seas, crew members could not maneuver a stretcher carrying his son through the submarine's hatches before he died.

"They tried numerous times to maneuver him through various hatches," Mr. Ashley said. "But it just didn't happen."

Admiral Sullivan, who is based in Hawaii, sent the e-mail messages to other Navy officials. As the messages circulated within the submarine community, two people provided copies to The New York Times, and Navy officials confirmed their authenticity.

The e-mail also indicated that about 60 crew members had been injured. All the Navy had said publicly was that 23 crew members were treated for broken bones, cuts and bruises.

The messages said those 23 were hurt seriously enough that they were unable to stand their watch duties as the submarine limped back to Guam. Mr. Ashley said the submarine's captain, Cmdr. Kevin Mooney, told him by phone on Monday that among the injured crew members, "there were a lot of broken fingers, broken arms and legs and one fractured back."

Navy officials said yesterday that the rest of the injuries were minor.

The admiral's e-mail also said an outer hull ripped open at the submarine's nose, causing flooding in a dome with sonar sensors and in four of the ballast tanks used to submerge the vessel or take it to the surface.

The flooding caused the submarine to sit deeper in the water and made it hard to maneuver on the trip back to Guam. Sailors had to keep pumping pressurized air into the tanks to prevent the water from rising and to maintain buoyancy.

An inner hull, which surrounds the crew's living and work spaces, held firm, the e-mail said. The nuclear reactor and critical propulsion systems were not damaged.

In the e-mail, Admiral Sullivan did not discuss why the vessel ran aground. The Navy is investigating, and the admiral, who ultimately will have to decide whether to reprimand any of the submarine's crew members, did not respond to requests for comment.

Navy officials have said that the submarine, which was headed for Australia, appeared to have smashed into an undersea mountain that was not on its charts. Mr. Ashley, who lives in Akron, Ohio, said Commander Mooney told him the same thing on Monday.

"He said, 'On the charts we have, this is a clear area all the way through to Australia,' " Mr. Ashley said.

Navy officials said the San Francisco was traveling at 30 knots when it careened off some part of the undersea mountain range. In one of the e-mail messages, Admiral Sullivan wrote that on impact, the vessel made a "nearly instantaneous deceleration" to about 4 knots.

Mr. Ashley said Commander Mooney told him that his son had just gotten off watch duty in the engine area and was chatting with other sailors when the accident occurred.

Mr. Ashley said his son, who was 24, "loved the Navy and that submarine" and had just re-enlisted.

Mr. Ashley said Commander Mooney, who could not be reached for comment, also told him that his son's condition seemed to worsen as sailors labored to tilt the stretcher through the evacuation hatch.

Mr. Ashley said that at the end of the conversation, Commander Mooney told him that he took full responsibility for the sailor's death. Mr. Ashley said he replied that he had heard all he needed "to know that you and your crew did everything you could do to save my son's life."