When preparing to attack the enemy, 'action stations' (*'auf Gefechtstationen!'*) would be called. The crew would vacate the bridge and close all vents and hatches. The diesels would be shut down and the electro-motors would take over. The bow planes would be angled down and speed increased so that water flowed over them in the same way in which air flows over the elevator flaps on an aircraft, thus forcing the boat underwater faster. At the same time the dive tanks would be flooded to make the boat heavier; any crewmen not occupied on essential duties would rush to the bow compartment to increase the weight in the forward part of the boat.

If the boat was in a position of extreme danger, the cry *'Alaaaarm!'* would ring out, signifying a fast dive. In many cases the boat would start diving as the vents were being closed and even before the bridge was cleared. There was a real danger of flooding if the bridge crew were not quick enough in entering the boat and securing the main hatch. It has been estimated that the safety margin in time between a boat submerging and the arrival of the expected enemy aircraft could be as little as ten seconds, so it is no surprise that crews used every conceivable method of shaving a few seconds off the diving time.

Once at the required depth below the surface, the boat would level off and hydroplanes would be used to keep the boat stable and stop it from rising to the surface. U-boats normally had a slightly negative trim, so that

The IWO on this U-boat takes a reading for the ship's position using a traditional sextant. The shield on his left sleeve is a campaign award for service in the waters around the Crimean Peninsula on the Eastern Front.