

Japan expert shares experience aboard deep-sea submersible similar to doomed Titan

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This screenshot from a YouTube video shows Masayo Goto pointing to the wreckage of the Titanic through a window in a submersible at a depth of about 3,800 meters on the floor of the North Atlantic Ocean on July 10, 2005. (Image from YouTube)

TOKYO -- The implosion of the Titan deep-sea submersible was a tragedy that has gained worldwide attention. The Mainichi Shimbun spoke with an experienced deep-sea explorer to understand what it was like aboard such a vessel.

In a statement, the Titan's U.S.-based operating company OceanGate Expeditions said that all five people on board the ship to view the wreckage of the Titanic in the North Atlantic Ocean are thought to have died.

About 18 years ago, part-time university lecturer and world traveler Masayo Goto, 62, visited the underwater site of the Titanic's wreckage. Departing aboard a ship from Canada's Newfoundland in July 2005, she arrived at the site of the sinking after about a day and a half. Including the ship's captain, a team of three boarded the submersible and headed for the wreckage. There were three windows through which the team could view the deep-sea scenery. They had no room to stand up or even stretch, as the vessel was jam-packed full of measuring tools and monitors.

The vessel slowly descended while spinning in a spiral motion. After reaching a depth of 100 meters below the sea's surface, daylight no longer reached them, and their surroundings became pitch-black.

Goto, experienced in deep-sea exploration and world travel from her bases in Tokyo and Australia, said she was deeply moved upon seeing the wreckage. "I also fully understood the danger of the journey," she reflected. "My life was in the hands of the captain and mechanic. I wondered if I would

live or die. I remember that every second felt longer, and there was a sharp sense of tension," she commented.

After about two hours, the vessel reached the site of the Titanic's wreckage at a depth of about 3,800 meters. The historic ship's enormous bow appeared before lights shone from the vessel. Over about five hours, the team viewed spots such as the bridge, crew cabins, and propeller. Even though sandwiches and water had been prepared for the tour, the team didn't lay a finger on them out of their abundance of tension.

The submersible was in constant contact with the boat on the surface and its current position could always be confirmed on screen. Another submersible was deployed at a distance, ready to assist in the event of an emergency.

"I don't know what happened, but if the Titan was destroyed, that's tragic. It's very unfortunate," Goto said.

(Japanese original by Takayuki Kanamori, Digital News Group)

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