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Harriet Phillippi

The Story Behind The Story: Cracking Colby's Glomar Files

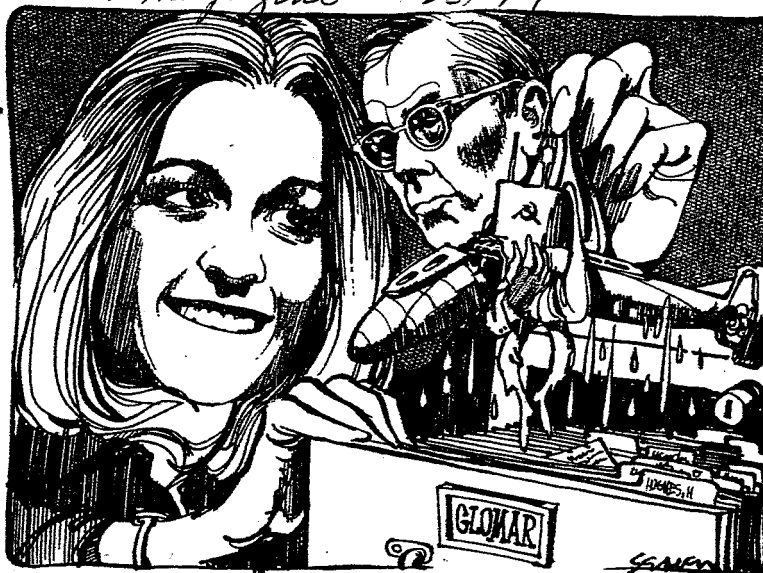


Illustration by David Seavey

Two and a half years ago the carefully laid plans of William Colby and the CIA began to go awry: details of the Agency's Project Jennifer, an attempt to raise a sunken Soviet submarine from the floor of the Pacific Ocean, hit the newspapers.

But not until several weeks ago did the press learn how diligently then-CIA Director Colby had worked to keep his secret. Urgent phone calls and meetings with reporters, editors, publishers and broadcasters kept the story under wraps, and those calls and meetings were faithfully noted (and sometimes tape recorded) by the CIA.

The story behind *that* story was the result of a Freedom of Information Act request filed by a 25-year-old Washington reporter for Rolling Stone magazine, Harriet Ann Phillippi, and her attorney, Mark Lynch.

"There had been some al-

lusion in some article that the story might have been delayed, that someone had the story and didn't print it," recalls Phillippi, now a weekend news anchorwoman for the NBC television station in Atlanta. Indeed, representatives of the Los Angeles Times, the New York Times, The Washington Post, Parade magazine and other media outlets were aware of the story in February of 1975 and were asked by Colby to withhold publication.

The details revealed in the Glomar Papers—finally released by the CIA at the order of an appeals court—surpassed Phillippi's expectations.

"We only wanted to know where Colby had gone, we figured there were driver's files or something," she says. "We didn't ask to find out what he said."

In August the CIA began releasing the heavily censored documents, and attorney Lynch urged Phillippi to

write a story detailing the recording of reporters' conversations, the background investigations of journalists, and other CIA activity that amounted to a domestic intelligence operation.

By then Phillippi, who had quit writing a Washington gossip column for Rolling Stone, was preoccupied working for an Indianapolis TV station and negotiating her move to Atlanta. She also postponed reporting the story the Glomar Papers revealed because she thought the details would be of little interest in Indianapolis or Atlanta. Last month she agreed with Lynch's decision to call several Washington reporters' attention to the documents.

Though the story received little attention outside the nation's capital, Washington reporters found the tale of media manipulation and inside trading of information fascinating.