

17 Jan 73

HW, HR, : Washington Post story 30 Nov 72 on Soviet subs in Norwegian fjord.

I'm glad to have been able to see this denouement to the story, on which we kept a careful file for other purposes, and have not seen a comparable story elsewhere.

FYI, initial interest here was related to the UFO problem, as the sparse reports printed here were so vague as to suggest a characteristic official coverup. Norway and Sweden were the scene of extensive overflights in 1946 of UROs, the first reported following the appearance of the mysterious "foo fighters" that tailed Allied bombers over Germany and Japan during World War II. The 1946 Scandinavian sightings were explained officially as Allied scientists testing German rockets from Peenemunde on the Baltic. Some could have been, but not those travelling in different directions, hovering and exhibiting other un-rocketlike behavior. UFO activity, moreover, never has been confined to the air, there having been many reports of their entering and leaving the ocean, operating under the ocean surface and so on, chiefly from the Antarctic and the South Seas. (See: Uninvited Visitors, by Ivan T. Sanderson, 1967; Cowles Education Corporation, 488 Madison Ave., N.Y.).

As the story petered out in the local press, our file on this was sent to a UFO researcher and I more or less abandoned the idea that UFO activity was involved. The 30 Nov 72 Washington Post account persuades me that there remains only theoretical possibility of the incident having been anything more than of normal terrestrial activity.

I see no reason against assuming the thrust of the Post story -- that this was a couple of Soviet submarines on an excursion. The account is consistent and contains no internal contradictions until one gets toward the end, where the "best explanation" -- that the Russian military were on an excursion of their own, presumably to wreck the Helsinki military security conference -- fails to ring true. If that were its purpose, the operation well could have been counter-productive, even from the Soviet military standpoint. The yarn refers to the "Pentagon masters of the U-2" out to undermine the Eisenhower-Khrushchev summit 12 years ago. The U-2 incident had that effect, but it was the CIA, not the Pentagon, which engineered it. So, the inference is available that this story originates at least in part with the CIA.

As HW points out, other things were going on besides the Helsinki conference. At the time of the Sognefjord incident, Nixon, who had tried unsuccessfully to get Moscow and Peking both to pressure the North Vietnamese into accepting harsher peace terms, had stalled on the peace settlement Kissinger had agreed to in October and was upping his price for peace -- in other words, demanding what amounted to Vietnamese surrender. We also know that all during the November negotiations, according to the North Vietnamese, Kissinger was threatening them with escalated bombing if they didn't cave in. It materialized in December after the talks broke down in Paris.

Rather than being a Soviet military excursion to wreck the Helsinki conference, I would say it is far more probable that this was Moscow's way of warning Nixon and his NATO allies -- like Norway -- what the possibilities could be if ~~the~~ Nixon didn't quit playing domestic politics with the Vietnamese question and get to work on a real settlement.

If it is true, as the story says and I doubt, that the idea of a Soviet military excursion originated from Soviet sources in other capitals, meaning diplomats, they would be merely putting the best face possible on a stupid adventure. I am inclined to doubt that any Soviet diplomat ever suggested anything of the kind. The idea is too self-denigrating to be of Soviet origin. *Jim* jdw17jan73

Soviets Tied to Fjord Sub; Mission, Timing a Puzzle

By Bernard D. Nossiter
Washington Post Foreign Services

OSLO, Nov. 29—On the afternoon of Nov. 12, shortly before darkness, Mons Langeteig, a fisherman standing on the shore at Vangsnes, saw what looked like a periscope and a ripple of water from something moving below the surface.

This seemed odd because Vangsnes is on the Sognefjord, 60 miles inside Norway's serrated coast.

That same night, the Vangsnes ferry's radar picked up the blip of an unidentified craft on the surface. A sailor insisted that he, too, had seen something strange moving through the water. Probably a whale, he was told. Perhaps, the sailor replied. But can you show me a whale with a periscope?

What Langeteig and the sailor saw, it now turns out, according to authoritative Western sources, was a Whiskey Class submarine produced by and almost surely controlled from the Soviet Union.

Precisely what the submarine was doing so deep in Norwegian waters cannot be stated with certainty. But all its movements for 13 days in the peculiar structure that is the Sognefjord indicate that it was on a mission of intelligence and reconnaissance.

In the opinion of responsible military and diplomatic officials, the world has quietly passed what could well

have been a crisis. It could have jeopardized the preparatory conference on European security just getting under way in Helsinki and might even have damaged the growing range of East-West contacts. This did not happen, largely because the Norwegian military failed in its assigned mission to force the sub to the surface.

(Spying by submarine, however, is a standard tactic by both the Soviet and U.S. military. For example, a primary mission of U.S. diesel-powered submarines plying the Pacific is gathering electronic intelligence.)

The question is not so much why the submarine appeared in the Norwegian

fjord as why it did so at such a sensitive moment in European diplomacy.

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NORWAY, From A1

There are some indications that the Whiskey Class submarine was not the only foreign sub in the Sognefjord. Three days after its location was definitely established and attacked, contact was made with what appears to have been a second sub. The best guess is that it came in to help the first and to serve as a decoy.

The Norwegian government has a fixed procedure for such intrusions in peacetime. The military is forbidden to kill the vessel, a relatively easy task either with a torpedo that homes in on its target or a ring of depth charges around the craft. Instead, the military is ordered to force the submarine to the surface, first by dropping hand grenades to sound a warning and then, two or three minutes later, dropping a depth charge about 900 feet from the craft. This procedure was repeatedly employed between Nov. 20 and Nov. 24.

But the submarine commander, probably a youngish man in his 30s, was apparently under orders to go down with his crew of 60 rather than surface in Norwegian waters. He ducked and dodged for four days, almost exhausting the batteries that power his diesel engine.

On the night of Nov. 24-25, he dashed for the open sea and made it, according to accounts pieced together here.

As soon as he reached international waters, 12 nautical miles from the westernmost point, he was immediately picked up by the Atlantic Alliance's airborne and subsurface surveillance. This was easy because the submarine then had to surface to recharge its batteries and put out the snorkel capsule bringing in fresh air and getting rid of the stale fumes. The allied surveillance team then tracked the submarine past the straits between Denmark and Sweden and back to the Baltic base from which it

started.

Announcement Delayed

Norwegian authorities carefully avoid announcing that the object in the Sognefjord was a submarine until Nov. 26, nearly two days after it left. This was done deliberately to avoid letting the submarine commander know that his escape had been spotted and his passage home tracked.

Norwegians are notably phlegmatic and Prime Minister Lars Korvald's government played this affair very low key. Korvald, an unemonstrative man even by local standards, was conscious of the international implications and told aides privately that he did not want to endanger the Helsinki talks. Whatever the embarrassment to the military, some officials here are clearly relieved that the effort to bring the submarine up did not succeed.

But the episode has troubled some of Norway's allies, and in confidential talks they are critical of Oslo's failure to employ more aggressive methods. They agree that it was wise not to sink the sub, but they believe that a sharper forcing technique should have been ordered by Norway's relatively untried political leaders.

These NATO officials think that the episode reflects poorly on alliance defense and suggest at the very least a political insensitivity by the Soviet military that has been matched only by the American dispatch of the U-2 spy plane over the Soviet Union in 1960 on the eve of a Paris Big Four summit conference. That, incident led to Nikita Khrushchev's walkout and the end of the meeting.

Much is unknown about the affair here, even the flag the submarine was flying. A great deal, moreover, is being held secret because the Norwegian response to such a maneuver is thought to be one of the things the submarine was sent to find out. What follows is as much as can now be gleaned from a variety of Western sources and in the face of rigorous security imposed at Huseby, the grim, gray concrete headquarters of the Norwegian military.

The Sognefjord is a geological oddity, millions of years old, stretching 120 miles into Norway and thus a logical point at which to place concealed equipment aimed at Moscow or Leningrad. It is only about 600 feet deep at the mouth but this shelf falls off to an astonishing basin, more than 4,000 feet in depth. It is bordered by mountains and glaciers and the melting ice and snows feed fresh water into the fjord. This gives it a very special quality. It is composed of layers of salt and fresh water.

Muffled Sonar

A sonar beam is muffled in such nonhomogenous waters. The Sognefjord, then, is an ideal place for a

sub to hide, and the Whiskey-class submarine played it for all it was worth. Contact was made, then broken, then made again and broken again as the daring commander dodged back and forth.

A Whiskey-class submarine is a 240-foot long diesel-powered affair, 1,030 tons, a medium-range attack sub armed with torpedos. The Soviet Union, according to Jane's manual, has 142 such subs and has sold a few others to Poland, Bulgaria, Indonesia and North Korea.

Although no one here can or will identify the flag of the Sognefjord Whiskey, the supreme commander of the Norwegian forces, Gen. Zeiner Gundersen, has told the Norwegian parliament's defense committee in private that the sub probably was from the Soviet bloc. Whether it carried a Polish or Soviet flag is regarded here as unimportant since the vessels are all considered to be under the operational control of Moscow.

Gundersen noted dryly that NATO forces had lost track of some Polish subs in the Baltic a few days before the vessel was spotted in the Sognefjord.

There is virtually no question about the identification of Whiskey Class, despite stories to the contrary. Every submarine has a characteristic signature, engine noise, the revolutions per minute of its propeller, and these can be identified by the sonar and hydrophone used by the Norwegian search force.

Charitable Version

What was the sub doing in the Sognefjord? The most charitable explanation is that it ran into some trouble at sea and fled to the bottom of the deep basin for re-

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pairs. Once spotted, it declined to surface, even though innocent, lest an international incident develop.

No knowledgeable Western source here accepts the charitable explanation. These officials point out that the submarine was too deep into the fjord before it was first spotted to have simply sought a repair haven.

The most plausible theory offered here suggests that the sub was on a spy mission. No outgoing messages from the submarine were monitored here. But there are indications that it received incoming traffic, probably electronic signals like radar, as well as radio messages. Those messages intercepted are recorded and processed in Washington, usually at the National Security agency.

The submarine, it is thought, had four tasks beyond routine gathering of electronic intelligence:

• Inspection and verification to determine whether a NATO country has placed underwater nuclear missiles inside the fjord aimed at the Soviet Union (The seabed treaty prohibits such devices only in international waters). If not, to determine whether beacons or some other underwater target markers are located in the fjord to assist a western missile-launching sub in wartime.

• Communication: How easy is it for a Soviet sub to maintain contact in such waters, particularly since the bordering mountains add an extra element of difficulty?

• Sonar conditions: Given the mix of salt and fresh water, how easy is it for a Soviet or Western sub to escape detection?

• Defenses: How quickly will Norwegian forces respond to such a penetration and what methods will they use?

First Reports

The first visual sightings by civilians were promptly reported to the Huseby defense headquarters on Sunday evening, Nov. 12. There, they were weighed and looked disturbing. Defense Minister Johan Kleppe was told the next day and he telephoned the information to Prime Minister Korvald.

A search force was organized, and it went into action on Monday, Nov. 13. It consisted of two Oslo class frigates or destroyer escorts, equipped with sonar; two

KODDEN class 450-ton submarines; one Orion anti-submarine war aircraft and a Norwegian helicopter, a relatively new tool here, used chiefly for rescue work.

The search force had trouble fixing the submarine, although seven reports of its appearance were recorded by Nov. 15. Two days later, Oslo asked the British for Sea King helicopters equipped with sonar devices. Since London is trying to sell these machines to Norway, it was only too happy to oblige and a pair of Sea Kings joined the search.

On Nov. 20, the task force sonar's electronic beams bounced off the submarine's hull in a northern arm of the Sognefjord, the Aurlandsfjord. The frigate Trondheim then invoked the

standard procedure. Its crew first dropped overboard some hand grenades which could be heard by the men inside the submarine. Next, the Trondheim dropped a depth charge. Although it was about 900 feet from the sub, the vibrations would have shaken the craft.

The sub, however, refused to surface and contact was broken. The submarine commander now began to run. He went up the Aurlandsfjord. He dashed down another arm, the Sogndalsfjord.

Tuesday, the 21st, was a difficult one for the search force. Its electronic equipment suddenly went awry, probably because Soviet intelligence trawlers outside the mouth of the Sognefjord were jamming.

Grenades and Charges

Nevertheless, the submarine was spotted again and the Trondheim repeated its grenade-depth charge technique at Hermansverk.

The next day, Wednesday the 22d, opening day of the Helsinki talks, the Trondheim tried something new. It released a Terne Rocket, a Norwegian device. But the submarine Commander still would not rise.

That night in Oslo, Prime Minister Korvald discussed with his staff whether he should make a statement on Norwegian radio and television. The decision was no, that a prime ministerial statement would accentuate the gravity of the affair. So the first official word that something was afoot came instead from the defense ministry.

On Thursday, Nov. 23d, the task force hydrophones and sonars picked up what appeared to be too many soundings at two different places and points in time for one sub. It is this that leads Western sources here to speculate that another submarine may have come in to help the beleaguered craft.

The second vessel's purposes, it is thought, was a serve as a decoy, leading pursuers away from the first

submarine. The vessel sorely needed to surface for energy and air. No description is so far available of the purported second vessel.

Special Group

Inside the government, Security Committee was formed. It consisted of Prime Minister Korvals, Defense Minister Kleppe and Foreign Affairs Minister Dagvinn Vaarvik. It deliberated frequently and secretly at Huseby, and how it behaved and what it decided is still closely guarded here. Those who saw Korvald privately during this period say he showed no sign of laboring under a crisis. But then, it is pointed out, he would not do so under almost any conceivable circumstances.

The outside world was getting only the dimmest clues to what was going on. An English radio operator said he had picked up a message from Albania saying that a mutiny had broken out on a Soviet Sub in Norwegian waters and that a second craft had come to suppress the revolt.

Like many such stories, there is frequently a pearl of truth embedded in the oyster fat of imagination. This was the first public indication that a second Soviet-controlled sub was on the scene.

At last during the night of Friday-to-Saturday, the submarine was spotted leaving Sognefjord for the open sea. Now Moscow could speak, and it did. A Tass dispatch ridiculed the whole exercise but carefully avoided any denial that a Soviet-controlled sub has violated Norwegian waters.

If there was second submarine, its departure was recorded, either by the Norwegians or NATO surveillance. or Oslo has kept a diminished search force in the Sognefjord and it was still operating as late as yesterday.

Perhaps the biggest mystery in this curious affair is why the Soviets did it, especially now. It is Moscow that has ardently sought the European security conference, chiefly to ratify the division of Germany. The Soviet Union is engaged in many other detente moves with the West. A sub surfacing deep inside Norway would have cast a cloud over all this.

The best explanation may lie in the observations of Soviet sources in other capitals. These sources point out that the Russian military, not unlike the American, is a powerful, freewheeling bureaucracy that moves to a large extent under its own momentum.

If an exercise had been scheduled for November in the Sognefjord, the explanation runs, the Soviet military would have been insensitive to the political authorities. In this view, the Soviet military was not trying to sabotage Helsinki, any more

than the Pentagon masters of the U-2 were out to undermine the Summit 12 years ago. The Soviet military machine, it is suggested, may have simply been pursuing business as usual.

Norwegian officials are uncomfortably aware of the criticism of the performance here. It is said that the Korvald government is, after all, a weak coalition, essentially a caretaker, and its leaders have no experience of international affairs. Even those who are gladit got away say this must not happen again. Defense and foreign affairs experts are now studying the episode and working on what is called a sharper procedure next time around.

As for the Russians, they are publicly treating the incident as a hoax and hinting that it may reflect a sinister Western wish to undermine Helsinki.