

Colby Called Glomar Case

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At the height of his efforts to suppress the Glomar Explorer story in 1975, Central Intelligence Agency then-Director William E. Colby described the effort to a White House official as "the wierdest conspiracy in town...an American conspiracy."

The official with whom Colby was speaking, Lt. Gen. Brent Scowcroft, then deputy director of the National Security Council, was clearly impressed.

"Do you really think you could do that?...It sort of takes my breath away," Scowcroft told the CIA director.

The telephone dialogue within the upper reaches of the government's intelligence directorate was recorded by a stenographer just four days before publication of some of the details of a secret CIA mission to pluck portions of a sunken Soviet submarine from the Pacific Ocean floor.

That stenographic account and other documents that portray a comprehensive CIA domestic operation to suppress the Glomar Explorer story—code-named Project Jennifer—are included in additional papers obtained through the Freedom of Information Act.

They were made public as a result of a U.S. District Court lawsuit brought by Mark H. Lynch, an attorney for the American Civil Liberties Union and for Ralph Nader's Public Citizen Litigation Group.

As previously released Glomar papers have done, the new documents depict a determined effort by Colby and his assistants to persuade some of the nation's most influential editors and broadcast executives to keep the lid on the Glomar story for "national security" reasons.

Most of the new documents cover the period between March 12, 1975, when a self-imposed censorship of the press began to crumble, to March 18, when syndicated columnist Jack Anderson broke the story on a Mutual Radio Network show.

Up until then, editors and publishers of the Los Angeles Times, The New York Times, The Washington Post, Time, Newsweek and Parade magazine had assured Colby that they would withhold the story as long as

the pact was not broken by one of the participants.

In some conversations with his CIA subordinates, Colby seems to marvel at his own successes, such as after a transcribed telephone conversation he had on March 13 with an unidentified news executive whose publication is not named but which becomes apparent in a follow-up call four minutes later.

"I would hope you could agree to sit on it, have a deal with two or three other journals to do this, and I have a corresponding obligation to call each of them if the thing does explode. And I would propose to make the same arrangement with you," Colby said.

'Weirdest

Conspiracy'

"That is fine," the news executive said.

"If you could hold it, I would appreciate it. I do not often ask this, but this one is rather important."

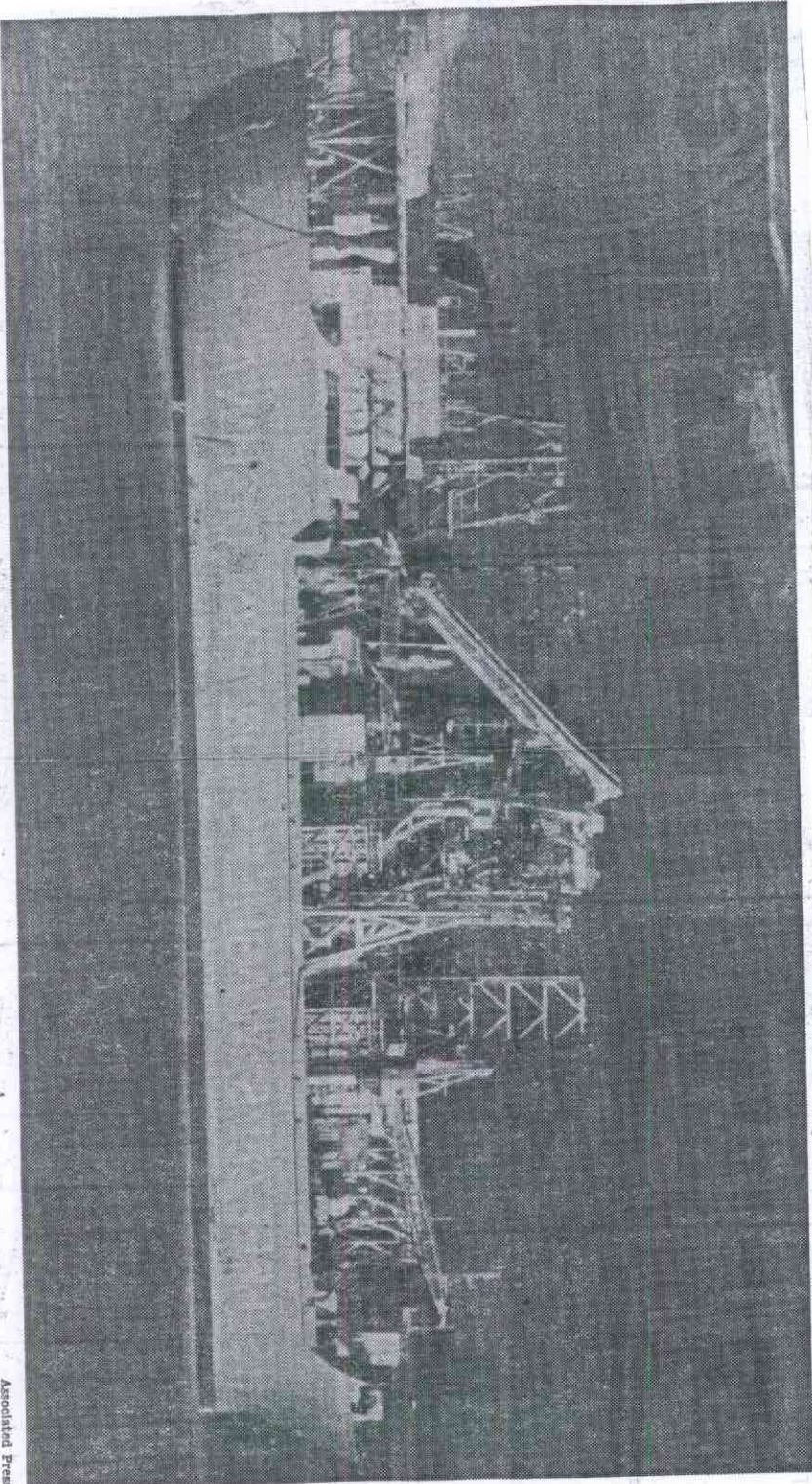
The news executive answered, simply, "I agree."

Moments later, according to the transcripts, Colby telephoned Carl Duckett, one of his high-ranking deputies, and said, "Time agrees."

Duckett responded, apparently facetiously, "Great. There are only 93 more that I can think of."

Then one of the two officials—apparently Colby, but the stenographer indicated uncertainty—asserted a seemingly sincere appreciation for the

As the story of the Gionar Explorer was about to break, CIA Director Colby said he felt "like the boy in front of the dike, and I am running out of fingers . . ."



Associated Press

behavior of the press in the whole Glomar affair.

"The main story in this one will be the way the American press showed its great responsibility, and they will have to catch me as their witness," the speaker said.

An hour and a half later, according to the transcripts, Colby expressed the same kind of appreciation in a telephone conversation with Parade Magazine editor Lloyd Shearer.

When Shearer asked the CIA director, "Do you have Boston?" Colby answered, "No. You sound like you are urging me to get into domestic activities."

After discussing commitments by other publications to suppress the

story, and being warned by Shearer that "whole (news) bureaus know about it," Colby suggested that the cooperative press might ultimately get its reward of praise.

"And that is, I suspect, the best story—maybe in a year or so—the performance of the press. It will make a hell of a story, and I would be the first to give it," Colby told Shearer.

If Colby was impressed with the performance of the press, Shearer seemed equally awed by the lengths to which the CIA had gone to keep the story secret.

"If you contain this, there will be a medal for you in Garfinckel's window," Shearer said.

But Colby's praise of the news executives' cooperation waned in his conversation the next day with Scowcroft.

After briefing the White House national security adviser on the various news organizations that had agreed to withhold the story, Colby said he was "carrying around a list of telephone numbers in (his) wallet" which he would use to call the editors once the lid was off the story.

"They are all just waiting to write that great, sanctimonious, sickening prose about . . .," Colby said. The end of the sentence was deleted.

The arrangement fell apart on March 18, 1975, as the result of a chance phone call by newspaper columnist Jack Cloherty, who was then a reporter on Jack Anderson's staff. Shortly before noon, he called a source, whom Cloherty still declines to identify, on another subject. The man told him about the Glomar's secret sub-raising mission, and added that, "It's all over town. The Times is sitting on it. The Post is sitting on it."

As soon as Cloherty finished the conversation, he hurriedly told a colleague, columnist Les Whitten, about it.

By 5:25 p.m., the two reporters were on the phone with Colby to get some final comment. He asked them to join the crowd and keep the secret.

The CIA director said he felt "like a boy in front of the dike, and I am running out of fingers and toes."

"I urge with you to sit with it (a) little bit," Colby told Whitten and Cloherty. "You are in good company. Everyone else is sitting on it. That is one of the most fascinating parts of it—the whole press [next word indistinct] has been just splendid."

Replied Whitten: "We are all doing a half-assed job."

According to Whitten, the CIA director told him and associate columnist Anderson that evening of his concern for "the national security" aspect of the Glomar case. They resolved it for themselves, said Whitten, after calling a high-level Navy source, who advised them: "Oh, go ahead and do it . . . Enough people know about it already."

Anderson broke the story that night on his 9 p.m. radio broadcast, 10 minutes after having informed the CIA's official spokesman at the time, Angus Thuermer, of the decision to publish.