

Navy Abandons Sunken Torpedo

By Jack Anderson
and Les Whitten

Deep in the ocean off the Bahamas, the Navy four years ago lost a super-secret Mark 48 torpedo that the Soviets were eager to get their hands on.

The circumstances were reminiscent of the crisis the Soviets had faced in 1968 when one of their subs sank in the Pacific with secret equipment aboard. Last summer, the Central Intelligence Agency recovered part of the sub but lost the section that contained the secret equipment.

Navy sources now say the 18-year-old Soviet sub was obsolete and had little intelligence value. But this was not true of the missing Mark 48, which had been built by hand for sea trials under the tightest security.

At a cost of \$1 million apiece, the torpedoes were designed to track and strike enemy ships with lethal accuracy. They could be fired from U.S. submarines and destroyers far away from the target ship.

But in the early tests, some Mark 48s purred so loudly that the sound threw the sensitive tracking mechanism out of

whack. Others suddenly plunged into a dive or swerved off the designated path.

The Soviets, apparently aware of the wayward wanderings of these early sophisticated Mark 48s, dispatched trawler spy ships to the Bahamas test area. They tried to monitor the tests and, if possible, to snare one of the top-secret torpedoes.

The capture of a Mark 48, of course, would have advanced the Soviet torpedo technology by years and would have taught them what countermeasures to use against America's deadly undersea weapon.

Then one day, as the Navy nervously watched the Soviet intelligence ships in the vicinity, a Mark 48 nose-dived to the bottom. It settled in an ocean hole about 6,000 feet below the surface, and there was no way to self-destruct it.

News of the loss was secretly flashed to the Pentagon, and the top brass held urgent meetings to decide what to do. We got an inkling of what had happened and reported on May 25, 1971, that a Mark 48 had "got away" and that it had thrown the Navy into "a panic." We quoted a Navy source as confiding to us: "We were afraid a Russian sub

would get the thing."

Now we have dug out the rest of the story, which the Navy has suppressed for four years. The Pentagon brass anxiously discussed how to keep the Soviets from retrieving the misfired Mark 48. "We were in a stew," a Pentagon official now recalls.

It was first proposed that an attempt be made to recover the precious torpedo, much as the CIA tried last summer to bring up the lost Soviet sub. But oceanographic and salvage experts, who were brought into the secret meetings, questioned whether recovery would be possible in water more than a mile deep.

In the end, the experts agreed to abandon the Mark 48 on the ocean bottom. "We studied the way we'd made the fish and figured it would implode," explained a participant in the secret meetings. "We decided it would cave in on itself because the pressures were so great down there. Even if the Ruskies got it, they would've wound up with no more than a lot of very expensive scrap metal."

Puerto Rican Smuggling—A confidential House study names Puerto Rico as the "hot spot" in the booming South American

drug trade. An estimated 80 percent of the heroin, hashish and cocaine smuggled into the ragged coasts of Puerto Rico is now reaching the continental United States.

Yet the Drug Enforcement Administration has only eight full-time agents assigned to cover Puerto Rico. An additional 300 Puerto Rican narcotics officers have such poor liaison with federal authorities that a top Puerto Rican narcotics official complained: "We get the same requests from different (federal) agencies which appear to be unaware of each other's activities."

These are the findings of House Coast Guard and Navigation Subcommittee Chairman John Murphy (D-N.Y.), who has submitted a confidential report to the parent Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee.

Much of the deadly narcotics is smuggled out of Colombia to a nearly deserted island off the Puerto Rican coast. Swift motorboats haul the drugs to secret landing spots on the Puerto Rican coastline. Since Puerto Rico is U.S. territory, they can be smuggled to the mainland without customs examination.

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