

Press Forgets Prime Responsibility

By Jack Anderson
and Les Whitten

There have been signs of late that the press—battle-scarred from its jousts with two Presidents and shaken by the enormity of its victory over them—has begun to wear a hair shirt.

The older blather about "responsibility" to keep secrets instead of exploding abuses has begun to creep back into press parlance.

The old pre-Watergate, pre-Vietnam ideals of partnership with government, of cozy intimacy with the high and mighty, of a camaraderie of secrets shared by this peerage but kept from the public, begins to appeal once more to a press concerned that its abrasive successes have earned it a bad name and a hostile reception.

At such time, we reporters need a reminder that we exist not to lie down with the lions but to fend them off, to cause the turmoil by which the free system cleanses and energizes itself.

The story of the Central Intelligence Agency-Howard Hughes Gomar Explorer is just such a reminder. Some of the nation's top news organizations knew about the abortive attempt to salvage an 18-year-old Soviet sub that sank to the bottom of the Pacific.

They chose, for reasons weighty and altruistic, not to reveal it. We made the opposite choice.

Certainly, there are legitimate secrets that ought not to be revealed. Sometimes, the right of the public to know and the press to print should be voluntarily subordinated to the interests of national security or the safety of endangered individuals.

In the past, we have been amenable to such appeals from CIA Director William Colby and his predecessors. Last May, we

received a letter from Colby which declared:

"Please let me express my appreciation and that of the Agency for your recent cooperation on the wording of one of your stories so as to protect significant and still continuing intelligence sources."

But this time, Colby's arguments for secrecy were not compelling. It was hardly conceivable that the Glomar expedition was still a secret from Soviet intelligence.

Thousands of people in our government and industry had played some part in it over a seven-year span; some of them were leaking it out; newsmen were asking questions; a ring of thieves and blackmailers had broken into the Hughes offices in Hollywood and had stolen documents describing the Glomar operation; and on Feb. 8, 1975, the Los Angeles Times had published key elements of the story.

So the Russians knew. We knew they knew. They knew we knew they knew. But, as Colby told us, it would be "rubbing their noses in it" to let the American people know.

What was at stake in publishing, then, was not national security but international etiquette, not American secrets but Soviet face, not the sabotage of a second Glomar mission but the ruffling of Russian tail feathers if we should go ahead with it.

These are considerations not to be mocked, but we hold them to be insufficient reasons for renewing the dread precedent of cutting off the news—the windpipe of the American system.

All right. If there is no compelling reason to suppress, is there a public need to know a story that might inconvenience the conduct of our diplomacy? We think so. An estimated \$350 million was spent outside of the legitimate appropriations process—in a gamble to recover an

archaic diesel sub, obsolete missiles and outdated codes.

No doubt this submerged museum piece would have been of some intelligence value had it not fallen apart. But was it worth a sum that, for instance, could have financed the down payment on 100,000 new homes? Was it a national necessity or was it an admiral's toy?

Until the story was published, these questions were not being asked. Now they will be asked by Sen. Frank Church (D-Idaho) as part of his inquiry into CIA operations.

The Glomar incident confirms again that congressional oversight of costly and provocative CIA operations has been a bad joke—such a bad joke that the second-most-senior member of the Senate Armed Services

Committee, Stuart Symington (D-Mo.), knew nothing about Glomar until he read it in the press.

The late President Harry Truman, who founded the CIA, began to grow uneasy about it in his later years. In 1963, he wrote for the North American Newspaper Alliance:

"We have grown up as a nation, respected for our free institutions and for our ability to maintain a free and open society. There is something about the way the CIA has been functioning that is casting a shadow over our historic position, and I feel that we need to correct it."

Because we share this apprehension, we couldn't permit the CIA chief to determine what we should print.

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