

Retrievers Fear H-Bomb Will Slide

By Robert C. Toth
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MADRID, March 20—American efforts to recover the missing hydrogen bomb off the Spanish coast encountered temporary difficulties late Saturday and resumed at a slower pace today.

Official reports yesterday that the weapon was being dragged off its precarious perch 2500 feet under the surface turned today into official refusal to say whether a line has yet been put around the object.

There are reliable unofficial
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reports that no hookup has yet been made and, moreover, that the bomb slipped 20 feet down the steep face of the undersea canyon Saturday night after initial attempts to fasten onto it.

The object rests uncertainly on a 70-degree slope of a silt-laden canyon whose bottom is 500 feet below the bomb. Its retrieval is being handled very gingerly for fear the object will slide down and get lost again.

Apart from the awkward position of the bomb, now at precisely 2527 feet, rescue operations were hampered by zero visibility on the sea floor for many hours due to silt clouds, and by the need to surface the research submarines to recharge their batteries and rest their crews.

The 22-foot Alvin required 12 hours yesterday, for example, to be recharged following almost a day of hovering over the presumed bomb. She and the Aluminaut take one hour to dive to the depth where the recovery is being attempted.

Given the new developments, officials have toned down optimistic predictions that the weapon might be recovered quickly.

Choppy seas on the surface over the bomb some six miles off Palomares also hindered operations. But since the first order of business is to attach a special anchor which is not linked to a surface vessel, surface conditions were of secondary importance.