

Lost H-Bomb Is Recovered By U.S. Ship

Weapon Called Intact,
1st Photographs Set
As Proof of Recovery

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The United States Navy yesterday hauled up America's missing hydrogen bomb off the coast of Palomares, Spain.

The weapon, which had eluded and thwarted recovery teams for 80 frustrating days, was hoisted aboard a small submarine rescue vessel at roughly 1:30 a.m. EST.

There was jubilation among the people of Palomares, and sighs of relief in Madrid and Washington. Word of the recovery came to Spaniards over Spain's Radio Nacional, and also from an American Embassy statement in Madrid saying the searchers all are pleased to announce that the long missing bomb has been identified and recovered intact.

News of the find was widely publicized, in contrast to the news of the loss which was held in strict secrecy for 44 days.

Retrieval of the weapon marks the end, in effect, to the Nation's most expensive, intensive and embarrassing search for a man-made object in its history.

To convince skeptics that it has recovered the weapon, the Defense Department plans to indulge in instant declassification in Spain on Thursday by making the first public display of a modern hydrogen bomb. Hitherto, even photographs of such weapons were labelled secret.

Reporters will be invited aboard a Naval vessel on Thursday to see and photo-

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graph the wayward weapon. Then there will be a news conference either aboard ship or on the beach at which time the undersea photographs of the weapon, taken three weeks ago, will be released.

The Pentagon yesterday refused to release those photographs which it has here in Washington. The reason given amounted to the fact that release here would spoil the party in Spain.

The bomb — equal in explosive power to roughly a million tons of TNT—was lost along with three other unarmed nuclear weapons on Jan. 17 when a U.S. Air Force B-52 collided with a refueling plane over Palomares. The other three weapons, which fell near the village, were recovered quickly.

Stateside Examination

What happens now is that after its public showing, the recovered weapon will be returned to the Atomic Energy Commission, which will send it to a weapons assembly plant somewhere in the United States.

At the assembly plant the bomb will be dissembled and carefully studied to see what damage was suffered by its non-nuclear parts, such as its fusing and firing mechanisms, and its nuclear parts—in this case, plutonium and uranium. The other three weapons already are at an unidentified assembly plant undergoing study.

Depending upon what the tests show, the recovered weapons will either be refurbished and put back into the stockpile as a weapon, or retired. Retirement will mean that it is gutted of its plutonium and uranium. These materials will be then reworked into other warheads or bombs or put into a stockpile.

Like old soldiers, the radio-

activity of nuclear material just fades away. In plutonium's case, this takes hundreds of thousands of years.

Meanwhile, the United States is making ready to de-camp at Palomares and end its occupation of the Mediterranean coast.

Navy Shortcomings

The primary lesson of Palomares, in the view of some officials, is that the incident pointed up the Navy's lack of tools and techniques to locate and retrieve objects on the sea floor.

As it turned out, the missing bomb was perilously perched on a muddy slope five miles off the coast under 2500 feet of water — exactly where a Spanish fisherman told incredulous searchers a strange object plummeted into the sea on the day of the accident. Still, it took weeks to locate and identify the weapon.

Moreover, three times the Navy tied a cable to the weapon, using rented submarines among for the task. Each time the cable snapped.

Still haunted by the Thresher disaster, and worried about the Palomares undersea difficulties, some officials here express renewed concern about what might happen if a Polaris submarine with 16 nuclear-tipped missiles is lost at sea.

These officials take the view that, so long as America must maintain its nuclear might undersea and in the air, there will be accidents such as Palomares.