

Submarine Once Trapped by Parachute

H-Bomb Was Almost Lost Forever

Associated Press

During the great 80-day search-and-recovery operation, off Spain for the elusive H-bomb, the United States lost the bomb a second time and was in danger of losing it forever in a deep undersea canyon.

The 1.1-megaton device, retrieved from 2500 feet deep in the Mediterranean on Thursday, had shifted two weeks earlier along a widening ravine to within a few hundred feet of a canyon extending to depths of 4000 feet, it was learned yesterday. Had it slipped into the ravine it would have been beyond the capability of retrieval equipment.

The exasperating development occurred when a 1-inch-thick nylon line snapped as a surface vessel's winch dragged the bomb up a 70-degree slope toward a level area.

The silvery, 8-ton bomb toppled 100 feet back into the

underwater ravine and sank in the muck-filled bottom. There it remained hidden until April 3 when the miniature sub Alvin, after repeated groping about the black depths, sighted a piece of the weapon's parachute protruding from the mud.

Four days later, in the early morning hours in Washington, a cryptic message from Rear Adm. William S. Guest in Spain clacked off a teletype machine in a Navy command post at the Pentagon:

"Target on deck of Petrel and identified as weapon."

Despite the massive undertaking—some 180 scuba and hard-hat divers were used—no one was injured.

The Alvin, however, had one scare. In an attempt to drag the bomb from a slope to a more secure area, the parachute billowed over the sub's portholes, rendering the crew not only blind but poten-

tially trapped like a fish in a net.

"Those men could have been anchored down there to that bomb, and there would have been very little we could do to get them," one source said.

Fortunately the Alvin—which has barely 50 pounds thrust—was able to back out of its undersea trap, and its crew proceeded cautiously from then on—to eventual success.

The exact price of the unprecedented operation may never be known, but the Navy acknowledges the cost runs into the millions of dollars.

The sea search involved 18 vessels and 3200 men.

The bomb was first found by the tiny Alvin creeping backward down a 70-degree sea slope. "The sub couldn't go forward down the slope because at that angle the crew couldn't see over the nose," an official explained.