The Missing H Bomb-IV

Some Experts Fear Strategic Loss If Curbs Are Put on Nuclear Routes

Last of four articles By Howard Simons

Washington Post Staff Writer The four unarmed hydrogen bombs that fell from a U.S. Air Force B-52 last Jan. 17 landed on Spanish territory, but they "exploded" in Washington.

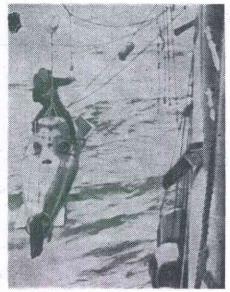
Soon after the Palomares incident, Spain asked for and promptly received State Department assurances that American nuclear-armed aircraft would no longer fly over her territory. The Phillipines has since sought and received a somewhat similar assurance.

Expert opinion here is divided over just how much the Palomares incident might thus erode America's ability to deploy her nuclear might. One group says that the effect of Palo-

One group says that the effect of Palomares will be minimal. U.S. B-52's can easily be re-routed and refueled over the vast oceans. Moreover, the United States still has a sufficient number of steadfast allies who will continue to permit overflights.

This group cites the British government's rejection of a bid by Labor members of Parliament in the wake of Palomares to ban B-52 re-fueling over Britain.

But a second group holds that any erosion of America's freedom of nuclear move-See BOMB, All, Col. 1



Associated Press

IN SEARCH—This tiny submarine was used to look for the missing H-bomb off Spanish coast. ment is a significant loss. They no!" "Bases, no!" should the can have the equivalent of a sary by the Soviet nuclear note, for one thing that too demonstrators. many overflight restrictions would dangerously limit the incident. Apparently, it took plutonium which, itself, is not that long for word of the nu-particularly hazardous." number of B-52 corridors an clear accident to seep through enemy need guard against.

most is that Palomares will mares to Madrid. start a chain reaction whereby nation after nation will want to ban the bomber. Even start a chain reaction whereby worse, it could accentuate the eneral uneasiness over the tockpiling of American atomweapons and the berthing of merican atomic ships abroad. A Russian blueprint to set in motion just such a chain Unhappy Over Secrecy reaction exists in the form of a "memorandum" handed to America's Ambassador in Moscow by Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko 30 days after Palomares.

It was below freezing in Moscow that day, and Foy Kohler's reception at the Foreign Ministry wasn't much warmer. In a turgid and technically imprecise indictment. the Russians charged that the United States had violated the 1963 limited test ban treaty

at Palomares by contaminating the atmosphere. The very next day, at the

disarmament talks, worse. Geneva Soviet delegate Semyon K. Tsarapkin echoed the Russian for example, if Palomares had indictment. Tsarapkin had already charged that "only a fortunate stroke of luck" had averted an atomic catastrophe t Palomares.

Other Nations Critical

Other nations have since aken America to task for the Palomares incident.

The United States dismisses Russia's charges as "propa-ganda," as it did in a formal "memoreply to Gromyko's landum" just yesterday.

But for obvious self-serving reasons, the Russians continue to play upon the world's nuclear fears, saying that the next B-52 crash, may set off an accidental nuclear war.

(Only the Russians know how many nuclear accidents dents. Hopefully none will rethey have had.)

In effect, Russia's "memorandum" tells Communist par- mares, and if it can be called ties of the Free World how to bring pressure to bear against tions the United States has American nuclear presence, taken to safeguard against an using Palomares as a cudgel, accidental atomic catastrophe "The Palomares interior," was ready made for agitation," said one Administration official signers of atomic weapons and cial, adding if "it hadn't been the "boards of disbelievers" this one it would have been who must pass on the safety something else."

al agitation-except for diplothrusts-was a small, anti - American demonstration one place really is hazardous.

an almost impenetrable cur- in the physics and engineering The Russians accepted the

some 250 miles from Palo-

State Department acquiesced, one else's next. to a policy of total secrecy. Spanish official will publically admit that a hydrogen bomb has been lost.

Several American officials, within the State Department and without, are desperately unhappy with the excessive that the incident has lingered in the world mind with the cause of Palormares, one of their H-bombs is missing. ium to the excessive secrecy.

Actually, the United States was more than fortunate, in a way. Palomares is remote and not heavily populated. Miracu-lously, no one was hit by debris.

It could have been much

What would have happened, been a city and were contam-inated with radioactive plutonium. We may repatriate the dirt of Palomares? Would we also repatriate the bricks and cobblestones of a contaminated foreign city?

What would have happened if Palomares had been a town in a more-unstable nation, perhaps a "developing" nation? Would a more violent reaction to the incident have taken place, possibly toppling the government?

Safeguards Demonstrated

So long as it is necessary for America to maintain a nuclear bomber and missile force there will be other incimissile sult in an atomic explosion.

If there is a plus to Palo a plus, the elaborate precau-"The Palomares incident has once again proved effective. The "what if" safety deof all American nuclear arms Surprisingly, the only actu- were vindicated at Palomares. As one scientist remarked: "A million tons of TNT in in front of the U.S. Embassy But the physics of nuclear in Madrid on Feb. 4. "Yankees, weapons is remarkable. We

million pounds of TNT in the threat to Western security. This was 18 days after the shape of a small amount of

But what this group fears tain of silence and travel the safety of nuclear weapons, no reply but not its contents. one can guarantee one won't some day accidentally explode, contained in a Feb. 16 mem-

There is this footnote to the Even today no American or Palomares incident. Until the propaganda. missing H-bomb is found or given up as irretrievably lost, two giant computers in the American Southwest will continue to "come up coughing," as one wag put it.

On computer is located in Albuquerque, N.M. The other secrecy surrounding Palo This job is to keep taps on mares. They attribute the fact every American atomic is hidden in the mountains. weapon's whereabouts. Be-

U.S. Reply to Moscow

Charges Propaganda

MOSCOW, Feb. 26 (AP) The United States Embassy announced today it has re-lected as "without any founlation" Soviet charges of American violations of the partial nuclear test ban treaty.

The Soviet charges grew out of the crash in Spain last month of an American bomber carrying nuclear weapons, which the Russians said had spread radioactivity in the area.

The American Embassy also rejected a Soviet demand that the United States end flights 1 over foreign territories by thombers carrying nuclear carrying nuclear 1 The Embassy said 1 weapons. these flights were made neces-

Davis E. Boster, counselor the Embassy reply yesterday In spite of all the comfort to the Soviet Foreign Ministry.

The Soviet charges were Gromyko. The American reply termed the charges sheer