

How the Press Dealt With CIA on Sub Story

Washington

News executives who withheld until yesterday accounts of the CIA's attempt to salvage a sunken Soviet submarine insist that their decisions to do so were sound.

For instance, A.M. Rosenthal, managing editor of the New York Times, said, "We were told that this was an important ongoing military operation.

"We believed in this case that the advantages of immediate publication did not outweigh the considerations of disclosing an important, ongoing military operation."

Seymour M. Hersh, an investigative reporter in the Washington bureau of the Times, had been working on the story on and off since late 1973.

Newspapers that had been working on the story published it after columnist Jack Anderson revealed some details of the project over his radio show. 18 MAR

"The country," said Anderson, "was better served by a watchful press."

CIA Director William E. Colby would not answer questions yesterday as to how many media organizations he contacted to try to stop publication, but they included top executives of the New York Times, the Washington Post, the Los Angeles Times, Parade magazine, CBS, National Public Radio, NBC, Time and Newsweek magazines.

It is highly unusual for the nation's top intelligence official to be scurrying around Washington seeing news executives. That was the case, however. 18 MAR

On Tuesday evening, for instance, Colby and two aides visited the top brass of the National Public Radio network, which was readying a story on media suppression of the submarine story, the went across M street NW to the studios of NBC News.

"This happens more often than the public might think," said Benjamin C. Bradley, executive editor of the Washington Post.

"On the one side, there's a claim by a government official of some standing that what you're about to print will harm the country's national security.

"But on the other side, you have the conviction that you're being conned, that

CIA Charges in Parliament

London

Thirty-four leftwing members of Parliament belonging to Britain's governing Labor party last night named ten diplomats serving at the U.S. embassy who the lawmakers said had links with the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency.

The MPs introduced a motion in the House of Commons demanding the government expel the ten unless the claim can be disproved.

An embassy spokesman refused to comment on the motion.

It was the latest in a series of statements by Labor leftwingers critical of alleged CIA presence in Britain.

United Press

what is at stake is not any plain embarrassment.

"You're forced to make these decisions with incomplete information and with speed. This decision was made and so be it. I do not today have information to know whether it's true or false that the national interest was harmed with the publication this morning. The only place where you could get that information is the CIA and I'm not sure I'd believe them anyway."

Bradlee noted a number of other kinds of cases where stories are withheld, including kidnappings, cases where justice might be impaired by premature disclosure and the like.

Editor Bill Thomas of the Los Angeles Times, whose paper originally published a brief version of the submarine project February 8, is confident he made the right

decision not to go further until someone else published.

That night, CIA officials reached him a few minutes after an early edition was on the streets with a front page story on the projects.

The story did not have many details—and had some incorrect — and Thomas moved it to page 18 in later editions, as much for its deficiencies, he says, as for the CIA's plea.

After talking with West Coast CIA agents and with Colby by telephone, Thomas assigned reporters to further evaluate the story. Eight reporters worked on it and the newspaper set a story in type several weeks ago. Thomas says, so it would be ready to publish in the event that it was published somewhere else.

"In situations like this," said Thomas, "you weigh what the possible harm of publishing could be and the possible good there could be and it seems to me the scales are pretty heavy on harm's side. And it wasn't a matter of it never being published, only a matter of when."

Colby's argument with all the editors and publishers he called was that other publishers had withheld, that the CIA wanted time to attempt to complete its operation, and that the Soviets should not learn of it.

Columnist Anderson, Thomas said, lacked certain facts that other reporters had that were more significant to the national security, including the fact that the submarine was equipped with nuclear-tipped torpedoes.

Anderson said one factor involved in his decision to use the story on a radio broadcast was that someone else was planning to make it public. Washington American Civil Liberties Union director Charles Morgan identified himself as that person.

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