

# The CIA, That Sub, Gnomes And Me

By Mary McGrory  
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Washington

IT JUST SO happens that I am in a position to cast a little light on the CIA's latest ex-secret, the \$350 million sub-chaser built by Howard Hughes that was the site of a burial at sea for some 70 Soviet sailors who had just been brought up from the depths.

I'm not saying that I have any inside dope from the crew. I'm just telling you that I have had some communication with the CIA which explains a lot.

Before I get into it, I would like to suggest that it would be helpful — to detente and us taxpayers — if we could think of the whole affair as a \$350 million funeral. That may seem a little steep, but is it too high a price to pay for making the point that we care more about red dead than the reds do?

It was unfortunate that this enormous propaganda coup had to be shrouded in secrecy, but there was, to be fair about it, no other way. After all, the Soviets had not told their people the sub was lost. Therefore the CIA couldn't very well tell us that it had been found — could they?

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NOW I will explain how I think it happened. My theory is based on documentary evidence from the agency itself.

The day that Director William E. Colby, was up on Capitol Hill trying to explain to Representative Bella Abzug (Dem-N.Y.) why the agency had been reading her mail, I asked him during a recess if I could find out if there was a CIA file on me, too. Colby told me to wire a letter to him and I did.

I quote the reply, written on CIA stationery, in full:

"Dear Ms. McGrory:

I received your letter of 11 March requesting information as to whether CIA is maintaining a file on you on 14 March.

We are processing your request and will provide you with the results as soon as possible.

Sincerely

Robert S. Young

Freedom of information coordinator."

I should add that there was a bicentennial seal on the lower right hand corner of the page. That is not important. The key phrase, as any seasoned bureaucrat will immediately spot, is "we are processing your request."

Like me, you probably had assumed that the filing cabinet at CIA was a computer about the size of the "Glomar Explorer" (which is two football fields long). Obviously we have inflated ideas about the technocracy. Just because they can locate with their sophisticated sonar a sub that is 17,000 feet under the sea doesn't mean they can locate a file folder under the same roof by pressing a button.

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THE REAL situation I guess, is that the CIA has gnomes like any other agency, who open up drawers and walk with their fingers through the alphabet. The gnomes are practically under water these days, being submerged with choice items sent over by the FBI which have to be integrated with their own.

This is how I reconstruct the crucial scene: two of the gnomes are gossiping over their work one morning when the "Glomar Explorer" folder drops into their brimming "In" basket.

"What's that?" says one.

"Give it here," says the other. "It's from the FBI. 'Glomar Explorer' is a rock group — lead guitarist played at Joan Baez concert — mother from Latvia, subscribes to Socialist Worker party paper."

So "Glomar Explorer" got filed under "subversive" instead of "submarine" and its messages floated around until one day the skipper cabled "Seventy dead. Advise." The agency, which as we know, is excellent in crisis, radioed back, "Bury them."

And that is how they happened to drop half the sub which they were dredging up back into the water and turned their full attention to providing a classy burial service for the Soviet sailors. Several CIA officials flew back for the event, which was recorded in full color by CIA cameras, and for all we know, joined in singing "Nearer My God to Thee" over the presumably grateful dead.