

Parade and Project Jennifer

by Lloyd Shearer

Project Jennifer, the supposedly partial recovery of a sunken Soviet submarine, has become one of the most widely publicized operations in the 28-year history of the Central Intelligence Agency.

In September, 1974, however, when PARADE first heard of the project, it was a most closely secured top secret, and there was no indication that any other publication in the world had heard of it.

As this reporter sought to follow up and check out various angles and rumors, many of them with the Summa Corp. in Houston, Tex., that it was hiring Russian-speaking deep sea divers, that it was conducting a Russian language school aboard the Hughes Glomar Explorer, that it was in fact paying the Glomar's crew as much as \$40,000 a voyage—he was told that the Hughes Glomar Explorer, constructed in the Chester, Pa., shipyards, was involved in recovering manganese nodules from the Pacific ocean floor. He was informed further that other corporations such as Tenneco and Kennecott were also engaged in the same sort of exploration, that the sea bottom was in fact a treasure house of valuable and needed

minerals, and that the Summa Corp., formerly the Hughes Tool Corp., owned entirely by Howard Hughes, was determined to make it a profitable enterprise.

All other questions concerning a secret project, Russian-speaking deep sea divers, a sunken ship, the CIA, and the U.S. Navy, were quickly and deftly turned aside.

No news at Hughes

Phone calls for help to Richard Hannah, one of the most knowledgeable men in the country on the ways and means of Howard Hughes—Hannah handles the Hughes public relations account—proved friendly but fruitless. Hannah said he knew nothing of any sunken submarine.

PARADE's source, however, was zeroed in on the details of Project Jennifer, later termed Project Azorian, and was confident it would surface "because so many men are involved in it."

Sure enough, The Los Angeles Times early in February, this year, published a front-page story about the robbery of Howard Hughes' Hollywood office on Romaine Street and the disappearance of a top secret memo involving Hughes with the CIA recovery of a sunken Soviet subma-

rine in the Atlantic.

The Times had the wrong ocean, but it was the first corroboration this reporter could obtain of his original source.

Immediately I phoned William Colby, director of the CIA, and asked him to confirm or deny several allegations concerning Project Jennifer.

As soon as Colby heard the name, Jennifer, he said, "Listen, we can't discuss this on the telephone. I'll have someone out to see you in a few hours."

A change of name

"Let's change her name to Barbara," [Colby's wife's name] I suggested, "and just chat for a minute."

"No," Colby insisted, "not on the telephone. This one is far too important. I'll have someone in touch with you right away."

Within a few minutes a CIA case officer based in Los Angeles phoned. We made an appointment to meet at my home. He arrived with another agent.

Both confirmed in detail the CIA project and both urged in the name of national security that PARADE not publish the story. If PARADE did, they maintained, it would make it ex-

ceedingly difficult for the Hughes Glomar Explorer to return to the site of the sunken Soviet submarine this July or August and try to recover the two-thirds of the Soviet sub it had not recovered.

The main objectives

What the CIA wanted most was the Soviet code machinery, logs, nuclear-tipped torpedoes, and other equipment it had not brought up.

According to its agents no other publication—they thought there were two, The New York Times and The Los Angeles Times which knew about the project—would break it.

There is neither time nor space here to comment on the information, judgment, honor, and commitment of various CIA operatives. Eventually Jack Anderson, the columnist and PARADE's Washington bureau chief, did break the story on radio, explaining to me "the story's all over Wash-

ington. Chuck Morgan of the American Civil Liberties Union has been telling it to almost everyone in the National Press Building. What's your opinion?"

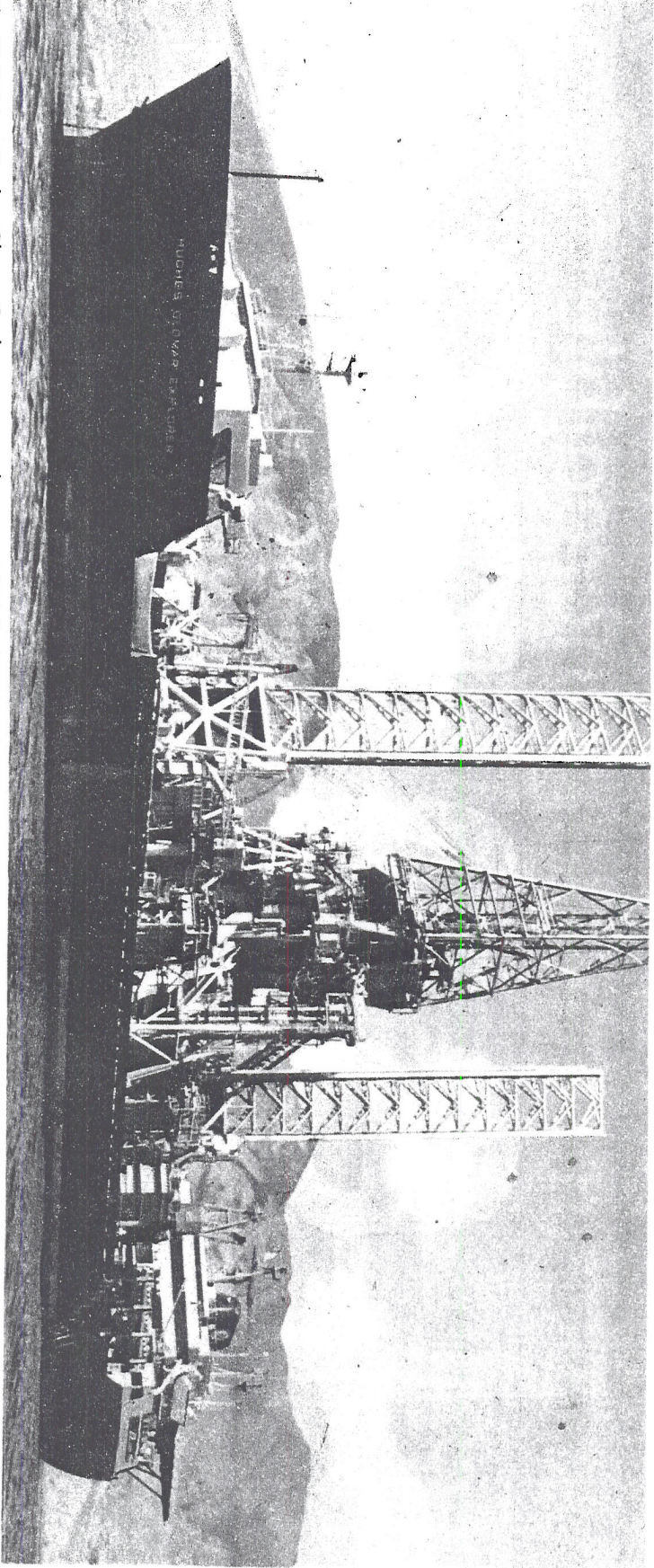
"My opinion," I said, "is that the CIA wants the story out. At a time when it's been accused of meddling in domestic affairs, when it's being investigated by several Congressional committees, it can point to Project Jennifer as a superb covert operation. Just imagine putting together a project involving more than 4000 men and keeping it secret for seven years."

A moment of silence at Anderson's end of the phone. "You're probably right. Why don't you write the story as you know it. After all, it's our job to get the news and print it, or how else are the people going to find it out?"

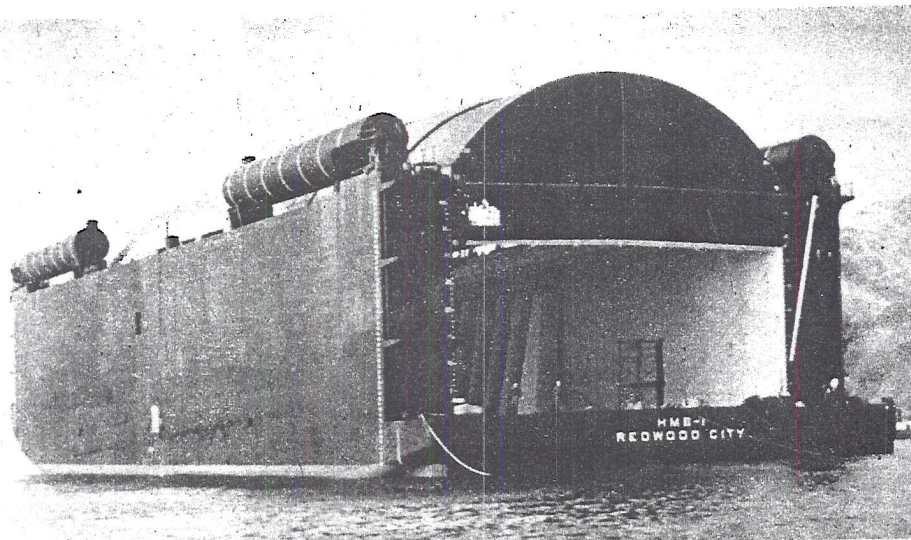
I told Anderson I would. Here it is.

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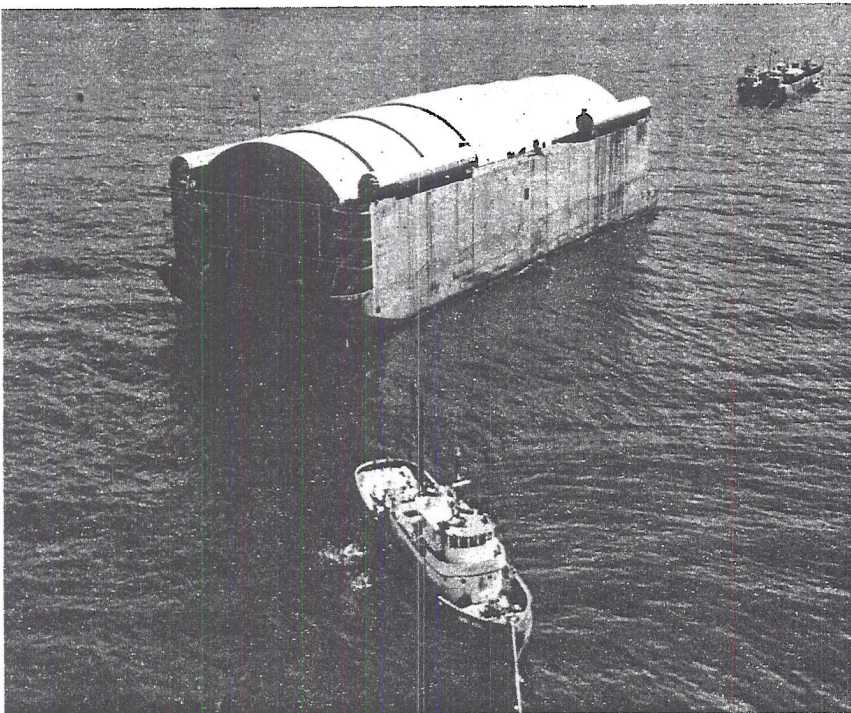
The 36,000-ton Hughes Glomar Explorer was used in secret CIA Project Jennifer—an effort to raise a sunken Soviet sub. The purpose of the structural tow-



ers was to deceive observers (including Soviet fishing ships) into believing that the Explorer was deep sea mining. The plan involved 4000 persons.



During recovery operations, the barge, shown open, rested 150 feet beneath the Explorer. The CIA, as a cover, registered both vessels under the name of Howard Hughes. Consequently, Hughes is now liable for property tax on \$350 million to the state of California—a tax that comes to about \$9 million.



The size of a football field, the barge, shown closed and at anchor, had fitted into its bottom—so no one could see it—a 6-million-pound claw. Lowered three miles to grab the sub, it reportedly dredged up a third of the vessel.

Early in March of 1968 a diesel-powered Soviet submarine of the G or Golf class, departed Vladivostok and proceeded southeast on a test voyage.

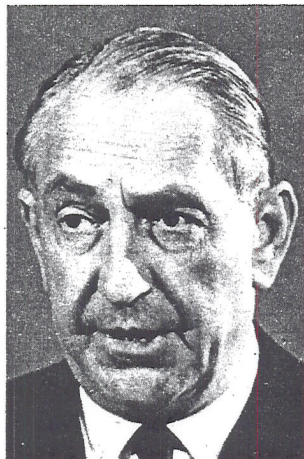
Originally constructed in 1958 it had been remodeled and equipped with at least two nuclear-tipped torpedoes. Approximately 750 miles northwest of the Hawaiian Islands, the Soviet sub exploded, possibly as a result of improper venting procedure. It quickly went to the bottom, three miles deep, with all hands. The U.S. Navy, through its various supersecret listening devices, detected and recorded the explosion.

Uncoded messages

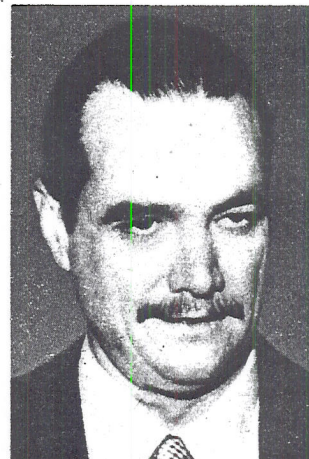
From March until May in 1968, the Soviets made numerous attempts to locate their missing submarine. They sent out trawlers, a submarine tender, and from time to time called in plain,

uncoded language over the marine distress channels for the submarine to identify its location.

The U.S. Navy monitored these distress calls. In May the Soviets gave up their search. Our Navy thereupon went



DAVID PACKARD
Pushed the project



HOWARD HUGHES
His ship—maybe



WILLIAM COLBY
Secret or leak?

back to its recordings, computed the various coordinates and by superb analysis determined where the Soviet submarine lay on the ocean's bottom.

It then sent down sophisticated photographic equipment which took photos of the Soviet sub. A report including the photos was sent to David Packard, then Deputy Secretary of Defense under Melvin Laird.

Packard was interested in what might be derived from the recovery of the sub. Intelligence experts were brought in for their professional opinions. They were ecstatic at the possibility of getting their hands on a Soviet sub with its coding devices, its torpedoes, its guidance system, and all the remainder of its gear.

The intelligence analysis was presented to the 40 Committee, which reviews and approves intelligence projects, and which voted to "go," and of course to Richard Nixon, then President, who gave the final go-ahead.

The Central Intelligence Agency under Richard Helms was assigned the responsibility of secretly recovering the Soviet submarine, no small assignment.

Decides on Hughes

Helms decided after much consultation with his technological experts that the Hughes Tool Co., owned by Howard Hughes, was the private company best qualified to undertake the job. The CIA, however, never got directly to Hughes. The agency contacted Raymond Holliday, chief executive director of the Hughes Tool Co. Holliday listened to the agency's proposal, relayed it to Hughes, then notified the CIA that Hughes' name and company could be used as a cover on "the collection effort for the submarine."

In January of 1970 the agency began sounding out various contractors such as Global Marine and Lockheed, both of which were in the ocean mining business. It was decided that the recovery would basically be made through a two-unit device. A surface

ship would support and then have attached to it a large, clawlike device that would be lowered to the ocean bottom, entwine itself around the submarine, and draw it up via one single pipeline into the ship itself.

The cost would be approximately \$350 million.

On July 4, 1974, the Hughes Glomar Explorer with a crew of 172 and its accompanying barge arrived over the recovery site in the Pacific. The recovery attempt was started one month later on Aug. 4. It took almost four days to lower the pipe at the rate of seven feet an hour to the sub site. The pipe claw weighed 6 million pounds. Guided by computer, its eight subsidiary claws grabbed the Soviet sub midship, fore, and aft and began to raise it.

From a depth of 16,000 feet, it raised the sub 7000 feet. Then the submarine itself fractured, broke some of the claws, and two-thirds of it sank back to the ocean bottom.

The one-third of the sub that was salvaged was drawn up into the well of the ship. It was carefully examined. From five to seven Soviet bodies, some skeletonized, were found.

A burial ceremony was conducted in Russian and in English by a U.S. Navy captain in full uniform. The Soviet national anthem was played. The American national anthem was played. The burial ceremony—there was one common casket for all the remains—was conducted in accordance with Soviet Navy at-sea burial ceremonies. The ceremony was photographed in full.

What did the CIA learn from salvaging one-third of the 1958-model Soviet sub?

Hits and misses

It learned something about the Soviet standards in metallurgy and welding, the station assignments of the sub's personnel, and the type of pinups the sub's personnel collected. But it claims not to have recovered the sub's coding equipment or its nuclear-tipped missiles or its warheads or its code books. Which is why, so it maintains, it wanted to keep the entire Jennifer Operation a secret so that it could try for another recovery.

If the Central Intelligence Agency obtained various coding equipment and anything else of value from the Soviet submarine, it would never admit it. No intelligence service informs its rivals of its accomplishments.

Which is why the American public is not likely to know ever what it got for \$350 million or even to know if two-thirds of a Soviet sub still lies on the ocean floor. The CIA might have raised the whole job. One of its main objectives is to keep the Soviets guessing.