

CIA's Deep-Sea Attempt To Raise Soviet Sub Told

Salvagers

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Sought

Secrets

By Seymour Hersh
New York Times

Washington FILED CIA

The Central Intelligence Agency financed the construction of a multimillion-dollar deep-sea salvage vessel and used it in an effort last summer to recover hydrogen-warhead missiles and codes from a sunken Soviet nuclear submarine in the Pacific ocean, according to high government officials.

The salvage vessel, constructed under disguise for the CIA by Howard R. Hughes, the eccentric billionaire industrialist, did successfully recover about one-third of the submarine, the officials said, but the portion raised from the ocean bottom did not include either the ship's missiles or its code room.

Instead, the government officials said, the CIA-led expedition recovered the forward section of the ship containing the bodies of more than 70 Soviet seamen and officers who went down with the vessel in 1968, when it mysteriously exploded and sank in more than three miles of water.

The Soviet submariners were buried at sea in military ceremonies that were filmed and recorded by CIA technicians.

The Los Angeles Times said there were reports that analysis of the recovered wreckage provided evidence confirming that the Russians were arming conventional undersea craft with Polaris-type nuclear missiles and also with nuclear-tipped torpedoes.

Although thousands of scientists and workmen had security clearance for the program, known as Project Jennifer, the submarine sal-

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vage operation remained one of the Nixon and Ford administrations' closest secrets.

The Jennifer operation has provoked extended debate inside the United States intelligence community since the CIA proposal to build the salvage vessel with the cooperation of Hughes first underwent high-level evaluation in the early 1970s. Critics of the program have said that the value of the information that could be gleaned from what they depict as outmoded code books and outmoded missiles did not justify either the high cost of the operation or its potential for jeopardizing U.S.-Soviet detente.

The program's defenders, who include CIA Director William E. Colby, have said that the successful recovery of the whole submarine would have been the biggest single intelligence coup in history.

They argue that even a 1968 code book would give the government's signal experts a chance to evaluate all of the Soviet submarine communications that were in existence then and perhaps for years before the ship sunk.

Recovery of the missiles also would help provide standards for judging the existing analysis of such weapons as compiled from the precise scrutiny of aerial photographs taken by satellites.

In recent weeks, Colby has formally requested Secretary of State Henry Kissinger for permission to stage another attempt next summer to salvage the rest of the submarine, which reportedly is lying in nearly 17,000 feet of water about 750 miles northwest of Oahu, Hawaii.

Kissinger, who serves as head of the 40 Committee, the secret government panel that reviews and finances all intelligence operations, supported the efforts of the CIA to keep the salvage program secret until a decision could be made on continuing it.

Privately, however, he is known to have dismissed the

Jennifer program as not being of sufficient immediacy to require much of his personal attention.

It was the 40 Committee that agreed to secretly authorize funds to the Hughes organization to subsidize construction of what was to be publicly described as the world's largest deep-sea mining ship, the Glomar Explorer.

The vessel took its name from the first three letters in the first two words of the title of the company that operated it for Hughes-Global Marine Inc.

A New York Times reporter initially learned some details of the salvage operation in late 1973, when the Glomar explorer was conducting tests in the Atlantic ocean. He stopped his research on the matter after a request from Colby in February, 1974.

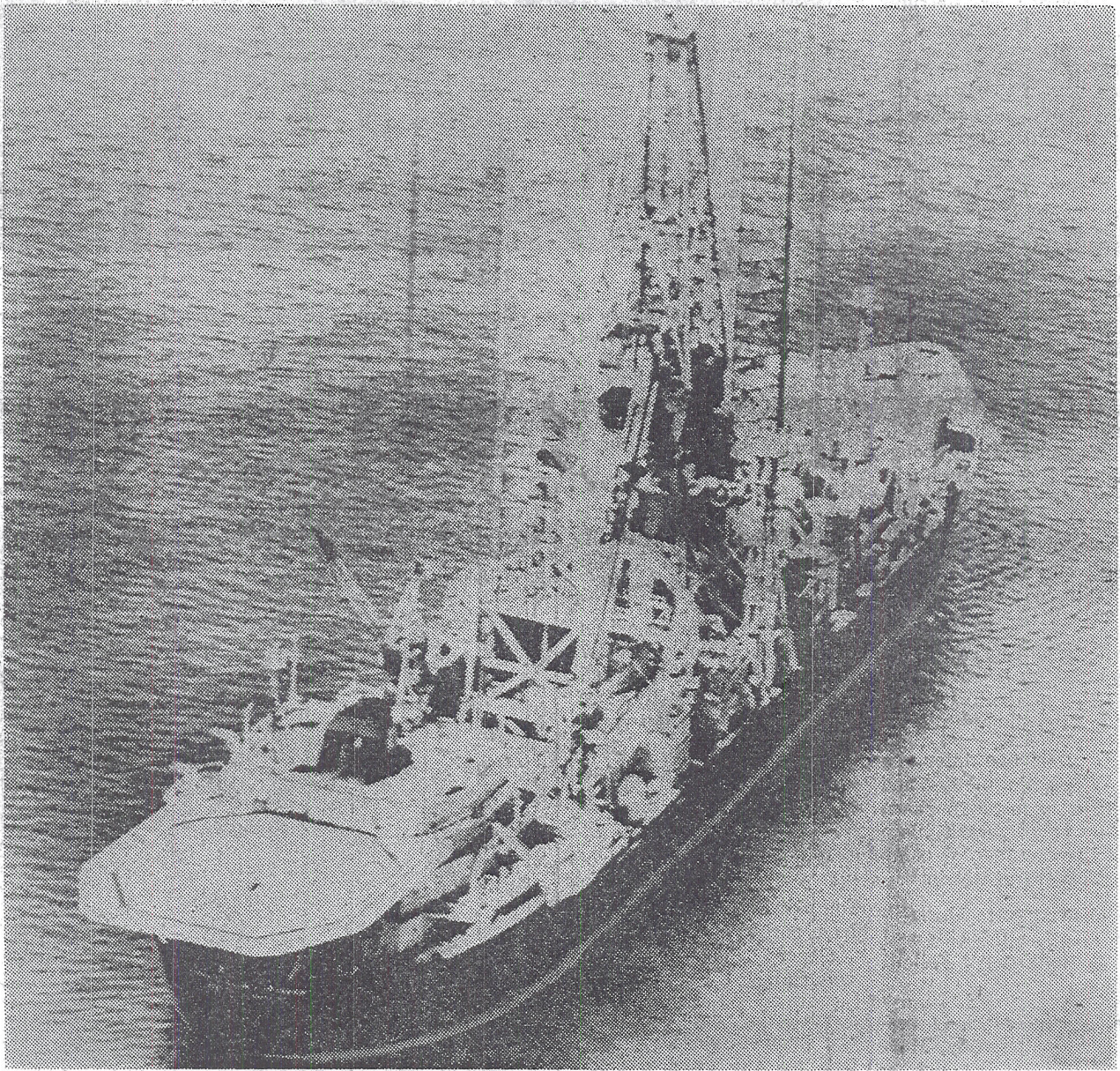
Following the publication of some information about the operation by the Los Angeles Times last month, the New York Times investigated the matter further.

The New York Times was informed by the CIA in the course of the investigation that publication would endanger the national security because the agency was considering an effort this summer to retrieve the remainder of the sunken submarine and publicity would thwart any such effort.

The Times decided at that time to withhold publication until the CIA either made another effort to retrieve the submarine or decided not to go ahead with the project.

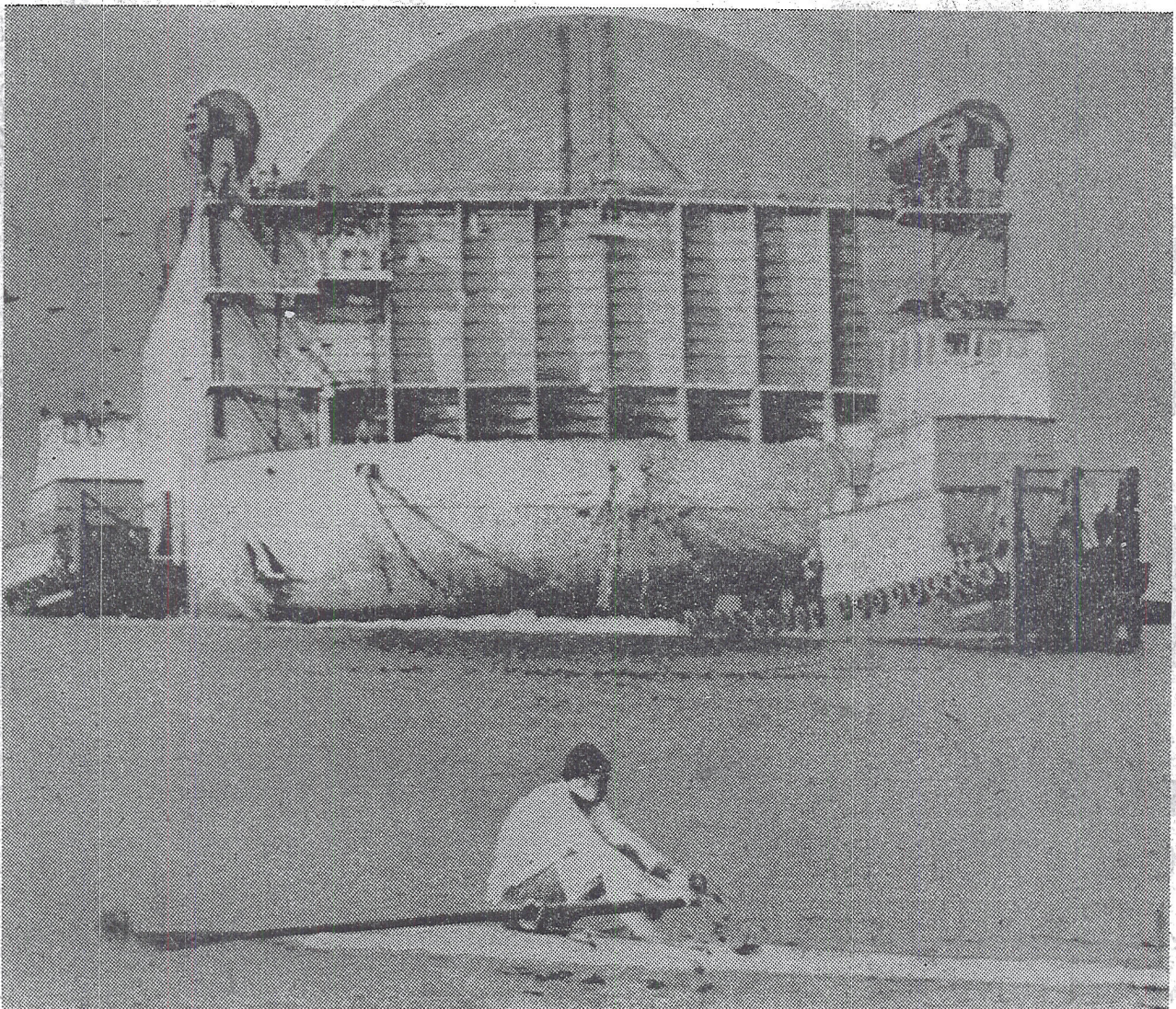
Some other publications and broadcasters also decided to delay.

Last night the story of the Soviet submarine and the salvage effort was circulating widely and publication appeared imminent, despite the efforts of the CIA to convince the news media that its secret should be kept.



AP Wirephoto

The deep-sea mining ship Glomar Explorer was constructed by Howard Hughes' Summa Corp.



AP Wirephoto

The 106-foot wide ocean floor mining barge dwarfed an oarsman (foreground) as it was towed from port of Redwood City in January, 1974

High government officials said Hughes was selected to provide the cover needed to shield the true purpose of the vessel because of his widely publicized penchant for secrecy, his known interest in deep-sea mining and the fact that his wholly-owned holding company—the Summa Corp.—had experience in large-scale construction projects.

In addition, the Hughes Aircraft Co. also has long been involved in the construction and development of space satellites for heavily classified intelligence purposes and now employs a number of former high-ranking CIA and military men.

Another factor behind the selection of Hughes, the officials said, was his patriotism. The officials insisted that Hughes made very little

money in the construction of the Glomar Explorer.

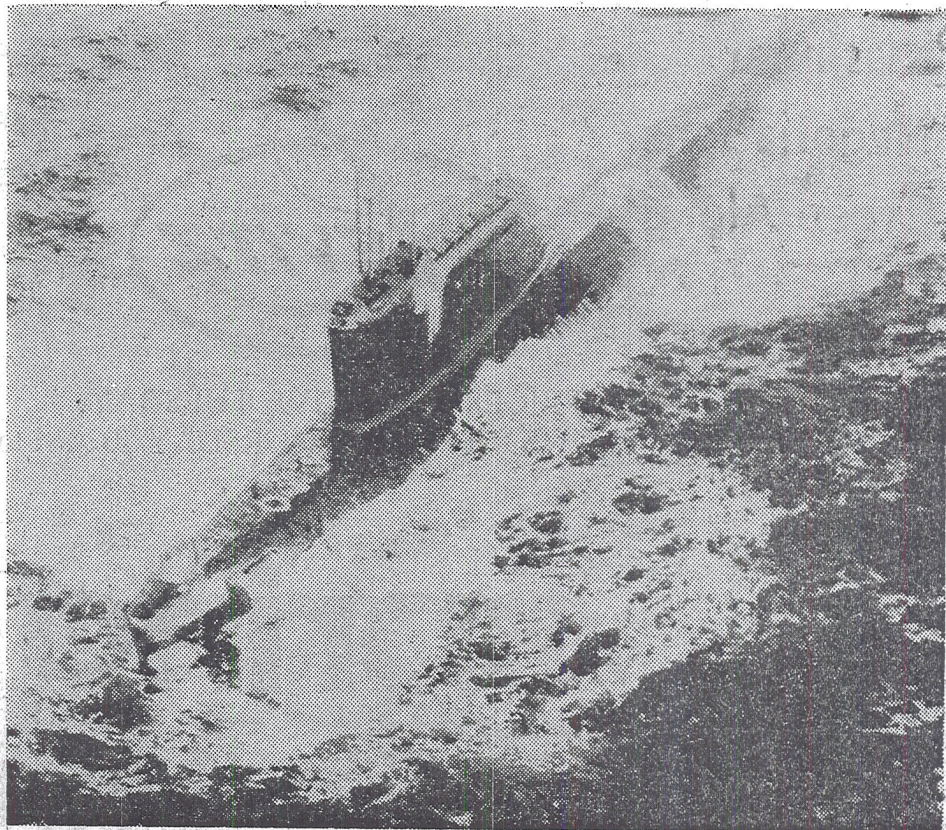
Government officials acknowledge that much more than \$250 million has been spent thus far on the Glomar Explorer and Project Jennifer, with other reliable estimates placing the funds authorized at more than \$350 million.

Operation Jennifer was initiated soon after the Soviet submarine, a 1958 model of the so-called Hotel class that was believed to have sailed from the Soviet port of Vladivostok, sustained a series of on-board explosions and sank while cruising on patrol in the Pacific.

American intelligence officials emphasized that the Soviet craft was found, after it sank, through what was described as a "passive" means — that is, not from signal or other communications intercepts — and there was no chance for the U.S. Navy to rescue any crew members.

Other sources said the Navy's sonar underwater listening devices apparently were able to detect the sounds of underwater explosions at depths far deeper than the Soviet Union could intercept and thus knew the specific location of the submarine on the ocean floor.

During the recovery attempt last August, the official sources said, American technicians were successful in grabbing and lifting the submarine from the ocean floor and raising it about halfway to the surface — roughly 8000 feet — when there was a failure in the lifting devices and part of the ship fell.



AP Wirephoto

A Soviet submarine of the Hotel class such as the one that sank in the Pacific

Although the CIA is known to have taken extensive undersea photographs of the sunken ship, there is apparently some dispute over its classification. It has since been established, however, that the vessel, which carries three missile launchers, is in the Hotel class in the ballistic missile ship.

According to the 1973-74 edition of "Jane's Fighting Ships," a standard naval reference work, it could contain missiles with ranges of between 350 and 650 miles. Some sources said, however, that modifications to the vessel apparently had blurred the Navy's ability to determine its specific configuration.