

Keeping Secrets, Exposing Abuses



Jack Anderson

THERE have been signs of late that the press has begun to wear a hair shirt. The old blather about "responsibility" to keep secrets instead of exposing abuses has begun to creep back into press parlance.

The old pre-Watergate, pre-Vietnam ideals of partnership with government, of cozy intimacy with the high and mighty, of a camaraderie of secrets shared by this peerage but kept from the public, begins to appeal once more to a press concerned that its abrasive successes have earned it a bad name and a hostile reception.

At such times, we reporters need a reminder that we exist not to lie down with the lions but to fend them off, to cause the turmoil by which the free system cleanses and energizes itself.

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THE STORY of the Central Intelligence Agency-Howard Hughes Glomar Explorer is just such a reminder. Some of the nation's top news organizations knew about the abortive attempt to salvage an 18-year-old Soviet sub that sank to the bottom of the Pacific.

They chose, for reasons weighty and altruistic, not to reveal it. We made the opposite choice.

Certainly, there are legitimate secrets which ought not to be revealed. Sometimes, the right of the public to

know and the press to print should be voluntarily subordinated to the interests of national security or the safety of endangered individuals.

In the past, we have been amenable to such appeals from CIA Director William Colby and his predecessors. But this time, Colby's arguments for secrecy were not compelling. It was hardly conceivable that the Glomar expedition was still a secret from Soviet intelligence.

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THOUSANDS of people in our government and industry had played some part in it over a seven-year span; some of them were leaking it out; newsmen were around asking questions; a ring of thieves and blackmailers had broken into the Hughes offices in Hollywood and had stolen documents describing the Glomar operation; and on Feb. 8, 1975, the Los Angeles Times had published key ingredients of the story. So the Russians knew. But, as Colby told us, it would be "rubbing their noses in it" to let the American people know.

What was at stake in publishing, then, was not national security but international etiquette, not American secrets but Soviet face.

These are considerations not to be mocked, but we hold them to be insufficient reasons for renewing the dread precedent of cutting off the news — the windpipe of the American system.

Written with Les Whitten

Longer version, WXP 25 Mar 75, filed CIA (d)