

Soviet Sub's Secrets

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About a year ago, a great misshapen mass of steel arrived on the Redwood City waterfront where, amid tight security, it was jockeyed into a large but ordinary appearing metal shed.

Its arrival was the signal that the Central Intelligence Agency Project Azorian, which had begun as Project Jennifer, had advanced be-

yond the drawing boards, shipyard bustle and super-secret negotiation and planning.

Now, six years of intrigue which would lead to the recovery of part of a sunken Russian submarine had reached a turning point.

Crewmen of the Hughes Glomar Explorer, already intensively screened for the undertaking, would begin to learn at a secret school in Redwood City techniques by which they were to raise the

sub from a Pacific Ocean depth of three miles.

Intelligence sources insist analysis of the recovered wreckage supplied evidence confirming that the Soviet Union was arming conventional undersea craft with Polaris-type nuclear missiles and also with nuclear-tipped torpedoes.

Now, the Los Angeles Times has been told by an independent source possessing an intimate knowledge of Project Azorian

that much of its reputed success results from another find — a two-inch thick journal kept by a young Soviet naval officer being groomed as an expert on the nuclear capabilities of the vessel which plunged to the ocean bottom in 1968.

The Glomar explorer crew also recovered the young officer's body, curled as if asleep in his bunk and so well preserved that intelli-

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gence agents were able to establish his identity.

His journal, the source said, details the suspected — but never before documented — nuclear potential of the submarine.

The misshapen steel mass transported into one of the big buildings at Lockheed's Redwood City Space and Missile Facility on the shore of San Francisco Bay resembled, said a Times source, "an old diving bell that had collapsed."

The contorted object — about five feet high, about eight feet thick and about 20 feet long — was to have a major role in one of the most remarkable intelligence feats in American history.

Its role was to imitate the sub, a 320-foot-long Golf class vessel built in 1958, which sank 750 miles north of Hawaii.

It became the centerpiece for an intensive two-week cram course for selected Glomar Explorer crewmen who attended a unique "school" in the Lockheed facility's two metal buildings.

In the placid bay waters alongside the structures floated the HMB-1, the monster barge which was an integral part of the salvage operation in which was constructed a giant "claw" designed to snatch the sunken sub from the ocean floor.

Classes included, a course which hammered the difficult Russian alphabet into the "students" — many of them former oil field rough-necks.

Papers Show Hughes Owns Salvage Ship

Washington

Despite claims of government ownership, sworn papers state that billionaire Howard Hughes' Summa Corp. is the sole owner of the Glomar Explorer, reportedly financed by the Central Intelligence Agency.

The tax assessor of Los Angeles county said he agreed to forget about a potential \$9 million tax bill for the vessel when CIA representatives secretly assured him it was government property.

But the ship's license, filed under oath with the U.S. Coast Guard, says it belongs to the Hughes empire.

The conflicting reports could pose a dilemma for the Hughes organization. If the Summa Corp. owns the ship, it may have to pay substantial federal, state and local taxes.

If the government owns the vessel, its license to ply the waters when it recovered part of a sunken Soviet submarine last summer would seem to have been invalid. Under U.S. shipping law, "no marine document shall be considered to be in force longer than the vessel to which it is granted is

owned as stated in the document . . ."

Built at the CIA's behest and reportedly financed by the government after the sunken sub's position had been charted, the Glomar Explorer was publicly proclaimed as a deep-sea diving ship.

The Los Angeles county tax assessor, Philip E. Watson, said his office has been keeping notes on the Glomar Explorer since November 1973 and has been pressing Summa officials about it for more than a year.

Finally, on January 31, 1975, Watson said, an FBI agent escorted four men to his office and told him they were "from the CIA." The assessor said the CIA delegation wanted to keep the vessel's real mission secret and asked that he keep it off the tax rolls, on grounds that the government really owned it.

He says he asked for a letter, which he promised to keep secret, attesting to U.S. ownership, but the CIA representatives refused to give him one. He said they simply reassured him verbally that Hughes "had no investment in either the boat or the barge."

Washington Post

Sources have supplied not only precise details about the school and its classes but also with new information about the total recovery enterprise.

Some of the information is at odds with that previously divulged by the CIA, which — using billionaire recluse Howard Hughes as a front — was in charge of the project.

For instance:

- The huge grappling hook planted aboard the Glomar Explorer from beneath by a barge off Catalina Island initially clutched the entire submarine, according to one Times source.

The sub, intact but badly damaged, was raised about 5000 feet, said the source, before two-thirds of it broke away.

- Two nuclear-tipped torpedoes were brought up with the 38-foot forward section that was salvaged, according to the source. He also said a missile, believed nuclear tipped and relatively undamaged, slipped back to the ocean floor when one section broke away.

- The great height of the towering, eye-catching derrick on the Explorer serves no useful purpose, according to a Times source.

He said a much smaller derrick could handle the 60-foot lengths of thick-walled pipe which operated the claw with pressure from water or hydraulic fluid.

The derrick was built the

way it was, he added, to jibe with the cover story supplied by Hughes' Summa Corp. personnel that the Explorer was constructed to mine the ocean for valuable mineral nodules.

The Glomar Explorer was built in a Pennsylvania shipyard. The giant barge was constructed in San Diego and towed to Redwood City where the claw was assembled inside it.

A Times source said the CIA recruitee specialists in a variety of highly technical areas. They were the true "the contract men."

One, the source said, was a charismatic former Navy officer known to crew members by his code name: Blackjack.

Blackjack, the source added, was — and still is — the on-the-scenes boss of the recovery operation.

Blackjack, the source said, visited the Lockheed facility in Redwood City last week to inspect a new claw being completed in the HMB-1 for this summer's projected second mission!

The original claw was severely damaged last July when the major portion of the sub broke away and hauled its tentacles.

The redesigned new claw, said the source, will have the task of lifting the sub without penetrating or breaking the conning tower area where the missiles are housed.

For that reason, he added, its tentacles have been shortened to a single long scoop which will go under the sunken vessel has been added.

But a little more than a year ago no such return to the site of the sinking was anticipated.

At that time, the educational process which preceded the first salvage operation was the matter of great moment — or at least one of the primary concerns.

Classes at the Redwood City "school" were to serve three basic functions:

Provide crew members with detailed information about submarines, especially the one on the Pacific ocean floor.

Teach them the Russian alphabet so they could recognize letters on items aboard the sub and then relay them to Russian language specialists who would translate them into words during the process of picking the vessel apart, once it was recovered.

Instruct them in ways of handling possibly contaminated components of the submarine when they worked on it after recovery and advise them of the nuclear dangers.

Crewmen spent much of their classroom time in protective garb resembling spacesuits. The garments were designed to protect them against contamination.

Oxygen flowed through the

back of the headgear which also contained a microphone and earphones that permitted communication with two Russian-speaking CIA agents, called by the crewmen "the two linguists."

"They're the ones who taught crew members the Russian alphabet. During training, the crew people would work on the ship (the mockup) wearing those spacesuits," the source said.

"When they saw some Russian words that had been put on the sub, they would spell them out and the linguists would tell them what they meant. We knew there were some places that could be damn dangerous and we wanted to be prepared."

Four or five two-week classes were held at the school, the source said, with eight to ten men in each class.

Last year, the Explorer, trailing its monster claw from the moon pool, chugged into a pre-selected spot in the Pacific — and stopped.

Four Russian trawlers circled it.

Trawlers had been monitoring the area since the sub went down, said a source.

The Explorer crew set about "mining" the ocean depths for manganese nodules. That was the plan and that is how it must have appeared to the Russian trawlers.

But something else really was occurring aboard the Explorer.

Section after 60-foot section of exquisitely designed pipe was fed down through the "moon pool," driving the claw deeper into the ocean.

"Sometimes," the source remembers, "the four Russian trawlers came so close some of our guys would give them the finger — and the Russians would give the finger right back."

By the time the claw reached the ocean floor, the pipe had spiralled down 3 miles.

The claw reached for the wreckage.

"It lifted the sub slowly and cautiously for about a mile," the source said.

Then the aft two-thirds of the sub snapped at least two of the claw's tentacles and plunged back into a three-mile deep ocean trough.

The intake into the "moon pool" resumed.

What radiation experts had feared was found. Warheads which had been aboard the sub had contaminated it, either when it sank or during the years it had lay rusting in the ocean water.

As crew members assigned to the duty worked on the vessel, they wore the same heavy "spacesuits" in which they had trained in Redwood City.

Despite the precautions, the source discovered that he had sustained radiation burns and that an expensive pair of his boots had been ruined.