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CIA Ship 'Glomar' Is for Rent

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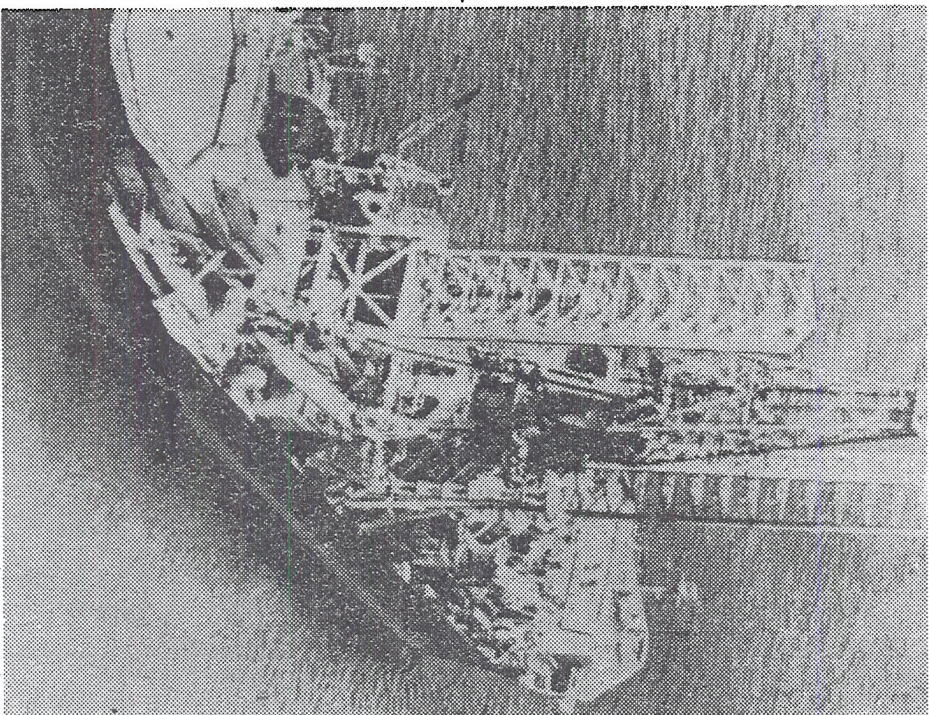
Washington

Available for lease: a 618-foot ship "specially designed to dynamically maintain its position over a work site as deep as 20,000 feet while lowering or raising a heavy machine."

It is not just another piece of government surplus being described by the General Services Administration. The GSA is looking for someone who needs the Glomar Explorer, the ship built by Howard Hughes and used by the CIA in a salvage operation of a sunken Soviet submarine in the summer of 1974.

GSA spokesmen won't tell where they got the exotic ship, with an estimated worth of several hundred million dollars. They just say they got it as surplus from another government agency.

The presence of the ship on GSA rolls marks the abandonment by the CIA and Navy of the submarine salvage operation, which succeeded in lifting from the floor of the Pacific about one third of a Soviet Golf class sub. The operation was killed largely by publicity following news leaks of the venture, estimated to have cost as much as half a billion dollars.



AP Wirephoto

618-FOOT GLOMAR EXPLORER
 This is the ship Howard Hughes built for the CIA

The GSA, as is its duty when disposing of surplus government property, has contacted several other federal agencies that might have use for the Glomar. Many have shown considerable interest, but the operating costs — about \$35,000 per day — have kept anybody from taking it.

Among interested government agencies have been the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Energy Research and Development Agency, the National Science Foundation, and the Department of the Interior.

Other possibilities include leasing the ship to private companies for deep ocean mineral or oil exploration.

No specific lease costs are available. For most of the past month GSA officials denied they even had the ship.

The Glomar Explorer is berthed in Long Beach Harbor. A huge submersible drydock, the HMB-1, now berthed near Redwood City and also used in the submarine salvage operation, has been tentatively picked up for use by the

Energy Research and Development Agency.

The drydock was reportedly used in the salvage effort to carry a huge grappling claw. The barge was sunk below the surface and stationed under the Glomar Explorer during salvage operations.

A spokesman in the development agency's San Francisco Operations office said the agency is considering using the barge in studying undersea thermal gradients — temperature differences between surface and deep waters that are potential energy sources.

Details of the big craft are found in a six-page brochure being circulated by the GSA.

The pamphlet gives no hint of the ship's involvement in a secret project, but says it is 618 feet long, has a 115 foot beam, can cruise at ten knots, and has a satellite-beam navigation system linked to side-thrust engines that enable the Glomar Explorer to hold a desired position in the middle of the ocean plus or minus ten feet.

Air conditioned quarters are on board for 178 persons.