

SFCronicle

MAR 20 1975

# Barge Used in Sub

By Jack Viets

The gigantic submersible domed barge that can be seen from the Bayshore freeway in Redwood City was built to carry the huge steel claw the Central Intelligence Agency used to fish for a Russian submarine in the depths of the Pacific, it was disclosed yesterday.

And more than three miles under the Pacific, the massive barge may have swallowed the sub section the claw recovered — and then closed its sliding dome over the wreckage to hide the top secret operation behind a steel shroud nine stories high.

When the multimillion-dollar monster was shoved out the Golden Gate by a fleet of tugs on January 5, 1974, the barge was ostensibly bound for sea trials off Catalina island with Howard Hughes secret "sea mining"

vessel, the Glomar Explorer.

"I can tell you one thing," he said. "I can't say anything about what's in there," he said. "It has a big dome that slides open and you'll have to call Howard Hughes for the rest."

The tug captain said he had been on board the big barge several times since Lockheed Missiles and Space Co. started installing highly sophisticated equipment on board in Redwood City in the fall of 1972.

According to reports, the mission of the barge from its inception was to help the Red Stack tug pilot Bill Hildreth told The Chronicle after the barge had been turned over to a big seagoing tug outside the Golden Gate.

Surveillance TV cameras

followed anyone who approached the barge, he said, and guards with big pistols walk beside you on board."

The secret vessels — supposedly built for Howard Hughes — were actually financed by the CIA.

The secret target was a sunken Russian submarine some 750 miles northwest of Hawaii — not nodules of manganese, cobalt, nickel and copper at the bottom of the sea.

According to the Los Angeles Times, the barge did rendezvous with the Glomar Explorer off Catalina for a series of test operations.

Here, the barge was carefully submerged and its huge claw attached to a sophisticated deep-diving control and drive system that was extended from the bottom of the Glomar Explorer.

Then, early in the summer, the salvage operation switched to the deep waters northwest of Hawaii.

By early August, the claw

had managed to pick up a large section of the Russian sub. But a big piece of the sub broke away, damaging the claw and its tentacles.

Whether the submersible barge from Redwood City was actually used to carry off the recovered remains of the sub is unclear at this point.

But the barge and its damaged claw reappeared in Redwood City at the Leslie Salt dock in September.

"There's been all sorts of activity on board ever since it came back," said Pete Uccelli yesterday at his Pete's Harbor across the channel from the barge.

The barge's claw is reportedly being repaired and modified for an attempt to recover the rest of the sub. A work force of several hundred men are working 12-hour shifts seven days a week on the vessel.

The welders working on the outside of the submersi-

## marine Hunt Built Here

ble barge — which is bigger than a football field — "don't know what is going on inside," Uccelli said.

"There's another crew inside, and they never talk to anybody on the outside."

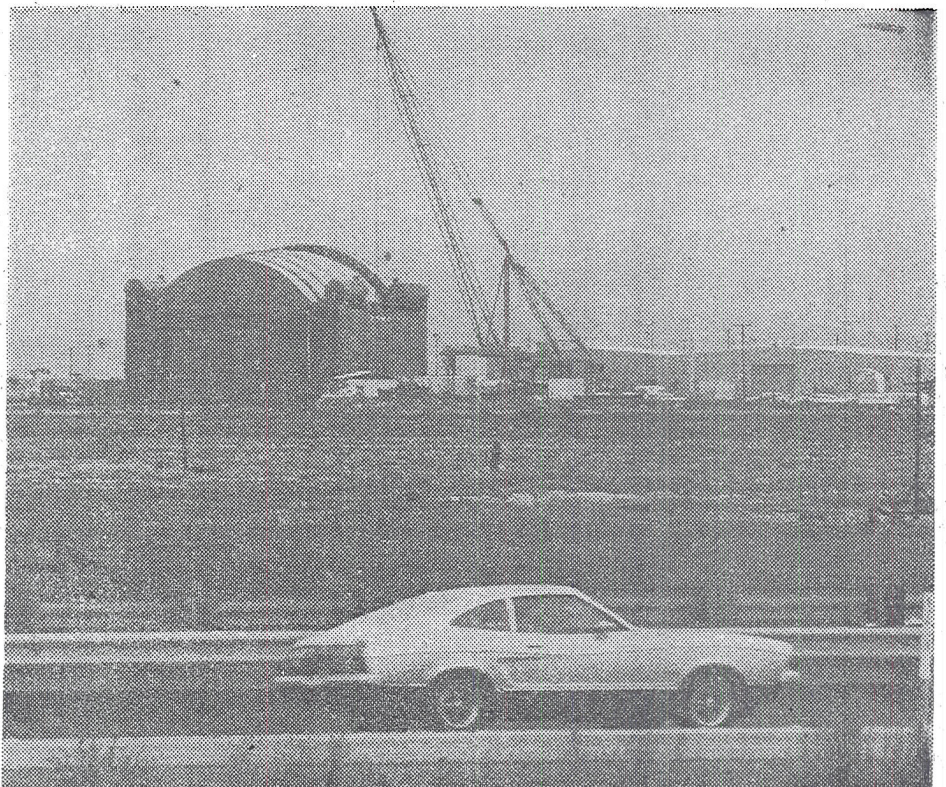
Lockheed Missiles and Space Co. officials weren't talking about the mystery barge yesterday, either.

"We will not have any comment at all," a spokesman said.

Meanwhile, Redwood City Fire Marshal George Asvos said yesterday he wants to make a thorough safety inspection of the huge vessel.

If they're fooling around with nuclear warheads," Asvos said, "I don't want to take any chances that anything might happen while the barge is moored here."

Asvos did not say when he wants to inspect the barge. He will check the 300-foot ship for hazardous materials on his tour, he said.



By Peter Breinig

Hughes barge can be seen from Bayshore freeway near Redwood City