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From Inside

CIA Barge

By Jack Viets

Redwood City's fire chief toured the CIA's giant barge yesterday and said he could find no sign of the massive claw the CIA used to recover the remains of a Russian submarine from the Pacific.

"There was no evidence of any part of a submarine or missile or part of a torpedo that I could find either," said Chief John W. Keller.

And the CIA's cover story—that the submersible monster is just part of Howard Hughes' "sea mining" venture—is still in force on board, he noted.

"They don't even mention that Russian submarine. They're very cooperative, but they only talk about sea mining.

The fire chief said he spent more than an hour aboard the 51,000 ton barge with the chief of the barge project, R. T. Sliker, and the barge's chief of security, who was identified as R. C. Kirwan.

He asked to inspect the steel giant to make sure no hazardous or nuclear materials were on board after reports of the barge's role in the CIA's bizarre fishing expedition for a Russian sub surfaced earlier this week.

The permission was promptly granted by officials of the Lockheed Missiles and Space Co., which has been installing top secret and highly sophisticated recovery equipment in the barge since the fall of 1972, when it was towed here from the National Steel and Shipbuilding Corp. in San Diego.

Chief Keller said he could see only what appeared to be mining machinery inside the nine-story domed barge, which is longer than a football field and looks like a giant, floating aircraft hangar.

But whenever he asked a "technical question," he said, "they referred me to a mining publication or manual."

According to reports, the submersible barge was used to carry a massive steel claw to the sea bottom off Catalina Island, where the claw was attached to a control and drive system that was extended from the bottom of another Hughes "sea mining" vessel, the Glomar Explorer.

The Glomar Explorer — financed like the barge by the CIA at a cost of hundreds of millions of dollars — then proceeded to its mining ground 750 miles northwest of Hawaii where it dropped 17,000 feet to fish up sections of a Russian sub.

The barge's claw was reportedly damaged in the salvage operation and since September — when the barge reappeared in Redwood City — a tight-lipped crew of 300 has been working seven days a week.