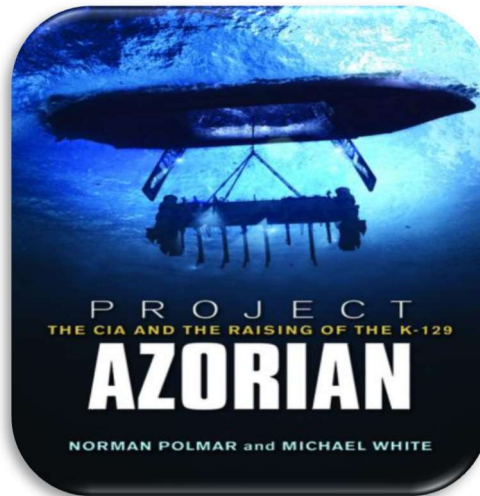


COLD WAR MISSION CODENAME “AZORIAN”
THE GREATEST RECOVERY ATTEMPT IN MARITIME HISTORY AT THE TIME
RAISING THE RUSSIAN SUBMARINE K129 FROM 17,000 FEET OFF THE OCEAN FLOOR
SUCCESSFUL COVERT MISSION OR 800 MILLION DOLLAR FIASCO??
KEPT SECRET FOR OVER 30 YEARS
177A



PLEASE READ BEFORE STARTING ENTIRE ARTICLE

This Article and the one directly following (# 177B) are directly related with each other. They tell the story of two (one Russian and One United States) submarines that were sunk within six months of each other in 1968 during the Cold War. Each government accused the other for the sinking's. There is no evidence that clarifies what really happened to either submarine. History has accepted this as a “standoff” between the super powers.

PERTINENT VIDEO'S:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jDqCb_83Xcg (Length – 2 min 51 sec)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wQEUVntrUSE#t=62> (Length 3 min 11 sec)

PART 1

SOURCE OF INFORMATION (PART 1)

The History Learning Web Site @ http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/project_azorian.htm

Article entitled: “The Nuclear Vault”

Project Azorian was the codename given to an American attempt during the Cold War to raise a sunken Soviet submarine. Project Azorian was approved in 1972 by the then US President, Richard Nixon, and remained secret for over thirty years. It was only after a Freedom of Information application in 2010 that the CIA released any information on Project Azorian.

Nuclear submarine supremacy was paramount during the later years of the Cold War. To a degree by the 1970's, ICBM's had become 'old hat' in the sense that it was assumed that both sides in the Cold War knew where ICBM bases were and could launch pre-emptive strikes against these bases when Cold War moved to Warm/Hot War. The era of the moveable Soviet SS-20 was yet to come, as was Ronald Reagan's unfulfilled dream of an underground missile base where missiles were constantly moved along underground railways so that their position could never be traced by the Soviet Union. However, nuclear submarines were a different proposition as they could stay on the bottom of the seabed undetected and could launch a nuclear attack, which would only be detected after the missiles had been launched.

It was generally believed that there was nothing that could be done against a nuclear missile launched from a submerged submarine. Therefore knowledge of what the 'other side' had in terms of submarine technology was considered vital. This was the rationale behind **Project Azorian**.

US Intelligence knew that a Soviet Golf-II submarine (K-129) had sunk in the Pacific, 1,560 miles northwest of Hawaii, in 1968.

A US Naval listening base on the Californian coastline used its records to track an explosion in the area to **March 8th 1968** and the whole area had seen a large Soviet naval presence over several weeks after the explosion, which the CIA concluded was a task force trying to pin down where K-129 had sunk.

No one knew why the submarine had sunk but it was known that there were three nuclear-armed ballistic missiles on board and two nuclear-armed torpedoes.

Knowledge of the guidance system in these missiles and the composition of the missiles would have been a huge coup to US Intelligence. Likewise any readable codebooks found would have been invaluable.

In 1972 Richard Nixon gave the go-ahead for Project Azorian – the attempt to bring K-129 to the surface – and the actual salvage operation started in 1974., six years after it's sinking. The project was helped by shipping and maritime mining company owned by Howard Hughes who already had a number of US defense contracts. In today's money the salvage operation would have cost over \$1 billion. **Senior military figures and government defense advisors were against the idea simply because the submarine was three miles down and the general opinion was that such an operation was impossible.**

However, the project has to be viewed against the background of the Cold War and US foreign policy experiences in the early 1970's. The US withdrawal from South Vietnam had been a national humiliation. The gloss put on 'Vietnamisation' could not disguise the fact that a rag-tag army of communists had defeated the powerful US military – as some areas of the US media had portrayed the victorious NVA and Viet Cong. The boost this whole episode gave to the Soviet propaganda machine was all but priceless and was thoroughly exploited.



What Nixon needed was something that would boost the US intelligence community's morale and raising K-129 served this purpose. What a technical achievement – raising a submarine from three miles down – it would have ranked very highly; in fact, **it was the deepest salvage operation ever carried out at the time.** As a national achievement – and a blow to the Soviet Union – it would also have ranked very highly as a successful Covert Action for the US.



Howard Hughes' 'Glomar Explorer'

In essence Project Azorian failed. Despite the use of Howard Hughes' 'Glomar Explorer' only a portion of the submarine was brought to the surface in August 1974. However, because of the covert nature of the operation ('Glomar Explorer' was a 'deep sea mining vessel' for the duration of its time in the Pacific) Nixon could not even exploit this as a national success.

Even today, no one outside of the US Intelligence community is quite sure what exactly was brought to the surface by 'Glomar Explorer' as the documents that have been released to the public in February 2010 has had much redacted.

However, it has been assumed by some that what was brought to the surface was of limited importance (the CIA called it "intangibly beneficial"). Others have concluded that if what was brought to the surface was of little importance why has it remained so secretive after all these years especially as the Golf-II submarine must now be considered something of a veteran in the world of submarines? Also if what was brought up was of little importance, why have areas of the now released documents been redacted? In later years a member of the crew of 'Global Explorer', David Sharp, wrote a book about his experiences during Project Azorian. However, over one-third of the book was not published on the advice, according to Sharp, of the CIA.



The Soviet Submarine K-129, diesel powered, and nuclear missile capable

In the era of Cold War frenzy any good news by either side was heavily exploited. However, Project Azorian was buried. The media did report it in 1975 when a journalist from the 'New York Times' broke the story. However, the tale was officially sold as 'Operation Jennifer' to deflect attention away from 'Project Azorian'. It is also thought that the then President, Gerald Ford, put a gag on all references to the project and despite a few mentions to it over the years the matter was seemingly closed. However, a Freedom of Information application has brought at least some of what happened during Project Azorian to the surface.

What did Project Azorian achieve? From an intelligence point of view, not many can answer that. However, the project did do a lot to boost knowledge in maritime heavy lifting technology and apparently, it did a lot to boost the morale in the US intelligence communities after a number of difficult years.

PART TWO

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION & SOURCE

The National Security Archive Website @ George Washington University.

<http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nukevault/ebb305/index.htm>

Unfortunately, the CIA made significant deletions from the text of the article, which makes it extremely difficult to accurately gauge just how successful "Project Azorian" was. For example, the CIA refused to declassify any information concerning the massive cost overruns, which threatened to shut down the program during its early stages. Subsequent reports estimate that as much as \$500 million (in 1974 dollars) were spent. Nor did the declassified portions of the CIA article answer the critically important questions of how much of the submarine the Hughes Glomar Explorer managed to bring to the surface, or what intelligence information was derived from the exploitation of the portions of the sub that were recovered. Unfortunately, this material apparently was either redacted from the text or not included because of the high classification assigned to this material.

So what can we surmise about what "Project Azorian" accomplished? Because the CIA article provides no answers to this critical question, the prevailing school of thought maintains that the project failed to accomplish its primary goals.

Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Seymour Hersh's March 1975 New York Times article reported that the mission was, in the opinion of senior U.S. Navy officials, a failure, because the CIA did not recover any of the K-129's SS-N-4 nuclear-armed ballistic missiles.

Sherry Sontag and Christopher Drew's 1998 book *Blind Man's Bluff* reported that only a 38-foot long forward section of the K-129 was recovered, including the sub's torpedo compartment and its store of Russian nuclear torpedoes.



The Method of Attempted Salvage

Ninety percent of the highly-fragile submarine, including the conning tower, missile compartment, control room, radio shack and engine room, broke free and fell back to the ocean floor, disintegrating on contact. "Back to the ocean floor went the intact [SS-N-4] nuclear missile, the codebooks, decoding machines, the burst transmitters. Everything the CIA most wanted to reclaim." And because only small fragments survived the disintegration of the submarine when it hit bottom, the CIA decided not to make a second attempt to retrieve what was left. Sontag and Drew argue that a Navy proposal to use a deep-sea submersible to probe the sunken vessel was never properly vetted, although it may have produced better results.

There apparently were some tangential benefits that accrued from the project. In June 1993, a panel of Russian experts prepared a report for President Boris Yeltsin, using only information made available to them by the Russian intelligence services, which concluded that the CIA recovered at least two nuclear-armed torpedoes from the portion of the K-129 that it managed to bring to the surface. According to the report, the level of plutonium radiation the CIA team on the Hughes Glomar Explorer encountered was consistent with two nuclear warheads. This conclusion is partially confirmed in the surviving text of the CIA article, which reported that Glomar Explorer's recovery crew had to deal with plutonium contamination once the sub was raised to the surface caused by the one-point detonation of the high explosive components of one or more of the K-129's nuclear torpedoes.

So was "Project Azorian" a waste of time and taxpayer money? We will not know for sure until the CIA declassifies the remainder of this article and other documents relating to this operation.

PART 3

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION & SOURCE

U.S. Navy Times Website

<http://www.navytimes.com/article/20070910/NEWS/709100312/U-S-gives-Russia-info-1968-sub-sinking>

It was unclear whether Monday's ceremony would help assuage the persistent suspicions that Russian naval officials and relatives have had about the fate of the K-129 — a Golf-II class, nuclear-missile armed, diesel-electric submarine that had 98 seamen on board when it sank in 16,000 feet of water northwest of the Hawaiian island of Oahu on March 11, 1968.

On June 16th, 1975, Kissinger sent a memorandum to President Ford:

It is now clear that the Soviets have no intention of allowing us to conduct a second mission without interference. A Soviet ocean-going tug has been on station at the target site since 28 March, and there is every indication that the Soviets intend to maintain a watch there.

Our recovery system is vulnerable to damage and incapacitation by the most innocent and frequent occurrences at sea—another boat coming too close or "inadvertently" bumping our ship.

Our recovery system is vulnerable to damage and incapacitation by the most innocent and frequent occurrences at sea—another boat coming too close or "inadvertently" bumping our ship. The threat of a more aggressive and hostile reaction would also be present, including a direct confrontation with Soviet navy vessels.

And with that, Project AZORIAN was terminated. The total cost of the operation: \$800 million, which, in current dollars, translates into more than \$3 billion. The Hughes Glomar Explorer would eventually be refitted to match its cover story and perform deep-sea drilling. It was sold to a private company in 2010 for \$15 million.

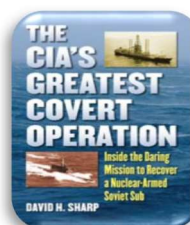
WILL WE EVER KNOW THE TRUTH?

(ANOTHER POSSIBILITY-ANOTHER STORY)

STILL ALIVE – WAS THE USS SCORPION INVOLVED?

Retired United States Navy Captain Peter Huchthausen, former naval attaché in Moscow, had a brief conversation in 1987 with Soviet admirals concerning K-129. Huchthausen states that Admiral Peter Navojtsev told him, "Captain, you are very young and inexperienced, but you will learn that there were some matters that both nations have agreed to not discuss, and one of these is the reasons we lost K-129.

In 1995, when Huchthausen began work on a book about the Soviet underwater fleet, he interviewed Admiral Victor Dygalo, who stated that the true history of K-129 has not been revealed because of the informal agreement between the two countries' senior naval commands. The purpose of that secrecy, he alleged, is to stop any further research into the losses of USS Scorpion and K-129. Huchthausen states that Dygalo told him to "overlook this matter, and hope that the time will come when the truth will be told to the families of the victims."



THE USS SWORDFISH STORY

American officers have refuted the Russian charge made early on that American nuclear attack submarine U.S.S. Swordfish was the U.S. submarine involved—a charge based solely on the latter's reported arrival in the Ship Repair Facility, Yokosuka, Japan, on 17 March 1968, with a badly damaged sail.

Retired U.S. Navy Admiral William D. Smith informed Dygalo by letter following an 31 August 1994, meeting of a Joint U.S./Russia Commission examining questions of Cold War and previous war missing, that the allegation of Swordfish's involvement was not correct and that Swordfish was nowhere near the Gulf on 8 March 1968.

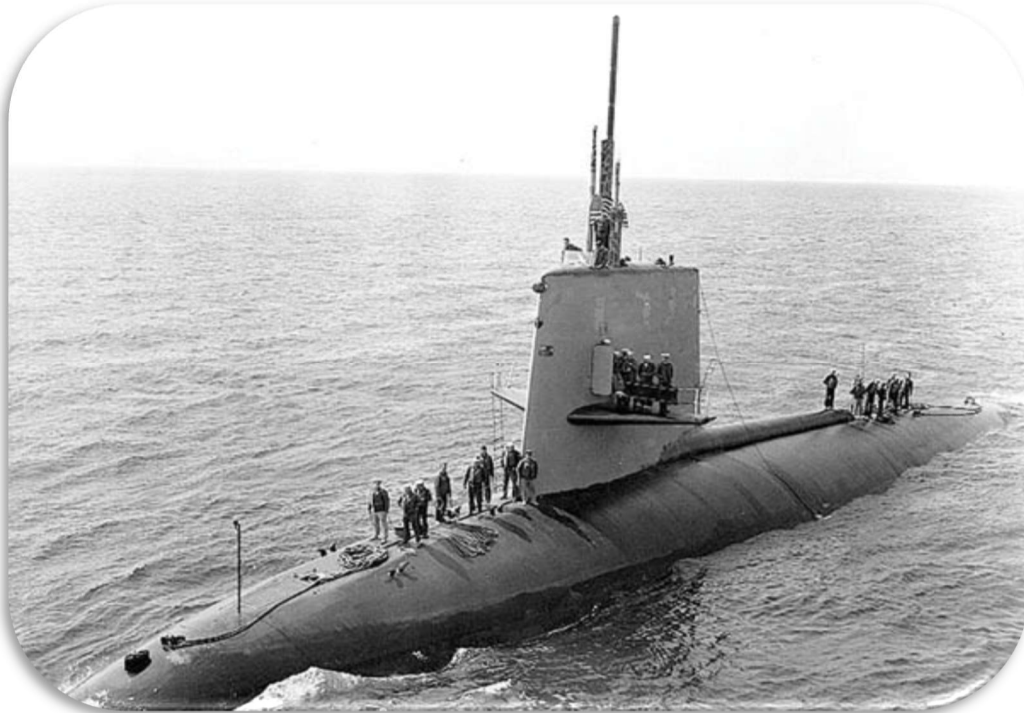
The joint commission, headed by General Volkogonov and Ambassador Toon, informed the Russians that no U.S. submarines on 8 March 1968, had been within 300 nautical miles (560 km) of the site where the K-129 was found.



THE COLD WAR – WE WILL PROBABLY NEVER KNOW WHAT WENT ON DURING THOSE YEARS

THE FATE OF THE USS NUCLEAR SUBMARINE SCORPION
SUNK ON MAY 27, 1968 - BY MECHANICAL PROBLEMS OR A RUSSIAN SUBMARINE?
ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF COLD WAR ATTEMPTED COVER-UPS - TRUTH IS NOT KNOWN TODAY
A MASS OF WORDS THAT SOLVE NOTHING

177B



USS Scorpion shortly before the final mission

VIDEO: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NJWHiPSvzh8>

The crisis exploded without warning across the sprawling U.S. Navy community in Norfolk, Virginia: A nuclear submarine and its crew had vanished in the Atlantic. On May 27, 1968, USS Scorpion (SSN 598) failed to return as scheduled to its home port at the destroyer-submarine pier complex at the southern end of the waterfront.

Within hours the sub's failure to arrive escalated into a major military crisis that spread to the Pentagon E-Ring and White House. From Atlantic Fleet headquarters to dozens of homes and apartments across Hampton Roads, a day of anticipation and celebration had suddenly turned into an open-ended vigil of fear and uncertainty.

Scorpion and its 99-man crew had left Norfolk on February 15 for a three-month Mediterranean deployment. The crew participated in several naval exercises with the U.S. Sixth Fleet and NATO, conducted ongoing reconnaissance of Soviet naval units in the Med, and paused to enjoy liberty at ports in Italy and Sicily before reentering the Atlantic for the homeward voyage on May 17. Scorpion's skipper, Commander Francis A. Slattery, had radioed Atlantic Submarine Force headquarters early on May 22 that the sub would arrive in Norfolk at 1 p.m. the following Monday, Memorial Day. Officials had released the arrival date 72 hours earlier and, despite a spring nor'easter that had swept the navy base with high winds and heavy rain, family members and Submarine Squadron 6 officials anticipated seeing the low silhouette of the Skipjack-class submarine coming into view on time.

The 1 p.m. arrival time came and went with no sign of Scorpion. Unknown to the families of the crew, the submarine's failure to break radio silence by late morning had already sparked concern that by early afternoon was swelling into near panic throughout the Atlantic Submarine Force headquarters staff. At 3:15 p.m. the navy made it official, transmitting a flash message over the Fleet Broadcast System to naval bases from Brunswick, Maine, to Jacksonville, Florida, and out to Bermuda, the Azores, and the Mediterranean. Its terse technical phrases meant only one thing: Scorpion was missing.

Executed Event SUBMISS at 271915Z for USS Scorpion ETA NORVA 271700Z....All submarine units surface or remain surfaced until this message cancelled. Units in port prepare to get underway on one hour's notice....

The curtain opened on what a navy admiral involved in the Scorpion incident would later describe as "one of the greatest unsolved sea mysteries of our era."

" The 251-foot-long submarine and its crew had inexplicably disappeared somewhere in the trackless Atlantic Ocean. **For four decades, the navy and U.S. intelligence communities have revealed little about the facts of the Scorpion sinking, citing the need to protect military secrets.**

The full account of its loss has continued to elude and frustrate researchers, journalists, and family members of the 99 sailors who died aboard the sub. But a careful reexamination of the public record—as well as interviews with former U.S. and Soviet military officials, men involved in the search for the sub, and sailors stationed on Polaris missile submarines on patrol in 1968—**suggests the sinking may not have been an accident. Instead, it may have been the outcome of a deadly Cold War confrontation between the U.S. and the Soviet Union that both sides chose to bury at the bottom of the sea.**

As documented in press accounts, U.S. Navy situation reports, and the official court of inquiry convened to probe the incident, by nightfall on that Memorial Day, Atlantic Fleet commander Admiral Ephraim P. Holmes had ordered what would become the largest U.S. naval operation since the Cuban Missile Crisis six years earlier. Officials announced that Vice Admiral Arnold F. Schade, the Atlantic Submarine Force commander, was out at sea in the Atlantic in the Connecticut-based nuclear attack submarine USS Pargo (SSN 650), and had directed it to head south at full speed for the Virginia Capes to organize a search of the shallow waters off the East Coast.

Meanwhile, the first members of what would become a task force of nearly sixty ships and submarines and dozens of land-based patrol aircraft raced into the Atlantic that Monday night to search for the missing sub. For nine days the searchers scoured the ocean from the continental shelf to the Azores, looking for any sign of Scorpion. They failed to find a single clue. **Nine days later, on June 5, Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, chief of naval operations, declared that both submarine and crew were "presumed lost."**

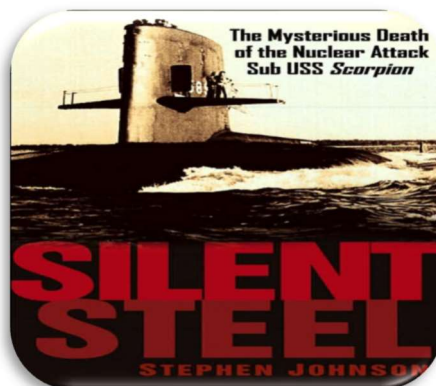
Throughout June and July 1968, two Scorpion investigations proceeded on parallel paths. A small group of scientific research and support ships headed by the oceanographic research vessel USNS Mizar (T-AGOR 11) scoured an "area of special interest" southwest of the Azores that scientists had identified by examining underwater signals that they believed came from the submarine's sinking at 1844Z (GMT) on Wednesday, May 22.

In Norfolk a seven-member court of inquiry convened on June 5 to probe Scorpion's disappearance. In his message appointing retired Vice Admiral Bernard L. Austin president of the Scorpion investigation, Admiral Holmes set out the inquest's mission: "The Court is directed to inquire into all the facts and circumstances connected with the disappearance of the Scorpion; death of, or injuries to personnel aboard...**and to fix responsibility for the incident.** After deliberation, the Court shall submit its findings of fact, opinions and recommendations."

The seven-member panel had legal powers equivalent to those of a civilian grand jury, and the authority to review classified information up to the level of top secret. Its mandate did not include determining criminal guilt or innocence. The court's chief function was to determine the facts. During eleven weeks of hearings—most of them closed to the press and public due to the classified information under examination—**the court took sworn testimony from ninety witnesses and reviewed 232 separate exhibits.**

By mid-August, the court had scoured the submarine's operational and administrative history, reviewed detailed records of its two shipyard overhaul periods since joining the fleet in 1960, examined what records were available on the Mediterranean deployment, and received updates on Mizar's ongoing "technical" search in the eastern Atlantic. After huddling for two weeks, the panel completed an initial report of over eighteen hundred pages—classified top secret at the time—that Admiral Austin submitted to the navy's uniformed leadership for review.

Two months later came stunning news: On October 30, 1968, the navy announced that Mizar had found the wreckage of Scorpion. A towed sled gliding fifteen feet above the ocean floor at the end of a three-mile cable had photographed the sub's broken hull. Several thousand images of the site were rushed back to the United States, where the hastily reconvened court of inquiry met with navy photo analysts to see if the new evidence might lead them to a firm conclusion as to what had caused Scorpion's destruction.



On January 31, 1969, the navy tersely announced an unclassified summary of the court's findings. In effect, Admiral Austin and his fellow panelists had thrown up their hands. Their conclusion: "The certain cause of the loss of Scorpion cannot be ascertained by any evidence now available." For the Scorpion families and many navy personnel, the court's findings were a major disappointment.

The court did rule out foul play, an underwater collision with an undersea mountain, and a reactor malfunction, and expressed confidence in the crew's training, the submarine's overall material condition, and the safety of its torpedoes.

By implication, the court let stand an unstated premise that some unconfirmed mechanical malfunction had sent the submarine plunging to the Atlantic abyssal plain two miles down.

For fifteen years afterward, that was the extent of what the navy, submarine service, Scorpion families, and the public knew about what had happened to the sub and its crew. Citing the operational requirements of the nuclear submarine force and the sensitivity of all information on the Skipjack-class submarine's capabilities, the navy kept the Scorpion archive locked away in a top-secret vault.

However, when I talked with Admiral Schade, the retired Atlantic Submarine Force commander, fifteen years after Scorpion's mysterious demise, he lifted a corner of the navy's opaque security cloak that had long concealed most details of the incident. In an interview for a fifteenth-anniversary retrospective article on the tragedy, Schade offered up details of events in May 1968 that contradicted the official account of the sub's disappearance.

Despite the many unknowns that still kept the Scorpion narrative incomplete, on one key point U.S. Navy officials, reporters, ordinary sailors, and family members had all agreed: The crisis had flared up suddenly—on that May 27, after Scorpion's 1 p.m. arrival time passed with no sign of the submarine. Slattery had announced the arrival date and time in an encrypted message to Atlantic Submarine Force headquarters composed late on May 21.

Officials briefing reporters in the hectic first days of the Scorpion search had related the sub's last known position as 29:19 north 27:37 west, about 400 miles southwest of the Azores. The message, officials said, also included Slattery's homeward course track. Admiral Schade and other staff officers who appeared before the court of inquiry said the same thing: The crisis had begun on May 27.

Captain Wallace A. Greene, who as Submarine Division 62 commander in 1968 was responsible for Scorpion and three other nuclear attack boats, remained adamant on that point many years later: "There was no reason for us to have been the slightest concerned for her safety." Schade himself had flown to Connecticut earlier that Monday morning for the ride on Pargo.

A second premise on which all officials agreed was that Scorpion had been operating under radio silence following the transmission of the May 21 message, a common practice for submarines at sea. This explained why there was no concern in Schade's headquarters in Norfolk over the lack of messages from the submarine during the five-day period between the actual sinking on May 22 and its scheduled arrival on Memorial Day. In his own testimony to the court of inquiry on June 5, Schade minimized the significance of his command's lack of awareness that anything had happened to Scorpion: "Polaris subs go on 60-day patrol and never broadcast," he explained to the court.

But when he talked with me in April 1983, Schade revealed that Scorpion's radio silence had in fact been a cause for concern. He disclosed that the Atlantic Fleet had actually launched a highly classified search for Scorpion sometime shortly after May 22. When pressed, he said the submarine's failure to respond to a message from his headquarters prompted the alert. "We got that position report," Schade said of the May 21 Scorpion message. "That was the basis for our initial search operation. But that was really all we had and we didn't consider that too significant, other than just as the last known position that we actually had. They were due to report in to us shortly thereafter. It was at that time we got a little suspicious, because they did not report, they did not check in, and then, when we got to the time limit of their 'check-in,' they were first reported as overdue."



Bow wreckage of the Scorpion underwater after wreck

Pressed on this point, Schade elaborated: "As far as we were concerned, all was clear and she should have kept coming and then within about 24 hours after that she should have given us a rather long, windy resume of her operations and what she would need upon her return to port...you know, transition from one command to another, homeward-bound voyage. We have absolute confidence in our communications, both in the reception and the response and when they did not respond, almost immediately that's when we first became suspicious, that's when we followed up with other messages, and really, it was just a matter of hours that we became somewhat concerned."

The admiral's revelations suggested that there was a lot more to the story of what had happened to Scorpion than the navy had publicly revealed. Moreover, it became apparent that winnowing out the actual Scorpion story from the official account would take more than a recitation of known facts and newly released details.

To begin with, a veil of secrecy surrounded Scorpion's final operational assignment before it sank on May 22. Shortly after reentering the Atlantic, Schade diverted Scorpion nearly twelve hundred miles south of its homeward track to conduct surveillance on a group of Soviet warships—including at least one nuclear submarine—operating near the Canary Islands off the northwest coast of Africa. The court of inquiry noted the presence of the Soviet ships but was silent on whether or not Scorpion had conducted any surveillance against them, noting only that the evidence it had reviewed showed no indication of hostile Soviet acts. *Schade in 1983 told me he had indeed dispatched Commander Slattery to spy on the Soviets, but backpedaled on whether or not the mission had actually occurred. Navy officials and declassified documents paint contradictory conclusions, with some asserting that the mission took place and others denying it.*

Nevertheless, the pre-May 27 search revealed by Schade remained a key for penetrating the navy's security cloak on the Scorpion incident. Two other senior admirals serving in 1968—Thomas A. Moorer and Philip A. Beshany—confirmed during on-the-record interviews that the secret search had indeed taken place. Moreover, sailors on several Atlantic Fleet ships that participated in that classified hunt later provided compelling details of a sudden scramble to sea four days before May 27, so abrupt that in at least two instances it resulted in large numbers of the ships' crews being left behind.

The significance of the secret Scorpion search was pivotal to uncovering the details of what had really happened to the sub. Schade and Admiral Moorer, the chief of naval operations at the time, had both explained that the secret search effort was a precautionary step ordered after their concern had grown over the submarine's failure to respond to messages. They explained the navy's failure to subsequently reveal the existence of that search—even when Scorpion's disappearance could no longer be concealed after May 27—as an effort not to further upset the grief-stricken families.

That rationalization, however, failed to explain why Schade and others did not reveal the secret search to the court of inquiry charged with determining what had happened to Scorpion. *To this day, the official navy line is that such a search never took place.*

Troubling mysteries also surround the five-month span between the time the navy declared the submarine presumed lost on June 5 and the announced discovery of the wreckage two miles down in the eastern Atlantic on October 30. Responding to acoustic evidence, the "focused operations" search involving Mizar initially plotted an area about twelve miles by twelve miles wide in what was believed to be Scorpion's final resting spot, several hundred miles southwest of the Azores



Scorpions Logo

As the weeks turned into months, the ship doggedly dragged a sled mounted with strobe lights, cameras, magnetometers, and sonar transducers across the seabed in the search area. It was, one official later recalled, "like looking through a soda straw to find a lost contact lens in the front yard, at midnight in the rain." With little sign of progress, the tragedy eventually faded from the newspaper pages and public interest waned. Then, on October 30, came the stunning news: The navy announced that the searchers had located the lost sub's hull. Thousands of images of the torn hull photographed by Mizar's towed sled provided the navy with new evidence in its search for a cause of the sinking.

In retrospect, it appears that this dramatic five-month technical search for Scorpion was an elaborate charade. During a span of fourteen years (1993-2007), several dozen participants in the classified pre-May 27 search, the highly publicized open-ocean search-and-rescue mission, and the Mizar search have admitted that the navy actually knew where the Scorpion wreckage lay on the Atlantic seabed from the outset.

Why did the navy not merely announce the discovery of the submarine when it actually occurred in early June 1968? One possibility is that the five-month Mizar search was carried out to make it appear that the submarine's loss was an accident and the searchers had no specific idea where it had gone down. That five-month timeline conformed to the known limitations in naval deep-ocean search technology at the time. With the same technology, it had taken the navy fourteen months to find the debris of the nuclear submarine USS Thresher (SSN 593) after it sank in April 1963—even though a submarine rescue ship was in voice contact with Thresher immediately before it sank and had a precise navigational fix on the location of that 1963 mishap.

With the Scorpion wreckage now officially found, the court of inquiry wrapped up its investigation, issuing a final report on January 31, 1969, concluding that even with the photographic evidence, the "certain cause" for the loss remained unknown. The court privately elaborated on that conclusion—in a secret section of its findings that would not be declassified and released for twenty-five years—that the most likely cause of the sinking was a runaway Mark 37 torpedo that was accidentally launched by Scorpion itself and turned on the submarine, homing in and striking it.

Skeptics offer an alternative explanation. They speculate that the sub had in fact been attacked and destroyed by a Soviet submarine in revenge, because Soviet officials believed that the U.S. Navy had been complicit in the sinking of the Golf II-class missile submarine K-129 in the Pacific on March 7, 1968. That was the sub that the CIA-financed ship Glomar Explorer attempted to lift off the Pacific seabed in the mid-1970s. (Covered in above article)



Support for this theory comes from the accounts of sailors at shore stations, on surface ships, and even aboard submerged missile submarines on patrol who have broken the official silence about the incident in recent years. They have disclosed that Scorpion had radioed Norfolk that it was being followed by a Soviet submarine and could not evade it—right before communications suddenly ended.

In face-to-face interviews, telephone calls, e-mails, and correspondence since 1998, dozens of former naval officers and enlisted men have provided new information about Scorpion's final days. Taken together, their testimonials depict a steadily growing crisis over Scorpion that began when the Norfolk-based sub reentered the Atlantic on May 17, 1968, and culminated in a confrontation five days later that left it at the bottom of the ocean.

Rear Admiral Philip A. Beshany, who was serving as director of submarine warfare on Moorer's staff when Scorpion suddenly disappeared, provided a critical piece of the puzzle that neither Admirals Schade nor Moorer had ever revealed: In all likelihood, the Scorpion surveillance mission against the Soviet warships off the Canary Islands had been blown.

"There was a lot of classified material relating to the Soviet group [circulating in the Pentagon at the time]," Beshany explained. "In fact, there was some concern that the Scorpion might have been trailed and sunk by them, that they had tracked our submarine and decided [it] had seen things they didn't want divulged.... They had been alerted to the presence of Scorpion.

They [U.S. intelligence and navy officials] had reason to believe at that time...that they might have detected her, trailed her and decided they would just eliminate her. "Beshany said the information was at a level of classification so high that he and his colleagues would sometimes jest that it was a "burn before you read category."

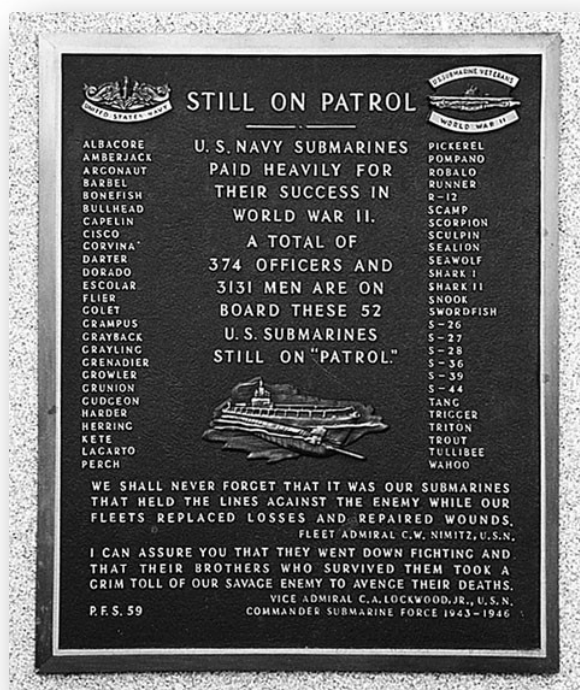
Moreover, dozens of individuals who had been drawn into the Scorpion search at sea the week of May 20, 1968, provided explicit and repeated confirmation of Beshany's disclosure. When, at Schade's request, Admiral Holmes ordered surface ships and submarines to hunt for Scorpion during the week of May 20, his alert message included specific reference to the fact that the Soviets were trailing Scorpion. The message also said that the American sub had sent a message to Norfolk saying it was unable to elude its shadower. On surface ships, in subs, and in squadron ready rooms, sailors of all ranks and duties were aware of the ongoing encounter between Scorpion and the Soviet sub. Indeed, word that Scorpion had reported its inability to shake the Soviet submarine was so hot that it rocketed over the Navy Fleet Broadcast System to Polaris submarines on patrol. Two Polaris sub crewmen provided me with examples of the details of the ongoing Scorpion confrontation that they had learned as the crisis grew.

Ron Rule was a storekeeper on USS Nathanael Greene (SSBN 636), patrolling the North Atlantic during the week of May 20, when his commanding officer made an announcement over the ship's 1MC loudspeaker.

"What I remember about the incident is the announcement over the 1MC that the Scorpion was missing. Obviously, this was a very sobering announcement, and it had an immediate effect on all of us," Rule recalled. "A very somber mood immediately came over all of us."

He remembered that the information the commanding officer relayed to Nathanael Greene's crew was explicit and detailed: "The announcement continued that what was known about Scorpion was that she was in transit back to the United States after her mission, and that she thought she was being tailed and asked for instructions as to what to do, e.g., go check it out or simply continue in transit. We were told that that was the last that was heard from her. I remember thinking and talking about the possible scenarios, 'Russian submarine' being foremost on most, if not all, of our minds."

Another Nathanael Greene crewman confirmed Rule's account. Frank Greene said he learned of Scorpion even before the formal announcement. "I was a quartermaster, and all information generally flowed through us pertaining to navigation. Word spreads quickly among a crew of 130," he said. Nathanael Greene was returning to its home port in Charleston, South Carolina, from a seventy-day patrol when the message about Scorpion came in, Greene recalled. "We were nearing Bermuda," he said, "when we received orders from Subflot 6 to plot new courses in order to assist in the search for USS Scorpion." Greene concluded that the sub had been sunk by a Soviet torpedo. "The U.S. Navy has listening devices all over the floor of the ocean and taped everything.



USS Scorpion – "Still on Patrol"

Despite official denials, several informed sources allege the top-secret Sound Surveillance System (SOSUS) had indeed recorded an underwater duel between Scorpion and a Soviet submarine that ended when the Soviet launched a torpedo that struck and sank the American submarine. One former SOSUS operator, Vince Collier, came forward decades later to tell in chilling detail how he and other sailors in SOSUS School were shown a bootleg copy of the tape that graphically depicted the death of Scorpion.

The instructor who played the tape, Ocean Systems Technician Analyst First Class Richard Falck, confirmed the details in an on-the-record interview. Former SOSUS officials revealed that within hours of the sinking, the navy raided SOSUS facilities worldwide to seize all evidence—hydro-acoustic tapes, "lofargram" printouts, and documents—that pointed to the Soviet attack on Scorpion.

If the Soviets did in fact sink the Scorpion, navy officials at the time surely would have been mystified at how the Soviets could have overcome the clear technological superiority of an American nuclear submarine. They would not learn for nearly two decades a critical "unknown unknown"—in former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's now-famous phrase—that the only operational U.S. nuclear submarine to be lost at sea may have been caught up in a massive Soviet intelligence operation.

By early 1968 that operation had led to the seizure of the electronic reconnaissance ship USS Pueblo and produced the infamous Walker Spy Ring, which ripped open the navy's top-secret coded communications channels to Soviet intelligence, until the conspirators were identified and arrested in 1985.

Captain Peter Huchthausen, a former U.S. naval attaché to the Soviet Union during the early 1980s, revealed during a series of interviews with me that he was convinced the U.S. and Soviet navies had quickly reached a highly classified accord soon after the Scorpion sinking.

Conversations with top Russian officials, including Vice Admiral Ivan M. Komarov, led him to conclude that the U.S. and the Soviet Union had agreed to suppress evidence about the demise of Scorpion, as well as the sinking of the Soviet sub K-129 a few weeks earlier, in order to forestall a politico-military crisis that could easily have flared into a general war between the two countries. Huchthausen had a subsequent conversation, after his retirement from active service, with retired Admiral Viktor A. Dyaglo, who in 1968 had commanded the Soviet submarine division to which K-129 had been attached. Huchhausen claimed Dyaglo told him there "was an unofficial agreement by senior submariners on both sides" that would prevent anyone from ever learning the full account of what had caused the two submarine sinkings.

The Scorpion incident did not occur in a vacuum. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, scores of top-secret U.S. reconnaissance aircraft were attacked and some were shot down while attempting to spy on Soviet military capabilities. The U.S. Navy conducted aggressive tactics using submarines to spy on their Soviet counterparts. The Soviets in turn used spies and their military allies to wage limited war against America, as new information about the seizure of Pueblo shows.

A popular historical theory of the Cold War is that fear of nuclear war deterred the United States and the Soviet Union from engaging in a direct military confrontation. What the Scorpion incident suggests is that rather than preventing such confrontations, it merely drove them into the shadows.

As the final statement extracted from another website says.... despite the myriad of data and pictures collected and studied, the cause of the loss remains a mystery.

Apparently of no significance it was noted that the USS had an accident just five weeks before it sank. The record shows:

USS SCORPION collides with a barge during a storm in Naples harbor. The SCORPION was alongside the barge which was used as a buffer between the submarine and another US warship. The barge and the SCORPION's stern came together and then the barge was swamped and went down. SCORPION returned to Naples on April 20 and divers descending to untangle a fishing line from SCORPION's propeller made a partial inspection of SCORPION's hull and reported no damage.



Located in the heart of Patriots Point, the Cold War Submarine Memorial is an enduring tribute to the dedicated men who served in our naval submarines during the Cold War from 1947-1989.

AND THE COLD WAR SECRETS GO ON AND ON AND ON