

## Sunken Soviet sub got a lift from CIA in 1974

BY CALVIN WOODWARD

In 1974, far out in the Pacific, a U.S. ship pretending to be a deep-sea mining vessel fished a sunken Soviet nuclear-armed submarine out of the ocean depths, took what it could of the wreck and made off to Hawaii with its purloined prize.

Now, Washington is owning up to Project Azorian, a brazen mission from the days of high-stakes Cold War rivalry.

After more than 30 years of refusing to confirm what the world already knew, the CIA has released an internal account of Project Azorian, though with details taken out. The account surfaced Friday at the hands of private researchers from the National Security Archive who used the Freedom of Information Act to get the information declassified.

The document is a 50-page article quietly published in the fall 1985 edition of Studies in Intelligence, the CIA's in-house journal that outsiders rarely get to see.

In it, the CIA describes a mission of staggering expense and improbable engineering feats that culminated in August 1974 when the Hughes Glomar Explorer retrieved a portion of the submarine, K-129.

"It's a pretty meaty description of the operation from inception to death," said Matthew Aid, the researcher who had been seeking the article since 2007, when he learned of its publication in a footnote he spotted in other documents. "But what's missing in the end is, what did we get for it? The answer is, we still don't know."

Journalists broke the story in 1975, led by Seymour Hersh, then of the New York Times.

The disclosed sections of the document hint that not much of value was found. It claims only "intangibly beneficial" results, such as a boost in morale among intelligence officers and advances in heavy-lift technology at sea — an assertion that does not point to a trove of intelligence.

"Lifting a submarine weighing approximately 1,750 tons from a depth of 16,500 feet had never been attempted or accomplished anywhere before," the document says. "A government or organization too timid to undertake calculable risks in pursuit of a proper objective would not be true to itself or to the people it serves." To researchers, that sounds like bureaucratic justification for a project thought to have cost over \$1.5 billion in today's dollars.

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