

1 JUNE 1975

Unsolved: Mystery of three sunken subs

WASHINGTON [UPI]—Two submarines, one American and the other Russian, went three miles down with their crews to the bottom of oceans half a world apart in the spring of 1968.

Seven years later, Washington officials apparently know less about what happened to the USS Scorpion, which went down in the Atlantic, than they do about the Soviet submarine in the Pacific, part of which was raised in a secret Central Intelligence Agency operation costing \$135 million.

The Scorpion, skippered by 36-year-old Comdr. Francis Slattery and carrying 98 crew members, nuclear-tipped missiles, and torpedo warheads, was returning to Norfolk, Va., after a three-month tour with the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean.

SLATTERY'S LAST authenticated message, received May 21, 1968, gave Scorpion's position as 250 miles south of the Azores. He had indicated he expected to complete the 2,100-mile underwater cruise about May 27.

On May 29, when the 252-foot vessel was two days overdue at Norfolk, the U. S. Navy reported it officially missing. A task

force of 55 ships and 35 aircraft spent 10 fruitless days searching the Scorpion's planned route between Norfolk and its last reported position off the Azores. The Navy then declared the craft "presumed lost."

But on Oct. 31, it was announced that the Mizar, a Navy oceanographic research ship, had located the Scorpion more than 10,000 feet below the surface about 400 miles southwest of the Azores. The Mizar previously had found the wreckage of the nuclear submarine Thresher, which sank off Cape Cod, Mass., in April, 1963, with 129 men aboard in 7,800 feet of water.

PHOTOGRAPHS FROM cameras lowered on cables showed that the Scorpion's hull was broken in two, completely flooded, and lying on its side amid scattered debris.

No attempts were made to salvage either the Scorpion or Thresher at the time, partly because both were in pieces and because it was technologically impossible to raise them from those depths.

But by last June, with the help of special salvage craft secretly built by the Howard Hughes organization, the CIA was able to recover part of the

diesel-powered Soviet submarine from 10,000 feet, along with some of the bodies of the more than 80 Russians aboard.

THE NAVY now presumably could salvage at least part of the Scorpion and Thresher wreckage if it wanted to. The Pentagon says it has no plans to salvage either one.

A Naval court of inquiry which met for 11 weeks could not determine any cause for the Scorpion's loss. Among its conclusions, the court said the boat's nuclear reactor was not at fault and there was no evidence of foul play, sabotage or collision.

What did happen to the \$40 million Scorpion, launched at Groton, Conn., in December, 1959, as the fastest and most maneuverable attack submarine yet built?

THE NAVY after a court of inquiry, ruled only that the Thresher "most likely" sank because of a piping system failure that allowed flooding of the engine room.

The last time the Pentagon commented about the Scorpion was Oct. 27, 1970.

"The investigation is completed," a spokesman said then. "No further information is forthcoming."