

# BOMB RECOVERY

## BEGUN BY U.S.

NY TIMES 3/19

But Aides Say Object May Not Be Lost Weapon — Russians Skeptical

By TAD SZULC

Special to The New York Times.

MADRID, March 18—Specialized vessels and midget submarines of the United States Navy began today the arduous task of recovering "Object No. 261"—which may be the long-missing hydrogen bomb—from the Mediterranean near the Spanish coast.

United States officials in Madrid were virtually certain last night, on the basis of reports from the search area, that the object that had been located early Wednesday by Alvin, the two-man submarine, in 2,500 feet of water actually was the unarmed high-megaton bomb.

But high officials returning tonight from Palomares, the search headquarters, cautioned that it was not yet "100 per cent certain" that the nuclear weapon had been located after the two-month hunt.

They said it might be necessary to lift the object to the surface, a task that might take several days in the squally Mediterranean, before "final and positive identification" could be made. The object lies on an underwater slope some six miles from the Spanish coast.

### Lost in Air Collision

The bomb, which is believed to be shrouded in its parachute, was lost in the Jan. 17 midair collision off Palomares between a B-52 bomber and a KC-135 refueling tanker.

Following the crash, four un-

ed hydrogen bombs fell in-

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# SECRECY IMPOSED ON BOMB SALVAGE

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mersibles and three specialized ships will be used.

The Alvin, a 22-foot craft that can go down to 6,000 feet below the surface, is equipped with mechanical arms that can, if required, "put a line around this bomb," one Navy officer said tonight.

The Alvin reportedly made contact with the object through its sonar equipment. Subsequently, it photographed it with its closed-circuit television system, recording it on magnetic tape.

Preliminary interpretation of the underwater photographs suggest that the bomb—assuming it is one—is intact and did not release any radioactivity from its plutonium core.

### Russians Are Skeptical

Special to The New York Times.

MOSCOW, March 18—The Russians expressed skepticism today over the United States report that a submarine had

found the hydrogen bomb missing off the coast of Spain.

The Government newspaper, Izvestia, urged the creation of an international commission to verify the discovery and to observe the raising of the weapon. The commission also would determine whether the bomb had caused radio active contamination of the sea.

"It is possible that the United States has succeeded in finding the lost nuclear bomb," the newspaper conceded. "However, suspicion is aroused by the haste with which it was announced that the bomb was not dangerous."

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# A-Device Reported Near Recovery

PALOMARES, Spain, March 18 (UPI) — The operation to recover a missing nuclear device lying in 2,500 feet of water off Palomares "is going smoothly" and the weapon should be recovered within the next 36 hours, an informed source said Friday.

Any abrupt change in the weather, however, could hamper the operation and cause a delay in bringing up the weapon that was lost in the crash of a B52 two months ago near this village.

Although there has been no official announcement that the device has been located, it was learned Thursday that the 22-foot two-man submarine Alvin had located the weapon and that it was intact.