

Despite reports to the contrary, the experts could not tell from photographs that this was indeed the bomb—the first H-bomb the United States had ever lost.

But the Navy proceeded on the assumption that it was.

The day of the first sighting, Admiral Guest sent Washington officials a terse alert: "Watch for my message."

Half an hour later came a second, rather understated message which told what the world wanted to know:

"We think we have had an interesting contact."

It was contact Number 261 and it was the bomb—but no one knew for sure until Thursday.

New York Herald Tribune
9 Apr 1966

First H-Bomb Photo



Associated Press wirephoto

THE LOST HYDROGEN BOMB is photographed in the waters of the Mediterranean as it is raised from the bottom wrapped in its parachute. Radar device on the vehicle that raised it protrudes at the bottom of the picture in the foreground. Yesterday, 100 newsmen and photographers were permitted to view the bomb as it rested in a wooden cradle on the deck of the recovery ship Petrel.

Albuquerque Journal
9 Apr 1966

Rescued H-Bomb Put on Display For All to See

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PALOMARES BEACH, Spain (AP) — The United States put on public display here one of its most secret weapons — a hydrogen bomb.

Nestled in a wooden cradle aboard the submarine rescue ship Petrel, the bomb was unveiled to show the people of southeastern Spain — and the world — that the last of four such weapons lost in the crash of a B52 bomber here last Jan. 17 had indeed been recovered from the depths of the sea.

Rear Adm. William A. Guest was host at the "coming out" party. With what he called "the world's best underwater equipment," the bomb was pulled Thursday from a tricky underwater slope 2850 feet down, where it had been lodged for 80 days.

Until the weapon was recovered, all military personnel had referred to it only as "that unidentified object with a parachute" or "Contact No. 261." Friday they not only spoke openly of the H-bomb but permitted photographers to photograph it and newsmen to look at it and ask questions.

The Palomares H-bomb appeared as seen from the Task Force 65 flagship to be about 12 feet in length and more than two feet in diameter, resembling in size and formation a submarine torpedo.

Adm. Guest estimated its weight at about 16,000 pounds, but declined to say what nuclear power it packed. Some reported it was 20 megatons, others, only one megaton. The best official "guidance" available was that it was closer to the latter.

Once given the public display to quiet Soviet and other critics, the H-bomb was to be returned to the United States for laboratory dissection to determine the effects upon it of the fall and the long submersion in salt water.