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PUBLIC RELATIONS ASPECTS OF A MAJOR DISASTER:
A CASE STUDY OF THE LOSS OF USS THRESHER

JOSEPH WILLIAM STIERMAN, JR.

Thesis
S723

BOSTON UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF PUBLIC COMMUNICATION

PUBLIC RELATIONS ASPECTS OF A MAJOR DISASTER:
A CASE STUDY OF THE LOSS OF USS THRESHER

by

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//
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A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirement for the degree
of Master of Science
in Public Relations

May, 1964

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FOREWORD

Almost as soon as the loss of the nuclear submarine USS Thresher, with a crew of 129 men, had been confirmed, the author began investigating the possibility of preparing an extensive study of the public relations aspects of this disaster. A study of public relations matters associated with a disastrous explosion aboard an aircraft carrier in the Boston Naval Shipyard in 1950, prepared by Lieutenant E.L. Castillo, United States Navy, has proven to be of great value in the curriculum of the Navy's journalist school, and suggested the study of the loss of THRESHER. With assurances of cooperation from Navy public information officials in Washington and Boston, the study began.

In the months that have followed, the author has received the complete cooperation not only of Navy officials, but also of newsmen who covered various aspects of the story of the loss of THRESHER. Their cooperation and candor have been, in some instances, surprising, and in all instances, gratifying. Without their assistance this study could not have been complete. It could not have been accomplished at all if the author had not been studying at Boston University during this period, under a program administered by the Naval Postgraduate School, Monterrey, California.

As the story of the loss, search for and investigation of the submarine has developed, the author, on several occasions, was given the opportunity of working with the press in his ca-

capacity as a Navy public information officer. The opportunity to deal with newsmen and Navy officials during a period of stress has provided material that could never have been obtained in interviews conducted subsequently. For providing these opportunities, and for their helpful commentary on the entire sequence of events, the author is especially indebted to Commander George Hall, United States Navy, public information officer for the First Naval District, and Commander James Gormsen, United States Navy, the specially-appointed public information officer for the court of inquiry which investigated the loss of the submarine.

The cooperation of these individuals is gratefully acknowledged, although the responsibility for the contents of this study rests entirely with the author. It should be specifically noted that this study does not necessarily constitute the official views of the Department of the Navy.

PREFACE

Organization of the Department of the Navy

The requirements of maintaining a large seagoing force supported by an equally extensive land organization have led the Navy to adopt a unique administrative organization. The following description of the organization, as it existed in April, 1963, is designed to assist the reader who is unfamiliar with the Navy.

The Department of the navy is divided into three principal parts:

(1) The Operating Forces, which include most of the forces afloat along with a few specified land activities, whose identification is not essential to this study.

(2) The Navy Department, or central executive agency, located at the seat of government.

(3) The Shore Establishment, consisting of all remaining activities.

The responsibility for the direction of the Department of the Navy rests with the Secretary of the Navy, who is appointed by the President of the United States, and reports to him through the Secretary of Defense.

The Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) is the senior military officer of the Department of the Navy.

Although the Secretary of the Navy retains policy control over the Navy, he has delegated some of his authority; for

instance, the Chief of Naval Operations is responsible for the military direction of the Navy. The Secretary retains direction of "business" activities, and, pertinent to this study, of public relations, legislative affairs and morale and welfare of personnel of the department.

For administration, the operating forces are divided into fleets according to area of operation (e.g. Atlantic and Pacific), and, within the fleets, into smaller forces according to ship type and function (e.g. Destroyer and Cruiser Force, Submarine Force or Amphibious Force.)

The Commander in Chief, United States Atlantic Fleet (CINCLANTFLT) is in command of all operating forces mentioned in this study. He is a full admiral, with headquarters in Norfolk, Virginia. Subordinate commanders include: Commander, Submarine Force, United States Atlantic Fleet (COMSUBLANT), a vice admiral, with headquarters in Norfolk, Virginia; Commander, Destroyer and Cruiser Force, United States Atlantic Fleet (COMCRUDESANT), a rear admiral, with headquarters in Newport, Rhode Island; and Commander, Amphibious Force, United States Atlantic Fleet (COMPHIBLANT), a vice admiral, with headquarters in Little Creek, Virginia.

For administration of the shore establishment, the continental United States is divided into ten geographical areas called Naval Districts. Each district is headed by a rear admiral, whose title is Commandant. The Commandant exercises military control over all shore activities in his district, though normally he does not command fleet units. The New England States all fall into the First Naval District. The Commandant of the

First Naval District (COMONE), has headquarters in Boston, Massachusetts.

Public Information Organization

The Army, Navy and Air Force each conduct their own public information program, receiving broad policy guidance from the Department of Defense. All military information released at the seat of government must be coordinated with the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs.

Within the Navy, the Secretary of the Navy maintains immediate supervision of those activities "which involve vital relationships with the public."¹

The Chief of Naval Operations is responsible for assuring the effective implementation of the public information policies of the Secretary of the Navy within all units of the operating forces and certain other units under his command.

The Chief of Information (CHINFO), however, is the direct representative of the Secretary and the Chief of Naval Operations in all matters of public information. The Chief of Information is a rear admiral who directs the operations of the Office of Information, which consists of about 100 persons located in the Pentagon building in Washington, D.C. Not only is the Chief of Information an advisor on public information policies and programs, but, through his office, information and regulations on such matters is disseminated throughout the Navy. Members of his

¹Navy Public Information Manual, NAVEXOS P-1305 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1955), p. 7.

staff also collect information of national importance originating within fleet commands and coordinate its release by the Department of Defense.

The Office of Information is an integral part of the executive offices of the Secretary of the Navy. The Chief of Naval Operations does not have a separate public information staff, but utilizes the Office of Information to conduct such programs as he considers appropriate for the fleets. The Chief of Naval Operations does have an Assistant for Information, but his duties are primarily concerned with information matters which personally affect the Chief of Naval Operations.

Fleet Commanders are the direct representatives of the Secretary of the Navy and the Chief of Naval Operations for public information within their commands. Regulations provide that

They will prepare and disseminate to all units under their command such supplementary instructions as are necessary to implement Navy Department public information policies.¹

Naval District Commandants are the direct representatives of the Navy Department, and are assigned public information responsibilities similar to those for Fleet Commanders. General Order 19, a basic Navy regulation concerning the relationships among various commanders, provides that Naval District Commandants are responsible for the coordination of all Navy public relations matters within their districts.²

¹ Ibid., p. 8.

² General Order 19, though officially a separate document, is appended to Navy Regulations, 1948 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1948).

Subordinate fleet commanders and commanding officers of ships and stations are also responsible for implementing Navy Department public information policies.

To assist commanders in the fulfillment of these responsibilities, public information personnel are assigned to duty on their staffs--the number of personnel varying with the size of the command. The public information staff of the Commander in Chief of the Atlantic Fleet consists of a captain, a commander, two lieutenants and enlisted journalists and photographers. The First Naval District public information staff is somewhat smaller, with a commander, a lieutenant and enlisted and civilian personnel. Subordinate fleet commands have only one public information officer, usually a lieutenant commander, assisted by enlisted personnel. At all but the largest stations, public information duties are carried out by an officer whose primary responsibility is another field. At the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, the only station involved in this study, the public information officer was a Wave lieutenant (junior grade), whose primary duty was as a communications officer.

Courts of inquiry are formal investigative bodies, authorized by federal statute and convened to collect and preserve information pertaining to a particular matter or event. They are intended to be temporary bodies, and normally their administrative staff is limited to legal experts and stenographic personnel.

The court of inquiry investigating the loss of THRESHER took the unique step of appointing a special public information officer to remain with it during its existence. The officer

assigned was a Commander, whose regular duties were as Public Information Officer for the Third Naval District.

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2. The second part of the chapter discusses the various methods of accounting, including the double-entry system and the cost of sales method. Each method has its own advantages and disadvantages, and the choice of method depends on the nature of the business.

3. The third part of the chapter discusses the various types of accounts, including the personal accounts, the real accounts, and the nominal accounts. Each type of account has its own characteristics and is used for a specific purpose.

4. The fourth part of the chapter discusses the various types of journals, including the general journal, the sales journal, the purchases journal, and the cash journal. Each type of journal is used to record a specific type of transaction.

5. The fifth part of the chapter discusses the various types of ledgers, including the general ledger, the sales ledger, the purchases ledger, and the cash ledger. Each type of ledger is used to summarize the transactions recorded in the journals.

6. The sixth part of the chapter discusses the various types of statements, including the balance sheet, the profit and loss account, and the cash flow statement. Each type of statement provides a different view of the financial position of the business.

7. The seventh part of the chapter discusses the various types of errors, including the errors of omission, the errors of commission, and the errors of principle. Each type of error can be detected and corrected, and it is important to understand the causes of these errors in order to prevent them from occurring in the future.

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PLATE 1.--USS THRESHER (SS(N)593), built at the Portsmouth (New Hampshire) Naval Shipyard; launched July 9, 1960. Length, 278 feet; beam, 31 feet; submerged displacement, 4,311 tons; speed, over 20 knots; armament, four, semi-automatic loading torpedo tubes; complement, eight officers and seventy-five enlisted men.

Lost at sea 200 miles east of Cape Cod, April 10, 1963, while conducting submergence tests.

This photograph was distributed by the Department of Defense in Washington, D.C. on the night THRESHER was reported missing.



FORM NO. 100-10

FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20535

100-

PLATE 2.--Bow view of USS THRESHER--
also distributed to newsmen on the
night of April 10, 1963.



ASB-457 24 July, 1961
THRESHER (SS(N)593)
DIRECT BOW VIEW

USN 107605

7-2-61

USS THRESHOLD (SS(N)-593)
DIRECT BOW VIEW.

OFFICIAL U.S. NAVY PHOTOGRAPH
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U.S. NAVAL STATION, ANACOSTIA
WASHINGTON 25, D.C.

REG

INTRODUCTION

PUBLIC RELATIONS AND DISASTERS

At the end of each calendar year, the newspaper editors of the United States vote to select the "ten biggest news stories of the year." The preponderance of stories are distinguished by one of two characteristics: (1) they, in some way, involve the government, and/or (2) they were catapulted to prominence by a single, unpredictable event.

One class of story most often a contender for the "ten biggest" list is the crisis or disaster. Any disaster story, even those which are not destined to be among the biggest stories of the year, attracts special attention.

Since dealing with representatives of the mass media of communications is part of the public relations function, the characteristic reaction of the press to a disaster should be of special consequence to the public relations official. This is particularly true since the "big story" so often has implications which influence the public's confidence in the organization involved in the disaster.

The study which follows is an account of the public relations implications of one of the "big stories" of 1963, the loss of the nuclear powered submarine USS THRESHER. (See Table 1 for the other "big stories" of 1963.)

TABLE 1. -- The ten "biggest news stories of 1963" as selected by the editors of the Associated Press and United Press International

Associated Press		United Press International
Kennedy assassination	1	Kennedy assassination
Civil rights crisis	2	Civil rights crisis
Britain's Profumo scandal	3	Pope dies, successor named
Coup in Viet Nam	4	Cooper space flight
Submarine THRESHER lost	5	Nuclear test treaty
Pope dies, successor named	6	Coup in Viet Nam
Nuclear test treaty	7	Submarine THRESHER lost
Supreme court prayer ruling	8	Britain's Profumo scandal
Pennsylvania miners saved	9	Supreme court prayer ruling
Russia-Red China dispute	10	Fischer quintuplets

While the subject of this study is THRESHER, the purpose of the study is to document and analyze a typical disaster story in an attempt to determine the essential characteristics of this sort of event.

The loss of THRESHER was a major event, and the story, even at the end of almost a year, is not finished. However, the major distinguishing characteristic of a disaster story is the sudden onset and tremendous initial interest that it generates.

During this initial period, the public relations official faces three related yet different types of problems:

(1) There is a sudden, large-scale demand for information which generally exceeds the public relations official's ability to accommodate within the framework of the normal organization.

(2) The unique nature of the public response to a disaster is such that the initial intense interest quickly diminishes. The public relations official then finds it difficult to attract attention to information which he considers significant.

(3) Superimposed on these demands, unique to the disaster, are the continuing problems of maintaining satisfactory working relationships with newsmen. Certain problems, which exist at all times, become proportionally more pressing during a disaster situation simply because a greater amount of information is being reported.

It is the aim of this study to report the interplay of all the elements that transpired as a result of the loss of THRESHER, with emphasis on the first days and particularly the first hours. All the elements are important, but those unique to the disaster are given special attention.

The study includes a detailed account of the events at Portsmouth, N.H. and Naval headquarters in Washington, D.C., which reveals the great effort necessary to accommodate the public demand for information.

The manifest and latent content of selected newspapers is studied to reveal the nature of information reported, and the rapid decline of general interest in the story.

Also included are some examples of error and distortion in reporting the events, which although not unique to the disaster situation, are unquestionably a part of the total consideration of this event.

The performance of both Navy public information officials and civilian newsmen, though generally commendable, was not flaw-

less. Each at times made mistakes in reporting events, although it is fair to say that these mistakes were unintentional. This study is not an attempt to assess the performances of any individual or group. It is, instead, an attempt to report the phenomena which occurred. Those tentative conclusions to which the study leads, are expressed in general terms. Any value they have is in terms of better understanding the disaster situation, not in evaluating the specific events incident to the loss of THRESHER.

Fortunately, disasters of the magnitude of the loss of THRESHER are rare. Unfortunately, disasters are not. One need not be a fatalist to predict that other disasters will occur. Inevitably, public relations officials will be called upon to deal with newsmen in the wake of such tragic events.

And yet, one of the most persistent commentaries on public relations is that its practitioners deal only with subjects favorable to the organizations they represent. It is compatible with common sense to believe that an individual, or an organization, would prefer to speak of that which is favorable; and observation proves this to be the case. The output of any public relations "shop" consists essentially of salutary information. According to a popular slogan, public relations is "good performance, publicly appreciated." The phrase implies the organization's acceptance of the responsibility to perform well. Some critics suggest that the slogan is only a thinly veiled admission that the public relations man, like the sun dial, records only the sunny hours.

J.A.R. Pimlott, in Public Relations and American Democracy,

observed:

The commonest form of distortion is the suppression of information unfavorable to the source. Few would say that this is never permissible. That some latitude must be allowed is clear; nobody is going to hire public relations counsel to blacken his reputation, any more than he would hire a lawyer to secure his own conviction. Even in the federal government, where the checks on abuse are probably stronger than anywhere else, every delinquency will not be published as well as every achievement.¹

His reference to the government is especially significant, since the government public relations official is a servant of the people with basic obligations and responsibilities which go beyond those of his colleague in private life.

Public relations is generally conceded to be a legitimate function of government. It tends to fulfill an essential need in a democracy -- informing the people of the activities of their government. In an era of complex government, the citizen seldom has first hand contact with his government, and must learn of its activities through the mass media of communication. The government public relations official serves as an intermediary between the bureaucracy and the press. The public relations function also serves as an aid to administration, explaining and interpreting the operations of the government to the citizen.

Unless the public relations official is dedicated to the idea that the people have a right to know everything, good and bad, about their government, he impedes the process which makes democracy viable. It is relatively easy to measure up to the

¹J.A.R. Pimlott, Public Relations and American Democracy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), p. 214.

standards of faithful public service when the situation is favorable and there is only good news to report. It is the difficult situation which is the true gauge of the government official's acceptance of duty.

The public relations official facing a difficult news situation must rely on his own experience, good judgment, integrity and honesty in meeting the problems presented; the public relations literature offers him almost no guidance. The textbook treatment of public relations deals almost exclusively with those situations which can be planned, and are subject to techniques such as proper timing, or form of release. The "bad" news situations like scandal or disaster offer no opportunity for such a methodical approach. They require instantaneous reaction.

In what is perhaps the standard textbook on public relations, Cutlip and Center's Effective Public Relations, only two and one half pages are devoted to the subject of disasters.¹ The major part of that brief discussion is devoted to the activities of a private corporation in winning public approval of personnel policies formulated after the occurrence of an explosion. There are probably several reasons for the dearth of information on the public relations implications of disasters. They occur relatively infrequently, and therefore are not a general problem for the public relations practitioner. Most often, disasters are caused by natural forces, and elicit public sympathy in response to an improvident circumstance. Another, and perhaps most significant, restraint is the natural reluctance

¹Scott M. Cutlip and Allen H. Center, Effective Public Relations (2nd ed.; Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1958), pp. 121-23.

to discuss painful circumstances.

Paradoxically, nothing attracts more public attention than stories of crime, scandal or disaster. One needs only to examine the pages of most newspapers to realize that these are the topics which receive special attention.

What should be especially significant to the public relations official is the fact that events, at least certain events, stimulate the formulation of public opinion. In 1944, Hadley Cantril and a group of associates formulated fifteen "laws" of public opinion. These laws indicated that events and particularly crucial events were the primary stimuli of public opinion. The laws include:

1. Opinion is highly sensitive to important events.
5. By and large, public opinion does not anticipate emergencies, it only reacts to them.
6. Psychologically, opinion is basically determined by self-interest. Events, words, or any other stimuli effect opinion only in so far as their relationship to self interest is apparent.¹

In 1948, Leonard Doob postulated another set of tentative principles of public opinion, and the first is:

Public opinion remains latent until an issue arises for the group; an issue arises when there is conflict, anxiety or frustration.²

By either Cantril's or Doob's standards, a disaster would appear to be a prime motivater in the formation of public opinion if it involved self interest, or gave rise to conflict,

¹Hadley Cantril, Gauging Public Opinion (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), pp. 220-230.

²Leonard Doob, "The Behavior of Public Opinion," in The Process and Effects of Mass Communication, ed. Wilbur Schramm (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1954), p. 341.

anxiety or frustration. Any activity of a government is the proper concern of its citizens; the citizens' self interest is constantly at stake. It is clear that every action of the government does not attract the interest of the public. But when an exciting event, involving government and arousing conflict or anxiety occurs, public interest is at the highest peak.

CHAPTER I

THE LOSS OF USS THRESHER

Sequence of Events

Such a circumstance occurred when the nuclear powered submarine USS THRESHER was lost with 129 men, during diving tests in the Atlantic on April 10, 1963.

The submarine had been specially designed to withstand pressures which would enable it to operate at depths below those of normal submarines. When it had been commissioned three years before, the Navy had characterized it as the world's "fastest and deepest diving submarine."¹

On April 10, the submarine was conducting the last of a series of tests which would prove her fit to rejoin the fleet after nine months in the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard for overhaul. She was to dive to her maximum operating depth, which the Navy would only identify as being "below 400 feet" for security reasons. Since this was a test dive, her normal crew was augmented by 21 Navy and civilian personnel from the shipyard and representatives of civilian firms whose equipment was installed in the submarine.

At 8:00 a.m., the submarine submerged 225 miles east of

¹A complete fact sheet, including this statement, is included in Appendix A.

Cape Cod. Standing by was an escort ship, the submarine rescue vessel USS SKYLARK. Her mission was to accompany THRESHER, provide routine services, and serve as a communications link with the submarine via underwater telephone.

Once underwater, the submarine completed preliminary tests and then started down, step by step, to her maximum operating depth. During the descent, she periodically reported her condition to SKYLARK. At 400 feet, a routine check for leaks was made. At 9:00 a.m., THRESHER was nearing her "test depth." At 9:13 a.m., the submarine transmitted, "Experiencing minor difficulties, have positive up angle, attempting to blow [surface]. Will keep you informed." The message was spoken without urgency.

At 9:17 a.m., another message was transmitted, but the only words that could be understood by men aboard SKYLARK were "...test depth." The rest of the message was garbled, but this circumstance is not uncommon in underwater communications.

THRESHER was never heard from again. At 8:00 p.m. that night, the Navy's top uniformed official, Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral George W. Anderson, announced that the next of kin of the crewmen were being notified that the submarine was "overdue and presumed missing." An hour and a half later, he said that the presence of an oil slick in the area indicated that the sub was probably lost. The discovery of debris ruled out the possibility that the submarine was merely experiencing communications difficulties and, though safe, was unable to report her presence. The following morning, at 10:30 a.m., Admiral Anderson announced that he had reluctantly come to the conclusion that the submarine had indeed been lost.

The nature of the disaster immediately made it of world-wide interest. In the grim record books of disaster, it went down as the first loss of a nuclear powered warship and the worst single submarine disaster in history. Practically every daily newspaper in the United States devoted from 60 to 70 per cent of the front page of its first edition after the report of the loss to the story. In an era when television had the obvious advantage in reporting the news first, several newspapers put out extra editions.

Newsmen were aware from the first minute that the loss of THRESHER was a big story. One of the first to learn of the suspected loss of THRESHER was Elton C. Fay, the Associated Press correspondent in the Pentagon. When he received a statement from the Chief of Naval Operations, he didn't wait for any supplementary details, but turned and hurried to a telephone. Recounting the event later, he said:

I hadn't dictated more than a few words when I heard the bells ringing on the teletype machine indicating that a bulletin was going out.¹

As the wire services flashed the story across the country, editors geared their papers to cover what was obviously a "big story." The Boston Globe, reflecting on their reaction to the initial news, said:

At just such a time, a big-city newspaper city room actually does take on some of the tension, electricity and bustle that Hollywood and television depict as the routine way of life for a newspaperman.

The situation is quickly assessed. Assignments are made. And, within minutes, reporter and photographer teams are on

¹Interview with Elton C. Fay, Washington D.c., April 26, 1963.

their ways to start recording all the details that must be gotten back to the city room where re-write men and copy editors tie the loose ends together into the story-and-picture package that is unfolded in your newspaper.¹

The Role of Navy Public Information

Officers

Since the Navy was the sole source of much information about the disaster, the way in which it assisted newsmen in telling the story would have the gravest implications for future public confidence in the Navy and the United States' defense program.

To Navy public information officials fell the job of informing the public fully and honestly, while at the same time, protecting the families of crewmen from added grief brought on by the glare of publicity, protecting classified information about the submarine's operating capabilities and insuring that the court of inquiry, sure to be convened, could conduct its investigation in an orderly manner.

The magnitude of the story meant that many public information officers throughout the United States would be involved. Obviously, Washington, D.C. would be a primary point of interest, since Navy headquarters were located there. So would Portsmouth, N.H., for the submarine had sailed from the Naval Shipyard after nine months of overhaul there, and relatives of most of the crewmen resided in the communities near the shipyard.

Since THRESHER was a unit of the Submarine Force, U.S. Atlantic Fleet, public information officers on the staffs of the Commander in Chief, U.S. Atlantic Fleet and the Commander

¹The Boston Globe, April 14, 1963, p. 42.

Submarine Force, both in Norfolk, Virginia would be involved.

News men would also come to New London, Connecticut, the traditional home of the submarine service and regular home port of THRESHER; to Newport, Rhode Island, where many of the search ships were based; to the First Naval District Headquarters in Boston, Massachusetts; and even to San Diego, California, where the bathyscaph which was to be used in search operations was located.

Nevertheless, the public relations events surrounding the loss of THRESHER were centered in two cities: Washington, D.C. and Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

Washington, D.C.

The first hint that THRESHER might be in trouble was received in Washington at 3:35 p.m. on April 10. Admiral Robert L. Dennison, Commander in Chief of the Atlantic Fleet, called from his headquarters in Norfolk to Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral George W. Anderson, on a "hot line" telephone circuit that links the offices of the two men. Admiral Anderson, at that moment, was walking down a Pentagon corridor on his way to his office, having concluded a meeting with the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The phone call was taken by Vice Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Claude V. Ricketts, who was advised that communications had been lost between SKYLARK and THRESHER and the submarine might be in trouble. Admiral Ricketts immediately sent his aide to intercept Admiral Anderson and advise him of this.

The aide met Admiral Anderson in a corridor adjacent to the office of the Secretary of the Navy, Fred Korth, at about 3:40 p.m.

Admiral Anderson immediately went into the Secretary's office and Mr. Korth then called President Kennedy's Naval aide, advising him of the situation so that he could brief the President. Mr. Korth then went to the office of Deputy Secretary of Defense, Roswell L. Gilpatric, who was acting Secretary of Defense.

Upon his return, Secretary Korth advised his information assistant, Commander James E. Jenkins, who in turn called the Navy's representative in the news service section of the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, Commander Edmund L. Castillo, advising him to "break out" background information on USS THRESHER and her crew. A few minutes later, Commander Castillo left a note in Commander Jenkin's office which said, " I have broken out the file - any reason to stay past 5:30?" As it turned out, he did not leave the Pentagon until about 5:30 p.m. the following afternoon, after spending 33 consecutive hours on the job.

By this time, word was spreading rapidly to key Navy public information personnel in the Pentagon. Admiral Anderson had alerted his assistant for information, Captain Vincent C. Thomas, Jr. and the Deputy Chief of Information, Captain James S. DOWDell. (The Chief of Information, Rear Admiral James S. McCain, Jr., was representing the Navy at a meeting in New York and did not return to Washington until after midnight.)

The Navy's Office of Information consists of several divisions, the Media Relations Division being the one which routinely deals with newsmen. It consists of a news branch, an audio-visual branch, a still photo branch and a magazine and book branch and was staffed by fifteen officers and ten enlisted men.

At 4:45 p.m., a time when the division staff was normally preparing to go home for the day, the officers in the section were briefed by the Deputy Chief of Information and the Division Director. The officers were asked to start collecting all available information on THRESHER and her crew. Personnel from each of the branches started collecting material appropriate to the medium regularly served.

The still photo branch located three views of the submarine in their files in sufficient quantity to meet anticipated demands.¹ No photograph of SKYLARK was on hand, so a picture of a sister ship was readied. The Naval Photographic Center, which is the principal agency for maintaining photographic files, is located in Washington, and a rush order for pictures of SKYLARK was placed immediately.

There is no central file of photographs for the more than one half million men serving in the Navy. However, a file of information on each officer is maintained in Washington, and this file includes an identification photograph. These identification photographs were obtained from the files of officers who served in THRESHER as soon as their names were known, and the Office of Information photographer began to copy them, using an instantaneous Polaroid process, which provides a 4 x 5 inch negative. In the course of the evening, 350, 8 x 10 inch portraits of the officers lost in THRESHER were printed and made available to the press.

At the same time that one team was working to collect

¹These are the photographs facing pp. 1 and 2.

photographs, another was collecting information on THRESHER and background information on previous submarine disasters.

THRESHER information was of two sorts: background information on the submarine, and operational information related to her last cruise. The background information was collected from files in the Office of Information, such as a folder prepared when the submarine was commissioned in 1961. Operational information was collected by telephone and radio from commands on the east coast, and from submarine experts in the office of the Chief of Naval Operations. By 6:00 p.m., the first draft of the account of THRESHER's last dive was assembled, and efforts were being made to obtain a statement on radioactivity hazards.

This statement was obtained from Admiral Hyman G. Rickover, the Navy's foremost authority on nuclear reactors, and was ready at 7:00 p.m.¹ At this time, another team completed the history of previous submarine disasters.

The original statement on the operational aspects of THRESHER was constantly being changed as new information became available, and the final draft was not completed until 7:20 p.m. This draft, which contained pencilled additions of last minute information was reproduced by thermofax process and 20 copies were delivered for use when the first announcement was made.²

Although the members of the Office of Information worked in earnestness throughout the period from 4:30 p.m., until

¹DOD news release 511-63, 11 April 1963. Included in Appendix A.

²Subsequently retyped and issued as DOD release 509-63, 11 April 1963. Included in Appendix A.

8:00 p.m., it is significant that almost every one of them later said that he felt THRESHER would be reported safe at any moment. Practically every Naval officer who has operated at sea with submarines can recall an incident when communications with a submarine were lost and search operations instituted, only to discover later that the submarine had surfaced and was temporarily unable to report her position.

The Chief of Naval Operations

As reported, the Chief of Naval Operations learned at 3:40 p.m. that THRESHER might be in difficulty, and immediately went to the Secretary of the Navy. Quite obviously, the men first discussed search and rescue operations, but they also began to make public information contingency plans.

Admiral Anderson's assistant for information later said:

The admiral was aware from the very first that this would be a public information matter of major magnitude.

He recognized that it was the Navy's responsibility to get the news out and that he was the one who should do it. He proposed his plan to Mr. Korth, who approved it.¹

A primary concern at that time was the decision as to when information should be released. Premature announcement could result in needless anguish for relatives if the sub were safe. On the other hand, any significant delay would certainly elicit criticism if the submarine were proven lost. It was therefore determined that if no report of the submarine had been received by 7:30 p.m., when the sun would set at the site where THRESHER had last dived and search operations would be hampered, the next

¹Interview with Captain Vincent C. Thomas, Washington, D.C., April 26, 1963.

of kin would be notified that the ship was missing. Public announcement would be made thirty minutes later.

Subsequently, Admiral Anderson outlined the information which he felt should be in the initial release - only the fact that next of kin were being notified that the submarine was overdue, along with all factual information known about the submarine's movements.

Admiral Anderson then returned to his office and prepared in his own handwriting a list of questions that he felt was pertinent and that he should be prepared to answer.

At 8:00 p.m., he went to the Pentagon press room where he met with Elton Fay, of the Associated Press and Charles Corddry, of the United Press International, who had been recalled to the Pentagon by Department of Defense officials for "an important announcement."

After the two wire service reporters had read only a line or two of his statement, they asked Admiral Anderson to wait while they filed bulletins. He agreed, and after they had called in the first sentences of their stories, he spoke briefly with them.

None of the television networks and only a few members of the press had arrived at the Pentagon in time to hear the first announcement, so Admiral Anderson agreed to repeat the statement at 9:30 p.m. A tape recording of his statement had been made on portable equipment by an officer from the Office of Information, but the admiral re-recorded the statement on professional equipment in the Department of Defense studio, which was nearby, so that it could be used by radio and tele-

vision stations.

At 9:30 p.m., as he had promised, he again met with the press. There was a large contingent of newsmen at this session, including all but one major television network. At this briefing the admiral said it "appeared" that the submarine was lost, although the Navy still had "fervent hope" that communication difficulties were responsible for the delay in reporting. The much less optimistic evaluation was prompted by reports of an oil slick which had been received since the first briefing.

Admiral Anderson answered all requests for factual information, but refused to speculate on the possible causes of the loss, saying:

We have appointed a court of inquiry headed by one of our senior admirals, Vice Admiral Austin, the President of the Naval War College, assisted by other experienced submarine officers, to conduct an inquiry. I would not presume to judge what might have happened in this case.¹

As he left the press room at the end of the briefing, the admiral was met by another television network crew which was just arriving, and at their request, returned to conduct a brief interview for them.

On the following morning (Thursday, April 11) there was still no word from THRESHER, now long overdue, and bits of debris which might have been associated with the submarine had been recovered. At a 10:30 a.m. press conference, Admiral Anderson told the press that he "reluctantly" had reached the conclusion that THRESHER was lost. As Admiral Anderson had walked from his office to the briefing theater, he had studied

¹Transcript of a press briefing by Admiral George W. Anderson. The Pentagon, April 11, 1963.

a list of "important points" which had been prepared by information officers during the night. According to his assistant for information, he covered each of these points during the long, and remarkably frank session with newsmen.

A study of newspaper content (which constitutes a subsequent chapter of this study) reveals that a significant proportion of all stories carried on the loss of THRESHER on the first day, were devoted to the interviews which Admiral Anderson held. His words were quoted directly in news stories and verbatim transcripts of the press conference were printed. Film clips of the interviews were carried on television network news programs.

As a consequence of this, the first report of the loss of THRESHER and her crew was reported in a basically sympathetic manner. Stories were written in the context of the admiral's statements, and he had expressed the Navy's deep feeling of loss, its resolution to determine and rectify the cause, assurance that every known precaution had been taken to insure the safety of submarine and crew, and determination to continue every effort to enhance America's defense posture. The careful preparation by Admiral Anderson and his information and technical assistants had resulted in his touching on practically all of the matters that were subsequently to prove to be the important "issues" surrounding the loss.

The Navy's Deputy Chief of Information, who was the senior Navy information officer in Washington during the first eight hours, and who was closely associated with information aspects of the THRESHER case subsequently, said:

The success of the operation can be directly attributed to the full support given to the office by the Chief of Naval Operations. By his personal presence, we were able to establish, from the very beginning, the tone that was necessary for successful handling of news aspects.

Not only was he willing to make the initial announcement in person, but he gave us his personal assistance in getting facts from other commands. He made it known by phone calls to key operational persons that he wanted full public information cooperation.

Sometimes in the past, it has been difficult to get information which can be made available to the press in a fast-breaking story. In this case, press requirements were almost as stringent as operational requirements.¹

Other Public Information Activities in Washington

The first press inquiries related to the loss of THRESHER were actually received by the Navy a few minutes before Admiral Anderson's initial announcement. A wire service had carried a story saying that Navy ships were leaving from an east coast port to search for a submarine reported to be in trouble. A telephone call seeking comment on this report was received at the Pentagon at about 7:50 p.m.

As soon as the announcement was made and carried on the wire service teletypes, a deluge of calls that was to last throughout the night began. Both Navy and Department of Defense telephone lines were jammed with requests -- primarily from newsmen, but also from private citizens. Requests came from all over the United States and from many foreign countries. The most distant call was from Australia.

Requests from newsmen during that period fell into four

¹Interview with Captain James S. Dowdell, Washington, D.C., April 26, 1963.

categories:

(1) Requests for confirmation of the story, or for confirmation of some detail (such as the spelling of a name).

(2) requests from radio stations for telephone interviews with Navy Department spokesmen discussing the general situation.

(3) Requests for transportation to the scene of search operations.

(4) Requests from newsmen seeking to learn if any of the men lost were from their circulation area.

As might be expected, most of the private citizens who called sought to learn if their relatives were aboard the submarine. In one instance, a public information officer had to confirm that the person inquired about had been aboard THRESHER. (The Navy notified only the primary next of kin-- those listed by the servicemen to be notified in case of emergency.)

Other persons called with suggestions for salvaging the submarine.

So rapid was the pace, that Navy information officers working in the Navy office and the Department of Defense office (the two are separated by two floors) were hard pressed to keep one another informed of what they were doing. As new information was released in the Department of Defense it was passed by telephone to the officers working in the Navy office. One officer has estimated that, at one time, there was a two-hour lag in passing information from one office to the other.

In addition to responding to newsmen's inquiries, the

Washington staff was communicating the text of new statements and related material to information officers in Portsmouth, Boston, Norfolk and New London.

Though the volume of phone calls remained steady, it slacked off enough by 3:00 a.m. so that some of the officers could return to their homes.

During most of the night, five of the Navy's top information officers were on duty in the Navy news section of the Department of Defense. The Chief of Information, Rear Admiral McCain had arrived in Washington shortly after midnight, and had gone to the Pentagon. Since he had served in submarines he was able to brief newsmen on technical matters.

Earlier in the evening, after a telephone conference with the public information officer on the staff of the Commander in Chief of the Atlantic Fleet, Captain Bernard Solomon, it had been decided that newsmen desiring to visit the search area would be transported to the scene in a destroyer based in Newport. However, reports received from the search area during the night indicated that weather was already foul and worsening and the ships were encountering heavy seas. It was also learned that the destroyer marked to carry newsmen might be needed to transport scientific equipment to the search area, and that its departure time was uncertain.

It was decided that plans for shipboard transportation should be cancelled and a group of newsmen, representing the various media and selected by lot, would be flown over the area the next day.

By then, many newsmen anxious to get to the search area

had already gone to Newport and New London, which they considered to be the logical departure point for search ships. During the night, about thirty newsmen went to each of the cities. On the next day, when informed of plans to fly newsmen over the search area, some of the reporters returned to their offices. Most remained in the port cities to see what would develop. Later that afternoon, a destroyer did depart from Newport. Although newsmen were told that accommodations would be spartan, the seas rough, and the ship's schedule uncertain, some desired to accompany the ship. After a hasty conference with information officials in Norfolk, newsmen were permitted to board the ship. Only fifteen chose to accompany the ship, but those reporters were rewarded by the opportunity to write a series of dramatic stories.

Several of the newspapers which had recalled their representatives when the original plans for sea transportation had been cancelled were incensed at missing the opportunity to have a reporter on the scene.

As the search ship was departing from Newport, two airplanes with press representatives aboard were flying over the search scene. While bad weather obscured most of the operations, the newsmen were able to listen to radio reports of the search ships. Among the transmissions they heard was the report of the submarine SEA OWL saying that she had picked up underwater transmissions which might have come from THRESHER.

The same report went to Navy headquarters, where it was quickly determined that the transmissions were being made by equipment which had never been installed in THRESHER. The

sounds apparently had come from another search ship.

A reporter in one of the press planes reported the incident and for a fleeting moment public hopes were raised that THRESHER might be in a state of equilibrium below the surface.

Even after the Navy had discounted the possibility that the sounds might have originated from THRESHER, a television network reported reception of the signals, without the qualifying information. After urgent calls from Navy officials, who felt the report would give an unjustifiable sense of hope to families of THRESHER crewmen, the network interrupted its program to clarify the statement.

On April 11, Navy press officials in Washington were kept busy answering inquiries, issuing statements on the progress of the search, the plans of Navy officials and other new developments. Two major television networks began preparing reports on the loss, and the television branch of the Office of Information provided film footage and assisted in arrangements for the programs. (The National Broadcasting Company issued a news release explaining how it prepared an hour-long report within a period of six and one-half hours. This revealing account is included as Appendix B.)

Press briefings on all new developments related to THRESHER were instituted on April 11, and continued on a daily basis so long as new information was being reported.

At one of the earliest briefings, the Navy was obliged to explain an apparent error made by the Chief of Naval Operations during a briefing. Admiral Anderson had been asked:

QUESTION: Did the Skylark at any time at 9:17 yesterday

morning detect any unusual noises on its hydrographic phones or any other disturbances that might indicate that there was an accident of some kind?

ADMIRAL ANDERSON: None whatsoever has been reported and we have endeavored to check to see whether in retrospect anything of this sort occurred; and the answer is no.¹

Subsequently, during testimony at the court of inquiry, the log of communications between SKYLARK and THRESHER was read into the record. It included the following previous transmission which had not been announced:

Experiencing minor difficulty. Have positive up angle. Am attempting to blow (surface). Will keep you informed.²

An officer from the ship testified that at 9:18, he heard a sound over the hydrophones. He said:

A sound registered with which I am familiar. It was the sound of a ship breaking up, a compartment collapsing, or something of that nature. It had a muted dull sound, which the skipper and I agreed were cracking-up noises.³ I have heard those noises before, during World War II.³

Reporters in Washington have told the author that when this testimony was reported, they felt that the Navy had lied to them.

Rear Admiral McCain, the Chief of Information, discussed the matter with newsmen at the next daily briefing. One newspaper commented:

He (the Chief of Information) also made it clear that the extended public observations of Adm. George W. Anderson, Chief of Naval Operations, on Wednesday and Thursday, and the further data provided by McCain's office through Saturday morning had made public all information up to then

¹Transcript of a press briefing by Admiral George W. Anderson. The Pentagon, April 11, 1963.

²As reported in The Boston Globe, April 14, 1963, p.1. (Verbatim transcripts of the hearings of courts of inquiry are not released.)

³Ibid.

available to the department in Washington.¹

The apparent delay in transmitting THRESHER'S last messages to search commanders was also to be the subject of concern to the court of inquiry, and will be discussed further.

At subsequent briefings, technical experts met with newsmen and gave them information on search techniques. On April 22, an officer discussed the progress of the search till then and described in detail the technical problems associated with locating the remains of the submarine. On April 25, the commanding officer of the bathyscaph TRIESTE discussed the capabilities of his research vessel with newsmen.

Pentagon correspondents told the author that these briefings were invaluable to them, not only providing them with immediately useful information which could be put in the form of a story, but also providing useful background material which made subsequent reports of the search more meaningful.

Although the focus of attention quickly shifted from Washington to Portsmouth and the search area, the Navy continued to release summaries of information from those areas at the Pentagon. A compendium of all releases issued during the first two weeks, is included in this study, as Appendix A.

Portsmouth

To appreciate the public information events which occurred in Portsmouth, one must first be introduced to the setting and circumstances which influenced the public information activities there.

¹The Baltimore Sun, April 16, 1963, p. 7.

The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions. It emphasizes that every entry should be supported by a valid receipt or invoice. This ensures transparency and allows for easy verification of the data.

Additionally, it is noted that the records should be kept for a minimum of five years. This is a legal requirement in many jurisdictions and helps in the event of an audit or a dispute.

The second part of the document provides a detailed breakdown of the financial data. It includes a table showing the monthly income and expenses over a period of six months. The data shows a steady increase in income while expenses remain relatively stable.

Month	Income	Expenses	Net Profit
Jan	1200	800	400
Feb	1300	850	450
Mar	1400	900	500
Apr	1500	950	550
May	1600	1000	600
Jun	1700	1050	650

The overall trend indicates a positive financial outlook, with a consistent growth in both revenue and profit.

The final part of the document concludes with a summary of the key findings. It reiterates the importance of accurate record-keeping and the positive financial performance shown in the data.

It is recommended that the business continues to monitor its financial health closely and seeks opportunities for further growth and expansion.

The Portsmouth Naval Shipyard is one of the oldest activities in the Navy, having been established in 1800. Over the years it has developed into one of the largest and most modern shipyards, and today is devoted almost exclusively to the building and overhauling of submarines. It is nevertheless one of the few major naval installations which is not located near a large metropolitan city. The nearest large city and major news center is Boston, an hour and one half away by automobile.

In the course of normal operations, the most important public relations events associated with the yard are the launchings of submarines. For such events, the responsibility for public relations coordination rests with the Commandant of the First Naval District, in Boston.

Other public relations activities are of such a nature that they can be supervised adequately by a single officer on a part-time basis. At the time of the loss of THRESHER, the public information officer was a Wave lieutenant (junior-grade) whose principal duties were in the shipyard's communications center. The public information office was staffed by a single enlisted journalist. The normal cadence of public information business was slow - an occasional news release or making arrangements for tours of the shipyard.

It is difficult to imagine a major naval activity which offers a more striking contrast to the elaborate public information organization in Washington. There, a staff of 100 full-time information personnel operates in close cooperation with the Navy's key policy officials. Hundreds of major news releases, many of national and international importance, are issued every

month. Trained technicians operate television and radio equipment, a photo lab is geared to produce many prints on quick notice and a staff of clerical personnel reproduce and distribute news releases in great quantities.

The Pentagon press corps consists of top newsmen who devote their full attention to reporting defense affairs. They are intimately familiar with the operations of the military services and personally acquainted with information personnel and key defense officials.

And yet, on the night of April 10, the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard was called upon to accommodate more than 75 newsmen, approximately twice as many as were at the Pentagon during the same time. Most of the newsmen were not familiar with the shipyard, and only a few were familiar with submarine operations. Some, representing foreign newspapers, were hardly familiar with the American Navy.

So sudden was the onset of the story that the shipyard had no time to prepare for the arrival of the newsmen. In fact, the shipyard's small public information office was pressed into service as the headquarters for a team of officers who were making telephone calls to notify the relatives of THRESHER crewmen that the submarine had failed to surface after the test dive.

Direction of the public information activities at the shipyard was assumed by Commander George W. Hall, Public Information Officer for the First Naval District.

The first suggestion that THRESHER might be in trouble had come to him at about 1:00 p.m., April 10, in the district

headquarters in Boston, when he was handed a dispatch reporting the loss of communications between SKYLARK and THRESHER.¹ This was about two and one half hours before the more serious overdue report was sent to Washington.

Coincidentally, when the public information officer was given the dispatch, he was working on a story about another nuclear submarine which had become entangled in the nets of a trawler off Boston the day before. The THRESHER report did not particularly disturb him, since he also knew that communications failures were not uncommon. He did comment to another officer, however, that "if anything did happen to THRESHER, it will be the story of the year."

Later that afternoon, with THRESHER still out of communication, he discussed the public information implications with the acting Commandant of the Naval District. Realizing that Portsmouth would be a focal point of interest for the press, the district public information officer felt he should go there with members of his staff if the submarine should be proven lost. The acting Commandant agreed to this plan.

In the afternoon, the public information staff was assembled and detailed plans were made for the establishment of press centers in Boston and Portsmouth. At the end of working hours, the public information officer permitted his staff to go home, directing them to remain where they could be reached by telephone. He then went home, but no sooner had he arrived there than he was informed that the submarine was now officially feared mis-

¹The text of this dispatch is included in DOD news release 514-63, 11 April 1963, included in Appendix A.

sing. He called key members of his staff, telling them to execute the plans made earlier that afternoon. He then called Portsmouth and advised officials there that he was departing immediately, and requested that preliminary steps be taken to provide physical accommodations for the press, which were sure to arrive. After advising Navy information officials in Washington of his plans, he sped to Portsmouth, accompanied by an enlisted journalist and a photographer. He arrived shortly before 8:00 p.m. - only minutes before the announcement of the loss was made in Washington.¹

After checking in with the top shipyard officials present (Rear Admiral Charles J. Palmer, the commander of the yard, was even then flying back from Washington, where he had been when he learned that the submarine might be in trouble), the public information officer turned his attention to providing for the newsmen.

With the shipyard's public information office in use, the district public information officer established his headquarters in another office-- normally used for personnel administration. Although the choice of that space was dictated purely by chance-- it was the closest office available-- it proved to be particularly well-suited for a public information headquarters. It was fully equipped with office equipment, including duplicating machines which were immediately put to use to reproduce news releases. A counter, running across the front of the office,

¹Commander Hall later observed in a letter to the author that the existence of prior plans had enabled him to have public information offices manned in Portsmouth and Boston before the announcement was made, and without any direction from higher authority. He considered this to be an important factor in the success of the public information effort.

The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions. It emphasizes that every entry should be supported by a valid receipt or invoice. The text also mentions the need for regular audits to ensure the integrity of the financial data. Furthermore, it highlights the role of the accounting department in providing timely and accurate information to management for decision-making purposes.

In addition, the document outlines the procedures for handling discrepancies and errors. It states that any irregularities should be reported immediately to the relevant authority. The text also discusses the importance of confidentiality and the need to protect sensitive financial information. Moreover, it mentions the requirement for all staff to adhere to the highest standards of ethical conduct.

The document further details the process of budgeting and financial forecasting. It explains how the accounting department works closely with other departments to develop realistic budgets. It also discusses the use of various financial ratios and indicators to monitor the company's performance. The text emphasizes the need for flexibility in the face of changing market conditions.

Finally, the document concludes by reiterating the commitment to transparency and accountability. It states that the company is dedicated to providing a clear and accurate picture of its financial health to all stakeholders. The text also mentions the ongoing efforts to improve financial management practices and to stay abreast of the latest industry trends.

limited access to the working area and later allowed the public information officer to work in relative privacy.

The office was located on the main floor of the shipyard's administration building. The only other office on that floor which was not in 24-hour use by military personnel was pre-empted as a newsroom. The office selected was normally used as a stenographic pool, and was equipped with desks and typewriters which could be used by the newsmen. Additional office equipment was ordered for the room and a dozen extra telephones were installed. A Navy lieutenant who was familiar with submarines was assigned to the press room and remained all night to provide general information about submarines. In the course of the night, a coffee urn was brought in and newsmen were provided coffee during the next two weeks. As the newsmen arrived, they also brought equipment, such as telephoto transmitters, and by morning, the office had all the earmarks of a long-established press room.

Soon after the public information officer arrived in the administration building, a few crewmen's relatives came there hoping to obtain additional information about the fate of the submarine. A special reception area was arranged for them and Navy chaplains provided assistance and comfort.

With more and more newsmen arriving and clamoring for information the next step was to provide them with all released material. Even as arrangements for providing office space were being made, telephone contact with Washington was made and the text of releases obtained. These were reproduced and distributed to newsmen. Clerical assistance was provided by Navy men who happened to be in the administration building at the time.

The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions. It emphasizes that every entry should be supported by a valid receipt or invoice. This ensures transparency and allows for easy verification of the data.

Furthermore, it is noted that the records should be kept in a secure and accessible format. Regular backups are recommended to prevent data loss in the event of a system failure or disaster. The document also mentions the need for periodic audits to ensure the integrity and accuracy of the information stored.

In addition, the text highlights the role of technology in streamlining record-keeping processes. Modern accounting software can automate many tasks, reducing the risk of human error and saving valuable time. However, it is stressed that users must be properly trained and that data security measures are in place to protect sensitive information.

Overall, the document serves as a comprehensive guide for anyone responsible for financial record-keeping. It provides clear instructions and best practices to ensure that all records are accurate, complete, and secure. By following these guidelines, organizations can maintain a high level of financial transparency and accountability.

Throughout the night, the volunteers worked alongside the regular public information personnel, and returned the following day to be of further assistance. Some did not return to their regular duties for more than a week.

The transmission of news from Washington to Portsmouth by telephone was a necessarily slow process. In fact, newsmen at the shipyard were receiving the information at about the same time it was arriving at their home offices by teletype. The newsmen at first resented this fact, but then it became clear that the primary news source was to be Washington, and they accepted the fact that they would not originate coverage of this facet of the story. Several reporters later told the author that they felt their primary contribution in covering the news would be to get the "reaction" stories of next of kin and Navy officials in Portsmouth.

Obtaining the names of the next of kin was crucial to this aspect of the story. According to a long-standing military policy, the names of the crewmembers were scheduled to be released four hours after the initial steps were taken to notify the next of kin -- in this case, near midnight.

First release of the names of the crewmen was to be made in Washington. The district public information officer checked and determined that lists of the crewmen and their relatives had been mimeographed by the casualty assistance teams in Portsmouth. But at 12:30 a.m., when the names were released in Washington, the head of the casualty assistance team in Portsmouth refused to provide copies of the list to the public information officer. Lacking specific instructions from higher authority, the personnel

officer felt that he could not be a party to informing newsmen of the names of persons, whom he know by personal experience to be grief-stricken. The officer held out for about an hour, during which time, many of the names were obtained from Washington by telephone and were released to the press in Portsmouth. The newsmen were obviously disgruntled about the delay since it limited them in an aspect of the story they had felt was to be their primary contribution to the coverage.

After the names were released, at least one reporter-photographer team complained that they had been told by next of kin that the Navy had advised them not to talk to reporters. Many other newsmen whom the author interviewed reported that they did not encounter this difficulty and subsequent investigation failed to reveal that such a warning had been made by any Navy official. It seems likely that if such an admonition were given, it was not by a responsible Navy official. Certainly, many next of kin did not want to talk to newsmen and it is conceivable that some adopted this statement as an "excuse."

Nevertheless, the district public information officer issued the following statement:

It has been brought to the attention of this command that the dependents of the USS THRESHER personnel have allegedly been notified not to discuss anything with the press. This is not the Navy's policy and to the best of my knowledge no official naval source has recommended this action to the THRESHER dependents. If there are any misunderstandings in this matter, steps will be taken immediately to correct them.¹

Throughout the night, information was duplicated and

¹Mimeographed statement released to the press at Portsmouth, April 11, 1963.

released to newsmen as it was collected, both from Washington and Norfolk sources and from officials in Portsmouth. The releases were numbered chronologically so that late-arriving newsmen could assure themselves that they had obtained a complete file.

During the period from the evening of April 10, until the evening of April 12, thirty news releases were issued. They included the statements of the Chief of Naval Operations, the names and addresses of crewmen, bulletins on the progress of the search, background material on THRESHER, SKYLARK and the bathyscaph, TRIESTE, biographical data on the commanding officer of THRESHER, transcripts of the Portsmouth press conferences by the Secretary of the Navy and the Commander of the Submarine Force and by the President of the Court of Inquiry, other statements by Portsmouth officials, texts of messages of sympathy, and background information on assistance provided to the next of kin.

This steady flow of information was sustained even while the public information officer was working to provide adequate press accommodations, to establish communications channels with other Navy activities on the East Coast and to maintain liaison with Navy press headquarters in Washington.

Adding to the difficulty was the fact that newsmen were submitting a barrage of questions: requests for transportation to the search area; requests for confirmation of stories reporting possible causes for the submarine's loss. Some newsmen asked the public information officer to arrange for crewmen's relatives to talk to members of the press.

Answers to some of the questions would have revealed classified information; others would have invaded the privacy of the next of kin and still others would have impinged on the prerogatives of the court of inquiry.

Despite the lack of a pre-existing public information organization, the shortage of personnel, and the almost overwhelming number of newsmen, the situation was relatively well-in-hand on the morning of April 11.

The newsmen were provided with adequate accommodations, information was flowing freely, the minor difficulties of the night before had been resolved.

The hectic pace continued on Wednesday, but the public information officer, freed of the necessity to create an effective organization, was better able to cope with the problems. On Wednesday evening, the district public information officer went to bed for the first time in two days.

On Thursday, the arrival of the Secretary of the Navy and the Commander of the Atlantic Submarine Force to visit relatives of crewmen was handled smoothly, although a last-minute press conference had to be arranged in response to newsmen's requests.

The members of the court of inquiry arrived at Portsmouth on Friday, after conducting sessions in New London, Connecticut.

The hearings of the court of inquiry occupied most of the newsmen's attention until Monday, April 15, when the first of several memorial services was conducted. Few phases of the public information arrangements made in conjunction with the loss of the submarine required more "diplomacy" than the religious services.

The services were conducted in public and were the object of the legitimate interest of the press. On the other hand, uncontrolled photography during the ceremonies would detract from the solemnity of the services. To photograph grief-stricken persons at such a highly emotional moment would certainly constitute a breach of good taste, if not an invasion of privacy.

After consultation with religious leaders who were to conduct the services, the district public information officer briefed newsmen on the forthcoming events. He provided specific areas from which the ceremonies could be photographed unobtrusively, and he requested that photographers refrain from taking pictures at certain times.

At the conclusion of the services, many photographers took pictures of the deeply distraught families of crewmen as they walked away from the site of the services.

One photographer was observed to be crying as he operated his camera. He later told a public information officer, "I hate to take pictures like that, but if I don't, I will be 'scooped,' and the office would never understand."

After one memorial service, a wreath was flown to the last known position of THRESHER and dropped into the sea. Search ships stopped their operations and manned their rails in salute to the submarine.

Newsmen were flown to the scene in two Navy aircraft.

With the conclusion of the religious services, on Tuesday, April 16, the attention of the press at Portsmouth was again focused almost exclusively on the hearings of the court of inquiry. Since the public information matters for the court

were handled by its specially appointed officer, the district public information officer was able to return to his duties in Boston on the evening of Wednesday, April 17. He was represented in Portsmouth by a Naval Reserve officer who had been called to active duty for two weeks.

The district public information officer returned to Portsmouth on several occasions subsequently, but, except for the court of inquiry, most of the story of THRESHER was now to be told from other places.¹

The Court of Inquiry

So much is at stake in the inquiry into the loss of the submarine Thresher that the investigation must be pursued without ceilings of time, money or energy. An answer to the tragedy is hidden somewhere in the case and must be found.²

With these words, one Boston newspaper pointed to what it felt was the most important single aspect of the THRESHER case. Certainly no aspect of the case received attention equal to the press coverage of the investigation.

The court held its first meeting on the morning of April 11, and continued its hearings until June 6. During that period it heard one-hundred twenty witnesses and recorded more than one and one-half million words of testimony.

The witnesses included former THRESHER crewmen, three

¹In May, 1964, the Public Information Office, First Naval District was awarded a "Silver Anvil" by the Public Relations Society of America for superior achievement in public relations in dealing with the incidents surrounding the loss of USS THRESHER.

²Boston Traveler, April 15, 1963, p. 19.

The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions. It emphasizes that every entry should be supported by a valid receipt or invoice. The text also mentions the need for regular audits to ensure the integrity of the financial data. Furthermore, it highlights the role of the accounting department in providing timely and accurate information to management for decision-making purposes.

In addition, the document outlines the procedures for handling discrepancies and errors. It states that any irregularities should be reported immediately to the supervisor. The text also discusses the importance of confidentiality and the secure handling of financial information. Moreover, it mentions the need for ongoing training and development for the accounting staff to stay updated with the latest industry practices and regulations.

The document concludes by reiterating the commitment to transparency and accountability in all financial operations. It expresses the confidence in the accounting team's ability to manage the company's finances effectively. Finally, it provides contact information for any further inquiries or concerns.

members of the crew who did not accompany the sub on its final test dive, officers and enlisted men from SKYLARK, officials in charge of search operations, shipyard workers and officials, Navy experts in submarine design and nuclear propulsion (including Vice Admiral Hyman G. Rickover) and even the civilian brother of two THRESHER crewmen.

Sessions of the court which did not deal with military secrets were open to newsmen. Since these sessions touched on practically every phase of the submarine's construction, repair and operation, as well as the crew's training and readiness, they provided the American public with more information about THRESHER than any other source.

The court consisted of five officers. Their combined experience covered almost every phase of naval operations which would be germane to the investigation.¹ The men themselves became the object of press attention, biographical information about them was printed, and photographs were taken of their arrivals and departures.

The comprehensive press coverage of the court was not surprising. Long after events, such as the memorial services, were over, and the press had completely covered the "background" stories, such as the comments of the next of kin and the history of submarine disasters, the court was in session, dealing with subjects not previously discussed. More important was the fact that the court was examining the one question about all others which had preoccupied the attention of the press and

¹Composition of the court is indicated in Department of Defense News Release (unnumbered) of April 11, 1963, included in Appendix A.

The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions. It emphasizes that every entry should be supported by a valid receipt or invoice. The text also mentions the need for regular audits to ensure the integrity of the financial data. Furthermore, it highlights the role of the accounting department in providing timely and accurate information to management for decision-making purposes.

In addition, the document outlines the procedures for handling discrepancies and errors. It states that any irregularities should be reported immediately to the supervisor and investigated thoroughly. The text also discusses the importance of maintaining confidentiality of financial information and the consequences of unauthorized disclosure. Moreover, it mentions the need for ongoing training and development for the accounting staff to stay updated with the latest industry practices and regulations.

The document concludes by reiterating the commitment to transparency and accountability in all financial reporting. It expresses confidence in the accounting team's ability to uphold the highest standards of professional conduct. The text also mentions the availability of support and resources for any queries or concerns. Finally, it provides contact information for the relevant departments and individuals responsible for the implementation and monitoring of the financial policies.

the public from the first: what had happened to THRESHER?

The President of the Court, Vice Admiral Bernard L. Austin, had anticipated the great press interest. He had presided over other courts of inquiry, including that which investigated the cause of a fire which swept the aircraft carrier USS CONSTELLATION during its construction in 1960, and he had even been the Navy's Public Relations Officer (roughly equivalent to the current Chief of Information) when the submarine SQUALUS had been lost off Boston, in 1939.

The Navy directive dealing with the conduct of courts of inquiry, provides

The proceedings will be held in open session unless the convening authority or the court, for security reasons or other good cause, directs the entire proceedings or any portion thereof be closed to the public.¹

Holding the inquiry in closed session might have speeded the proceedings (since it would allow witnesses to intersperse classified testimony with unclassified) and it would have eliminated inhibitions which probably influenced some witnesses. On the other hand, closing the court would have seriously abridged the public's right to know.

A decision was made to hold as much of the investigation as possible in open session, and the court decided to appoint a public information officer who could devote his full attention to affairs related to the inquiry. Such a procedure is unusual, but the overwhelming press interest necessitated this move for several reasons. He would be able:

¹Manual of the Judge Advocate General (Department of the Navy, Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, June, 1961), p. 62.

Faint, illegible text in the upper section of the page, possibly a header or introductory paragraph.

Second section of faint, illegible text, appearing to be a main body of content.

Third section of faint, illegible text, possibly a conclusion or a separate paragraph.



(1) To interpret the rules under which the court of inquiry operates (and which are different from civilian courts),

(2) To devote his full-time efforts to working with the press, thereby relieving members of the court from this time-consuming task,

(3) To arrange for experts to discuss with the press the various phases of submarine construction and operation as pertained to THRESHER, since witnesses could not be interviewed,

(4) To help interpret Navy "lingo" to the press and possibly prevent inaccurate reporting,

(5) To answer the many telephone inquiries that were to come from news media not represented at Portsmouth,

(6) To keep the press advised of items of particular interest in forthcoming activities of the court, and

(7) To protect, in general, the interests of the press.

The officer assigned was Commander James H. Gormsen, whose regular duties were as District Public Information Officer for the Third Naval District, with headquarters in New York City. Much earlier in his career he had been Public Information Officer for the Pacific Fleet Submarine Force.

He joined the court in New London, just as the members were boarding an airplane to fly to Portsmouth. During the flight, the president of the court told him that he would be considered a full-fledged member of the court's staff, with responsibility for providing assistance to the press and allowing the court members to remain as free as possible to

concentrate on their work.¹

In certain respects, the court's public information officer was fortunate. He was able to utilize the services of the public information staff which had been established under such trying circumstances during the first hours after the announcement of the submarine's loss. He was also dealing with events which, in most instances, the newsmen could observe at first-hand.

On the other hand, there were certain restrictions which would have to be placed on newsmen covering the court's hearings-- restrictions which, to say the least, would not enhance the creation of cordial working relationships between the public information officer and the members of the press.

Procedural rules prohibit sound and photographic equipment in the courtroom, and witnesses are not allowed to discuss their testimony outside the courtroom.

It was also apparent from the first that much of the testimony would concern military secrets of the highest category, and many sessions would be closed to newsmen.

Courts of inquiry are unlike civilian judicial bodies and some procedures of the court were liable to appear highly unusual to newsmen familiar only with civilian courts.

The public information officer was aware that newsmen would be sensitive to any apparent lack of candor on his part,

¹The material in this section is based primarily on a series of interviews with Commander Gormsen, conducted during four days in April when the court was in regular session, and on May 24, when most of the testimony had been heard and the court was preparing its final report. Some additional ideas were provided by correspondence in May, 1964.

or of any effort to limit their access to legitimate information.

He felt it was essential to gain the newsmen's confidence immediately, since it was clear there would be times (when classified information was being discussed by the court) when such information as was releasable, (names of witnesses and general topics discussed) would have to be released by him and accepted by newsmen on faith.

When the members of the court stepped out of the automobiles which had brought them from the airport to the Portsmouth shipyard, they were immediately surrounded by newsmen. The public information officer identified himself and held his first press briefing on the spot assuring the reporters that he would make every effort to assist them in covering the court's proceedings. So spontaneous was the meeting, that at its conclusion, the newsmen showed the public information officer where the press room was.

The apparent success of that first meeting is indicated by the fact that several newsmen, who were in the group, told the author they were pleased and relieved to find that the Navy was going to cooperate fully in assisting them to cover the court's activities.

The information officer's next act was to meet with photographers and to arrange for them to obtain pictures of the members of the court. He later said that the time spent with the photographers on the first day established a spirit of cooperation which paid off in the days ahead.

The court went into session almost immediately. Among

first witnesses to be heard were the crewmen from the rescue vessel SKYLARK. The ship had been engaged in rescue operations since the submarine was lost, and the crewmen's testimony gave newsmen their initial opportunity to hear the accounts of eyewitnesses to the events surrounding the submarine's last dive. The crewmen had been transferred at sea from their ship and appeared in the courtroom in their working uniforms, which gave an air of urgency to the proceedings.

If there had been any doubt that the court of inquiry was to be a major source of information about the tragedy, it was dispelled during these early sessions. At every meeting, the courtroom was filled to capacity with newsmen (there was room for about thirty-five persons) and one headline story after another was written about the testimony.

No effort was made to suppress legitimate news even though it might not be altogether favorable to the Navy. Regularly the reporters heard information which, even if not embarrassing to the Navy, certainly was not salutary. A former commanding officer of the submarine told the court of previous materiel problems, including some which had resulted in the suspension of previous test dives. A brother of two THRESHER crewmen told the court they were "apprehensive about the submarine's conditior." Crewmen who had remained ashore when the submarine made its last dive reported discrepancies in repair work done by shipyard personnel.

Several newsmen told the author they were surprised at the amount of information which was revealed in open hearings.

The rapid flow of information and the large number of

newsmen covering the court made it inevitable that certain small errors and misinterpretations of the testimony would result.

At one session of the court, a SKYLARK crewman told the court that the submarine had reported it was checking for leaks while at four hundred feet. A wire service reporter left the courtroom and filed a story on this fact. By leaving the courtroom, the reporter had missed subsequent testimony which revealed that this was merely a routine evolution and report. The reporter's story, lacking this qualification seemed to his editors to be significant news and it was flashed across the country as a bulletin. Other reporters who had remained in the courtroom and heard the full story did not emphasize the reference to leaks in their stories. Some were queried by their home offices as to why they had "missed" this important item.

Submariners' jargon also caused some confusion, even to reporters who were familiar with more conventional Navy terminology.

On one occasion, a witness referred to an aborted "fast cruise" of THRESHER. The term "fast cruise" is used to describe a mock cruise, conducted while the ship is tied "fast" to the pier and all operational components of the submarine are tested. Some newsmen, unaware of this distinction, reported that the THRESHER had gotten underway for a fast trip but had been forced to return to port.

To most Navymen, the initials "ASW" stand for anti-submarine warfare; to submariners they denote "auxiliary salt water." Since this variant meaning was unknown to several experienced military reporters they incorrectly inter-

preted the testimony of witnesses.

As soon as the newsmen became aware of the potential pitfalls they were careful to check with the public information officer on facts about which they were uncertain.

When the court dealt with material particularly likely to be unfamiliar to newsmen, background briefings were arranged. The briefings were couched in general terms and specific reference to THRESHER was avoided. Newsmen, however, attempted to channel these general discussions into a specific examination of the THRESHER incident.

One shipyard officer who was to discuss the function of a specific type of gauge was led into an examination of possible causes of materiel failure in THRESHER. Since the officer stated he was convinced that the submarine was structurally sound, he was led to conclude, at least according to press reports, that the cause for the loss of the submarine was human error. A newspaper reported that he said, "It appears to me that most likely it was human error and the submarine exceeded her maximum depth limits. It could have been flooding, but I doubt it."¹

After the briefing, the commander of the shipyard issued this statement:

It has been called to my attention that a press report alleges that Captain Roseborough stated at a press conference that human error was responsible for THRESHER exceeding her maximum permissible depth, the inference being that human error was of an operational nature, and that this was the most probable cause of loss. This is not repeat not Captain Roseborough's opinion nor is it mine. I deeply regret the pain that this report must have caused the next of kin of the gallant officers and

¹The Boston Herald, April 14, 1963, p. 50.

men of the THRESHER.¹

This development, though it was not directly associated with the court of inquiry, was included in stories about the court. One newspaper reported it as a "sharp difference of opinion," another as a misunderstanding in terms.

The only action of the court of inquiry which was the subject of forthright criticism in the press was the designation of the commanding officer of the rescue vessel SKYLARK as a "party to the inquiry."

An admiral who had commanded the early search for the submarine told the court that for the first three days of the operations he had been unaware of the last messages sent from the submarine to the rescue vessel -- messages which indicated that THRESHER was experiencing minor difficulties and was attempting to surface. The admiral explained that the messages had come to his attention only when he read the rescue vessel's communication log, which had been transferred to his ship for transportation to the court of inquiry.

He told the court, "It was inconceivable to me that anyone would withhold such vital information".²

Navy directives concerning courts of inquiry say:

A person's conduct or performance of duty is "subject" to inquiry when the person is involved in the incident or event under investigation in such a way that disciplinary action may follow; or which may affect his rights or privileges; or jeopardize his personal reputation or professional standing.

¹From a news release issued at Portsmouth, New Hampshire Naval Shipyard, April 11, 1963

²Rear Admiral Lawson P. Ramage, quoted in the Boston Herald, April 17, 1963, p. 4.

Any member of the naval service . . . whose conduct or performance of duty is¹ subject to inquiry shall be designated as a party.

The language of the directive is so unequivocal that the court had no alternative but to designate the rescue vessel's commanding officer as a party to the inquiry, even though the admiral stated it was apparent that the incident had not contributed to the loss of THRESHER.

A person designated as a party is entitled to be present at all hearings, to be represented by counsel and to cross-examine witnesses and introduce evidence. Military legal authorities characterize the procedure as a "privilege," but such a fine distinction could hardly be recognized by civilian newsmen, accustomed to covering civilian courts, which offer no parallel.

The public information officer had anticipated this problem and was concerned that the action might be construed as a reprimand to the rescue vessel's commanding officer. He therefore arranged for a Navy legal officer, not associated with the court, to brief newsmen on the significance of the action. At a lengthy session with newsmen, the legal officer explained the procedure in detail--and the newsmen's stories ultimately conveyed the essence of the briefing.

The stories, however, ultimately made their way into the hands of editors and headline writers who had not had the benefit of the background explanation. Thus the event

¹Manual of the Judge Advocate General (Department of the Navy, Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, June 1961) p. 53.

was given special prominence on the pages of the newspapers, and the stories were introduced by headlines which could not express the many qualifying aspects of the action.

A sampling of headlines indicates this point:

Skipper of Skylark on Carpet¹

Skipper of Escort Hit²
for Delay in Sub Data

Sub Escort's Captain
on Carpet for Delay³

The public information officer's efforts to insure that the story was reported in proper perspective were thus mitigated.

One Boston newspaper was not convinced, in any respect, that the designation of the commanding officer was routine or unavoidable. In an editorial, it said:

Lt. Comdr. Stanley Hecker has been made a party to the Thresher inquiry, in order, the Navy says, to protect his own interests.

We hope this is so and that the Skylark commander is not being made a scapegoat for the undersea disaster which took 129 lives a week ago. Too much is involved for the Navy and country to have this inquiry sidetracked on petty and personal issues.

.

It would appear that Hecker's real offense was that he embarrassed high naval brass by causing it to give incorrect information to the press. Several days after Thresher went down the Navy was still saying there had been no distress messages. This was obviously unfortunate. And if the Skylark skipper had been more experienced or more alert it might have been avoided.

But in light of the whole Thresher tragedy, is it

¹The Boston Globe, April 17, 1963, p. 1.

²Los Angeles Times, April 17, 1963, p. 7.

³The Boston Herald, April 17, 1963, p. 1.

important? Should the naval court be concerning itself with a possible public relations goof when there is so much else at stake? We can't believe so.

The country is not interested in scapegoats. It is interested in facts that will help prevent another Thresher tragedy. The court should get on with its business.¹

No one, least of all, the public information officer would deny that the extensive press coverage given to the matter was unfortunate. The very fact that the press briefing was set up is evidence that the court was trying to diminish the idea that the officer was being blamed for the loss. The procedure, unique to military law, was necessary - but the newsmen's lack of familiarity with the practice led to an unintended interpretation of the situation.

Fortunately for the public information officer, not all the problems which arose were so difficult to resolve.

The prohibition on photography, for instance, might have caused resentment. The public information officer, however, spoke to each witness at the conclusion of his testimony, explaining that the newsmen desired to obtain photographs of him. Each individual was allowed to make his own decision, and those who agreed (most of the witnesses did) were introduced to the photographers. By agreement between the public information officer and the photographers, all pictures were taken at the entrance to the building in which the courtroom was located. As a result, the witnesses were not pursued by press photographers and all confusion was eliminated.

¹The Boston Herald, April 19 1963, p. 48.

One photographer told the author, that the arrangement worked so well that he had "never had an easier assignment."

The court met in open session during the first three days of its hearings in Portsmouth. On the fourth day, the Atlantic Fleet Submarine Force Commander, when asked if he had a theory on the cause of the loss, explained that he did, but that it involved classified information. The court was closed to hear his testimony, and the newspapers reported the incident with special urgency. One headline said:

Secret Theory Adds
To Thresher Mystery¹

Fortunately this was a reaction to the first closed session and emphasis of the "mysterious" quality of classified testimony did not persist. As the court turned to the systematic examination of the various components of the submarine, more and more testimony was classified, until almost all hearings were in private.

During this period, the public information officer briefed the press on the names of the witnesses, and their relationship to the inquiry.

Not all the testimony given in closed session turned out to be classified. One officer, after testifying on a classified matter for which he had been summoned, volunteered information about a piece of charred insulating material from THRESHER which had been recovered by search

¹The Boston Globe, April 16, 1963, p. 1.

ships. The officer explained that he was not convinced that the charred appearance of the material was the result of a fire in the submarine, as had been suggested by other witnesses in previous, open sessions. He felt that the blackened appearance of the material was the result of a drilling process, used in the shipyard. He exhibited a piece of insulating material which had been subjected to such a process and it appeared almost identical with the debris which had been recovered.

The court was reopened, and the officer repeated the unclassified segment of his testimony before newsmen, since it was apparent they would be interested in the new theory.

The public information officer was dissatisfied with this procedure. It was obviously impractical to reopen the court and repeat every shred of unclassified testimony that was mentioned in closed session. On the other hand, it would be misleading if, as the information officer expressed it, ". . . we held a 'second performance' for the press everytime we wanted to clear up a point."¹

The next time such a situation occurred was when another shipyard officer, testifying in closed session, explained to the court why a number of valves had been observed in THRESHER backwards. He explained that when piping was being installed in the submarine, valves were included as spacers to insure that the piping was of the

¹Commander James H. Gormsen, in a personal interview with the author, Portsmouth, New Hampshire, May 24, 1963.

proper length. No effort was made to insure that these valves were functioning properly at that time, since they were used solely as "dummies" and would ultimately be removed, fitted with special packing rings and installed permanently by special workmen.

The question of the "backward valves" had been raised by a THRESHER crewman in open court and had been widely reported by the press. Rather than reopen the court so that newsmen could hear this unclassified testimony repeated, the information officer suggested that the shipyard hold a press conference to clear up the misunderstanding. This was done, and many Boston newsmen travelled to Portsmouth to attend the press conference, and subsequently wrote clarifying stories.

One of the witnesses to appear before the court was Vice Admiral Hyman G. Rickover, whom most Americans identify as the "father of atomic submarine," and certainly the foremost authority on nuclear propulsion. Any comment he might make about THRESHER would be important news, but the matters he was to discuss were classified. The court was therefore opened for Admiral Rickover's introductory remarks, which consisted, almost exclusively, of a reiteration of his previous comments on the matter. Commenting on this procedure, the public information officer said:

The press realized that this was "staged," but they appreciated the opportunity to obtain the admiral's statements. Admittedly it took the court's time, and it wasn't absolutely necessary, since his testimony consisted of information he had already released. He again stated his conviction that the loss was not caused by reactor failure, and he expressed his deep

sorrow at the loss of life. Nevertheless, his comments, given as they were at the court of inquiry investigating the loss of the submarine, were important and of concern to the public.¹

As more and more of the court's investigation was held in closed session, press interest dwindled. During the last month of the inquiry, Boston newspapers did not send reporters to cover the session, but relied on reports distributed by the wire services and originated by newsmen in the Portsmouth area. Table 2 is a tabulation of the number of newsmen who were present at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard during the first month after the loss of THRESHER. (The figures are drawn from a

TABLE 2 -- Tabulation of the number of newsmen present at Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, April-May, 1963

Date	No.	Date	No.	Date	No.	Date	No.
April 15	42	April 23	5	May 1	3	May 9	6
16	26	24	37 ^a	2	2	10	0
17	23	25	0	3	1	11	0
18	20	26	6	4	0	12	0
19	13	27	2	5	0	13	0
20	17	28	0	6	0	14	0
21	0	29	15 ^b	7	14 ^c	15	0
22	15	30	4	8	0		

^aLaunching of USS JACK

^bVADM Rickover testifies

^cPress conference on "backward valves"

logbook which was not started until April 15. Estimates as to the number of newsmen on the base during the first days ranged from 75 to 100. It has also been suggested that figures for the final days are too low, since some newsmen did

¹Ibid.

not re-register every day.)

By June 6, 1963, when the report of the investigation was forwarded to the convening authority, and the court met for the last time, the event went almost unnoticed in the Boston press.

Two weeks later, on June 20, 1963, the Navy announced the findings of the court and a summary of their findings was issued in a news release. (The actual release is attached at Appendix C.) The report was given only cursory attention in the press and no newspaper reported on the total contents of the release. A more detailed study of this phenomenon is included in chapter II.

A year after the court had been in session, the court's public information officer made the following observations on some unique problems he faced:

It seemed that as the court dragged on, the press tried to aim their stories toward the eventual conclusion of finding the submarine. That was not in any way the function of the court unless finding the submarine would shed light on the cause of the disaster. . . It was unlikely that finding the submarine would help the court, since no means exist to raise the submarine from that depth if it could be found essentially in one piece. Most likely, what would be found would represent what happened to the submarine as a result of the disaster rather than what caused it.

I continually tried to explain that. . .the court would not remain in session solely to hear how the search was progressing. Finding THRESHER was not the court's responsibility, nor would it contribute to the court's mission. But, inevitably, the two got mixed.

Also, it was of great satisfaction to me to discover that the press, although given relatively free movement through the unclassified areas of the yard, made no effort to ferret out people whom they could interview about THRESHER, or try to do any sleuthing on their own.

I honestly believe that we gained their confidence sufficiently at the outset so that they believed they would be offered anything of interest and that going behind our backs would be detrimental to them rather than of value.¹

Public Relations Events in Other Areas

During the night after THRESHER was lost, the feverish activity at Portsmouth and Washington, D.C. was duplicated at New London, Connecticut, the home of the submarine service, at Newport, Rhode Island, where newsmen waited to to to the scene of the search, and at the First Naval District Headquarters in Boston. In striking contrast, the public information office at Atlantic Fleet headquarters in Norfolk, Virginia, though busy throughout the night passing and receiving information, was able to operate in an orderly manner, since newsmen seeking first-hand information were not present. Statements originated by the command were released through Washington, and the local newspapers were kept informed of the developments by telephone.

Activities in New London were marked by the same intensive demand for information as in Portsmouth, and the Naval Base was "swamped with newsmen."

The situation was somewhat different at Newport, Rhode Island. Although about thirty newsmen checked in at the Cruiser-Destroyer Force public information office, they were primarily interested in getting to the scene of the rescue. The force commander, a rear admiral, met with the newsmen,

¹Letter to the author, from Commander James H. Gormsen, May, 1964.

assured them of his fullest cooperation, but explained that the plans for future operations were incomplete and that his staff would be unable to provide information on the incident other than that which was being released in Washington and Portsmouth.

Newsmen who were at Newport invariably commented on the "spirit of cooperation" shown by the admiral and added that his presence in the newsroom made it clear that everything possible was being done to assist them.

Since it was apparent that no substantial developments in the THRESHER story were going to develop in Newport, the newsmen checked into motels and hotels, having been assured by the public information officer that they would be called if the situation changed.

The following morning, the decision to cancel the ship coverage was announced, and some newsmen left the city, with the previously reported consequences.

One newsmen who stayed, however, said

I am not too sympathetic with anyone who would walk out on the chance to cover the biggest submarine disaster in history. I think the Navy should have maintained its plans to send the ship out. When a story that big occurs, the people want to know everything that is happening, and the Navy should have expected this. But, when the ship did go out, the reporters with initiative were there, ready to go along.¹

About thirty newsmen were still in Newport when the ship departed, and all were offered the opportunity to go along. Only fifteen accepted. The Cruiser-Destroyer Force public

¹Interview with Richard Lamere, Boston Traveler reporter, Boston, Mass., May 28, 1963.

information officer accompanied the ship and assisted the reporters in obtaining information and filing their copy by radio and ship-to-shore telephone.

With the return of the destroyer, the primary public relations activities in Newport in conjunction with the THRESHER incident concluded.

Boston was also a key locality in the THRESHER story, both because the Naval District headquarters were located there, and because the bathyscaph TRIESTE operated out of Boston during its search.

On the night that THRESHER was lost, the Naval District public information office was open and accommodated about forty newsmen who interviewed naval district personnel and reported the information relayed to the office by telephone from Washington. Like other public information offices on the east coast, the Boston office was besieged by telephone calls from newsmen throughout the United States seeking facts on the loss of THRESHER and information on the Navy's plans to transport newsmen to the scene of the loss. The volume of calls was so great that there were delays of up to two hours in returning the calls. Boston newsmen who had to "wait their turn" found this unaccustomed delay aggravating.

The assistant district public information officer, a Wave lieutenant, was assisted throughout the night by the remainder of the office staff and two inactive-duty Naval Reserve officers who were public information specialists. When they heard about the loss of THRESHER, they voluntarily reported to the office, realizing that their assistance

would probably be welcome.

Despite the fact that there was little information being released at the Boston office that was not also being released in Washington or Portsmouth, the large contingent of newsmen remained through the night--some sleeping in chairs or on the floor.

In the early morning hours a teletype hook-up between the Boston and Portsmouth public information offices was completed, which enabled the district public information officer and his assistant to communicate more freely. Subsequently the machine was used to pass news releases from Portsmouth to Boston for quick transmittal to the Boston newspapers.

While the Boston office was essentially an "auxiliary" to the Portsmouth office during the first few days, it became a primary information center when the bathyscaph TRIESTE arrived in Boston on April 26, after being shipped from California, through the Panama Canal, in the well of a dock landing ship.

The bathyscaph was moored at the South Boston annex of the Boston Naval Shipyard and a press headquarters was established in an unused building nearby. This office was subsequently used for press conferences associated with test dives of the bathyscaph, and when the search commander had occasion to talk to newsmen.

Another naval reserve officer, a lieutenant from Boston, spent close to a month on active duty during various periods in the following two months when press interest in the search operations was at its peak.

While these activities were directly associated with the loss of THRESHER, the First Naval District public information officer is not inclined to consider them a part of the disaster public relations problems. Two weeks after THRESHER was lost, the press coverage of the events, though still thorough, lacked the intensity and highly emotional quality that marked the "disaster" phase of the incident.

CHAPTER II
NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF THE
LOSS OF THRESHER

Manifest Content

The mysterious loss of a major combatant vessel of the United States Navy and the death of one hundred twenty-nine persons was an event which stimulated the concern and interest of most American citizens. Only a relative handful could observe any of the events at first hand, and these events were only the most public--memorial services or the departure of search ships. It remained for the mass media of communication, principally the newspapers and television stations, to provide information on the search operation, the sessions of the court of inquiry, the comments of naval officials and civilian scientists.

Any individual's opinion as to what happened, and whether the Navy had performed and was performing satisfactorily depended primarily on what he read in the newspapers and saw on his television set.

Accordingly, a study was made of the coverage provided by eight major daily newspapers, four in Boston, The Boston Globe, The Boston Herald, the Boston Record-American and Sunday Advertiser, and the Boston Traveler, and four from out-of-Boston, Chicago Tribune, Los Angeles Times, The New York Times and the Washington Post. (The Christian Science Monitor is also pub-

lished in Boston. Its coverage of news events is atypical of other American newspapers, and the paper is therefore excluded from this study.)

As a means of comparing the coverage of each newspaper, stories devoted to the THRESHER case were divided into separate categories, and the number of column-inches devoted to each category on each day was tabulated. The raw results are indicated in Tables 3 through 10.

The Categories

Categories were determined by examining the newspaper stories and establishing a new category whenever subject matter was discovered which did not readily fit into already existing descriptions. Stories in twenty of the categories were found to occur more or less regularly in the newspapers. A miscellaneous category was used to tabulate all other stories. Footnotes on the tables indicate the content of the miscellaneous stories.

The following is a brief description of the contents of typical stories in each of the categories:

1. Loss announcement. Stories based on information released by Admiral Anderson at his press conferences and by Navy spokesman elsewhere during the first hours after the loss.
2. Background of USS THRESHER. Stories describing THRESHER, based on previously released material.
3. Background of submarine service, losses. Stories describing the submarine service, written from previously known information. These included previous submarine disasters

TABLE 3. -- Amount of space (in column/inches) devoted to coverage of USS THRESHER incident in the Boston Traveler during the period April 11-24, 1963

Date (April, 1963)	Loss announcement	Background on USS THRESHER	Background on submarine service, losses	Radiation hazard	Search operations	Search background	Biographical data on crewmen	Next of kin reaction	Court of inquiry	Memorial services	Congressional reaction	Reaction of Navy men	Portsmouth reaction	Messages of sympathy	Official statements	Speculation on loss	Editorial comment	Newsmen's activities	International reaction	Letters to the Editor	Miscellaneous	Daily total	Amount on page one
11.	86	88	90	9	5	20	138	101	..	14	..	114	34	..	10	2	..	..	..	..	12a	723	123
12.	..	2	..	..	42	27	..	7	38	35	..	..	..	..	..	16	8	..	..	..	..	175	26
13.	6	12	..	..	18	..	..	..	4	..	..	2	..	..	..	..	..	42	23
14.*
15.	..	2	..	..	3	..	..	..	42	10	2	..	..	..	..	..	52	..	27	..	..	138	32
16.	7	..	..	..	34	7	..	..	..	..	3	..	..	..	..	..	..	51	4
17.	3	..	..	..	14	29	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	46	..
18.	..	6	..	..	39	..	..	..	55	3	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	103	48	
19.	23	13	..	..	32	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	68	30	
20.	31	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	6b	37	23
21.*
22.	9	..	..	..	16	..	3	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	28	..
23.	15	..	..	..	11	..	3	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	29	..
24.	2	..	..	..	19	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	24	..
Tot.	86	98	90	9	154	72	138	108	310	98	8	114	38	..	13	20	60	..	27	..	21	1464	..

*No Sunday edition.

^aMoody description of physical characteristics of ocean depths.

^bTHRESHER class submarine being readied for launch.

^cTHRESHER class submarine launched.

TABLE 4. -- Amount of space (in column/inches) devoted to coverage of USS THRESHER incident in the Chicago Tribune during the period April 11-25, 1963

Date (April, 1963)	Loss announcement	Background on USS THRESHER	Background on submarine service, losses	Radiation hazard	Search operations	Search background	Biographical data on crewmen	Next of kin reaction	Court of inquiry	Memorial services	Congressional reaction	Reaction of Navy men	Portsmouth reaction	Messages of sympathy	Official statements	Speculation on loss	Editorial comment	Newsmen's activities	International reaction	Letters to the Editor	Miscellaneous	Daily total	Amount on page one
11.*
12.	86	45	..	..	1	20	48	19	1	25	..	21	..	..	..	..	..	..	8	..	..	296	22
13.	22	78	32	..	..	3	15	..	15	..	..	..	..	..	..	4	..	..	147	31
14.	13	..	25	9	..	..	36	3	..	..	..	..	10	..	..	..	..	..	..	96	49
15.	13	..	..	..	3	1	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	17	17
16.	1	..	..	..	41	2	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	12	..	..	56	24
17.	3	..	..	..	35	3	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	41	14
18.	4	..	..	..	..	8	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	4	..	16	..
19.	5	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	42	34
20.	1	..	..	..	15	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	16	..
21.	29	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	29	11
22.
23.	15	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	15	..
24.
25.	4	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	1 ^a	5	..
Tot.	86	45	13	22	131	61	48	19	219	57	..	36	..	..	10	..	..	..	24	4	1	802	..

*Edition examined was mail edition, marked "Home," all information was one day late.

^aTHRESHER class submarine launched.

TABLE 5. -- Amount of space (in column/inches) devoted to coverage of USS THRESHER incident in the Los Angeles Times during the period April 11-24, 1963

Date (April, 1963)	Loss announcement	Background on USS THRESHER	Background on submarine service, losses	Radiation hazard	Search operations	Search background	Biographical data on crewmen	Next of kin reaction	Court of inquiry	Memorial services	Congressional reaction	Reaction of Navy men	Portsmouth reaction	Messages of sympathy	Official statements	Speculation on loss	Editorial comment	Newsmen's activities	International reaction	Letters to the Editor	Miscellaneous	Daily total	Amount on page one
11.	84	21	8	..	..	4	55	42	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	214	105	
12.	55	10	..	16	97	37	60	57	30	..	..	..	..	..	3	33	12	..	10	..	..	420	69
13.	26	..	..	..	14	7	..	..	..	6	..	..	32	..	..	..	7a	92	12
14.	5	4	18	..	..	90	3	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	15	42b	177	15
15.	29	..	..	..	8	..	..	..	..	..	4	..	..	..	..	..	..	41	7
16.	29	..	..	31	70	1	..	..	..	4	..	..	..	..	..	..	135	..
17.	3	..	..	..	30	..	..	..	..	..	..	15	..	..	6	..	17c	71	..
18.	4	..	..	..	..	8	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	12	..
19.	17	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	17	..
20.	6	19	..	..	11	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	36	5
21.	24	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	4	..	11b	39	14
22.	4	..	..	..	3	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	7	..
23.	25	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	25	..
24.	5	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	5	..
Tot.	139	31	8	21	173	137	115	99	258	88	1	..	..	6	11	48	44	..	20	15	77	1291	..

^aPortsmouth Shipyard officer assigned to new duty.

^bSunday summary of preceding week's news.

^cSpeculation on possible change in THRESHER class design.

TABLE 6. -- Amount of space (in column/inches) devoted to coverage of USS THRESHER incident in the Boston Record American and Sunday Advertiser during the period April 11-24, 1963

Date (April 1963)	Loss announcement	Background on USS THRESHER	Background on submarine service, losses	Radiation hazard	Search operations	Search background	Biographical data on crewmen	Next of kin reaction	Court of inquiry	Memorial services	Congressional reaction	Reaction of Na ymen	Portsmouth reaction	Messages of sympathy	Official statements	Speculation on loss	Editorial comment	Newsmen's activities	International reaction	Letters to the Editor	Miscellaneous	Daily total	Amount on page one
11.	99	40	13	..	..	..	11	8	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	171	60
12.	14	43	5	..	87	10	73	131	4	12	..	..	..	..	9	2	..	..	..	..	..	390	60
13.	58	..	..	38	44	89	..	..	..	..	..	6	6	..	..	..	..	241	54
14.*	6	25	..	4	13	105	13	7	..	..	..	..	29	..	18	..	..	36 ^a	256	53
15.	26	4	..	..	6	38	35	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	3	..	..	112	20
16.	27	67	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	94	..
17.	39	11	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	50	5
18.	43	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	5	..	48	..
19.	52	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	52	..
20.	4	..	..	19	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	3 ^b	26	..
21.*	1	..	..	..	33	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	34	..
22.	3	..	..	..	16	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	9	..	..	28	..
23.	12	..	..	..	4	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	16	..
24.	12	..	..	..	1	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	2 ^c	15	..
Tot.	113	83	18	6	224	18	88	190	350	273	42	..	..	..	9	37	6	18	12	5	41	1533	..

*Sunday Advertiser.

^aPoem, "Message from Sub Overdue."

^bTHRESHER class submarine to be launched.

^cTHRESHER class submarine launched.

TABLE 7. -- Amount of space (in column/inches) devoted to coverage of USS THRESHER incident in The Boston Globe during the period April 11-24, 1963

Date (April, 1963)	Loss announcement	Background on USS THRESHER	Background on submarine service, losses	Radiation hazard	Search operations	Search background	Biographical data on crewmen	Next of kin reaction	Court of inquiry	Memorial services	Congressional reaction	Reaction of Navy men	Portsmouth reaction	Messages of sympathy	Official statements	Speculation on loss	Editorial comment	Newsmen's activities	International reaction	Letters to the Editor	Miscellaneous	Daily total	Amount on page one
11.	104	93	127	..	5	31	93	27	..	..	..	..	14	..	..	20	..	..	..	..	..	514	95
12.	73	43	12	27	89	40	116	134	7	16	..	..	4	29	48	38	10	..	..	..	32a	726	94
13.	..	8	..	..	45	..	13	33	75	15	..	..	..	..	3	..	..	..	..	..	62b	254	36
14.	10	..	40	10	..	12	99	..	3	..	..	9	..	..	..	21	3	..	66c	273	91
15.	20	44	9	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	73	41
16.	29	29	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	58	21
17.	47	5	..	..	..	..	3	..	..	..	..	..	..	55	25
18.	8	..	..	..	6	25	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	39	..
19.	16	15	..	..	62	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	6	..	..	99	30
20.	3	15	..	..	13	..	..	..	..	..	6	..	..	..	..	..	..	37	10
21.	3	..	54	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	57	12
22.	2	..	..	..	8	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	10	..
23.	2	..	..	..	18	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	20	..
24.	11	..	..	1	..	4	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	16	..
Tot.	177	144	149	27	210	122	225	206	439	134	16	5	18	38	60	58	10	21	6	6	160	2231	

aBackground information on submarine rescue technique research.

bAdmiral Rickover had warned submarine contractors to improve quality control.

cChronology of THRESHER's last cruise.

TABLE 8. -- Amount of space (in column/inches) devoted to coverage of USS THRESHER incident in The Boston Herald during the period April 11-24, 1963

Date (April, 1963)	Loss announcement	Background on USS THRESHER	Background on submarine service; losses	Radiation hazard	Search operations	Search background	Biographical data on crewmen	Next of kin reaction	Court of inquiry	Memorial services	Congressional reaction	Reaction of Navy men	Portsmouth reaction	Messages of sympathy	Official statements	Speculation on loss	Editorial comment	Newsmen's activities	International reaction	Letters to the Editor	Miscellaneous	Daily total	Amount on page one
11.	105	61	36	12	14	29	81	54	2	..	..	..	2	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	396	131
12.	129	40	..	25	173	28	62	68	..	..	..	..	43	6	20	..	14	..	..	..	44a	652	129
13.	5	172	18	12	7	45	28	..	10	3	..	4	..	..	..	..	..	15b	319	90
14.	38	15	..	22	197	74	..	..	..	8	..	..	..	..	..	..	66c	420	67
15.	..	2	..	..	52	..	..	..	39	30	5	..	3	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	131	50
16.	70	91	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	161	60
17.	1	3	..	..	..	58	10	..	..	..	..	2	..	..	..	..	..	..	74	15
18.	4	..	..	..	..	59	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	63	25
19.	64	..	..	..	34	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	16	..	..	..	..	114	47
20.	24	..	..	..	14	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	15d	53	9
21.	5	..	63	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	8e	76	9
22.	5	..	..	..	19	..	..	..	2	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	26	11
23.	46	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	46	26
24.	18	..	..	..	3	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	21	..
Tot.	234	103	36	43	567	90	160	151	590	292	5	10	53	14	26	..	30	..	..	..	148	2552	..

a Editorial column contrasting selflessness of THRESHER men with greed of politicians.

b Possible effects of THRESHER loss on NATO planning (from N. Y. Times.)

c Chronology of submarine's last cruise.

d THRESHER class submarine to be launched.

e Sunday edition summary of THRESHER news.

TABLE 9. -- Amount of space (in column/inches) devoted to coverage of USS THRESHER incident in The New York Times during the period April 11-24, 1963

Date (April, 1963)	Loss announcement	Background of USS THRESHER	Background on submarine service, losses	Radiation hazard	Search operations	Search background	Biographical data on crewmen	Next of kin reaction	Court of inquiry	Memorial services	Congressional reaction	Reaction of Navy men	Portsmouth reaction	Messages of sympathy	Official statements	Speculation on loss	Editorial comment	Newsmen's activities	International reaction	Letters to the Editor	Miscellaneous	Daily total	Amount on page one
11.	63	18	40	..	6	26	28	3	..	2	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	2	..	..	188	36
12.	53	6	4	35	36	14	9	..	9	1	..	..	..	5	..	..	..	..	6	..	..	178	33
13.	5	..	28	2	..	6	19	12	..	..	1	1	12	..	57	..	9	..	40 ^a	192	16
14.	23	..	..	6	77	..	1	..	..	16	..	..	..	..	19	..	..	142	34
15.
16.	22	33	..	..	..	..	4	..	..	..	..	..	..	59	..
17.	15	1	..	..	..	..	3	..	..	..	3	..	..	22	..
18.	2	5	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	24 ^b	31	..
19.	26	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	26	..
20.	10	2	..	..	3	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	15	..
21.	114 ^c	..	..	..	..	..	15	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	129	..
22.
23.	20	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	20	..
24.	1 ^d	1	..
Tot.	116	24	163	35	103	44	37	15	208	54	1	..	1	22	19	..	57	..	39	..	65	1003	..

^aInfluence of loss of THRESHER on NATO.

^bSoviets lag in submarine development.

^cBackground story (pictorial) in Sunday Magazine.

^dMentioned in passing in story on new weaponry.

TABLE 10. -- Amount of space (in column/inches) devoted to coverage of USS THRESHER incident in the Washington Post during the period April 11-24, 1963

Date (April, 1963)	Loss announcement	Background of USS THRESHER	Background on submarine service, losses	Radiation hazard	Search operations	Search background	Biographical data on crewmen	Next of kin reaction	Court of inquiry	Memorial services	Congressional reaction	Reaction of Navy men	Portsmouth reaction	Messages of sympathy	Official statements	Speculation on loss	Editorial comment	News men's activities	International reaction	Letters to the Editor	Miscellaneous	Daily total	Amount on page one
11.	23	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	23	23
12.	..	20	..	..	26	12	39	44	..	..	..	24	..	..	..	..	10	..	..	..	175	46	
13.	4	..	..	..	..	6	12	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	40 ^a	80	14
14.	16	..	..	..	..	6	48	..	..	..	..	3	..	..	..	..	3	..	..	86	20
15.	15	..	..	..	6	1	1	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	13	..	..	23	8
16.	12	..	..	26	26	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	8 ^b	72	..
17.	24	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	24	..
18.	1	..	..	..	1	6	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	8	..
19.	20	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	20	..
20.	20	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	20	..
21.	20	..
22.	22	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	22	22
23.	1 ^c	1	..
24.	13	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	1 ^d	1	..
Tot.	23	20	16	4	55	24	39	50	154	65	1	24	..	3	15	..	10	..	16	..	50	568	..

^a Admiral Rickover had warned submarine contractors to improve quality control.
^b Drew Pearson suggests UHF radio failure was cause of submarine loss.
^c THRESHER class submarine launched.
^d Passing mention in Drew Pearson column.

both in the United States and foreign Navies.

4. Radiation hazard. Comments by American scientists and United States Navy officials concerning the possibility of hazards to public safety resulting from escape of radioactive material from THRESHER'S reactors.

5. Search operations. Specific activities of Navy units searching for THRESHER, including surface search for debris and underwater search using scientific devices.

6. Search background. Descriptive stories of the ocean depths, and interpretive stories designed to explain the scientific principles being used to conduct the underwater search. Much of the material in this category was devoted to explanations of the bathyscaph TRIESTE.

7. Biographical data on crewmen. Stories which dealt with Naval and civilian personnel lost in THRESHER. These stories ranged from simple identification, to accounts of individuals' reactions to serving in THRESHER as related by second parties.

8. Next of kin reaction. All stories dealing with the reactions of relatives of THRESHER crewmen.

9. Court of inquiry. All stories associated with the court of inquiry, including accounts of hearings, reports of findings, and speculation as to what might have transpired in closed sessions.

10. Memorial services. Any story dealing with memorial services, including religious ceremonies at Portsmouth and other cities, flowers dropped at site of loss, and half-masting flags.

11. Congressional reaction. Stories recounting the reaction of United States Congressmen. Primarily these stories dealt with plans for official investigations of the cause for the loss.

12. Reaction of Navymen. Stories written on the basis of newsmen's interviews with other Navymen. Primarily of two sorts: (a) reminiscences of men who had served in THRESHER, and (b) the comments of submariners concerning their feelings about returning to duty.

13. Portsmouth reaction. Stories describing the mood of modern Portsmouth (i.e. grief and concern) and the city's long association with the sea and maritime disasters.

14. Messages of sympathy. Stories carrying the text of messages of sympathy received by the government, primarily from heads of foreign nations.

15. Official statements. Stories based on the comments of government officials (other than Navy officials) such as the President's message of condolence to next of kin.

16. Speculation on loss. Stories based on unofficial explanations as to the cause of the submarine's loss. Primarily of two sorts: (a) statements issued by submarine experts such as retired Naval officers and oceanographic experts and (b) interpretive stories by newsmen.

17. Editorial comment. Newspaper comment carried in editorial columns; primarily expressions of sympathy but also including comment on the need for a thorough investigation.

18. Newsmen's activities. Newspapers' accounts of how their reporters covered the story.

19. International reaction. Stories based on the reaction of foreign nations other than messages of sympathy from heads of governments. Primarily of two sorts: (a) Russian comment on possible hazards to public health from radiation hazards, and indications of the inherent weakness of the American submarine service and (b) Japanese reaction to the possible hazard related to the visit of American nuclear submarines to Japanese ports.

20. Letters to the Editor. Readers' comments on submarine loss carried in "Letters to the Editor" columns of newspapers.

21. Miscellaneous. All other stories. Each miscellaneous item is briefly identified in the footnotes to the tables.

Additional tabulations were made of the amount of front-page space devoted to the THRESHER case. Results are indicated in the final column of Tables 3 through 10.

Units of Measurement

The unit of measure is the column inch, i.e. the space occupied by one normal column width times the length in inches. The column width in all newspapers examined is approximately the same.

The measurement includes headlines, pictures and type.

Study Procedure

Although there are twenty-one separate categories, there were many occasions in which a given story, or part of a story, might almost as easily fall into one category as another. For

example, a story on a memorial service would contain descriptions of the reaction of next of kin. In such instances the space was included in the category which seemed most appropriate. Often the decisions were extremely subjective, and ideally, the material should have been codified by several observers to determine if significant variations occurred. Since this was not possible, the author re-examined several newspapers, obtaining almost identical results.

Photographs often caused the greatest difficulty in classification. A case in point was the photograph of a buoy which marked the last known position of THRESHER. It was used once to illustrate a story dealing with the search operations, and on another occasion, it was used in conjunction with eulogy of the men lost in the tragedy. When such instances occurred, photographs were included in the category of the story which they illustrated.

Results of the Study

Analysis of all data indicates that certain patterns of coverage were characteristic of all the newspapers studied.

In five of the eight newspapers examined, the greatest amount of space devoted to the THRESHER incident in a single day, occurred on the second day. The three exceptions were the Boston Traveler (the only afternoon paper in the study) and the Chicago Tribune, both of which registered the greatest amount of coverage on the first day, and The New York Times, which hit its peak on the third day. (It should be noted that the "first" day the Chicago Tribune carried any THRESHER news

was on April 12. The edition of the Tribune examined was one mailed to out-of-town subscribers, and was printed very early. The Tribune, therefore, carried news one day after other newspapers.)

The most intensive coverage occurred during the first four days - in each case more than half and in some cases close to three quarters of the total coverage recorded in the full fourteen day period occurred in the first four days.

Examination of Tables 3 through 10 shows that only information on the court of inquiry and reports of the search operations appeared consistently after the initial four-day period. Consequently, these two categories were the largest. Each newspaper devoted more space to the court of inquiry than to any other single subject. A total of 2,528 column/inches was devoted to this subject. The next largest category was that dealing with search operations - 1,617 column/inches. Ranking third in total volume were stories about memorial services - 1,061 column/inches.

The three categories together accounted for 5,206 column/inches, nearly half of the total space (11,444 column/inches) devoted to all stories related to the THRESHER incident in all the newspapers examined.

This is hardly surprising, for these are subjects about which it was easiest to write. The newsmen could observe the event and report what he observed, or obtain his material from news releases. To obtain material for stories in most of the remaining categories, the newsmen had to conduct his own

research, seek out sources and collect information.

Comparison of Coverage

By Boston and "Out-of-Town" Newspapers

As might be expected, the Boston newspapers devoted more space to the coverage of THRESHER events than did the "out-of-town" papers which were examined. For the Boston press, the loss of THRESHER was a local story. The disaster occurred nearby, the court of inquiry, the site of most memorial services and the base of operations for the search were all located in the circulation of the Boston newspapers. In addition, Boston has long been a seaport, and its citizens are especially interested in stories of the sea. Bostonians also remembered the loss of previous United States Navy submarines better than most other Americans, for most of these tragedies had also occurred in nearby waters.

Therefore, it is not surprising that Boston newspapers devoted from two to four times as much space as some of the out-of-town newspapers. (See Table 11 for a comparison.)

TABLE 11. -- Comparison of total amount of space (in column/inches) devoted to THRESHER incident by Boston and "Out-of-Town" newspapers during the two weeks after the loss

Boston		Out-of-Town	
Newspaper	Column/Inches	Newspaper	Column/Inches
<u>The Boston Globe</u>	2,231	<u>Chicago Tribune</u>	802
<u>The Boston Herald</u>	2,552	<u>Los Angeles Times</u>	1,291
<u>Boston Traveler</u>	1,533	<u>The New York Times</u>	1,003
<u>Record-American and Sunday Advertiser</u>	1,464	<u>Washington Post</u>	568
<u>Total</u>	<u>7,780</u>		<u>3,664</u>

While the out-of-town newspapers devoted less total space to the loss of the submarine, they gave proportional prominence to the same stories that were emphasized in the Boston press. Stories about the court of inquiry occupied the greatest amount of space, followed by accounts of the search and memorial services.

Boston and out-of-town newspapers devoted approximately equal space to stories in several categories - notably to Admiral Anderson's press conferences, stories about radiation hazard and background stories on search techniques. All of the newspapers, both Boston and out-of-town, wrote editorials expressing sympathy for the loss of the submarine and noting that such tragedies were the price of progress, except the Chicago Tribune, which made no editorial comment on the loss.

The out-of-town newspapers placed more emphasis on international reaction than did the Boston papers. As might be expected, the out-of-town papers did not carry stories about the reaction of Portsmouth citizens as the Boston papers did.

Summary of Manifest Content

During First Two Weeks

When the story of the loss of THRESHER broke, it monopolized the front pages of newspapers across the country. During the first four days, newspapers devoted space to describing the widest possible variety of aspects of the incident: reports of the search, court hearings and memorial services, background information on the submarine and its crew, the emotional reaction of relatives and prominent citizens of the world and the scientific reaction of civilian scientists and Navy officials.

On the fifth day (Monday, April 15) there was a marked drop in THRESHER coverage, followed by a gradual decline in space devoted to the story. Background stories disappeared from the newspaper's columns as the reporters' job became one of surveillance of the events that were occurring.

Subsequent Newspaper Coverage

Newspaper coverage subsequent to the period reported in Tables 3 through 10 followed the declining trend already established. Total coverage fell off, stories were devoted almost exclusively to reports of the court of inquiry and the search operations and were generally carried on the inside pages under unobtrusive headlines.

By mid-May, typical coverage consisted of a story, four or five paragraphs long, summarizing search operations and indicating that the court of inquiry was still hearing witnesses in closed session. For several days at a time a newspaper might make no mention of THRESHER. Occasionally the submarine might be mentioned in passing in another story - such as the account of the launching of another nuclear submarine. There were also scattered reports of efforts by several organizations to raise money for a scholarship fund for the children of THRESHER crewmen.

On May 30, 1963, the Navy announced that THRESHER had been located, and the story was back on page one with large headlines. The announcement was based on an at-sea evaluation of underwater photographs. A day after the announcement, expert photo interpreters in Washington, D.C. determined that the

pictures were not of the submarine, and the Navy issued a retraction. This anticlimax further cooled public interest in reports of the search. Following the retraction, practically all mention of the submarine ceased until June 20 when a series of photographs showing a high intensity of debris on the ocean bottom were obtained and the Navy announced that the bathyscaph TRIESTE would be taken to sea to dive in the area where the pictures had been made.

A revival of interest in THRESHER followed (although it was not intense enough to result in widespread coverage of reports of the findings of the court of inquiry, which were announced during this period.) Radio, television and newspaper representatives went to sea with the search forces and observed the TRIESTE's diving operations. Newspapers devoted extensive space to accounts of the dives during which various underwater phenomenon were observed, including a large crater, which it was felt might have been created by the submarine's impact with the bottom of the ocean. Initial stories were written in a scientific vein - the complicated operations of the bathyscaph were explained. Before the series of dives were completed, Russian fishing ships took the operation under surveillance and on several occasions hampered the mission by approaching too closely. The Russian harassment became the topic of primary interest to the newsmen.

After five inconclusive dives (during one dive it was considered possible that the bathyscaph crew obtained fleeting contact with the submarine) the attempt was ended so that the bathyscaph could return to port for overhaul and the replacement

of ballast which had been depleted during the operation.

Although the search was continued by surface ships, even the brief summaries that had been appearing in the newspapers now disappeared.

In August, the THRIESTE again went to sea for another series of dives, but no newsmen requested to accompany the search force, and no reports of the dives were carried in the newspapers. After almost a year, the search for THRESHER has not been concluded. A major search operation, utilizing an improved version of TRIESTE is scheduled to begin in the summer of 1964.

Latent Content

While the quantitative study of the manifest content of the newspapers is revealing, it does not tell the whole story. A brief story, vividly written and prominently displayed may attract more attention and influence more readers than a considerably longer story, buried in the middle of the newspaper.

A headline which does not accurately represent the contents of the story it introduces will mislead anyone who does not read the story, and will probably provide clues which will influence even the thorough reader's perception of the event.¹

Or one newspaper editor may choose to give far greater prominence to a story than his colleague on another paper.

The diminished attention to the THRESHER incident, which occurred with the passing of time, meant that every aspect of

¹The extent to which a reader's perception of a news story is influenced by the headline is reported by Percy H. Tannenbaum, "The Effect of Headlines on the Interpretation of News Stories", Journalism Quarterly, Volume 30, No. 2 (Spring 1953) pp. 189-197.

the story was not brought to the attention of the public with equal thoroughness and force.

While the examples which follow are not an exhaustive study of these matters as they relate to the THRESHER case, the isolated instances are considered to be significant and interesting.

The Importance of Headlines

Time and again in the study of the various newspapers' coverage of the THRESHER story, the author was struck by the disparity in headlines used to describe essentially identical stories.

On April 18, 1963, two THRESHER crewmen who had not sailed on the final cruise, testified before the court of inquiry concerning extensive mechanical problems which they had observed while the submarine was undergoing repairs in the shipyard. (Their testimony included the previously mentioned observation that many valves had been installed backwards.) Both told the court they felt that the problems had been solved before the submarine left on its cruise, and that they were satisfied with the quality of workmanship.

A Boston newspaper carried the story on page one, under the banner headline

SUB UNFIT FOR DIVE?

despite the fact that the story included (in an inside paragraph) this statement: "He said to his knowledge all this was corrected prior to the ship's first fact cruise in March."¹

In a later edition of the same paper, on the same day, a

¹Boston Traveler, April 18, 1963, "5 Star Stocks" edition, p.1.

seven line bulletin concerning the incorrect report that THRESHER had been found was inserted over this story and a new head was displayed:

THRESHER HULL FOUND?¹

There was no sub-head concerning the testimony in court, and the basic story was unchanged.

Another Boston newspaper's headline for the report of testimony at the court was:

Trouble Plagued Sub,
2 Thresher Men Say²

The more conservative The Christian Science Monitor carried an abbreviated account of the testimony on page 17, under a one-column headline:

Thresher
Malfunctions
Reviewed³

In Los Angeles, the story was reported on page two, under the one-column headline:

Sunken Sub
Fault Prone
Officer Says

and included the sub-head:

But All Failures
Were Corrected
Navy Court Told⁴

In Chicago, the testimony put the THRESHER story

¹Boston Traveler, April 18, 1963, "5 Star Final" edition, p. 1.

²The Boston Globe, April 19, 1963, p. 1.

³The Christian Science Monitor, April 19, 1963, p. 17.

⁴Los Angeles Times, April 19, 1963, p. 2.

back on page one, after it had been relegated to the inside pages the day before, with the banner headline:

FLAWS ON LOST SUB BARED

and a sub-head:

FIXED BEFORE
FATAL TEST
PROBERS TOLD¹

An example of the unusual, if not downright capricious, use of headlines was observed on April 19, 1963--the day of the running of the Boston Marathon.

In an early edition, a Boston newspaper carried this banner headline on page one:

SECRET SUB WITNESSES²

In a later edition, the same story, which earlier had rated that urgent headline, was relegated to a corner of page one, and was now given a one-column headline:

Board Calls
Secret Sub
Witnesses³

The banner headline which had displaced the THRESHER court story was:

BELGIAN IS WINNER⁴

and concerned the marathon.

On occasion, the headline misrepresented the content of the story it introduced, as when one Boston paper carried

¹Chicago Tribune, April 19, 1963, p. 1.

²Boston Traveler, April 19, 1963, "4 Star Edition," p. 1.

³Boston Traveler, April 19, 1963, "5 Star Edition," p. 1.

⁴Ibid.

this headline as a banner on its front page:

Congress Opens

A-Sub Inquiry¹

The story, which began on page two, opened with

A full-scale Congressional investigation of the tragic loss of the Thresher was urged Sunday by Senator Leveritt Saltonstall....²

and later quoted the Senator as saying

I don't believe, however, that our investigation will begin until the Navy has completed its inquiry.³

Emphasis of "Dramatic" Stories

Newsmen have long known that their readers are interested in stories of conflict and emotion, and one can hardly be surprised if reporters seek out such stories and recount them with far greater detail than they do the less dramatic incidents.

The loss of THRESHER gave rise to many dramatic stories, and they were given special prominence.

There is no example of this more striking than the prominence given to stories relating to some crewmen's expression of fears about the seaworthiness of the submarine, while the expression of trust in the submarine by others went almost unnoticed.

A careful examination of all stories printed on this

¹Boston Record American, April 15, 1963, p. 1.

²Ibid., p. 2, underlining added.

³Ibid.

subject indicates that five crewmen had told relatives of various feeling, from concern to fear, about the submarine's fitness.

An Associated Press story of April 11, datelined Groton, Connecticut was the first of these. It said

The wife of a crewman blamed the navy for sending the Thresher thru deep-dive maneuvers shortly after leaving drydock at Portsmouth, N.H.

"Most of the fellows were a little leery," she said, asking that her name be withheld. "They thought the boat needed more time."¹

The Los Angeles Times reported the comments of another crewman's relatives:

"My father's whole life was submarines," said Mrs. Andrea Keele, 20, of 1515 $\frac{1}{2}$ 204th St., Torrance.

"He served on several. But he said the Thresher was different. He called it a coffin. He tried to transfer off it several times."

Mrs. Keele's father, George J. Kiesecker, 38, an electronics technician, was one of 129 lost on the vessel.

Kiesecker had expressed similar doubts about the seaworthiness of the Thresher to his sister-in-law, Miss Jacqueline Clover....²

The long Beach (California) Press Telegram reported the fears of another crewman, after a telephone interview with his wife in Groton, Connecticut. The paper reported

"You might as well get yourself another man," engineman Bill M. Klier told his wife, Mary, before boarding the ill-fated nuclear submarine Thresher.

"I don't think this tub is going to make it."³

The paper's display of this story was exceptional. It was

¹In the Chicago Tribune, April 12, 1963, p. 4.

²Los Angeles Times, April 12, 1963, p. 1.

³Long Beach (Cal.) Press Telegram, April 12, 1963, p. 1.

carried under a four-bank, eight-column banner headline, which took up one-third of the front page.

WAS SUB UNSAFE?

'Get Another Man...I Don't
Think This Tub Will Make It'
Santa Ana Crewman Told Wife

(The display was so noteworthy that another Long Beach newspaper, a privately-owned paper devoted to coverage of Navy activities, commented on it in its editorial columns. It called the coverage a "...frightening example of yellow journalism," and continued:

The men of the Thresher died with dignity and in silence, deep in the ocean's bowels. Wherever they are now, it is our prayer that they see not the words of sensationalism in the few newspapers who "played" the story with irresponsibility.¹⁾

A Connecticut man, with two brothers aboard THRESHER (the only case of brothers serving in the ship) traveled to Portsmouth and asked to be heard by the court of inquiry, where he said: "They were both extremely apprehensive about the condition of Thresher."²⁾

On April 12, The Boston Herald reported:

Mrs. Laurence Whitten, of Northwood, N.H., wife of an electronics engineer on the Thresher, admitted she had no faith in the sub "because they have dragged it into dry dock so many times."

She had a premonition of horror.

"I told him not to go, " she said. "But he told me it was his job."³⁾

¹Long Beach Dispatch, April 19, 1963, p. 4.

²The Boston Globe, April 14, 1963, p. 1.

³The Boston Herald, April 12, 1963, p. 11.

At the same time, another point of view was being expressed.

The Los Angeles Times quoted a relative as saying:

"Ronald tried many things during his 13 years in the Navy, but being aboard the Thresher was his greatest thrill . . ."

"He spent his last leave with us just before reporting to the sub. He was happier than I had ever seen him . . ."¹

The Boston Globe reported the comments of a crewman's mother, who lived in Wellesly, Massachusetts:

"It's funny," she said, "but I had never been afraid for him. He loved the submarine service and used to call the Thresher 'my \$43 million home'."²

The Boston Record-American reported that one of the THRESHER's crew who had remained ashore

. . . said the morale of the Thresher crew was higher than average.

He said the men who served aboard in the sea and shock trials felt it was America's finest submarine and "the feeling was infectious to new men."³

A former member of THRESHER's crew, who was then serving in Chicago, told the Chicago Tribune:

"When I went to sea on the Thresher, I had the safest feeling of any ship I have served on. I felt safer submerged than on the surface. The Thresher belonged to the sea. She looked out of place on the surface."⁴

Apparently no effort was made to give special prominence to any of these favorable comments. All were buried in stories primarily devoted to some other subject.

A startling example of how a story could be given a highly dramatic "twist" by the careful selection of certain material

¹Los Angeles Times, April 12, 1963, p. 10.

²The Boston Globe, April 12, 1963, p. 21.

³Boston Record-American, April 19, 1963, p. 20.

⁴Chicago Tribune, April 13, 1963, p. 2.

and the avoidance of others can be observed in a story carried by The Boston Globe, under the headline "Relatives Report Fears of Crew".

The story began

Did the enlisted men who went down with the Thresher know something about their ill fated ship that the officers didn't know?

An admiral has quoted the skipper of Thresher as "completely satisfied with his ship in all respects".

But next of kin of some of the men who went to their death in Thresher's crushed hull painted a totally different picture.

Veterans of long service in submarines, whose courage and knowledge of submarines was beyond question, feared this ship.

Some of the crew called the Thresher a coffin and tried without success to get transfers to the other ships.

One said the Thresher spent most of its short lifespan in repair yards.

Adm George W. Anderson, chief of Naval operations, said he heard rumors about the Thresher but his doubts were dispelled by another admiral, Rear Adm Charles J. Palmer, commanding officer of the Portsmouth Navy Yard.

Adm Palmer told Adm Anderson that Thresher's skipper was completely satisfied with his ship.

But the sister and daughter of a veteran submarine man, electronics technician George J. Kiesecker, 38, of Los Angeles, one of the 129 lost in the Thresher, recalled today that Kiesecker called Thresher "a coffin" and tried to secure a transfer from it.

Kiesecker's wife told her sister that when her husband bade her goodbye Sunday, he told her "Honey, I have a feeling this will be our last trip, that you will be a wealthy widow before the week is out."

Kiesecker's sister-in-law said the veteran of 20 years' submarine service "was afraid for the first time in his life after he was transferred to Thresher".

He had earlier served on the first Nautilus and the Sea Dragon. In World War II, he applied for submarine service and was on the submarine that penetrated Tokyo Harbor.

"He went aboard when they commissioned Thresher," she said.

"George told us it was in drydock most of the time, that it wasn't a good ship from the beginning, that there was always trouble."

The Thresher had been undergoing overhaul, repairs, and installation of new equipment for eight months in Portsmouth Navy Yard just prior to its fateful sailing Sunday.

Another Navy wife confessed that she had pleaded with her husband not to make this voyage, but he insisted he had to.

He, too, was an electronics technician. His widow said he had "no faith" in the submarine which has been "dragged into dry dock so many times".

But Adm Anderson said, after going to Portsmouth, ". . . there was no hint of any concern on the part of the officers, crew or civilians about the seaworthiness of this fine ship."¹

The remainder of the story contains a recapitulation of statements made by Navy officials concerning previous damage to the submarine, and their explanation of why the submarine had been in the yard so often, along with some speculation about the possible causes for the submarine's loss.

The author of the story was probably convinced that his account was accurate. And yet, he made several slight errors (some of which affected the sense of the story), drew certain generalizations from isolated incidents, left out facts which were probably available to him and in general, heightened the dramatic quality of his story.

An item by item examination of these discrepancies is revealing.

Item:

Some of the crew called Thresher a coffin and tried without success to get transfers to other ships.

Comment: The only stories in which it was said that a crewman called the submarine a coffin, were those referring to

¹The Boston Globe, April 13, 1963, p. 5.

George Kiesecker.

Item:

One said the Thresher spent most of its short lifespan in repair yards.

Comment: This too, was attributed only to Kiesecker, although the "some . . . one . . ." combination tends to imply that the statements were made by different crewmen.

Item:

Adm George W. Anderson, chief of Naval operations, said he heard rumors about Thresher, but his doubts were dispelled by another admiral, Rear Adm Charles J. Palmer . . .

Comment: The actual statement issued by Admiral Anderson was:

Inevitably in the wake of such a major tragedy as that involving THRESHER, rumors arise as to the physical ability of the ship, aircraft, or other vehicle concerned, to carry out a particular case. To dispel them in my own mind, I have personally checked with the commanding officer of Portsmouth Naval Shipyard . . .¹

Item:

The Thresher had been undergoing overhaul . . . just prior to its fateful sailing Sunday.

Comment: The ship sailed from Portsmouth on Tuesday, April 9.

Item:

Another Navy wife confessed that she had pleaded with her husband not to make this voyage, but he insisted he had to.

He, too, was an electronics technician.

Comment: Although the reporter does not identify the source of this comment, it is clear that it was Mrs. Laurence Whitten (quoted above). Since Whitten was a civilian employee of the

¹Department of Defense News Release No. 516-63, of April 12, 1963, contained in Appendix A.

shipyard, and not an electronics technician, which is the name of a Navy rate, it is incorrect to call Mrs. Whitten "Another Navy wife".

Item:

His widow said he had "no faith" in the submarine which has been "dragged into dry dock so many times".

Comment: The original story says:

Mrs. Laurence Whitten . . . admitted she had no faith in the sub . . . (underlining added)

Item:

But Adm Anderson said, after going to Portsmouth . . .

Comment: Admiral Anderson did not visit the shipyard at any time after the disaster.

The story made no mention of other crewmen's expressions of confidence in the submarine.

It seems significant that the newspaper in which this story appeared had previously carried stories expressing the favorable comments of crewmen. In a column adjacent to the story cited above, it printed a Navy statement explaining that THRESHER had been sent to the shipyard more often than other submarines because it was the first ship in its class and therefore subject to special tests. On the same page, it carried another story which related a heroic act previously performed by a crewman lost when the submarine went down.

There can be no question but that the newspaper's characteristic reaction was one of sympathy and concern, and its reporting objective.

Indeed these facts only emphasize the point that the most responsible newsmen writing under the pressure of deadline can

fall into a pattern of unfortunate oversimplification. It is an especially unfortunate situation since it offers no simple solution.

Newspaper Coverage And the Time Factor

The rapid decline of space devoted to coverage of the THRESHER incident has been noted earlier. While in many instances the explanation for this was that there was no news to report, it can also be observed that as time elapsed, events which earlier would have warranted great attention were underemphasized. Consequently, significant but late development in the case were less likely to be known to the public.

On June 20, 1963, ten weeks after the submarine had been lost, the results of the court of inquiry were announced in Washington, D.C. and the news release dealing with the findings was transmitted to newsmen elsewhere, including Boston. The news release (attached as Appendix C), if printed in its entirety would have filled 31 column/inches of space. No newspaper in the Boston area devoted more than seven inches of space to the findings of the court despite the fact many had previously used more space than that to say that the activity of the court of inquiry was all-important.

To illustrate the effect of passing time on the amount of coverage devoted to the incident, Table 12 indicates the amount of space given to the court of inquiry by the four Boston papers and The New York Times during the first two weeks, on the single day of greatest coverage and the amount devoted to the court's findings.

TABLE 12. -- Comparison of amount of space (in column/inches) devoted to court of inquiry at various times

Newspaper	Total space during first two weeks	Maximum space in any single day	Space devoted to findings
<u>The Boston Globe</u>	439	99	4
<u>The Boston Herald</u>	590	197	5
<u>Boston Traveler</u>	310	55	7
<u>Record-American</u>	350	105	5
<u>The New York Times</u>	208	77	18

Only The New York Times and the Boston Record-American carried the news in a story devoted exclusively to the findings. The other newspapers included additional information on the search findings (although the figures in Table 12 refer only to space devoted to the findings). The readers of one newspaper were not even informed in the headline that the findings of the court were included in the story. That newspaper's page-one headline said

Trieste Heads for Thresher's Grave¹

and the first mention of the court's findings occurred in the third paragraph of the story.

Newspaper Content and Navy
Public Information Officers

A quick glance at the volume of news releases issued by the Navy in Washington during the two weeks after THRESHER was lost (Appendix A) readily indicates that only a minute fraction of the

¹The Boston Herald, June 21, 1963, p. 1.

total newspaper coverage was originated by the Navy.

The Navy played an important part in facilitating other coverage - by transporting newsmen to the scene of search operations, by conducting background briefings, by answering press inquiries, by holding press conferences, and in other similar ways.

The great bulk of the newspaper coverage was derived from sources other than the Navy. Newsmen on their own initiative sought out the next of kin, civilian scientists, and others whose commentary was interesting. Drawing on their own experience, the newsmen related accounts of previous trips in nuclear submarines. Turning to their files, newsmen resurrected the details of previous submarine disasters. Based on their unique perception of the event and its consequences on world affairs, some analysts wrote stories about the implications of the disaster.

In other words, Navy information officials throughout the United States, working at peak efficiency, could not have begun to supply all the information which newspaper editors felt was necessary to tell the whole story of the loss of the submarine.

The collection, preparation and dissemination of news by the modern communications media is a dynamic process, involving many individuals - editors, reporters, rewrite men, headline writers, and certain circumstances the public relations official.

In a fast-breaking story of major magnitude, as the THRESHER story was, the final product, a news story appearing in a newspaper, became a mosaic of elements derived from various sources. A typical THRESHER story might begin in a courtroom at Portsmouth, New Hampshire, pass via telephone to a rewrite man in a newsroom, be subject to modification by a news editor, and be assigned a

unique slant by a headline writer, and given more or less importance by its placement in the newspapers page.

A "background briefing" provided by a public information official for the newsmen on the scene thus has in effect only one of the inputs into the final product - only one element of the process of reporting.

Even when the public information officer was on the scene, his influence on the story as read by the public is minor.

Newspapers and the Issues

As noted earlier, it has been suggested that an important event which involves the self-interest of the public, or which arouses conflict, anxiety or frustration, will lead to the development of issues, which will influence the formation of public opinion.

As might be expected, many issues arose from the loss of THRESHER; some were explicitly stated by the press, others were only implied. Some were mentioned only once or twice and then disappeared; others attracted greater attention; none became a matter for really extensive discussion in the press. Attention to the issues accounted for a minute proportion of the total manifest content.

An analysis of press coverage indicates that the following issues were reported.

1. Hazard to the public safety from radioactive contamination. Most adults in the United States are probably aware that radioactivity constitutes a potential hazard to health. Perhaps the most immediate potential threat to the self interest

of the American public, in connection with the loss of THRESHER, was the danger that radioactive material from the submarine's reactor might represent a hazard if released. The Navy maintained there was "absolutely no chance of nuclear explosion in the submarine, nor is there any danger of radioactive contamination".¹

The Russian government gave wide dissemination to reports by its own experts that "the disaster will poison the Atlantic with radioactivity and endanger waters as far away as Newfoundland and New York and Boston".¹

2. Public confidence in the Navy. The very fact that THRESHER was lost indicated that something had gone wrong. This cast some doubt on the future effectiveness of deep-diving submarines. Strangely, press comment did not dwell at length on this apparently important issue. The editorial comment of The Washington Star was typical, "If there is a fatal flaw in the THRESHER design or the construction specifications, the implications are obvious."² However obvious the implications were, the Star did not spell them out. Did it mean that because the THRESHER class submarine is designed primarily to fight other submarines that the Russians, with their large submarine fleet, would now have an advantage? Did it mean that other submarines built to the same specification as THRESHER would now have to operate at reduced depth, with decreased effectiveness? If these were implications, they were only implied, and were never treated in a forthright manner in the newspaper columns.

¹Reported in The Boston Globe, April 14, 1963, p. 50.

²The Washington Star, April 16, 1963, p. 10.

The most direct statement about the possible implications that THRESHER's loss would have on the future operations of nuclear submarines appeared in the Boston Traveler. The paper stated editorially:

The nation's ability to survive in an unpredictable world rests on the reliability of the Polaris missile system. That missile system in turn rests on the reliability of nuclear submarines operating at great depths. Up to last Wednesday, the Thresher was rated as the best and most dependable deep-dive nuclear submarine in the U.S. Fleet.

Until we find out what went wrong with her and build safeguards to prevent it from happening to other nuclear submarines, our Polaris security theory stands as a question mark.¹

It is ironic that the most forthright comment on the possible operational consequences of the loss of THRESHER, did not concern the THRESHER class submarines, but referred to a significantly different type of submarine, which does not, in fact, need to operate at great depths to obtain tactical advantages.

The Christian Science Monitor, which specializes in "interpretive reporting", never investigated the operational implications of the loss of THRESHER.

Its initial report on the loss of the submarine, began:

Disappearance of the nuclear submarine Thresher off the Massachusetts coast has turned the attention of naval officials--and of the general public--to how underwater tragedies can be avoided.

It also raises the question of what went wrong with the various safety devices of the giant attack submarine, one of the most modern and best equipped in the Navy's arsenal.²

Most newspapers felt, like the Monitor, that the prime issue was whether the submarine was safe, and whether the Navy had

¹Boston Traveler, April 15, 1963, p. 19.

²The Christian Science Monitor, April 11, 1963, p. 1.

taken every possible step to insure the safety of men who serve in submarines. In this respect, the following issues were dominant:

a. Was the Navy heedless of the fears of its men?

The special prominence given to stories about crewmen who had expressed a lack of confidence in their ship has already been noted.

Russian propagandists also attempted to add to the controversy. A United Press International report from Moscow said:

Soviet naval authorities said today the loss of the U.S. submarine Thresher with 129 aboard may have been due to haste in getting the vessel into action and to technical shortcomings.

They added that the accident might testify to the fact that the level of preparedness and technical equipment did not correspond to the bragging assertion of the American press.

A soviet naval captain, V. Pustov, said ". . . American authorities knew there was something wrong."¹

The New York Times quoted another Russian naval expert, reporting:

The admiral attributed the loss of the 129 men aboard the Thresher to what he described as the Pentagon's "pursuit of sensational publicity and dubious priority." He charged that the Thresher had been compelled to undertake "risky experiments."²

b. Was the Navy conducting adequate research in submarine rescue techniques? The earliest announcements of the loss of THRESHER were accompanied by statements that rescue was impossible at the depths at which the submarine was operating. For most people this was a revelation. The astronauts are in a similar situation, for if any crucial equipment should fail, they are beyond rescue. The astronauts, however, are clearly recognized as being explorers, and the calculated risk has been assessed and

¹UPI report in The Boston Globe, April 13, 1963, p. 3.

²The New York Times, April 14, 1963, p. 10.

deemed acceptable. On the other hand, the Navy is asking thousands of submariners to routinely operate in a hostile environment where there is no possibility of rescue if an accident should occur.

The issue did not escape the press. One science editor wrote:

Even if the Thresher had gone down in only 800 feet of water and her hull had remained intact, rescue of those trapped inside would have been all but impossible.

The maximum depth that men can be rescued from a submarine today is 400 feet and even this is straining.

. . . New England, home of three major submarine bases and with a submarine tradition, will want to know what the Navy could do if faced with yet another submarine disaster.

And again, what research has been carried on to devise new methods of rescue?

Now that much of the country's naval strength and depth is in its underseas craft, both Congress and the people may demand a better "safety belt" for submarine personnel.¹

c. Was the Navy doing all it could to determine the cause of the loss? As soon as the submarine was reported overdue, search operations began, and are in progress even as this is being written (June, 1964). When it was determined that the submarine was lost, a court of inquiry was convened to investigate the disaster. As has been noted, these two facets of the THRESHER incident accounted for more newspaper space than any other items.

Initial newspaper coverage made it apparent to the public that an intensive search had been mounted.

A Boston paper said:

It became apparent toward the close of the third day of the

¹Ian Menzies, The Boston Globe, April 12, 1963, p. 1.

search for Thresher in an area 290 miles east of Boston that a massive effort would be made to recover at least a part of the prototype attack submarine from water that runs to a depth of 8,400 feet.

That search will use nuclear submarines, under-water television cameras, a diving device in which men have explored ocean waters to a depth of seven miles and whatever knowledge is gleaned by a court of inquiry which set up operations yesterday at Portsmouth Naval Shipyard.¹

The public was made aware of the magnitude of the search effort, but was also led to expect quick results by optimistic reports of civilian oceanographers. On April 14, a Boston newspaper reported that the director of Wood Hole Oceanographic Institution predicted the submarine would be found in seventy two hours, although the Navy search commander was quoted as saying the search was "a great big problem which could take days and days of fine tooth combing."² Expectations that THRESHER would soon be found, led one Boston paper to report, incorrectly, that the search had been successful.³

When the early rumors failed to be fulfilled, the stories of imminent discovery ended. On May 31, on the basis of underwater photographs, the Navy announced that the submarine had been located, but the pictures were subsequently proven not to be of THRESHER.

While it is difficult to assess the effect the various "THRESHER found" stories and their subsequent retractions had on public opinion, it can be noted that the press never criticized the Navy's effort in searching for the submarine.

¹The Boston Herald, April 13, 1963, p. 1.

²The Boston Globe, April 14, 1963, p. 26.

³The Boston Globe (evening edition), April 18, 1963, p. 1.

The court of inquiry, however, was criticized, and defended in the newspapers.

The most outspoken criticism of the court was the previously mentioned editorial advising the court not to look for scapegoats, but to "get on with its business."

On another occasion, a New Hampshire Senator told the Senate he objected to "exaggerations and emotional distortions" surrounding the court. He was reported to have said, "I deplore the misleading sensationalism of some reports of isolated details of testimony before the court of inquiry."¹ His criticism was directed more at the testimony of witnesses than at the procedures of the court.

Only the day before this statement was made, another Senator, John C. Pastore, Chairman of the Joint Congressional Atomic Committee was quoted as saying:

We believe the Navy's board of inquiry is staffed with competent people who have the best interests of the Navy and its personnel at heart. We believe they will make every effort to get to the cause of the tragedy.²

Perhaps the public's best clues to the thoroughness of the court's procedures came from the reporters' descriptions of the hearings. Descriptions, such as the following, made it seem unlikely that the court was attempting to "whitewash" any possible Navy discrepancies:

Vice Adm Bernard L. Austin, leaning hard on Rule [a shipyard officer], asked sardonically if he could "give a good reason" why so many valves were improperly installed, "despite your

¹Senator Tom McIntyre, quoted in The Boston Globe, April 24, 1963, p. 24.

²Boston Traveler, April 23, 1963, p. 2.

fine quality control organization?"¹

d. Was the Navy being candid in revealing information on THRESHER? Those newspapers which chose to comment on the question of the Navy's candor, were generally favorable. A correspondent, covering the search operations wrote:

The Navy was not out to manage the news, but out to be sure all the news available on the Thresher managed to get to the public.

It may not ever get to the answer as to just what happened and why, but it will not be for lack of trying.

Editorial comment, was also favorable: "Navy spokesmen, however, deserve credit for their candidness so far, in attempting to explain to the public the intricacies of nuclear submarine technology."³

While no newspaper openly accused the Navy of purposely withholding unclassified information, the sensitive reader might be led to believe that the Navy was not candid in some instances.

A California newspaper, for instance, carried the headline

ADMIRAL HIDES SECRETS
OF ATOMIC SUB DISASTER

over a wire service story which conveyed a totally different meaning. The story said:

The admiral in charge of rescue operations the first three days after the nuclear submarine Thresher sank in the Atlantic testified today he had formed an opinion as the cause of the sinking, but he added "it is nothing I care to

¹The Boston Globe, April 21, 1963, p. 1.

²Neal Sanford, The Christian Science Monitor, April 12, 1963, p. 1.

³The Boston Globe, April 12, 1963, p. 6.

state in open session."¹

A more complicated example was a series of stories printed by The Boston Globe, which began with a report by the newspaper that THRESHER had been found.

A late edition of the paper carried the banner headline,
Thresher Found Intact, Flooded.

The story read:

WOODS HOLE--The Thresher has been located. It is intact and flooded. It may be salvageable.

The nuclear powered submarine that was lost with 129 men aboard in a test dive on April 10 was located on the ocean floor 220 miles east of Boston in more than 8000 feet of water.

This was learned today when the Atlantic II, research ship of Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution here, returned in fog and drizzle to pick up more electronic sounding equipment.

The hope of salvaging the submarine is understandably slender.

Whether or not the Thresher can ever be brought to the surface again depends almost entirely upon the capabilities and resourcefulness of the bathyscaph Trieste scheduled to arrive here from the West Coast within a fortnight.²

At no place in the story was the source of information cited. The newspaper made no attempt to confirm the story with Navy officials until the paper was on the streets. Navy public information officials were advised by Woods Hole authorities that the story was incorrect, and so informed the newspaper.

Subsequently, the author was advised by newspaper sources that the story was based on information from a civilian at Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, whom they preferred not to iden-

¹Long Beach, California Press-Telegram, April 16, 1963, p. A-1.

²The Boston Globe, evening edition, April 18, 1963, p. 1.

tify, except to explain that he was "reliable." Newspaper personnel admitted the story was exaggerated, but said this was the result of misunderstandings between a reporter and a re-write man and the over-enthusiasm of a headline writer.

It was explained that the newspaper had failed to check the story with the Navy prior to publication because of the pressure of deadline.

On the day after the initial story appeared, the paper reported:

Hopes that the submarine Thresher may be located in her underwater burial place brightened Thursday . . .

A Boston Globe story that the stricken sub had been located was denied Thursday night by the Navy and the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution.¹

This particular statement did not tend to discredit the Navy, but on April 24, the paper reported: "Despite previous denials, the Navy acknowledged Tuesday that six ocean-bottom 'protuberances, considered real good prospects,' had been found."²

The story referred to the fact that a Navy spokesman in a briefing for newsmen in Washington, had indicated that the search had isolated a series of "bottom anomalies." The spokesman explained at length that these could be rock outcroppings or old ship wrecks. At no time did he suggest any confirmation of the newspaper's report.

On May 31, after the Navy made its incorrect announcement that THRESHER had been located, the newspaper again implied that previous Navy denials were false. Under the headline

¹The Boston Globe, April 19, 1963, p. 1.

²The Boston Globe, April 24, 1963, p. 1.

Confirms Globe Story

the newspaper said,

The announcement Thursday that the submarine Thresher had been found confirmed a Boston Globe story of six weeks ago which reported location of the wreckage.

.....

Navy officials at the time denied this report, as did officers of the search ship which reportedly had made contact with the ill-fated vessel by sonar soundings.

.....

A source aboard the Atlantis told the Globe that Thresher's hull was recorded for a second or two in a sweep of the research ship's sounding equipment.¹

While the newspaper was not pressing the point of the Navy denials, it did continue to imply that the newspaper was correct and the Navy wrong.

Significantly, the newspaper did not offer an explanation of how it concluded, in its initial story, that the submarine was intact, flooded and salvageable when the information was based on a sound recording of a "second or two."

3. Long-range defense programs. In addition to the immediate implications raised about the future of the THRESHER class submarine in our defense program, the loss of THRESHER raised other issues which might have the gravest effects on the defense program in the future. Although they were given relatively little treatment in the press, they include the following:

a. Access to foreign ports for nuclear powered vessels. The primary strategic purpose of any navy is to pro-

¹The Boston Globe, May 31, 1963, p. 1.

vide mobile force which can operate in advance areas. In this respect, the opportunity to use friendly foreign ports, though not essential is advantageous. The loss of THRESHER immediately revived long-standing and politically motivated demands in Japan, that nuclear submarines not be allowed in that country's ports. Immediately after the disaster, a Los Angeles Times correspondent wrote from Tokyo:

Disappearance of the U.S. nuclear-powered submarine Thresher off Boston will lead to increased protests in Japan against American plans to berth atomic submarines here.

Socialist opponents of the United States request that nuclear submarines be permitted to call at Japanese ports have already taken up the issue.

They say the Thresher incident proves that nuclear vessels are not as safe as American experts have assured the Japanese government.¹

A wire service story from Tokyo, on April 17, reported the Japanese foreign minister had said his country was "not in a position to reject port calls by (U.S.) nuclear-powered submarines." In a press conference, he said

But the Japanese government has asked the United States government to provide information on the causes of the loss of Thresher² and answers to questions on the safety of atomic subs.

b. Type of Polaris launchers for proposed NATO deterrent force. At the time of the loss of THRESHER, discussions were being held by NATO members concerning the possible methods of deploying Polaris missiles, which were proposed as the main NATO nuclear deterrent. The question, essentially, was

¹Ted Sell, Los Angeles Times, April 12, 1963, p. 2.

²Associated Press story in the Los Angeles Times, April 17, 1963, p. 6.

whether the missiles should be deployed in surface ships or submarines. Either type ship would be manned by mixed crews from several nations. Hanson Baldwin, one of the nation's leading military analysts, wrote that the loss of THRESHER would seriously affect the decisions as to the type of ship selected. He said,

. . . if Thresher, manned by a carefully selected and trained crew from one nation could come to grief, what might happen to an even more complex submarine of a Polaris type, manned by a crew drawn from several nations?¹

4. Privately run verses Navy shipyards. The question of the relative merits of private and navy shipyards is constantly being debated. The issue was particularly important at the time of the loss of THRESHER, since Congress was considering the 1964 defense budget, which contained a provision that a prescribed amount of Navy work would be done in private shipyards. The Marine Editor of the New York Herald Tribune reported on April 12,

The Navy's Bureau of Ships is conducting a quiet campaign in Congress for elimination of a requirement in the pending Defense Appropriations Bill that at least 35 per cent of all Navy modernization and overhaul work be assigned to privately operated shipyards instead of Navy yards.

Private shipbuilders contend their yards are operated more efficiently than naval shipyards making it possible for them to execute modernization and repair work more quickly and inexpensively than in naval yards.²

The fact that THRESHER had been built and overhauled in a navy shipyard (Portsmouth, New Hampshire) led to some lively comment by proponents of private and navy yards.

Connecticut Representative William L. St. Onge, represents

¹The New York Times, April 13, 1963, p. 6.

²Walter Hamshar, New York Herald Tribune, April 12, 1963, p. 22.

the area in which the Electric Boat Division of General Dynamics is located. Electric Boat is the largest civilian shipyard engaged in the construction of nuclear submarines. Mr. St.Onge, according to an Associated Press report,

. . . said the engineers at General Dynamics' Electric Boat Division felt the original design for the Thresher failed to meet minimum safety requirements.

Mr. St.Onge said Electric Boat engineers saw the original specification for the Thresher and felt the submarine would be a "waterlogged floating stump."¹

He also reported that Electric Boat had refused to bid on construction of Thresher class submarines, but this story was quickly disproved when the Navy pointed out that the company was at that time working on five submarines of that class.

One of the submarines that Electric Boat was building, FLASHER, was struck by a fire on May 8, which killed three workmen. Congressman St.Onge said he would ". . . request an immediate investigation of the cause and particularly whether any sabotage was involved."²

On the same day, New Hampshire Congressman, Louis C. Wyman, was defending the Portsmouth shipyard. He too hinted at sabotage, apparently a favorite defense, for the integrity of a yard, which is under fire. A newspaper account said:

"Let us quit blaming Portsmouth for the loss," Wyman urged in the House.

.

Cong. Wyman told Congress that "rumors, speculation, individual sour grapes and outright slander by headline seekers are contributing to give the Portsmouth Naval Ship-

¹The Christian Science Monitor, April 23, 1963, p. 12.

²The Boston Globe, May 8, 1963, p. 8.

yard, its officers and its workers an undeserved and unwarranted black eye."

"It is entirely possible that the loss had nothing whatsoever to do with the Portsmouth yard or with any structural failure within the submarine itself," Wyman said.

"It is entirely possible that the loss was deliberately brought about. We do not know," he said.¹

The issues--a summary

These were the issues by implication only. They were seldom succinctly stated; they were never the object of extensive and purposeful discussion; and they accounted for only a minute part of the total coverage given to the event. Some were mentioned in only one newspaper (as the case of the implications for Polaris submarines for NATO, which was the work of a single analyst and was never commented on by other writers).

Almost a year after THRESHER was lost, on March 4, 1964, an hour-long television documentary, "The Legacy of the Thresher," was broadcast by the Columbia Broadcasting System television network. After extensive interviews with persons associated with the search for THRESHER, CBS concluded that the "legacy" of the submarine was the dramatization of the need for additional knowledge of the ocean depths.

The other issues, drawn from the newspapers in April, 1963, were not mentioned in the television program. Indeed they have been neglected by the mass media almost from the day they were raised.

The possible reasons for this are threefold:

¹Ibid., p. 21.

- (1) The "issues" never existed, as such, in the public mind.
- (2) That the issues existed, but were resolved.
- (3) That the issues are dormant.

The most likely resolution of the problems of the issues is a combination of the three possibilities.

Some of the potential issues were simply not important to the American public. By and large, the man on the street is not significantly concerned about whether Navy ships are built in private or public shipyards (unless he is employed by one or the other), or whether Japanese ports are available to Navy ships.

Certain other issues were unquestionably resolved. The most dramatic of these was the possibility of a threat to personal safety--the danger to health from radiation. This issue was resolved when the public accepted as credible, the statements of authorities who said that no danger existed. Perhaps a similar process resolved other issues. Navy officials said they had done everything possible to prevent the accident, those Navy sources were accepted as credible, therefore the public was satisfied by the explanation.

In the months since the loss of THRESHER, the Navy has announced that it has made certain changes to submarines of the same class, and was incorporating additional safety measures into new construction submarines. The formation of a special board to study the problems of deep submergence¹ also indicated the Navy's concern and that it was taking appropriate steps.

The resolution of the issues associated with the THRESHER

¹See Department of Defense news release #582-63, April 25, 1963, included in Appendix A.

incident was almost invariably based on the evaluation of highly technical information--in many instances classified, and in most instances complicated beyond the ability of most citizens to understand. The resolution of the issues became a product of the public's confidence in its officials.

Any influence the loss of THRESHER has had on public opinion seems, after one year, peripheral at most. The dramatic example of THRESHER will surely continue to stimulate interest in oceanography. It might be a factor if a proposal were made to man nuclear submarines with crews of mixed nationality.

The THRESHER incident will be recalled whenever men talk of disaster at sea. The example of THRESHER may influence some decisions in the future, but it would still seem that the specific incident of the loss of THRESHER never generated any crucial issues for the American public.

CHAPTER III
NEWSMEN'S COMMENTS
ON THE THRESHER INCIDENT

Since the public's perception of the THRESHER incident was based primarily on account in the mass media, the men who prepared those accounts played a crucial role in the total public relations picture.

The author, therefore, interviewed representatives of all media, including newsmen from Boston, Portsmouth and Washington, D.C.

Each newsman was asked to comment on his assessment of the performance of Navy public relations officials and to discuss any matters which helped or hindered him in his attempt to cover the story.

Responses varied widely. Some newsmen were lavish in their praise of the Navy's performance during the disaster. Other's were critical. Often newsmen differed in their assessment of the same event. In other cases, there was almost universal agreement.

A summary of their comments on each important phase of the THRESHER disaster follows.

Washington, D.C.

Newsmen interviewed in Washington, agreed that the Navy's performance there was exceptionally good. One reporter charac-

terized the Navy's handling of the matter as "about the best job I've seen done here."¹ Another called it "almost perfect."² A third said, "The people the Navy had down here were faultless."³

All were impressed with the Navy's candor, the speed with which it disseminated information, and its efforts to keep them provided with information, even about events which were not occurring in Washington.

One newsman felt that much of the success could be credited to Admiral George W. Anderson, the Chief of Naval Operations. He said:

I don't recall seeing anything handled better than the THRESHER case. The Chief of Naval Operations obviously decided it was a Navy problem and the Navy should tell everything it knew as fast as it could.

The Navy had its best PIO on the story--Admiral Anderson. He has an unusual appreciation of the need for informing people.

He assembled a little group of professional men and kept them here all night. Any question you asked you could get a factual answer.⁴

Portsmouth, New Hampshire--Early Phase

Although most of the newsmen who covered the initial release of information in Portsmouth praised the Navy, they did so with qualification.

Their criticism was not directed at the performance of public information officials at Portsmouth, but at the fact that

¹Interview with Charles Corddry, United Press International Pentagon correspondent, Washington, D.C., April 26, 1963.

²Interview with Elton Fay, Associated Press Pentagon correspondent, Washington, D.C., April 26, 1963.

³Interview with Fred A. Hoffman, Associated Press Pentagon correspondent, Washington, D.C., April 26, 1963.

⁴Charles Corddry, interview with the author.

the Navy had chosen to make Washington, rather than Portsmouth, the focal point for the release of information.

They pointed out that the loss of THRESHER was a New England story and that most aspects of the incident would be covered by New England newsmen. They complained that local officials often could not release information without "clearing it with Washington." They were particularly critical of the delay in the release of crewmen's names and of the lack of positive information on plans for transportation to the scene of the search operations.

The newsmen praised the performance of the Public Information Officer, and felt he did everything possible to assist them despite obvious obstacles.

Significantly, there was very little criticism of the events which occurred after the first day. The newsmen attributed this to the fact that the public information organization has "settled down." It is interesting to note, however, that it was at this time that Portsmouth did become the focal point of news coverage, and this fact may have unconsciously influenced their evaluation.

Radio and television representatives (who could not cover the story to the degree that newspaper reporters could) offered practically no criticism of the Portsmouth operation.

Portsmouth--Court of Inquiry

Newsmen who covered the activities of the court of inquiry were generally outspoken in their praise.

They were pleased with the cooperation of the members of

the court (particularly the President, Vice Admiral Austin) and the assistance of the public information officer.

One newsman felt that too many of the sessions were closed; most of the others were convinced they were allowed to hear all significant unclassified testimony. A few expressed surprise that some of the information they were allowed to hear was not given in closed sessions.

One reported said:

We were aware that the court discussed things in closed session that were not classified. On one occasion, the court heard the testimony of several young seamen from SKYLARK. It was apparent that the public's presence would have inhibited their responses--so we understood that situation. We were given access to all the legitimate news.¹

Search Operations

The reporters who were aboard the Navy destroyer which participated in the early search for THRESHER agreed that this was an important phase of the coverage of the whole incident. They were surprised that the Navy had even considered cancelling the trip and were generally irritated at the Navy's delay in announcing its plans in this respect.

A reporter who was aboard the ship said:

It proved to be a very productive trip. We had an opportunity to talk to the scientists, who gave us their approach to the search problem; we were able to observe the techniques of the search. Most of all, we were able to capture the color and the drama which was a vital part of the story. We went through a gale and knew the problems that the navy faced. We observed the emotions of the men on the ship. We were impressed with the effort the Navy was making and our stories reflected this.²

¹Interview with Robert Norling, City Editor, The Portsmouth Herald, Portsmouth, N.H., May 24, 1963.

²Interview with Ed. McGrath, The Boston Globe, Boston, Mass., May 21, 1963.

The Unique View from the Newsroom

Although most of the interviews were conducted with reporters who had covered the events at first hand, some were with newspaper personnel who remained in the newsroom. Among these were the city editors of three Boston newspapers.

The author had expected to find that their views would reflect the experiences and opinions of the reporters on their staffs. This was not altogether true. In one case, several reporters had related various irritating delays and problems which they had faced.

Their city editor told the author, "I have no comments on specific problems. As a matter of fact, no one who was on the story complained to me about any problems."¹

Equally strange is the fact that the city editors of the three papers differed somewhat in their assessment of public relations matters associated with the disaster.

One city editor summarized his comments, by saying, "The Navy did the best job it possibly could have under difficult circumstances. I have no criticism of anything that was done."²

Another city editor said, "I can't think of anything that was too bad. We have to understand that when a story as big as THRESHER occurs, mistakes will be made on both sides. I have no complaints . . ."³

¹ Interview with Joe Dineen, Night City Editor, The Boston Globe, Boston, Mass., May 23, 1963.

² Interview with John Mannion, City Editor, The Boston Herald, Boston, Mass., August 15, 1963.

³ Interview with Joseph Dineen, Night City Editor, The Boston Globe, Boston, Mass., May 23, 1963.

Yet another city editor said:

I think that sometimes Navy officials weren't quite as well informed about the case as we were . . .

Some people on this case broke their backs to get information to us. If they were stumped on a question they would try to find the answers.

Sometimes our reporters discovered resistance.

In general, the¹ Navy tends to overprotect its personnel and their families.

While the editors' opinions of the performance of Navy officials varied, they all agreed that, good or bad, the performance of public information officers would in no way influence the newspaper's coverage of the event.

The editor who had been somewhat dissatisfied with the Navy's performance, said "We don't allow opinion to creep into the news. Our editorial opinion might be caustic but we remain objective in the news columns."²

The editors' opinions of their ability to remain reasonably objective despite any personal dissatisfaction, is borne out by the evaluation of the three newspapers' coverage of the THRESHER case. The author is unable to observe any long-term trend of coverage slanted so as to be favorable or unfavorable to the Navy.

While there was no trend of biased reporting, there were many instances of subjective reporting, editing, and headline writing (notable examples have already been indicated). That

¹Interview with John Brookes, City Editor, Boston Record-American, Boston, Mass., August 14, 1963.

²Ibid.

this problem is inherent in the business of reporting the news, is indicated by the many studies that have been written documenting lapses of truth, fairness and objectivity in reporting the news.¹

Despite this fact, the almost universal answer that reporters gave when the author asked, "Can you remain objective?", was an unqualified "Yes." Almost invariably reporters reiterated the maxim that editorial comment should be reserved for the editorial page.

Interviews with editorial writers, however, revealed that reporters rarely communicate information to them, which the reporter felt "should be reserved for the editorial page."

Pentagon correspondent, Elton Fay, was one of a very few newsmen who admitted the possibility of personal emotions becoming involved in a news story. He said,

Of course there are times when I get angry--if I feel that I have been lied to, I get angry. In a way, I get paid for getting angry, but that doesn't affect the way I write a story. Or at least, it shouldn't.²

Another Washington newsman, Fred Hoffman, admitted the possibility of subjective writing, and suggested a novel precaution, the careful selection of adjectives and a complete avoidance of "extravagant phrases."³

Such insight into the existence of the problem was rarely expressed.

¹A notable study is Wilbur Schramm's Responsibility in Mass Communications, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), chap. 8, "Truth and Fairness," pp. 217-265.

²Fay, interview with the author.

³Hoffman, interview with the author.

Newsmen's recommendations

Each newsman interviewed was told that the purpose of this study was to determine what procedure should be followed in the future to facilitate coverage of fast-breaking news stories. Each was asked his recommendations for future incidents.

The replies were invariably couched in the most general terms.

The most consistently stated recommendation was that the armed services should have more public information officers, and that the public information officers should be experienced in newspaper work.

This, newsmen said, would insure that the public information officer had an appreciation for the newspapers' requirements--both as to the type of information desired, and special requirements, such as meeting deadlines.

The Boston newsmen generally felt that the focal point for release of information should be as close as possible to the site of the event..

Editors stressed the importance of the Navy's immediately advising its local authorities of the plan of action in other areas. This, the editors said, would enable them to assign their reporters to the points of principal interest.

Several reporters, notably those who had accompanied the destroyer which participated in the search, said that public information plans should invariably provide for newsmen to have direct access to the scene of action.

Newsmen's Assessment of the THRESHER
Incident as a "Big Story"

All newsmen who were asked, correctly predicted that the THRESHER story would be among the "ten biggest stories" of 1963. All said they were aware of the magnitude of the story as soon as they learned what had happened.

When asked why the story was of such interest, most newsmen, almost automatically, enumerated several reasons. The most mentioned were: (1) the great loss of life and property, (2) the fact that THRESHER was the first nuclear ship to be lost, and (3) the possible consequence to the defense program.

After quickly naming these reasons, and in response to further questioning, several newsmen added that the mysterious nature of the loss and the suspense of the search added to the story. Another reason consistently given was that sea tragedies always attract special interest.

A surprising explanation, all the more interesting because it was advanced independently by several newsmen, was that people are all somewhat claustrophobic and were therefore compulsively drawn to the story. Several reporters said that reports of the incident must have elicited "images" of trapped men struggling as water poured into the submarine. This theory is supported by the fact that a national magazine illustrated its account of the loss of THRESHER with an artist's representation of just such a scene.¹

¹Life, Vol. 54, No. 16 (April 19, 1963), pp. 40-41.

CHAPTER IV

THE PATTERN OF DISASTER COVERAGE

Several newsmen told the author that public information officials could facilitate coverage of any future disasters by "anticipating the requirements of the press." The suggestion implies a more or less standard set of requirements common to all disaster situations.

Examination of newspaper coverage of previous disasters reveals that there are not only elements common to all major disasters, but that the newspaper coverage is indeed so standardized that it can be predicted with reasonable accuracy.

For purposes of comparison with the THRESHER case, two previous naval disasters were studied. One was the explosion aboard the aircraft carrier USS LEYTE in 1953, which caused the deaths of thirty-seven men; the other was the explosion aboard the aircraft carrier USS BENNINGTON, in 1954, in which one hundred and four officers and men perished.

From the many cases that could have been studied, these were chosen since the comments of public information officers involved have been recorded. Also, in common with the THRESHER disaster, both occurred in or near Boston and were reported by the Boston press.

USS LEYTE¹

On October 17, 1953, an explosion of unknown origin rocked the aircraft carrier USS LEYTE, which was undergoing repairs in drydock at the Boston Naval Shipyard. Thirty-four navymen and civilian shipyard workers were killed in the blast and three other subsequently succumbed to injuries.

The explosion started fires which sent pillars of dense smoke into the sky and served as a beacon to direct newsmen to the scene of the disaster. Reporters and photographers gained entry to the yard by following fire engines, almost bumper to bumper, arriving at the scene ahead of any Navy public information officers. (The public information officer from the ship had been killed in the explosion.)

The reporters and photographers gained access to the ship, but were ordered off by the commanding officer, who was directing fire-fighting operations. Armed marine guards escorted the men from the ship. The guards did not have to use force, but did have to "let them know we were right behind them and meant business." As soon as some newsmen were escorted down one brow (or gang plank) they boarded the ship from another. One reporter was taken from the ship "at least three times." The order was therefore given to remove the reporters from the shipyard. This was being done as the First Naval District Public Information Officer arrived at the scene. After consultation with the ship's commanding officer, he obtained permission for

¹The account is derived from a study made by Lt. E. L. Castillo, "The USS LEYTE Disaster" (unpublished paper, 1954).

the newsmen to remain near the scene, on condition that they did not board the ship. (One reporter, an honorary fireman, remained aboard the ship for three hours, dressed in firemen's protective clothing.)

While the public information officer had averted one highly undesirable situation, another was developing at the shipyard gate. Only the reporters who had arrived at the time the fire engines were passing through the gate had gained access to the shipyard. Other newsmen (along with all civilians and naval personnel who did not have a direct connection with the fire-fighting operation) had been barred from entering.

In addition, photographers who had attempted to leave the shipyard during that period, had been detained and their cameras and film impounded.

The public information officer, engaged in providing information for the reporters already on the scene, was unaware of these developments, and the yard was not opened to all newsmen who wanted to cover the event until almost three hours after the initial explosion.

The fires were extinguished four hours after the explosion, and two hours later, the commanding officer of the ship met with newsmen for a press conference.

Despite the basically bad press relations which had evolved during the early hours of the disaster, the public information officer was able to re-establish satisfactory working relationships with the press by insuring their access to subsequent events.

The court of inquiry was appointed the day after the

explosion and the members arrived in Boston the following day. The next morning, hearings began. Newsmen were allowed to sit in on all unclassified sessions, and to photograph witnesses after they had testified.

During early sessions it became apparent that the probable cause of the explosion was a failure in the hydraulic system of the ship's catapult mechanism, which was being tested at the time of the explosion.

After the first four days of hearing, the court was recessed so that tests on parts which were suspected of causing the explosion could be conducted. This was accomplished a week later and the court met for two more days before concluding its investigation.

On the day that the court had first met, memorial services were held aboard LEYTE. Newsmen were invited to attend, but were not permitted in the area where the explosion had occurred.

USS BENNINGTON¹

On May 26, 1954, an explosion occurred aboard the aircraft carrier USS BENNINGTON, operating at sea off Boston. One hundred and three officers and men were killed and damage to the ship amounted to two million dollars. Casualties were evacuated to the Quonset Point Naval Air Station, Rhode Island, and the ship subsequently came into port there.

Since the explosion had occurred at sea, the press was

¹Account derived from "A Case Study of Public Relations Aspects of USS BENNINGTON Disaster" (Unpublished report prepared by U.S. Navy, November, 1954).

unaware of the disaster. At about 10 a.m., roughly three and one-half hours after the explosion, the Commandant of the First Naval District made the initial release of the news in response to an Associated Press inquiry.

The First Naval District Public Information Officer (the same man who had handled the LEYTE disaster) went to Quonset Point and established liaison with officials there. Arrangements for assisting the press were completed prior to their arrival. When the ship came into port, newsmen were allowed to board her to photograph the disaster area and to interview crewmen and other officials. The activity went on throughout the night. Later, newsmen were assisted in their coverage of court hearings, memorial services and related developments.

There was no duplication of the undesirable public relations circumstances which had surrounded the early phases of the LEYTE disaster.

Press Coverage of the Disasters

To determine press coverage of the disaster, microfilm editions of the Boston Daily Globe,¹ The Boston Herald and The New York Times were examined.

Despite essential differences in the circumstances and events associated with the LEYTE, BENNINGTON and THRESHER incidents, the pattern of newspaper coverage was strikingly similar. Certain important elements appeared in each newspaper in each circumstance. The New York Times, in each

¹The Boston Daily Globe is the predecessor of The Boston Globe.

instance, avoided detailed accounts of the more emotional events, such as the reactions of the next of kin. The Times also devoted less space to the incidents than did the Boston papers, but it touched on most of the same subjects.

The same categories into which the THRESHER stories were divided, could be used to describe the LEYTE and BENNINGTON coverage, except that there were no stories on nuclear radiation, search operations or international reaction, and there were extensive accounts of the progress of injured men.

On the basis of the examination of press coverage and the reports of public information officer, the following "typical" pattern of response to a major shipboard disaster can be inferred:

First Day

(1) Newsmen learn of the occurrence of a disaster and all available reporters and photographers from local newspapers are assigned to cover the various aspects of the event. Wire services and major out-of-town newspapers send in correspondents. Certain reporters, experienced in one phase or another of disaster coverage are assigned to their "specialty"--some will concentrate on obtaining factual information and eye-witness accounts, others will interview the next of kin, others will report the mood at the scene of the disaster and in secondary places, such as the hospital to which the injured are taken.

(2) Newsmen arrive at the scene, seeking direct access to the event. They are primarily interested in three things: the opportunity to observe the scene at first hand, obtaining

the names and addresses of the dead and injured and interviewing officials concerning the cause of the disaster.

(3) Reporters not actually at the scene of the disaster begin research on previous similar disasters. As indications of the magnitude of the disaster are received, they draw comparisons of previous and present disasters--is this the biggest? when was the last time a similar disaster occurred? A newsman who covered a similar disaster writes his recollections of the previous occurrence.

(4) Artist prepare maps, showing where the disaster occurred and cutaway drawings showing the internal arrangement of the ship.

(5) On the basis of the first reports, the newspaper goes to press. The story is described under a banner headline, indicating the number of dead, the place at which the disaster occurred and the manifest cause of the disaster.

First day coverage of one Boston paper for each of the disasters indicates the pattern.

The LEYTE disaster:

NAVY BLAST KILLS 33

Carrier Leyte Rocked at South Boston Dock; 40 Hurt.¹

The BENNINGTON disaster:

100 Killed in Carrier Fire

125 Hurt on USS BENNINGTON Off N.E. Coast.²

The loss of THRESHER:

¹Boston Daily Globe, October 17, 1953, p. 1.

²Boston Evening Globe, May 26, 1954, p. 1.

Atomic Submarine Lost in Atlantic

Hope All But Gone for 129 Men

USS Thresher Crushed 8400 Feet Down¹
Navy Fears, in Worst Underwater Loss

(6) A previous photograph of the ship involved in the disaster is printed, along with the picture of the commanding officer.

(7) In adjacent columns, reporters tell of the reports of eye-witnesses, the reaction of the next of kin who await word on the fate of their loved ones and the plans for Navy officials to visit the scene. This initial coverage is essentially sympathetic; the sense of personal loss pervades the stories.

Second Day

(1) The press remains at the scene of the disaster, awaiting any comments by Navy officials. Next of kin are interviewed in their homes. Messages of sympathy are received by the Navy and are reported by the press. More eye witness accounts are obtained, but the emphasis is on what the cause might have been rather than a description of the scene itself.

(2) The composition of the court of inquiry is announced and the president is interviewed. He is asked for his opinion as to the cause and the probable areas to be investigated by the court. He is obliged to explain that he has no preconceived opinions as to the cause, and the court will follow all avenues of investigation which might lead them to an answer. The press reports that the Navy is "baffled as to the

¹The Boston Globe, April 11, 1963, p. 1.

cause" and has no leads. The question of the possibility of sabotage is raised, and the navy announces that it has not ruled this possibility out, but that it seems unlikely.

(3) The newspaper prints a list of all the dead and injured, and carries a full page of pictures of casualties.

(4) Ironic stories are related--men who did not go on the fateful cruise are interviewed; the relatives of men who died report that the victim had premonitions of disaster.

(5) Congressmen announce that they will seek full investigations of the disaster.

(6) Second day coverage is still displayed prominently on page one, although the headlines are smaller. Several different developments in the event are reported in a single story, whereas they would have been dealt with separately on the previous day.

Third Day

(1) Attention shifts to the court of inquiry, with secondary emphasis on the other aspects (such as the progress of injured men in the case of the two explosions, or the progress of the search in the case of THRESHER.) The first witnesses before the court describe the events that occurred. Much of the testimony duplicates information that has already appeared in the newspapers, but the accounts of the testimony are covered thoroughly by the reporters.

(2) The newspaper prints editorials expressing the sympathy of the nation to the relatives of the men who have died. It is noted that their sacrifice is the price of defense readiness of the United States.

Fourth Day

(1) The court hears its first opinions as to the possible cause of the disaster, and these opinions are reported in detail. Other developments in the incident are included in the story reporting the activities of the court.

(2) Memorial services are held. Newsmen devote as much attention to the reactions of relatives of the victims who attend the memorial services as they do to the principals conducting the ceremonies.

Subsequent Days

(1) Court testimony tends to become **repetitious** as new witnesses confirm the accounts of previous witnesses. The first closed session is especially significant, but as more and more testimony is held in closed session, press interest dwindles.

(2) Newspaper coverage is considerably curtailed-- other stories of major importance will push the disaster story off the front pages. Lacking other significant news (i.e. if it is a "slow news day") editors may give the disaster story special prominence, although stories that would have rated large headlines during the first days, are now often reduced to a few summary paragraphs, carried on inside pages.

(3) The final session of the court goes almost unnoticed in the newspapers, since the findings are not announced, but are forwarded to higher authority for review. When a summary of the findings is announced, two weeks to a month later, it attracts only cursory attention.

A Variation on the "Disaster Story" Theme

Especially interesting from a public relations standpoint, is the fact that other stories, basically similar to the major naval disasters described, are often treated almost cursorily.

Airplane accidents resulting in the loss of a great many lives, though not common, still occur often enough so that they are reported matter-of-factly. A unique "twist" in the occurrence may give it special prominence: if a record number of persons die, or if there is a suspenseful rescue effort to extricate survivors, or if all the passengers are from one geographical area. By and large, though, the newspapers are not deeply interested in "normal" airplane disasters.

Nor was the American press particularly interested in an event which occurred in 1958, and duplicated most of the circumstances of the THRESHHER disaster--with the important exception that there was no loss of life.

On May 29, 1958, the conventionally powered submarine, USS STICKELBACK sank in waters off Hawaii several hours after a collision with another Navy ship. By any standards, the story was an exciting one. The submarine had been engaged in maneuvers with surface ships, when suddenly it lost power and started sinking. It had dropped one hundred feet, before emergency procedures brought it to the surface--directly in front of a surface ship which rammed the submarine. For several hours, rescue operations were attempted, and Navy divers were at work within the sinking submarine until only a few minutes before it went down.

THE HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES

The history of the United States is a story of growth and change. From the first European settlers to the present day, the nation has expanded its territory and diversified its population. The early years were marked by the struggle for independence from British rule, followed by a period of westward expansion and the development of a unique American identity. The Civil War was a pivotal moment in the nation's history, leading to the abolition of slavery and the strengthening of the federal government. The late 19th and early 20th centuries saw rapid industrialization and the rise of a powerful middle class. The 20th century has been characterized by significant social and political changes, including the Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam War, and the space age. Today, the United States continues to evolve, facing new challenges and opportunities in a globalized world.

Two days after the event had occurred, it was reported in The New York Times--on page five in a twenty-one column/inch story.¹ The Boston Daily Globe devoted only five column/inches to the story, although it appeared on page one, under the two-column headline:

Navy Submarine Sunk

In Collision; All Safe.²

Both the Times and the Globe accounts were limited to factual information--the dramatic circumstances of the salvage teams at work in the submarine moments before it sank, were not included.

Comments on the Previous Disasters

Public relations aspects of both the LEYTE and BENNINGTON disaster were analyzed by Navy public information officers. Both cases led the observer to conclude that candor and cooperation with the press aided in the objective telling of the story. The following excerpts from the studies are considered especially significant.

Following the LEYTE explosion, Lieutenant (now Commander) Edmund L. Castillo, United States Navy, who was a student at Boston University School of Public Relations and Communications, interviewed fourteen newsmen who had covered the disaster. Despite the early confusion following the explosion, when many newsmen were given no cooperation from the Navy, 69% of the

¹The New York Times, May 31, 1958, p. 5.

²Boston Daily Globe, May 30, 1958, p. 1.

newsmen interviewed, rated the Navy's public relations performance as good.¹ All those interviewed agreed that the Navy had released all the information it legitimately could, and when asked if they were impressed by "especially good practices" in the Navy's dealings with them, 83% said they were.

The newsmen's satisfaction with the public relations activities of Navy officials was further indicated by the following editorial in the Boston Traveler:

Countless times in the past, our military services have been rapped on the knuckles for unnecessary secrecy, censorship and misguided hush-hush tactics. When flagrantly out of place, such things lead only to public resentment, irritation and generally poor public relations.

It's only fair, therefore, to commend a service when it rejects such measures and offers the public its confidence and co-operation.

That has been the case in the handling of the LEYTE disaster. Except for isolated instances, where information of unquestioned security was involved, the LEYTE story has been out in the open since the moment of the tragic explosion and fire.

The Navy's handling of this case has set a good pattern for future relations between the services and the public. Step by step, as the story has been placed before the Board of Inquiry, it has been placed with clarity in the hands of the public.

Secrecy and foolish censorship in this case by now would have bred damaging rumors. A whisper here and whisper there would have launched false reports that could never be corrected.

Frankness and open discussion have combined to answer the questions in the mind of the public.

It proves that honest co-operation pays off.²

A Navy Department case study of the BENNINGTON disaster,

¹Castillo, "The USS LEYTE Disaster."

²Boston Traveler, October 22, 1953, quoted by Castillo, "The USS LEYTE Disaster," p. 50.

assessed the importance of candor, and the desirable results of such practices as follows:

Contrary to belief popularly held, a major disaster does not necessarily result in bad public relations. From the BENNINGTON disaster emerged numerous stories of individual heroism and self-sacrifice which elicited a sympathetic public response throughout the country. Editorially and otherwise, the press praised the Navy's fast action in saving lives and keeping damage to personnel and equipment at a minimum. Many papers pointed out that such peacetime disasters are unfortunate but necessary consequences of maintaining the nation's military security.

It cannot be stressed too emphatically that a "headline press" is not necessarily a "bad press." If anything, it is felt that the public reaction to the Navy as reflected by the press during the BENNINGTON disaster was one of admiration and pride. This is the response which the Public Information Officer must strive to achieve. He will never achieve it if he indulges in futile attempts to suppress bad news. A disaster situation like any other news event requires public relations handling peculiar to its geographical location, the personnel and material involved, and the temper of the media on the scene. There are no hard and fast rules covering all situations. Every situation is unique, and must be handled by competent personnel as the situation becomes known.

If, however, in handling peacetime disasters, the Navy Public Information Officer is able to interpret a disaster situation to the press in such manner that it elicits from the public a sympathetic, patriotic reaction similar to that which occurs in time of actual war, then he has achieved the one desirable public information objective which he can hope to attain from a tragic event.¹

¹From "A Case Study of Public Relations Aspects of the USS BENNINGTON Disaster."

CHAPTER V
CONCLUSIONS AND
PUBLIC RELATIONS IMPLICATIONS

The fact that the attention of the American public is drawn, almost compulsively, to stories of disaster is a phenomenon of importance to students of communications and particularly to public relations officials.

Especially interesting is the paradoxical, but nevertheless apparent, fact that some disasters attract more attention than others.

While it was immediately apparent to newsmen, and public relations officials that the loss of THRESHER was a "special case," there was no universal agreement as to the reasons for this.

The reason most consistently advanced by newsmen was the great loss of life. It is readily noted, however, that other disasters (especially airplane crashes) often approach and sometimes exceed the death toll of THRESHER without attracting a fraction of the attention.

Newsmen's explanation of this was twofold; (1) airplane disasters occur regularly, and therefore are too common to excite great interest; and (2) so many other elements were present in the THRESHER case--the loss of a major ship, the mysterious nature of the disappearance, the implications for

defense planning--and that these additional factors determined the attention.

One would expect, if this assessment were accurate, that the newspaper content would reflect this situation, and that the elements which were considered most important would receive the most attention. This could not be observed.

An alternate explanation for the appeal of disaster stories, can be inferred from the writings of students of communications. They have noted that events involving personal consideration are most likely to appeal to the general public.

Bernard Berelson has written:

Communications are probably more effective in influencing opinion on "personalities" than on "issues." Americans are an individualistic people. They like to have heroes; and the communications media do their best to supply heroes of various kinds to various groups in the population.¹

Another authority, Wilbur Schramm has written:

A familiar name in a headline, a picture of one's own street, a story about the university football team in which one feels an almost personal pride, a story about a polio epidemic which may affect one's children, a story about a subject which has previously rewarded us and been remembered--cues like these will certainly attract attention.

.....

A communicator is in the position of trying to arrange his index cues so that they will appeal to the personality needs of his audience. Some of these will be individual and personal; others will be widespread and general. For example, stories about Lindbergh in 1927 would have a personal-acquaintance appeal to a few hundred or thousand people, but vast numbers could enjoy the conflict situation of a man against an ocean, and could identify with the

¹Bernard Berelson, "Communications and Public Opinion," in The Process and Effects of Mass Communications, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1961), p. 350.

American boy who had that adventure and won the victory.¹

In the same vein, a Boston newsman, writing about the reason for the tremendous attention given to another of the "top ten" stories of 1963, two coal miners trapped in a mine in August 1963, said:

In a day and age when we send astronauts orbiting thousands of miles around the world, through outer space, what is it about two men trapped only 331 feet underground that so stirs the imagination?

.....

Suspense, of course, is a factor common to both feats.

.....

Aside from the suspense factor, another thing that makes the Sheppton story of universal interest is the admiration we all have for two qualities--qualities that can appear anywhere in the social spectrum among the rich or poor, the ignorant or the educated, the old or the young. These qualities are skill and fortitude.²

It can be observed that editorials written about the men of THRESHER struck this same note.

Typical comment was this:

The tragedy was a grim reminder that man, in his invasion of the dark waters, still ventures beneath the waves at his peril; that each dive is an act of courage, and that for every advance into the unexplored depths of the sea, a heavy toll may be required.³

The comments of those newsmen who said that the THRESHER case attracted such attention because "most of the people are a little claustrophobic" and original reports of the loss

¹Wilbur Schramm, "The Anatomy of Attention," in The Process and Effects of Mass Communications, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1961), pp. 31-32.

²Victor O. Jones, The Boston Globe, August 28, 1963, p. 13.

³New York Herald Tribune, April 12, 1963, p. 14.

immediately conjured images of man trapped and struggling against the sea, thus becomes more significant.

It would seem that the personal element, perhaps even some sort of public identification with the crewmen was the quality about the story which gave it such urgency and attracted such attention.

It was certainly apparent that the newspaper dwelt at greater length on the personal aspects of the THRESHER story than they did on any of the potential issues.

This theory does not explain why certain other disasters do not attract equal attention. An airplane crash is certainly an event which the average person can more easily comprehend in terms of personal experience. But it is probably this very fact that results in such stories being minimized. The threat of death or injury in an automobile or an airplane is all too real to the average person. The natural tendency of persons to avoid communications which threaten them has been observed.¹

It can also be argued that those disaster situations which are most widely reported are those which the average person is not likely to encounter.

Perhaps newsmen can afford to dismiss the point with the simple explanation that "people are not interested in commonplace disasters," but the public's motivations for reading the story should concern the public relations official.

This perhaps over-ingenious explanation would tend to

¹The point is discussed fully by Hovland, Janis and Kelly in Communication and Persuasion (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953), Chapter 3.

explain why the only issues which became dominant in the press, were those which concerned the procedures to safeguard personnel.

The Momentum of the Disaster Story

Regardless of the reasons for the immediate and intense attention which disasters attract, the fact remains that such attention does develop. The disaster occurs suddenly and the response of the representatives of the communications media is instantaneous.

This quite obviously creates certain practical problems for the public relations official--such as providing physical accommodations for newsmen, and instituting procedures for collecting and disseminating information.

An equally important consequence of the instantaneous nature of disasters is the fact that vast attention is suddenly focused on a subject about which there are probably few pre-existing attitudes. This was certainly the case in the loss of THRESHER. The validity of the concept of nuclear submarines had never been challenged. One achievement after another had established the nuclear submarine as a reliable and valuable part of the American defense structure. Suddenly the reliability of the nuclear submarine was questioned, the pre-existing stereotype of a flawless mechanical masterpiece was shaken. What might be called an "opinion vacuum" existed.

The communications media made an intensive effort to fill the vacuum. They sought information from every conceivable source, most obviously the Navy, but also from other sources. Front page prominence was given to the opinions of a young

woman whose expertise was based on the fact that she was the sister-in-law of a THRESHER crewman, and had talked to the crewman's wife via long distance telephone.

This tremendous rush to obtain information from any and all sources resulted in the story reaching a premature climax. Within two or three days practically every conceivable source had been interviewed, the story began to wane, with the result that important information which developed later was anticlimactical and received less attention than was apparently due it.

The powerful dramatic quality of the original incident gave the story an initial impetus so great that subsequent developments could not sustain the pace.

Less significant developments which occurred when the momentum was greatest received far more attention than more significant developments which occurred when the momentum had been lost.

Nothing illustrates this point better than the great prominence given to early stories which reported that valves had been installed in THRESHER backwards, and the minor importance placed on the subsequent explanation of this apparent discrepancy, or the lack of prominence given to the conclusions of the court of inquiry.

This tremendous initial surge of news also restricts the public relations official's ability to influence the manner in which the story is told. Information is sought from so many sources that the public relations official is associated with only a limited amount of the material which is printed.

In the THRESHER case, the Navy's decision to make the initial announcements in Washington, provided the opportunity for presenting the facts in an essentially favorable manner. Information from many sources was assembled in one central place so that a single spokesman could present a unified explanation of what had happened and what was being done. It would seem that this procedure would best serve the interests of the American public, but it has been noted that the procedure was subject to criticism by the Boston press, who considered it an abridgement of their right to tell the story in the manner they felt would best serve the public interest.

This circumstance presents a dilemma, unavoidable in a fast-breaking story: it is impossible to satisfy the requirements of every group.

There can be no question but that certain procedures followed by the Navy on the night of April 10, were not completely satisfactory. To have delayed in releasing the news until all the public relations arrangements had been satisfactorily completed would have been a serious breach in the Navy's obligations to the people.

Military Secrets and Credibility

The need to protect military secrets complicates the public relations problems associated with a military disaster. The public's desire to know all the information about the situation which has aroused their interest must inevitably be frustrated.

It has been observed that an urgent situation which cannot

be fully explained foster ambiguity and gives rise to rumor.

According to one study, the establishment of even mild censorship during World War II

. . . created the most fertile of all possible soils for the propagation of rumor. We now know that rumors concerning a given subject-matter will circulate within a group in proportion to the ambiguity of this subject matter. . . .¹

The authors of the study note that as the rumors circulate, certain details are obliterated, and others are given additional importance. (The previously cited examination of one newsman's selection of information to be included in a story about the "fears of THRESHER crewmen" bears a striking similarity to the process of the selection and transmission of rumor, except that it was done by an individual rather than a group.)

The public information officials goal is to reduce ambiguity when some information must be withheld.

Two "techniques" are available to him:

(1) To immediately establish his credibility by insuring a free flow of unclassified information, and

(2) To take immediate steps to respond to any rumors which begin to develop.

It will be recalled that the public information officer at Portsmouth was able to quell the rumor that next of kin had been advised not to talk to newsmen by issuing a statement denying that this was Navy policy, and guaranteeing that they would take immediate steps to correct this false notion if it

¹Gordon Allport and Leo Postman, "The Basic Psychology of Rumor," in Process and Effects of Mass Communication, ed. Wilbur Schramm (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1961), p. 141.

were proven to exist.

In this particular instance, the newsmen could check the authenticity of the statement by a test case (though none did).

In other instances, newsmen and the public at large were asked to accept Navy statement's on faith alone.

It has been noted that there was sharp disagreement between Navy officials and certain Russian sources concerning the possible dangers of radioactive contamination resulting from the THRESHER disaster.

Without any hesitation the American public accepted the assurances of American experts (particularly Admiral Rickover), obviously considering them more credible than the Russians.

This particular incident is a practical duplication of the controlled experiments reported by Carl Hovland and Walter Weiss.¹ Those authors reported that "high credibility" was the function of two things: expertise and trustworthiness.

The very existence of the nuclear powered submarine was a testament to Admiral Rickover's expertise, and his long history of outspokenness would qualify him as trustworthy; he had demonstrated time and again that he would not hesitate to advocate ideas unpopular with his superiors.

Admiral Anderson's credibility was established with the Pentagon correspondents, from long experience. His position as the top naval officer qualified him as an expert, and the fact that newsmen were willing to accept the Navy's explanations concerning his failure to report THRESHER's last messages, indi-

¹Carl I. Hovland and Walter Weiss, "The Influence of Source Credibility on Communication Effectiveness," in Process and Effects of Mass Communication, ed. Wilbur Schramm (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1961), pp. 275-288.

cates that he was considered trustworthy.

On the other hand, Navy public information officials who worked on the THRESHER case, often had to establish their credibility--since they were dealing with newsmen with whom they were completely unfamiliar.

The only way they could do this was by demonstrating time and again that they were willing to cooperate fully in the coverage of legitimate news.

The events surrounding the court of inquiry provide an especially useful example. The newsmen had no way of knowing what was discussed in the closed sessions. They were, however, aware that some information, which might be construed as unfavorable to the Navy, was revealed in open session. There was evidence that they were getting both sides of the story, which tended to limit their suspicions that the evidence submitted in closed session was not truly classified.

Implications for Public Relations

Planning

On the night of April 10, a naval officer who has just finished talking to the wives of THRESHER crewmen to tell them that their husbands were dead, stepped out of an office in the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard. At the end of the hall, a group of newsmen were clustered around an obviously distraught widow, attempting to question her. The officer clenched his fist, shook it at the newsmen and said, "I'll never buy another newspaper so long as I live."

In many respects, his reaction characterizes the tre-

mendously difficult circumstances which inevitable arise in the wake of a disaster. In the emotionally charged atmosphere which pervades an organization struck by a disaster, the presence of newsmen, clamoring for information, seems like an affront to common decency. The fact that the public relations official is advocating a policy of complete cooperation with them seems less understandable.

But the mood passes. The officer probably did read the newspaper and was surprised to discover that the reporters had written about the event with understanding and sympathy, and the editorial columns of the paper carried a stirring tribute to the men of the submarine.

The same officer probably read with interest the details of the next exciting story which his newspaper printed.

Right or wrong, it is the prerogative of the press in America to print the news that the public wants to read. While one can philosophize about the lack of taste which the press sometimes shows, their right to access to facts is undeniable. Ultimately it is the responsibility of the government to inform its citizens, fully and honestly about its operations.

"Bad" news, just like "good" news belongs to the people, and their right to it cannot be abridged except for legitimate reasons of security. As awkward or as embarrassing as it may be to release bad news, it is a denial of the basic democratic process not to do so.

Even if the moral and legal requirement to tell all the news did not exist, there is yet another reason for releasing discomfiting information: "bad" news cannot be suppressed.

Inevitably it will leak out, and then any previous lack of candor will only serve to magnify the event. To the original bad news is added a second story of attempted suppression.

Since trying to hold back news can only result in discrediting the news source, truth must be the principal rule in the release of news.

A second rule should be speed. By getting the story out as quickly as possible, the opportunity for rumor is dispelled, and the story is over and done with in a minimum of time.

One Navy public information officer who has seen his share of disasters (and who prepared the study on the LEYTE disaster mentioned previously) observed in a professional navy journal, that three objectives should guide the public relations official in a disaster situation:

- (1) To retain public confidence in the Navy.
- (2) To preserve good press relations.
- (3) To protect and promote the welfare of navy personnel and their families.¹

These were the principles which guided public information officers during the THRESHHER disaster, and they can well guide the public relations official of any organization.

Retaining Public Confidence

When a disaster which might have been prevented occurs, the public's opinion of the organization involved is subject to reappraisal. When THRESHHER was lost, the public had a number of

¹LCDR E. L. Castillo, "The Art of Getting Off the Front Page," U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, March 1959, pp. 36-43.

reasons to question the competence of the Navy in general, and nuclear powered submarines in particular.

The public is aware that it is an unfortunate consequence of the drive for military security that men and machines must operate near the limits of endurance and safety. But if risk must be accepted, it must also be minimized. Did the Navy take every step to insure that the submarine was structurally sound, and the crew fit? Was the Navy making an honest effort to discover the reasons for the loss of THRESHER? Was research under way to reduce the unavoidable risks?

If the answers to these questions were "yes" then the loss of THRESHER, though still a terrible tragedy, might not undermine the public's belief in the basic integrity of the Navy.

If the fact that the Navy had taken and was taking all the steps it could to promote safety and efficiency were known, that it is even conceivable that the public ultimately would develop increased respect and confidence in the Navy. The loss of the men of THRESHER can never be ameliorated, yet, it is just such a dramatic incident which can lead the public to a fuller appreciation of the men who serve their country.

Preserving Good Press Relations

Good press relations can only be derived from a long history of candor and cooperation between an organization and the members of the press. It would be an affront to the integrity of responsible newsmen to assume that any history of good press relations is going to influence the reporters' presentation of the facts. Good press relations can facilitate the flow of

communications between public relations official and newsman. They result, for instance, in the newsmen's acceptance of the basic honesty of his source. If the press is accustomed to being treated fairly and with candor, it is not necessary for the public information officer to document his every statement with evidence.

This reservoir of good will is invaluable, but it can be washed away in one flood of improper or inconsiderate action.

Good press relations can be lost if there is lack of candor or cooperation when a difficult situation has arisen. In fact, the press admires nothing more than an honest answer to a difficult question. In the long run, it may mean more than a history of cooperation in what is basically a good news situation.

The temptation to cover up a bad situation is admittedly strong, and it is probably strongest in those who do not regularly work with the press. Unfortunately, practically every official knows of some "bad" news that has been successfully withheld from the press. The danger is that one may win a succession of such battles and then lose the war in one calamitous misfortune.

Protecting the Welfare of Personnel

The obligation to inform the public and the advantages to be gained from cooperation with newsmen does not imply that the privacy of an organization's personnel or their families should be invaded.

After the protection of security information, protection

of individual privacy is probably the most legitimate reason for not "cooperating" with the press.

It is a reason which newsmen understand and honor, perhaps reluctantly, without eventual damage to satisfactory press relationships.

Admittedly, it is easier to outline objectives than to attain them. In a disaster situation, there is no simple formula for success. One can observe from the THRESHOLD incident and the other disasters examined, that certain predictable conditions inevitably arise when disaster strikes. Anticipation of these conditions and the application of certain procedures aimed at ameliorating them can make the public relations official's efforts more effective.

Prior Planning

The key to successful action in a disaster situation is the existence of a previously formulated plan.

Cutlip and Center in their textbook on public relations have observed:

There is one type of event which cannot be forecast--a catastrophe. But it can be planned for. Every institution and industry is subject to the fate of a disaster and should plan accordingly. When it happens, time is a key element in the handling of communication. There is no time to plan cautiously and carefully in a program of information. Plans made far in advance for calamity procedure must go into action.¹

If one could anticipate the events which lead to "bad" news, the events, in most cases, could be avoided. It is an

¹Scott M. Cutlip and Allen H. Center, Effective Public Relations (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall, Inc., 2nd ed., 1958), p. 121.

almost universal characteristic of "bad" news that it is unexpected. It is painfully apparent that disasters and crises occur again and again. While no two disasters are exactly the same, the subsequent responses of the press shows remarkable predictability.

The time to make decisions on the broad questions of philosophy and organization is when things are quiet and can be considered calmly and objectively. When there is no pressure, the public information officer can often win approval for basic policies, like full cooperation with the press and absolute candor, that he might be able to obtain only with difficulty when the instinct for self-preservation is at its peak--in the moment of crisis.

Having a plan means more than thinking about the possible consequences of a bad situation and deciding on a logical course of action. The plan must be written down and sanctioned by authority.

When disaster strikes a complicated organization, individuals with varying responsibilities are thrown together. All too often key figures are unfamiliar with public information procedures. At such a time, nothing is more convincing than the existence of a document approved by higher authority.

Anticipate Public Interest and the Presence of the Press

Disasters intrigue and fascinate the public. Although the general public cannot be present, they expect to be represented by the media of public communication. It is a service that news-

men render with relish. Invariably newsmen will want to visit the scene. It is part of their job to be eye-witnesses to the events. They will not be satisfied with second-hand descriptions of the events, or the written statements of the officials.

Newsmen do not want to quote public relations officials in their stories, nor is the euphemistic term "an official spokesman" a satisfactory substitute. If the people are to give credence to the statements of officials, they want to know who the officials are, to judge for themselves whether the source is expert and trustworthy.

During the early phases of a disaster, the organization is, in effect, on trial. Anticipating questions and having answers ready is a long, first step toward creating an atmosphere of cooperation. By taking the initiative and releasing information before it is requested, the public relations official gains an even greater advantage.

He has, first of all, indicated his willingness to cooperate. This leads to a situation which cannot be duplicated if the newsman feels he has to pry out information item by item.

Taking the initiative in releasing information also enables the public relations official to organize his facts, to create a single story which guarantees that all members of the press will receive equal treatment.

When THRESHER was lost, the first newsmen arrived at Portsmouth within minutes after the announcement, but others arrived throughout the night. As each man arrived, he could obtain copies of all information previously released. Conflicting statements were avoided and public relations personnel

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were spared the necessity of constantly briefing late-comers.

The original THRESHER announcement, prepared in Washington, took three hours to write, although it consists of only four paragraphs. The statement was phoned to key Navy commands on the east coast, insuring that the same basic facts were available to all newsmen.

Accept Certain Limitations

The public relations official firmly committed to a policy of full cooperation with the press can easily fall into the trap of trying to do too much. The powerful stimulus of a major disaster creates an almost limitless demand for information. A pre-occupation with certain details may result in the neglect of more important general issues. It is better to do a few things well, than many things haphazardly.

When THRESHER was lost, literally hundreds of small radio stations called the Pentagon, seeking to record interviews with Navy spokesmen. A public information official in Washington noted that their compliance with these requests delayed their final decision on plans to transport newsmen to the site of search operations.

The public information officer for the court of inquiry received similar requests. Since he was the only spokesman for the court, he could not respond to a daily barrage of requests for interviews. He therefore denied the requests, but invited the radio stations to send their own representatives. Under the circumstances, there were no grounds for an accusation that the Navy was being evasive.

Avoid meaningless controversy

While the government public relations official has an inherent responsibility to provide the public with facts, he is under no obligation to answer irresponsible criticism, nor is it practical for him to attempt to correct every misrepresentation of the facts.

A major crisis stimulates the imagination of almost everyone. A tragedy, such as the loss of THRESHER, cannot help but elicit feelings of frustration, in the public as well as in the military. An obvious source of relief is to find someone to blame. Often the process results in ill-defined expressions of disfavor, as in this letter, quoted in its entirety, which was received by the Navy Department:

April 12, 1963

Dear Sir:

Damn it to Hell for the things you have permitted.

Sincerely,

Of greater concern to the public information officer are those expressions of disfavor which find their way into the public media of communication. Is it more to his advantage to attempt to answer such criticism, or to ignore it?

The Russian government, always eager to malign the United States issued several stories related to the loss of THRESHER. In an Izvestia story which was also broadcast throughout the

world, the Russians charged among other things:

The sinking of the newly charged atomic reactor is sure to contaminate the Atlantic waters, all the more so since the tragedy took place in the northern current of the Gulf Stream.

The abyssal counter current probably will carry the contaminated water in the opposite direction, toward Boston and New York.¹

The story can be rebutted on a number of grounds, and atomic energy experts in the Navy prepared a lengthy statement, consisting essentially of information that had already been released, but specifically referring to the Russian charges. Information officials decided not to release the statement, since it would have attracted more attention, needlessly extending a pointless controversy.

Summary of Findings

On the basis of the study, the following conclusions can be drawn:

(1) The disaster situation, if unusual in nature, and involving the loss of life, will stimulate intensive public interest.

(2) The suddenness with which disaster strikes, results in attention being focused on a subject about which there has often been little prior thought. The public need for orientation on this new subject stimulates massive reaction by the media of communications.

(3) Disaster coverage begins at a peak and quickly reaches an ante-climax. Events of minor importance occurring during the

¹Quoted in The New York Times, April 14, 1963, p. 6.

peak of activity will receive more attention than more important events which occur later.

(4) Public interest is primarily focused on personal elements. Among the issues which develop, those which concern the organization's procedures to protect its personnel will receive principal attention.

(5) Because of the emphasis on the personal aspect of a disaster, the response, even to dissimilar disasters, is standardized. The public relations official, by studying previous disasters, can anticipate requirements for the future.

(6) The press expects immediate and complete cooperation from the public relations official, and direct access to the scene of action and to authorities. The gathering of news is highly competitive and newsmen will be most sensitive to any apparent partiality to one segment of the press.

(7) The public relations official's ability to influence the coverage of a disaster situation is limited (a) by the magnitude of the event which results in his dealing with only a small proportion of the total news, and (b) because the aspects of the story which he does handle are subject to subsequent treatment by media officials with whom he has no personal contact.

(8) The public relations official, by facilitating the free flow of information, can create a spirit of cooperation with members of the press that will prove advantageous to his organization. The public relations official must rely essentially on instinct and experience, but two attributes will aid him: speed and truth.

(9) Disasters do not inevitably result in "bad" public relations. The public is willing to accept the idea that certain risks are inevitable. Its confidence in an organization is based on belief that the risks were as minimized as possible. Disaster can lead to greater appreciation of the men who accept risks to promote the general welfare.

Implications for Further Study

The disaster situation can create intensive interest in a matter not subject to pre-formed opinions. One could therefore assume that opinions which are formed, would be the result of recent stimuli, notably the mass media of communications. This would be particularly true in an event like the loss of THRESHER, to which the public did not have direct access, and therefore relied exclusively on accounts in the mass media.

In the course of the study of the THRESHER disaster, it was observed that key personnel on several Boston newspapers expressed significantly different opinions of the performance of Navy officials.

Early studies of newspaper content had not made the author aware of any substantial bias toward the Navy by one newspaper or another. With benefit of the knowledge that opinions of key editorial personnel varied, their newspapers were re-examined. While no marked bias could be categorically proven, the author was struck with the idea, perhaps no more than a hunch, that readers who obtained most of their information about the loss of THRESHER from one paper or another, might vary in their opinion of the Navy's performance, and that there would be cor-

relation between opinion and source of information.

Under normal conditions, it would be difficult to prove that public opinion on a matter of consequence was dependent on the unique view of the newspaper which an individual read. It would be logical to assume that an individual would subscribe to that newspaper which most consistently expressed opinions with which he agreed. One could not reject the strong likelihood of compatible, pre-existing bias. If, for instance, an opinion poll indicated that there was correlation between opinion and source of information, there would be a strong indication of direct cause and effect.

For the student interested in the relationships between mass media communications and public opinion, the study of issues generated by a disaster would seem to provide distinct advantages.

APPENDIX A

A compendium of releases issued by the Department of Defense on behalf of the Navy in Washington, D.C., following the loss of THRESHER. Additional information released in Washington but not included in this compendium because of a lack of copies included the transcripts of press briefings by Admiral Anderson on April 10 and 11, and of other Navy officials on subsequent days.

NEWS RELEASE

PLEASE NOTE DATE



DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS
Washington 25, D. C.

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

APRIL 11, 1963

NO. 506-63
OXford 76161

SUMMARY OF ADMIRAL ANDERSON'S PRESS CONFERENCE About 9:30 p.m. (est), April 10, 1963

Just before dark, an oil slick was reported in vicinity of last dive.

If the submarine sank in 8400 feet of water, "rescue would be absolutely out of the question."

Purpose of today's test was to dive to test depth.

No chance of a nuclear explosion; no likelihood of radioactive contamination.

If sub sank in that depth, no possibility of personnel being alive aboard. We can only hope she is proceeding but merely out of communications.

Court of inquiry will be convened: Vice Admiral Bernard Austin, President of Naval War College, will be president of the court, which will be made up of other experienced submarine officers.

We have had no difficulty with any SSN which might have led to such an accident.

Admiral Anderson does not plan to go to the scene. Rear Admiral Ramage, an experienced submariner with Medal of Honor, is on scene commander.

Commissioned in August 1961. In 1961 and 1962, she took part in tests and operations with the fleet. In July 1962 went into yard at Portsmouth for overhaul and installation of new equipment. She just completed this overhaul and was undergoing the tests which are normal at the end of an overhaul period. She made shallow dives yesterday and was scheduled today to make test dives.

There probably is a remote possibility of sabotage. This is a matter for the court of inquiry to look into.

Last submarine peacetime disaster was sinking of SQUALUS in 40 fathoms of water off New Hampshire coast on May 23, 1939. 33 were rescued, 26 were lost. The submarine was raised, renamed, and saw service in WWII.

This accident will not result in any change in our plans to build additional ships of this class, although we will, of course, try to ascertain what caused this accident.

END []

NEWS RELEASE

PLEASE NOTE DATE



DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS
Washington 25, D. C.

8:00 P.M. (EST)
April 10, 1963

NO. 509-63
OXford 76161

Statement by Admiral George W. Anderson, Chief, Naval Operations at the Pentagon, Wednesday, April 10, 1963, 8:00 p.m., on USS THRESHER.

The next of kin of the crew of the nuclear submarine USS THRESHER (SSN-593) are being notified that the ship is overdue and presumed missing.

The THRESHER had been conducting routine tests some 220 miles east of Boston. The submarine rescue vessel USS SKYLARK was accompanying the THRESHER. This procedure is normal for submarine tests and trials following an overhaul.

SKYLARK reported that THRESHER has not communicated as scheduled since beginning deep dive tests shortly after 9 A.M. (EST) this morning.

While there is a possibility that the nuclear submarine has not reported her position due to a communication failure, a search was immediately commenced by the Navy in accordance with emergency proceedings for such situations.

Navy ships, aircraft and other submarines are searching the area where the THRESHER was last reported. They are encountering cloudy weather with winds of from 25 to 40 knots and seas of from 5 to 9 feet. Such conditions would make it difficult for the on-scene search units to sight the overdue submarine even though it were on the surface and unable to transmit a position report by radio communications.

The location of the THRESHER from her last report was given as 41.44 North and 64.57 W. The depth of water at this location is approximately 8400 feet (1400 fathoms). Merchant ships in this area have been requested to keep a sharp lookout for the submarine in addition to the maximum effort being made by the Navy.

Additional reports on the progress of the search will be made by the Navy. Names and addresses of the members of the crew will be released after all next of kin have been notified that the ship is overdue.

END

[162]

23 May 1960

SS(N)593 (THRESHER) FACT SHEET

1. SS(N)593 (THRESHER) is the lead ship of the Navy's newest class nuclear attack submarines. She is similar to the other recent submarines with the ALBACORE teardrop shape hull, the Westinghouse S5W reactor plant and a single propeller driven by a geared turbine. However, she represents a tremendous advance over all other submarines in the areas of performance, depth quieting and sonar. THRESHER, in becoming our Country's best ASW defense, will be a true submarine independent of the surface with unmatched submerged maneuverability and speed. In order to achieve the quietest position, the sonar (underwater listening devices) has been moved to the bow of the submarine, and the torpedo tubes to the midships area. Conventional and advanced weapons are fired therefrom at a 10° angle to the hull.

2. An entire new sonar suit has been designed for THRESHER enabling her to hear enemy ships and submarines at far greater ranges than has ever been possible before. Her active sonar will allow her to "ping" on other ships and submarines to great ranges. THRESHER has over 1,000 transducers and hydrophones installed along the length of the ship. The majority are concentrated in the quiet forward area making her our most effective mobile underwater listening post. Raytheon Manufacturing Company is the prime contractor for the majority of this sonar, but special portions are furnished by Edo Corporation, Sperry Company, Bell Laboratories and others.

(MORE)

3. Noise in a submarine has two effects. The first is radiation into the ocean which allows the submarine to be detected by others. The second is noise interference with submarines own listening devices. In order to make this sonar equipment effective, tremendous quieting measures have had to be made in THRESHER. Refinements and developments of machinery have been made specially for THRESHER to reduce the noise output of all equipments installed in this submarine. Great pains have been taken to smooth the hull and optimize its shape to reduce the hydrodynamic noise to a minimum. THRESHER will be by far the quietest nuclear submarine afloat or submerged. Naval activities, notably Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, have led the development of quite machinery but private industry has picked up the ball and made great strides in machinery equipment design and construction to silence the "Silent Service." A few of the many groups involved in these efforts are General Electric, Westinghouse, Louis Allis, Electro Dynamic Division of the General Dynamics Corporation, Ingersoll-Rand, Allis Chalmers, Cutler-Hammer, Aurora Pump Division of the New York Air Brake and DeLaval Steam Turbine Company.

4. Another significant advancement of THRESHER is the ability to cruise the oceans at far greater depths than any other submarine. Problems in welding and forming of heavy structural members in development of piping systems and hull fittings for deep submergence have been encountered and successfully solved. A vast program was setup to develop and test each and every item required for this submarine to operate at these unprecedented depths. Again the Navy and private industry worked in cooperation

(MORE)

to develop and test thoroughly hundreds of items required. Never before has such an extensive development program been necessary for a Naval Ship and never before has such extensive tests been undertaken to give complete assurance that the submarine would be absolutely safe.

5. Another area of development has been in the increasing of habitability and operability of submarines. Great efforts have been expended on increasing the habitability standards to make the crew's life as pleasant as possible. Operating stations have been worked out in great detail to assure simple and safe operation with a minimum of personnel and operator fatigue. One particular area is in the weapons handling and firing system. Weapons are loaded into the torpedo tubes and fired in "push button" fashion in THRESHER with a minimum of personnel. Special equipment for air revitalization will allow THRESHER to operate completely independent of the atmosphere for long periods of time.

6. THRESHER is being launched bow first, and is the first submarine to be so arranged. This has led to breaking of the traditional bottle of champagne on her propeller shaft rather than on her bow. The reason for the bow first launching is that the depth of water over the way ends at Portsmouth is comparatively shallow. Since the forebody of the ship is more full than the afterbody, launching bow first develops buoyancy earlier in the launch travel than the usual stern launching. This earlier buoyancy is required to prevent the ship from tipping off the end of the Ways and allow her to float off.

(MORE)

7. General Characteristics.

LENGTH	278' 6"
BEAM	31' 8"
DISPLACEMENT SURFACED	3732 tons
DISPLACEMENT SUBMERGED	4311 tons
ENDURANCE FOR STORES AND FOOD	90 days
OPERATING DEPTH	Deepest in the World
SPEED	Over 20 Knots
ARMAMENT	Four 21" diameter torpedo tubes amidships with semi-automatic loading and firing equipment
COMPLEMENT	Eight Officers Seventy-five Enlisted Men

There are presently 13 submarines in the SS(N)593 Class being built and four more authorized. Other shipbuilders are New York Shipbuilding Corporation, Camden, New Jersey; Ingalls Shipbuilding Corporation, Pascagoula, Mississippi and Mare Island Naval Shipyard, and Electric Boat Division of General Dynamics Corporation, Groton, Connecticut. Many THRESHER concepts are incorporated in our entire submarine shipbuilding program.

THRESHER is the world's most advanced nuclear powered submarine and is designed and being built by the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard.

NEWS RELEASE

PLEASE NOTE DATE



DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS
Washington 25, D. C.

6:20 A.M. EST
APRIL 11, 1963

NO. 510-63
OXford 76161

Amplifying Information released 6:20 AM EST, April 11, 1963 re USS THRESHER

During the night, five additional ships arrived on the scene to assist SKYLARK and RECOVERY in search operations for the nuclear-powered submarine THRESHER. These ships include the destroyers W. L. LIND and YARNELL, the submarine SEAOWL, the nuclear-powered submarine SEAWOLF, and the frigate NORFOLK.

Commanding the search operation at this time is Captain Frank Andrews, Commander Submarine Development Group 2, embarked in USS NORFOLK.

Six other ships, including the destroyers BLANDY, S. B. ROBERTS, WARRINGTON, and THE SULLIVANS, and the submarine rescue vessel SUNBIRD and the oceanographic survey ship ATLANTIS II are expected to arrive before noon today. In addition, the fleet oiler WACCAMAW is enroute to provide fuel for ships participating in the search.

Rear Admiral Lawson P. Ramage, Deputy Commander of the Atlantic Fleet Submarine Force, will assume command of the search force upon his arrival at the scene in USS BLANDY at about 9:30 AM EST today.

E N D

NEWS RELEASE
PLEASE NOTE DATE



DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS
Washington 25, D. C.

9:15 A.M. (EST)
April 11, 1963

Oxford 76161

Estimated weather in the area

A storm warning is posted for the area with a gale warning issued.

Winds now are between 15 to 25 knots with possible predicted winds of 20-35 knots with occasional gusts up to 40 knots. The cloud cover is between .6 and .8 with a ceiling of 3500 feet. Scattered showers predicted with accompanying lower ceiling.

The weather system affecting the area is fairly stationary and improvement is predicted to be slow.

The seas have diminished somewhat with seas running between 6-10 feet.

END

NAVAL MESSAGE

UNCLASSIFIED

NAVY DEPARTMENT

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FM DEPCOMSUBLANT

TO CNO

BUPERS

UNCLAS

CNO OP-31

NEXT OF KIN USS THRESHER

LTJG RONALD C BABCOCK MARTHA E BABCOCK (ROBERTSON) 19 RICHARDS
 AVE PORTSMOUTH N H 436-8330
 LCDR MICHAEL J DI NOLA EDNA G DI NOLA (ZIMMERMANN) 51 CABLE ROAD
 RYE NH W04-8075
 LCDR PAT M GARNER ALICE GARNER (STETS) 21 RHONDA DRIVE MYSTIC CONN
 536-9823

LTJG JOHN G GRAFTON RALPH E GRAFTON 104 JAMESVILLE RD DEWITT NY
 (FATHER) GI6-2198
 LCDR JOHN W HARVEY IRENE JOYCE HARVEY (NAGORSKI) 127 GLENWOOD
 AVE NEW LONDON CONN GI3-3434

LTJG JAMES J HENRY JR JAMES J HENRY SR 4591 KINGS HIGHWAY
 BROOKLYN 4 NY ES7-1120

LCDR JOHN S LYMAN JR JOAN LYMAN (BOERNER 8 COOK ST KITTERY MAINE
 ID9-2736

LTJG FRANK J MALINSKI FRANK MALINSKI JR 321 MEDLOCK DR PHOENIX ARIZ
 (FATHER)

31....ACT

SECNAV..UNSECNAV..ASTSECNAV(R&D)...ASTSECNAV(I&L)..ASTSECNAV(F&M)..00..09
 09B..09D..01..03..32..33..34..35..04..40..05..50..53..06..60..61..07..
 70..71..72..75..90..94..007..IP..OLA..NAVAIDE..BUSHIPS..BUWEPS..COMSTS..
 FLAGPLOT...BFR

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CLAUSSEN LARRY W EM2(SS) USN MOTHER HELLEN MAE CLAUSSEN 1312 LINCOLN TOPEKA KANSAS CE 3-1824

CHRISTIANSEN EDWARD (N) SN(SS) USN FATHER OLIVER CHRISTIANSEN 3900 GREYSTONE AVE BRONX 63 NEW YORK NY KI 3-5341

CAYEY STEVEN G TM2(SS) USN DONNA LEE CAYEY 170 BROADWAY NORWICH CONN 887-0640

CARMODY PARTICK WAYNE SK2 USN FATHER EDWARD CARMODY 676 WALLBRIDGE AVE TOLEDO OHIO NO PHONE LISTED

CARKOSKI RICHARD J EN2(SS) USN FATHER STEVE CARKOSKI 504 W 10TH ST GRAND ISLAND NEBR DU 4-0419

BRANN RICHARD P EN2(SS) USN JO-AN M BRANN 2 MORRISON ST SOMERSWORTH NH 692-4053

BRACEY GEORGE (N) SD3(SS) USN LETHA BRACY 39 RED OAK RD GROTON CONN HI 5-5471

BOSTER GERALD C EM3(SS) USN FATHER STANTON M BOSTER 9850 COLONY DR ST LOUIS MISSOURI WN 9-1739

BOBBITT EDGAR S EM2(SS) USN FATHER JAMES A BOBBITT ROUTE 2 BOX 57 MIDLAND TEXAS OX4-5290

BELL JOHN E MM1-P2 USN CARRIE ANN BELL PACKER RD ROUTE 95 MYSTIC CONN JE 6-2590

BAIN RONALD E EN2(SS)-P2 FRED A BAIN ROP HERBERT ST MT VERNON ILL (FATHER) CH2-3699

ARSENAULT TILMON J ENG(A) (SS) HILDA MARY ARSENAULT (RODRIGUES) 438 COLONIAL DR PORTSMOUTH NH GE6-2570

LT MERRILL F COLLIER HELEN HARVEY CUTTER COLLIER BOX 118 RT 3 HARVARD RD GALES FERRY CONN 464-2838

LTJG JOHN J WILEY PATRICIA ANN WILEY 135 WHIPPLE ROAD KITTERY MAIN 439-2517

LT JOHN SMARZ JR JOYCE ALICE SMARZ 442 1/2 RICHARDS AVE PORTSMOUTH NH GE6-7495

LTJG GUY C PARSONS JR MARJORIE PARSONS (COCHRAN) 90 GREENBRIDGE AVE WHITE PLAINS NH WH8-0782

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NAVAL MESSAGE

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NAVY DEPARTMENT

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CLEMMENTS THOMAS E ETR3(SS) USN ELAINE R CLEMMENTS 740 FIRST ST WESTFIELD NJ AD3-5487

FUSCO GREGORY J EM2(SS)-P2 FRANCIS RITA (SIRUGO 12 WATTS ST KITTERY ME 439-9530

GALLANT ANDREW JOSEPH JR ROSE EDNA GALLANT (RUMILL) MCKINLEY MAINE 244-2

GARCIA NAPOLEON T SD1(SS) CHARLOTTE LEE (EDISON) GARCIA 4242 4TH ST SE WASHINGTON 20 DC JO 24906

GARNER JOHN E YNSN (SS) NOT MARRIED CHESTER G GARNER (FATHER) 1313 CARL AVE VALLEJO CALIFORNIA

GAYNOR ROBERT W EN2(SS) ANITA EDITH GAYNOR (CHAREST) 35 PROTEUS AVE GROTON CONN HI 5-7693

GOSNELL ROBERT H SA(SG) NOT MARRIED HENRY LLOYD GOSNELL 1706 PATTON RD RALEIGH NC TE-49035

GRAHAM WILLIAM E SOC(SS) DOROTHY MAE (POWERS) GRAHAM CEDAR DRIVE NORTH STONINGTON CONN 535-1871

GUNTER AARON J QM1(SS) DORIS MAE GUNTER 29 SUZANNE DR PORTSMOUTH NH GE 6-5856

HALL RICHARD C ETR2(SS)-P2 NOT MARRIED GEORGE WILLARD HALL 2702 S CLEVELAND ST ARLINGTON VA OT-48045

HAYES NORMAN T EM1-P2 NOT MARRIED KENNETH MARVIN HAYES (STEPFATHER) 5616 N LOMA AVE TEMPLE CITY CALIF AT-66674

HEISER LAIRD GLENN MM1-P2 NOT MARRIED ROBERT GEORGE HEISER BOX 183 TOPEN PA OV 2-828

HELSEIUS MARVIN THEODORE MM2 NOT MARRIED BRUNO BERNHARDT HELSEIUS BOX 111 TROUT CREEK MICIGAN 634

HEWITT LEONARD HOGENTOGLER EMCA(SS)-P2 BODIL NOOMI HEWITT 55 MOORE ST KITTERY ME ID 9-9128

HODGE JOSEPH HARSHORNE TM2(SS) JUDITH A HOAGUE 58 EXETER ROAD HAMPTON NH WA 6-2706

HODGE JAMES P EM2 USN HOHN W HODGE 1225 WHARTON AVE TARRANT CITY ALA VI 1 6553

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HUDSON JOHN F EN2(SS) USN RONNA L HUDSON 69 LARCH RD GROTON CONN HI 5 2366
 INGLIS HOHN P FN USNR ROBERT P INGLIS N 9904 IVANHOE RD SPOKANE
 53 WASH HU 7 8246
 JOHNSON BRAUER G FT1(SS) USN MARY E JOHNSON 25 ORION ST GROTON
 CONN HI 5 2572
 JOHNSON EDWARD A ENCA(SS) USN ROBERT THOMAS JOHNSON NORTH JAY MAINE
 JOHNSON RICHARD L RMSA USN EDGAR G JOHNSON BOX 342 HENDRICKS MINN

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NAVAL MESSAGE UNCLASSIFIED NAVY DEPARTMENT

NEWS RELEASE
PLEASE NOTE DATE



DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS
Washington 25, D. C.

1:00 P.M. EST
April 11, 1963

NO. 511-63
OXford 76161

FOR THE PRESS:

The following statement was issued by Vice Admiral Hyman G. Rickover, Chief of Naval Reactors Branch of the Atomic Energy Commission, and Assistant Chief of the Bureau of Ships for Nuclear Propulsion:

"I am deeply affected by the loss of the THRESHER and her crew and test personnel. I and members of the Naval Reactors Group knew many of them personally. We mourn their loss. We can only hope that in giving their lives for their country they have contributed in making it stronger. Our sympathy goes out to their wives and children and to their parents.

"I can assure you there is no radio active hazzard as a result of this unfortunate accident. Reactors of the type used in the THRESHER, as well as in all our nuclear submarines and surface warships, can remain submerged indefinitely in seawater without creating any hazzard."

E N D

NEWS RELEASE
PLEASE NOTE DATE



DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS
Washington 25, D. C.

April 11, 1963

OXford 76161

COURT OF INQUIRY:

Vice Admiral Bernard L. Austin, President, U. S. Naval War College, Newport, R.I.

Rear Admiral Lawrence R. Daspit, Commandant, Sixth Naval District, Charleston, S.C.

Capt. William C. Hushine, Superintendent of Shipbuilding, Croton, Conn.

Capt. James B. Osborne, Joint Strategic Planning Staff, Omaha, Neb.

Capt. Norman C. Nash, Commander Service Squadron 8, Atlantic Fleet.

Capt. Saul Katz, Legal Counsel.

NEWS RELEASE

PLEASE NOTE DATE



DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS
Washington 25, D. C.

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 11, 1963

NO. 513-63
OXford 76161

FOR THE PRESS:

Two Navy aircraft are departing Andrews Air Force Base, Md., at 1:00 P.M. (EST) today, April 11, to overfly the area in which the search for the USS THRESHER is underway.

A news pool is aboard each plane consisting of the following media:

Plane 1:

United Press International -- Steve Gerstel

United Press International Photo -- Jim Atherton

Magazines -- Times Magazine -- Joe Kane

Afternoon Newspapers -- Christian Science Monitor -- Neal Stanford

Plane 2:

Associated Press -- Bem Price

Associated Press Photo -- Bob Schutz

Morning Newspapers -- Boston Herald

Local Pool -- New London Day

Foreign News Services -- Sydney Morning Herald Foreign News Service,
6th Floor, New York Times Building, New York City - Maurice Adams

Editors desiring to obtain copy filed by pool members may do so by contacting directly the office of the appropriate representative listed above.

END

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NEWS RELEASE
PLEASE NOTE DATE



DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS
Washington 25, D. C.

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 11, 1963

NO. 514-63
OXford 76161

FOR THE PRESS:

The following message was transmitted at 11:04 A.M. (EST) yesterday by USS SKYLARK, the submarine rescue vessel which was accompanying USS THRESHER during her test dive:

"UNABLE TO COMMUNICATE WITH THRESHER SINCE 9:17 A.M. (EST).
HAVE BEEN CALLING BY UQC VOICE AND CW QRB CW EVERY MINUTE EX-
PLOSIVE SIGNALS EVERY 10 MINS WITH NO SUCCESS. LAST TRANSMISSION
RECD WAS GARBLED. INDICATED THRESHER WAS APPROACHING TEST DEPTH.
MY PRESENT POSITION 41-43N 64-57W CONDUCTING EXPANDING SEARCH."

The message from THRESHER to SKYLARK was of a routine nature and indicated no distress. It is not unusual for communications between submarines and surface ships to be garbled due to varying sea conditions.

END

[The following text is extremely faint and illegible due to the quality of the scan. It appears to be a legal document, possibly a deed or contract, containing several paragraphs of text.]

[illegible]

[illegible]

NEWS RELEASE
PLEASE NOTE DATE



DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS
Washington 25, D. C.

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 12, 1963

NO. 515-63
OXford 76161

Secretary of the Navy, Fred Korth, after a flying trip to confer with Submarine Force Officers in New London, and with Admiral Ramage at the scene of the THRESHER search, returned to Washington tonight and issued an official declaration that the THRESHER and all on board are lost.

At the same time, Secretary Korth ordered that all naval installations display the national ensign at half mast from tomorrow morning until sunset on Monday, April 15.

In making his official declaration of the loss, Secretary Korth expressed a fervent hope that the rumors and speculation which have already begun will cease, providing the bereaved families a more stable climate in which to compose themselves and endure their grief.

"In this connection," he said, "I have the unequivocal assurance of all those in a position to know, including the Chief of the Bureau of Ships, the Commander, Submarines Atlantic, and the Search and Rescue Commander on the scene that, in waters of this depth, there is absolutely no possibility that there might be survivors."

- E N D -

Faint, illegible text, possibly bleed-through from the reverse side of the page.

NEWS RELEASE
PLEASE NOTE DATE



DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS
Washington 25, D. C.

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 12, 1963

NO. 516-63
OXford 76161

The following statement has been made by Admiral George W. Anderson, Chief of Naval Operations:

Inevitably, in the wake of such a major tragedy as that involving THRESHER, rumors arise as to the physical ability of the ship, aircraft, or other vehicle concerned to carry out a particular mission. Such has been true in this particular case. To dispel them in my own mind, I have personally checked with the commanding officer of the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, Rear Admiral Charles J. Palmer, and have been assured by him that the commanding officer of THRESHER, prior to going to sea, was completely satisfied with his ship in all respects. I also learned that the proposed diving routine which was to be followed on Tuesday and Wednesday of this week by THRESHER, although in accordance with routine Submarine Force Atlantic Fleet doctrine, had personally been approved by the commanding officer himself. There was no hint of any concern on the part of the officers, crew, or civilians about the seaworthiness of this fine ship.

It should be remembered that a Court of Inquiry has been convened with Vice Admiral B. L. Austin as President to ascertain to the best of its ability the facts attendant to this most tragic happening, and to delve thoroughly and meticulously into all aspects of operations, overhaul, and other related factors.

(E N D)

[176]



IN SENATE
JANUARY 1, 1907

REPORT OF THE
COMMISSIONERS OF THE LAND OFFICE

IN RESPONSE TO A RESOLUTION PASSED BY THE SENATE

APRIL 1, 1898, AND BY THE ASSEMBLY

APRIL 1, 1899, AND BY THE SENATE

APRIL 1, 1900, AND BY THE ASSEMBLY

APRIL 1, 1901, AND BY THE SENATE

APRIL 1, 1902, AND BY THE ASSEMBLY

APRIL 1, 1903, AND BY THE SENATE

APRIL 1, 1904, AND BY THE ASSEMBLY

APRIL 1, 1905, AND BY THE SENATE

APRIL 1, 1906, AND BY THE ASSEMBLY

APRIL 1, 1907, AND BY THE SENATE

APRIL 1, 1908, AND BY THE ASSEMBLY

APRIL 1, 1909, AND BY THE SENATE

APRIL 1, 1910, AND BY THE ASSEMBLY

APRIL 1, 1911, AND BY THE SENATE

APRIL 1, 1912, AND BY THE ASSEMBLY

APRIL 1, 1913, AND BY THE SENATE

APRIL 1, 1914, AND BY THE ASSEMBLY

APRIL 1, 1915, AND BY THE SENATE

NEWS RELEASE

PLEASE NOTE DATE



DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS
Washington 25, D. C.

Noon, April 12, 1963

STATUS OF FORCES IN THRESHER SEARCH

ON STATION

SKYLARK	W. L. LIND
SUNBIRD	NORFOLK
RECOVERY	SULLIVANS
SEA OWL	BLANDY
ATLANTIS II	WARRINGTON
HAZELWOOD	
2 A/C DAYLIGHT HOURS TODAY	

ENROUTE

WACCAMAW	ETA	121600Z
REDFIN	ETA	132300Z
T. JEFFERSON	ETA	132330Z
ROCKVILLE	ETA	150700Z



STATE OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

IN SENATE

January 11, 1906

REPORT

OF THE

COMMISSIONERS

OF THE

LAND OFFICE

FOR THE YEAR

NEWS RELEASE
PLEASE NOTE DATE



DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS
Washington 25, D. C.

2:30 P.M. EST
April 12, 1963

NO. 523-63
OXford 76161

FOR THE PRESS:

The following statement was issued by Vice Admiral H. G. Rickover today:

"Measurements for radioactivity on samples of debris recovered from the scene of the THRESHER incident have shown no radioactivity. Samples of the ocean bottom have also been obtained by the oceanographic ship ATLANTIS II, in the vicinity of the incident, and have likewise shown no radioactivity. Additional samples will be obtained and measured."

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Chronology of Events on April 10, 1963, Pertaining to THRESHER Sinking

Throughout the various naval activities on the East Coast and in Washington, Wednesday was at first a fairly routine day. The first hint of trouble came at about 11 a. m. (EST) when SKYLARK, the anti-submarine rescue ship working with THRESHER during her tests, reported to Commander Development Group Two at New London, Captain F. A. Andrews, that the ship was unable to communicate with THRESHER. At this point, SKYLARK's message did not cause a great deal of concern, because submarines many times before have failed to communicate promptly in response to other communications, but still have returned safely from operations. Further more, THRESHER was not due to complete her tests until 3 p. m.

At about 1 p. m. , Commander Development Group Two relayed SKYLARK's report to Commander Submarine Force Atlantic Fleet, Vice Admiral Elton W. Grenfell, at Norfolk. Admiral Grenfell and his staff then commenced initial procedures to alert naval activities in the Norfolk area. Admiral Grenfell also notified Admiral Robert L. Dennison, Commander in Chief, Atlantic Fleet, that there was a possibility THRESHER might be in difficulty. At 2:15 aircraft were diverted to the vicinity of the diving position, and other measures were taken in the event further action should be necessary. These included diverting ships to the scene and alerting other ships to get underway. Aircraft were at the scene of action by 3 p. m.

In Washington, Admiral George W. Anderson, Chief of Naval Operations was attending a meeting of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Vice Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Claude V. Ricketts, was in a meeting in the CNO conference room, located between Admiral Anderson's office and his own. The Joint Chiefs of Staff meeting concluded at 3:35. While Admiral Anderson was en route from the meeting, he received a call from Admiral Dennison on the "hot line" telephone circuit in his office. When informed of Admiral Anderson's absence, Admiral Dennison asked to speak to Admiral Ricketts, who took the call in Admiral Anderson's office and was advised of the fact that communication between SKYLARK and THRESHER had been lost, and that the submarine possibly could be in trouble. Admiral Ricketts immediately dispatched his senior aide, Captain H. B. Sweitzer, to intercept Admiral Anderson and inform him of Admiral Dennison's message.

Captain Sweitzer encountered Admiral Anderson in the corridor adjacent to the office of Secretary of the Navy, Fred Korth. Upon receiving Admiral Dennison's message, at about 3:40, Admiral Anderson immediately informed the Secretary. After a brief conversation, Secretary Korth called President Kennedy's Naval Aide, Captain Tazewell T. Shepard, Jr. , to inform him of

(MORE)

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the situation at this time, and then went personally to pass this word to the Deputy Secretary of Defense, Roswell L. Gilpatric, who was Acting Secretary of Defense in the absence of Secretary McNamara, who was in Europe. Admiral Anderson then returned to his own office.

Throughout the balance of the afternoon, numerous conversations were held between Admiral Anderson and Admiral Dennison, during which the measures being taken by Admiral Dennison and his subordinate commanders were discussed. As time passed and no word was received from THRESHER, all became more and more concerned. Later in the afternoon, it was decided that it was probable that she had encountered serious difficulties, was missing, and possibly was lost.

A decision was made that the Navy would begin notifying next-of-kin at 7:30, and that a public announcement would be made at 8 p.m. Rear Admiral Lawson P. Ramage, Deputy Commander Submarine Force Atlantic Fleet, was placed in charge of search and rescue operations on the scene and Vice Admiral Bernard L. Austin was informed that he was to be named the President of the Court of Inquiry. A statement summing up the situation was prepared by the Navy's Office of Information for Admiral Anderson's use at 8 p.m.

Admiral Anderson met with Elton Fay of the Associated Press and Charles Corddry of the United Press, shortly after 8 p.m. and with a larger group of newsmen, including radio and television reporters about an hour later.

Admiral Dennison, who is retiring May 1 as CINCLANT, CINCLANT Fleet, and SACLANT, long had been scheduled to be honored at a dinner by SACLANT officers at the Officers Club on the base, and did attend, although he arrived 45 minutes late. He kept in touch with proceedings through the means of a portable radio-telephone. Upon conclusion of the dinner, about 10 p.m., he returned to his quarters with Admiral Grenfell, Rear Admiral Joseph W. Leverton, Jr., and members of his staff, and reviewed events up until that time.

In Washington, Admiral Anderson conferred on several occasions with Secretary Korth, Admiral Ricketts, Vice Admiral Charles D. Griffin, and his own staff before meeting again with media representatives at about 9:30. He returned to his office about 10 p.m. where he remained for an hour before securing to his quarters.

THRESHER SUMMARY -- SITUATION SUMMARY, NOON APRIL 16, 1963

The search continues today for the submarine THRESHER in an area 220 miles east of Cape Cod. Captain F.A. Andrews, USN, Commander Submarine Development Group TWO, commands the search units from his flagship, the destroyer USS WARRINGTON. Other ships involved are the research vessel ATLANTIS II of the Scripps Institute of Oceanography, the submarine rescue ship USS SUNBIRD, the submarine USS REDFIN, the POLARIS submarine USS THOMAS JEFFERSON, and the research vessels USNS GILLISS and USS ROCKVILLE. The destroyer USS THE SULLIVANS will sail from Newport today for the search area. Captain C.D. Brown, USN, Commander Submarine Squadron EIGHT will sail from Newport later today in the destroyer USS HISSEM to relieve Captain Andrews as on-scene commander.

The services of USS REQUISITE as mother ship for a deep-towed bottom echo sounder will not be required. The device will be installed on the ATLANTIS II at Woods Hole instead. USS PREVAIL will arrive at Norfolk tomorrow where she will have a deep-towed magnetometer installed.

The Atomic Energy Commission reports that results of an air survey are negative for radioactivity in the search area. No further debris or significant information has been obtained in the search area.

The bathyscaph TRIESTE departed from San Diego yesterday aboard the landing ship dock USS POINT DEFIANCE. She is expected off the New England coast by April 27. The Court of Inquiry headed by Vice Admiral Bernard Austin reconvened this morning at 9:00 AM at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard.



NEWS RELEASE

PLEASE NOTE DATE



DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS
Washington 25, D. C.

IMMEDIATE REELEASE

April 25, 1963

NO. 582-63
OXford 76161

DEEP SUBMERGENCE SYSTEMS REVIEW GROUP ESTABLISHED BY NAVY TO STUDY DEEP OCEAN OPERATIONS

(The following information was released in Washington, D.C., at 7:16 P.M. (EST), April 24, 1963, by the Department of Defense.)

The immediate establishment of a Deep Submergence Systems Review Group in the Navy Department was announced today (April 24) by Secretary of the Navy Fred Korth.

Rear Admiral E. C. Stephan, USN, Commander of the U. S. Naval Oceanographic Office and a veteran submariner, has been relieved of all other responsibilities to serve as chairman of the Group. He will have a full time staff and will be further assisted by representatives of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, the Office of Naval Research and the Navy's Bureaus of Medicine and Surgery, Ships, Weapons and Yards and Docks.

This group, under Admiral Stephan, will review and formalize into one program all of the Navy's continuing efforts to solve the many problems presented by deep ocean operations. These efforts include oceanographic research programs which have been in progress for many years as well as plans for Deep Research Vehicles which are now ready for application to operational use.

The immediate objective of the new Group will be to examine the Navy's plans for the development and procurement of components and systems related to the location, identification, rescue from and recovery of deep submerged large bodies from the ocean floor and to recommend a program that will enhance the effectiveness of such systems. In this connection the Group will review and formulate recommendations to the Secretary of the Navy and the Chief of Naval Operations concerned with:

- (1) Programs currently underway in Navy bureaus and laboratories for the location, identification, rescue of personnel and recovery of objects such as submarines on the ocean floor.
- (2) Research, development and operational projects currently being carried on in the National Oceanographic Program under the aegis of the Interagency Committee on Oceanography.
- (3) Any novel and alternative instruments and methods suggested by government agencies, private industry, academic and research institutions or other agencies which have a bearing on the subject.

MORE

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The group will not directly concern itself with current efforts involving the USS THRESHER unless requested to do so by the Naval authorities in charge of the operation.

Admiral Stephan will receive overall policy guidance from the Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Research and Development, Dr. James H. Wakelin, Jr.

END

APPENDIX B

News release issued by the National Broadcasting Company, April 12, 1963, concerning the evolution of the television report on the loss of USS THRESHER.



April 12, 1963

HERE'S HOW NBC NEWS QUICKLY BUILT ITS TV SPECIAL
ON THE LOSS OF THE SUBMARINE THRESHER

On the night of Wednesday, April 10, the Navy Department announced in Washington that the atomic submarine Thresher "appeared to be lost" in the Atlantic at a point some 200 miles east of Boston.

NBC News quickly assigned a group of newsmen throughout the northeast to cover the story. These were the preliminary moves that resulted in an hour-long special program the following night that, with films and live interviews, told the story of the Thresher's disappearance.

A chronology of these events follows: (all times EST)

1 p.m.--The decision is made firm to televise "The Loss of the Thresher" at 7:30 p.m. The sponsor, Gulf Oil Corporation, has decided to omit any commercial messages because of the nature of the program. Producer Chet Hogan, researcher Mona McCormick and Frank McGee, who will "anchor" the program, have already been gathering material.

2 p.m.--Associate producer Jerry Jacobs and news editor Gene Farinet screen films taken by an NBC News cameraman from a plane flying over the ocean where the sub went down. The NBC plane was the first on the scene Thursday morning.

2:30 p.m.--Production assistant Marian Eiskamp finishes typing the "routine" of the show. This is an outline showing where various film segments and live pickups are spaced in the program.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
DEPARTMENT OF CHEMISTRY

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD
DATE: [illegible]

RE: [illegible]

1. [illegible]

2. [illegible]

3. [illegible]

Thresher

2:35 p.m.--Jacobs and Farinet screen a portion of an NBC News special broadcast that dealt with the atomic submarine George Washington. A segment showing the diving sequence aboard the George Washington is edited out for use on the night's program. The film clip will last 27 seconds.

2:40 p.m.--Hagan calls his wife to tell her he will be home late. He tells her about the special program.

2:44 p.m.--Farinet spreads large maps of the northeast coast on the floor of Hagan's office. They select a map for reproduction by visual technicians for use on the program. It will be seen by viewers for about 20 seconds.

2:50 p.m.--A messenger brings Farinet, Jacobs and unit manager Frank Badami hot dogs and containers of coffee. McGee runs out of the office saying he is going to eat. It will be 10 p.m. before they eat again.

3:20 p.m.--Everyone is typing except Badami. He is talking long distance with a mobile TV unit being set up at San Diego, Calif., where correspondent Roy Neal will interview an officer of the bathyscaph Trieste.

3:40 p.m.--McGee is typing at his desk with long sheets of copy paper spread out before him. Hagan enters his office and the two discuss the outline of the show. The pieces begin to fall into place.

4:30 p.m.--Stopwatch in hand, McGee reads to himself the script he has written. He yells, "How long is the dive sequence?" Farinet yells back, "Fifty seconds." McGee clicks his watch and reads on.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

PHILOSOPHY DEPARTMENT

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PHILOSOPHY DEPARTMENT

Thresher

4:35 p.m.--Farinet has located some film of the Trieste. A messenger has been dispatched to Jersey City to get the film. He has not returned. Farinet checks and learns the film is en route.

5:10 p.m.--The film of the Trieste arrives. Portions of it are germane to the program. It is edited and prepared.

5:37 p.m.--Badami is on the phone talking with Washington for a remote pickup on correspondent Martin Agronsky who will interview Captain James F. Calvert, former skipper of the nuclear sub Skate.

5:45 p.m.--The mobile TV unit arrives at New London, Conn., and establishes communications with Badami in New York. Joseph Michaels will broadcast live from the unit with late word on a Navy board of investigation that has been convened.

7:12 p.m.--In the control room, Hagan scans late wire copy, searching for any late news breaks that will alter the factual content of his program.

7:13 p.m.--Director Robert Priaulx has alerted directors at the remote pickup sites.

7:20 p.m.--Badami passes out coffee and cup cakes.

7:24 p.m.--There is difficulty clearing up the video line to the New London pickup. Within a minute, the line is clear.

7:30 p.m.--An announcer says: "'Wide Country,' usually seen at this time . . ."

The next morning, critics praised the show; one writing, ". . . by far the most comprehensive coverage."

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The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records and the role of the committee in overseeing these activities. It also mentions the need for regular communication and reporting to the relevant authorities.

In the second part, the committee outlines its findings and recommendations. It notes that while there have been some improvements, there is still a need for further action in certain areas. The recommendations are aimed at addressing these issues and ensuring a more effective process.

The third part of the document provides a detailed overview of the current state of affairs. It includes a list of key areas that require attention and a breakdown of the resources available. This section is intended to provide a clear picture of the challenges and opportunities facing the organization.

Finally, the document concludes with a summary of the main points and a call to action. It emphasizes the need for continued effort and collaboration from all stakeholders to achieve the desired outcomes. The committee expresses its confidence in the ability of the organization to overcome these challenges.

The committee also wishes to thank the staff and members for their dedication and hard work. It looks forward to working closely with them in the future to implement the recommendations and improve the overall performance of the organization.

Yours faithfully,
[Signature]

The Committee
[Address]

APPENDIX C

News release containing the findings of the Court of Inquiry investigating the loss of USS THRESHER. Issued in Washington, D.C. and Boston, Mass. The copy appended was released by the Public Information Office, First Naval District.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of various factors on the performance of a system. The study is organized as follows: Section 2 describes the methodology used in the study. Section 3 presents the results of the study. Section 4 discusses the implications of the findings. Section 5 concludes the study.

PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE
HEADQUARTERS, FIRST NAVAL DISTRICT
196 SUMMER STREET
BOSTON, MASS.

20 JUNE 1963

FOLLOWING IS TEXT OF NATIONAL RELEASE BEING MADE BY OASD (PA) IN WASHINGTON AT NOON JUNE 20, 1963

QUOTE " A FLOODING CASUALTY IN THE ENGINE ROOM IS BELIEVED TO BE THE "MOST PROBABLE" CAUSE OF THE SINKING OF THE NUCLEAR SUBMARINE USS THRESHER, LOST APRIL 10, 1963, 220 MILES EAST OF CAPE COD WITH 129 PERSONS ABOARD.

THE NAVY BELIEVES IT MOST LIKELY THAT A PIPING SYSTEM FAILURE HAD OCCURRED IN ONE OF THE THRESHER'S SALT WATER SYSTEMS, PROBABLY IN THE ENGINE ROOM. THE ENORMOUS PRESSURE WATER SURROUNDING THE SUBMARINE SUBJECTED HER INTERIOR TO A VIOLENT SPRAY OF WATER AND PROGRESSIVE FLOODING. IN ALL PROBABILITY WATER AFFECTED ELECTRICAL CIRCUITS AND CAUSED LOSS OF POWER. THRESHER SLOWED AND BEGAN TO SINK. WITHIN MOMENTS SHE HAD EXCEEDED HER COLLAPSE DEPTH AND TOTALLY FLOODED. SHE CAME TO REST ON THE OCEAN FLOOR, 8,400 FEET BENEATH THE SURFACE.

THIS OPINION OF THE COURT OF INQUIRY WAS MADE PUBLIC TODAY BY SECRETARY OF THE NAVY FRED KORTH.

THE COURT, HEADED BY VICE ADMIRAL BERNARD L. AUSTIN, USN, HEARD TESTIMONY FROM 120 WITNESSES, BOTH MILITARY AND CIVILIAN, DURING THE EIGHT WEEKS IT WAS IN SESSION AT THE NAVAL SHIPYARD, PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE. IT RECORDED 1700 PAGES OF TESTIMONY AND GATHERED FOR THE RECORD SOME 255 CHARTS, DRAWINGS, LETTERS, PHOTOGRAPHS, DIRECTIVES, DEBRIS AND OTHER EXHIBITS BEARING ON THE SINKING.

THE RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS OF THE COURT WAS DELIVERED LAST WEEK TO THE CONVENING AUTHORITY, ADMIRAL H. PAGE SMITH, USN, COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF, U.S. ATLANTIC FLEET, WHO TRANSMITTED IT, WITH HIS COMMENTS, TO THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY. COPIES OF THE BULKY 12-VOLUME RECORD ARE NOW BEING STUDIED IN THE NAVY DEPARTMENT BY ENGINEERS, DESIGNERS AND EXPERTS IN NUCLEAR SUBMARINE OPERATIONS.

THE COURT DECLARED THAT, IN ITS OPINION, "THE BASIC DESIGN OF THE THRESHER CLASS SUBMARINE IS GOOD, AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION HAS RESULTED IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF A HIGH-PERFORMANCE SUBMARINE".

THE BULK OF THE COURT'S RECOMMENDATIONS STATED THE NEED FOR CAREFUL REVIEW OF THE DESIGN, CONSTRUCTION AND INSPECTION OF VITAL SUBMARINE SYSTEMS, SUCH AS SEA WATER AND AIR SYSTEMS, AND A REVIVAL OF OPERATING PROCEDURES TO IMPROVE DAMAGE CONTROL CAPABILITY UNDER UNUSUAL CONDITIONS SUCH AS FLOODING.

CERTAIN ACTIONS HAVE ALREADY BEEN TAKEN. FOR EXAMPLE, THE NAVY'S BUREAU OF SHIPS IS APPLYING A NEWLY DEVELOPED INSPECTION TECHNIQUE TO ASSURE THE INTEGRITY OF HIGH PRESSURE PIPING SYSTEMS ON ALL NAVAL SHIPS. BASED UPON ULTRASONIC PRINCIPLES, THE NEW METHOD IS BEING EMPLOYED INITIALLY ON NUCLEAR SUBMARINES. PERSONNEL TRAINING AND ULTRASONIC INSPECTION EQUIPMENT FAMILIARIZATION ARE NECESSARY AND SOME RESCHEDULING OF SUBMARINE CONSTRUCTION DATES AND OVERHAUL INTERVALS WILL BE REQUIRED.

MUCH OF THE TESTIMONY HEARD BY THE COURT WAS RECEIVED IN CLOSED SESSION AND ITS OVERALL REPORT IS CLASSIFIED SECRET TO PREVENT DISCLOSURE OF THE CAPABILITIES OF THE NAVY'S NUCLEAR SUBMARINE FORCE. SECRETARY KORTH HAS AUTHORIZED THE RELEASE OF THE FOLLOWING PORTIONS OF THE RECORD WHICH DO NOT CONTAIN SECRET INFORMATION.

... THE ... OF THE ...

1. The first part of the document is a list of names and addresses. The names are written in a cursive hand, and the addresses are in a more formal, printed style. The list includes names such as "John Doe", "Jane Smith", and "Robert Brown", along with their respective street addresses and city names.

2. The second part of the document is a series of short, handwritten notes or entries. These notes are written in a cursive hand and appear to be organized in a list-like format. They contain various pieces of information, possibly related to the names and addresses listed above.

3. The third part of the document is a block of text, possibly a letter or a report. It is written in a cursive hand and contains several paragraphs of text. The text is somewhat difficult to read due to the cursive style and the fading of the ink.

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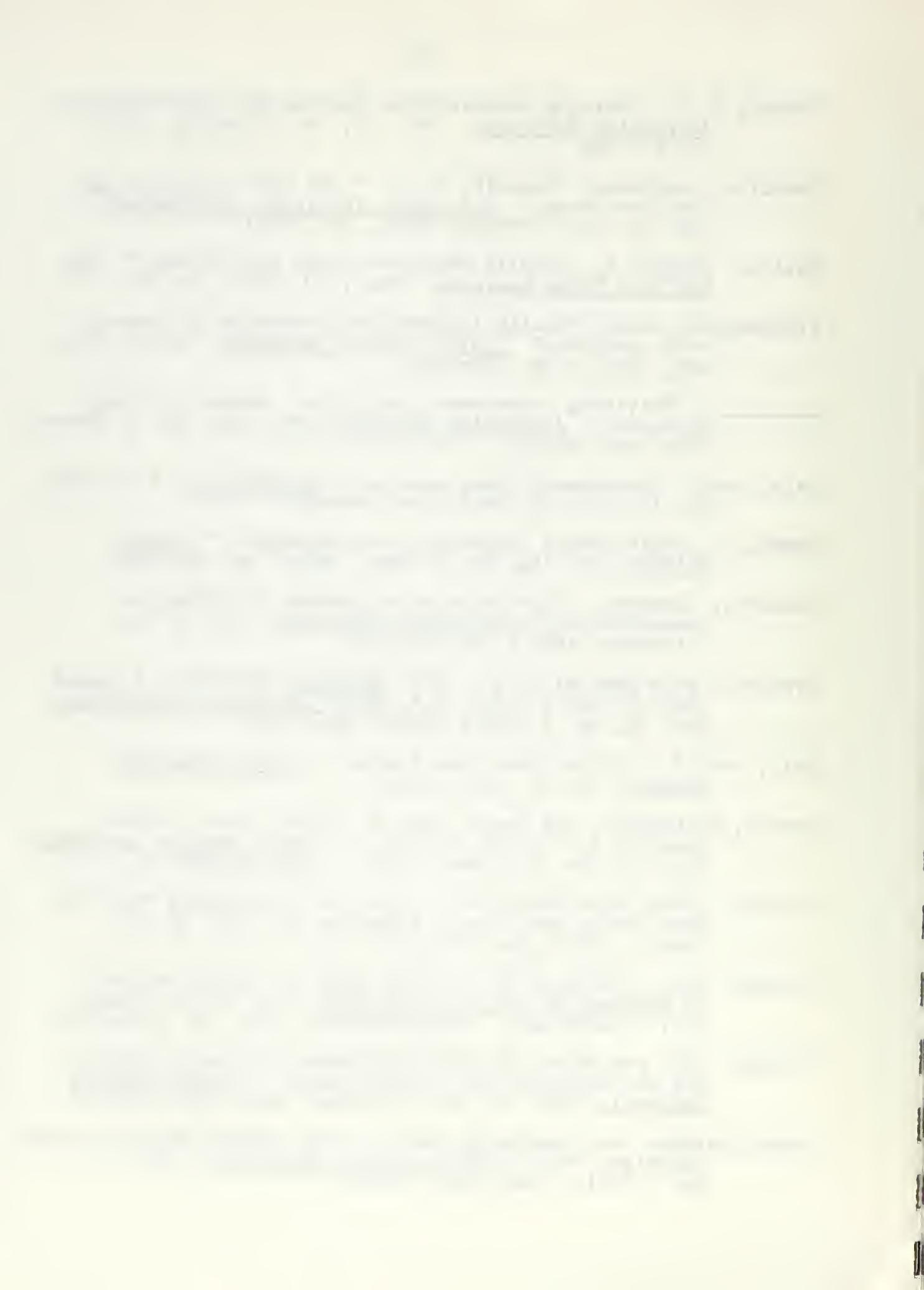
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