

# Only the loss of four lives to Navy to start playing by the

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As flags flew at half mast last week in Carradale, Kintyre, where villagers mourned the loss of the trawler Antares, sunk with all hands by a Royal Navy submarine, some hard questions were being asked by outraged fishermen.

How could a warship like HMSS Trenchant, costing £200m and bristling with state-of-the-art listening devices, fail to detect the presence of a fishing boat? And why, having sunk her, did it take two hours to admit there had been a "snagging?"

Clyde fishermen, furious as never before at the Navy, have their own answers to these and many other questions. Even if their conclusions are only partly right they expose a long history of dangerous malpractice in the Clyde, a frightening scandal which has been covered up for years.

Other users of the Clyde have stories of submarines surfacing terrifyingly close by. They include yachtsmen and oarsmen and, a few years ago, passengers on the ferry Caledonia who saw a periscope a few yards from the side of the ship, indicating that a submarine had passed underneath and missed by a few feet.

It took four deaths to break the Royal Navy's notorious secrecy at last, if only partially. The Navy has a tradition of paying fishermen for their silence after "snagging" incidents.

Only extraordinary good fortune has prevented an Antares-type disaster befalling other fishing vessels long before now. Fishermen have been predicting this disaster for a generation but it took the ultimate tragedy to persuade the Royal Navy to play by the rules last week. Some say the Navy owned up, others that this time it was found out.

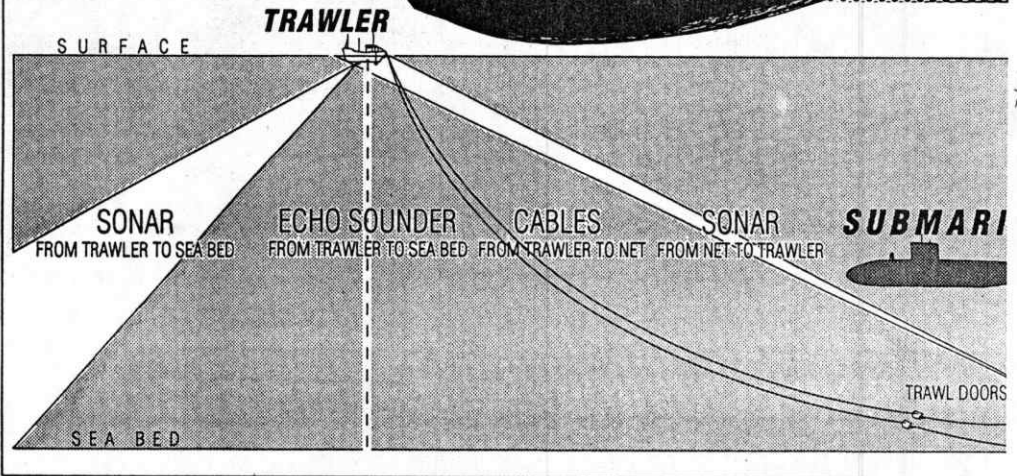
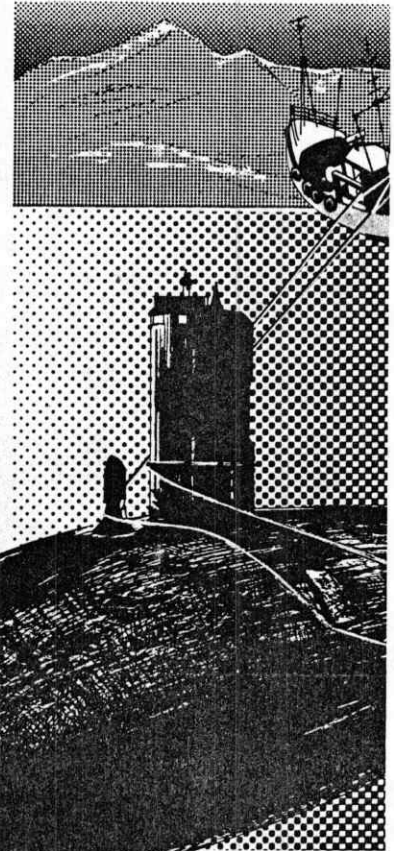
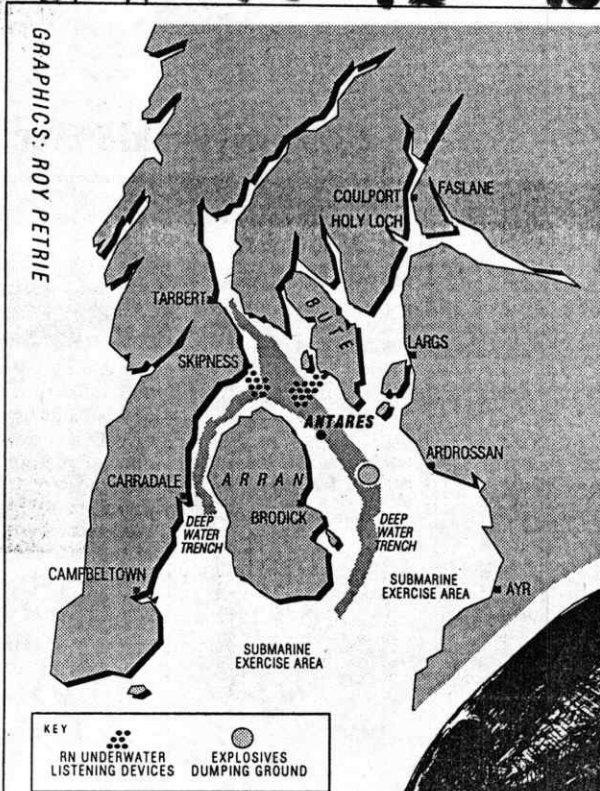
What happened to the Antares at 2.17am in perfect conditions on a moonlit, frosty, flat calm on November 22 is now subject to official inquiry but evidence so far shows that some shocking conclusions are unavoidable.

Skipper Jamie Russell, a popular fisherman, married with three children, had just taken over at the wheelhouse from Billy Martindale, 24, after his four-hour watch. They were fishing for cod and whiting with nets a foot or so off the seabed. The other two crew were probably asleep below. Earlier Mr Martindale had telephoned his wife, and minutes before the Antares sank he chatted with men on two nearby fishing boats. There was no hint of trouble.

When Jamie Russell took over, the Antares was moving south at a point two-and-a-half miles off Sannox, Arran, and probably turning to port to begin trawling northwards in about 540ft of water in a seabed trench popular with fishermen. The manoeuvre required a sharp turn with the engine revving to keep the nets clear of the seabed to prevent them being torn.

In mid-turn the Antares would list to port and face the Ayrshire coast with her twin steel warps at right angles to the stern. That would be her most vulnerable position in a snagging.

The Antares must have sunk in seconds. All the skipper had to do was lift one of two telephones and click a finger-press mechanism to raise the alarm. In a tiny



indicating fish and the depth and nature of the seabed.

Fishermen are convinced that any submarine should have been able to detect at least one of these beams. The Navy say the submarines are on different frequencies. Even if the beams were not detected a submarine would have been expected to "hear" the fishing boat. It should also have known approximately the whereabouts of the nets and trawl wire because the nets were attached to steel trawl doors which are used under water to spread the mouth of the net.

When Tom Blackburn, Commodore Clyde, met angry

passed below, scraping the trawler's keel, tearing off its steel keel strap and scoring the bilge.

"Although we were in 80 fathoms it was as though we had run ashore," Mr Gillies reported. "The sea was bubbling like Corrievechan. I shouted to a stand-by naval boat on Channel 16 and steamed after it. We gave chase but she took off for Campbeltown and we gave up. The Navy denied knowledge for a long time but eventually we got 75% of our claim settled out of court. The Navy never admitted liability."

No fishermen believes that the Trenchant could not hear the

claims that the Navy has no other means of detecting obstacles. "If that is the case how do they miss Ailsa Craig?" asked one.

Fishing boats and submarines don't mix, as one former naval officer knows from experience. He is Captain James Bush who was a Polaris commander in the US Navy in the 1960s and is now director of the Centre for Defence Information in Washington and a supporter of nuclear disarmament.

Captain Bush was aboard a submarine which snagged a fishing boat in the Irish Sea. He told me: "We did not know what we had done at the time. Our ship slowed down and we were puzzled, and then we speeded up again. We thought it was just the current. When we periscope up four or five hours later we found we had hooked a net. It was still with us."

Asked if anyone had been killed, he replied: "We have no idea. We did nothing about it. We heard nothing and there was

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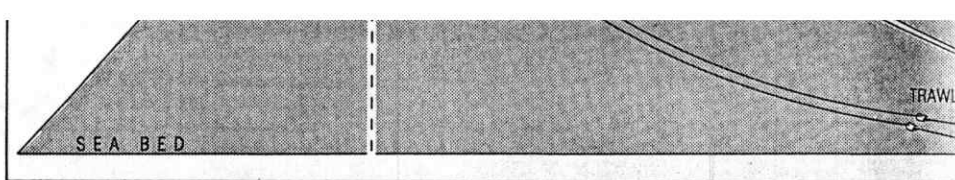
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The Antares must have sunk in seconds. All the skipper had to do was lift one of two telephones and click a finger-press mechanism to raise the alarm. In a tiny wheelhouse he should have been able to do this in one second. In two or three seconds he could have called for help on the emergency channel 16 to which all ships in the area listen constantly.

Yet there was silence from the Antares. The two nearest trawlers heard nothing. The speed of her sinking suggests the Trenchant was at speed when she tangled with the warps of the trawler. Such force would almost upend the Antares. She was probably dragged down, stern first, overturning as she disappeared. A 35-tonne fishing boat was no match for a 4200-tonne hunter-killer submarine capable of 32 knots underwater.

Three electronic beams were being emitted by the Antares. On her net she had a Japanese-made Furuno device which monitors fish entering it and indicates how far the net is from the boat and the seabed. The Navy said this was a pencil beam and could not, therefore, be detected by a submarine.

But Furuno in Aberdeen told me the Antares had a Furuno CN-8 monitor which transmits a conical beam which becomes wider the farther it travels from net to boat. The Antares also had a Furuno echo sounder going directly down to the seabed and a Furuno sonar system which constantly scans ahead and down



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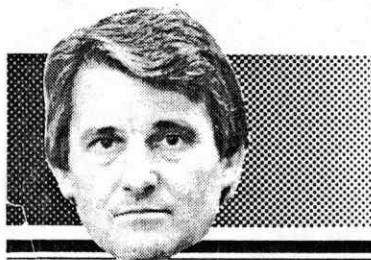
Asked if anyone had been killed, he replied: "We have no idea. We did nothing about it. We heard nothing and there was no report of a fishing vessel with a problem. There was no policy on this."

Captain Bush said the only way to detect steel doors or mines is with active sonar. "That means sending out an active signal which makes a pinging sound. You don't detect steel doors or mines with passive sonar. If there is no ping you won't detect these items. And if you are a submarine sending out a ping, you get found. It is not normal, therefore, for submarines to transmit a ping; you might as well be on the surface."

Another source of warning to a submarine would be the echo sounder used by the Antares. The Navy's claim that it could not detect a fishing boat's sonar is at odds with a statement made last year by a senior naval officer to Fishing News. Commodore Paul Hoddinott said passive sonar could easily detect noise from a trawler, including engine noise and "in particular the signals from its sonar and sounder."

Which leaves the theory most widely held in the fishing community: that the Antares was simply a victim of a dangerous system which would inevitably lead to tragedy when someone's seamanship was found wanting.

An inquiry will seek the truth but the benefit will come too late for four hard-working men and their families in Kintyre.



Murray Ritchie

fishermen he made the chilling statement that the submarine was incapable of detecting steel doors and was also not equipped to detect mines.

Since the Clyde still hides mines from the Second World War — one blew up a fishing boat two years ago — this raises the remarkable thought of what might happen if a mine exploded against a nuclear-powered submarine armed with atomic weapons.

For years some fishermen have suspected submarines on exercise in the Clyde of "snuggling up" to fishing boats to avoid detection. A trawler's engine can disguise submarine sound. The Navy denies doing this but there are countless complaints from fishermen of submarines surfacing amidst the trawler fleet without warning.

Many fishermen have "caught" submarines and been towed or struck by them. A few years ago Alex Gillies, of Carradale, was aboard the trawler Sapphire when there was a loud thump, and the boat shook and lurched from side to side. Her gear was severed 50 metres away as a submarine surfaced. The Sapphire "saw" the submarine on her echo sounder as it

sound of the Antares in her death throes as she went down. "The noise must have been hellish," says Lachie Paterson, a fish dealer and former Antares crew member. "They must have heard it loud and clear."

The Trenchant surfaced soon after the incident and the Navy says it tried to contact the two boats trawling nearby. No-one can understand why no contact was successful or why the Trenchant made no effort to approach the other boats to raise the alarm. Not until 4am did the Navy notify Mr Patrick Stewart, secretary of the Clyde Fishermen's Association, that a submarine had snagged fishing wires.

This was in accordance with a recent agreement that snaggings would be reported. Mr Stewart raised the alarm with the coastguard. The Trenchant resumed its part in the naval exercise.

The Trenchant should have detected five vessels in the area but when she surfaced she must have found only four. This could have been put down to the proximity of land, says Mr Stewart, which can confuse sonar devices.

No-one, apart from naval personnel, really knows how submarines navigate with passive sonar. Fishermen are sceptical of

## Trail of havoc for fishing boats

**CLYDE** fishermen have been drawing up a list of incidents involving fishing boats and submarines. These include:

**HEROINE:** September 1989. Snagged by USS Lafayette off Portpatrick. No compensation paid.

**HUNTRESS:** June 1989. Two incidents, second of which involved severe snagging by the Oracle which surfaced and was photographed. Compensated for the second incident only.

**NEW DAWN:** January 1989. Damage sustained in collision with USS Will Rodgers.

**BRILLIANT STAR:** October 27, 1988. Towing bottom nets in Sound of Bute. Fouled by Oberon class submarine. Compensated July 1973. Snagged by Canadian Oberon Class submarine in the Kyles of Bute. Admitted.

**PREVAIL:** 1988. Severe snagging six miles south-west of Sanday. Total loss of gear. Compensated by Royal Navy.

**SAPPHIRE:** 1983. Oberon class submarine surfaced under boat. Severe damage. Compensated. 1979. Pair-fishing with Golden Fleece when Dutch submarine surfaced between boats and threatened gear which boats loosened. Snagged but freed herself. No loss.

**AQUILA:** October 1979. Towing bottom nets in the Sound of Jura. Towed astern by USS Alexander Hamilton. Gear cut, winch damaged. Compensated.

**CATRIONA:** 1974. Snagged by

submarine, believed to be Oberon class. No admission.

**VILLAGE MAID:** Snagged at periscope depth by submarine. Gear lost.

**MARIE:** February 1971. Snagged. No admission. No compensation.

**GIRL SHONA:** March 1970. Snagged by submarine which failed to surface. No admission.

**TAEPING:** January 1968. Snagged. No admission, no compensation.