

NEWS

Nuclear subs 'key' to sea mystery

by Robert Shrimley

EIGHT MPs hope to solve the mystery of "Scotland's Bermuda Triangle" when they visit two submarine bases on the west coast next month.

Up to 20 trawlers have sunk or simply disappeared since 1980, with the loss of nearly 100 lives, in the triangle of water between the Isle of Man, Larne in Northern Ireland, and Gournock on the Firth of Clyde. In many cases, the bodies have never been recovered.

In half those cases, the vessels vanished in calm waters without even a Mayday call. Three fishermen died when the South Stack disappeared in good weather somewhere between the Isle of Man and Anglesey in May, 1985. A two-day search found no trace of the boat.

The incident came three months after another tragedy. The Mhari L from Kirkcubright vanished with all five hands close to where the South Stack is thought to have gone down. An inquiry suggested it had snagged its nets on an underwater cable.

In 1987 the Girl Fiona disappeared off the Isle of Islay with two men on board, and this year the Belgian trawler Tiji Uliensplegal sank with its five crew on March 7.

All the incidents have been monitored by the Celtic League



Geoff Comber (left) and crew, whose trawler, Laurel, was dragged by a US submarine

pressure group, which believes that the answer to the "Triangle" mystery lies in the Royal Navy's submarine base at Faslane and the US submarine base in Holy Loch. Celtic League general secretary Mr Bernard Moffatt is certain that submarines are responsible for dragging down the boats.

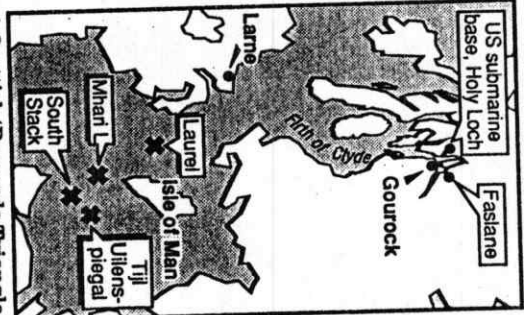
There is much evidence to support his theory. Last Mon-

day the Manx trawler Laurel was dragged for 20 minutes at four knots by a US submarine 12 miles north west of Peel. Skipper Geoff Comber described what happened:

"We were dragging our nets on the bottom, trawling for scampi," he said. "The bed in that area is very clear and I was surprised to find us slowing down and stopping. I called the

crew on deck and we watched as we began to go backwards, picking up speed. "We hung on for about 20 minutes but the ship was starting to creek and we were going further and further down so we cut the wires and lost £4,000 worth of new equipment."

US Navy spokesman Petty Officer Robert Jenkins has admitted that an American



A Scottish 'Bermuda Triangle' submarine did snag a trawler's net. He said that the incident was being investigated and Mr Comber's claim processed.

Last year, the Americans paid £11,347 compensation to the skipper of the Scottish trawler Heroine after a similar incident in September, 1987.

Mr Moffatt has chronicled more than 50 incidents of sinkings, near-misses and net snag-

He said: "There are many, many cases. Just three years ago a submarine suddenly surfaced between two ferries in Larne harbour, for example. Many of these disappearances have occurred in designated submarine areas and we have no doubt there is a connection. We are campaigning for a change in the routes."

The Government has repeatedly resisted public inquiries into the loss of fishing and pleasure boats on the approaches to the bases. But now Mr Younger, Defence Secretary, whose Ayrshire constituency looks out on the Triangle, has given the go-ahead for the unprecedented visit of the MPs to the submarine bases on May 8.

Mr George Poulkes, MP for Carrick, who will lead the delegation, intends to use the visit - which is also to discuss nuclear discharges into the sea - to question submarine commanders on links between their craft and the sinkings.

He said: "There have been far too many disappearances of shipping in this area for it simply to be put down to natural mishaps. I want to question commanders about safety measures taken to avoid fishing boats and systems for detecting craft on the surface."

Mr Allen Adams, MP for Paisley North, said: "With the increase in leisure activity on the Clyde there should be a rule that submarines stay on the surface until they are well into the Irish Sea."

A Defence Ministry spokesman would not comment on whether the visit was an admission of guilt by the Royal Navy. He said: "The MPs expressed a desire to go to Faslane and Holy Loch and we have arranged to comply with this request. During the discussion shipping vessels were mentioned but were not the main subject."