

US sub rams Waste Dump

There have been conflicting reports recently as to the source of radioactive contamination in the paint on an American nuclear submarine at Holy Loch. Following information received, and a careful monitoring of the Press we have discovered that the Poseidon submarine USS Sam Rayburn has been in collision with nuclear waste barrels dumped in the North Atlantic.

The submarine, which carries 16 missiles, ran into the barrels at 6.15 a.m. on September 2nd last year about 175 miles south west of Lands End. When the nuclear powered vessel hit the barrels the captain noted abnormally high radioactivity and feared that the sub had been damaged. The boat waited on the seabed for three days until a support ship came out to check her.

US Navy divers were sent out from Plymouth to ascertain the fault. On their return it was heard that the submarine was not damaged but that some barrels lying around her were leaking. The submarine then presumably carried on with her voyage, because she did not turn up at the US Holy Loch base until mid-January.

US Navy spokespeople initially attempted to confuse the locals around Holy Loch when they became concerned at strange activities at the base. They claimed that people had "misinterpreted the routine offloading of a missile" and that the USS Andrew Jackson had not been in port at the time and there had not been a radioactive leak. This 'cover up' was irrelevant as the submarine involved in the incident was the Sam Rayburn, of the 35th Squadron (Holy Loch is the 14th Squadron base), she was an infrequent visitor (if she had ever been there before), and she had a unique feature - a catwalk around the conning tower - which made her unmistakable to the experienced local 'submarine watchers'.

Duncan Campbell discovered that an incident had occurred and the US Navy had to admit that the Sam Rayburn was indeed contaminated, although only slightly. He disclosed in an article in the New Statesman that everyone aboard the floating dry dock USS Los Alamos was issued with personal radiation monitoring badges the day after the sub was taken aboard. This was the weekend on the 25/26th February. What had happened to the sub between mid-January and the

end of February?

Local sources state that, when the sub first arrived she was accompanied by USS Vanguard, a very rare visitor indeed. The Vanguard, a white, converted tanker, is a spy ship and bristles with surveillance gear. Most of the crew of the Vanguard is civilian. Both the sub and the spy ship left Holy Loch around about 18th February, after remaining apart from the base since their first arrival.

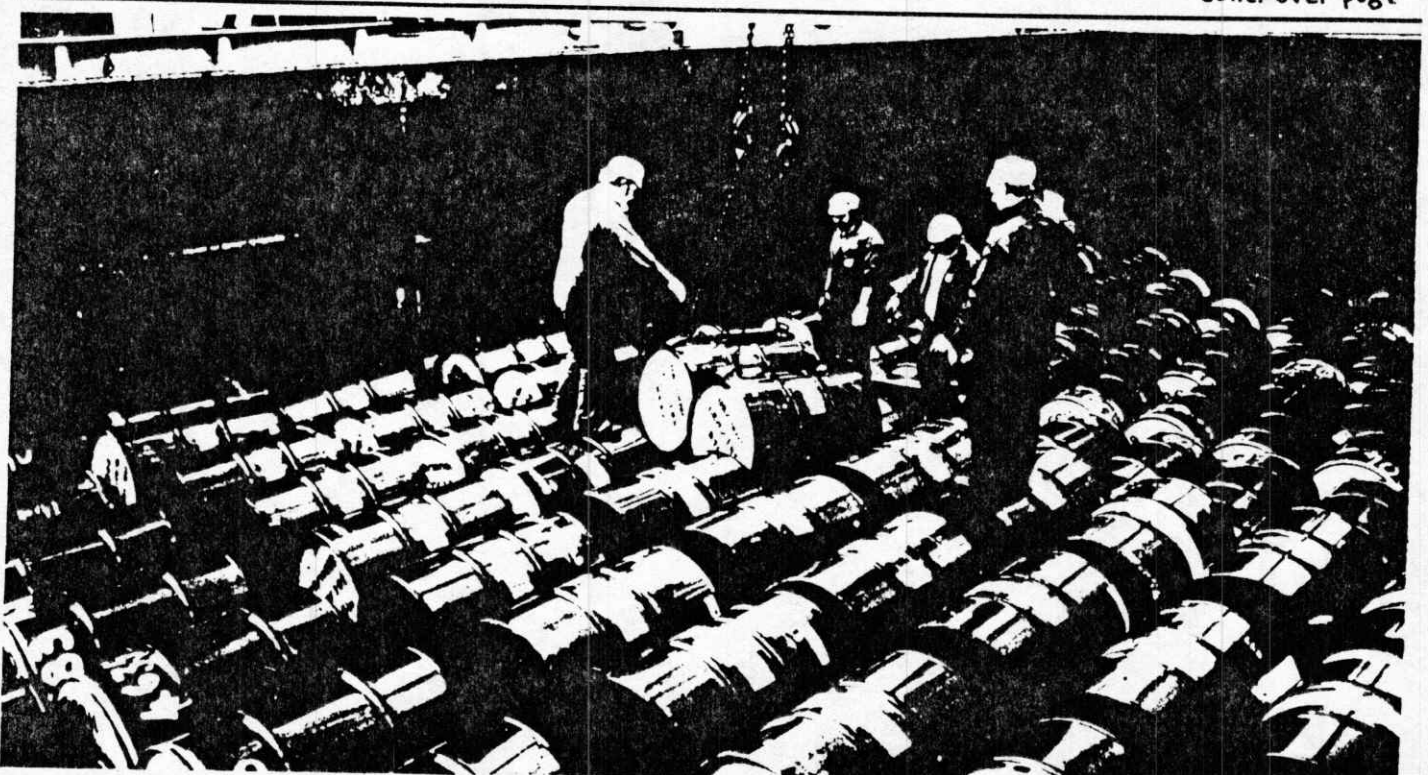
On her return the sub was taken into dry dock, where the decontamination process began. During the time of her earlier visit the submarine was 'shunted' around the Loch only by Royal Navy tugs - themselves rare visitors to the US base. Only later, after the work was completed, were US tugs involved in moving her. Was the submarine so highly radioactive that US vessels, and personnel, could not approach her?

The US has stricter regulations for radiation exposure than we have in this country. In fact, during the period when Rayburn was in dock three US servicewomen in early pregnancy, who worked aboard the supply ship, were flown home after an appeal to a Senator. This is apparently routine for women in later pregnancy, but a Senate Appeal was required for these three women.

The work of the submarine took nearly a month to complete; she eventually left Holy Loch on the 20th April. During the decontamination process water was sprayed over the hull whilst the barnacles and paint were scraped off, to prevent radioactive dust being released to the atmosphere. 200-300 civilian workers were employed on the clean-up operation.

The National Press carried the story of the radioactive submarine on 2nd and 3rd April. They quoted US Navy spokespeople who claimed that the contamination was routine: "one of our routine surveys is to sample paint in locations on ships associated with operations involved in handling low-level nuclear radiation". However, they pointed out that the level of radioactivity was too low to be detected by a geiger counter, and that "if a person eats 10lb of this paint they would receive less radiation exposure than that received each year from natural sources of radioactivity in the body".

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Although unable to explain where the radioactivity had come from, the Navy admitted that slightly different procedures to normal were used when the sub was scraped and repainted.

The elected representatives for the area are not convinced. Peter Collier, the Chairperson of the local Sandbank Community Council "can't believe anything the Americans tell us" and accused the Navy of "bandying with words" when they explained that no spillage occurred in Holy Loch; the sub was radioactive when it sailed in from the Clyde. Strathclyde Regional Council believes it was "misinformed" by the Navy; at the end of February they told Robert Calderwood, the Region's Chief Executive, that there was no such incident. Councillor Ronald Young commented, after the admission that an incident had, in fact happened, "If the US Navy was now saying there had been an incident, however small, that raises the very basic question of the integrity of the relationship between the civil and military authorities in the area".

Labour MP for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley, George Foulkes, a consistent opponent of Windscale and the military and 'civil' nuclear programmes, asked questions in the House of Commons but was blocked because of the 'defence' nature of his questions. He attempted to discover "the operational movements and activities of US submarines in British waters and what controls, if any, the Ministry of Defence have over them".

The Scottish Health Minister, John MacKay, tried to assure locals that nothing was wrong, and that the rumours were just gossip. Peter Collier regards the Minister's attitude as "very arrogant" particularly after the recent disclosures.

There are many worrying aspects of this incident. Did the Government know about the waste barrels, and if they did why didn't they make any official statement? If they didn't, why were they not told. According to the Plymouth-based **Sunday Independent**, an official at the Dept. of the Environment, which controls the dumping of waste, had "heard

something about" the sub hitting the barrels. And an American Navy spokesperson they questioned admitted that the Sam Rayburn "could have been in the area at the time".

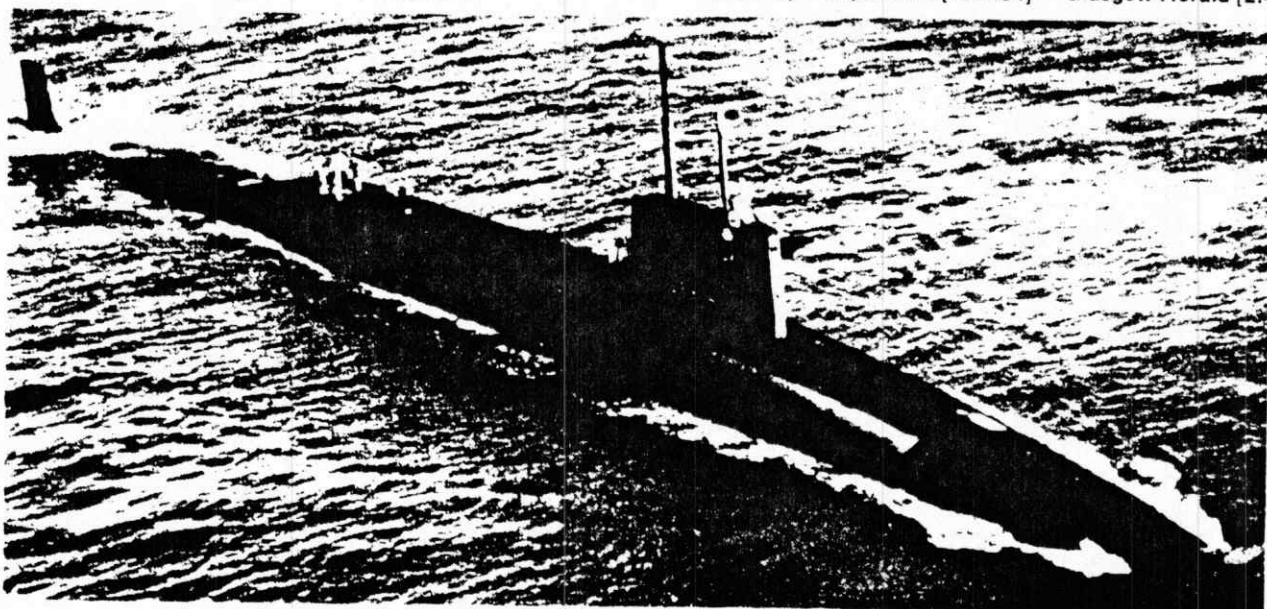
However, the UK low-level waste dump is 500 miles off Lands End; did the barrels drift over 300 miles towards Britain? If so all the Environment Department's assurances that the dump is "safe" seem to be worthless. If not, where did the barrels come from? We have discovered that the barrels may have actually been dumped at the point where the sub hit them. Sources indicate that sometimes the **Fisher** boats (the waste dumpers, eg. **Atlantic Fisher**) dumped their cargoes much closer in than the 500 mile dump zone.

Also, if the barrels contained only 'low-level' nuclear waste (the oft-mentioned hospital gloves etc.) is it conceivable that the radioactivity on the submarine would still be hazardous after over four months at sea? Reports from local people tell that the lead-based undercoat was so contaminated that it too had to be removed during the decontamination work at Holy Loch. Does this imply that the waste was not low-level at all?

Duncan Campbell points out that locals suspect that the US Navy has been dumping "highly radioactive resins" overboard from their submarines, and a report prepared last year by the US Fund for Constitutional Government confirms that, in at least two previous incidents, "the resin had been swept onto the submarine's hull, contaminating paint and marine debris". Is it possible that the barrels which the Sam Rayburn hit were another example of US disregard for Britain's sovereignty, or is it a coincidence that she hit barrels on the same trip as being contaminated by her own effluent?

Other questions remain also; why did the sub stay at sea for so long after the waste barrel incident; why did she not go straight into dry dock after entering Holy Loch; and why did she go out to sea again for a week before the decontamination process? The people of the local community, and Britain at large, deserve answers to these questions.

Sources: Duncan Campbell, *New Statesman* [30.3.84] Rorie Smith, *Sunday Independent* [15.4.84] Steve Martin, *Glasgow Herald* [2.4.84 and 3.4.84].



DANIEL BOONE NUCLEAR-POWERED MISSILE SUBMARINE OF LAFAYETTE CLASS similar to the USS Sam Rayburn.

Seven fishermen from the Faroe Islands were burnt and blinded by mustard gas that leaked from barrels brought up during a deep sea trawl. The leaky canisters came from World War II Axis stockpiles which were dumped under Russian supervision shortly after the war. German sailors who participated in the operation indicated that the specified dump sites were disregarded and barrels dumped

carelessly. The unfortunate fishermen were more than 50 miles from the designated dumping areas.

It appears that the barrels have contaminated local fish as in the 1950s there was a wave of mustard gas poisonings among East Germans who had consumed Baltic cod. The Danish government is concerned about reports of fish contamination, by the 50,000 tonnes of mustard gas disposed

of at the end of the war, and have set up a committee of investigation.

This story taken with the casual nature of sea dumping revealed when an illicit site was disturbed by the **USS Sam Rayburn** suggests that all seabed dumping should cease, sites should be checked and local fish monitored for contamination. This is not done at present, with very few fish being monitored by MAFF.