Project Azorian – Sinking & Search for Soviet submarine, *K-129*

Personal account – Sheldon Breiner

In 1972, three years after I had founded Geometrics, I received a call from a member of Howard Hughes staff, for whom we had done some aeromagnetic surveys in Nevada. The gentleman said he'd like us to make a tow system (magnetometer and cable) that can tow a magnetometer at about 10,000' – 12,000' depth.
He said that the Hughes organization was tasked to locate and mine, using a vacuum apparatus, 'manganese' nodules, strange mineral occurrence which supposedly occurs at a depth of about 10,000' throughout the world. He said they had contracted to pay $300 million to a company that had made deep-drill ships to drill to the 'Moho Discontinuity' and thus had experience. This boat would be several hundred feet long equipped with a means to suck up these nodules, rich in such metals as cobalt, manganese, vanadium, etc. The whole program was a feasibility project funded by the government.

I visited several labs, including the Mine Defense Lab in Panama City, Florida and the Coast Guard Research lab in nearby Tiburon to examine manganese nodules to have a better idea of their magnetic properties, among other things. My interim conclusions were that these nodules were not that magnetic and would be difficult to detect. However, the Hughes team said to disregard my conclusions as they felt they knew what they were doing. I did not question it.

Geometrics was accustomed to have built marine magnetometer tow systems that tow only to depths of several hundred feet, always to get the sensor at least that distance *behind* the large steel ships in the search for oil and for mapping plate tectonics geology. Nevertheless, we delivered to Hughes a system including the magnetometer that would two to about 10,000' (maybe 12,000'?)

Beyond that, we heard nothing about this experiment, well, at least for about ten years. The Glomar Explorer showed up, anchored at Redwood City, CA, and could be seen from the Highway 101, for several years with a large canvas shroud over its mid-section. We presumed that held the vacuum apparatus.

A rumor surfaced that there was much more to this project, called by some *'Project Jennifer*.' There was a fake project name,.' Also, the story about manganese nodules was a subterfuge to hide the true objective, later confirmed by many rumors to be a Soviet diesel submarine that sank in April,1968 for unknown causes 1,500 miles northwest of Hawaii in about 15,000' of water, with about 190 Soviet sailors on board. Hughes group was a buffer for the U.S. government.

The whole effort was called "**Project Azorian**." Further, that the Glomar Explorer had a mid-section unit that would be lowered a short distance under the ship, from which there were four large 'grappling' hooks to grasp the sub, called the K-129, and that what was of interest were the nuclear missiles and code books, Apparently because the sub experienced an implosion at its "crush-depth," it lost its integrity and broke into two pieces and fell back down. Whether anything other than some Soviet bodies turned over to the Soviets was ever obtained, is not known to the public. Two books about this whole project claim that the Soviets had intended to fire missiles on Hawaii and somehow have the U.S. blame it on China. The Soviets, according to these books, claimed that a U.S submarine actually sunk the K-129.
According to the story, the Soviets countered this by sinking a U.S. nuclear submarine, *The Scorpion* three months later. (The Scorpion had indeed sank for unknown causes.) In fact, I worked with the Navy to find and recover *The Scorpion*, and had travelled to visit the Bathyscaph

Trieste II at the NEL, Navy lab in San Diego to use it as a possible survey vehicle (my idea, which the Navy was considering). Much of this story is still not public.