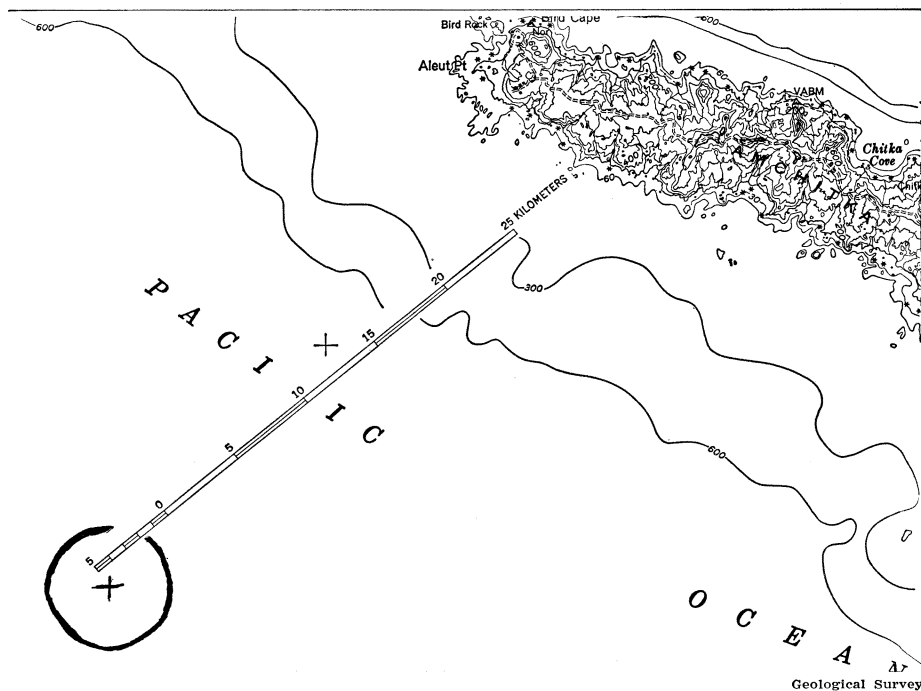


Kilotons of TNT, 3,500 feet down



Stevenson's hulk is thought to be in circled area, 17 miles from Amchitka.

On August 9 at 8 p.m. local time, an Underwater Explosive Ordnance Demolition Team boarded the explosive-filled hulk of the World War II liberty ship Robert Louis Stevenson, set pressure charges to go off at a 4,000 foot depth and opened her seacocks. Everyone then retired to a safe distance to wait for the explosion, which was to rock the ocean bottom off the Aleutian Islands with a force equal to 10 percent of the atomic blast that leveled Hiroshima.

But, for reasons not yet clear, the Stevenson did not sink as fast as expected. The hulk remained on the surface until 12:40 p.m. the next day, meanwhile drifting with the wind to a point about 17 miles southwest of Amchitka Island, where the water is only slightly over 3,000 feet deep.

There, presumably, it settled to the bottom. The Navy says it knows within a few hundred yards where the hulk is because the entire sinking was followed on radar, but it isn't exactly certain.

Ever since, the Navy has been trying to pinpoint the location of the hulk, poised on the edge of automatic detonation. It has been trying for four weeks; so far it has gotten nowhere.

The reasons why the ship got lost in the first place and why it remains lost are the same—the delicate nature of its cargo.

The Stevenson was destined to end her years of service in a magnificent two-kiloton explosion 4,000 feet beneath the surface of the sea, about 32 miles southwest of Amchitka. Shock

waves from the titanic blast were to have been recorded by stations of the Defense Department's world-wide seismic nuclear test detection network for comparison with an earlier natural earthquake at the same site.

The whole affair was to climax a series of 40 smaller blasts for the same purpose under the Advanced Research Projects Agency's Vela Uniform nuclear test detection program.

Accordingly, Stevenson was loaded up with 2,000 tons of obsolete mines, torpedo warheads and bombs and towed out to the explosion site. The deadly cargo was fused with six Sofar bombs—four-pound charges detonated by pressure-sensitive fuses.

It would be relatively easy to find and detonate the Stevenson if ships could pass directly over it, but for weeks the Navy feared that extra pressure from a passing ship might set off the sensitive Sofar fuses. In desperation, apparently, they decided to try bombing the estimated hulk site from the air.

Two "Intruder" jets were to drop a total of 12, 2,000-pound bombs into the water in the hope that their shock waves would detonate the Sofars.

The jets screamed over August 24, neatly plunking three large bombs right on target. Navy brass gnashed their teeth as the bombs splashed into the sea and settled, unexploded, to the bottom. The attempt was called off and a statement issued blaming the failure on a new fuse on the bombs.

Electronic probing, from a safe distance of at least 4,000 yards (2.3 miles), was resumed, as the Navy turned to a policy of pinpointing the Stevenson and identifying bottom topography before any further attempts to detonate the cargo.

This month, the Navy relaxed its caution and has ordered the Silas Bent, an oceanographic research ship, to seek Stevenson with magnetometer sweeps throughout the area—chancing passes over the cocked and loaded liberty ship.

This phase of the operation is being observed by a Soviet trawler, number GS 34, that arrived on the scene September 3 and took up a position where it could watch without danger. A Soviet minesweeper that was nearby when Stevenson was scuttled left early and did not come back, according to Navy reports. ♦

HIGHER EDUCATION

To foot the bill

The greatest dilemma facing higher education, which has become since World War II more of a right than a privilege, is that colleges cannot afford to operate and students cannot afford to attend. In a kind of uneasy compromise, institutions bill their students for only about 60 percent of the actual cost of their education, looking to Government and private sources for the rest; but even that 60 percent outstrips the income of the average family.

Government backed loan programs somewhat alleviate the financial burdens of a bachelors degree, but for poor students from minority groups that money is often hard to come by. And in spite of general philosophical agreement that higher education benefits society as well as the student, society has not been overanxious to support that philosophy with taxes sufficient to provide high quality education at a low price.

To cope with this burgeoning problem, a prestigious government panel last week put its weight behind a proposal that has been around in various forms for decades: namely, that tuitions be raised and the students pay the price after graduation. Specifically, the Panel on Educational Innovation, which works under the aegis of the President's Office of Science and Technology, called for creation of an Educational Opportunity Bank to lend any student any amount of money he needs to attend any college that accepts him, regardless of his financial resources. In return, the student would commit himself to repaying that loan over the course of 30 or 40 years by turning