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Letters

Altered data

"Secrecy and the Seafloor" (SN: 3/15/86, p. 170) brings to the forefront some interesting questions. While the Navy and NOAA are both sure that their positions are correct, we need to consider how the Defense Department's position could have altered history if it had been truly policy in times past.

Imagine sending Lewis and Clark off on their explorations with instructions to produce "altered" data, so that the native Americans could not sneak up on Washington because their maps showed hills and rivers in the wrong place.

Imagine funding space probes at a cost of billions to study the solar system, galaxies and deep space, but programming them to show the earth in a different orbit so extraterrestrials would not be able to find us in the event of an invasion attempt.

Or imagine Rand McNally publishing state maps with a town or two placed somewhere different just to be sure that a nearby "sensitive" installation would be safe from attack because it could not be found. Pity vacationers

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Cover: The protective surfaces of teeth are made of microscopic mineral crystals. Those shown in this scanning electron micrograph are only about a thousandth of a hair's breadth thick. Tooth decay gets its start when acid dissolves more mineral than saliva can reform, something that's starting to happen in the enamel pictured here. But the chemical dentistry performed by some experimental mouth rinses can painlessly repair decay while it is still invisible to the dentist. (Photo: John Featherstone/Univ. of Rochester)



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wandering aimlessly through central Oklahoma searching in vain for Disney World, or the school kids from Meddybemps, Maine, collecting soup labels to fund a trip to Spokane to see the Statue of Liberty.

Scientists and others working with altered or incomplete data will produce only altered or incomplete results. I would sooner have a beautiful leather-bound volume of blank pages than one that contained invalid information.

Jeff Orchard
Windham, N.H.

If the concept of national security were examined with the same rigor and discipline most scientists apply to their own work I wonder how much of it would be left standing. And that a spokesperson for the armed forces in a democracy could conceive — let alone express — the question of why a scientific organization (NOAA) should want to collect data "of that quality and resolution" tells us how far the militarization of our society has progressed.

Peter Silverman
Philadelphia, Pa.

I found "Secrecy and the Seafloor" very informative but somewhat misleading — more so in tone than in content.

The U.S. Navy has raised national security concerns about the bathymetry maps NOAA is developing as part of our EEZ survey program. I believe the Navy's concerns are legitimate and I share them.

I also believe that there is much that is coming out of our survey work that could be of great value to the scientific community without compromising national security. I believe the Navy shares this view. The issue, then, is finding the middle ground between legitimate and compelling concerns.

Far from being an interagency conflict, I believe NOAA and the Navy have made good progress toward a solution. These are complex issues and a compromise cannot be expected quickly. However, I am confident that a compromise will be found that will satisfy very legitimate national security and scientific interests.

Anthony J. Calio
Administrator, National Oceanic and
Atmospheric Administration
Washington, D.C.

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