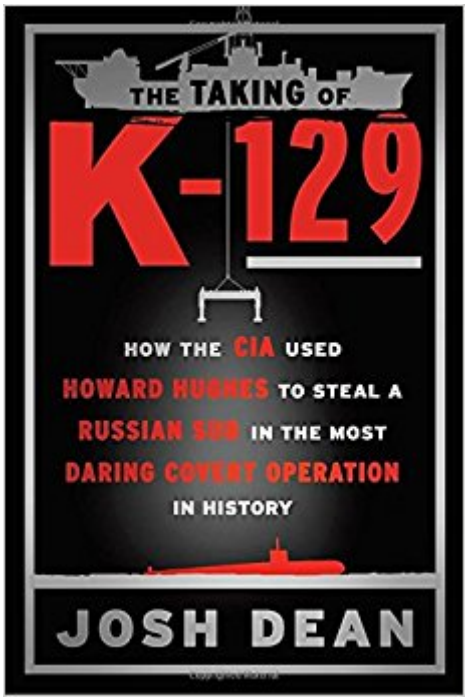
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The Taking Of K-129: How The CIA Used Howard Hughes To Steal A Russian Sub In The Most Daring Covert Operation In History



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Synopsis

An incredible true tale of espionage and engineering set at the height of the Cold WarÃ¢â ¬â •a mix between The Hunt for Red October and ArgoÃ¢â ¬â •about how the CIA, the U.S. Navy, and AmericaÃ¢â ¬â„¢s most eccentric mogulÃ Â spent six years and nearly a billion dollars to steal the nuclear-armed Soviet submarine K-129 after it had sunk to the bottom of the Pacific Ocean; all while the Russians were watching.In the early hours of February 25, 1968, a Russian submarine armed with three nuclear ballistic missiles set sail from its base in Siberia on a routine combat patrol to Hawaii.Ã Â Then it vanished.As the Soviet Navy searched in vain for the lost vessel, a small, highly classified AmericanÃ Â operation using sophisticated deep-sea spy equipment found itÃ¢â ¬â •wrecked on the sea floor at a depth of 16,800 feet, far beyond the capabilities of any salvage that existed. But the potential intelligence assets onboard the shipÃ¢â ¬â •the nuclear warheads, battle orders, and cryptological machinesÃ¢â ¬â •justified going to extreme lengths to find a way to raise the submarine.So began Project Azorian, a top-secret mission that took six years, cost an estimated $800 million, and would become the largest and most daring covert operation in CIA history. After the U.S. Navy declared retrieving the sub Ã¢â ¬Å“impossible,Ã¢â ¬Â• the mission fell to the CIA's burgeoning Directorate of Science and Technology, the little-known division responsible for the legendary U-2 and SR-71 Blackbird spy planes. Working with Global Marine Systems, the country's foremost maker of exotic, deep-sea drilling vessels, the CIA commissioned the most expensive ship ever built and told the world that it belonged to the reclusive billionaire Howard Hughes, who would use the mammoth ship to mine rare minerals from the ocean floor. In reality, a complex network of spies, scientists, and politicians attempted a project even crazier than HughesÃ¢â ¬â„¢s reputation: raising the sub directly under the watchful eyes of the Russians. The Taking of K-129 is a riveting, almost unbelievable true-life tale of military history, engineering genius, and high-stakes spy-craft set during the height of the Cold War, when nuclear annihilation was a constant fear, and the opportunity to gain even the slightest advantage over your enemy was worth massive risk.

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Customer Reviews

Praise for THE TAKING OF K-129Ã¢â ¬Å“One of the most astonishing covert operations in U.S. history is detailed by author Josh Dean in his new book The Taking of K-129... a spy story on steroids.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •New York Daily NewsÃ¢â ¬Å“Josh Dean takes readers on a fascinatingÃ¢â ¬â •and optimisticÃ¢â ¬â •journey through this strange saga.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •VICE.comÃ¢â ¬Å“The stellar research Dean uses to tell this captivating tale includes declassified primary documents, personal journals, and autobiographiesÃ¢â ¬Â| Recommended for fans of naval history, marine engineering, ocean mining, and spy stories.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã Â Ã¢â ¬â •Library JournalÃ¢â ¬Å“Outside magazine correspondent Dean ably resurrects the forgotten Cold War drama of Project AzorianÃ¢â ¬Â| A well-researched, mostly engrossing geopolitical narrative of American ingenuity in the face of Russian threats.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Kirkus ReviewsÃ¢â ¬Å“An incredible true tale of espionage and engineering set at the height of the Cold War when the CIA, the US Navy, and America's most eccentric spent six years and nearly a billion dollars to steal the nuclear-armed Soviet submarine K-129...Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •The IntelligencerÃ¢â ¬Å“Josh Dean has a gift for unearthing remarkable stories lost to history, and in The Taking of K-129 he has uncovered perhaps the most remarkable one of allÃ¢â ¬â •a story replete with spies and engineering marvels and a secret drama unfolding thousands of feet beneath the sea. Brilliantly researched and beautifully written, this is a book you can't put down.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •David Grann, New York Times bestselling author of Killers of the Flower MoonÃ¢â ¬Å“From the depths of the Pacific and the depths of CIA covert operations comes an absorbing tale of daring engineers and shadowy espionage. A terrific read.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •David E. Hoffman, New York Times bestselling author of The Billion Dollar SpyÃ¢â ¬Å“An engrossing account of shadowy intrigue, precision engineering and ultra-deception,Ã Â The Taking of K-129Ã Â is a high-stakes espionage drama of operational boldness married with technical brilliance.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Robert Wallace, author ofÃ Â Spycraft: The Secret History of the CIA's Spytechs from Communism to al-Qaeda Ã Â Ã¢â ¬Å“AÃ Â riveting account of the American

intelligence community. Told in fascinating detail,Ã Â The Taking of K-129Ã Â is nonfiction at its best because with every page I had to remind myself this actually happened.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Kevin Maurer, co-author of the #1 New York Times bestseller No Easy DayÃ¢â ¬Å“As a former submariner and navy diver, I give Josh Dean an A+ for The Taking of K-129. This non-fiction account of one of the most dangerous and daring missions of the Cold War is well-researched and reads like a Tom Clancy thriller.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã Â Ã¢â ¬â •W. Craig Reed, New York Times bestselling author of Red November"If youÃ¢â ¬â„¢ve been hungry for a submarine tale in the league of The Hunt For Red October, but subscribe to the belief that the truth is stranger than fiction, youÃ¢â ¬â„¢ll devour The Taking of K-129, anÃ Â epicÃ Â befitting the top shelf of espionage and military reads. Prepare for impactÃ¢â ¬â •you wonÃ¢â ¬â„¢t be able to put this one down.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Eric Blehm, New York Times best-selling author of Fearless andÃ Â The Only Thing Worth Dying For

Josh Dean is a correspondent for Outside;Ã Â a regular contributor to many national magazines, including GQ, Bloomberg Businessweek, Fast Company, and Popular Science;Ã Â and the author of Show Dog and The Life and Times of the Stopwatch Gang.

In 1968, the Cold War between the U.S. and the Soviet Union had been boiling for two decades. Each nation had its long-range bombers and nuclear-tipped Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) aimed at the other on hair-trigger alert, while their missile-armed submarines prowled the oceans, ready to launch at a momentÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s notice. Tensions between the two superpowers were high, with memories of the Berlin Blockade, the U-2 Incident and the Cuban Missile Crisis still fresh.On February 25, 1968, the diesel-powered Soviet submarine K-129, armed with three 755-nautical-mile-range R-21 missiles, each tipped with a one-megaton thermonuclear warhead, set sail from its base at Petropavlovsk on the Kamchatka Peninsula bound for its patrol station on a 60-day mission. The 324-foot-long, 3,610-ton boat never made it. On March 11, the K-129 sank in the northern Pacific Ocean, about 1,600 nautical miles northwest of Hawaii, in 16,400 feet of water. All 98 men aboard perished.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“The Taking of K-129ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• tells the full, fascinating, hard-to-believe story of the most audacious American clandestine operation in history. Taking place in the summer of 1974, the top-secret operation, dubbed ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Azorian,ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• involved nothing less than an attempt to salvage the K-129 from the ocean floor. If the U.S. could do so, its CIA intelligence analysts would gain incalculably valuable insights into Soviet technologies, capabilities and operational procedures.

Analysts practically drooled at the thought of what the K-129 could yieldÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •cryptographic hardware, code manuals, communications systems, torpedoes and, the biggest prize of all, ballistic missiles and their thermonuclear warheads. Azorian would be technically challenging, unprecedentedly complex, extremely risky, scandalously expensive, probably illegal and not guaranteed to succeed. But if it didÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â¦Author Josh Dean covers the operation in great detail. In an accessible, matter-of-fact and highly readable way, he describes the people, the technology, the challenges and the day-to-day work of the Government/industry team that attempted to do the impossibleÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •and nearly succeeded. The utter audacity of the operation will leave you thunderstruck. Project Azorian cost nearly as much as an Apollo mission to the moon, and involved incredibly sophisticated hardware that remains a marvel of innovative marine engineering to this day. The CIA and its industrial partners, with cost no object and through a series of ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“frontÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• companies untraceable to the spy agency, built the huge salvage ship ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Hughes Glomar Explorer,ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• a remote-controlled ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“clawÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• to pick up the forward part of the K-129 (which had broken in half when it sankÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •the forward part housed the missiles) and an enormous covered barge to conceal the operations from prying eyes.I should note that my pre-publication copy of ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“The Taking of K-129ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• did not include any photos, drawings or other illustrations. I assume the final version will have a photo section, which will add immeasurably to the information it presents.One of the most fascinating things about studying history is that sometimes new information arises that throws all of what you thought you knew about a subject into disarray. Such is the case with Project Azorian. Today, with secret government agencies and their operations subject to ever-more-intense scrutiny and public criticism (not all of it unfounded), this story of the CIAÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s attempt to salvage a sunken Soviet submarine more than 40 years ago shows what the bold thinkers and doers of the time were capable of. Project Azorian was a product of its time, not only because of the Cold War, which led to its inception, but also because the kind of dedicated, selfless commitment and technical/financial resources to pull off such an audacious scheme do not seem to exist in either government or industry today.To find out what happened with the top-secret operation that could have been an incredible Cold War intelligence coup, read ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“The Taking of K-129.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• I recommend it most highly.

Years ago I saw an absolutely awful espionage movie that hinged on being able to recover the ingredients of some freight that someone had attempted to ship across the ocean. The only trouble

was that the freight was on the bottom of the ocean. The only solution, the CIA decided, was to raise the wreck of the ship and from there open the cargo hold. Oh, and the ship was the RMS Titanic. Luckily for the filmmakers, they managed to release the film in 1980, only five years before Robert Ballard and his team discovered the Titanic off the coast of Newfoundland.Anyone watching RAISE THE TITANIC today, if they know much - or even anything - about the Titanic will wince while watching the film, but the unbelievable thing is that something almost as unbelievable happened. In 1968 a Soviet diesel powered nuclear submarine sank not too far from Oahu in the Pacific. After it missed two check ins with the Soviets made attempts to contact the vessel that anyone was capable of hearing. Thanks to an American world-encircling sonar system, the US was able to locate the approximate location of what they suspected to be the location of the event that caused the sinking of the submarine, known to be the K-129, and they were later able to confirm its approximate location. But without the means to recover anything from the wreck and unable to let the Soviet Union know that they knew where it rested, nothing more could happen. At least not yet.THE TAKING OF K-129 tells the story of the conceptualization and planning of a brilliant if ultimately disappointing attempt to recover a Russian nuclear submarine (in the sense of having nuclear weapons, not in the sense of being nuclear powered) from the bottom of the Pacific Ocean. Don’t be deceived by the listing of Howard Hughes’s name in the subtitle; he had little to do with the project except to allow the CIA to use his company as cover. All the work, from the planning, to the building of the recovery vessel, to the execution was done by others.I first heard about the existence of the Glomar Explorer a number of years ago on an episode of SIXTY MINUTES, at a time when some of the details about the project were first released, though at that time no comment was made about the possible success or failure of the project. The episode mainly focused on the outrageousness of the Glomar Explorer. Upon learning that the K-129 was relatively intact, the CIA had the dream of raising it off the bottom off the bottom of the ocean. If not as large as the Titanic, it was 3,000 feet or over half a mile deeper than the Titanic, though in somewhat better condition. It still seemed like the plot of a bad spy movie. But once the engineers, backed by an almost limitless budget - because, after all, what was the going rate for a nuclear submarine during the Cold War? It might not be quite the peak of the cold war, but it was still during the heart of it (though things would get worse again after the US led a boycott of the Moscow Olympics after their invasion of Afghanistan; bad feelings would remain through the subsequent boycott by the Iron Curtain countries, and then the harsh rhetoric from Reagan during his first term and especially his saying on his Saturday morning radio show that the nuclear rockets were about to be launched toward Russia, words he said without realizing that his mike was live; bad feelinsg were exacerbated by the US

providing extensive small arms and hand held missiles for the Islamic resistance fighters and by Reagan causing US and Soviet relations to regress a bit by calling them "the Evil Empire". Things only started to with the installation of a new Soviet president in Reagan's second term. At first Gobachev made overtures that seemed too good to be true, but upon meeting Reagan face to face he continued to make offers that seemed too good to be true, such as both side eliminating all their nuclear weapons.But at the time when they were planning and building the Glomar Explorer the US was concerned to not suffer any set backs from improvements since the 1960s. Though the Soviets suspected that we had a world wide listening system on the bottom of the ocean, it wasn't the time to confim this, and it certainly wasn't a good time to reveal that we planned on stealing one of their submarines.The ship that was built to recover the K-129 was one of the most amazing ever made. It wasn't particularly long, but it had an internal capacity to store an entire nuclear submarine, should they be so lucky as to be able to pick it up. They devised an elaborate pulley and life system that would allow them to literally pluck the submarine off the bottom of the ocean. My favorite part of the book, geek that I am, was reading about the nuts and bolts of how to make such a huge vessel work. Questions of how to maintain stability while lifting the submarine and how to pick it up to start with are, to me, fascinating. But the there are also moments of enormous suspense, such as a Soviet vessel more or less camping the spot where they need to be to attempt the recovery. All the way up until the very end of the operation is a nailbiterThere have been at least two previous books about the attempt to recover the K-129 along with a number of journalistic article have been written on the K-129 and the Glomar Explorer. In fact, they greatest investigative journalist post-WW II, Seymour Hersh, was ready to publish an article in the New York Times in 1974 about what he knew at the time, but William Colby, the head of the CIA, squelched the publication of it. But when the Los Angeles Times was preparing to publish an article a little while after the salvage effort was completed, the NY Times went ahead an dpublished Hersh's story. But only gradually over time have many of the major details been released. A previous book and documentary film provided pretty much all the main story, but this book provides a somewhat fuller picture. There is still some additional information that has not been declassified while there are others who insist that much of what we have already been told is either misleading of flat out deceptive. Some of the complaints are not unlike ongoing suspicion about Area 51, but some of the writing raises legitimate suspicions. This book raises some but focuses most of its narrative on presenting what might be the most astonishing CIA mission of the past 50 years. The story, as I've noted, is wildly improbable from beginning to end, whether you think we know the final truth or not.Where do I stand? I think this is an excellent book that does not go especially beyond previous work. This is, however, the most

complete book to date on Project Azorian, which is the name of the overall mission to recover K-129. Whether one believes that most of the submarine, as some improbably claim, or whether only part of it has been recovered, as the CIA claims, this book puts you in the best position today to discuss the affair intelligently. I suspect that this book contains most of all the story that we will ever get, that while there might be a tiny bit more to reveal, we pretty much know what happened. But only time will tell for sure.The one bit of sadness for me concerns the Glomar Explorer. This was by all standards one of the most amazing ships ever made. I strongly urge the reader to got to Youtube and look at the various videos that can be found there. Some films and documentaries disappear as organizations assert copyrights, but there are always a number of things in public domain and it is always informative. What is remarkable is that this is one of the most amazing machines ever constructed, but one that only briefly was able to function to its maximum capacity. The problem is that it was build to do only one thing: pick a submarine off the bottom of the ocean. No one was ever able to find another use for the Glomar Explorer. There were weak attempt to use it in the accumulation of minerals off the ocean floor, but no one was able to make a go of it. As a result, two years ago it was handed over to a Chinese company for scraping. I assume that they have completed the scraping project. By one standard it was one of the greatest ships ever made, but there was no purpose for it,and in the meantime it was expensive to operate.If you don’t know in detail about the raising of K-129, this is definitely something you should read. There are few more inherently interesting stories that you can encounter. The conclusions that you can draw from the whole affair may be foggy, the moral of the story as a whole may be vague, but that doesn’t lessen the fascination of the whole affair.

My dad said he vaguely remembered this incident, although not the outcome. I’m glad, because it was kind of a spellbinder for me: Would the U.S. be able to raise the Cold-War era Soviet sub from the sea floor 3 miles below? And not only recover it, but do it without the Soviets realizing their mission?The book is an exhaustive narrative of both the science behind the building of the ship and apparatus to accomplish this impossible-seeming task and the spy story of the mission. Not only did the U.S. have to build and operate the equipment for the job, they also had to create an elaborate cover story so that the real goal of the mission wasn’t discovered. And with the glorious free press the United States enjoys, that was a huge undertaking. Even the PR person tasked with spreading the story that the ship was a deep-sea mining ship financed by Howard Hughes and going after manganese nodules didn’t know it was fake news! Yet the story held for years.As always with narrative nonfiction, the characters are what hold your interest throughout the book. Everyone

involved in the mission comes to life, so much so that you feel they are people you know. Without the personal stories, the book would be a heavy read. In fact, I confess I did skip some of the book, but could pick up the story wherever I dived back in. In tone and scope, the book reminded me of Neal Bascomb'sÃ Â The Winter Fortress: The Epic Mission to Sabotage Hitler's Atomic Bomb.

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