

US submarine's hull 'showed no sign of nets'

By IAIN GRAY

US Navy, having examined the hull of a submarine allegedly involved in a snagging incident, ruled its denial last night that the vessel was to blame. An Irish fishing boat was damaged five miles west of the Mull of Kintyre on Thursday evening.

The skipper of the Ulster-registered Green Eagle had claimed the submarine, which had been on the surface after leaving Holy Loch for an exercise in the area, had ripped his vessel's nets.

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accident happens to a fishing boat".

"It is very unlikely indeed that a submarine on the surface would snag these nets of a fishing boat," he added.

Mr Hamilton said that after previous incidents fishermen had asked that submarines operate on the surface in the approach areas, which was what the US submarine.

However, Preston Scott, skipper of the Green Eagle, said the surfaced submarine had passed through a small area where more than a dozen boats were fishing.

On BBC Radio Ulster, he said: "There were 13 or 14 boats fishing in that vicinity. There should be no submarine anywhere near them. It was a big area. He could go out round them. But to come in through them is suicide."

The Green Eagle's crew had felt a "shudder" and then the badly damaged fishing net started rising.

It could only have been the submarine which fouled the vessel's nets, Mr Scott claimed, because there was no other boat nearby and the net had not been on the seabed.

The US Navy hopes to complete an inquiry into the incident within four days. The Ministry of Defence will also conduct an inquiry.

A US Navy spokesman at Holy Loch said the last incident involving an American submarine and a trawler was in April, 1989, when an Irish fishing vessel had been dragged for a time off the Isle of Man. The US Navy paid compensation for damaged fishing gear.

After the Antares tragedy, a new code of practice is to come into operation on Monday under which Clyde fishermen will be given details of submarine movements. The code applies only to the Firth of Clyde area and not to the area in which the alleged Green Eagle incident occurred.

This has prompted MPs to call for a submarine code of conduct covering all of Britain's coastline. Their mood was summed up by Mr George Foulkes, Labour MP for Carrick, Cumnock, and Doon Valley, who said: "I want a reassurance that American and other Nato navies are covered by the agreement. I want it extended to include all areas where fishing takes place around the coastline."

Mr Foulkes also demanded Mr Hamilton's sacking for "unfeelingness" for his comments on BBC Radio 4's The World at One about fishermen blaming submarines for every unexpected accident.

Meanwhile, a code of practice under which fishermen will be given advance notice of submarine movements in the Clyde came into operation from midnight last night, after the loss three weeks ago in the Firth of Clyde of the Antares and her four-man crew. The Antares was lost after the Royal Navy nuclear submarine Trenchant apparently snagged the vessel's fishing gear at a point off Arran.

Mr Patrick Stewart, secretary of the Clyde Fishermen's Association, which successfully petitioned for a

new safety code for fishing vessels operating in the Firth of Clyde following the Antares incident, said last night that although the code is now in operation, it is not expected there will be any significant submarine movements in the area until early in the New Year.

The code allows for fishermen to be given advance notice of submerged submarine activities in the Clyde. Through the association, the fishermen will be given up to two months notice of "short-call" exercises and up to one year's notice of

exercises planned for the long term. A minimum of six hours notice will be given of submarine in transit movements to and from the nuclear submarine base at Faslane.

The association and the Royal Navy have also agreed on a common communications frequency to allow, wherever possible, submarines and fishing vessels operating in the same vicinity to pass on their respective operating intentions.

Meanwhile, a spokesman for the Royal Navy base at Faslane yesterday refused to comment on a claim in a Sunday newspaper that the Trenchant had ignored four naval standing instructions before and after the loss of the Antares, on the ground that the Navy inquiry into the incident is still under way.

While the results of such inquiries are not normally released to the public, it is understood that the results of the Trenchant inquiry will be disclosed after it is completed shortly before Christmas. A Department of Transport investigation and a fatal accident inquiry will also be held into the loss of the Antares.

US Navy denies submarine ripped nets

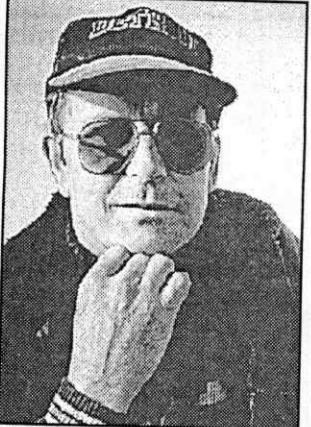
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By IAIN GRAY

THE US Navy and Britain's Armed Services Minister Archie Hamilton claimed yesterday it was highly unlikely that an American nuclear submarine had been responsible for snagging the gear of a fishing boat five miles south-west of the Mull of Kintyre late on Thursday evening.

The alleged incident came four weeks after the trawler Antares was lost along with her four-man crew after apparently being dragged to the bottom of the Clyde by the Royal Navy nuclear submarine Trenchant.

A spokesman for the US Navy at Holy Loch confirmed yesterday that one of its submarines — which has not been named — had



Skipper Preston Scott

been in the area when the Irish trawler Green Eagle had its nets ripped.

He added, however, that the commander of the submarine, which had been travelling on the surface, reported that his vessel had not been in contact with any object.

The commander had reported that the submarine had passed a fishing vessel when it surfaced some 2000 yards abeam and 4000 yards astern. The submarine had left Holy Loch yesterday afternoon for an exercise in the Atlantic.

Mr Hamilton, also saying it was highly unlikely the submarine had snagged the Green Eagle's nets, claimed fishermen blamed submarines "every time some unexpected

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