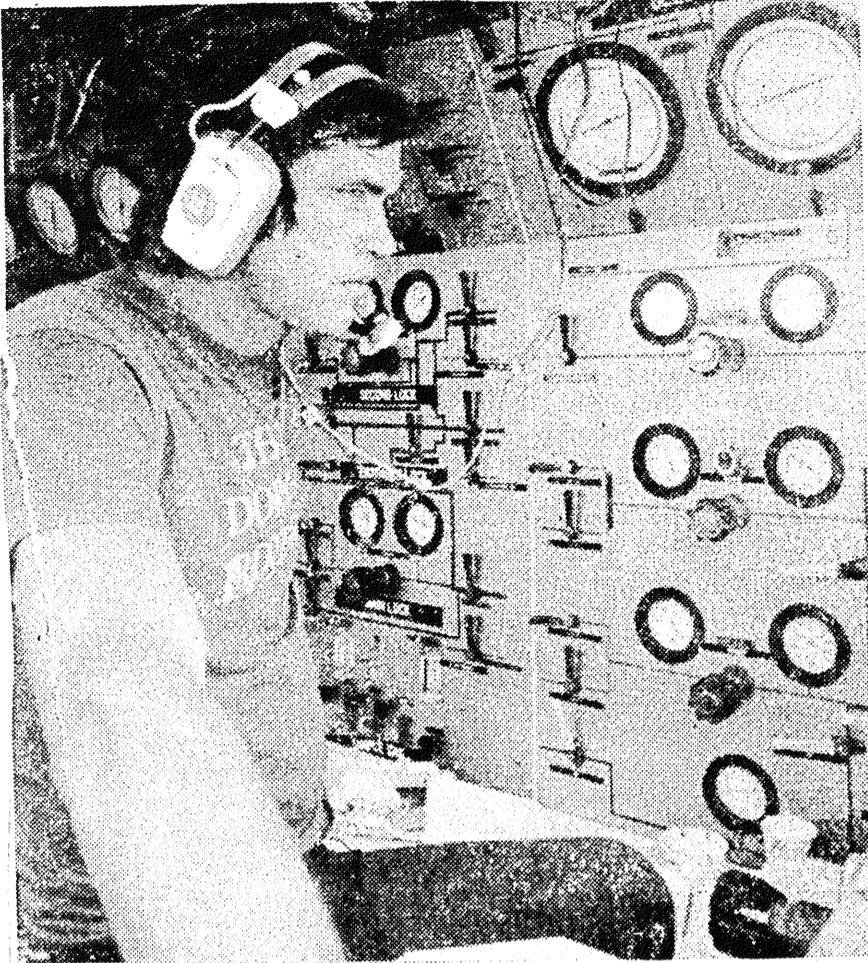
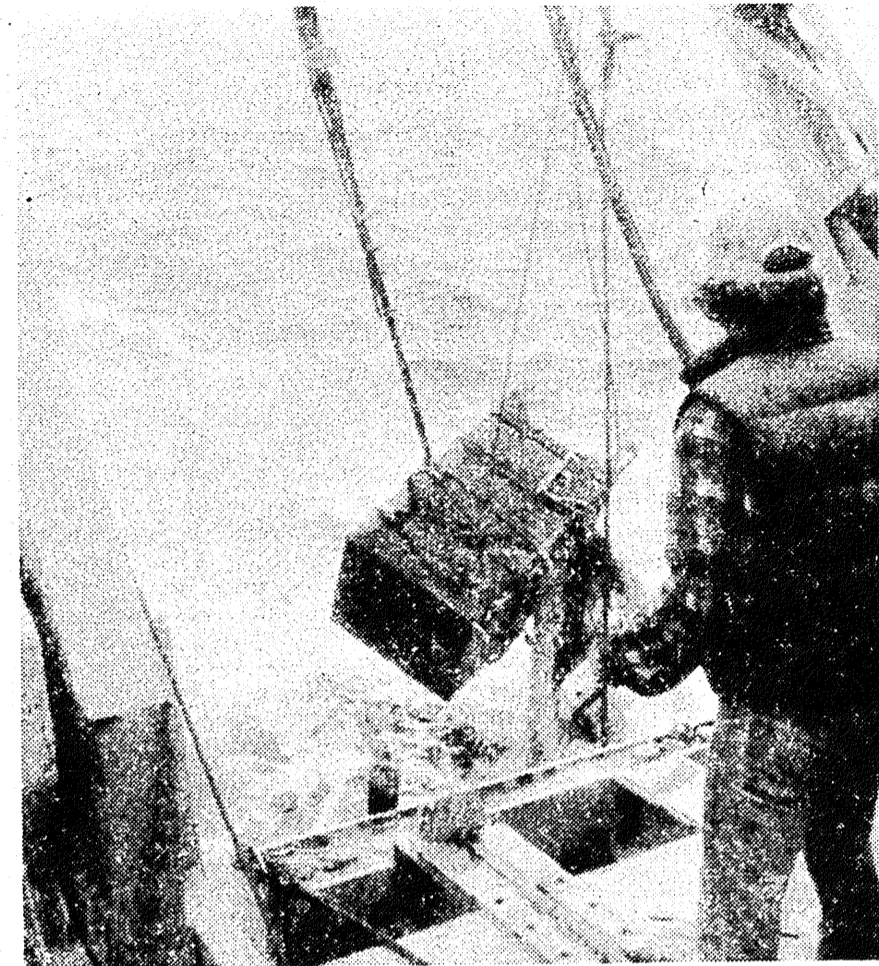


Andrea Doria: Watery tomb holds secrets



Photos by Mark Schreyer

STEVE JENNINGS monitors gauges topside while, left to right, Larry Miller, Raul Rutten and Bob Hollis study the map of the Andrea Doria inside the chamber prior to a dive. The ship's Bank of Rome safe was finally brought to the surface near the end of the expedition. The chamber in which the divers lived for 31 days is on the right side of the stern of the Sea Level II.



Local divers assist recovery of lost safe

By Hillary Hauser
News-Press Staff Writer

Last summer a bank safe was salvaged from the deep watery tomb of the sunken Italian liner Andrea Doria, and when it is opened on live television next year, four Santa Barbara divers will have a special interest about what's inside.

Steve Jennings, Larry Miller, Raul Rutten and Chuck Ebner — all of whom worked on the project for the local division of Oceaneering International — had a hand in locating the safe in the liner's tangled wreckage. And, in a complicated series of maneuvers, they helped bring it to the surface.

No one knows exactly what's in the safe, but some reports have placed the value of the contents as high as \$1 million.

Elegant 697-foot liner

The Andrea Doria was in a sense an Italian masterpiece, an elegant 697-foot liner bedecked with priceless pieces of art and treasures befitting the first-class clientele that sailed aboard her. It navigated the Atlantic on a regular schedule between Rome and New York, and the voyage that ended in disaster was its 101st crossing. Aboard the ship were 1,134 passengers and 572 crew.

On the night of July 25, 1956, as the Andrea Doria approached Nantucket heading for New York, a heavy fog began to build. At 10:45 p.m., the Swedish liner Stockholm was picked up on the Andrea Doria's radar screen, which told Captain Piero Calamai that the two ships were 17 miles apart. The distance between the two vessels closed by two miles every three minutes, and even though both captains tried a number of corrective maneuvers, the two ships remained on a collision course.

At 11:10 p.m., the sharp icebreaker bow of the Stockholm sliced into the exposed starboard side of the Andrea Doria. In three hours the Italian liner was listing about 25-degrees. Within 11 hours, on the morning of July 26, the unsinkable ship sank in the cold North Atlantic, 50 miles south of Nantucket.

Forty-six people died in the disaster.

Unanswered questions

Over the years there have been two persistent yet unanswered questions about the Andrea Doria disaster. First, why did an "unsinkable" ship sink, and second, how much of a

fortune went down with the ship? On the first question there were rumors that a critical watertight bulkhead had been omitted in construction. The Andrea Doria was supposed to have had a series of bulkheads that were to have sealed it into 11 watertight compartments, making the ship virtually impossible to sink.

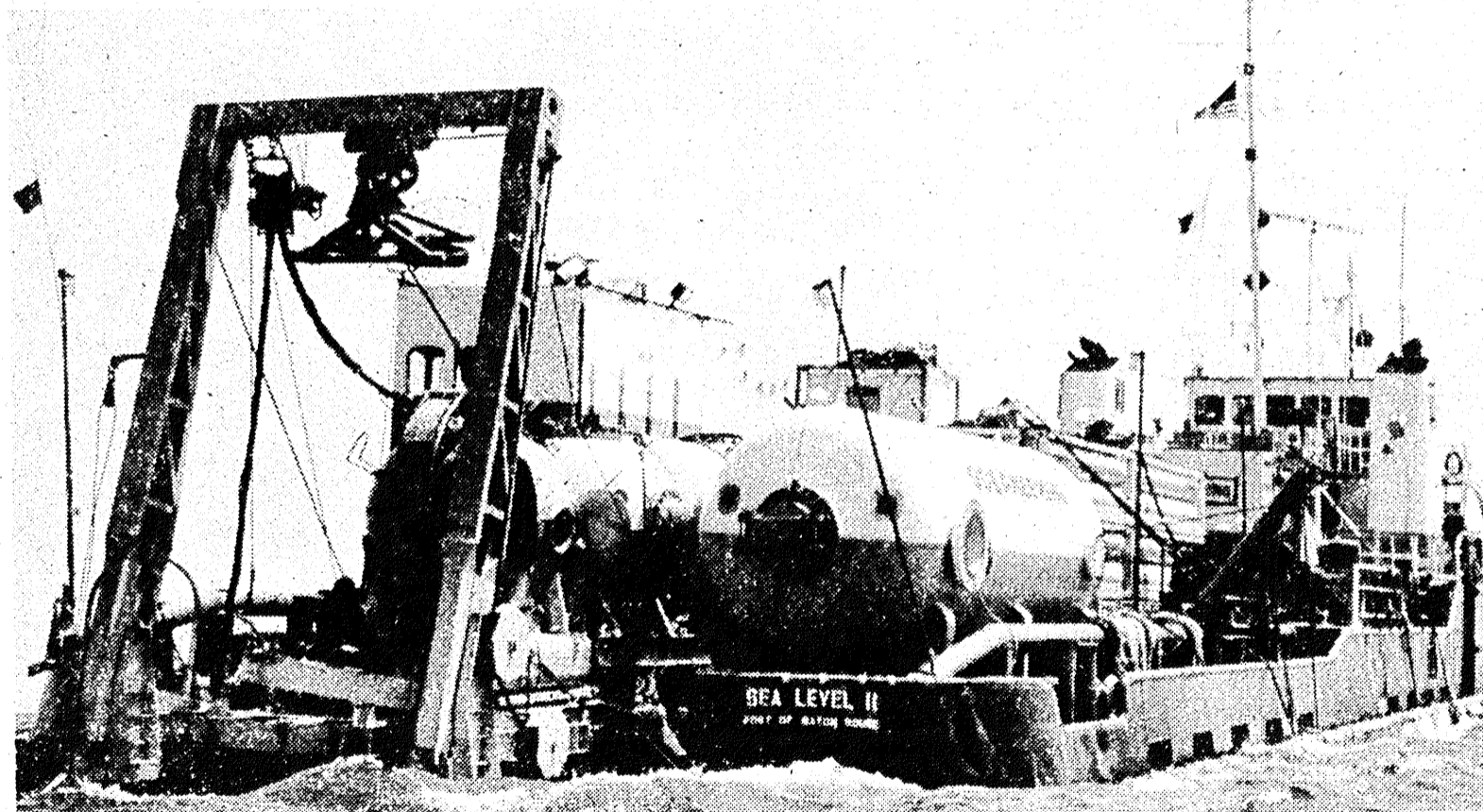
As for the fortune that sank with the Andrea Doria, it was known that, in addition to the Italian art treasures, there were 16 safes aboard. Two were of particular interest: one inside the Bank of Rome office aboard the ship, and another in the first-class section to hold the valuables of the passengers.

The sinking of the Andrea Doria has been compared to the fate of the Titanic, and over the years shipwreck devotees and treasure fanciers around the world have speculated on what might be salvaged from either ship. However, no one has pursued the mysteries of the Andrea Doria as vigorously as Peter Gimbel.

Gimbel, a New York department store heir with a keen sense of adventure, made his first dive to the ship the day after it sank, and over the past 25 years he has returned to the sunken liner four times. The last expedition, in 1975, resulted in the CBS-television documentary, "The Mystery of the Andrea Doria," but that expedition was seriously hampered by equipment which required the divers to return to surface pressure following each dive. Because the Andrea Doria lies in 235 feet of water, divers could only make short explorations into the ship and had to undergo long decompression, at considerable risk. Gimbel himself suffered equipment failure and came close to suffocating. The inside of the Doria, built primarily of wood materials, was a hazardous and tangled mess, and, after several partitions nearly collapsed on the divers, it was finally determined that the wreck was too unsafe to explore any further.

Divers work inside wreck

Early this year Gimbel and his wife, German actress Elga Andersen, decided to try another salvage of the Andrea Doria, this time using sophisticated saturation diving equipment that would allow divers to stay on the ship for longer periods of time. By using a deep sea diving bell, divers could stay four or five hours inside the wreck, remaining saturated (under pressure) in a chamber on the surface between



dives. The only decompression necessary would be done at the end of the entire expedition.

Gimbel contracted with Oceaneering International, Santa Barbara, for equipment and personnel, and thus divers Jennings, Miller, Rutten and Ebner became involved last July and August in a historic moment of high adventure.

What was it like to dive to the Andrea Doria? "As we went down in the bell we'd look out the portholes through murky water," said Miller, "and we couldn't make out any detail until we were just 15 feet above the wreck. Then we'd only see a massive, dark object." Miller, who was one of the principal divers on the project, said that once the divers were out of the bell and swimming along the side of the ship, they got a better idea of how massive the Andrea Doria was.

Distance limited

"We were limited by the length of our umbilical hoses," said Rutten, another principal diver. "It wasn't like we could run around the foyer, like tourists. We never saw the full length of the liner."

Most of the time visibility was 15 feet at most, said Miller. He remembered one day when it was "crystal clear," when the divers could see the davit arms which held the lifeboats.

"But then a big cloud came in," he said.

The biggest problem was weather. In the middle of the operation Hurricane Dennis came in, did its worst, and although the storm did not hit the exact area where they were working, they got the peripheral effects. There were steady 16-foot seas and occasional 20-foot waves. Jennings, who supervised the diving operations from the surface, explained that even though the support ship — Sea Level II — was 200 feet long, it was "really not all that big" for the situation. Launching the bell was extremely hazardous in rough seas.

'I didn't want to give up'

"One time I really wanted to get out of that bell," said Rutten. "The main lift line severed and I thought to myself that this was really getting scary, that it wasn't worth it. But I didn't want to give up."

The first thing the divers had to do was create an access to the interior of the wreck. Joining Miller and Rutten in this operation were Ted Hess and Drew Ruddy, two additional Oceaneering divers from Santa Barbara. In one of the preliminary forays to the ship, Hess and Miller saw that the best access would be through a set of double doors.

"The ship was on its side," said Miller, "so the doors were on top. We went through a previous hole that had been cut during the 1975 expedition, and from underneath we cut the hinges on each door. Then we took out the bolts, attached a 7,000-pound tugger from the

surface, and then we pulled the doors open. After that, we cut out the 5-by-8 foot section between the doors."

It took two days for the divers to get this job done.

Search for 2 safes

Then the divers began to hunt for the two safes. Gimbel had the passenger map of the ship which indicated stateroom locations and emergency exits. With this map the divers figured out, roughly, where the safes were.

The hunt for the safes was no easy thing. As in the first Gimbel expedition, the divers ran into a hazardous tangle of boards, sticks and other debris.

"We had to dig it out," said Rutten. "The way we located the Bank of Rome was via the ventilator shaft. By looking at the passenger map we saw that there was a dead space above the bank, and we figured that this was a good access. We started digging there and we looked for clues."

Rutten said that the first time the divers got inside the ship there was an initial mysteriousness.

"There were crabs scurrying out of the way, and a lot of eels that came up to our lights," he said. "Once we got use to that, we went to work."

By mid-August everyone was beginning to worry. Gimbel was making a film of the

Local divers describe Andrea Doria search

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salvage, which he hoped to sell to network television, and as the price of the expedition mounted at the rate of \$25,000 per day, everyone wondered whether Gimbel would come out with anything at all. Two diving cinematographers, Jack McKenney and Bob Hollis, were on hand with cameras, but so far there had been nothing that would amount to a network documentary. The diving operations were to stop at the end of August, because the North Atlantic in September is traditionally violent.

The divers continued to explore the Bank of Rome area. During this time, diver Ruddy continually returned to the diving bell with plates, ash trays and other Doria memorabilia.

"There was a gift shop above the Bank of Rome," said Rutten, "and when the ship went over on its side, souvenirs rained down from up above. Ruddy was finding all these things and Hess, the lead diver, would remind him that we weren't there to find artifacts but to find the safe."

On the night of Aug. 19, it was Ruddy who found what they were looking for.

It was 10 p.m., and Ruddy was by himself inside the Bank of Rome office with Miller outside the double-door hole, tending him. Inadvertently, Ruddy put his hand on top of something that felt like a bank vault, and then he groped around until he found the dial on the door.

"He told topside that he had an announcement to make," said Jennings. "Some of us assumed that he was going to announce that he had had enough and was going to drag up. But at last came the finest sound imaginable: 'I've got my hands on the dial of a safe,' he said."

Jennings said that the safe was still welded to the deck under 20 feet of linoleum and wood and "completely intact with a key in the door."

For the next two to three days, the safe was prepared for lifting, and McKenney and Hollis filmed a re-enactment of the safe being found, then filmed Ruddy cutting the safe out of the floor.

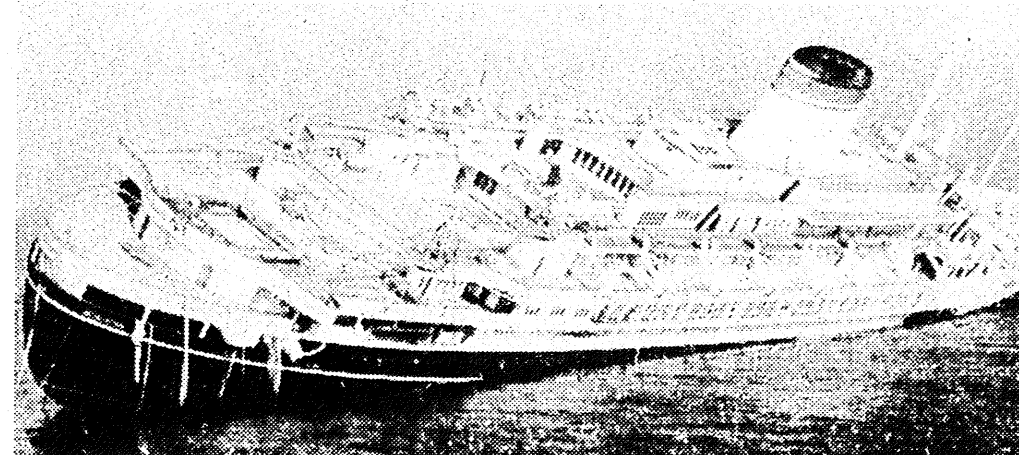
Then Hurricane Dennis came in.

For four days the diving activities were suspended due to rough seas, and as they waited Gimbel began to show the strain. The safe was found on the night of the 19th. Diving operations did not resume until the 26th.

Finally, the safe was ready to be hauled up from the Andrea Doria. Rutten was in the bell and recalled the moment.

"We were just ready to get the safe out of the ship when suddenly a big, freak swell came up. I made a statement, something like, 'It's almost like she didn't want us to have it.' The press picked it up and said we heard voices, that we were spooked. There was none of that. It was only the fact that we'd waited six days to get the safe, and then the waves came."

When the safe was finally pulled on board the



AP Laserphotos

THE ANDREA DORIA sank off Nantucket in the early morning hours of July 26, 1956, after colliding with the Swedish liner Stockholm. Last August, filmmaker Peter Gimbel, right, organized a salvage of the Italian liner using high-technology diving equipment.

Sea Level II, the divers knew that Gimbel had his film, and that was the most important goal of the expedition.

The search for the first-class passengers safe was abandoned in favor of spending time on the second objective of the expedition: trying to determine why the Andrea Doria went down.

For this, Hess and Gimbel swam through a ventilator shaft into the main generator room to have a look.

What they found was a "jumbled mess," said Miller. Gimbel managed to work his way to the impact area and found that the entire hull in the generator room was split open for its entire length.

With the two objectives satisfied, the Gimbel expedition was officially, successfully, ended. But then came speculations, demands and rumors. What was in the safe? Stories began to

circulate that the safe had been emptied before the ship sank.

"It took 11 hours for the ship to sink," said Rutten. "But there was a 25 degree list within three hours. It would have been hard to open the safe with a list like that."

No one will know what is in the safe until Gimbel's documentary airs on network television next year, when it will be opened following the showing of the film. Jennings pointed out that the vault was a day safe, and that it was used for routine banking.

"It'd be lucky if there was \$100,000 in it," he said.

The safe is currently being held in the shark tank at the New York Aquarium on Coney Island, which is not a stunt. Metal that has been submerged for 25 years would rapidly deteriorate in air, and to keep the safe intact, it will remain submerged until it is hauled up for



the opening.

The television documentary will not be the end of the Andrea Doria story. The Bank of Rome has reportedly made a claim on the safe, and there are hints that even if Gimbel can keep the contents he will be taxed on the dollar amount of the treasure. The Santa Barbara divers said that there have been survivors of the fateful trip contacting Gimbel, asking for the return of their possessions.

The stories of big treasure, said the divers, are unfounded. The lucky participants in the expedition managed to collect a few plates, an ashtray or two, some memorabilia that says Andrea Doria on them — something to remind them that they had a part in a historic salvage of one of the world's most famous shipwrecks.