



NEWS

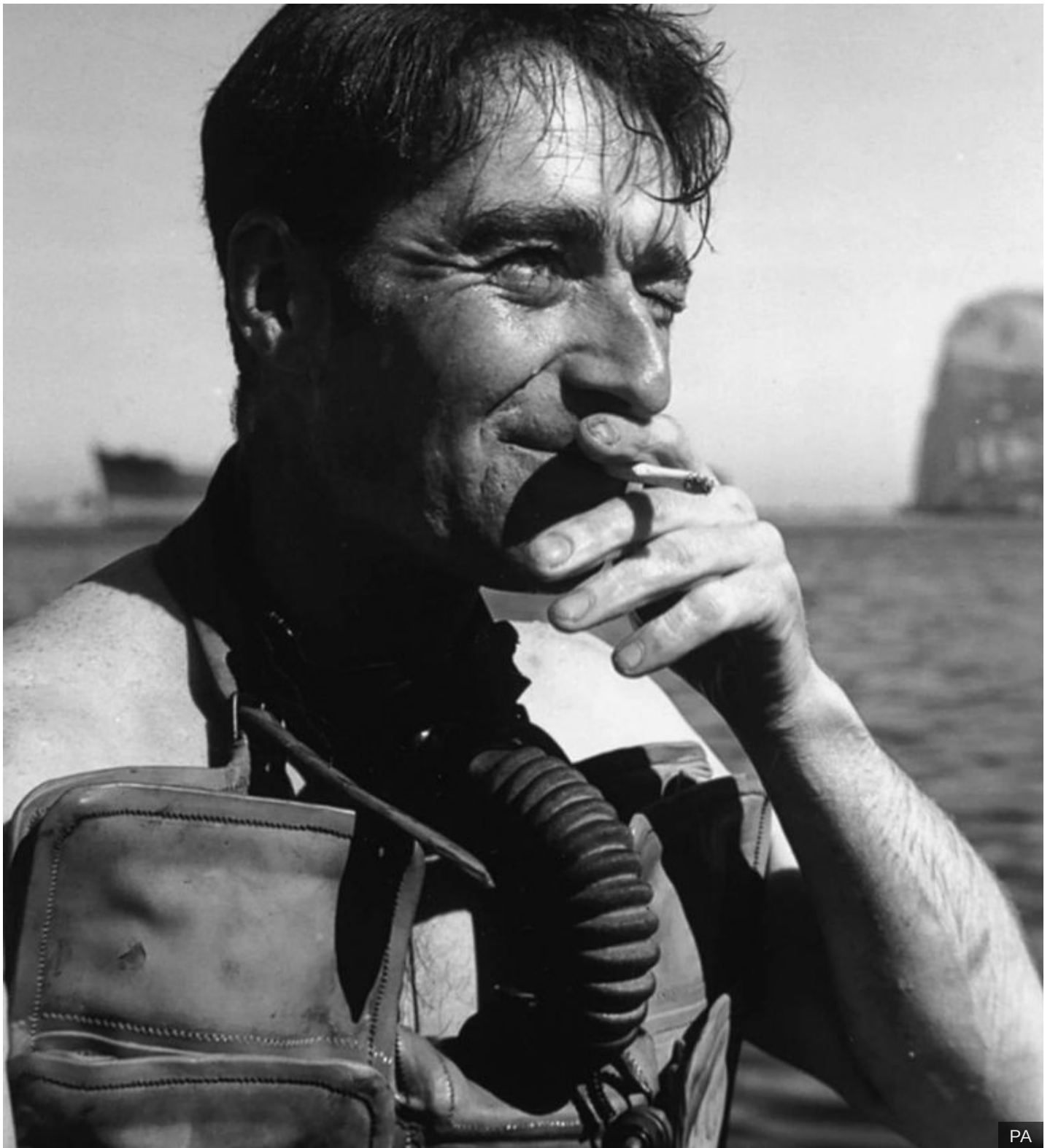
[Home](#)[UK](#)[World](#)[Business](#)[Politics](#)[Tech](#)[Science](#)[Health](#)[Family & Education](#)[More](#) ▾[England](#)[Local News](#)[Regions](#)

Frogman files show blunders surrounding Cdr 'Buster' Crabb's death

🕒 23 October 2015



Share



The death of Navy frogman Commander Lionel 'Buster' Crabb is one of the most enduring mysteries of the Cold War era

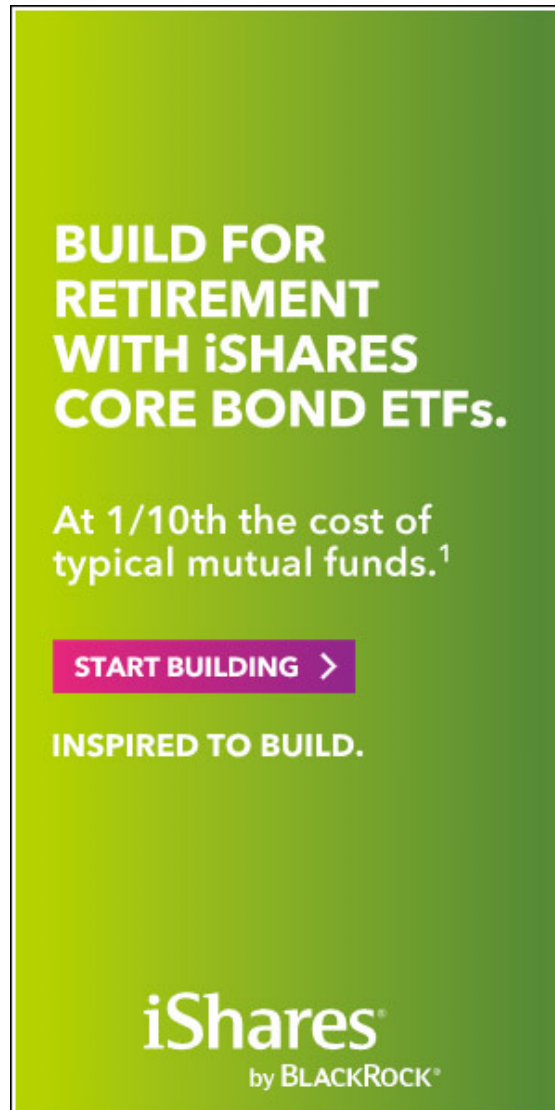
Previously unseen official papers have revealed mistakes in a Cold War spy operation in Portsmouth in which a Navy frogman died.

Lionel "Buster" Crabb disappeared while spying on a Russian warship in Portsmouth harbour in 1956.

A year after he vanished a headless, handless body washed up in Chichester.

Government documents released by the National Archives at Kew describe the operation as bordering on "criminal folly".

Cdr Crabb disappeared on 19 April 1956 in Portsmouth harbour while spying on the Ordzhonikidze, which had brought Soviet leaders Nikita Khrushchev and Nikolai Bulganin to the UK.

An advertisement for iShares Core Bond ETFs. The background is a vertical gradient from light green at the top to dark green at the bottom. The text is white and pink. At the top, it says "BUILD FOR RETIREMENT WITH iSHARES CORE BOND ETFs." Below that, it says "At 1/10th the cost of typical mutual funds.¹" There is a pink button with the text "START BUILDING >". Below the button, it says "INSPIRED TO BUILD." At the bottom, the iShares logo is displayed, with "by BLACKROCK" underneath it.

**BUILD FOR
RETIREMENT
WITH iSHARES
CORE BOND ETFs.**

At 1/10th the cost of
typical mutual funds.¹

START BUILDING >

INSPIRED TO BUILD.

iShares
by BLACKROCK

The incident was the inspiration for Ian Fleming's James Bond adventure Thunderball.

Mark Dunton, records specialist at the the National Archives in Kew, said: "While the files don't solve the mystery of exactly how Cdr Crabb met his death, they lay bare all of the blunders surrounding that operation in its entirety for the first time."

The files show Secretary to the Treasury Sir Edward Bridges' report in to the incident concluded it was a "thoroughly bad and unplanned" operation.

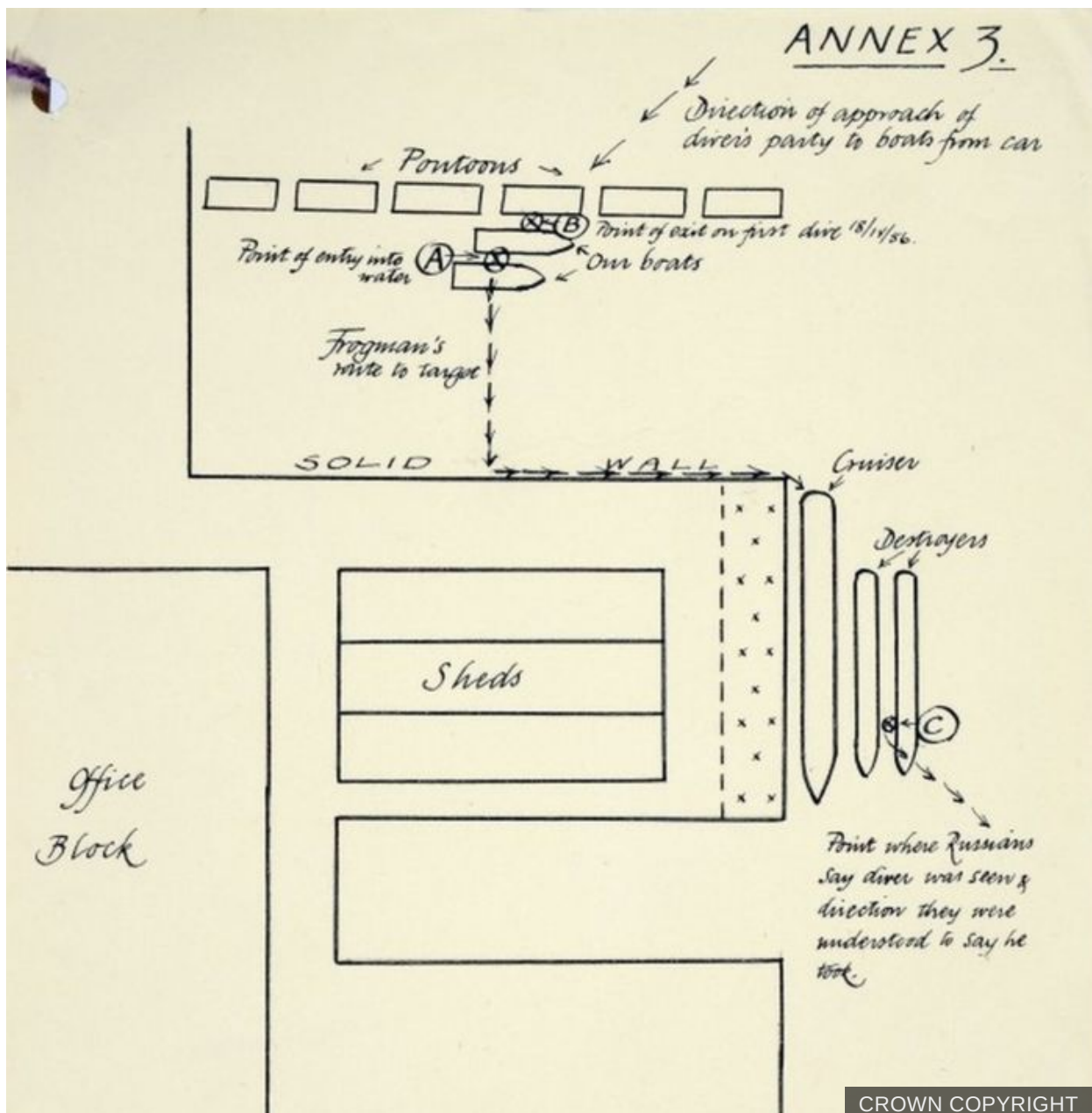
"No serious steps seemed to have been taken to conceal the movements of the participants or to plan any cover story," it said.

After he failed to emerge Whitehall officials thought he had either been spotted by the Russians and taken aboard alive, that he had been destroyed by Russian "counter measures", or that he had suffered a "natural mishap".

'Cut Crabb's throat'

Prime Minister Anthony Eden "had made it clear that adventures of a similar nature were forbidden" but the frogman operation went ahead anyway.

MI6 had mistakenly thought a Foreign Office advisor had authorised the activity.



TOP SECRET

PRIME MINISTER

Thank you for your Top Secret Minute about the Bridges Enquiry. The Admiralty will certainly give any assistance for which we are asked.

2. You will probably think this a small point but, for the sake of accuracy, the date on which the operation was reported to Ministers was May 3rd not May 4th as your Minute says. I heard the news on the evening of May 3rd and I had Anthony Nutting - in the absence of the Foreign Secretary - also informed. We then asked for an interview with you which you gave us in the afternoon of May 4th.

CILCENNIN

CROWN COPYRIGHT

The Prime Minister Anthony Eden was eventually told about what had happened on 19 April

The files show the efforts of the security services to spy on the visiting Russians and that they considered hiding microphones in Claridges.

They also reveal Bernard Smith, the MI6 agent handling Crabb, had used both of their full names and addresses in the registration book of a Portsmouth hotel before the mission.

A local police officer made the "regrettable" decision to rip out the relevant pages, fuelling interest in the case from the press.

There was also concern that the Russians could have used Crabb's body for propaganda purposes.

As they cobbled together a hasty cover-up and a plan to keep the story secret, mandarins discussed the ramifications of an inquest, including efforts they could be forced into to find a body.

A secret draft paper for ministers said: "Any thorough search, involving diving and dredging would be an extensive and expensive operation... but a search by divers along the face of the jetty could be done in a week (cost about £60). This could not be kept secret."

Records of meetings also show there was "consternation" at the highest levels of government at the debacle.

The case has sparked widespread interest and theories as in 2007 a retired Russian diver claimed he cut Cdr Crabb's throat in an underwater fight after catching him attaching a mine to the warship.

A theory the frogman had defected gained ground when some of his associates in MI5 and MI6 turned out to be double agents.

They included Sir Anthony Blunt, who was unmasked as a Soviet Spy in 1979.

Related Topics

Portsmouth

Chichester

Share this story About sharing



More on this story

Call for release of Cold War frogman Buster Crabb records

4 December 2014

Secret spy diver report revealed

12 June 2006

Russian 'killed UK diver' in 1956

16 November 2007

Related Internet links

The National Archives

Cabinet Office

Secret Intelligence Service

The BBC is not responsible for the content of external Internet sites

England >



Guards accused of assaults at prison

🕒 13 August 2018 | Nottingham



Watchdog 'lets down' 999 van death family

🕒 13 August 2018 | London



'I was stalked by my husband'

🕒 13 August 2018 | Sussex

Top Stories

Plan to end rough sleeping within decade

The government is unveiling a £100m strategy to make sleeping on the streets "a thing of the past".

🕒 52 minutes ago

Heathrow passport queues reach 2.5 hours

🕒 2 hours ago

Ticketmaster to close its resale sites

🕒 57 minutes ago

Features



The fastest-sinking city in the world



Do pregnancy prevention apps work?



In a hurry? Here's what you need to know this morning



Forget hygge... the laws that really rule in Scandinavia



In pictures: World Architecture Festival 2018 shortlist



'You need to think 10 years ahead'



A star is born: Why Asher-Smith could win Olympic gold



Knives down bikes up for 3,000 teenagers



Caspian Sea deal may end long-held claims

Elsewhere on the BBC



Four health hacks

These tips could change your life




Daily news briefing direct to your inbox

Sign up for our newsletter

Most Read


Jakarta, the fastest-sinking city in the world

Heathrow Airport passport queues reach 2.5 hours	2
Ruby Rose exits Twitter amid Batwoman casting backlash	3
Sir William Nicholson painting bought for £165k is 'fake'	4
Spain festival collapse in Vigo injures hundreds	5
Ticketmaster to close resale sites Seatwave and Get Me In	6
Lindsay Lohan 'sorry' for Me Too 'weak women' comments	7
Newspaper headlines: Palace 'bust-up' and rail fares increase	8
Turkey takes action in bid to curb currency crisis	9
Plan to end rough sleeping in England by 2027	10

 Why you can trust BBC News

BBC News Services

 On your mobile

 On your connected
tv

 Get news alerts

 Contact BBC News

Explore the BBC

Home

Shop

Culture

CBBC

Music

Nature

News

Earth

Future

CBeebies

Arts

Local

Sport

Travel

TV

Food

Make It Digital

Weather

Capital

Radio

Bitesize

Taster

[Terms of Use](#)

[About the BBC](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)

[Cookies](#)

[Accessibility Help](#)

[Parental Guidance](#)

[Contact the BBC](#)

[Get Personalised Newsletters](#)

[Advertise with us](#)

[Ad choices](#)

Copyright © 2018 BBC. The BBC is not responsible for the content of external sites. [Read about our approach to external linking.](#)