Defense Report

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ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES ARMY

Project Seafarer—A Vital Element to National Survival

The armed services of the United States spend a great deal of time and effort to assure continuity of communications during emergencies. Multiple modes are established and each mode—whether it be radio, teletype or simple telephone circuits—is made as redundant and resistant to battle damage as possible. Obviously, without adequate communication the far-flung land, sea and air forces would be operating pretty much in the dark.

One of the trickiest elements in the communications equation is the way we talk to our nuclear-powered submarines. They operate at great depths to avoid detection until they must communicate with shore-based command elements. With the kind of radio equipment now available they must rise close to the surface so the radio waves, both transmitting and receiving, can penetrate the water. While at that depth they are very vulnerable.

The Navy thinks it has an answer to this problem in the form of a very low frequency transmitter system called Project Seafarer. Seafarer's emissions will penetrate to great depth and operate through the electronic holocaust that would come with a nuclear attack. While still safe in their deep ocean lair the submarines could get instructions and perform their missions, launching strategic missiles or searching out enemy warships.

For a variety of complex reasons the best location for the seafarer antenna—which must be buried under the ground like a water main or gas pipe—is in Michigan's upper peninsula. Although it has been proved that Seafarer's emanations have no effect on the environment—either plant or animal life—there is resistence to construction of a Seafarer test facility on the upper peninsula that could prove, once and for all, whether the full system should be built. The opposition is organized primarily by environmental and pacifist groups.

Laying the test antenna will require a 25-foot right of way through the Michigan countryside extending for 130 miles. Once the cable is buried, though, the strip can be returned to its natural state. If the decision were made to build the full antenna array the strip would be much longer but the long-term effect on the environment would be no greater.

No one likes the idea of having a trench dug through forests and farm land (the antenna can be routed to avoid homes and towns) but in this case the scar will be only temporary.

The people of Michigan owe it to themselves and to the nation to take a long, unemotional look at the need for Seafarer before they stymie a project that is of the utmost criticality to national defense.