

NEWS RELEASE

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SCIENCE CHANNEL WORLD PREMIERE, *DISAPPEARANCE OF PX-15* REVEALS MISSING CHAPTER OF SIXTIES SPACE RACE

*--Special Airs During the Week of the 35th Anniversary of Moon Landing and
Includes New Interview with Walter Cronkite --*

On July 14, 1969 at 10:40AM an historic voyage began. Less than 48 hours before the Apollo 11 astronauts launched into space, six men embarked on a concurrent NASA mission to an equally inhospitable environment – Earth's previously unexplored and powerful Gulf Stream current. The men resided in a 50-foot submersible, named the *PX-15 Ben Franklin*, and conducted experiments and observations during the course of a 31-day, 1,400 mile drift from the waters just off southern Florida to those southeast of Nova Scotia. Their mission, eclipsed by media coverage of the moon landing, disappeared from public consciousness, until now.

The story of this forgotten expedition, which, along with the Apollo 11 mission, was the culmination of President Kennedy's push to explore new frontiers, is told in The Science Channel's one-hour special, **DISAPPEARANCE OF THE PX-15**, premiering on Friday, July 16 from 9PM to 10PM and encoring Saturday, July 24 from 10PM to 11PM.

Using contemporary interviews with surviving crew members and archival footage shot during the actual dive, **DISAPPEARANCE OF THE PX-15** takes viewers along on the first "manned" deep-sea exploration of the Gulf Stream and tells the story of the sub's eventual rescue from obscurity by Vancouver Maritime Museum director James Delgado.

The original mission was the brainchild of explorer Jacques Piccard, who had already descended to the bottom of the Marianas Trench, seven miles deep, in the submersible *Trieste*. Piccard convinced Grumman Corporation of the importance of Gulf Stream exploration, and the company built both the Lunar Module, or LEM, for the Apollo mission and the *Ben Franklin*. Top brass at NASA in 1969 saw the *Ben Franklin* as a way to study the effects of prolonged space travel on human beings, since this experiment in a closed environment was in many ways analogous to the conditions of space travel.

Ben Franklin was originally scheduled to launch over one month before Apollo 11, but serious electrical problems plagued the submersible, which was powered by massive batteries hanging from beneath the hull. It took a full month to run down all of the short circuits, with the result that the expedition ran concurrently with that of Apollo 11, and languished in the shadow of the successful moon landing.

After the expedition, the submersible was purchased by a Canadian firm, which planned to use it for Arctic exploration. Those plans fell through, and the *Ben Franklin* was put on blocks, ultimately neglected and destined for the scrap heap until Jim Delgado, director of the Vancouver Maritime Museum, rescued and reassembled it in the museum's yard.

DISAPPEARANCE OF THE PX-15 was produced for The Science Channel by Omni Film Production Limited of Vancouver, Canada; Greg Smith of The Solution film Group, LLC; and Paul Gasek of Stony Brook Films, in consultation with Dr. Gene Feldman of NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center. Steve Burns was executive-in-charge of production for The Science Channel.

The Science Channel is part of Discovery Networks, U.S., a unit of Discovery Communications, Inc., which also operates and manages the Discovery Channel, TLC, Animal Planet, the Travel Channel, Discovery Health Channel, Discovery HD Theater, Discovery Kids Channel, Discovery Times Channel, Discovery Wings Channel, Discovery Home Channel, Discovery en Español and FitTV. The unit also distributes BBC AMERICA.

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