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The Washington Merry-Go-Round

Russell a Quiet but Potent Statesman

By Drew Pearson and Jack Anderson

The public saw a new face presiding over the Senate as the electoral college ballots were counted—that of Richard Brevard Russell of Georgia, elder statesman of the Senate.

It was a stern face which gives Russell the appearance of being tougher than he is. Acutally he's a compassionate human being, who has been known to go out of his way to help a small dog get through the revolving door of the Senate Office Building.

Russell was elected to the Senate in the same year Franklin Roosevelt was elected President, 1932, and took office in January, two months ahead of Mr. Roosevelt. He is 71, and has served in the Senate 36 years as of Sunday, Jan. 12.

Sen. Russell was born in Winder, Ga., population 5555, and he has lived there all his life. In his domestic outlook he is a rural-minded, small-town Senator. When it comes to world affairs he is a far-sighted statesman. He makes few speeches, works from within.

Last week Sen. Russell made a statement which surprised many diplomats—that the United States should resume diplomatic relations with Red China. When two nations talk together, he said, they don't make war.

Looking through the back files of the Washington Merry-Go-Round, this statement is not so surprising. Russell has been consistently opposed to the war in Vietnam, and in November, 1964, shortly after Lyndon Johnson scored one of the greatest political victories in history, Russell was invited to the LBJ ranch where he gave the newly re-elected President some strong advice to get out of Vietnam.

Russell has been consistent. Some Senators allow themselves the luxury of inconsistency, more so in private, where they are not recorded, than in public where they are.

Back in April of 1954 when Vice President Richard Nixon told the American Society of Newspaper Editors the United States would land troops in what was then French Indochina, Russell played an important part in thwarting such a move. When John Foster Dulles and Admiral Arthur Radford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, unfolded before aclosed-door meeting plans to send American troops into the French Indochinese jungles, Sen. Russell observed:

"That means war."

Secretary Dulles denied this, claimed the United States would only send a police force.

"When you commit the flag," said Russell, "you commit the country. And that is war."

Sen. Earle Clements of Kentucky asked Radford whether the other Joint Chiefs agreed with him about sending troops into the jungles.

"No," confessed the Admiral. "I am the only one who favors this. But I am the only one familiar with Southeast Asia."

It was this searching cross-examination by Democratic Senators, plus editorial reaction to Nixon's statement, which caused the Eisenhower Administration to back away from military intervention.

Note—Later the same year, however, Gen. Eisenhower did send a thousand troops into South Vietnam, and this force has now mushroomed into 545,000 men under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson.

Advice to USS Pueblo

The commander of the USS Pueblo would also have been better off if he had followed the recent stern advice of Sen. Russell and scuttled his spy ship.

The repatriated Pueblo crewmen have now confimed that they were unable to destroy all the super-secret electronic gear on board their ship. Only a few sensitive instruments, tapes and papers were destroyed. The rest was turned over to Russia by the North Koreans for careful analysis.

The dozen American spy ships still operating throughout the world have also been ordered to keep a safer distance from hostile shores. The Pueblo, for example, hasn't been replaced off the North Korean coast because of the risk. This has restricted U.S. ability to monitor one of the principal Soviet submarines and shipping corridors in the Far East.

Despite all the precautions, however, insiders admit that the United States probably couldn't stop a hostile power from seizing another spy ship. In the last analysis, the commander would have to take Sen. Russell's advice and scuttle the ship.

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Drew Pearson and Jack Anderson will report on the battle shaping up over confirmation of Governor Hickle to be Secretary of the Interior over WTOP radio, Saturday at 9:40 a.m. and 6:40 p.m.

The Federal Diary now appears on the second Comics page.