

Pentagon Tricked Ike in China Crisis

By Jack Anderson

The top-secret documents stolen a few weeks ago from Daniel Ellsberg contain startling evidence that the Pentagon in 1950 tried to trick President Eisenhower into using nuclear weapons against Communist China.

The military brass plotting, according to the documents, to test their new tactical nuclear weapons in combat. The opportunity came in 1953 during a crisis over two tiny, Nationalist-held islands, Quemoy and Matsu, which the Communists threatened to seize.

The generals deliberately deceived the White House, which was misled, therefore, into tentatively approving the use of nuclear weapons to defend the islands. In other words, the United States was ready to fight a nuclear war 18 years ago over two insignificant islands, which today draw no more than a shrug from our policymakers.

The story of the Pentagon's deception, of course, has been swept under the top secret stamp. But in 1967, the shocking details were summarized in a secret Rand study by Morton H. Halperin, who later was to become a top White House security adviser.

While Daniel Ellsberg was with Rand, he had official access to the Halperin report and later made a copy of it in hopes he could someday testify about it to Congress. Halperin, who

worked in the White House, has now sought unsuccessfully to declassify it, but had no idea Ellsberg had a copy.

A few weeks ago, Ellsberg broke into Ellsberg's home and pulled off some valuables, including a few private papers. Among them was a secret photo copy. Police recovered the papers, which the Justice Department then sought to obtain. But Ellsberg successfully arranged for Congress to get custody.

The explosive Rand report gives a chilling account of the Quemoy-Matsu crisis, here are the highlights:

The two offshore islands were under intensive Communist artillery attack in 1953. The United States, which was sworn to assist Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek defend the islands, assumed the Communists were softening them up for an imminent invasion.

This led to some urgent contingency planning in the Pentagon and the White House. The military brass, according to the report, wanted to test tactical nuclear weapons. Ellsberg, China's underground "nationalist" dump and air equipment.

The Pentagon, therefore, falsely informed the White House that the available Air Force planes had no bomb racks that could accommodate high-explosive conventional bombs

the underground "nationalist" dump. It would take "weeks" the Pentagon estimated to get the planes fixed. A copy of this false Pentagon report was sent to the White House. The military brass was too honest to mislead the White House.

By secret "back channel" gambling only to the top brass, he warned them that they were wrong about the bomb racks. There were adequate racks, he reminded the Pentagon to send the most powerful conventional bombs.

The Pentagon fired back a hot order to the bomb commander to "shut up," according to the Rand report, and the deception was White House confirmed.

Impressed by this and other false information from the Pentagon, President Eisenhower, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and their advisers went ahead with tentative plans to use nuclear weapons against Communist China.

Wisely, Eisenhower kept Ellsberg out of the final decision when the nuclear button was to be pushed. Meanwhile, the Quemoy-Matsu supply line was severed.

While the Pentagon maneuvered the nation to the brink of nuclear war, the American people were kept in blissful igno-

rance. The military brass, however, was generally aware that they were in the midst of America's first nuclear crisis since the decision to drop Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945.

The American people haven't been told how close they came to nuclear war. The deception embodied in the Rand report has been all too typical of the military brass. They continue to use "back channel" communications to exchange messages that they don't want their civilian superiors to see.

In the 1950s, the admiral ordered the Marine receptionist in Navy Secretary Francis Matthews' office to dip them a complete list of people who called the Secretary and the exact number of minutes they remained.

More recently, the Joint Chiefs used the same system to keep the Secretary of State from knowing what State Secretary A. Kissinger, a Navy yeoman actually rifled through burn bags and pilfered papers for the brass from Kissinger's briefcase.