

The Washington merry-go-round

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Jack Anderson

With LES WHITTEN

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon is quietly considering plans to establish a flotilla of floating spy bases to replace the intelligence installations in Turkey.

The Turks began expropriating U.S. bases after Congress refused to lift the arms embargo. These bases, according to intelligence sources, account for about one-fourth of the information gathered about Soviet nuclear tests and military maneuvers.

Top defense officials are still hopeful that Turkey will let them continue to use the bases. But they are casting about for other options.

The most likely plan, now under discussion at the highest levels, would call for taking old ships out of mothballs and equipping them for intelligence gathering. Thus, the Soviet Union would be monitored from international waters. Meanwhile, another all-out effort will be made this fall to change the House vote.

If the House votes to restore arms to Ankara, our sources predict, the Turks will give the U.S. access again to the strategic bases.

But if the vote is negative, one source warned, "there's no doubt we'd have to get Americans out of there fast. Our equipment would probably be held in 'postage and we'd have to evacuate dependents'."

DANGEROUS DELAY: Government investigators have yet to complete their probe of a major auto scandal we uncovered over two years ago.

In 1973, we exposed a massive corporate coverup of dangerously faulty equipment in Cadillacs. Largely as a result of our exposure, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) opened a formal investigation.

Two years later, the investigation is still at sea.

The story actually began in 1967 with General Motors' discovery that a "blower relay" used in Cadillacs was failing its engineering tests.

This innocent-looking switch, somewhat smaller than a cigarette package, is a vital part of the air conditioning system. Any breakdown can cause sudden, dangerous electric fires.

Nonetheless, the blower relays were installed in 1969 and 1970 Cadillacs. By the end of 1969, there were an incredible 21,000 blower relay failures in the 1969 Cadillacs. The 1970 Cadillacs did better with only 9,516 reported relay failures.

GM abandoned the troubled relay device before producing the 1971 model. But before dumping the defective part, an honest memo circulated through Cadillac's plush headquarters. The

memo stated starkly that 48 per cent of the relays would probably fail in five years or 50,000 miles.

The findings led some Cadillac men to urge a recall, campaign which would protect Cadillac owners but would cost \$1.4 million.

Cadillac's bosses balked. In addition to the expense, the recall campaign would have meant admitting that Cadillac, "the king of cars," had flaws. It was decided, therefore, to fix the cars that came in without alerting other owners to the potential danger.

By the time of the coverup decision, the trouble reports were growing more ominous. One told of an elderly man who tried to fight the fire in his new Cadillac with a hand extinguisher. He wound up in the hospital with over \$10,000 in bills. Other reports told of burned hands, burned dashes, burned cars.

In the spring of 1973, we uncovered the scandal. Our queries to GM produced Watergate-like responses. First came outright denials, then partial, guarded admissions of some trouble. But a spokesman told us no recall campaign was instituted because, "the situation was not considered safety related under the federal safety act."

At this point, the feds entered the picture. It is the government's responsibility to protect the consumer.

The Center for Auto Safety gave the federal sleuths all the information, which we had asked them to help evaluate. Then we sat back to wait. And we waited.

This week, we called the NHTSA about the investigation. A spokesman told us no conclusion has been reached in the matter. But, he added, "we are essentially done with the investigative phase of the investigation."

What's left? Well, after the NHTSA finishes the unconcluded investigative phases, the investigation is evaluated, then assessed, and then a determination is made as to whether a defect exists. If a defect is found, public hearings are held so the industry can present its case.

By the time the case is concluded, the dangerous Cadillacs will be obsolete.

MICROWAVE MENACE: The Pentagon has royally pooh-poohed our reports of microwave damage to human eyes because safer standards would cost them billions in equipment changes and compensation.

Now, the esteemed "Eye, Ear, Nose and Throat Monthly" has printed an article by Dr. Milton Zaret telling of a 53-year-old radar repairman who was not only blinded by the rays, but deafened. The ear damage has also affected his balance and left him virtually unable to walk.