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North Korea's Phony Defector

By Drew Pearson
and Jack Anderson

THERE WILL BE some red faces in the Pentagon when South Korea goes into court in one of the most bizarre spy cases to come out of the Far East. The details have been buried for two years in a secret Pentagon file but will be revealed later this year.

On March 22, 1967, the American and North Korean truce teams met at Panmunjon for another of their intermittent battles of wits. Maj. Gen. Richard G. Ciccolella, then chief American negotiator, was listening wearily to a routine Communist harangue when a note was slipped to him.

"There is North Korean who wants to defect," reported the note. "Request instructions."

Ciccolella whispered orders for an intelligence officer to check out the story. Back came another note verifying that the North Korean seemed determined to defect. The General suggested that the defector's face be bandaged and that he be hauled off in an ambulance as an injured American.

When this turned out to be impractical, the General directed that the man be issued a blue armband and be evacuated with the Allied press. But it was decided this, too, wouldn't work.

"Recommend that we not go through with this defection," the next note urged. "Recommend that we do it at the next meeting."

CICCOLELLA asked whether the defector was important and got back an affirmative answer. A man of action, he whispered terse orders for his subordinates to load the North Korean into a car and make a dash for freedom.

The defector, however, climbed into the wrong car. The driver, who hadn't been briefed, loudly demanded to know what he was doing. This alerted two North Korean guards, who ran up and started to drag the defector out of the car.

Capt. Thomas Bair, a burly military police officer, knocked down the two guards, and Lt. Col. Donald Thompson leaped into the car with the defector, shouting orders for the driver to take off.

North Korean guards fired at the fleeing car. This alerted the guards at the North Korean checkpoint, who slammed down the wooden barrier. Thompson ordered the driver to crash through it.

The defector turned out to be Sukun Yi, vice chief of North Korea's Central News Agency, whose dramatic escape made him the toast of South Korea. But South Korean intelligence, taking no one for granted, carefully reviewed an 8-mm. film taken of his defection. This showed that the North Korean guards, known to be crack shots, had aimed their guns awry.

Result: Yi was kept under quiet surveillance.

Apparently he discovered he was being watched and made elaborate preparations to escape by assuming the identity of a friend with business in Thailand.

Disguising himself with a fake moustache, wig and spectacles, Yi gave his watchdogs the slip on Jan. 27 and used his friend's passport to catch a plane bound for Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The South Korean agents, however, weren't fooled for long and gave chase. They intercepted him at the Hong Kong airport where Yi's plane made a stop.

Their attempt to grab Yi

created a scuffle, which attracted Hong Kong police. They held him for two days of questioning, then turned him loose. But unfortunately for the double agent, his plane to Phnom Penh made another stop in Saigon.

The anti-Communist South Vietnamese cheerfully turned him over to the South Koreans, who whisked him back to Seoul for trial. The expected testimony, on top of the Pueblo affair, will disclose that Americans have been humiliated again by the North Koreans.

Acheson Comments

DEAN ACHESON, who steered Truman's foreign policy during the hectic postwar days, is 77 years old and semiretired. However, he hasn't lost his pithy approach to world affairs. Answering questions before a select audience at Hobe Sound, Fla., last week, Acheson told exactly what he thought about everything from Cuba and Peru to the Suez Canal.

"About 12 years ago I spent an evening drinking whisky with Fidel Castro at the home of Gov. Meyner of New Jersey," Acheson said.

"At about midnight Castro offered me a job representing him. I told him, 'Why not wait until morning and see how you think about it then?'"

"Fortunately, in the morning he'd forgotten all about it."

"Frankly, I found him rather an attractive fellow. He had more sense than we've given him credit for."

"We Americans must remember that we freed Cuba from Spain, then left it in control of Americans of the same class as had controlled it under Spain. I can understand how a demagogue could do a lot with that situation. People have been unjust to Machiavelli."

Acheson added that Castro

is just as annoyed over his jacking as we are.

THE FORMER Secretary of State was blunt regarding the Near East and his belief that the Suez Canal should not be reopened.

"The only thing the canal serves is to bring petroleum from the Red Sea into the Mediterranean," he said. "It may be a good idea for us to develop a fuel that will lessen pollution. Besides, I see no reason for opening the canal and letting Russian submarines and naval vessels go down to Arabia. Let the Arabs sit on water rather than oil."

When queried regarding the peace talks in Paris, Acheson replied: "You want me to discuss that, with Averell Harriman in the audience? I'm a brave man, but not that brave."

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