

Readiness of U.S. Fast-Reaction Forces

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WASHINGTON, April 16 — The Army, Navy and Air Force have increased the readiness of their fast-reaction forces even though the United States is not expected to retaliate militarily for the downing of a reconnaissance plane by North Korea.

The moves by the Pentagon included the following:

¶The aircraft carrier Kitty Hawk and the destroyers Black and Knox were sent from Hong Kong toward waters off the Korean coast and the carrier Bonhomme Richard was similarly moving from Subic Bay in the Philippines.

¶A widespread alert was ordered for Air Force jet fighters and bombers. Air-defense fighters based in South Korea will be on airstrips, armed and ready to take off in five minutes.

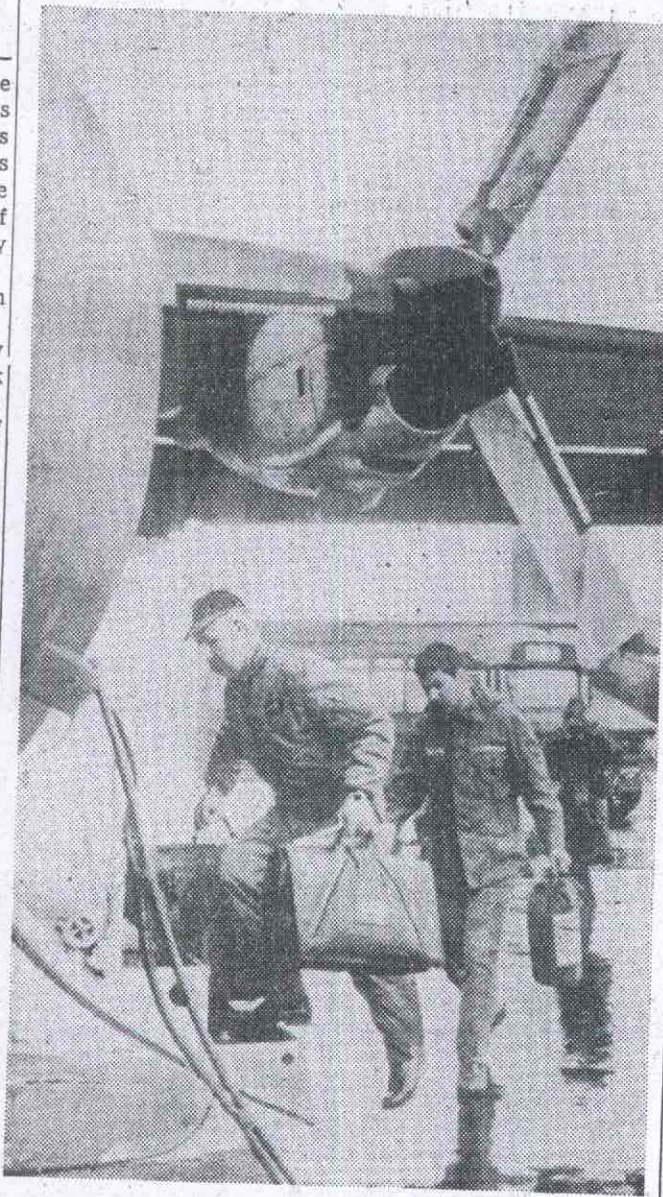
¶The Army informed commanders of units in the United States and elsewhere of the possibility of orders to be prepared to move, but there was no formal alert. Army planners were reviewing ammunition inventories in South Korea and the availability of cargo ships and were taking a "preliminary, precautionary look" at what kind of limited mobilization might be required in the United States should war break out in Korea.

Reluctant to Discuss Moves

Pentagon officials were usually reluctant to talk about any of these moves. On orders "from above," one of them said, being moved to forward air bases when the Navy EC-119 North Korean planes there were 128 Air Force jets in South Korea and about 50 in Japan.

Defense Department planners were looking at four possible types of military options, but said frankly that all of them were very risky. The options were:

¶A blockade of the North Korean coast by Navy ships. Since North Korea has a long border with Communist China, food and other supplies could move overland, the planners noted. Also, if the Soviet Union



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Crewmen of C-130 Hercules preparing to leave Tachikawa Air Force Base in Japan to join the search for survivors.

attempted to run the blockade, the situation could become very hazardous.

¶A quick, limited air strike against the air base from which the two MIG jets took off. If the American raid was staged from a South Korean base, however, it would probably encourage a North Korean counterthrust at South Korean bases. If it was staged from a Navy carrier, there would have to be a very large force available to protect the task force from the 444 MIG's and 80 IL-28 bombers in the North Korean Air Force.

¶A large conventional air attack on North Korea's 15 air bases, designed to wipe out most of its air force and preclude a large counterstrike against South Korea. But this would take a very substantial number of American planes and, in the opinion of most military men, would run the big risk of a North Korean land assault on South Korea.

¶An attempt to lure some North Korean planes or warships outside that country's 12-mile limit and then destroy them. This, too, could lead to reprisal against South Korea.

Anger in the Pentagon

The mood throughout the Pentagon was one of deep anger and frustration that North Korea could, with apparent impunity, first seize the intelligence-gathering ship Pueblo in international waters and then shoot down an unarmed reconnaissance plane about 100 miles from its shore.

An admiral asked: "How are our allies in the Far East going to react to our promises of defense after this, when we don't

in Korea Is Stepped Up

even retaliate for a brazen attack on our own forces?"

But even the angriest officers said that they realized that the danger of setting off a full-scale resumption of the Korean war was a predominant factor that only the President could weigh.

"I'd hate to be in his shoes," was a recurrent comment.

Pentagon planners said that the bolstering of the South Korean Army and Air Force after the unsuccessful attempt by North Korean agents to kill President Chung Hee Park and the seizure of the Pueblo 15 months ago had made them much more formidable.

South's Jets Are Old

The greatest weaknesses, they said, were in jet fighters, ammunition and modern communications equipment. The South Korean Air Force has 176 jets, most of them F-86's of Korean war times.

Military sources offered one logical explanation why the Navy EC-121 had not told its base that it was being approached by MIG's and did not send a distress signal after being hit. But they conceded that the explanation was only speculative.

In the first three months of this year, they said, there were 190 similar flights in the same general area. In most flights off the eastern coasts of Korea, China and the Soviet Union, they said, it is commonplace for two jets to fly alongside, just as American and Canadian jets fly alongside the Soviet aircraft that occasionally approach the northwestern and eastern coasts of North America.

One North Korean jet nor-

mally flies above and behind the reconnaissance plane while the other pulls alongside. The MIG pilot then jets down the identification numbers on the reconnaissance plane and photographs the pilot. This plane then normally drops back behind and below the reconnaissance plane.

If this happened with the EC-121, one source said, it would not have been considered worth reporting. If one of the planes

then fired a missile or a burst of cannon fire, the navy plane might well have simply exploded in mid-air, leaving no time for a call for help.