

U.S. IS UNCERTAIN IF PUEBLO STAYED BEYOND 12 MILES

McNamara Discloses Ship Wasn't in Radio Contact for 10 Days Before Seizure

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Excerpts from Rusk-McNamara
interview are on Page 15.

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Feb. 4—The United States is unable to rule out the possibility that the intelligence ship Pueblo entered North Korean territorial waters at some point before she was captured, two senior Administration officials said today.

Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara and Secretary of State Dean Rusk said that her exact course could not be known until the skipper and the 81 surviving crewmen were returned to United States custody.

If the questioning of the crew revealed that during a 10-day period of radio silence the Pueblo had strayed within 12 miles of the North Korean coast line, Mr. Rusk said, "We will make those facts available."

[The Soviet Union, in an article in Pravda, urged the United States to take "no rash steps" in the Pueblo case.]

Under 'Strictest Orders'

Both Cabinet members insisted that the ship was under the "strictest orders" not to violate any territorial waters and they both expressed the belief that it did not do so. The North Koreans have claimed repeated infractions of their 12-mile limit.

Mr. Rusk and Mr. McNamara were interviewed on the National Broadcasting Company's television program "Meet the Press."

Secretary Rusk said that a third meeting last night between United States representatives and the North Koreans at Panmunjom had brought new sign of hope that the crisis

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Rusk said, "and I have no information that indicates they are prepared to do so."

Indicating that diplomatic attempts to free the crew and the ship would continue, Mr. McNamara also disclosed that the United States had moved three aircraft carriers into Korean waters.

Apology Is a Condition

Mr. Rusk stopped short of saying that the United States would apologize if an investigation showed that there had been a violation. The North Koreans have made such an apology a condition for obtaining the release of the ship and her crew.

But by disclosing that the ship had been out of radio contact from Jan. 10 to Jan. 21—until two days before her capture—Mr. McNamara opened the possibility for a subsequent admission of error by the United States that might assist in the negotiations to resolve the crisis.

Asked if the skipper of the Pueblo, Comdr. Lloyd M. Bucher, would be disciplined upon his release if there had been a violation of orders, Mr. McNamara said: "We would always discipline a commander if he violated his instructions consciously or through negligence. We have no evidence that he did here—I certainly wouldn't want to predict any action we would take following his return."

Mr. McNamara said radio silence was essential to the Pueblo's mission—presumably to avoid detection by enemy counter-intelligence monitors while the Pueblo itself was monitoring North Korean communications.

The Defense Secretary said the Pueblo succeeded in going undetected by the North Koreans for 10 or 12 days.

Other diplomatic sources questioned this assertion. They noted that on Jan. 20 the North Koreans formally protested to the United States, at a meeting of the Military Armistice Commission at Panmunjom, border intrusions by "armed spy boats."

This protest apparently went unnoticed in Washington, for it was not until Jan. 29, nearly a week after the Pueblo's seizure, that the State Department could locate a transcript of the meeting at which this protest had been made. Last week, Mr. McNamara said he did not know of the delivery of such a protest.

Soviet Monitoring Reported

Moreover, Eastern European diplomats have privately alluded to alleged evidence in North Korean hands that the Pueblo was in territorial waters before she was seized. According to these sources, the vessel was being shadowed by Soviet monitors and her course was tracked even during the period of radio silence.

Rusk said that the United

States had "not a single scrap of information from any source whatever that this vessel was inside the 12-mile limit at any time during its voyage."

But, he added, "We cannot be one thousand per cent sure until we get our officers and crew back and we have a chance to interrogate them and look at the log of the ship—this was a ship peculiarly qualified to navigate with accuracy."

There could be no admission of error, he added, "on the basis of the testimony that we get from men who are being held prisoner or from spliced tapes of broadcasts that they are alleged to have made."

This was the first statement from the Administration specifying the belief that the "confessions" of several of the crewmen were artificially pieced together by splicing tape recordings of their voices.

Mr. McNamara confirmed that the seizure of the ship did not compromise secret United States Government communications and official codes. "Within an hour after the event," he said, "we had changed the foundation of those communications."

Soviet Urges 'No Rash Steps'

By HENRY KAMM

Special to The New York Times

MOSCOW, Feb. 4—The Soviet Union urged the United States to take "no rash steps" that would further complicate the case of the intelligence ship Pueblo, captured by North Korea on Jan. 23.

Moscow's exhortation was contained in an article in Pravda, the Communist party newspaper, which was signed Observer. This signature is customarily reserved for policy statements from the highest Soviet authorities.

The key paragraph came at the end of a long article castigating the United States for its policy in the Far East as well as in the Middle East. The tone of the paragraph, in contrast to what preceded it, was imploring rather than denunciatory.

'No Chance' With Threats

"Is it not clear that attempts to achieve something from a sovereign Socialist state, the Korean People's Democratic Republic, can have no chance of success if accompanied by threat and pressure," Pravda asked. "Now it is especially important that the United States take no rash steps that would further complicate the situation."

In addition to its implication that the Pueblo affair could be resolved to the satisfaction of the United States, the article appeared to experienced observers to suggest a way for the United States to obtain the return of the ship and its crew. It hinted that the Government should disassociate itself from the Pueblo's activities by declaring that it had not ordered her presence off North Korea's coast.