

Rejecting Military Action, U.S. Exerted Intense

By WILLIAM BEECHER
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Dec. 22—On Jan. 8, operating on secret orders approved at the highest level in Washington, the electronic intelligence ship Pueblo steamed out of Sasebo harbor in Japan on an intelligence mission in the Sea of Japan off the coast of North Korea.

The primary assignment was to report on activities of Soviet naval forces in the area. Second, it was to conduct electronic eavesdropping of the air and naval forces of North Korea.

The entire cruise was to have lasted less than a month, with return to Sasebo scheduled for Feb. 4. Except for some possibly bothersome harassment by Soviet or North Korean vessels, no real trouble was expected. The Pueblo's sister ship, the Banner, had successfully conducted a similar mission some months earlier.

But the Pueblo never made it back. On Jan. 23, at a point that United States officials insist was well outside North Korea's 12-mile limit, the ship and his 83-man crew were seized by North Korean gunboats and forced into Wonsan Harbor.

Tough Answers Studied

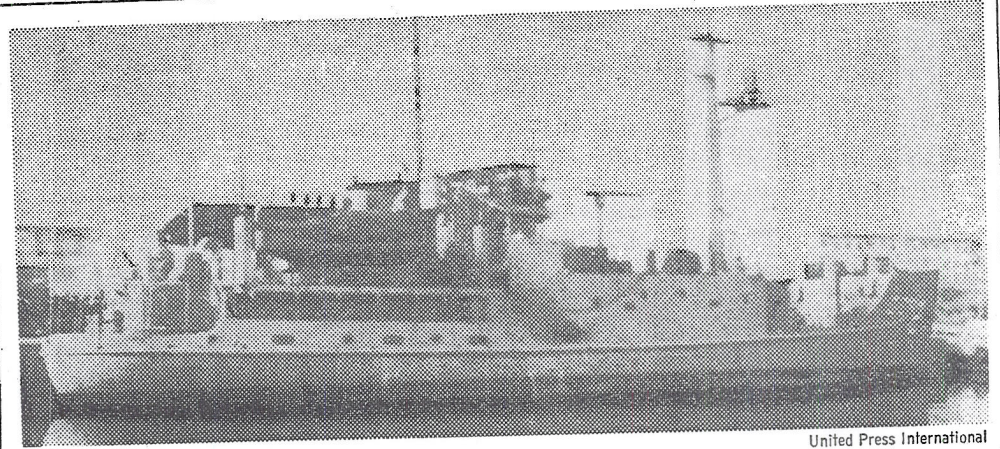
In the days immediately following the seizure, top military men studied a number of tough measures that might force the release of the crew. These included a blockade of Wonsan; seizure of North Korean vessels or even Soviet spy ships in hopes of a trade; the bombing of Wonsan or other targets in North Korea with a threat to do even more, or the sending of an unarmed tug into Wonsan with a warning to North Korea to place the crew aboard.

The danger of all the options studied, however, was that the situation could easily expand into fighting, perhaps even a full-scale resumption of the war between North Korea and South Korea, which ended in 1953.

"You recall that everyone was quite nervous and potentially trigger-happy at the time," one ranking Pentagon official said today. "Only a couple days before, 31 North Korean commandos had attempted to assassinate the President of South Korea, and we couldn't ignore the possibility that Pyongyang was looking for an excuse for a resumption of war."

Only eight American jets stood ready for action on South Korean airfields at the time. And they were armed only with nuclear weapons.

One Administration planner has disclosed that military officials made detailed contingency plans for nuclear strikes against the principal airfields in North Korea in case the North Korean Army suddenly marched south. Any decision to use nuclear weapons, of



United Press International

Pueblo in harbor at Wonsan, North Korea. Photo was obtained from North Korean sources.

course, could have been made only by President Johnson.

But instead of any of the stern military options placed before him, none of which seemed to offer any strong chance of getting the Pueblo crewmen back alive, President Johnson chose to press diplomacy.

Officials involved in the decision-making process say the President was not attracted to any of the military alternatives. They all agree, however, that the all-out North Vietnamese attack on the major cities of South Vietnam at the end of January provided an unwished-for relief for the President from some of the public pressure "to do something about Pueblo."

"Everyone concurred that Vietnam was our principal fight," said one ranking officer, "and we couldn't risk a second-front effort in Korea."

A Pentagon official agreed that the severe attacks in Vietnam eased the pressure over the Pueblo, "but I'm sure Mr. Johnson was disposed that way anyway."

Work in Three Areas

In the 11 months since, United States activities have been of three types:

First, steps to build up South Korea's defenses lest Pyongyang be tempted to risk an attack against the South.

Second, diplomatic efforts to get the Soviet Union to use its influence on North Korea for release of the crew.

Third, direct, secret negotiations with North Korean representatives at Panmunjom.

Within hours of the seizure, the nuclear-powered carrier Enterprise, with her 90 planes, was dispatched full speed to Korea.

Air Force fighters and bombers in Japan, Okinawa, Guam, Hawaii and elsewhere were alerted for movement to South Korea, within a few weeks nearly 200 American jets were on six South Korean airfields.

President Johnson also activated nearly 15,000 Air Force and Navy reservists.

In addition, modern jets, a destroyer, air defense missiles, radios, anti-infiltration devices, rifles and ammunition were rushed to South Korea's armed forces. The two American divi-

sions in South Korea were sent key specialists and scarce spare parts.

By late spring American military men in Seoul reported that a successful defense could be made without resort to nuclear weapons.

On the diplomatic front, the United States also moved im-

mediately on hearing of the seizure, asking the Soviet Union to intervene with North Korea to have the ship and crew released. This appeal was publicly rejected by Moscow, which supported North Korea's action in frequent propaganda statements.

United States officials be-

Diplomatic Efforts Over 11 Months to Get Crew Back

lieve, however, that the Soviet Union tried on at least two occasions to advise the North Koreans to settle the case.

Soviet Has Ships on Patrol

The Russians had a particular interest in a settlement, the Administration said, because about a dozen Soviet intelligence ships are on electronic monitoring missions similar to that of the Pueblo. Something like a "gentlemen's agreement" has long existed between Moscow and Washington about these operations. As long as there was no penetration of national coastal waters, the ships were not molested.

Analysts here believe that the halting of the bombing of North Vietnam on Nov. 1 gave the Soviet Union an opportunity to make another approach.

American attempts to enlist the good offices of the Soviet Union were carried out by various officials, notably Llewellyn E. Thompson, the Ambassador in Moscow.

Some well-placed American officials believed for much of the 11 months that Soviet pressure would do the job. One said in August: "The Russians are not at all happy about the precedent established by Pueblo. Since that incident, two of their spy ships have been seized, one by Brazil, another by Argentina. Now that all possible intelligence benefit from having the crew, and all propaganda value, have been milked, they're pressing the North Koreans to let the men go."

It has never been specifically clear, however, what leverage or threat, if any, the Soviet Union used on the North Koreans.

Twenty-eight times in the 11 months, American and North Korean negotiators met in secret session at Panmunjom to try to work out release of the 82 surviving crewmen.

Initially the North Koreans insisted that the United States apologize and promise not to

do it again, or even to sail intelligence ships into the Sea of Japan.

Proposal by the North

Then, in the summer, the North Koreans came up with a three-point proposal: first, that the United States admit that the Pueblo was on an intelligence mission; second, that it admit that the Pueblo violated the North's territorial waters, and third, that it admit that the crew was engaged in "criminal acts and espionage."

The American negotiator, Maj. Gen. Gilbert H. Woodward, responded that all the evidence in American hands indicated that the ship had been in international waters and that the Americans knew of no criminal acts, unless North Korea regarded defensive measures during the boarding as criminal. He offered to have some third party investigate and report. This proposal was rejected.

Two or three times since summer there have been re-

ports in the South Korean press that the release was imminent.

Some South Korean officials, who were irked about not being included in the Pueblo negotiations and who were fearful that any "abject apology" by the United States might increase the aggressiveness of North Korea, have been willing to disclose anything they knew, or thought they knew, about the negotiations.

American officials on the scene and in Washington have been apprehensive that leaks could anger the North Koreans and cause a last-minute hitch.

Drink Limits Reported

Dispatch of The Times, London

LONDON—The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food said that five eight-ounce glasses of soft drinks could be consumed by a child daily without exceeding the acceptable daily intake of cyclamates—artificial sweeteners. The adult limit was out at about 10 glasses.