

DREW PEARSON

Russell's Stance On Viet Prophetic

WASHINGTON — The public saw a new face presiding over the Senate as the electoral college ballots were counted—that of Richard Brevard Russell of Georgia, elder statesman of the Senate.

It was a stern face which gives Russell the appearance of being tougher than he is. Actually he's a compassionate human being, who has been known to go out of his way to help a small dog get through the revolving door of the Senate office building.

Russell was elected to the Senate in the same year Franklin Roosevelt was elected president, 1932, and took office in January two months ahead of Roosevelt. He is 71, and has served in the Senate 36 years as of tomorrow.

Sen. Russell was born in Winder, Ga., population 5,555, and he has lived there all his life. In his domestic outlook he is a rural-minded, small-town senator. When it comes to world affairs he is a far-sighted statesman. He makes few speeches, works from within.

Last week Sen. Russell made a statement which surprised many diplomats — that the United States should resume diplomatic relations with Red China. When two nations talk together, he said, they don't make war.

Looking through the back files of this column, the statement is not so surprising. Russell has been consistently opposed to the war in Vietnam and in November, 1964, shortly after Lyndon Johnson scored one of the greatest political victories in history, Russell was invited to the LBJ ranch, where he gave the newly re-elected President some strong advice to get out of Vietnam.

Russell has been consistent. Some senators allow themselves the luxury of inconsistency; more so in private, where they are not recorded, than in public where they are.

BACK IN APRIL of 1954 when Vice President Richard Nixon told the American Society of Newspaper Editors



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the United States would land troops in what was then French Indo-China, Russell played an important part in thwarting such a move. When John Foster Dulles and Admiral Arthur Radford, chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, unfolded before a closed-door meeting plans to send American troops into the French Indo-Chinese jungles, Sen. Russell observed: "That means war."

Secretary Dulles denied this, claimed the United States would only send a police force.

"When you commit the flag," said Russell, "you commit the country. And that is war."

Sen. Earle Clements of Kentucky asked Radford whether the other joint chiefs agreed with him about sending troops into the jungles.

"No," confessed the admiral. "I am the only one who favors this. But I am the only one familiar with Southeast Asia."

It was this searching cross-examination by Democratic senators, plus editorial reaction to Nixon's statement, which caused the Eisenhower administration to back away from military intervention.

Note — later the same year, however, Eisenhower did send a thousand troops into South Vietnam, and this force has now mushroomed into 545,000 men under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson.

THE COMMANDER of the USS Pueblo would also have been better off if he had followed the recent stern advice of Sen. Russell and scuttled his spy ship.

The repatriated Pueblo crewmen have now confirmed they were unable to destroy all the super-secret electronic gear on board their ship. Only a few sensitive instruments, tapes and papers were destroyed. The rest was turned over to Russia by the North Koreans for careful analysis.

This included the highly secret instruments the United States uses to track Soviet submarines. With this equipment, a spy ship can tell one Soviet sub from another by the distinctive noise its engines make under water.

The American equipment was considered far more sophisticated than anything the Russians have developed; so the seizure of the Pueblo was a far greater disaster than the public is likely to be told. To prevent such from happening again, the communications channels have been streamlined so an SOS will reach the Pentagon in time to send fighter planes to the rescue.

The Pueblo's distress call was held up in channels until it was too late to do anything about it. The messages were routed from Japan to Pearl Harbor to the Pentagon, but the admirals at the lower levels had no authority to act. This has now been changed.