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A Mislaid Message on The Pueblo's Safety

Washington

House investigators reported yesterday that the joint chiefs of staff never received a message addressed to them urging that study be given to protecting the USS Pueblo during its last intelligence-gathering mission.

Instead, said a special house Armed Services subcommittee, the warning was read by staff aides and sent on to the Pacific commander. There it was similarly evaluated and disposed of at lower echelons.

The message, written over the signature of the director of the National Security Agency, was sent in late December, 1967, on the same day the joint chiefs spent

about an hour approving hundreds of reconnaissance missions, including the one that led to North Korea's capture of the Pueblo on January 23.

APPROVED

The joint chiefs approved the Pueblo mission as a low-risk operation, the subcommittee said, but the message to them suggested that "the characterization of the mission as minimal risk might be wrong" and that protection for the Pueblo might be considered.

To underscore the panel's contention that men responsible for decisions are not always the men who make them, Representative Otis G. Pike (Dem-N.Y.), the subcommittee chairman, said it was a subordinate and not

the agency director who actually sent the message.

"The director never saw it until after the Pueblo was captured," said Pike in a statement he read in behalf of the subcommittee.

The subcommittee resumed the public hearings phase of its investigation into the Pueblo affair yesterday after a naval court of inquiry in Coronado, Calif., completed eight weeks of hearings on the matter.

BASE

The subcommittee heard yesterday from Rear Admiral Frank L. Johnson, who at the time of the Pueblo incident was commander of naval forces in Japan, the Pueblo's home base.

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