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Pueblo Background Bjt 500, 4 Takes Total 1,600

By JOHN M. HIGHTOWER

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WASHINGTON AP - The intelligence mission which led the USS Pueblo to North Korean capture was ordered initially by the U.S. military high command as a critically important but operationally routine assignment. Spy ships always work in some danger but this was rated as a low-risk operation.

The ship probably would have been sent on the mission even had the danger of a North Korean grab been foreseen.

One of its purposes was to check the possibility of a surprise invasion of South Korea, such as occurred 17 years ago.

When the seizure came on Jan. 23, no protection appeared.

Information available from Washington officials indicates that neither the Navy nor the Air Force had enough suitably armed combat planes near enough to give help in the short time the North Koreans required to board and seize the vessel and its 83-man crew.

Whether action could have been taken when a North Korean patrol boat first approached the Pueblo an hour and 45 minutes earlier is problematical, but it evidently would have required lightening checks with higher authorities and a full grasp of the real dangers all along the chain of command.

Apparently, it would have required also swift modification of the attitude that generally the intelligence ships are on their own, protected only by the right to cruise freely in international waters and by their pattern of unprovocative behavior.

The question of a ready air capability to help the Pueblo is one of those expected to be taken up in congressional study of the episode.

Another and related issue due for examination is whether top policymakers in Washington were alerted to the situation when they might still have been able to do something about it. The available evidence does not suggest that they were. Nor have officials suggested they should have been although some members of Congress have raised the question.

Nor apparently was this assignment of the Pueblo subjected to review by the highest officials. The mission was considered routine, so serious policy questions involving the possibility of a new war in the Far East were not expected to arise directly from the Pueblo's activities.

That they did arise is still considered here to be more accidental than predictable.

And the basic policies and patterns of spy-ship operations still are regarded in the government as both valid and necessary—even though officials do not dismiss the possibility of further incidents similar to the Pueblo episode. (INSERT)

The Pueblo itself, according to Pentagon experts, was operating on a mission laid down by the Joint Chiefs of Staff with over-all control vested specifically in an intelligence office directly under Adm. Thomas H. Moorer, chief of naval operations.

Above the JCS stood President Johnson, by whose authority spy-ship operations are carried out around the world, Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara, and Secretary of State Dean Rusk, whose department must be consulted on such missions.

MORE

AG1229pes Feb. 4

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WASHINGTON Pueblo Background Bjt A008WX, Take 2: missions. 470

Also in the chain of authority at the policymaking level was the Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, under the chairmanship of Clark M. Clifford, McNamara's designated successor at the Defense Department. This board is said to have reviewed operations of vessels like the Pueblo periodically.

Below the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the chief of naval operations the chain of command over the Pueblo while on station in the Sea of Japan ran to Adm. U. S. Grant Sharp, over-all Pacific commander; Adm. John J. Hyland, commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, and Rear Adm. Frank L. Johnson, commander of U.S. naval forces in the area of Japan.

The immediate superior of the Pueblo skipper, Cmdr. Lloyd M. Bucher, therefore, was Adm. Johnson. And it was Johnson's headquarters in Japan which got Bucher's reports as the drama of the capture unfolded.

How rapidly the reports moved upward has not been disclosed. Information supplied by official sources—White House, State Department, Defense Department—is that McNamara and Rusk were called 15 to 40 minutes after a North Korean boarding party actually began moving in on the Pueblo; President Johnson was awakened and informed about two hours after the ship was seized.

There is a 14-hour time difference between Washington and Wonsan, the North Korean port into which the Pueblo was taken. When the incident began, the time was about noon, Tuesday, Jan. 23 out there and about 10 p.m. Monday night here.

Officials here say that during two weeks off Korea the Pueblo had been subjected to frequent harassment by North Korean vessels which had made threatening, close approaches and circled the ship. This had caused no alarm here since electronic intelligence ships frequently are harassed in this manner.

Another such vessel, the USS Banner, was reported some months earlier to have been surrounded by 11 patrol boats for two and a half hours without being directly molested.

Bucher, officials say, had instructions to stay at least 13 miles off the Korean coast. North Korea asserts a 12-mile territorial limit. North Korea charges Bucher's ship violated this limit, but the United States says it did not.

Bucher was instructed also to expect harassment, not to resist it, and to flee if necessary to avoid a serious incident.

Bucher's mission has been described as electronic eavesdropping—the interception and recording of North Korean internal and ship-to-shore radio messages which, being of low-power, required his ship to go close to shore.

The Pueblo also had the task, normal for the "ferret boats" as they are sometimes called, of pinpointing radar and sonar locations in North Korea.

The necessity of operating close to shore creates one special element of the danger that has come to be accepted in the government as normal for intelligence vessels.

The peril became real for the 11,000-ton USS Liberty last June. It was on a mission for the super-secret National Security 1

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A further objection to an air rescue attempt expressed by some top civilian authorities here is that such an effort might have brought swift sinking of the Pueblo by the patrol boats with a heavy loss of life among the 83-man crew.

Members of Congress have voiced demands for air and sea cover for such vessels in the future. But administration officials told newsmen it is not practical—that to send an electronic intelligence ship close to a foreign shore with an escort as the ships stay in international waters they are evidently considered by both countries to be immune from direct hostile action.

Why North Korea broke the rules of the game and why the Russians, if they knew of the action in advance, permitted them to do so is a question Washington authorities have not been able to answer. Their guess, however, is the North Koreans acted on their own.

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This possibility

lpnifb5et8day by Secretary of Defense  
Robert S. McNamara who said the "same thing can happen" to other  
U.S. intelligence ships in the future.

McNamara said any of the countries operating such ships-he mentioned  
the Soviet Union, Britain and Japan-might have a ship seized bec9e4 ung5  
have saved that ship and crew".

McNamara gave these assessments when interviewed on the NBC  
television-ra "Meet the Press".

The Pueblo itself 13th graf

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Telegraph Editors:

WASHINGTON - Your attention is directed to the review of the Pueblo  
incident by John M. Hightower which moved as AC030-C11WX. It covers in  
detail much of the information touched on by Secretary of Defense  
McNamara on a broadcast interview which is being covered on a spot  
basis. You may want to use the Hightower analysis in conjunction  
with the upcoming spot story.

The McNamara-Rusk interview will be covered in a wrapup story and  
there will be a separate on the Pueblo material.

The AP

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WASHINGTON AP - Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara said Sunday American planes could have been caught in a bloody battle with North Korean aircraft if they had tried to rescue the intelligence ship Pueblo.

"Any reaction force that would have moved into the area would have moved into the air control sectors of the North Korean Air Defense, manned by about 500 aircraft," McNamara said.

"And almost surely any reaction force that we could have mounted or could have been expected to mount, would have faced a bloody battle at the time," he stated.

In hindsight, McNamara said, it is quite clear no reaction force could have rescued the Pueblo and its 83-man crew.

McNamara's comments came on NBC's "Meet the Press" television-radio program in a joint appearance with Secretary of State Dean Rusk.

Rusk said another bid by U.S. representatives at Panmunjom to secure the ship's freedom had failed but diplomatic efforts were continuing.

"The important thing is that we get the ship and the crew back immediately and we shall press that very hard indeed and report as we see any blue sky ahead on that point," Rusk said.

He said he had no word that North Korea has agreed to release the body of one dead crewman or in the injured.

The possibility of U.S. fighting with North Korean forces was one of the factors listed by McNamara in the American failure to try to aid the Pueblo.

"First it was necessary to find out what happened, and it takes time," McNamara related.

"In the case of the Liberty in the Mediterranean in June as an example, I thought the Liberty had been attacked by Soviet forces. Thank goodness our carrier commanders did not launch immediately against the Soviet forces who were operating in the Med at the time.

"I thought then it had been attacked by Egyptian forces," McNamara continued. "Who else could have done it? Thank goodness we did not launch against the Egyptians. We took time to find out it was the Israeli. Now, the same kind of a problem existed with respect to the Pueblo.

McNamara said officials could not be certain how much secret gear or information fell into enemy hands, but he disclosed that as a precaution U.S. codes used in international communications were switched.

"We do know that our worldwide communications were not compromised," McNamara said. "Within an hour after the event we had changed the foundation of those communications."

Messages from the crew, he said, showed the ship began destroying top secret equipment and documents as per instructions. How much was destroyed is not known, but McNamara said the crew "went far to that end."

Both McNamara and Rusk shied away from saying flatly the U.S. ship never entered North Korea's territorial waters, as the Communists claim

McNamara said the ship's commander was under strict orders to stay in international waters and "we are quite positive" that's where the seizure took place.

But, he added, "there was a period of radio silence appropriate to its Pueblo's mission from the period of roughly Jan. 10 to Jan. 21 and it is in that period that we lack knowledge and we will not be able to obtain knowledge of that until the crew and the commander are released."

Rusk said:

"We cannot be 1,000 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."

He added that if it is learned later that the Pueblo entered territorial waters at any time "we will make these facts known."

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Asked why the Pueblo wasn't protected, McNamara said an accompanying escort would have been provocative to the North Koreans.

And he indicated it would have compromised the ship's mission which apparently was to monitor North Korean radio transmissions.

"We are operating on the high seas in an entirely legal fashion," he contended. "Neither the Soviets nor we protect ships of this kind. Nor do we protect aircraft of similar kinds. You will remember we lost an RB47 shot down by the Soviets on a mission similar to this in 1960. It was unprotected."

Rusk said the Soviets also have sent their vessels into American territorial waters, citing three instances in 1965 and 1966.

"We didn't seize those vessels. We simply required them to depart. That is the civilized practice among nations in dealing with such questions," Rusk said.

Rusk said North Korea had the right under international law to require the Pueblo to leave its territorial waters-if it was there-but had no right to seize it.

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