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Pueblo-Prevention 390, 2 Takes Total 700
By FRED S. HOFFMAN
AP Military Writer

WASHINGTON AP - A key admiral said Saturday future Pueblo-type incidents should be prevented by a variety of measures the Navy has taken, including increased protection for its intelligence ships, more potent weapons and "fail-safe" destruction devices.

Rear Adm. Leslie J. O'Brien, who has spent all his time on this problem for the past year, said "I would like to think" that the many steps taken so far and under way will assure against a repetition.

Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird has ordered a special Pentagon study of the whole Pueblo matter and O'Brien acknowledged that this could come up with some new wrinkles.

O'Brien, special assistant to the chief of naval operations for Pueblo matters, listed in an interview the "many changes put into effect," some of them shortly after the Pueblo was seized by the North Korean navy on Jan. 23, 1968.

Among others, these included:

-Rapid, fail-safe destruct and scuttling systems.

The two-star admiral said these devices, designed to "selectively" destroy intelligence equipment and materials or to sink the ship, can be set off more rapidly than any equipment previously available and can be triggered by "very few people."

Cmdr. LLOYD M. Bucher, skipper of the Pueblo, has told a Navy court of inquiry in California that his ship had only axes and sledgehammers to destroy the sensitive intelligence-gathering equipment and that the Navy several times had turned down his request for improved gear.

Navy officials have said the Pueblo was so built that it could not be scuttled quickly by flooding her with sea water.

Some of the w.u.s. intelligence ships now afloat could be scuttled in a matter of minutes with the new equipment, O'Brien said.

He did not go into detail, but it was reported that explosives are involved, along with other means.

The Navy will not discuss the number of ships which serve a primary intelligence-gathering mission, but it is known there are about a dozen. All have been re-equipped, and some other actions will also be taken affecting sensitive intelligence-type devices aboard combat ships.

In describing the "fail-safe" features, O'Brien said the destruct devices "cannot be activated accidentally."

Also, he said there are specific plans, known by the crews in advance, as to what the officers and men should do and where they should go to avoid injury or death when explosive or scuttling systems are touched off.

He emphasized that the safety of the crew is a primary consideration.

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O'Brien, who began working on the problem a week after the Pueblo was seized, said there has been a general tightening-up and overhaul of the p

cedures and rules for command and control of such ships, to assure swifter communication with superiors responsible for sending aid, and to give the skippers of such vessels clear guidelines on what to regard as harassment by hostile ships or planes and how to react.

He declined to go into detail on improved "protective measures," but there are indications they involve contingency plans for having naval and air forces in the right places at the right times to come to the help of intelligence ships which may get into trouble. A major point of criticism in Congress and elsewhere was that the Pueblo was left naked when brought under attack by the North Koreans, with no warships or warplanes close enough to help.

Sources implied that the degree of protection would vary with the location of the spy ships—those operating fairly close to potentially hostile lands would be given greater backup than those operating farther out to sea.

The new armament provided for the intelligence ships includes rapid-fire weapons with longer

range than the 50 caliber machineguns that represented all of the firepower aboard the Pueblo.

O'Brien, who declined to go into many specifics for security reasons, said the new weapons are "greater than 50 caliber," but would go no further.

Knowledgeable sources indicated the weapons include 20 millimeter cannons.

O'Brien noted that a ship's size and construction dictate to some extent the kind of armament it could carry—thus, he said, you couldn't put a 5-inch or 8-inch gun on a small ship like the Pueblo.

He said some corrective moves were made within hours of the PUEBLO'S CAPTURE.

Again, O'Brien would not amplify, but it has been reported that the Navy quickly changed its secret codes, which it feared were compromised.

"Pueblo-type operations were suspended until the Navy was assured that there would be no repetition of this situation," O'Brien said.

He refused to say how long the suspension was in effect but said it was worldwide.

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