

Warning on Peril to the Pueblo Went Astray, House Unit Says

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WASHINGTON, March 14—The National Security Agency issued a written warning a month before the U.S.S. Pueblo was captured that the danger of its mission had been underestimated and protection for the intelligence ship should be given serious consideration.

But, a House subcommittee reported today, the message never got through to any of the top military authorities to whom it was sent, including the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Chief of Naval Operations and the Commander in Chief of United States Forces in the Pacific.

The investigating committee also reported for the first time officially that the National Security Agency had been responsible for the special intelligence unit aboard the Pueblo and that the Central Intelligence Agency had had nothing to do with the mission.

Even if the military communications system had not failed at the critical moment, the warning was sent, the Pueblo and its crew of 83 might have been seized by the North Koreans on its first intelligence mission anyway.

The admiral who cleared that mission as involving "minimal risk" testified today that he would have taken exactly the same action even if he had received the message from the National Security Agency—



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Rear Adm. Frank L. Johnson

which he did not.

"These messages come through all the time," said Rear Adm. Frank L. Johnson, who was Commander of United States Naval Forces Japan, at the time of the Pueblo incident.

Later, Admiral Johnson said he did not want to give the impression he ignored messages from the National Security Agency, but he said that there was "a constant flow of this type of accusation and threats—reports of possible enemy attacks—passing through his Navy office."

Admiral Johnson testified for

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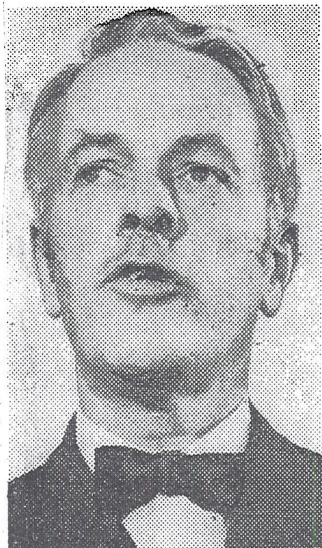
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nearly four hours before the House Armed Forces subcommittee investigating the Pueblo. The subcommittee is headed by Representative Otis G. Pike, Democrat of Suffolk County.

At the opening of the hearing, Representative Pike read a three-page "statement of fact"—conclusions reached by the subcommittee based on a series of closed hearings "on the Pueblo with intelligence officials."

Story of the Warning

This statement included the story of the National Security Agency warning and how it went astray, plus two more ultimate ironic facts: The director of the agency never saw the message, which had been sent over his signature by a staff member, until after the Pueblo was captured; and the agency, according to the Pike subcommittee, "had neither the responsibility nor the author-



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Representative Otis G. Pike at news conference. Suffolk County Democrat heads subcommittee on Pueblo.

ity" to send the message, in the first place.

The Pike committee also

said its inquiry had established the following:

¶The Central Intelligence Agency did not propose the Pueblo mission, staff it or play any part in its formulation. The special intelligence unit aboard the Pueblo was under the supervision of the National Security Agency, which deals basically with electronic surveillance and cryptographic work.

¶The amount of review that the Joint Chiefs of Staff give any one of the large number of intelligence missions, such as the Pueblo's, is "necessarily cursory and perfunctory."

¶"There is a great difference of opinion at high intelligence levels as to whether or not the loss of the Pueblo was very serious in terms of our national security and national intelligence effort.

"There was, and remains, a great deal of confusion at high Navy levels as to the rating of missions in terms of risk."