

Military Chastised On Spy Missions

Washington

United States military command networks are too "lethargic" to respond quickly in emergency situations such as the loss of the USS Pueblo and an EC-121 spy plane off North Korea, a House armed services subcommittee charged yesterday.

Moreover, the special subcommittee on the Pueblo said, the U.S. undertakes far too many reconnaissance missions for the information gathered.

"I think we can gather 90 per cent of the intelligence we're gathering with about 20 per cent of the missions," Chairman Otis G. Pike (Dem.-N.Y.) told a press conference.

HEARINGS

Pike's nine-man subcommittee held extensive open and secret hearings last March and April on the Pueblo incident and the loss of the Navy's EC-121 reconnaissance plane.

The Pueblo was seized by North Korea on January 23, 1968. The following December, 82 surviving crew members were released from Korean prisons. One crewman, wounded in the seizure, died in captivity.

Last April 14, the EC-121 was shot down 50 miles off North Korea. None of the 31 men aboard was found alive.

In its unanimous report, the House subcommittee accused the Pentagon of:

+ Failure to properly assess the nature of reconnaissance missions—hundreds of which are authorized each month—both as to risk and as to need.

- Failure to provide contingency plans for coming to the timely aid of imperiled vessels or planes.

- Failure to receive, transmit and properly assess the importance of messages from reconnaissance vehicles.

- Failure to provide area commanders with accurate and detailed definitions of the conditions under which they have authority to react in emergencies.

- Failure to define the operating channels for reconnaissance missions—who is in higher command at what times and under what circumstances. At other times, this responsibility was assigned to unsuitable higher commands, those not directly involved.

CONCLUSION

"The reluctant but inescapable conclusion finally reached by the subcommittee," the report said, "is that because of the vastness of the military structure, with its complex division into multiple layers of command, and the failure of responsible authorities at the seat of command to either delegate responsibility or in the alternative provide clear and unequivocal guidelines governing policy in emergency situations, our military command structure is now simply unable to meet the emergency criterion outlined and suggested by the President himself."

The report's reference to a presidential suggestion was to a recent statement by President Nixon that, "when a war can be decided in 20 minutes, the nation that is behind will have no time to catch up."

As to how we would assess blame at various command levels for failures cited in the report, Pike declared:

VOTERS

"I think there is enough blame in the Pueblo situation and in the situation of the EC-121 that every citizen of the United States can pick up a little piece of it."

Pike said he did not except

been ordered in an attempt to insure better availability of combat support forces for reconnaissance vessels and to insure that commanders at all levels understood what they could do in emergencies and what the emergency plans are.

CODE

In a concluding section of the report, the subcommittee recommended the Defense Department re-examine the code of conduct for prisoners of war to define when and how it applies to men captured by hostile nations without formal war being declared.

Pike noted that two top Navy legal officers had differed over whether the code of conduct applied to the Pueblo crewmen and that one, in the course of the hearings, changed his mind on whether it applied.

If these experts could not decide, the report asked, "it is certainly impossible to expect that 82 lonely, untrained, and abandoned men suffering imprisonment and torture by the North Koreans could come up with any clear and proper adherence to it."

Then the report added that on the basis of evidence provided the subcommittee, the group "is unaware of any member of the crew of the Pueblo who did not in some degree violate the code of conduct. Therefore, the criticality of the question of applicability of the code needs no further elaboration."

Areas in which the code might be re-examined, the group suggested, include whether it applies in undeclared war and whether it applies when prisoners are not held under conditions required by the internationally observed Geneva Conventions on treatment of war prisoners.

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Congress or the voters who elect its members.

Pike said he saw "nothing whatsoever to prevent another Pueblo or another EC-121 incident so long as (they) . . . are sent out on this kind of mission."

He said he thought the Pueblo incident resulted in loss of "a very great deal both in technological know-how and in their (Communist) awareness of our technological know-how."

The full committee report said, however, that loss of secret equipment was not as serious as compromise of the secret papers aboard the ship.

Representative William G. Bray (Rep.-Ind.), ranking Republican on the subcommittee, criticized the failure of Commander Lloyd M. Bucher, captain of the Pueblo, to defend his ship against North Korean vessels.

PASSIVENESS

But, Bray said, the fact that Bucher was given no orders to fight during lengthy radio transmissions showed "the action he took was tacitly approved by higher headquarters . . . the same passiveness existed not only with Bucher but with his superiors."

Coincidentally, Secretary Melvin R. Laird reported to Representative L. Mendel Rivers (Dem-S.C.) on steps taken by the Pentagon to avoid such incidents in the future. Rivers is chairman of the full House Armed Services Committee.

Laird said measures have