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House Panel Accuses Military of Serious Defects

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WASHINGTON, July 28—A House subcommittee charged today that the North Koreans' capture of the intelligence ship Pueblo and their shooting down of an EC-121 reconnaissance plane showed that the United States' ability to react to national emergencies was imperiled by "serious deficiencies" in the military command structure.

In a sharply worded 77-page report, the nine-man subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee asserted that the American military command structure was so cumbersome and the responsibility sometimes so unclear that it "is now simply unable" to respond swiftly enough to crises.

Representative Otis G. Pike of Suffolk County, the subcommittee chairman, told a news conference this would affect the President's ability to deal with a nuclear war. Mr. Pike, asked if there would be enough opportunity for the President to get enough information and react, replied, "My answer would be a flat no."

Time Lag Feared

"We have never demonstrated any capability to get a message from the scene of a crisis to the President and get a message back from him on what to do about it in the time frame necessary to act," Mr. Pike said.

The subcommittee report, equally sweeping and critical, charged that the "absent or sluggish response by military commanders to the Pueblo incident and North Korea's downing of an American EC-121 intelligence plane last April demonstrated the need for "a complete review of our military-civilian command structure and its capability to cope with emergency situations."

The subcommittee proposed a blue ribbon panel of civilian and military experts, Representative Pike said that he hoped the panel already appointed by Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird to investigate over-all Pentagon operations would "look hard" into this question.

The subcommittee, which held public and secret hearings last March and April, put much of the blame for the Pueblo seizure Jan. 23, 1968, on the defense establishment, from the American naval commander in Japan to the defense intelligence agency in Washington. It indirectly chided the Joint



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Representative Otis G. Pike

Chiefs of Staff and their aides.

The report, approved unanimously by the subcommittee, found fault with the Navy and Defense Departments for inadequately assessing the risk of the Pueblo mission off the North Korean coast, for not preparing adequate contingency plans in the event of emergency and for "unacceptably long delays" in relaying the Pueblo's distress messages to higher echelons.

Commander Criticized

The report was critical of Read Adm. Frank L. Johnson, former commander of American Naval forces in Japan, having called for the risk of the Pueblo mission "minimal" but said that the ultimate responsibility for this critical evaluation rested with the Defense Intelligence Agency headed by Lieut. Gen. Joseph F. Carroll.

The report also noted that a warning on Dec. 27 from the National Security Agency urging a consideration of protective measures for the Pueblo was rejected by the staff of Adm. Ulysses S. Grant Sharp, former commander in chief of American forces in the Pacific, and overlooked by D. I. A. during the Christmas holiday weekend.

The committee members also took issue with the Navy Department and former Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara by contending that menacing broadcasts from North Korea, cited by the N.S.A. message, had constituted a "valid warning" to the United States about the risks of the Pueblo mission.

The Congressional investigators also disputed official contentions that there had been contingency plans if the Pueblo ran into an emergency.

"No one on the staff of [Admiral Johnson] had the faintest idea of what forces might be made available to them in an emergency, and what appears to be more disturbing is the apparent total absence of any prior concern over this possibility," the report said.

Bucher Not Evaluated

The subcommittee made no attempt to evaluate the responsibility of the Pueblo's skipper, Lieut. Comdr. Lloyd M. Bucher. Mr. Pike said its concern had been with higher echelons because Commander Bucher was facing a Navy Court of Inquiry at the time of its hearings.

But with North Korea's treatment of Commander Bucher and his crew obviously in mind, the subcommittee urged a "revision and clarification" of the military Code of Conduct that required captured servicemen to give only information about their identity.

Where the captives are not being protected by the 1949 Geneva conventions on the treatment of war prisoners—which was the case of the Pueblo crew—the subcommittee

suggested that "the Code of Conduct should provide some latitude."

Mr. Laird's response to the report was an announcement that the Pentagon had already taken steps to "correct a number of deficiencies in the area of military intelligence."

In a letter to Representative L. Mendel Rivers, the South Carolina Democrat who heads the Armed Services Committee, Mr. Laird said the Defense Department had done the following:

¶Initiated a study in depth of world-wide reconnaissance missions to determine the degree of risk, value, cost, means of protection and other matters.

¶Made arrangements for escorts and contingency support forces for patrols entering sensitive areas and set up survival, evasion, resistance and escape training for crew members sent on such hazardous missions.

¶Reduced the number of such personnel to the minimum.

The letter also said that the Pentagon had given the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Administration new responsibilities "to improve the over-all coordination and effectiveness of Defense Department Intelligence activities."