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By ial, NARA, Date 7-22-05

PUEBLO COMMITTEE REPORT TO PRESIDENT

The Committee, consisting of General Mark Clark, U.S.A. (Ret.), General Laurence Kuter, U.S.A.F. (Ret.), Admiral David McDonald, U.S.N. (Ret.), and Mr. George W. Ball, who served as Chairman, has at your request given intensive consideration to the facts and circumstances of the PUEBLO incident with regard to (a) the necessity of the PUEBLO mission and missions of similar kind; (b) the design of the mission; and (c) the operation of the mission.

In the preparation of its report, the Committee has had the benefit of the full cooperation of the Services and Departments concerned. It has held extensive discussions with officers and officials who participated in the design and operation of the mission as well as other experts. The Committee's main objective has been to derive lessons from this incident that might result in more secure and effective intelligence gathering operations in the future. It has not attempted to fix responsibility or assess blame, if any, for the capture of the PUEBLO.

NSF Intelligence File
"Pueblo (Jan. 1968)" Box 11, Doc #2
MDA return

In view of the limited time available and the fact that the collection and analysis of information regarding the incident have not been finally completed, the Committee's conclusions should not be regarded as more than tentative, subject to further study and refinement by competent authorities.

As a part of its task the Committee has, in Annex A, undertaken to reconstruct the PUEBLO incident from all evidence now available. It is to be noted that this reconstruction differs in some significant

respects from earlier reconstructions, including those given orally to Congressional committees. This results from the fact that the Committee had before it information not available at an earlier date.

The evidence gathered, both from reports of the ship and [redacted] is fully conclusive that the PUEBLO was not in North Korean waters at the time of the incident. Nor is there any evidence that it was ever in North Korean waters at any earlier time, except the so-called "confessions". These are mutually contradictory on this point. Moreover, they disclose their fraudulence by asserting that the PUEBLO was in territorial waters when captured, which is in clear contradiction of hard evidence to the contrary, including the intercepted position given by the North Koreans.

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The circumstances of the mission reinforce the conclusion that the ship never did intrude in North Korean waters. The captain's sailing orders contained unequivocal instructions that he was to remain at least one mile outside of the 12-mile territorial sea claimed by North Korea. Moreover, the very fact that the North Koreans have failed to put forward any evidence other than these contrived "confessions" indicates that the PUEBLO consistently kept out of the 12-mile limit.

NECESSITY OF PUEBLO MISSION AND NEED FOR INTELLIGENCE GATHERING BY SURFACE VESSELS

The Committee has not felt that it was competent to make an informed assessment of the need for the specific intelligence that the PUEBLO was deployed to collect. This mission requirement was initiated by CINCPAC Fleet. It was approved by all of the relevant departments and agencies through the established machinery of our government against a background of increased bellicosity on the part

of Pyongyang and only after it was determined that other more sophisticated means would be too risky. This Committee has, however, become convinced from the statements of officers and officials who have appeared before it that the intelligence sought was of substantial value,

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at a time of mounting incidents
on the DMZ and intensive infiltration of South Korea.

Consideration of a mission of this kind necessarily involves delicate questions of judgment, since a balance must be struck between the need for, and usefulness of, the intelligence, and the risk involved in obtaining it. This risk is not only to the lives of the crew, but also to the compromise of our intelligence system and methods through the capture of equipment, documents and highly experienced personnel, the damage to American prestige and authority, and the possibility of armed conflict that may result. While it is easy to be wise after the fact, the Committee believes that, on the basis of prior experience and generally accepted views with regard to probable North Korean conduct, the responsible officials had at the time a valid basis for approving the mission.

Warning

We have discussed with representatives of intelligence agencies whether in retrospect there were indicators that might have given warning of the imminent seizure of the PUEBLO. We do not find this to be the case. No protests were ever made against [redacted] missions [redacted] [redacted] by the BANNER, which transited or in one case loitered briefly

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in international waters off North Korea. North Korean warnings about "spy vessels", expressed in broadcasts during the week when the PUEBLO was on station and at the January 20 MAC meeting, were in form and content simply the latest reiteration of familiar North Korean charges that hundreds of "fishing boats and armed espionage boats" were intruding in North Korean waters.

It is not clear when or by whom the decision to capture the PUEBLO was taken. The decision may well have come on the spur of the moment.

Both NSA and State did call attention to heightened North Korean sensitivities to peripheral activities, but merely as a consideration in determining the need for ship protection and a gradual approach to North Korean coastal waters, rather than questioning the mission.

Possible Alternatives

The Committee has examined alternative means by which intelligence of this kind might be obtained and has concluded that available alternatives to the use of surface ships for purposes of obtaining this kind of intelligence would either offer substantially greater risks or be less effective.



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Although an insistence on the continued use of intelligence collection vessels such as the PUEBLO necessarily implies the continued tolerance of parallel efforts by the Soviet Union directed against the United States, The Committee is nevertheless clear that it is important to continue to exercise our rights on the high seas, including the collection of intelligence by surface vessels operating outside the territorial waters of potentially unfriendly states.

Not only is it necessary for us to know as much as possible about the intentions and capabilities of potentially hostile states in order to protect our own security, but in the contest between open and closed societies the open societies have even more to gain by effective intelligence, since so much of their own activities are exposed to the whole world. In addition, the Committee believes it desirable to the maintenance of world stability that there be a gradual erosion of secrecy in order to produce greater mutual understanding between nations as to what each is doing and thus, by dispelling suspicion, create a condition of greater mutual confidence.

DESIGN OF MISSION

The program of intelligence collecting by the use of vessels of the AGER class is fairly recent.

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In view of the Soviet employment of trawlers for intelligence collection, however, it was proposed in the Defense Department that the United States adopt a parallel practice of using small unarmed surface vessels for this purpose. This, it was decided, would be far cheaper, and would be less provocative.

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It was assumed on the principle of mutual tolerance that, so long as we paralleled the Soviet practice, our vessels would remain relatively free from danger when operating outside of territorial waters.

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To this end 3 vessels fo the AGER class were built by the conversion of AKLs

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In addition other ships of the AGTR class have been employed for missions of a related type.

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There is nothing in our experience so far to question the design of these missions

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In retrospect, however, it is clear that missions for use against other

areas where the principle of mutual tolerance is not applicable must be carefully tailored in the light of the particular situations then prevailing. On the evidence before it, the Committee is convinced that, in principle, AGER class vessels should not be used near North Korean territorial waters without protection. It also feels that there may be other areas in the world where similar precautions should be taken in the light of then prevailing conditions. This is particularly true as a result of the PUEBLO incident since certain other countries may very likely be encouraged to attempt the same kind of attack by the success which the North Koreans achieved in their piratical act.



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Classification of Areas

In the case of the PUEBLO a central factor in explaining why the protective forces were not more alert is that the mission was classified as one of "minimal risk". The thinking which resulted in this classification was apparently influenced by two circumstances.

One was the fact that, while missions of this kind in other sensitive areas had in the past been subject to a great deal of harassment, never before had an intelligence vessel operating in international waters actually been seized.

The second was the belief--reinforced by the absence of prior incidents of this kind--that all nations would respect "freedom of the seas" and would thus not violate the integrity of a naval vessel

outside of territorial waters. The incident of the PUEBLO requires us to re-examine this assumption. It is the Committee's view that while we must insist on protecting the principle of freedom of the seas we can no longer safely assume that all other nations will respect such freedom. This is particularly true when the vessel in question is engaged in intelligence collection [redacted]

[redacted] since such activity is bound to be regarded by closed societies as a hostile act vaguely threatening their security. The Committee is not suggesting for a moment that this activity is in any way equivalent to an "armed attack" such as would justify military action against the vessel under Article 51 of the United Nations Charter. But we can assume that it is likely to be regarded in many areas as definitely provocative.

The Committee believes, therefore, that the existing classifications of [redacted] areas should be carefully re-examined insofar as they may govern the design on operation of missions of this kind. And it recommends also that whenever a PUEBLO-type mission in undertaken [redacted] the prevailing circumstances be carefully considered in specific terms and adequate protective measures be laid on in the light of that examination.

Protective Measures

The Committee has given careful consideration of the protective measures that would be most appropriate and effective. In principle,

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military support should be designed to deter attack rather than merely to reply to an attack once undertaken. This means that such measures must be visible, so that the aggressive state will have to take them into account.

The Committee believes reliance merely on the alerting of air forces in the vicinity would lack the advantages of a deterrent while possibly leading to air combat under conditions disadvantageous to the American forces, e. g., within enemy radar control or GCI, and that the maintenance of an aircap over the intelligence collecting vessel would in most cases be unnecessarily expensive and could lead to inadvertent air space violations. However, there should be contingency planning for air support when needed and this can be given additional deterrent value by occasional air surveillance.

The Committee concludes, therefore, that protection could in most cases be provided most practicably by a combatant surface escort which might stay a few miles farther off the coast than the intelligence vessel. While this would increase the cost of missions of this kind, it would probably be better than employing combatant surface vessels for intelligence collection, since that would require an expensive configuration of these vessels and thus impair the flexibility of their deployment for other purposes.

While the Committee is not prepared to make specific recommendations regarding the armament of the AGER, it does believe that the present design, armament and equipment should be carefully re-examined in the light of the PUEBLO experience. Steps should also be taken to provide adequate destruction devices not merely for the electronic

gear but for operating manuals and other classified documents. The Committee is informed that NSA, in coordination with the Navy, is urgently studying measures to this end and we recommend that their studies be given full support.

In staffing missions of this sensitive character, the risk of capture of personnel who are familiar with particularly sensitive operations should be taken into account. Since, in this instance, for example, [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] his capture exposes

this type of activity to the risk of involuntary disclosure. In the future, planning of [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] should reflect the possibility that those countries may have been alerted to the prospect of such missions and be prepared to take counter-action.

OPERATION OF MISSION

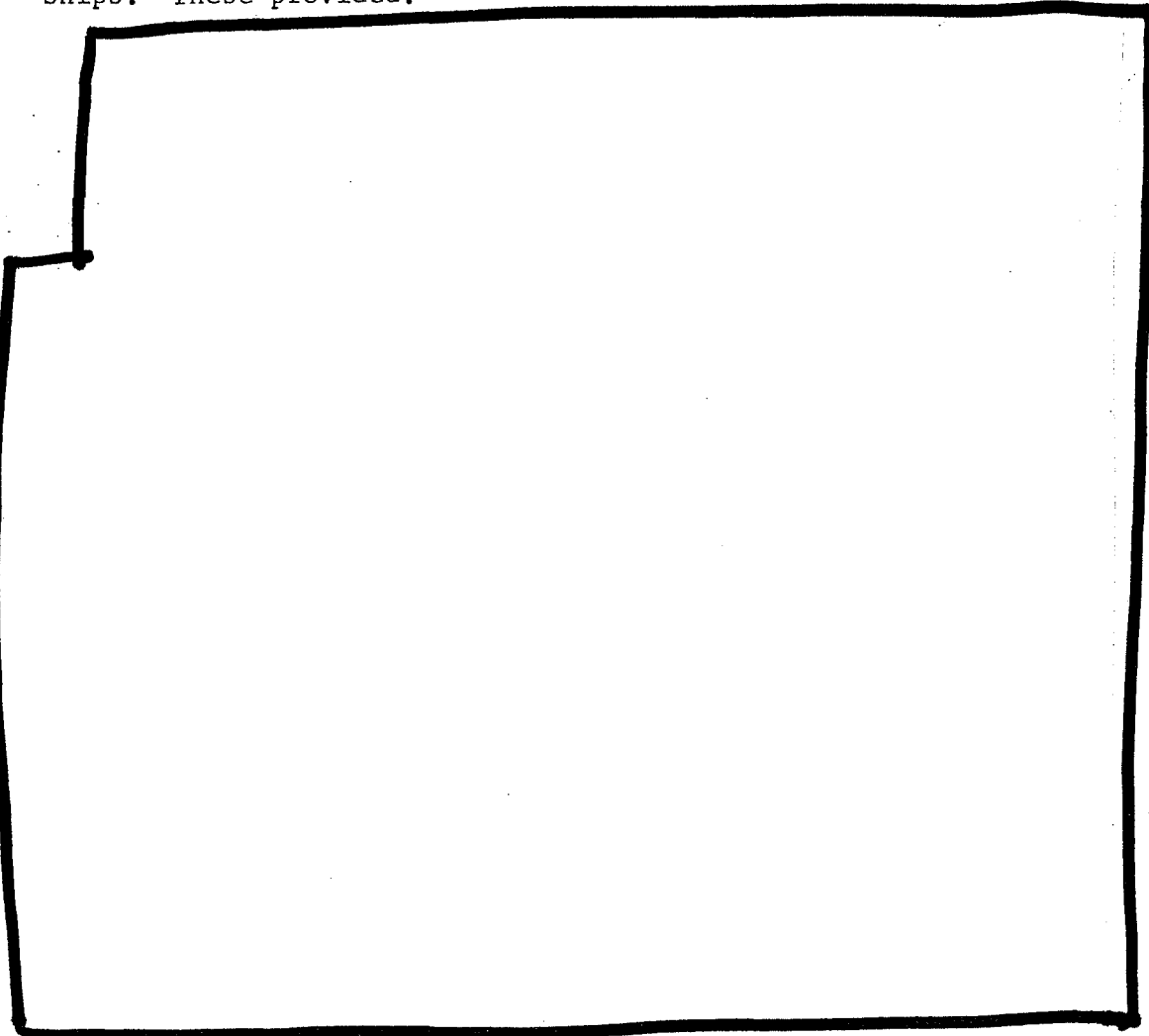
A study of the PUEBLO incident discloses a number of operational matters that should be given fresh attention. These relate not only to the actual running of the vessel but to the command arrangements and response when the vessel was attacked.

Need for Clear Instructions

The instructions given the captain of the PUEBLO reflected an effort to balance political risks, the captain's need to accomplish his mission, and his responsibility for protecting his

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vessel and the men. In the process the instructions became at certain points ambiguous and self-contradictory. It was not clear whether the ship was to act like a U. S. naval ship on a military mission or as an unarmed U. S. naval vessel engaged in hydrographic research.

Special CINCPACT Fleet instructions were given covering the subject of "harassing or embarrassing" tactics by Soviet/Satellite ships. These provided:



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On the other hand, the instruction refers to standing regulations

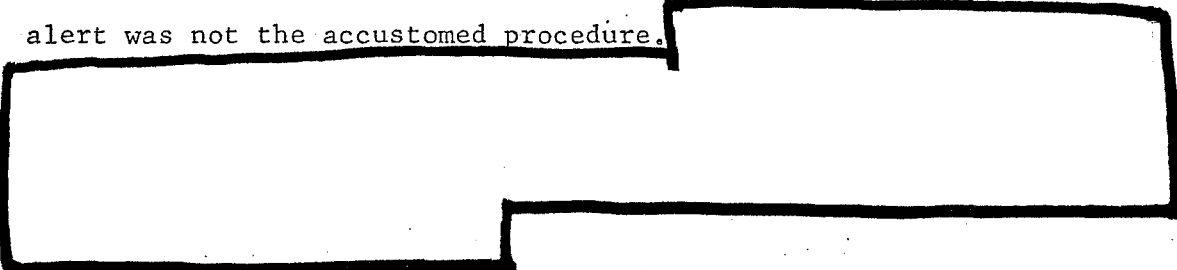
which provide that the commanding officer shall not permit his command to be searched by any person representing a foreign state nor permit any of the personnel under his command to be removed from the command by such person, "so long as he has the power to resist."

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The Committee believes that under these regulations it would be difficult for a commanding officer to determine when to terminate an ambiguous harassment and to employ force for self-preservation.
In most instances a commander literally following the regulations would be deterred from using force until it was too late to use it effectively.

Reaction of Support Forces

It is not the purpose of this Committee to make an assessment of the contingency planning procedures in effect and the performance of individual responsible persons within the various Commands which might have been able to support the mission of the PUEBLO.

The assessment of the risk as minimal in connection with the PUEBLO mission no doubt contributed to the absence of a request to the Fifth Air Force for an alert state of readiness. Such an alert was not the accustomed procedure.



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The Committee considers that a review should be undertaken of measures to assure availability of necessary support to protect

a surface intelligence gathering mission. These measures should include an evaluation on a mission-by-mission basis of the necessity for an alert state of readiness and for other contingency planning to establish procedures for reaction, if necessary.

Communications channels and procedures to assure rapid receipt of messages by responsible command echelons up to the highest levels should be assured.

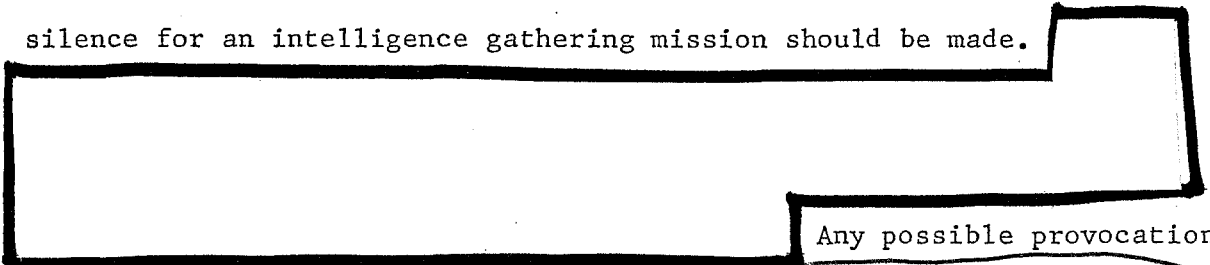
Radio Silence

Radio silence is customarily observed where possible in connection with the movement of naval units to avoid not only hostile action in wartime but surveillance in peacetime or wartime.

X In the case of the PUEBLO silence was observed for the additional reason of avoiding provocation, although the experts with whom the Committee held discussions believed that the North Korean authorities had the capability to detect the movement of the PUEBLO almost from the time it approached their waters, and perhaps to ascertain the nature of her mission.

PUEBLO instructions were to maintain radio silence until she made a significant contact which did not occur until January 22. Her message at that time gave, in addition to her then position, the position where she had been on January 20.

The Committee believes that to the extent continued reliance is placed upon the peaceful nature of the mission and the vessel's freedom to move about in international waters, a re-evaluation of radio silence for an intelligence gathering mission should be made.



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Any possible provocation

might be minimized by the use of instantaneous message transmissions.

The Overt or Covert Character of the Vessel

The PUEBLO-type missions have been designed in the hope that the surface ship may complete all or part its mission if possible without the state under surveillance becoming aware of the presence

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[REDACTED]

As a result of the PUEBLO incident and the surrounding publicity, it is probable that potentially hostile nations will in the future be more on the alert and that such missions are not likely to proceed for any length of time without detection.

Our inquiries have led us to conclude that intelligence collection missions of the PUEBLO type will not be seriously prejudiced by the disclosure of their character and intentions, provided they remain in an area of operations for an extended period of time. The information given the Committee on this point makes clear that, even though a state under surveillance may be aware of the presence [REDACTED]

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it cannot afford for more than a few days to shut down its radio and communications to evade intercept. The experience of the BANNER, a sister ship of the PUEBLO in [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] Moreover,

while the United States is fully aware of the presence of the AGI Soviet "trawlers", the Soviets clearly consider their continued collection activities worthwhile.

In view of these circumstances the Committee feels that it would be a mistake to place great emphasis on the maintenance of the covert character of such missions at the expense of adequate protection of the crew, the vessel, and the intelligence procedures employed.

In fact, in many areas of the world it might well be preferable to subordinate efforts to conceal the mission and its character to the larger consideration of an effectively protected intelligence-gathering operation.

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In the view of the Committee the problem posed by a mission of the PUEBLO type should be considered more in terms of its provocative character than the need to conceal its presence on purpose. The Committee believes, however, that even the problem of provocation can be overemphasized so long as the ship obeys customary international law.