

February 23, 2001

The KW-7 and John Walker

A lot has been written about the cryptographic equipment that was aboard Pueblo and its final disposition after our capture. During the emergency destruction, circuit boards from the main cryptographic communications equipment were destroyed and the current month's key-lists were burned. The CTs were trained to destroy these circuit boards for the newer KW-37 systems thereby, they were told, rendering the equipment useless to an enemy. They were also trained to burn the IBM punch card type key-lists so the equipment using that method of encoding was made equally useless.

Much has been made of the John Walker spy ring and their passing US Navy crypto key-lists to the Soviet Union. From all accounts John Walker's espionage began in mid 1967. It has been construed by many conspiracy theorists that the Soviet Union, having come into this treasure trove from Walker, now needed a decoding machine in which to insert the key-cards. There was one machine aboard Pueblo which would appear to fit the bill because it used key-lists for encryption/decryption. That was the KW-7, Orestes system.

If the Soviets could get the North Koreans to capture a US intelligence vessel they would get the needed KW-7. To a lot of people this simple premise explains why the USS Pueblo was captured. Unfortunately it doesn't fit the facts. It ignores the numerous threats and warnings the North Koreans made in their press, both print and radio, and in direct statements made across the negotiation table at Panmunjom. These pronouncements were made well in advance of our mission and prior to their January 1968 attack on Pueblo. The North Koreans stated they would retaliate against the US imperialist aggressor forces for sending armed spy ships into their territorial waters on numerous occasions. The warnings were known to both the US military and the US intelligence communities but were never passed on to my officers or me. Their tirades were simply looked upon as more saber rattling by the communist North Koreans. Or, they were sloughed off as references to the South Korean forces who the North Koreans consider stooges of the US imperialists. Even though reference was made to a mission by the USS Banner AGER-1 off the west coast of North Korea, the Navy and the intelligence services did not consider Pueblo's upcoming voyage to the east coast in the same context.

The theory about Soviet involvement also ignores some other facts that were well known to the US intelligence community at the time. The KW-7 was the most widely used code machine in the free world. It was developed by NSA for use in portable-tactical environs and was designed as a mobile crypto unit versus the other heavy cumbersome US machines in use. Because the KW-7 used key-lists it was considered expendable as long as the monthly key-list cards themselves were not compromised. The KW-7 was designated the prime coding machine for tactical use by NATO and SEATO countries. As such it was in use in embassies, consulates and armed forces of many free world nations. Thousands of these machines were in use by January 1968. It was used extensively in the field, at the battalion level and up, by ARVN forces in the Republic of Vietnam. It was also used extensively by the Armed Forces of the German Federal

Republic. The West German Intelligence Service, their Foreign Ministry and other governmental organizations also used the KW-7.

KW-7 cryptographic machines were most certainly lost prior to the unit that was aboard Pueblo. North Vietnamese forces captured intact machines on the battlefields in South Vietnam. As part of a quid-pro-quo for arms and supplies it is assumed intelligence materials most certainly made their way to the Soviet Union. This has never been confirmed by the present Russian government. Markus Wolf, chief of the foreign intelligence service of the Ministry of State Security of the German Democratic Republic, reported in his book *Man without a Face*, that the Federal Republic's Intelligence and Foreign services were thoroughly infiltrated by East German spies. It must be assumed that they obtained at least one copy of the widely disseminated but classified maintenance manual for the KW-7. The East Germans were world renowned for their machine tool expertise. Is it conceivable that the East Germans did at least attempt to build their own version of the KW-7. The one thing that the Soviets or the East Germans did not obtain was the key-lists. They may have possessed a few key-cards at various times but John Walker provided the constant flow that was needed to make penetration of US Naval communications by the Soviets such a continuing success.

It has been inferred that the key-lists turned over to the Soviets by Walker enabled them to read Navy communications in real time. That is false. The key-lists turned over by Walker were outdated key-lists that were supposed to have been destroyed by burning. NSA issued a month's supply of key-cards to each command in the US military. As a classified materials officer, Walker was directly responsible for receiving the cards and for the destruction of the previous month's set. The flaw in the system was the assumption that the outdated key-cards had been destroyed. Walker certified he had destroyed the cards, when in actuality he simply took them and gave them to the Soviets. No one verified that Walker had indeed destroyed the previous month's cards. Once the Soviets established a continuing supply of key-lists they could begin recording all the US Navy radio circuits that were likely to contain information which might be of interest. When the key-cards were received from Walker they were about 2 months old. The Soviets would then have to play the recording they had made 2 months before for a certain date and certain radio circuit into the KW-7 outfitted with the appropriately dated card. If all was timed correctly – out would come plain text US Navy communications. At the time there were thousands of daily Navy transmissions on hundreds of different frequencies or circuits.

Additional item that should be addressed re the Soviets

The Russians didn't move their AGIs

One day after Pueblo was attacked by North Korean forces the Soviet Navy was forced to issue emergency orders to their AGI fleet to move away from the covering positions they occupied near US Navy units. If the Soviets had planned the capture of Pueblo in order to obtain a KW-7 wouldn't they be smart enough to move their own ships out of a potential compromise.