

13 February 1967

THE POLARIS SUBMARINE

The USS WILL ROGERS is the last of 41 Polaris submarines authorized by Congress. The occasion seems appropriate for a brief summary of the purpose of the Polaris program.

It was just a dozen years ago that the world's first nuclear-powered submarine, the USS NAUTILUS, put to sea (17 January 1955). That same year the Navy began developing a ballistic missile for launching from a nuclear submarine. The first such missile was launched from the USS GEORGE WASHINGTON, 20 July 1960.

It is the combination of nuclear propulsion with long-range atomic missiles that makes Polaris submarines virtually invulnerable and highly lethal weapon systems. Nuclear propulsion enables these ships to travel enormous distances beneath the surface of the ocean and remain submerged for months at a time. They are completely self-sustaining. They make their own air and water. Their crews maintain and repair all equipment on board.

Senator Clinton P. Anderson of the Joint Congressional Committee on Atomic Energy, commenting on the effectiveness of the Polaris submarine, said: "...the nuclear propelled ballistic missile submarine marks the closest approach now foreseeable to an ultimate deterrent."

President John F. Kennedy, after observing a successful launch of a Polaris missile from the USS ANDREW JACKSON in November 1963, said: "Once one has seen a Polaris firing, the efficacy of this weapons system as a deterrent is not debatable."

And President Johnson, in his special message on national defense, 18 January 1965, announced that the administration proposed to develop a new missile system--Poseidon--to increase the striking power of our missile carrying submarines.

The advantage to the United States is obvious. Any would-be aggressor is aware that we possess 41 Polaris submarines, whose location he does not know, each equipped with 16 missiles having destructive power greater than that of all explosives used in World War II. For him to attack the U.S. proper, unless he had previously destroyed our Polaris fleet, would be futile.


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