

Pentagon Sends Missile Battalion to Pacific To Bolster U.S. Forces

Group, Believed Going to Formosa, Would Give U.S. Greater Air Defense Responsibility

By G WALL STREET JOURNAL Staff Reporter

WASHINGTON — Dispatch of a Nike-Hercules missile battalion to the Pacific—the latest step in the U.S. military buildup around Formosa—was described by Pentagon officials as a measure to help protect U.S. forces already in the area.

A Defense Department source close to the operation in the Far East indicated the anti-aircraft missile group would give the U.S. greater responsibility for air defense of the troubled Far Eastern area. He said this was a natural move to protect other U.S. men and materiel in the Pacific trouble zone. He said it would also free Chinese Nationalists assigned to air defense for other duties involving greater risk of direct conflict with the Communists.

"U.S. troops would fire on Communists only if they were attacked," the Pentagon source added. He insisted sending of the missile group into the area did not represent a basic shift of military policy. Instead, he said, it was merely another step in carrying out the Presidents' policies.

The Defense department officially reported yesterday that the Nike-Hercules battalion was being assigned for service in the "Pacific area." It was believed the missile group, containing between 700 and 800 men, would soon be on its way to Formosa. Pentagon officials flatly refused to confirm or deny the battalion's destination. A similar missiles group, using an earlier version missile called Nike-Ajax, is based on Okinawa.

The latest battalion to be assigned to the Pacific is believed to contain 48 launchers for the anti-aircraft weapon that uses either nuclear or conventional warheads. Defense officials noted that use of nuclear warheads would require a specific order from the President. They declined to say whether such an order has been issued.

Recent tests of Nike-Hercules missiles showed they can go into action "within hours after arrival" at their battle destination, an Army spokesman said. Tests of the missile's mobility proved that Hercules equipment can be airlifted easily and quickly, the official added.

The Pentagon continued to maintain silence about other details of the American buildup in the Pacific. However, officials indicated reports from the scene about the arrival of more aircraft are probably correct. It is believed an air strike force with nuclear capability has just arrived on Formosa. Such a force includes F-100 Super Sabre jets, RB66 destroyers, RF101 Voodoo reconnaissance planes, C130 Hercules turboprop cargo planes and KB550J tankers.