

Issue Date: **May 17, 1967**

U.S.-Soviet Naval Incident: U.S. Ship Bumped Twice

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The U.S. destroyer Walker was scraped twice by 2 Soviet destroyers in the Sea of Japan May 10 and 11. U.S. protest notes accused the USSR of harassment. Soviet counter-protests charged that the naval maneuvers were too close to the Soviet coast. [See 1966 [World News: U.S. Ships in Black Sea](#)]

The near-collisions of the U.S. and Soviet ships occurred during joint U.S.-Japanese anti-submarine maneuvers. 4 U.S. warships and at least 5 Japanese destroyers participated in the exercises (which had started May 4 and ended May 12).

According to the U.S. Defense Department's version of the first episode May 10, the Soviet destroyer, identified as the Besslednyi (Traceless), scraped the Walker as it attempted to overtake and pass the American vessel. Both ships were slightly damaged. The incident occurred about 375 miles east of the Soviet port of Vladivostok. The department said that about 1 1/2 hours previously the Soviet destroyer had been "operating in close proximity" to the naval task force, "apparently for the purpose of observing the U.S. training maneuvers."

(Later May 10 the department disclosed for the first time the collision of a U.S. Navy research vessel, the Banner, with a Soviet trawler June 24, 1966 in the Sea of Japan. The **Russian** vessel, the Anemometer, was described as an intelligence-gathering ship. The Banner was slightly damaged.)

The U.S. protest, filed with Soviet Charge d'Affaires Yuri N. Chernyakov in Washington, charged that the Soviet destroyer had engaged in a "dangerous performance" in violation of the international rules of the road. (The rules provided that a ship overtaking another one "shall keep out of the way of the overtaken vessel.")

The Walker was side-swiped a 2d time May 11 when another Soviet destroyer "turned into and toward" the American warship, according to the Defense Department. The ships "brushed together," and the Walker received a small hole in the bow above the waterline.

The State Department said that a note delivered to Charge d'Affaires Chernyakov had "protested the harassment of U.S. naval vessels...which result in dangerous situations" and had "asked the Soviet government to take prompt steps to halt such harassments." Chernyakov was said to have replied that the USSR had no intentions "to harass deliberately" the U.S. ships.

A Soviet note delivered May 11 to U.S. Ambassador-to-USSR Llewellyn E. Thompson charged that the U.S. task force had engaged in "provocative maneuvers." A 2d Soviet note May 13 charged that conducting the U.S.-Japanese exercises "close to the Soviet shores cannot be regarded as anything else but a premeditated organized provocative military demonstration." Moscow said both Soviet destroyers were damaged in the 2 incidents.

After receiving the Soviet notes, the U.S. State Department said May 13: "We have made our position clear and consider the incidents closed."

A department statement May 12 had said the U.S. had "no evidence that these incidents reflect any deliberate intention to worsen U.S.-Soviet relations or that they are in any way related to the situation in Vietnam."

The Japanese Defense Agency reported May 14 that during the May 11 incident Japanese ships had temporarily suspended their anti-submarine maneuvers when a Soviet destroyer and Soviet reconnaissance planes came close to the Japanese vessels, which were operating separately from the U.S. fleet.