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PUEBLO PROBE OPENS MONDAY

Navy to Seek Facts of
Vessel's Loss

By RICHARD E. MEYER

CORONADO, Calif. (AP) —

One of the most exhaustive investigations into the loss of a U.S. ship opens Monday at a court of inquiry into the capture of the USS Pueblo.

It ranks with inquiries into the sinkings of the nuclear submarines Thresher in 1963 and Scorpion in 1968, two of the most important Navy courts in recent history.

But it deals with an incident almost unique in the annals of the Navy. The intelligence ship Pueblo was one of only two Navy vessels captured in peacetime.

The other was the USS Chesapeake, captured by the British on June 22, 1807, during hostilities leading to the War of 1812.

ONE MAN KILLED

The Pueblo was captured Jan. 23, 1968, by North Koreans. One of her men was killed; the other 82 were imprisoned 11 months. They were released for an emotional Christmas Eve reunion with their families in San Diego.

From the court of inquiry, the officers and men could get recommendations for awards—ranging to the Medal of Honor—or severe discipline for misconduct.

Courts of inquiry are called to investigate any major damage to or loss of Navy ships, or in any major loss of Navy lives.

But the commander of the Pacific fleet, Adm. John J. Hyland, has given the Pueblo court what one officer calls "broad latitude" for its inquiry.

"The court is directed," said Hyland, "to inquire into all the facts and circumstances relating to the subject incident, including whether Pueblo did at any time during the period of 10 Jan. 1968 to the time of her seizure proceed within 12 miles of North Korea, and if so whether

such action was in accordance with or in violation of any order issued to the commanding officer by competent authorities.

"The court will also inquire into the circumstances surrounding the actual boarding, the details of that boarding, and the events immediately subsequent to the boarding, and will also inquire into all the facts and circumstances surrounding the subsequent detention of the ship and its officers and crew.

"The court is also directed to inquire into the death and injury to Naval personnel as appropriate to perform the duties of an inquest. . . The court will express its opinion as to the line of duty and misconduct status of any injured personnel and will recommend administrative or disciplinary action as appropriate."

The court has subpoena power to call anyone in the Navy to testify and, technically, it could recommend "administrative or disciplinary action" for any Navy man involved—aboard ship, at Pacific headquarters or in the Pentagon.

Five admirals headed by Vice Adm. Harold G. Bowen Jr., commander of the Pacific Fleet antisubmarine warfare forces, will take testimony in a 111-seat classroom at this Naval Amphibious Base across the bay from San Diego.

They will conduct a hearing, not a trial. Any recommendations for major discipline on grounds military law was broken would go to a court martial.

The court of inquiry will try to come up with definitive answers to these questions:

1. Where was the Pueblo when she was taken?

North Koreans said she intruded into their territorial water five times during 10 days before her capture. When she was taken, they said, she was within the 12 miles they claim offshore.

"I never once, nor did that ship, ever once intrude into the territorial waters of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea," said skipper Lloyd M. Bucher the day he and his men were freed. "The day we were captured we were some 15 to 16 miles from shore." Cmdr. Bucher has repeated the statement several times.