

Aid to Spy Ships Pledged



By Bob Burchette—The Washington Post

Admirals Moorer, left, and McDevitt at Capitol Hill hearing on the Pueblo.

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The Navy's top admiral told Congress yesterday that future Pueblo-like missions will be backed by forces that could go to their rescue at a moment's notice.

Adm. Thomas H. Moorer, Chief of Naval Operations, told a House Armed Services subcommittee no rescue forces had been placed on alert when

the Pueblo sailed to its capture 14 months ago because its listening mission off the North Korean coast was considered a "minimal risk" operation.

Rep. William G. Bray (R-Ind.) asked who had decided there was little risk "when anyone who read the newspapers knew of threats and harassment" by North Korea against the South.

Moorer said the decision

was made by field commanders and approved here by the Joint Chiefs of Staff on which he serves and by the office of the Secretary of Defense, then Robert S. McNamara. A number of similar missions had been carried out without incident, said Moorer. But it is easy to see now that "we goofed," he said.

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PUEBLO, From A1

The Admiral was the opening witness at a series of hearings to be conducted by a special subcommittee headed by Rep. Otis G. Pike (D-N.Y.) set up to determine why the Pueblo was captured. It will also consider its national security implications, whether further administrative or legislative action is needed and whether changes are needed in the code of conduct for captured military personnel.

Much of the testimony repeated that given a continuing Navy Court of Inquiry in California by the Pueblo's captain, Cmdr. Lloyd M. Bucher, and its crew.

Moorer declined to answer a number of questions in open session, usually on grounds that as reviewing officer of actions taken by the Court of Inquiry he should say nothing to prejudice its decisions. Pike pressed him to make the fullest possible public record. The Congressman wasn't satisfied but said at the end of the hearing that Moorer had been more responsive in public than Secretary of the Navy John Chafee, who gave no answer to 13 of 29 written questions submitted by the House group last month.

Moorer met with the subcommittee for 1½ hours in closed session yesterday afternoon and is scheduled to return for more closed testimony today.

Pike said he plans to call to testify most of the naval officers in the chain of command along which proposals and decisions flowed between the Pueblo and the Pentagon. This would include Rear Adm. Frank M. Johnson, in direct charge of the intelligence-gathering program in Japan, and the commander in chief of the Pacific, Admiral U.S. Grant Sharp.

Moorer said Pueblo-type missions were subject to approval by the Joint Chiefs and "ultimately to higher authority," meaning the Secretary of Defense and even the President. He said that each month the Joint Chiefs act on a "package" of proposed missions. The military chiefs may complete their review of the proposals in an hour or so,

said Moorer. But he said they "get special attention at all levels" and receive adequate consideration at the top level.

Moorer said several times the Pueblo was conducting an "overt" mission, not a secret spy operation. Rep. Samuel S. Stratton (D-N.Y.) asked why the ship flew no United States flag until challenged. Moorer said it is customary for naval vessels not to fly the flag when alone on the high seas because the ensign "disintegrates quickly in high winds."

Pueblo Sailor Tells Of Agonizing Surgery

CORONADO, Calif., March 4 (UPI) — North Korean doctors gave a USS Pueblo sailor agonizing surgery without anesthetic on a jail table three days after his capture and later made him tell a news conference about his "humane" treatment.

Engineman 2/c Steven E. Woelk, 20, of Grand Rapids, Mich., told a story of medical care that ranged from kindly to savage today before a five-admiral Court of Inquiry into the Pueblo affair.

Woelk, who was wounded in the pelvis by shell fragments when the North Koreans seized the Pueblo, described the jailhouse surgery to remove them as "very painful."

Despite the jailhouse surgery, Woelk insisted his treatment by the North Koreans was not all bad.

When he failed to rally after the operation, he was transferred to a military hospital where he convalesced for 44 days.

The wounded Woelk was carried off the Pueblo on a stretcher at Wonsan. He was beaten and dragged part of the way to the bus that took him to prison and put in a room with other crewmen, some of whom were wounded.

He said he suffered intensely during the first 10 days after the surgery.

"I couldn't move. You can't believe the smell. The whole room smelled rotten, and the wounds drained continuously," Woelk said. One sailor in the room was not wounded and he cared for Woelk and the others.