

# Admiral Asserts Help for Pueblo Was Unavailable



REAR ADM. JOHNSON  
... outlines situation

## Navy Relied On Free Seas As Protection

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By George C. Wilson  
Washington Post Staff Writer

CORONADO, Calif., Jan. 29—The admiral in direct charge of the Pueblo mission said today that he could find no American forces — either ships or planes — that could go to the rescue of the hijacked ship.

Rear Adm. Frank L. Johnson, who was commander in chief of U.S. naval forces in Japan Jan. 23, 1968, when the Pueblo was captured, said the possibility of the ships running into trouble off North Korea was considered so remote that he had not even asked that ships be put near it or airplanes kept on alert.

He said he was relying instead on the historic freedom of the seas to protect the lightly armed intelligence ship.

When the Pueblo radioed for help at 1:28 p.m. (Korean time) on Jan. 23, 1968, he said there was nothing suitable to send to her aid.

Johnson matter-of-factly told the court of five admirals looking into the Pueblo's seizure that:

- He had no ships or planes under his own command to send to the rescue.

- The Navy's 7th Fleet had ships but none close enough to help. Even the planes on

the carrier Enterprise were considered too far away.

- The 5th Air Force had planes in Japan, Okinawa and South Korea. But none was sent out for varying reasons.

The net result was that the Pueblo was forced into North Korea's Wonsan harbor by an armed escort of one sub chaser and four torpedo boats without a shot being fired in her defense nor an American reconnaissance plane sent over to see what was happening.

Cmdr. Lloyd M. Bucher,  
See PUEBLO, A10, Col. 1





Associated Press

These are the five admirals comprising the court of inquiry investigating the Pueblo's seizure. From left: Rear

Adm. R. R. Pratt, Rear Adm. M. W. White, Vice Adm. H. G. Bowen, Rear Adm. E. E. Grim, Rear Adm. A. A. Bergner.



## PUEBLO, From A1

skipper of the Pueblo, testified last week that it took all afternoon for the North Koreans to get his ship into Wonsan. He said the harassing started at noon while he was in international waters 16.2 miles from the nearest land, the island of Ung Do, and culminated in the Pueblo being tied up in Wonsan about 8:30 that evening.

After Rear Adm. Marshall W. White on the court of inquiry had heard Adm. Johnson's testimony today, he said: "We had a contingency plan for using forces which did not exist. There was no way to help her."

Johnson explained at the outset of today's session that it was considered "highly improbable," that the Pueblo would ever be seized. He defined "highly improbable" as meaning "in effect there is almost no chance of this happening."

He said the Pueblo and Banner, sister spy ships, were under his command but not any fighting ships that could have come to their aid.

"The feasibility of this type of operation," Johnson said of the Pueblo's mission, "is dependent to a large degree on the safety provided by the time-honored recognition of the freedom of the seas. This had gone on for over 150 years. No public vessel had been seized in all that time. This was a very excellent precedent on which to base the safety of any one individual ship."

He testified that the pertinent authorities were informed in advance of the spy ship missions, including the 7th Fleet, which has headquarters on a flag ship working out of Yokosuka; the 5th Air Force with headquarters at Tachikawa, Japan, Air Base; Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific, Honolulu; the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington, and the Chief of Naval Operations.

"Each echelon of command had the opportunity to assess the risk," Adm. Johnson said of the Pueblo mission, but no one requested that it be called off. He added that the sea off North Korea, in his view, was a less dangerous place for spy ships than either the waters off China or the Soviet Union.

He said he had worked on sea and air rescue procedures

with the 7th Fleet and 5th Air Force and for fear a spy ship might "inadvertently" drift into territorial waters, only occasionally, he said, did he feel compelled to set up special safeguards for "illegal procedures" against his ships on the high seas.

But for a spy ship mission off Shanghai, Johnson said he did request, and got, the 7th

he said, before she set sail from Sasebo, 6 a.m., Jan. 11. The mission was considered low risk.

Adm. Johnson said he was in Tokyo at the Sanno Hotel hosting the annual tropical cyclone conference when his chief of staff from his Navy headquarters back at Yokosuka telephoned him about the Pueblo's plight.

"She's in trouble," Johnson was informed. "She may be gone." The Admiral said he then rushed back to his headquarters, flying most of the way by helicopter, arriving there at 3:10 p.m. This was about a half hour after North Koreans had boarded the Pueblo during its forced steaming into Wonsan harbor.

"I was briefed immediately as I arrived and advised again that the 5th Air Force had been asked to provide assistance," Johnson said. He said the 7th Fleet had advised his staff that its ships were "so positioned that they could not provide assistance."

The aircraft carrier Enterprise, Johnson said, was 600 miles from Wonsan at that moment. This "extreme range made it practically impossible" for her planes to fly to the Pueblo. (The Enterprise carries F4 Phantom jets that can reach a speed of 1500 mph. Apparently "loiter time" at the Pueblo would have been minimal, however).

To send the Enterprise's planes to Japan and then have them fly on to the Pueblo "would have created a diplomatic incident of a very serious nature," he said.

Under the status-of-forces agreement the U.S. has with Japan, the admiral said, planes cannot take off on combat missions from bases there without advance approval of the Japanese government. It therefore "was impractical to use those forces available," Johnson said.

No one on the court of inquiry asked Johnson if he had sought permission from the Japanese government to send out the planes anyway. At the time of the Pueblo's seizure, high Pentagon officials told newsmen that Japanese approval was not a factor in rescue considerations.

Adm. White asked if the fact that North Korea last January had intruded through the DMZ on land did no raise the possibility in Johnson's mind that the same thing might happen at sea—"a so-called

Fleet to put a destroyer just over the horizon in case it was needed. The destroyer stood off at a distance of about 30 miles. The 5th Air Force at his request also kept planes ready to take off just in case.

No such extra insurance was taken out for the Pueblo,

crossing of the DMZ in the water."

"A bookmaker would give you such fantastic odds," Johnson responded, "that even someone as rich as a Howard Hughes could not pay off on it."

He added that since North Korea has hijacked a ship on the high seas, "we're in a completely different ball game now." He said spy ships like the Pueblo and the Banner "are no longer safe under the concept of the freedom of the seas."

The Navy, he said, has revamped its policies covering small, unarmed ships out on electronic snooping missions. Asked if the Banner has gone to sea since the Pueblo was captured, Johnson said: "She was sent to sea but not on a similar type mission."

Late in today's session, Cmdr. Charles R. Clark said he took the Banner out to sea as skipper three times after the Pueblo was sized but never steamed closer than 70 miles to the target country's coast. The Pueblo had operated from 14 to 18 miles off shore, moving to 20 to 25 miles off shore at night.

the Navy, since the Pueblo hijacking, apparently is keeping its spy ships well out to sea and in probability is keeping rescue forces within reach as well. Staying farther out to sea means spy ships will not be able to collect as much electronic intelligence, but

close-in surveillance is now seen as a bigger risk.

### **Rep. Wolff Demands Congressional Probe**

United Press International

Rep. Lester L. Wolff (D-N.Y.)

yesterday joined the lengthening list of lawmakers demanding a Congressional investigation of the Pueblo incident.

Asserting that the Navy's own inquiry "has simply not provided the sort of public study that is needed," Wolff introduced a bill to create an investigating panel composed of ranking Representatives and Senators of certain committees.

On the Senate side, Harry F. Byrd (D-Va.) said part of former Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara's explanation of why no help was sent to the beleaguered Pueblo has been removed from a Senate committee's files.

Byrd called for a Congressional investigation of the Pueblo incident as soon as the Navy completes its court of inquiry.

He said one of McNamara's answers at a committee hearing last Feb. 1 was "scissored out of the report by the Department of Defense."

Byrd said the answer was in response to a question he asked concerning a published report that U.S. aircraft in Japan could not have been sent to aid the Pueblo without the consent of the Japanese government.