

# 10 Days Are Officially

General Idea of Mission  
Has Emerged

By BOB HORTON

WASHINGTON (AP) — Few incidents in American history left the United States so infuriated and yet so impotent as North Korea's seizure of the U.S. intelligence ship Pueblo.

All that happened on that cloudy midday last Jan. 23 in the Sea of Japan, and in the days just preceding, is not fully known—and may never be.

There are official obscurities and a critical 10-day time blank when no one knows—or will say—what the Pueblo was doing, but this general picture of her mission and her undoing has emerged:

The 906-ton vessel, a converted Army freighter that was lightly armed and barely able to make 12 knots, sailed out of Sasebo, Japan, at 6 a.m. (Korean time) Jan. 11 on a secret assignment to roam the coasts of North Korea.

## SPY MISSION

It was a spy mission.

Under Cmdr. Lloyd M. Bucher, the Pueblo, rigged with the most advanced U.S. electronics gear, was supposed to listen for radar emissions and pinpoint their origins so the United States and South Korea could update their file on North Korean air defenses.

In a secondary role the Pueblo was to snoop, at a distance, on Soviet ships which entered three areas off the North Korean shores code-named Mars, Pluto and Venus.

U.S. commanders in the Pacific thought the electronics checkout was due. It had been 9 months since a sister ship, the Banner, had made the North Korean run.

Officials all the way up through the Joint Chiefs of Staff and then Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara approved without dissent—and apparently without laying any plans to defend the Pueblo.

## ATTENTION UNWANTED

Military escorts, officials felt,

-PICAYUNE, NEW ORLEANS, LA., MONDAY MORNING, DEC

# Blank for Pueblo

would merely call attention to the ship—and might be all the more provocative.

"It is an entirely legal operation," McNamara said.

Orders code-named Ichthyic One instructed the Pueblo and her crew of 83 (two civilians, six officers, 75 enlisted men) to remain at least 13 miles offshore at all times. North Korea claims water out to 12 miles.

To avoid detection, the Pueblo shut off its radios from the time Bucher sailed her out of Sasebo through 11 succeeding days.

This time blank was to deepen

even further the mystery of the voyage and leave a critical knowledge gap about whether she accidentally or deliberately violated her Jan. 8 sailing order and penetrated North Korean waters.

North Korea claimed the "imperialist warship intruded 4.4 miles inside its coastal waters. The United States said there was no evidence the vessel ever got nearer than 13 miles to shore and that furthermore she was seized, according to U.S. recordings of North Korea's own radio reports at the time, more than 18 miles out.

## SILENCE BROKEN

The Pueblo broke radio silence about 10:50 a.m. Korean time Jan. 23 to report that two North Korean fishing ships had approached her twice the preceding day, closing first to within 100 yards, later to within 30 yards.

One hour and 10 minutes after sending this report to commands throughout the Pacific, the Pueblo was caught up in the misadventure which led to her

capture.

The basic Washington account was given to Congress on Feb. 1 by McNamara, General Earle G. Wheeler, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and his assistant, Lt. Gen. George S. Brown, who provided much of the narrative:

At noon, Jan. 23, the Pueblo reported that she was challenged by a North Korean sub-chaser who signaled, "Heave to or I will open fire."

The Pueblo replied with an international flag signal "I am in international waters."

## 19 MILES REPORTED

"The North Korean subchaser reported her position as nearly 19 miles off the coast," Brown said. "The Pueblo reported her position as 17 miles off the North Korean coast, actually 16.2 nautical miles from Ung Do Island, which is in Wonsan Harbor.

"At 1210 (12:10 p.m.) on the 23rd, Korean time, the North Korean subchaser radioed 'The name of the target is GER-1-2. I judge it to be a reconnaissance ship. It is American guys. It does not appear that there are weapons, and it is a hydrographic mapping ship.'"

At 1 p.m. three North Korean patrol boats joined the subchaser. While two MIGs circled overhead, the subchaser backed toward the Pueblo with fenders rigged—a sign she would make physical contact—and an armed boarding party stood on the bow.

"The Pueblo turned away and reported her intention to depart the area," Brown related. "At

1306 (1:06 p.m.) Korean time, the North Korean subchaser reported to the shore her intent to board the Pueblo and tow her into Wonsan.

#### 'PLAN TO FIRE'

"At 1313 (1:18 p.m.) the Pueblo reported 'They plan to fire on us now.'

"At 1327 (1:27) the North Korean subchaser ordered the patrol boats out of the way because she was going to fire on the Pueblo."

The Pueblo had three 50-caliber machine guns but she was no match for regular combat vessels. She made no move to defend herself.

"At 1328 (1:28), 1 minute later, the Pueblo reported 'The North Koreans plan to open fire.' She then reported 'We are being boarded. Initiating emergency destruction of classified equipment. Request help. SOS.'"

Inside the Pueblo, officials theorize, crewmen were locking themselves in hatches while desperately trying to destroy code books and classified electronics gear by triggering special destruct devices.

This, rather than resisting, was her first order of business.

"At 1340 (1:40) the North Koreans reported bringing the Pueblo to a stop and continuing to fire," Brown said.

#### NO FIRING REPORTED

The Pueblo never actually said she was fired upon but reported: "Have three wounded and one man with leg blown off. Have not used any weapons nor uncovered 50 caliber machine guns. Destroying all (deleted) and as much electrical equipment as possible. How about some help? These guys mean business. Do not intend to offer any resistance."

At 1418 (2:18 p.m.) the North Korean patrol boats reported: "The crew of the Pueblo throwing articles into the water."

U.S. officials believe these included some of the precious American cryptographic material the crew was attempting to keep out of Communist hands.

Between 2:22 and 2:32 p.m. the Pueblo reported "Have been directed to come to all stop. Being boarded at this time. Destruction incomplete. Several publications will be compromised. Four men injured, one critically. Going off air now. Destroying this gear."

Which of the injuries resulted

from an attack and which may have resulted from the destruction procedures the Pueblo crew was to follow, was never fully clarified.

#### HODGES DIES

Navy Fireman Duane D. Hodges of Crewwell, Ore., died of his wounds.

Pueblo's last report came 6½ miles outside Wonsan Harbor.

Her messages caught official Washington asleep, literally.

A brigadier general in the Pentagon's top-secret National Military Command center studied them, then quickly began making telephone calls.

Wheeler was awakened at 12:03 A.M. EST and was told the Pueblo was being harassed. McNamara was roused 20 minutes later but said there was nothing in the way of decision-making required of him.

At 1:30 a.m. both got the message the ship had actually been boarded.

Washington sent no instructions or advice on what the local commanders ought to do.

In Yokosuka, Rear Adm. Frank L. Johnson, commander of Naval forces in Japan, decided nothing could be done quickly enough or effectively enough to pluck the Pueblo out of North Korean hands at this point.

#### FOUR DAYLIGHT HOURS

The man he would turn to for aircraft was Lt. Gen. Seth McKee, commander of the 5th Air Force, Japan. He had roughly four hours of daylight in which to arm and fuel planes, brief the crews and get them en route to Korea.

"He attempted—he was scrambling trying to do it, and he finally figured that he was going to get there too late . . ." Wheeler said later.

The administration came in for stern criticism from Congress about failure to provide backup forces or any sort of contingency plan for aiding the Pueblo in such an incident.

Both Wheeler and McNamara maintained that any force the United States could have dispatched to the scene would have been overwhelmed by North Korea.

Pyongyang had an air force of some 500 combat planes and would have been operating within 25 miles of Wonsan with the help of an extensive radar and radio communications network.

#### THREE SQUADRONS

The U.S. had only three

squadrons of fighters—about 54—in Japan. There was one 18-plane fighter squadron in South Korea.

The South Koreans could muster only about 200 combat planes.

One critic who was to figure prominently in future defense planning grilled McNamara sharply on the lack of protection for the Pueblo.

He was Rep. Melvin R. Laird, now the choice of the Nixon administration to be secretary of defense. Laird said the United States should have been "cocked and prime" for anything that might have arisen on the Pueblo mission.

He said the United States had received a series of warnings from the North Koreans about sending "armed boats mingled with fishing boats" into Communist waters preceding Jan. 23.

McNamara placed a different interpretation on the "warnings" Laird cited but said that in any event sending in planes "would have meant walking into an ambush."

#### PROPAGANDA BATTLE

Despite a United States protest in the United Nations, the Pueblo affair quickly degenerated into a propaganda battle and periodic vitriolic diplomatic exchanges with the Communists at Panmunjom.

Secretary of State Dean Rusk suggested that an impartial body investigate the Pueblo incident while a neutral country held the crewmen prisoner. If the United States found the ship penetrated North Korean waters, it would apologize, Rusk said.

North Korea rejected the offer, demanded an outright apology and public confession to "criminal espionage" and a promise that it would not happen again.

Beginning within days of the incident and throughout ensuing months of haggling, North Korea offered its own "evidence" that the Pueblo was an international intruder.

First came a "confession" from Bucher, followed by still and motion picture films of Pueblo crewmen, letters to home, broadcast interviews and even a letter purportedly written by the crew asking President Johnson to "frankly admit" the Pueblo's transgression.

#### 'PROOF' REJECTED

The United States rejected North Korea's "proof." U.S. an-

alysts found the language of the alleged confessions awkward in phraseology, as if the North Koreans had written them.

"We know further from the scientists," McNamara said, "that it is possible through the use of drugs to extract statements of this kind from individuals.

"We know these men have fine records of service in the Navy.

"Putting all of it together leads me to conclude that the confessions were extracted by force," McNamara declared.

The most immediate action taken after the Pueblo takeover was a switching of the mathe-

matical foundation on which the U.S. codes were based.

#### U.S. LEARNS LESSON

The United States also learned a lesson from the unfavorable balance of airpower that became evident in the Pueblo crisis.

President Johnson ordered American air strength in Japan and South Korea reinforced with air units drawn from the U.S. Strategic Reserve Force, an active-duty military pool in the states. Some 14,800 air reservists were ordered up to replace units dispatched to the Pacific.

Why did North Korea grab off the Pueblo? McNamara offered about as good a theory as anyone when he told the Senate Armed Services Committee last Feb. 1:

"First, North Korea has felt frustrated—as we know other Communist nations have—in their inability to support North Vietnam more than they have

"A second objective, I suspect, is to leave the impression with the North Korean people and perhaps others as well of the increasing power of North Korea vis-a-vis South Korea."

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