

Pueblo 'Destruct System Deferred'

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CORONADO, Calif. (AP)—
Cmdr. Lloyd M. Bucher, skipper of the USS Pueblo, said today there was no "destruct" system on board to destroy secret equipment and code when the intelligence ship was captured by North Koreans because the Navy deferred his request for one.

He made the statement in opening testimony at a court of inquiry into the seizure of the Pueblo last year. He said the "destruct system" — a

means of destroying secret equipment with explosives— was deferred because of "problems of time and money."

"I REQUESTED that a destruct system be installed on board," he said. "Not a specific one. I am not familiar with explosives. But I felt there would be people in Washington who would be able to give me specific action."

The Navy has said many valuable items of intelligence, codes and equipment were aboard the Pueblo when it fell into North Korean hands. Bucher has said previously that some but not all of the classified material was destroyed before the ship was boarded.

"I did request that a destruct system be installed in the electronic spaces on the ship," Bucher said. "I requested this together with the crypto (code) area."

"I WROTE A classified letter about it and included it in my monthly reports to CNO (chief of naval operations)."

Bucher said action on his request, along with other suggestions for improving the Pueblo during its conversion

into an intelligence ship in the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard, was deferred partly because \$1 million was cut from his conversion allocation.

"Eleven million dollars had been allocated for the conversion of two ships, the Pueblo and the Palm Beach, giving them \$5.5 million each," Bucher said.

"This was cut back by \$1 million on each ship."

AMONG "THE most important improvements de-

vice--Bucher

ferred for some reason or another," he said, was the destruct system.

Bucher said his request for the destruction equipment "went up through the chain

of command and I received what I considered to be thoughtful replies . . . the chief of naval operations and others all commented on this specific point." ★