

Other Spy Ships Get Swift 'Destruct' Gear

Post 1-29-69
By Fred S. Hoffman

Associated Press

The Navy says that improved destruction equipment was installed in the sister ships of the USS Pueblo after the intelligence vessel was captured by North Korea just over a year ago.

The acknowledgment came after the captain of the Pueblo, Cmdr. Lloyd M. Bucher, told a Navy Court of Inquiry in California last week that he had been denied such equipment on two occasions "because of money and time."

The Court of Inquiry, which has been taking testimony in the Pueblo case, has generated heated controversy over Bucher's statements that superiors twice rejected his requests for a system for swift destruction of secret intelligence equipment and documents.

Asked why the Pueblo was not provided with this equipment, the Navy said the subject is being covered by the Court of Inquiry, thus indicating it would not comment on Bucher's testimony.

However, the Navy did say that "improved destruct equipment has been installed in all ships of the Pueblo class," and that this was accomplished

after the Pueblo was seized Jan. 23, 1968.

"The improved destruct equipment will permit more rapid destruction of classified equipment and publications," the Navy said. "It also can be actuated by fewer personnel and with greater reliability than previous destruct equipment."

No technical details were given but the gear presumably involves explosive devices.

Bucher told the five-admiral court last week that his ship had only fireaxes and sledgehammers to break up equipment and an incinerator for burning papers.

There are two other ships in the Pueblo class, the Banner and the Palm Beach.

Although the Navy was asked questions about improvements in terms of all U.S. ships performing intelligence functions, it chose to limit its reply to the Pueblo class.

The Navy customarily avoids identifying intelligence ships, but there are about a dozen with that primary mission, along with about 15 oceanographic survey ships that may also serve intelligence purposes.