

Officials Deserve Blame, Not Bucher, Senator Says

Pueblo Needed Destructive System—Dominick

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By CARL P. LEUBSDORF

WASHINGTON (AP) — Sen.

Peter H. Dominick, R-Colo., charged Friday that the Navy is trying to blame Cmdr. Lloyd M. Bucher for the Pueblo affair rather than the officials who denied him the means to destroy the spy ship's secret equipment.

Dominick, a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said in an interview that top Pentagon officials did not tell the committee in briefings last year that Bucher had requested such a destructive system.

Bucher testified at a naval court of inquiry in Coronado, Calif., this week that he requested the destructive system two or three times and that it was rejected because of "money and time."

"At no time were we informed that such a request had been made or that it had been denied," Dominick said.

Senate Democratic leader Mike Mansfield of Montana predicted at least two Senate committees will want to look into the Pueblo affair.

Mansfield told reporters he thinks the Foreign Relations Committee, of which he is a member, and the Armed Services Committee will want to inquire into all aspects of the Pueblo's capture by North Korea.

But Mansfield said he does not expect any action until after the naval court of inquiry completes its hearing and announces its findings.

WHEELER QUESTIONED

Testimony given last Feb. during the Armed Services Committee's annual hearings on

the nation's military posture shows that Sen. Strom Thurmond, R-S.C., asked Gen. Earle G. Wheeler, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, what could be done to prevent future Pueblos.

"It seems to me that we must take a very hard look at our destruct mechanism, to take a look at other things that we can do to disable a vessel, so that it can't be moved as easily, if possible," Wheeler said.

Dominick noted that the court of inquiry has told Bucher he may be court-martialed for surrendering his ship to the enemy.

But he said that former Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara told the committee at the Feb. 1 hearing "his first responsibility was not to attack the harassing vessels but to destroy his equipment."

McNamara testified that "the ship, as I understand it, could not have been physically scuttled within the kind of limited time available to it—it is a difficult process to scuttle this kind of a ship."

And Wheeler noted that destruction of the equipment, as well as calls for help, got off to a delayed start because "Cmdr. Bucher was of the opinion this was a normal type of harassment. It has happened all over the world before."

RECOURSE TO DESTROY

The officials made clear that once Bucher realized what was happening his only recourse was to destroy as many documents as possible.

"It's interesting testimony," Dominick said, "because the implication has been given by the court that he should have fought his way out. McNamara showed clearly that he had orders not to do it."

"It would seem to me," Dominick went on, "that the Navy is trying to assess blame on the commander whereas the blame ought to be on the people who did not supply equipment that was ordered and rejected and who did not have contingency plans to back him up."

Later Dominick issued a statement saying: "We should have a hearing before the Armed Services Committee to

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try and fix the responsibility on the persons responsible for turning down his request for equipment and for failing to adopt contingency plans to take him out of a spot into which he had been ordered by the U.S. Navy and the U. S. government."

Rep. Samuel S. Stratton, D-N.Y., a member of the House Armed Services Committee, said the Navy will be in trouble if it tries to make Bucher a scapegoat.

In a newsletter to constituents, Stratton, a captain in the Navy reserve, said that if the five admirals conducting the inquiry "think the public will sit still for making Cmdr. Lloyd Bucher the scapegoat for what went wrong in the Pueblo fiasco, they're in for a big surprise."