

No Explosives on Pueblo, Skipper Tells Navy Court

Three Destructive Tools Called Inadequate

By RICHARD E. MEYER
 CORONADO, Calif. (AP) —

The skipper of the USS Pueblo said Monday he couldn't blow up secret equipment before North Koreans captured his intelligence ship because the Navy provided no explosive system.

To dispose of secret documents, said Cmdr. Lloyd M. Bucher, he had an incinerator, a paper shredder and weighted bags—but he said the first two worked too slowly and that there weren't enough of the latter.

He added that the Navy didn't mount guns on the craft until a few weeks before seizure, the steering system gave trouble and the telephone system was inadequate. He estimated it would have taken 2½ hours to scuttle the craft.

The Pueblo was seized last Jan. 23 off the North Korean coast and the crew spent 11 months in captivity.

Bucher was leadoff witness at a court of inquiry into the seizure and captivity before a board of inquiry composed of five admirals, who could recommend anything from courts martial to medals.

NO EXPLOSIVES

Bucher said the Pueblo, a former Army coastal freighter, was not equipped with explosives to destroy secret electronic equipment when it was outfitted at the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard because the Navy felt there was not enough time or money.

He said he addressed a classified letter to the chief of naval operations requesting the "destruct" system, but that the request was deferred after review by "the chain of command."

"They said in order for the destruct system to be effective and safe, that is without having it go off unintentionally or intentionally without my orders, it had to be built as an integral part of the electrical equipment," Bucher said.

"They said as the equipment had already been installed it was not possible to include the destruct system without a great

deal of expense and time."

CUT IS REASON

One reason why his request for explosives and other items were deferred, he said, was because \$1 million had been cut from the conversion allocation for the Pueblo.

After a Navy intelligence ship was attacked in the Arab-Israeli war, Bucher said, the Navy ordered two 50-millimeter guns for the Pueblo.

These, he said, would have been too heavy and he recommended 20mm or 40mm. He finally got armament just weeks before sailing, he said.

His only destruct equipment, he said, was "fire axes and sledge hammers capable of being swung by a standard-size sailor to bash in equipment."

The incinerator for destroying documents, he said, was four feet high and not fuel fed, which meant pages of publications had to be torn out a few at a time before being burned. The paper shredder, he said, took 15 minutes to destroy an eight-inch stack of documents.

INSUFFICIENT BAGS

The Navy provided enough weighted bags for codes, he said, but not for other secret documents.

Bucher has said that some, but not all, of the Pueblo's se-

cret equipment and documents were destroyed.

The steering system, he said, quit working "as many as 60 times in two weeks" and was very old and troublesome.

The telephone system, he said, did not permit communication between the bridge and men inside the ship. He said he asked for a better system but got only token help.

The inquiry is aimed at finding answers to a host of questions about the Pueblo's seizure and the captivity of the crew, freed last month and flown here.

The questions include: was the ship in North Korean territorial waters, as that country claims and Bucher denies? Why wasn't it scuttled, or all its secret papers and gear destroyed? How did the crew react during seizure? Was resistance adequate? What about "confessions" attributed to crewmen?