

Navy's Decision on Pueblo Leaves

By George C. Wilson

Washington Post Staff Writer

The Navy decision on the Pueblo affair, while a skillful political compromise, leaves the big questions unanswered.

The debate the Navy would so much like to see ended once and for all is bound to go on and on. If nothing else, several books in the works with fresh disclosures will make sure of that.

But, given the heat around the Pueblo issue, Navy Secretary John H. Chafee could hardly have been expected to come to any other decision.

While nobody wins under his compromise, nobody loses all the way either—except for the public, still

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waiting for a full accounting on the who's and why's of this foulup which cost the Nation so much.

For the Navy as an institution, the Chafee compromise preserves the "don't give up the ship" tradition. Cmdr. Lloyd M. Bucher was put in the dock figuratively, though not convicted for giving up the Pueblo to the North Koreans without firing a shot.

Chafee allowed the Naval Court of Inquiry indictment against Bucher and Lt. Stephen R. Harris, the Pueblo intelligence officer, to stand on the record. He just decided not to prosecute.

This probably will not satisfy the old sea dogs, like Adm. Arleigh Burke, who maintain that Navy skippers are paid to die—no matter what the odds.

But for many younger Naval officers—closer to today's unusual demands stemming from being half at war, half at peace—Chafee's clemency will be welcomed.

There is a generation gap in today's Navy—just like there is in the rest of our society.

For Bucher himself, the Chafee compromise makes him skipper of a Flying Dutchman—sailing the Pueblo in his mind forever, with no judgment day. "The Navy is my life," he said several times while awaiting the verdict of the five An-

napolis admirals on his performance off Wonson.

For the other officers who stand accused by the Court—Lt. Harris; Lt. Edward R. Murphy Jr., the Pueblo's executive officer, who Bucher also found wanting; Rear Adm. Frank L. Johnson, who was in direct charge of protecting the ship; and Capt. Everett B. Gladding, who was supposed to make sure the men in the sealed-off intelligence center of the Pueblo were up to their jobs—the Chafee reprieve is more apparent than real. Their service records are stained for good.

And, for the Navy as a working service, Chafee at least put the official lid on the painful Pueblo affair. He considers it closed.

Major Questions Unanswered

Court-martial or hearings on letters of reprimand recommendations would have brought out even more examples of bungling—from the top down. Enough is enough, in the Navy's eyes.

Never mind that the public still does not know exactly who thought up the spy ship program and why. The roots, according to independent investigation, go all the way back to the McNamara "Whiz Kids" in the Pentagon. But the Court never called former Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara or his deputies to put their story on record.

And we still do not know what went wrong within the Naval Security Group—a Navy "spook" shop.

There, according to sev-

eral of the Pueblo crew, is where a big part of the blame should fall. That Navy intelligence outfit according to these men, fouled up the staffing of the ship itself and the communications once the Pueblo got in trouble.

The Pueblo mission had the primary purpose of collecting intelligence information off the coast of Russia, not North Korea. Harris, as intelligence chief on board, spoke Russian—for example—not Korean. But somebody—we still do not know who—thought it would be a good idea to shake down the Pueblo and its crew by sending the ship off North Korea first, as sort of a training exercise.

Nothing much was picked

up—according to Bucher's public testimony—in the way of electronic intelligence in that run. Only the Pueblo was.

Perhaps it would be best to close the case, as Chafee suggested, if there were hard evidence that the lesson of the Pueblo had been well learned by all. But more than a year later came the shooting down of the "Flying Pueblo" off North Korea—the EC-121 with 31 men aboard. This, too, had the earmarks of partial training mission.

Rep. Otis G. Pike (D-N.Y.), the only member of Congress who has probed the Pueblo affair in depth, said the EC-121 was almost a carbon copy of the Pueblo as far as who thought it up and

why. There also were communications lags—again.

These raise two fundamental questions: (1) have the Navy and the Defense Department really learned from the Pueblo disaster?

(2) Do the people deserve a fuller Navy explanation of the Pueblo fiasco than the 6½-page press release Chafee read Tuesday?

These questions on the Pueblo raise the larger policy question for the U.S. Government: spying missions like those of the Pueblo and EC-121—now compromised to the point that obtrusive protection is needed—really vital to our security? Or can they be allowed go the way of the U-2's which flew over Russia until 1960?