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CORONADO, Calif. AP - The admiral who supervised the Pueblo said Wednesday he had no ships to help when North Koreans attacked the intelligence vessel and planes and ships in other commands were unavailable or too far away.

The Pueblo's two .50-caliber machine guns, he added, "did not appear to me to provide a significant defense capability."

Rear Adm. Frank L. Johnson, commander of naval forces in Japan when the Pueblo was seized a year ago and its crew imprisoned, testified at a court of inquiry first open session after three days of secret testimony.

In earlier sessions the Pueblo's skipper, Cmdr. LLOYD M. Bucher, had said he asked for help after North Korean gunboats opened fire but got none; that he had asked for bigger guns but got none; and that facilities for destroying secret papers and gear were inadequate.

Johnson said the Navy checked the PUEBLO'S SYSTEM OF DESTROYING CLASSIFIED MATERIAL IN THE EVENT OF ATTACK, BUT IT WAS ONLY "informal."

Johnson, now commander of the 13th Naval District in Seattle, Wash., told the five-admiral court which can recommend anything from decorations to courts martial—that even the nuclear powered aircraft carrier Enterprise couldn't help the Pueblo.

It was too far away, he said, and her planes couldn't operate out of Japan because of an agreement with that country that forbids using Japan-based aircraft in engagements with unfriendly forces.

Rear Adm. Marshall White of the court said: "Then we really had a contingency plan to use forces that didn't exist. There was no help available for her?"

Answer: "No forces were available to me."

Q. "Then there were no forces readily available to come to the assistance of the Pueblo as I understand your on call arrangement with the 5th Air Force and the 7th Fleet?"

A. "They (the forces) were instructed to go into action any time they received word from any source that assistance was needed. But each command had to go back as far as CINC-PAC Commander in chief for the Pacific to get final authorization to use these forces at the time of an incident. THE 5TH Air Force was the only military organization which had available within a reasonable distance any aircraft—not from Japan but primarily from Okinawa and possibly from South Korea, although it was somewhat difficult at least at my level to determine what availability there might be in South Korea."

Q. "Okinawa was so far it would not have been too feasible?"

A. "As you are aware, the distance is 500 miles from Okinawa."

Q. Rear Adm. Edward Grimm: "Were there any communications...with CINC-PAC during the incident?"

A. "The telephone was used. I believe the first call was about 2:20 p.m. to CINC-PAC.

AND I was advised that the 5th Air Force reported delay of possibly about three hours before they could have aircraft in the area."

Johnson told the court he was not in favor of arming intelligence ships.

"We had successfully carried out 16 missions in unarmed status and I considered this a good basis for continuing this type of mission unarmed," he said. "I did consider they the guns might well be provocative...I was concerned about the reaction to this armed status.

w"and the addition of two .50-calibers did not appear to me to provide a significant capability."

Johnson said the "informal" inspection of the Pueblo's ability to destruct secret material was made by Lt. E.A. Brooks, who the Navy has said will testify at the inquiry.

Bucher has testified that his destruct equipment was fire axes and sledge hammers, instead of explosives he wanted.

Johnson was asked whether he was satisfied with the action taken by his staff at the time of the incident.

"I was satisfied with the action taken by my staff," he said.

"We never had such an operation before."



Of Bucher's statement that communications with Japan were sometimes difficult, involving delays of hours, Johnson said he was aware of "certain difficulties." "Japanese mountains, he said, made it hard to link frequencies.

Asked if he considered this critical, he said: "I did not... There was no instance that any time this created a critical problem in operations."

Johnson said that to support intelligence missions he "requested that the 5th Air Force provide aircraft assistance, a special alert of aircraft on the runways and that the commander of the 7th Fleet assign me a destroyer to remain about 30 miles distance over the horizon."

The Air Force provided the special alert, he said, but in at least one instance, for an intelligence mission off Shanghai, the destroyer was not provided.

"They directed a destroyer from the Taiwan defense patrol to remain in the northern sector of this Shanghai patrol area," he said. "It had a reaction time of 16 hours. This then became more or less the standard procedure for requesting special air-surface support."

To get the support, he said, he had to ask it from the commander of the 7th Fleet, who would relay it to the commander of the Pacific Fleet, who had to go to the commander of Pacific Forces to get final authority.

The destroyer usually was started during the message exchange and recalled if approval wasn't given, he said.

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The on-call concept of support forces came under criticism.

Q. Vice Admiral Harold G. Bowen, president of the court: "The on-call concept is misleading, then, since nothing was on call?"

A. Johnson: "It was understood to be on call . . . The reaction time was to be an hour and thirty minutes on liaison with the 5th Air Force . . . This on-call concept, like any on-call situation, is dependent on the situation and the availability to take whatever action possible."

Q. Bowen: "Well, it certainly didn't take care of the situation we had and therefore is suspect in its validity!"

Johnson said he thought the risk in the Pueblo mission was minimal because a U.S. vessel had not been attacked during peace time for 150 years.

"If you were a betting man, I would suggest that a bookmaker would give you such fantastic odds that even someone as rich as a Howard Hughes could not pay off on that bet."

Then, at one point, Johnson turned to Bucher and said:

"I would like to assure the court and commander Bucher and the crew that had I been convinced that ship was in jeopardy I would never have sent the ship on that mission without proper protection."

Bucher listened impassively.

Then Johnson repeated an earlier statement that Bucher had been told to "get all the training . . . and all the destruct drill he could get."

Johnson also said a ship commander should not take "too literally" Navy rules against jettisoning secret material in water less than 100 fathoms deep.

The admiral testified that he was not at his headquarters when the Pueblo's first urgent pleas for help arrived.

"I was in Tokyo attending the annual Pacific Command Tropical Cyclone Conference," Johnson said.

"I was called to the telephone . . . my chief of staff told me, 'Pueblo is in trouble.' He said, 'She may be gone.'"

Because the message couldn't be explained on an unclassified telephone, Johnson said he didn't catch the immediate significance but asked whether the 5th Air Force and air-sea rescue had been alerted. He said his chief of staff answered yes.

"I asked the chief of staff to get me a helicopter so I could return to the base," Johnson said. "I took off at 2:39 p.m. and arrived at headquarters at 2:40."

By then, he said, the Pueblo had sent its last message and had been off the air for thirty minutes.

Johnson said his staff had made no request for 7th Fleet assistance because its forces were not positioned close enough to help.

"I told my staff they had taken proper action in making basic decisions," he said.

"Would you have done anything differently?" asked Capt. William Newsome, counsel for the court.

"It's difficult for an individual to place himself back into the situation," Johnson said.

"I can't get the feel of the confusion and pressures, so I'm not sure what I would have done.

"But as an afterthought there was nothing I would have done that was not done by my staff."

"What do you think of the operation now?" Asked E. Miles Harvey, one of Bucher's attorneys.

"It's a completely different ball game now," Johnson said, adding that Pueblo-type vessels operating near unfriendly coasts are "no longer safe under the recognized code of freedom of the open sea."

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