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Pueblo Bjt, 500, 2 Takes, Total 850

By RICHARD E. MEYER

Associated Press Writer

CORONADO, Calif. AP — After the capture of the Pueblo, two high ranking Navy officials ordered a destroyer to prepare to go into a North Korean harbor to board it and tow it away if necessary, an admiral has testified.

Rear Adm. George L. Cassell detailed the order Monday to a Navy court of inquiry into the Pueblo's capture by North Korea. But a further question, asking whether any actual attempt to rescue the Pueblo was ever carried out, was left unanswered.

There was no known actual attempt to remove the Pueblo from North Korean custody.

When the Pueblo was seized a little over a year ago, Cassell was assistant chief of staff for operations for the commander in chief of the Pacific Fleet, based in Honolulu.

He agreed with earlier witnesses that neither U.S. ships nor planes were close enough to help immediately but said recovery action was possible the next day.

"Adm. Hyland, myself and the Operational Control Center directed the Seventh Fleet to dispatch a destroyer and position this destroyer off Wonsan Harbor in international waters," Cassell said.

"We further directed Commander Seventh Fleet to provide air cover for this particular destroyer and be prepared to recover the Pueblo either by going into the harbor and manning the ship and getting under way or towing as necessary. I forget the precise words, but she was to be prepared to recover or tow the Pueblo."

He said naval officials discussed other possibilities, such as sending aircraft to destroy the ship "to prevent classified material from falling into the hands of the Koreans."

Executive officer Lt. Edward R. Murphy Jr. was called to the stand today as the first of the Pueblo's crew, other than skipper Lloyd Bucher, to testify in open court.

Lt. Stephen Ha

ris, in charge of the Pueblo's intelligence detachment, testified for more than five hours Thursday and Monday. The Navy said his testimony was classified in the interest of national defense, but that Harris would give unclassified testimony in open court later this week.

Cassell said he was in the home of Admiral Hyland when the Pueblo was seized.

Cassell said he and Hyland went to the Operational Control Center four or five minutes from the house. Cassell then described the orders to the Seventh Fleet, and Capt. William Newsome, council for the court, asked: "You were positioning your ships then with a view toward retaliation?"

"Yes," Cassell said, "retaliation and what we could have done the next morning as far as recovering the ship was concerned. Let me say we began positioning our forces to carry out whatever higher authority ordered. WHETHER that would have been in retaliation I couldn't say . . ."

"I want to make it clear that there could be no launch of aircraft, no reprisal, or retaliatory attack without CINCPAC (Commander in Chief of Pacific forces) authority," Cassell said.

Newsome asked: "After the forces were positioned was any action taken . . . to either attempt to effect recovery or to assist her?"

Before Cassell could reply, Newsome was called to the bench for a whispered conference with Vice Adm. Harold G. Bowen Jr., president of the court.

Newsome then asked a different question: "Admiral, were any other actions taken by you at Commander Pacific Fleet headquarters?"

"No," Cassell said.

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CORONADO, Pueblo, Take 2: said.

Under questioning from E. Miles Harvey, attorney for Cdr. Bucher, Cassell said there were plans for the Seventh Fleet to send a reconnaissance plane over the Pueblo in the North Korean harbor.

"CINCPAC did not authorize it," Cassell said.

Q. Harvey: Did the Navy discuss torpedoing or sinking the Pueblo?

A. Cassell: "We discussed a lot of proposals. One was sending aircraft in there and dest

oying the ship to prevent classified material from falling into the hands of the Koreans."

Q. Harvey: Did you plan to free the Pueblo with a raid or by use of force?

A. Cassell: "Yes, we put our staff of planners to work, subject to higher command, on plans which could have laid on reprisal action."

Q. Harvey: Were any of these plans feasible?

A. Cassell: "Yes. I considered one of these proposals feasible . . . but the decision in this area—retaliatory or reprisal strikes—is out of our level."

Cassell did not specify, and he was not asked, which retaliatory plan he considered feasible.

At another point, Harvey asked whether Cassell felt the Pueblo's two .50-caliber machine guns added to her ability to defend herself.

"Yes, I do," Cassell replied.

Bucher has said he was hopelessly outgunned by the North Koreans, and had wanted the Navy to install two 20mm cannons before he set sail.

HQARVEY asked whether Cassell thought the commander of naval forces in Japan complied with instructions to provide the Pueblo with adequate devices to destroy classified material.

After a pause, Cassell answered, "No," adding, "My answer is just an opinion."

Bucher has testified that his only way to destroy classified electronic equipment was with sledge hammers and fire axes.

Court counsel Newsome asked whether Cassell considered the Pueblo's mission hazardous before she sailed.

"No," Cassell replied. "Based on the evaluation of risk no more hazards were anticipated than we would normally expect in going to sea with a ship of 800 tons in that time of year winter."

Because the risk of attack against the Pueblo was considered minimal, Cassell said, Air Force planes weren't ready to provide quick help "and simply could not have gotten there in time."

~~Cassell said: "The Fifth Air Force would have had to change the armament configuration and that would have taken an hour and a half, and then launched, and then taking into consideration the flight time . . . it would have taken an hour and 45 minutes or perhaps two hours to reach the Pueblo."~~

Cassell said he went on board the Pueblo before it left Hawaii on its mission adding his initial reaction was to her small size and that "her vintage impressed me."

The Pueblo was an Army coastal freighter during World War II and was used by the South Koreans during the Korean War before she was converted into an intelligence ship.