

Pueblo

Pueblo NL 500

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OORONADO, Calif. AP - The USS Pueblo was pictured by its chief engineer Wednesday as a small, old vessel that lacked items such as watertight hatches and a good communications system that he felt were needed to enable it to function effectively as an intelligence ship.

CWO Gene Howard Lacy said he believed the Navy denied this equipment because there were no precise plans for the ship's conversion from a freighter and they were made up as work went along.

Lacy also said he felt the ship's skipper, Cmdr. Lloyd M. Bucher, could not have resisted seizure by North Korean gunboats.

As for scuttling the ship to keep it and classified gear out of North Korean hands, Lacy said this would have taken at least 22 hours--the same estimate Bucher gave earlier.

Lacy, 38, thin and with a foreshock of grey hair and bushy eyebrows, told the Navy court of inquiry into the Pueblo capture a year ago that she was "pretty well shot up" before being boarded. He said she was hit by as many as 30 cannon shells and 1,000 to 1,100 machinegun bullets.

An attorney for Bucher told Lacy: "I now am going to ask you for your personal opinion, based on your experience and what you saw immediately prior to the time of the capture. In your opinion did the commanding officer or the ship any longer

have the power to resist the boarding and the ultimate seizure?"

"No," said Lacy.

The court has warned Bucher he is suspected of breaking Navy regulations against surrender of a command as long as the commanding officer

has the power to resist.

Later, the ship's freckle-face, 21-year-old supply officer testified Bucher is "an outstanding leader. I'd follow him anywhere."

Lt jg Timothy Leon Harris gave this assessment in reply to a question from the court's attorney. Harris said he was cut by flying glass when a cannon shell shattered a window in the pilot house and whistled past his head.

Rear Admiral Edward Grimm asked him what he thought of surrendering the ship.

"I didn't like it," said Harris, "but I feel the captain's decision was correct under the circumstances."

Harris said he exposed himself to North Korean fire for three or four minutes during each of the eight or nine times he took classified documents to the ship's incinerator on deck to burn them.

INSERT Lacy said there was little serious discussion about scuttling.

Besides the time involved, said LACY, THE CREW WAS "more interested in keeping the Pueblo afloat . . . very little damage control was built into the design."

This caused "our main concern" before the mission, he said, because of the likelihood the Pueblo might be rammed during harassment by Communist vessels.

"We asked for watertight hatches for the crew's berthing and office spaces," Lacy said, "but it was not accomplished. They the Navy promised it would be done at the next regular overhaul in 1969.

"By letter we made a request for damage control books and damage control plates . . . and it was denied, so we made our own."

Lacy said an additional on-board telephone system was denied at first, but later the equipment was p

rovided on condition the crew install it themselves. It was in the final stages of installation when the ship was seized, he said.

"We didn't have a collision alarm," Lacy said. "It was disapproved and never approved."

His crew would have had to remove 20 to 25 bolts from 15-inch pipes into the engine room to let water in for scuttling, Lacy said.

He said this would have had stopped the engines, cut off all power for communication with headquarters in Japan and left the Pueblo unable to move if help came.

"Why we

did you deny all these things?" asked Rear Adm. Marshall White, a member of the court.

"They cut back in funds," said Lacy. Bucher testified earlier that \$1 million was cut from money to convert the Pueblo from a freighter to an intelligence ship.

"My experiences have been the same . . . there is never enough money," said White. "Was your ship in worse shape in this regard than others?"

"No . . . the big problem was there was no concise plan for the conversion and outfitting at the beginning," said Lacy.

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