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Congress-Pueblo Bjt NL 460

By TOM SEPPY

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON AP — The four-star admiral in command of the Navy told Congress Tuesday the intelligence ship Pueblo was on a low-risk mission of spying on Soviet fleet maneuvers when she was captured by the North Koreans in January last year.

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Moorer, chief of naval operations, said there were operational plans to assist the Pueblo if it encountered hostile forces during its 25-day mission but no aircraft were specifically assigned to the ship. "There were aircraft within the time and distance available but none with pilots sitting in the cockpit and with bombs loaded," the admiral told a special House armed services subcommittee.

"There were no dedicated forces standing by on alert," Moorer said. "The risk was minimal because the ship was operating in international waters."

Moorer made his comments as the first witness before the subcommittee which is investigating the capture of the Pueblo by North Korea and the imprisonment of its 83 crew members.

Chairman Otis G. P. 5 1 j \$iy., said 7n ar opening statement the subcommittee wants, "tn know who generated the

concept of single, unprotected, intelligence-gathering ships and when and why."

The Pueblo's mission was divided into two phases. The intelligence ship was to sail north in the Sea of Japan off North Korea. After collecting intelligence in three separate areas along the coast, she was to reverse course and move South to watch and eavesdrop on Soviet fleet maneuvers.

Moorer told the committee the capture of the Pueblo could not have been prevented despite actions taken after the ship's first message that she was about to be boarded by the North Koreans.

He also said several factors—including time, distance and approaching darkness—led to the decision that the Pueblo could not be rescued by any military action before it had been forced into Wonsan harbor in North Korea.

He said the aircraft carrier Enterprise and USS Truxton, a high-speed transport, located 600 miles south of Wonsan, were ordered to proceed north at best speed after the Pueblo's first message was received.

Moorer also said the 7th Fleet commander in chief ordered a destroyer to proceed to a position off Wonsan Harbor, he said.

Moorer said the 5th Air Force commander, upon receiving a secret telephone call "took preparatory steps to deploy available fighter aircraft in the area."

Pike asked later: "Was it not a fact, admiral, that aircraft was not available to aid the Pueblo?"

Moorer: "There were no dedicated or alert forces in the event the ship was accosted. But provisions were made for protecting the ship in the sailing orders and in the operational orders."

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In an afternoon session, Moorer was asked if he could assure that incidents like the Pueblo seizure will not recur.

"No, sir," he replied. "I can't absolutely guarantee they will not occur. But we will take every possible precaution. We will make adequate provision with plans and forces to prevent such incidents.

"But I can't guarantee that an enemy force won't steam out onto the high seas and seize one of our ships," he said.

Moorer spent about 4 1/2 hours in open session before going behind closed doors with the committee for about 1 1/2 hours to discuss classified matters.

After the meeting, Pike said Moorer would return Wednesday morning for further questioning behind closed doors. He also said the committee will hear also from Richard Helms, head of the Central Intelligence Agency.

Pike said the subcommittee will call as witnesses several of the officers in the chain of command that sent the Pueblo on its mission.

Pike said the committee might call Robert S. McNamara, secretary of defense at the time of the Pueblo seizure. "There is a possibility," he said of calling McNamara, "but it is not a necessity."

He said, however, he does not plan to call Cmdr. Lloyd M. BUCHER, the Pueblo's skipper, even though the crew of the Pueblo would be welcome to testify if they want to.

"The actual happening has been looked at frontward, backward and everyway," Pike said. "We're trying to look into the 'why it happened' not the 'what happened.'"

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