

17 MAR 69

A375WX

lbylaeewyyf

Congress-Pueblo NL 450

By TOM SEPPY

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON AP — A former U.S. military commander in the Pacific said Monday planes could not have reached the USS Pueblo in time to prevent the capture of the intelligence ship by the North Koreans.

Adm. U. S. Grant Sharp, now retired, said planes aboard the carrier Enterprise, some 600 miles from the Pueblo, could have reached the ship but the decision was made that "they could not get there in time to be of assistance."

"I concurred in that opinion," he said.

Sharp also told the special House Armed Services subcommittee investigating the seizure of the Pueblo by North Korea Jan. 23, 1968, that aircraft based in South Korea were not equipped with conventional armament and would have been of no assistance.

He said the time and distance was a factor in not ordering aircraft based in Japan to go to the aid of the Pueblo after messages were received that she was being boarded.

Sharp, who retired last July 31 after four years as commander in chief, Pacific, said if the United States had had planes or ships in the area of the Pueblo, they would have pursued the enemy up to Wonsan Harbor, North Korea.

"If we had had planes or ships up there while this fellow was under attack, we certainly would have gone into the 12-mile limit," he said.

"In the harbor, however, it becomes a different ballgame. It then becomes an act of retaliation. It would have involved calling in major forces and possibly caused another Korean War," he said.

"You have to be concerned about how many wars you want to get into at one time," Sharp said.

Sharp appeared before the committee 2 1/2 hours in open session and then went behind closed doors for some 2 hours to discuss classified aspects of the incident.

During the open session, Sharp took issue with comments made by Rep. William C. Bray, R-Ind., in posing a question for the admiral.

Bray questioned whether there are any rules promulgated by the Pentagon that would have prevented U.S. planes from attacking the Pueblo's captors after they had forced the Pueblo from outside the 12-mile international boundary, recognized by North Korea, to within 11 or 9 miles.

"The American people have a right to know what side the Pentagon is on," Bray said.

"Assuming we had the planes available and had the courage and foresight to use them, when they arrived on the scene, would they have had the right to attack?" Bray asked.

"Now wait a minute," Sharp replied. "Are you implying I didn't have the courage or foresight to act? If you are, I would like to talk to you about that in private."

Bray said he was not accusing Sharp, adding he knew the admiral was in South Korea at the time.

"I know you would have," Bray said, "but would that have been a violation of the rules? These hearings are worthwhile to show the American public about the rules under which the fighting men have to operate."

"I couldn't agree with you more," said Sharp. "You know how I feel about rules. The rules don't make any damn bit of difference to me. I do what I think is best."

Rep. Lucien N. Nedzi, D-Mich., asked Sharp if he knew of any directive that would have prevented an American plane in his command from attacking before the 12-mile limit, recognized by the United States.

"No sir," replied Sharp.

WB819pes March 17