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Admiral Hints He Sought Action to Recover Pueblo

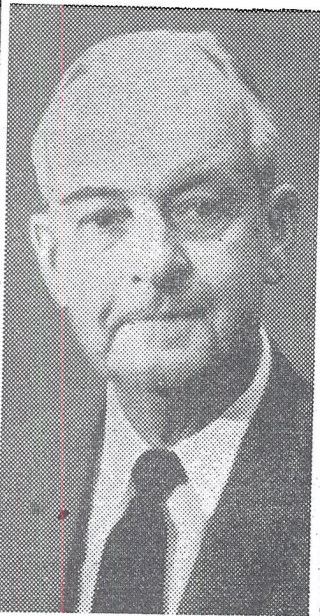
WASHINGTON, March 17 (UPI)—A former Pacific commander indicated today that he had been denied permission to take "positive action" to recover the Pueblo after she had been captured by North Korea and impounded in Wonsan harbor.

But the witness, Adm. Ulysses S. Grant Sharp, retired, refused to go into further detail at a public hearing by a House Armed Services subcommittee. He also refused to elaborate to reporters after testifying for two hours in closed session.

Speaking to newsmen, Admiral Sharp said that his request for action, directed to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, dealt with "what to do" on Jan. 24, 1968, the day after the Pueblo was hijacked, "and that sort of thing." At that time, the Pueblo was moored in Wonsan harbor and her crewmen were prisoners of the North Koreans.

The subcommittee, with particular emphasis on actions by higher commands, is investigating the loss of the intelligence ship. When the ship was seized, Admiral Sharp was the commander of all United States military forces in the Pacific.

In the open session today Frank Stalinshek, subcommittee



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Adm. Ulysses S. Grant Sharp, retired, at the House subcommittee yesterday.

counsel, asked Admiral Sharp: "Did you initiate a request to take positive action?"

"Yes," replied Admiral Sharp, who quickly added that any

elaboration would have to be secret.

In his prepared statement, read in open session, Admiral Sharp said that once the Pueblo was in Wonsan Harbor any American military action would amount to retaliation and "could result in a second Korean war."

Asked by reporters later if he therefore ruled out any military moves at that point, Admiral Sharp replied: "No, not necessarily. But you have to be concerned about how many wars you can get into at once."

There was no indication of what kind of "positive action" Admiral Sharp had in mind. Earlier, he had testified that regardless of any "rules of engagement," he would have sent airplanes to aid the Pueblo while she was still at sea had they been available. And he confirmed earlier reports that there were no planes within range to help the Pueblo except ones carrying nuclear weapons.

Representative William G. Bray, Democrat of Indiana, tried to draw from Admiral Sharp a statement that rules set forth by "certain people" in the Pentagon would have prevented Admiral Sharp from

acting, even if he had the means available. But the retired admiral insisted he had seen no such rules.

The admiral said time and distance prevented any adequately equipped American aircraft from reaching the Pueblo and her captor escorts before they sailed into Wonsan, or by the time they reached the three-mile limit.

The United States says the Pueblo was boarded in international waters, 17 miles off the North Korean coast. The North Koreans say the Pueblo violated their self-declared 12-mile territorial limit.

Admiral Sharp testified that his commanders had the authority to engage North Koreans as long as they were outside the three-mile limit. But, he said, "we got the word so late that by the time we could have done something" the Pueblo would have been virtually in Wonsan harbor.

By then, he said, planes in Japan and aboard the carrier Enterprise, equipped with conventional weapons, were too far away, and the Air Force planes that were in range, based in South Korea, had only nuclear weapons.