

Ex-Pueblo Aide Spurns Medal

San Diego

The former executive officer of the captured U.S. spy ship Pueblo declined the Navy Commendation Medal yesterday, calling the medal a "shallow" appreciation.

And he accused the Pueblo skipper, Commander Lloyd M. Bucher, of delaying the crew's release from North Korea.

Former Lieutenant Edward R. Murphy, executive officer under Bucher, accused the commander of prolonging the crew's captivity for nearly three months, even though he said, the United States and North Korea had agreed on the release of the ship.

Murphy, in a written statement issued at the awards presentation ceremony, said that after nearly nine months of imprisonment, he and another officer accepted their captors' offer "to man the USS Pueblo and

return it and the crew to our country." He said Bucher and other officers refused.

Bucher, contacted in Hawaii, denied Murphy's statement.

"I don't know what he's talking about," said Bucher. "This is the first time I've ever heard of it."

The Pentagon had no immediate comment.

The Pueblo was captured by North Korean naval craft on Jan. 22, 1968. The 83-man crew was released Dec. 22, 1968.

The Navy said it was awarding the commendation to Murphy for his resistance to the Communists while in prison.

"Now, after seven years of contemplation, comes this citation — silent regarding my responsibilities, erasing my courage and forgetting my solemn conviction to truth," Murphy's statement



Former Lieutenant Edward Murphy (right) refused to accept a Navy medal from Rear Admiral Fillmore Gilkeson

UPI Telephone

said.

It said he was "embittered that my country, through its silence, demands my admission and apology for a bum rap."

In recent months, the Navy has presented higher awards than the Commendation Medal to several of the Pueblo's crew for heroism during the capture and im-

prisonment.

A court of inquiry recommended a general court-martial for Bucher for giving up the ship without firing a shot and for allowing

some of his secret materials to be seized. A letter of criticism was placed in Murphy's files. Bucher's promotion trial was vetoed by the Navy, which said he had

suffered enough. He retired in 1974.

Rear Admiral Fillmore Gilkeson of the 11th Navy District was described as "taken aback" by Murphy's action in refusing the commendation. However, he

presented two other decorations to the former Pueblo officer — a Purple Heart, for beatings and torture

which Murphy endured in captivity, and the Navy Combat Action ribbon.

All of the Pueblo crewmen, including Bucher, have been awarded similar ribbons.

Murphy is now a mobile home dealer in nearby El Cajon.

Associated Press