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Pueblo-North Korea Roundup Bjt 500 Three Takes 1,160

By BOB HORTON

AP Military Writer

WASHINGTON AP - A Navy task force including the carrier Enterprise cruised toward North Korea today as the United States applied diplomatic leverage in a bid to recover its captured intelligence ship Pueblo.

The four-ship American force moved in high readiness through the Sea of Japan while the United States asked the Soviet Union to persuade North Korea to give up the 936-ton craft, which had 83 men aboard.

The White House called North Korea's capture of the lightly armed vessel "a very serious situation." The State Department viewed it "with utmost gravity."

President Johnson was to preside today at what was described as a regular meeting of the National Security Council. The ship incident was likely to be the No. 1 topic.

In Panmunjom, Korea, where the Korean War truce was negotiated, the United Nations Command strongly protested the seizure and demanded immediate return of the ship. The command also demanded a North Korean apology.

But the head of the North Korean delegation there, Maj. Gen. Choong-kook, claimed the Pueblo violated North Korean territorial waters off Wonsan and was trying to "come closer to the land to perpetrate intolerable provocative acts" when North Korean navy vessels "returned fire."

Some congressmen called the Pueblo's takeover an act of war and there were suggestions from Capitol Hill that the United States retaliate.

Sources said the nuclear-powered Enterprise was accompanied by the nuclear frigate Truxton and two other combat ships.

Late Tuesday night the ships-diverted from a combat assignment off Vietnam-were southwest of Sasebo, Japan, and hours away from the North Korean port of Wonsan where the Pueblo was assumed help prisoner. In her last message, the Pueblo reported she had been told to follow four North Korean patrol boats into Wonsan.

A North Korea Korean report monitored in Tokyo said the United States was trying to "ignite another war."

Ambassador William J. Porter informed South Korean officials in Seoul the United States had decided to take "certain initial measures" following the seizure.

Sources in the Korean capital speculated that beyond the dispatching of a naval force, retaliatory military actions against North Korea "are not totally excluded."

Information Minister Hong Jong-chul of South Korea said the North Korean Communist regime "must prepare itself to pay due price for its inhumane, unwarranted terrorism."

North Koreans commended the electronics-packed Pueblo at 11:45 p.m. EST, Monday, wounding four crewmen-one critically-according to her radioed reports.

The Pueblo was the first U.S. ship captured since the Civil War-when Confederates captured the Union's Harriet Lane-and a Pentagon spokesman said "she did not fire a shot."

Why? This was one of many unanswered questions.

Japan's Kyodo News Service quoted North Korea as saying the Communists "killed or wounded" several Pueblo crewmen when the North Koreans "returned" fire from the "intruding" U.S. vessel.

Noting its earlier denial that the Pueblo fired any shots, the Pentagon said it had no knowledge of any fatalities.

If "intruding" meant penetrating North Korea's 12-miles territorial limit, the Pentagon denied it.

Spokesmen placed the Pueblo's initial encounter with and subsequent boarding by the North Koreans at about 25 miles off North Korea's coast.

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But the Pentagon did not come to grips with a number of other questions presented by newsmen which had significant bearing on the situation:

-Why didn't the Pueblo, under the command of Cmdr. L. M. Bucher of Jefferson City, Mo., resist the takeover? She was armed with three 50-caliber machine guns.

-Why did the Pueblo wait until the North Koreans were boarding before asking for help? The Pentagon said this request was radioed at 11:45 p.m. and "time and distance factors made it impossible to respond to a call that was made when the ship was being boarded."

-Assuming Pueblo didn't seek aid, why didn't higher authorities perceive a serious situation and scramble some of the supersonic F4 Phantoms from Osan or Kunsan, South Korea, when the ship reported being accosted by the first of four North Korean patrol boats at 10 p.m.? The Pueblo reported at that time she was warned by the Communists to "heave to or I will open fire on you."

-Cmdr. Bucher, 38, in charge of his first ship, "did not request instructions" even after the four boats and two North Korean MIGs surrounded him, according to the Pentagon. Why?

-And why didn't the Pentagon or the Pacific command in Hawaii offer the Pueblo any advice?

The timing of Washington's first alert to the Pueblo's sensitive situation was not precise.

The initial report from Pueblo to Washington arrived "before midnight," the Pentagon said, adding that the precise time was secret.

Bucher "made periodic reports to higher naval authorities" after she was accosted, officers said, but the Pentagon did not identify these officials.

Secretary of Defense R5cNamara

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