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ADMIRAL IS NAMED FOR PUEBLO STUDY

President 'Concerned' Over Reports of Crew Beatings

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WASHINGTON, Dec. 24—The Navy is hoping that a special court of inquiry on the loss of the intelligence ship Pueblo can clear up a number of outstanding questions concerning the amount of secret data captured by North Korea, the resistance offered by the crew and the reported beatings of crewmen after capture.

The court, to be headed by Vice Adm. Harold S. Bowen, commander of antisubmarine forces in the Pacific Fleet, is expected to get under way within the next few weeks on the West Coast.

Pentagon sources made clear today that the convening of a court before which all 82 surviving members of the Pueblo crew are to testify did not suggest any wrongdoing by the ship's captain, Comdr. Lloyd M. Bucher, or members of his crew.

"We may well end up pinning a medal on the commander, probably will," said one ranking Pentagon official. "But whenever we lose a ship, particularly one as important as this one, we have to determine the facts as soon as possible."

Covert Signals Recalled

At the White House, Tom Johnson, acting press secretary, reported that President Johnson was "seriously concerned" about beatings many of the crewmen are said to have received during their 11 months of captivity. An "urgent investigation" into the reports was promised.

Pentagon sources said that questions of prisoner treatment and the prisoners' actions during imprisonment in North Korea would be raised in the initial "debriefings" of the crew in San Diego over the next few days and subsequently during the court of inquiry.

It was noted that while Commander Bucher and some others took part in North Korean news conferences, in which they allegedly confessed to spying and other charges of their

captors, some of the crewmen, when photographed for the world press, made covert signals with their fingers to suggest their plight and non-cooperation.

There will presumably be a formal protest to North Korea for the abuse of the prisoners during their internment.

The Pentagon is eager to determine precisely what highly secret electronic intelligence gear and classified documents fell into North Korean, and presumably Russian, hands.

For at least an hour after North Koreans started boarding the Pueblo, it is inferred from messages from the ship, frantic efforts were made to destroy secret equipment and papers.

The last radio message said in part, "Destruction incomplete. Several publications will be compromised . . . going off air now. Destroying this gear [radio]."

Immediately after the incident the Navy changed all codes that might have been discovered in the capture. But further details on what was lost, and its condition, will help in determining how much the other side learned.

The Navy is also interested in suggestions from the crew on devising "better" destruction mechanisms for such gear.

Another key matter of inquiry will be the extent to which the Pueblo followed all her operational orders. Commander Bucher said in his first news conference after being freed that he had followed all instructions and, in fact, had instructed the crew to make sure he was on the bridge whenever the ship came within 14 miles of North Korean territory.

The orders forbade him to go closer than 13 miles. North Korea contends its territorial waters extend 12 miles from shore.

The commander has insisted that at no time during his cruise did he intrude on North Korean waters.

The court of inquiry will at-

tempt to get a blow-by-blow account of how North Korean gunboats closed in on the Pueblo, denying an escape route and firing on the vessel. It will also try to determine what resistance the converted cargo vessel, which had only two .50-caliber machine guns, made during the enemy approach.

An early message from the Pueblo reported: "Have three wounded and one man with leg blown off. Have not used any weapons nor uncovered .50-caliber machine guns . . . do not intend to offer any resistance."

But since the release of the crew, it has been learned that the ship did put up a fight and that 11 men were wounded, one of whom died in the arms of a comrade during the boarding.

After release, Commander Bucher said: "I surrendered the ship because it was nothing but a slaughter out there."