

MOORER DEFENDS PUEBLO INQUIRY

Says Navy Searches for
'Facts—Not Scapegoats'

By FRED P. GRAHAM

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CHICAGO, Jan. 25—The Chief of Naval Operations declared Saturday night that the Navy is searching for facts—not scapegoats—in its court of inquiry into the capture of the intelligence ship Pueblo.

Adm. Thomas H. Moorer urged the American people "to be patient, not to prejudge, and to have full trust and confidence" in the officers and procedures of the inquiry board.

In a news conference held before a speech to the Fellows of the American Bar Foundation, Admiral Moorer said that elements of the press and public had misinterpreted the warning that was given to Comdr. Lloyd M. Bucher, skipper of the Pueblo, by the court of inquiry.

The warning was to the effect that Commander Bucher might have been guilty of a breach of Navy regulations when he surrendered his ship without a fight.

Admiral Moorer explained that this was a routine legal procedure used formally to inform a person of his rights against self-incrimination, and that it did not mean that the Navy had prejudged the case. He pledged that the rights of Commander Bucher and all the others at the court of inquiry would be protected.

Press accounts of the warning incident reported that Commander Bucher was visibly stunned and shaken by the warning. Some reports said that tears welled in his eyes.

But Admiral Moorer said Commander Bucher had been advised in informal proceedings prior to the open hearing that this warning would be given at the appropriate time.

"Such a warning was not unexpected by Commander Bucher or his counsel," Admiral Moorer said. "I am deeply troubled—the Navy is deeply troubled—that what was a routine and totally correct legal procedure has been widely misinterpreted."

Admiral Moorer's Pueblo statement was added to a text of a speech on comparative Soviet and United States naval power to the Bar Foundation dinner tonight. The dinner is a highlight of the American Bar Association's midwinter meeting at the Palmer House Hotel here.

see Bernard Weinraub, NYTimes 23 Jan.