

ADMIRAL SAYS CARRIER WAS ALERTED TO RETALIATE WHEN PUEBLO WAS ATTACKED

By BERNARD WEINRAUB
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CORONADO, Calif., Feb. 3—A Seventh Fleet aircraft carrier and destroyer were alerted to retaliate in Wonsan Harbor in North Korea when the intelligence ship Pueblo was attacked by North Korean gunboats in January, 1968, a former senior naval operations officer in the Pacific Fleet said today.

The officer, Rear Adm. George L. Cassell, told the court of inquiry into the capture of the Pueblo that the carrier, the Enterprise, had been ordered to "prepare to launch aircraft" to aid the stricken Pueblo.

"We began positioning our forces so they would perform whatever tasks could be ordered by higher authority," said Admiral Cassell, who is now deputy commander of the Naval Striking and Support Forces, a NATO command.

Air Coverage Ordered

"Admiral Hyland [John J. Hyland, Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet] notified the Seventh Fleet to position off Wonsan in international waters," said Admiral Cassell, a 50-year-old naval officer with a soft Texas drawl. "He further directed the commander of the Seventh Fleet to provide air coverage and prepare to recover or tow the Pueblo."

Such a move, Admiral Cassell testified, would have been "retaliatory and [in the form of] what we could have done next as far as recovering the ship."

"The Enterprise was 450 miles—50 minutes to an hour—away," he said. "She wouldn't have got there in time to render assistance."

Speaking slowly and firmly before the court of five admirals, the short, pudgy naval officer said that the order to launch aircraft "could not be taken" without the authority of the Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific. The order was never given.

Sharp Was Commander

At the time of the Pueblo's capture, the Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific was Adm. Ulysses S. Grant Sharp, now retired.

"At the time [of the Pueblo's capture] the U.S.S. Enterprise and one escort, the Truxtun, was four hours out of Sasebo [Japan]," said Admiral Cassell, who was then assistant chief of staff for operations of the Pacific Fleet.

"A message was sent to the Enterprise to turn north to prepare to launch aircraft as would be requested by CINCPAC

[Commander in Chief Pacific]. No launch of aircraft could be made without CINCPAC's authority," the admiral added.

There was no further explanation or speculation at today's court session on why the order was never given by Admiral Sharp or his superiors, the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington.

The court of inquiry resumed its sessions this morning after a three-day recess to give Commander Bucher a brief rest. The 41-year-old naval officer appeared jaunty as he stepped into the sun-dappled Naval Amphibious School, accompanied by his civilian and military attorneys.

"I feel fine," said Commander Bucher with a smile, "I spent the weekend with my family. As you may notice, I got a little color on my face."

He then walked past a handful of armed marines on guard and strolled into the lobby of the school.

At this morning's closed session, the five admirals on the court called a key witness in the inquiry, Lieut. Stephen R. Harris, a 29-year-old Harvard graduate who was in charge of the Pueblo's intelligence gathering mission.

The court heard Lieutenant Harris in closed session nearly three and a half hours today. On Thursday, the thin, sharp-eyed officer testified for more than two hours in closed session. During his appearances, he was accompanied by a military lawyer, Comdr. George W. Powell.

Establishing Facts

"I feel the facts are being well established here," said Lieutenant Harris, emerging from the hearing at the lunch break. "That's all I better say."

Asked how he was bearing up under the questioning of the five admirals, he smiled and said: "Well, I'm still standing."

Commander Bucher, standing next to him, grinned.

As Commander Bucher brushed past newsmen to the car of his civilian attorney, E. Miles Harvey, he was asked if he regretted making any of the decisions that led to the capture of the Pueblo by North Korean gunboats without a fight.

"I don't see that I would have done anything different had the incident occurred today," he said, climbing into the car and driving off.

Navy officials here have said that Lieutenant Harris is expected to appear in open session this week, possibly tomorrow afternoon or Wednesday.

He is tentatively scheduled to follow the Pueblo's executive officer, Lieut. Edward R. Murphy Jr., to the stand.

As the officer in charge of the secret "research space" on the ship, Lieutenant Harris commanded 30 intelligence crewmen who collected electronic data, particularly of radar installations, along the coast of North Korea, and checked on the movements of submarines in the area.

The Navy has declined to dis-

cuss his testimony, terming it "classified" and saying it dealt with the "operation and mission" of the Pueblo.

Commander Bucher has said in open court, however, that two mattress covers crammed with secret papers that belonged to Lieutenant Harris had fallen into the hands of the North Koreans.

The Pueblo's captain added that the bulk of the secret papers that were not destroyed belonged to Lieutenant Harris

and the members of the "research space."

In his testimony, the skipper clearly indicated that the "research space" on the main level of the Pueblo was not entirely under his control and that Lieutenant Harris "did not directly report to me."

"This was a very tender area and CINCPACFLT [Commander in Chief Pacific Fleet] representative for the research detachment on occasion made it known to me these people were

not working for me," Commander Bucher said.

Whom Lieutenant Harris and his staff served — and who issued their orders — has never been publicly disclosed.

House Inquiry Slated

WASHINGTON, Feb. 3 (UPI) — Representative L. Mendel Rivers, Democrat of South Carolina, said today that his House Armed Services Committee

would investigate the seizure of the Pueblo because of what he called "many unanswered questions and many, many inconsistencies" in the Navy's inquiry.

Mr. Rivers's counterpart, Senator John Stennis, Democrat of Mississippi, said last week that his Senate Armed Services Committee "most likely" would investigate the seizure, too.



United Press International
Comdr. Lloyd M. Bucher, right, skipper of the Pueblo, and Lieut. Stephen Harris, intelligence officer on the ship, leaving closed session of court at Coronado, Calif., yesterday.