

Secret Testimony

Crewmen Say Pueblo Officer Didn't Do Job

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From behind closed doors, the Navy yesterday released secret testimony of the most compromising sort concerning the almost total failure of the intelligence officer aboard the spook ship Pueblo to do his job.

The five-page "sanitized" version of what a five-admiral court of inquiry heard in private on Monday afternoon from two enlisted men among the 82 officers and crewmen captured by North Korea last year reveals:

- The ship's intelligence officer, Lieutenant Stephen Harris, never gave any of his 28 subordinates the order to destroy secrets, and an enlisted man had to take command of the research spaces crammed with listening gear and secret documents.

- The burning of close to one ton of secrets in the cramped, smokey research space apparently lasted only 15 minutes rather than the hour previously indicated by Lieutenant Harris in open court.

- While enemy gunboats pounded the Pueblo, Harris, the ship's "super-spook" . . . "appeared nervous, as they all were, but not confused." Additionally, Harris was absent from his duty station for at least one period of time.

- Detailed instructions on what to destroy and how to destroy it were never placed in the research space for all to read until the enemy ordered the Pueblo to halt.

The sanitized version of what happened behind closed doors was characterized by

one officer "as an attempt to explore a minefield using a baseball bat."

COMPROMISING

It places Lieutenant Harris, who has testified he did all he could to destroy his secrets, in a position many here feel is compromising, to say the least.

Chief Petty Officer James Kell, a communications technician attached to Harris' command, was quoted as telling the court in closed session "that at no time dur-

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ing the destruction attempts did he receive an order from Lieutenant Harris . . . nor did he hear Lieutenant Harris give an order to a subordinate."

In terms that seem lukewarm to many here, Kell characterized Harris as ". . . an average officer — nothing outstanding and nothing bad."

'DEATH'

Kell said it would have been "certain death" to take bags of secrets and jettison them, though some of the ship's regular personnel had earlier testified they braved the occasional hail of machine-gun fire and accomplished their mission."

One man was killed on the Pueblo and perhaps a dozen wounded — only two seriously — during the almost two-hour naval engagement.

Chief Petty Officer Ralph Bouden, another electronics "spook" under Harris, was quoted as testifying "that not all the personnel were familiar with the ship's destruction drill (instructions) and

that he has never, at any time during his 14 years of Naval service, been through a destruction drill."

Although it was Harris' responsibility for posting the drill, issuing destruction orders, and he was the only man aboard the Pueblo who had briefed his men on what to do if trouble started — Commander Martin Lloyd Bucher, ship's commander, has told the court the ultimate responsibility for everything rested with the skipper.

LINE

Only one telephone line linked the research space with Bucher up on the bridge. Bucher has indicated he gave Harris the orders to begin destroying his equipment over this line when the Pueblo was fired upon.

Monday's testimony indicated no one in the secret spaces could hear additional orders given over an outside loudspeaker.

Harris had earlier testified he did not install a loudspeaker inside his space "because of security regulations."

Chief Bouden said that after receiving an order to cease destruction and as he left the secret space, he observed intelligence matter laying about in the open.

AMOUNT

"You almost had to wade through it," the Navy release quotes Bouden as testifying.

The chief said some one handed him a box of materials to jettison, but a dull-witted North Korean guard, who had no idea what Bouden was carrying, ordered him to go below decks — still carrying his secrets.

Bouden told the admirals he would have burned these documents but he "had no matches or lighter on him."

The court is expected to resume in open session at the amphibious base here this morning.