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Congress-Pueblo Lead 350

WASHINGTON AP - Adm. Thomas H. Moorer, chief of naval operations, said today the capture of the Pueblo could not have been prevented despite actions taken after the intelligence ship's first message that it was about to be boarded by the North Koreans.

Adm. Moorer, in a prepared statement, also told a special House armed services subcommittee that time, distance and approaching darkness led to the decision that the Pueblo could not be rescued by any military action before it had been taken into Wonsan Harbor in North Korea.

Among the actions taken after the receipt of the first message from the Pueblo, Moorer said, was the ordering of the USS Enterprise and USS Truxton, located 600 miles south of Wonsan, to proceed north at best speed.

He said the commander of the 7th Fleet also ordered three destroyers to join the carrier Enterprise and the Truxton, a high speed transport.

The Pacific Fleet commander in chief ordered a destroyer to proceed to a position off Wonsan harbor, Moorer said.

The chief of naval operations also told the committee that the commander of the 5th Air Force, upon receiving a secret telephone call, "took preparatory steps to deploy available fighter aircraft to the area."

"However, a number of factors which included time, distance and approaching darkness led to the decision that Pueblo could not be rescued by any military action before it had entered Wonsan harbor," Moorer said.

During his appearance before the subcommittee, the first of several congressional panels expected to probe the capture of the Pueblo Jan. 23, 1968, Moorer emphasized that the intelligence ship was operating in international waters—the argument disputed by North Korea.

"Her seizure by the North Koreans was an act of piracy in direct violation of international law," the admiral said.

"From all reports, the treatment accorded her crew while in confinement was brutal and inhumane.

"Measured by any yardstick, this seizure and retention of a United States ship—which is a sovereign part of the United States—and the brutal treatment of American citizens represents a gross violation of the accepted standards of international conduct and of human decency," Moorer said.

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By TOM SEPPY

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON AP - A special House subcommittee is opening the first of what could be a series of congressional probes into the capture of the U.S. intelligence ship Pueblo.

Adm Thomas H. Moorer, chief of naval operations, was called as the leadoff witness at today's opening session as the committee sought information on why the Pueblo was sent on its mission and what steps were taken to protect it.

The special House Armed Services subcommittee hearings came as a Navy board of inquiry in Coronado, Calif., moved into its seventh and possibly last week of investigating the intelligence vessel's Jan. 23, 1968 capture by North Korea.

The committee also will look into possible revisions in the code of conduct which applies to military personnel who are captured by enemy forces.

At the Coronado inquiry, the Pueblo skipper, Cmdr. Lloyd M. Bucher, and other crewmen have repeated over and over that the ship was unprepared for a North Korean attack or any hostile actions beyond harassment.

However, last month, Rear Adm. Leslie J. O'Brien said future Pueblo-type incidents should be prevented by a variety of measures the Navy has taken, including increased protection for its intelligence ships, more potent weapons, devices to destroy secret papers and equipment and scuttling systems.

He said these devices, lacking on the Pueblo, can be set off more rapidly than any equipment previously available and can be triggered by "very few people."

Cmdr. Bucher told the Navy court his ship had only axes and sledgehammers to destroy the sensitive intelligence-gathering equipment and that the Navy several times turned down his requests for better gear.

O'Brien also said there has been a general tightening and overhaul of the procedures and rules for control of such ships to assure swifter communication with superiors responsible for sending aid and to give skippers clear guidelines on what to regard as harassment by hostile ships or planes and how to react.

A major point of criticism in Congress and elsewhere has been the lack of warplanes close enough to help the Pueblo.

The subcommittee's inquiry into the code of conduct comes about as a result of the Navy board being told the Pueblo's officers broke the code for American prisoners the day after capture and without being tortured.

The code of conduct was signed by President Eisenhower in 1955 after numerous American servicemen signed confessions in Korean War prison camps. It orders all servicemen to give only their name, rank, serial number and date of birth if captured.

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