

Bucher Defends Decision

CORONADO (San Diego County) — (UPI) — His Navy career in the balance, USS Pueblo skipper Lloyd Bucher today defended his decision to give up his ship in a final speech before a court of inquiry.

The five-admiral court heard Bucher's summation on the last day of testimony in an eight-week inquiry into the Pueblo's capture by North Korea Jan. 23, 1968.

The court will write a report that could recommend Bucher and other Pueblo men for court-martial, decorations, or no action at all.

Made Public

The court's decision is expected to be made public, but the Navy has not announced when.

In cross-examination this week, the admirals concentrated on Bucher's decision to surrender the Pueblo in the face of superior force

without a fight.

They also took Bucher to task for failure to devise fool-proof methods of destroying the Pueblo's secret documents.

Lt. Stephen Harris, 31, of Melrose, Mass., who ran the Pueblo's espionage center, also was under fire on this point. Harris' men have testified the destruction was carried out in an inefficient manner.

The admirals' questions about Bucher's role as leader of the Pueblo crew during 11 months of captivity in North Korea were far less hostile.

Witness

The only open court witness yesterday was Navy Capt. Albert Giorgis, 44, of Los Angeles, an engineering expert on vessels of the Pueblo type. He said no special method had been devised for scuttling the Pueblo before she sailed on her last voyage.

Giorgis said sinking the ship by conventional methods would have required at least 1 1/4 hours, with a specially trained crew. Without such a crew, it would have taken more than three hours.