

# Commander of Pueblo's Headquarters to Testify

Adm. Johnson to Take Stand Today

By RICHARD E. MEYER  
CORONADO, Calif. (AP) — The admiral who commanded the USS Pueblo's headquarters in Japan when the ship was captured off North Korea takes the stand Monday at a naval court of inquiry.

Rear Adm. Frank L. Johnson, former commander of naval operations in Japan and now a district commandant in Seattle, Wash., will occupy the witness chair behind a green-covered table in closed session.

Johnson's headquarters received the Pueblo skipper's urgent radioed pleas for help that

never came when North Korean gunboats fired on the intelligence ship a year ago.

And Johnson gave the skipper, Cmdr. Lloyd M. Bucher, his final orders before the Pueblo sailed out of Sasebo, Japan, to scout Soviet ships and observe the North Korean shore.

## USE OF MACHINE GUNS

"He (Johnson) said they (the Pueblo's two .50-caliber machine guns) were to be used in the event that all else failed in extracting ourselves from a harassment situation such as had not been experienced before," Bucher testified last Monday.

"He was quite sure they would never be needed and I was under the definite impres-

sion that everyone was not in concurrence at Commander Naval Forces, Japan, that guns should ever be located on the ship.

"I received this impression from many officers up there, that they did not think that they (the guns) belonged on the ship and they felt uneasy about putting the guns on her, and that we might in fact, by having the guns, draw the type of reaction from potential forces that we did not want, which was an attack on the ship."

Johnson will begin his testimony during the afternoon, the Navy said Saturday, after the court hears closed door testimony from his former chief of staff, Capt. Forrest A. Pease.

Pease is chief of staff for the current commander of U.S. Naval forces in Japan.

## ASKING QUESTIONS

Bucher, crewcut and angular, begins the second week of the inquiry much differently than the first. He is now in the position to ask questions, through his two attorneys.

Graying and looking older than his 41 years, Bucher was questioned last week.

He gave anguished testimony about bloodchilling mental torture and brought his wife Rose to tears when he recalled repeating as his captors threatened to shoot him:

"I love you, Rose. I love you, Rose."

But Bucher isn't off the hook. He is still the only person named a party to the court, a legal distinction making it his court of inquiry so far.

And Bucher is still the only person the court has said it sus-

pects of breaking regulations in the Pueblo incident. The court's job is to investigate and recommend — anything from medals to court martial.

## SKIPPER WAS TENSE

Bucher was tense as he told his story last week. He sipped water through tight lips. Even his jokes sounded strained.

He is balding and still thin from his 11 months in prison, where at one time he lost nearly 100 pounds.

Despite black-rimmed glasses he has trouble reading because lack of vitamins in prison temporarily damaged his eyesight.

Bucher rarely smiled. His voice was nasal. Sometimes he riveted his eyes on the gold carpet under his feet.

The courtroom was stuffy, because there are no windows in the 111th street amphitheater where open sessions are held.

It was usually filled with newsmen, spectators, a few wives of Pueblo crewmen and the young Navy lawyers who will represent the crewmen when they are called.

## WIFE PRESENT

In the front row next to Bucher sat his dark blonde wife, a pretty woman, whose national campaign pounded "Remember the Pueblo" into the minds of many Americans until they couldn't forget.

Mrs. Bucher didn't appear until the inquiry was three days old. She was in Washington, attending President Nixon's inauguration.

She wears simple dresses to court and a single strand of pearls.

Her shoulder length hair is smartly coiffed. Sometimes she takes notes.

So does Carol Murphy, wife of Lt. Edward R. Murphy Jr., navigator and the Pueblo's executive officer.

Mrs. Murphy cried when Bucher described his torture.

"It's really very hard to take," she said. Her husband hasn't been in court nor has

any other member of the crew.

#### USED FOR CLASSES

The amphitheater is normally used for classes in amphibious warfare. The audience seats are tiered. Across the front wall overhead is a colored diagram with model ships and airplanes demonstrating a beach landing.

The amphitheater is in the main school building at an amphibious naval training base on the peninsula of Coronado, stretching across the bay from San Diego.

The peninsula was one of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's favorite spas.

Presiding over the court of inquiry is Vice Adm. Harold G. Bowen Jr., who begins nearly every session by peering at the audience, then at the counsel, then at his table. There's a bald swath down the middle of his head, sometimes shining in the light.

#### FOUR OTHER ADMIRALS

Two admirals flank him on each side of the bench behind a long table covered with green felt on a stage.

To his left sits Rear Adm. Edward E. Grimm, 58, with a deep baritone voice; then Rear Adm. Allen A. Bergner, 52, a cigar clenched in his teeth. To Bowe's right is Rear Adm. Marsall W. White, 57, sandy-haired director of the Pacific Missile Range; and at the far right is round-faced Rear Adm. Richard

R. Pratt.

The Navy says Bucher has received between 160 and 170 telegrams from all over the nation "very much in respect and praise of the commander."

The five admirals on the court have received about 100 telegrams, the Navy said, many of which "are not as filled with praise."

One of the telegrams to Bucher, from a Mr. and Mrs. James Ray in Cincinnati, said, "We are deeply grateful to you and your fine crew. Thank you for all you have given to your men and our country."

"We are in agreement with you 100 per cent," said another from Max and Edna Bradley of Los Angeles. "Subjected as you have been to third-degree questioning is a disgrace to our nation."

But the chief of naval operations, Adm. Thomas H. Moorer, said in a Washington statement, "The Navy is searching for facts — not scapegoats." He said he was troubled that the inquiry "has been widely misinterpreted."

U. S. intelligence ships have the best available equipment, Moorer told newsmen Saturday.