

Crying Pueblo Skipper Tells of Korea Horror, Confession

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Tried to Commit Suicide,
Bucher Relates

By RICHARD E. MEYER
CORONADO, Calif. (AP) —

The skipper of the Pueblo—tears streaming, his voice an anguished cry—said Thursday North Koreans attempted to force a spying confession from him by pretending to shoot him as he knelt before them, so shaken he could say only: "I love you, Rose, I love you Rose."

Cmdr. Lloyd M. Bucher said he finally confessed later after they threatened to shoot his crew one by one, starting with the youngest — and that night he tried, vainly, to commit suicide by drowning himself in a water bucket.

Bucher's blonde wife, Rose, sobbed and dug her fists into her eyes as she heard her husband testify before a Navy board of inquiry. He finally broke down, so a recess had to be called. The board has warned him he may have violated regulations by surrendering his intelligence ship.

Of the confession, he said: "Some time during the night I attempted to commit suicide by drowning myself in a bucket of water in my room, but was unable to accomplish this.

"Mentally I was quite disturbed, partly because of the embarrassment this confession might have caused the United States. And I realized they needed me alive more than anyone else in the crew for public appearances that I was afraid of and knew were coming."

HAUNTED BY THOUGHT

He said he was unable to eat

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PUEBLO SKIPPER TESTIFIES

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or sleep for several days because he was haunted by the thought that secret information in the Pueblo had been compromised.

Bucher testified standing during the morning session when he broke down, but was seated during the afternoon session. He was excused at the end of the day—subject to later recall.

The court then said it would hold closed sessions to discuss classified — secrets — subjects starting Friday and extending through Tuesday, with Sunday off.

Scheduled to appear before the closed session of the court were:

Rear Adm. Frank L. Johnson, former commander of U.S. Naval forces in Japan and Bucher's superior officer at the time the Pueblo was captured. Johnson is presently commandant of the 13th Naval District in Seattle.

—Capt. Thomas L. Dwyer, assistant chief of staff for intelligence at Navy Headquarters in Japan at the time of the capture.

PEASE, EVERETT

—Capt. Forrest A. Pease, chief of staff for the commander of U.S. Naval forces in Japan now and at the time of the incident.

—Capt. William H. Everett, operations officer for Naval Headquarters in Japan when the Pueblo was captured.

They will appear after secret testimony by Bucher, who was expected to wind up his session behind closed doors on Saturday afternoon.

The Navy said it would prepare summaries of the secret sessions, deleting all classified information, and make them available to newsmen.

The 41-year-old officer, describing interrogation by his captors, said a North Korean shouted as Bucher knelt: "Kill the —."

Bucher added, referring to a guard with a gun pointed at his head: "The gun clicked, but it didn't go off, and I didn't hear a shell fall to the floor. I felt sure they were going to shoot me."

He said his captors showed him a man they said was a South Korean who had bitten through his lip during horrendous torture while strapped to a wall and told him, "That's what happens to spies, and you are spies, and you will get exactly the same."

"I passed out," he said.

Bucher was in his fourth day of testimony, describing the capture of his ship exactly a year ago and the imprisonment of its crew. He had been usually calm, sometimes tense, until he came to the interrogation.

BEGINS TREMBLING

As he talked he began trembling. The navy counsel, Capt. William Newsome, strode to him and reached to put a hand on Bucher's arm. His hand fell short but one of Bucher's attorneys put his hand under Bucher's arm as the skipper's legs appeared to wobble. The other attorney unhooked a microphone from around his neck and led him from the courtroom. Court was recessed. A navy psychiatrist-medical officer, followed by Mrs. Bucher, still weeping and pale, followed Bucher out.

Earlier, as he appeared near breakdown, Newsome asked if he wanted a recess. "No! No! I would rather get this over with now. I am sure I can do it," Bucher said.

Describing his interrogation,

Bucher said that when he revived after fainting a North Korean officer he nicknamed Super Colonel, or "Super C," seemed to be desperate.

He said the officer told him: "We will now begin to shoot your crew and shoot them in your presence until you sign. And even then if you will not sign, I will make you sign."

NOT PREPARED

The officer said they would start with the youngest, and brought forward Fireman 2-c Howard Bland, the youngest.

"I was not prepared for them to shoot my crew," Bucher said. "I was convinced they would do it. They were animals. I was not prepared to go through things like that," he said, stammering.

He paused, wiped his eyes, took a drink of water.

"I was not prepared for this type of mental torture," he said. "I told them at this time, 'I will sign this confession.' I did sign it. I was taken back to my room and a big plateful of food with eggs and other goodies was brought to me. . . . I did not touch it."

The typewritten confession said Bucher was a CIA agent, that his ship intruded into North Korean waters, and that he was trying to put South Koreans ashore.

The interrogation, Bucher said, came the day after the ship was seized. It began when he was called into a room where he later found most of his men got the severest beating of their captivity.

"They told me if I signed their confession we would be returned home quickly," Bucher said. Present were "Super C"

and two or three other armed soldiers.

MADE TO KNEEL

"I refused to sign. I was told I would be given two minutes to sign or be shot. They made me kneel. An officer with a weapon drew back the slide and stood behind me. Then Super C repeated, 'you have two minutes.' I was relieved at the prospect of being shot. I knew that through human torture it is possible to get somebody to say anything whether they mean it or not."

"When the gun pointed at his head clicked but didn't fire Bucher said, 'I knew damn well it was a game they were playing."

Two more minutes went by, Bucher said, and "The officer said, 'He's not worth a bullet,' and told me I would be beaten to death. Two guards beat me to the floor and kicked me and worked me over real good. I lost consciousness after a few minutes . . . I asked to go to the bathroom . . . all I could urinate was blood."

He was taken to another building and shown a tortured man strapped to a wall, he said. "They told me he was a South Korean spy. He was alive . . . but had a compound fracture of his upper right arm with the bone sticking out. He was stripped to the waist. He had completely bitten through . . ."

Bucher broke, then continued "completely bitten through his lower lip. It was hanging down. His right eye had been put out. His head was hanging down. There was a lot of . . . Bucher's voice failed momentarily) . . . black matter running down his right cheek. He was under three spotlights. I do not remember leaving that building. I thought for a couple of weeks it had been a nightmare."

'CLOSE TO 100 PCT.'

Earlier, describing how his ship was boarded and taken to port without a battle, Bucher was asked by Newsome: "Had you made a decision that you would accept incomplete destruction (of secret gear) when you authorized a boarding party to come aboard."

"Yes, sir, I did. I assumed it

had all been jettisoned with the exception of a few things Lt Harris told me about in phone calls to the bridge."

He said he noticed when touring the ship later with captors that "very close to 100 per cent" of secret gear had been destroyed.

He was accused after capture of being a CIA agent, Bucher said—"they have CIA on the mind"—but he stuck to his story that he was doing electromagnetic research as part of the international geophysical research operation.

He said he was placed aboard a train, blindfolded, hands tied "until someone noticed my hands had turned black."

He was transferred to a bus he said, and taken to a three story building with the crew where they were kept for several days during interrogation and were told they would be shot at sundown.

RECEIVES KICK

"As I got off the bus," Bucher said, "I received a kick in the small of my back and another in the leg. That one really got to me."

He had been wounded in the legs and buttocks by gunfire preceding the capture.

He asked several times for care for his wounded men Bucher said, and it was denied.

In the initial interrogation, he said, he and his officers were seated in front of a general surrounded by 40 officers. "The general said we were not prisoners of war and had no rights under the Geneva Convention but were espionage agents caught red handed and then he said we would be shot that day. 'How do you want it? One at a time or all together?'"

"I requested that I be shot and that the remainder of my crew be allowed to return to the ship and to the sea and to the United States."

Bucher said at one point the North Koreans told him Lt. Edward Murphy, the ship's executive officer, had confessed. He said he felt this was a hoax, "which it was."

Once he signed the confession, Bucher said "Super C" finally answered his continuous de-

mand to know what was being done for the wounded men. He quoted the colonel as saying, "I can tell you that the wounded are being taken care of."

TERRIBLE STENCH

"This as it turned out was a lie," Bucher said. "They got no medical attention for at least ten days."

He said one man was shot completely through with shrapnel "and gangrene and other diseases, I'd guess you'd call them diseases, associated with untreated wounds, set in. The stench in that room was so terrible that no one could stand being in that room without vomiting."

He told of a news conference in which he gave the answers his captors had written out for him.

"My primary thought as long as I was kept alive was to get back to the United States that our ship had not intruded," he said, "regardless of what coerced confession would come out of this captivity."

Pueblo crewmen gave a well-known gesture of vulgar contempt when they posed for a photograph the North Koreans distributed to the West.

"When they found that out, they really turned to on me and gave me the worst beating I received," Bucher said. He said one of his men was beaten in the stomach until his abdomen was ruptured and "his gut was sticking way out. They opened my door and stopped with his stretcher so I could see his condition."