

CHILLING TALE OF TORTURE

Tried to Kill Self, Bucher Says

By RICHARD E. MEYER
Associated Press Writer

CORONADO, Calif. (AP) —

The captain of the Pueblo says he confessed to spying after blood-chilling mental torture, and then tried to drown himself in a bucket of water.

Tears streaming, his voice breaking with anguish, Cmdr. Lloyd M. Bucher told a Navy court of inquiry yesterday that North Koreans finally broke him by threatening to shoot his crewmen one-by-one in front of him—and summoning the youngest sailor and saying they would start with him.

Bucher's account of the terror ended—at least for now—his public appearances. He

strode tight-lipped today into the first of a series of closed-door sessions to hear secret testimony.

His attorney told newsmen the secret sessions are "crucial" to Bucher because the witnesses will include the skipper's superior, Rear Adm. Frank L. Johnson, commander of U.S. naval forces in Japan when the Pueblo was seized. Bucher has said he radioed desperately for help as North Korean gunboats surrounded the intelligence ship, but it never arrived.

The Navy said Johnson would testify after closed-door accounts from one or more of three captains under his command in Japan when the Pueblo year. Summaries of all secret sessions will be prepared, deleting all classified information, and made available to newsmen, a Navy spokesman said.

OPEN COURT sessions are scheduled to resume Wednesday.

After describing why he confessed, Bucher said yesterday, "sometime 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," he said, partly because

of the embarrassment he thought his confession caused the United States.

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.

"AND I realized," he said, "they (North Koreans) needed me alive more than anyone else in the crew for public appearances that I was afraid of and knew were coming."

The court warned Bucher Wednesday he may have violated regulations by surrendering the ship. Bucher was in his fourth day of testimony and has been unusually calm, sometimes tense, until he came to describing an interrogation before he confessed. As he talked he began trembling.

"They made me kneel on the floor," Bucher said. He said a North Korean he nicknamed Super Colonel, or "Super C," seemed desperate.

"YOU HAVE two minutes to decide to sign the confession or be shot," Bucher said he was told. "I spent two minutes on the floor and I repeated over and over" . . . the skipper's voice broke and he paused . . . "I love you, Rose, I love you, Rose."

His blonde wife Rose sobbed and rubbed her eyes at that point in his testimony.

"At the end of the two minutes he asked me to sign," Bucher said. "I said I wouldn't. He told a guard at my side to move so when I got shot and the bullet passed through my head, he would not be hit."

"KILL THE son of a bitch!" Bucher said a North Korean shouted. "The gun clicked but it didn't fire. I had fully expected to be shot. But when the slide was drawn back, presumably to insert another bullet, I did not hear any bullet hit the floor and damn well knew 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."

AT ONE point, as Bucher ap-

peared near collapse, the Navy's counsel, Capt. William Newsome, asked if he wanted a recess.

"No! No! I would rather get this over with now," Bucher replied. He was trembling.

Bucher said he was taken to another building and shown a tortured man strapped to a wall. "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's voice broke, and after a long pause he 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 for a minute) ... black matter running down his right cheek. He was under three spotlights. I do not remember leaving that building."

He said his captors told him, "That's what happens to spies, and you are spies, and you will get exactly the same."

"I passed out," Bucher said.

Bucher said he revived in his interrogation room.

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

Bucher said the North Koreans summoned the youngest member of his crew, 21-year-old Fireman 2.C. Howard Bland.

"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."

Bucher was 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 egg and other goodies was brought to me ... I did not touch it."

Bucher began trembling.

NEWSOME WALKED across the gold carpet and reached to put a hand on Bucher's arm. His hand fell short as one of Bucher's attorneys put a hand under the skipper's elbow as Bucher's legs appeared to wobble.

Bucher's other attorney took a microphone from around the skipper's neck and led him from the courtroom. A Navy psychiatrist-medical officer and Mrs. Bucher, still weeping and pale, followed Bucher out.

Court was recessed for 90 minutes.

When it resumed, Bucher said his confession finally softened Super C enough to make him answer his (Bucher's) continuous demands to know whether his wounded men were being treated.

HE QUOTED the colonel as saying "I can tell you that the wounded are being taken care of."

"This as it turned out was a lie. They got no medical attention for at least 10 days."

He said one of his men had been shot completely through with shrapnel and gangrene in his untreated wound caused a stench "so terrible that another crewman who was not wounded said he could not stand being in the room without vomiting."

BUCHER said another one of his men was beaten until his abdomen was ruptured and "his gut was sticking way out. They opened my door and stopped with a stretcher so I could see his condition.

"My primary thought was, as long as I was kept alive, to get a message back to the United States that our ship had not intruded, 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 on me and gave me the worst beating I received," Bucher said.