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## 'REFUSED TO SACRIFICE HIS MEN'

# Sent Message Directly To White House--Bucher

By RICHARD E. MEYER

CORONADO, Calif. (AP)—The Pueblo's skipper says he used a communication priority direct to the White House as well as to his Navy superiors in Japan after North Korean gunboats surrounded his ship.

Cmdr. Lloyd Bucher told a Navy court of inquiry yesterday he kept the channels open as the Reds made their first attempt to board. Minutes later, a salvo raked his radar mast, wounding him and three of his crew.

Bucher said he did not order his crew to man their two machine guns and fight because it would have meant certain death for the gunners since the sub chaser and three torpedo boats were standing at point-blank range. He said he had "no hope of outrunning them" to avoid capture.

A WHITE HOUSE spokesman said last year that there had been a delay in informing then-President Johnson. The delay was attributed to the time it took presidential aide Walt W. Rostow to compile information for a briefing. Then-Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara was said to have received word nine minutes after the Pueblo sent its final message.

Bucher repeatedly denied he sailed into the 12-mile territorial water the North Koreans claim offshore.

Bucher said earlier his assignment was to conduct surveillance on Soviet ships in the

Sea of Japan and monitor North Korean radar.

ONE PUEBLO MESSAGE described the approach of the submarine chaser and its threat to open fire, Bucher said yesterday.

Another, he said, told of North Korean torpedo boats rushing up, two Communist MIGs flying overhead and one of the patrol boats "backing toward my bow" with an armed boarding party.

"I raised the precedence (on the messages) from flash to critical," Bucher said, a Navy priority rating that meant they went "immediately and straight to the White House."

Bucher, describing the opening shots fired at his vessel, said the sub chaser began firing "at 1,500 to 2,000 yards."

WHEN THE SUBCHASER was first spotted, Bucher said, he went to the wardroom and looked at it through binoculars.

"There were 10 to 12 people on the bridge, most of them with binoculars trained on us and watching us. I suspected this was nothing more than routine surveillance."

But Bucher said he also noticed that the vessel's guns were manned and pointed at him, so he ordered all hands to stay below deck to avoid showing how many men he had on board.

He reported raising flags to show the Pueblo was taking hydrographic tests.

"WHAT NATIONALITY?" the sub chaser asked.

"I was not particularly ap-

prehensive," Bucher said but added that he ordered the engines prepared to maneuver and emergency message blanks broken out.

"There was a great deal of activity on the bridge indicating to me that they might have been surprised that we were a U.S. ship," Bucher said.

Then, he said, three approaching torpedo boats were sighted.

The sub chaser then hoisted flags demanding "heave to or I will fire," Bucher said. "I was momentarily confused as to just what he meant by that message since I was dead in the water."

BUCHER SAID HE signaled, "I am in international waters," but the torpedo boats approached. Bucher said the Pueblo's location was fixed at 15.8 miles from nearest land. Bucher said this was confirmed by the navigator and himself.

A junior officer asked about scuttling the Pueblo, but Bucher said it would have taken more than 2½ hours and the vessel was in only 30 fathoms of water.

"Also the water temperature was freezing," Bucher said.

"A man cannot survive but very few minutes in that kind of water—perhaps less than five minutes."

AT THIS POINT, Bucher said, he ordered his men to prepare to destroy the classified material. "At about the same time, two MIG aircraft, I believe they were MIG 21s, passed directly over the ship . . . I said on the bridge, 'I'll be damned if they are going to get away with that.' So I got under way out to sea.

"Thank you for your consideration," Bucher said he messaged, "I am departing."

"They started playing porpoise, crossing my bow at 10 yards, and keeping all guns aimed at me. I did not feel at any time, though, that there was any point in going to war. I was completely and hopelessly outgunned. To man our .50-caliber machine guns would have been to send a man up to that gun, and that would have been certain death to him.

"And we would have had to remove their covers, which were in fact frozen . . ."

He ignored another order to halt, Bucher said, and the firing started.

# Pueblo Case Guilt Points To Top--Russell

By JACK BELL

WASHINGTON (AP) — Sen. Richard B. Russell, D-Ga., says that if testimony is upheld charging the USS Pueblo was inadequately equipped for defense and destruction of secret equipment, "then someone higher up in the line of command has been guilty of a very grave dereliction of duty."

Russell, chairman of the powerful Senate Appropriations Committee, said that testimony by the Pueblo's captain, Cmdr. Lloyd M. Bucher at a Navy court of inquiry indicates "a tragic mixture of errors" in outfitting the ship.

Bucher testified that the Navy failed to provide adequate means to destroy secret intelligence equipment, efficient guns and communications and made no arrangement for retaliatory help in case the intelligence vessel was threatened with attack.

"I do not want to prejudge this testimony," Russell said in an interview. "This is the statement of one man and perhaps the Navy has some satisfactory reply to it."

North Korea captured the Pueblo about a year ago, claiming the ship had intruded into its 12-mile territorial sea limit. The United States has denied the claim.