

Bucher: Pueblo Denied Destruct Gear

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CORONADO, Calif., Jan. 20—Skipper Lloyd M. Bucher of the Pueblo testified today that he vainly sought a system for destroying secret equipment on his ship before putting to sea because "I decided it was necessary and very desirable."

But, despite repeated personal pleas including a classified letter sent through channels to the Chief of Naval Op-

erations in Washington, Bucher told a Naval Court of Inquiry's first session, he was turned down "for various reasons," some of them classified.

The skipper—in a voice drained of emotion and with a countenance to match—disclosed other startling shortcomings about the ship he was given to command for the delicate mission of eavesdropping on North Korean radar and radio communications.

His pleas for improvements

were rejected, he said, because "of time and expense."

The Pueblo at the time of its seizure off the North Korean coast on Jan. 23, 1968, had only axes, sledge-hammers and a few weighted bags for destroying coding equipment and other secret gear, Bucher testified.

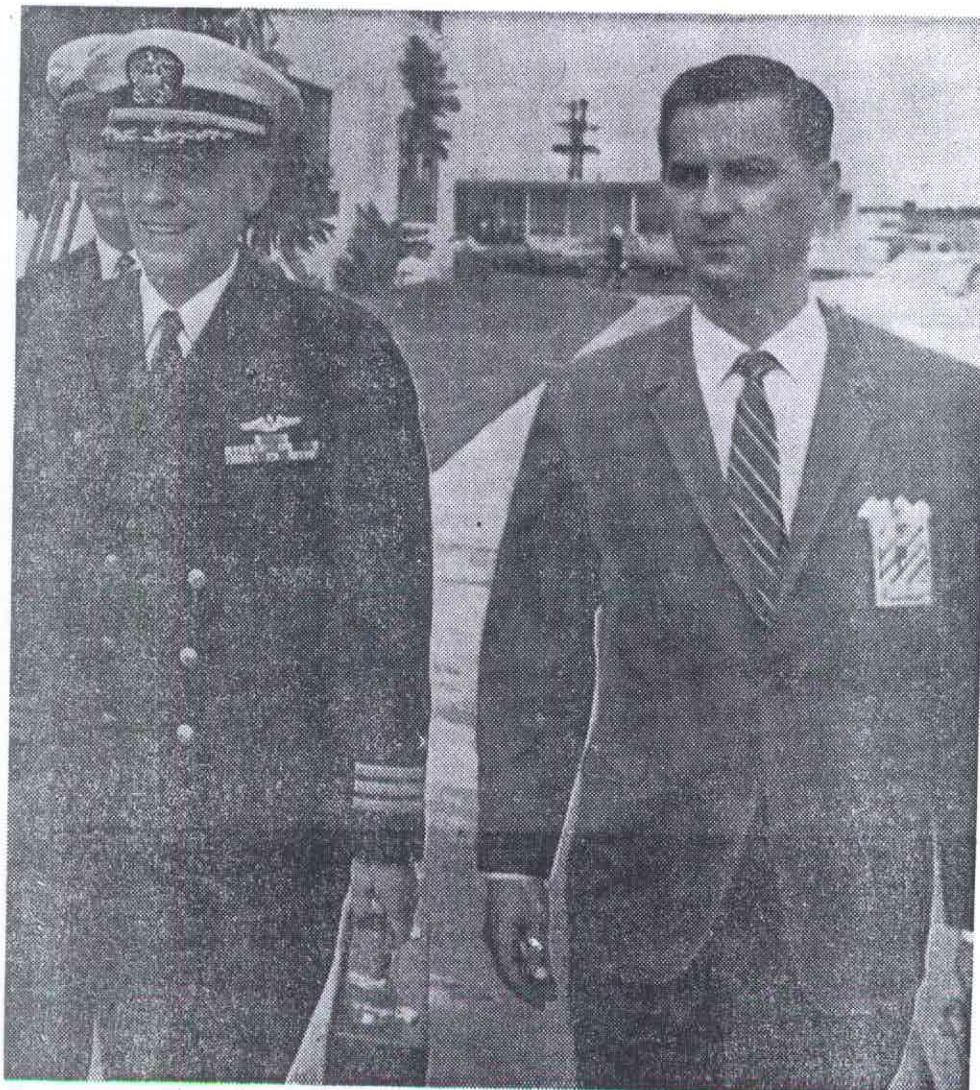
He said he requested the "destruct" system while his ship—a former Army light cargo vessel once used by the South Koreans—was being

converted for its intelligence mission at the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard at Bremerton, Wash., in 1967.

He said he wanted the destructive devices installed in the electronics room on the main deck, toward the bow, and in the small code center adjoining it on the port side.

He could not recall the exact date he sent the classified letter to the Chief of Naval Operations, but esti-

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United Press International

Cmdr. Lloyd M. Bucher arrives for Pueblo inquiry, flanked by his military counsel,

Capt. James E. Keys, and his civilian legal adviser, E. Miles Harvey.

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mated it was "between April and latter part of June, 1967." He said his own copy of the letter was destroyed or captured by the North Koreans at the time of the Pueblo's seizure. He said he also made the request in his progress reports on the Pueblo.

"I received official correspondence back," he said, "that the U.S. Army had been studying a program of destruct equipment . . . The request was turned down for various reasons. I believe these reasons are classified."

After a break in the morning session of the inquiry, however, Bucher returned to the destruct equipment issue—apparently to underscore his role for the court.

"I'm quite sure it went to the CNO, Bucher said of his letter to Washington. He said "the problem most emphasized" in the refusals to put the destruct system aboard the Pueblo was that it "has to be built integral to electronics equipment already installed."

He said the Pueblo also was short of equipment to destroy secret publications. Bucher said the ship had only one incinerator, 2 feet by 2 feet, which worked like a fireplace. It did not have a fuel-fed fire of its own. He said secret papers "had to be torn up or shredded" and ignited by hand.

The ship did have paper shredders, Bucher said, but they were too small to destroy a big pile of papers in a hurry.

The five admirals on the court of inquiry sat impassively behind a long table at the front of the 113-seat auditorium at the Naval amphibious base here as Bucher made these other disclosures:

- **Steering**—"The ship's steering system was a very old system manufactured by a defunct elevator company. It was the most troublesome system on the ship. It broke down as many a 60 times in two

weeks. The backup system was also ancient."

He said in sea trials outside the Bremerton yard he found that the steering problems had reached "the point of being insoluble." When the system broke down, he had to rely on seamen working the rudders by main force with cables or ropes.

The Pueblo left the yard however, with the same old steering system. Not until he reached Japan, he said, was it fixed—by the Japanese.

- **Telephones**—Bucher said he requested—but never received—a better telephone system so the officers could coordinate operations in such emergencies as hostile boarding, fire or flooding.

He said the Pueblo had only one "sound-power" telephone system, and this became jammed up whenever a lot of calls had to be placed. He said "the primary problem was time" as far as getting more extensive system installed at Bremerton.

The Navy's answer, he said, was to authorize Bucher to install the phone system himself. But he said he had only one electrician in his crew competent to do this. "I considered it essential" to have the system, Bucher said, but the do-it-yourself recommendation would have meant "months, if not years" before obtaining a system for operating "the ship safely from the standpoint of action, if the ship did get into an action situation."

- **Stability**—The skipper testified that the Pueblo had stability problems, partly because the converted cargo ship was topheavy. He recommended while the Pueblo was at Bremerton that a lifeboat which "had very ancient raising and lowering mechanisms" be removed from the upper deck to lower the ship's center of gravity. He would have depended instead on a life raft aboard big enough for 90 men.

"Once again," Bucher said

of his lifeboat recommendation, "funds and time did prevent this from being done."

- **Integrity**—Fighting ships are divided into compartments with watertight doors so if one part is flooded the whole ship does not sink. Bucher said the Pueblo had only one such watertight compartment. That was between the engine room and the auxiliary power room where diesel generators turned out electricity for the sophisticated electronic equipment aboard the ship.

If a hole were punched in the Pueblo below the waterline, the whole ship would have filled up like a bathtub for lack of watertight compartments.

"A hole of 15 inches would have been too much to contend with," Bucher told the court. He said even with a smaller hole, 8 inches to 12 inches in diameter, "we did not have the capability to save the ship."

- **Scuttling**—a big question in which has been raised is why Bucher, once he said the Pueblo was going to be captured, did not scuttle it. The skipper testified today that there was only one way to do this: The intake for water to cool the diesel engines would have to be removed, flooding the main engine room.

But because of the watertight bulkhead between the engine room and the auxiliary power room, the sinking would have taken time. There was no door in the bulkhead. Water would have had to fill up the engine room and then rise up through the stairway to spill into the rest of the ship.

"It would have taken 15 or 20 minutes to make preparations to let water in through the cooling port," Bucher said, "and then it would have taken in my opinion 2½ hours or perhaps longer" for the Pueblo to fill up enough to sink.

- **Armament**—Bucher suc-

cessfully persuaded his Navy superiors to allot more weaponry to the Pueblo before she went to sea because he thought he might need it.

Originally, Navy specifications called for the ship to carry four carbines and seven .45-calibre pistols. Bucher said he and the commander of the Palm Beach jointly protested this allocation as too small in a letter to the Chief of Naval Operations. Their ships were subsequently allotted 10 sub-machine guns, one carbine, seven .45-calibre pistols and 50 concussion grenades for use against hostile swimmers.

After the USS Liberty was attacked during what Bucher called the "Israeli-U.A.R. farce" in June 1967, the Navy changed its mind about how much armament intelligence ships could carry. Adm. Horatio Rivero Jr., now Deputy Chief of Naval Operations, personally ordered the Pueblo and ships like her to upgrade their armament.

"His order was for 3-by-50 guns to be installed on the

Pueblo," Bucher said. This would have been a gun with a shell three inches long and a barrel 50 times its length—an installation so big "it would have sunk us," Bucher said.

The Pueblo skipper said he agreed with Rivero's concern about armament for "independently operating ships" and sought to come up with armament practical for the Pueblo.

While the ship was still at Brewerton, Bucher — who said today he was no expert guns—recommended two tubs of guns, either 20-millimeter or 40-millimeter, on both sides of the Pueblo's bow. The installation was not made at the yard, Bucher said. The Navy Bureau of Ships studied the problem.

"We left the yard in September, 1967, without the guns installed," Bucher said. "The first I heard of .50-calibre machine guns (for the Pueblo) was when I got to Yokosuka," the ship's home port in Japan. Four of them were installed on the Pueblo at that time,

several weeks before it began its intelligence mission.

Former Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara, in Congressional testimony early last year on the Pueblo capture, said the armament of intelligence ships had to be limited to keep from appearing provocative.