

THE PUEBLO:

PALE and emaciated, the witness clenched his fists, blinked his hooded eyes and stumbled over his words as he relived the interminable nightmare. In 4½ days of torturous testimony before a Navy Court of Inquiry last week, Commander Lloyd M. Bucher recounted the details of the capture of his ship U.S.S. *Pueblo* and the eleven-month ordeal that he and his crew endured while they were prisoners of the North Koreans. The tale he told was one of almost unbelievable hardship and endurance, and it left unanswered many troubling questions about higher-echelon complacency and shortsightedness in the U.S. Navy.

Bucher rehearsed *Pueblo's* tragic odyssey before a panel of five admirals in the stark auditorium of the Naval Amphibious Base at Coronado, Calif. His wife Rose sat in the front row, and he appeared at times to enjoy the opportunity to tell his story. The Navy made it clear that this was an inquiry, not a trial. However, depending on the testimony, the panel will have to decide whether there is cause to recommend bringing charges against the commander or his crew. And midway through his account last week, Bucher was informed that his testimony rendered him suspect of violating U.S. Navy Regulation 0730 on the grounds that he had allowed foreign representatives to search and seize his ship while still having the means to resist. He had the right to remain silent thereafter, but the skipper decided to complete his story.

Frustrating Task. More scow than ship, the 24-year-old *Pueblo* seemed singularly unsuited for her mission. Her wheezing boilers could deliver a maximum speed of only 13.1 knots. The ship's steering mechanism was worn out. Bucher's initial duty was to supervise the refitting of *Pueblo* from an Army freighter into a first-class, electronic spy ship. It was a frustrating task.

The most serious deficiency he discovered was the lack of equipment to destroy classified documents and secret electronic gear. Bucher tried repeatedly to obtain a destruct system for the electronics snooping devices, but his requests were turned down by the Navy. Instead, *Pueblo* was issued fire axes and sledgehammers to do the job.

To destroy secret documents, Bucher installed an electric paper shredder and a small incinerator. The burner was totally inadequate for the amount of classified material *Pueblo* would carry. But Bucher could not know that because he was not even cleared for access to the ship's supersecret "research" compartment. His request for either a twin-mount 20-mm. or single-mount 40-mm. cannons to defend his vessel went unheeded by Navy brass. Instead, he was issued two .50-cal. machine guns that would be useless against another ship. The basic problem, said Bucher, was money. The original \$5,500,000 allo-

AN ODYSSEY OF ANGUISH REPLAYED

cation for refitting his ship had been slashed by \$1,000,000.

Clogged Channels. Bucher's orders were to eavesdrop on all electronic transmissions coming from the North Korean shore, to chart shoreside radar sites, and to observe and report shipping in the area, particularly the movements of Soviet submarines. On Jan. 16, *Pueblo* took up a station off Chongjin and slowly began working her way south. On Jan. 21, a Soviet-built subchaser passed about 1,000 feet away from *Pueblo* while steaming toward Wonsan harbor. The next afternoon, two small, grey boats, apparently government fishing craft, circled *Pueblo*. Bucher immediately tried to alert his headquarters in Japan. However, it took between twelve to 14 hours for his message to get through because of difficulties in obtaining a clear frequency in radio channels clogged with air-to-ground traffic.

At 11:55 a.m. the next day, a North Korean subchaser steamed into view and quickly circled *Pueblo* twice at 500 yards. The Koreans were suspicious. They demanded by signal flag, "What nationality?" Bucher ran up the U.S. ensign, identifying *Pueblo* as an American naval vessel.

The Capture. Soon the subchaser was joined by three 50-knot torpedo boats and another subchaser. One subchaser hoisted a signal: "Heave to or I will fire." Bucher personally checked his distance from shore by radar and was satisfied that he was 16 miles from the nearest land, four miles beyond the limit claimed by North Korea. The captain then fired off a situation report with CRITIC (critical) priority, which meant that it would go to the White House. Moments later, one of the torpedo boats tried to land a boarding party.

Bucher dismissed the possibility of scuttling *Pueblo*. The vessel was only

in 180 feet of water, a depth from which North Korean divers could easily have recovered the classified material. And it would have taken 2½ hours to sink the ship.

The three torpedo boats took up positions on both quarters of *Pueblo*. Bucher's .50-cal. machine guns were useless, cloaked by frozen tarpaulins that would take an hour to remove. "I did not," he said, "think there was any point of going to war—I was completely outgunned." The subchaser again hoisted a signal flag ordering "Heave to, or I'll fire." Bucher ignored it. The subchaser opened up with 57-mm. cannons. *Pueblo's* bridge was sprayed with shrapnel, wounding two enlisted men. The skipper suffered seven wounds in his right ankle and leg. Another metal shard ripped into his rectum. At this point, two MIGs screamed overhead. One fired a salvo of rockets that harmlessly hit ten miles ahead of *Pueblo*.

Fireman Duane Hodges was hit by a shell that penetrated his right leg and exploded. He died shortly thereafter, the only man mortally wounded in the attack. Frantically, the crew responded to Bucher's order to destroy the secret material and electronic gear on board. This task would have taken several hours, and it was far from complete when the ship was boarded at 5:30 p.m. Bucher thus became the first skipper to surrender a U.S. Navy ship without a fight in peacetime.

From the moment that *Pueblo* tied up at the dock in Wonsan, Bucher and his men entered into an atmosphere of Orwellian terror. North Korean officers came aboard to interrogate Bucher. Over and over, they charged that "the Americans are trying to start another war with North Korea." During the interrogation, Bucher was pistol-whipped around the head, neck and jaw.

Later, Bucher was blindfolded and



BUCHER ARRIVING AT HEARING
Atmosphere of Orwellian terror.

led off the ship through a mob of spitting, howling spectators. The prisoners were put on a train for an all-night ride to a jail in Pyongyang, the capital.

Super-C. When *Pueblo's* crew arrived at the prison, the skipper was led to his quarters, an unheated cubicle with a small table, straight-backed chair and a bed. Because of his wounds, he could not lie down. It was zero outside and below freezing inside the hovel. The chief interrogator was an army officer whom the men came to call "Super-C" for super colonel. Large (about 5 ft. 10 in.) for a Korean, Super-C wore a grey, Soviet-style topcoat with red lapels and huge shoulderboards. Bucher thought he looked funny, but he soon discovered that Super-C was intelligent and cruel. The colonel alluded to Shakespeare and classical mythology, but he did not speak English. His interpreter was a man Bucher nicknamed "Wheezy," because he had a habit of coughing between practically every word to disguise his inability to translate rapidly. To Bucher's dismay, his interrogators produced bundles of secret documents that they had found on *Pueblo* but appeared not to understand. It was evident to *Pueblo* officers that Super-C—who was later promoted to general—did not want to diminish his glory by consulting North Korean naval or intelligence officers who might have helped decipher the secret documents.

At first the North Koreans demanded confessions that the men were spying for the CIA. Later the captors changed their tactics. In an effort to offset adverse world opinion and justify their piracy, they tried to force Bucher and the other crew members into confessing that *Pueblo* had not only been spying but was also violating North Korean territorial waters when she was seized.

Almost incessantly, during the first days of his captivity, Bucher was sav-



ADMIRALS ON *PUEBLO* COURT OF INQUIRY

Troubling questions about higher-echelon complacency and shortsightedness.

agely beaten. Most brutal of all were the Korean enlisted men, who came regularly to beat the crew. A guard, said Bucher, would come into the enlisted men's quarters with a note in his hand, which told him "whom to beat up, how hard, how long, and how the man should look afterward." Routinely, the men were beaten about the face with straps, shoes or wooden slats. A bizarre note, according to Bucher, was that he could often hear the Korean officers "beating their own men for overstepping their bounds in beating our men."

Vile Stench. At times, Bucher was so badly beaten that he urinated blood. He did not tell his captors about his wounds for fear that he would be hospitalized and thus separated from his men. During the first few days of captivity, his three wounded men were confined in a room where the stench was so vile that a visitor could not help vomiting. Radioman Charles H. Crandall had 50 pieces of shrapnel in one leg; Marine Sergeant Robert J. Chicca had a bullet wound that penetrated his neck.

For Bucher, the grillings never let up. Brought before Super-C on his first day of captivity, he was told that he had two minutes to sign a confession or he would be shot. An officer held an automatic pistol to the back of his head. On the verge of total collapse, Bucher would only moan, "I love you, Rose. I love you, Rose." After the two minutes, and two clicks of the pistol, Bucher realized that his inquisitors were bluffing. As part of the softening-up process, he was then driven to a nearby prison to inspect a captured South Korean who had been gruesomely tortured. Bucher fainted at the sight of the mutilated prisoner. But he still refused to sign the false confession.

Ultimate Threat. Finally, in desperation, the Communists used the ultimate threat. Unless he signed their text, they insisted, they would shoot all of Bucher's crew members one by one before his eyes, starting with the youngest. "I was convinced they would do it," Bucher testified. "I was convinced they were animals. I told them I would sign the confession. And I did sign it." Even as he did so, he carefully added false information, such as an incorrect serial number, in a last-gasp effort to show that the document was a lie. After he had signed it, the Koreans rewarded Bucher with a huge plate of eggs. He could not eat them. Crushed, Bucher tried to drown himself in a bucket of water in his room.

When they were not being quizzed or beaten, *Pueblo's* men were continually subjected to Communist propaganda. They were told early in June, for example, that Robert Kennedy had been killed—by President Johnson. In time, the crew was afforded slightly better treatment. They were occasionally allowed to exercise together, most often by trimming the grass around their prison building with pocket knives. But the beatings and terror never ended until

Dec. 23, when they were finally released.

While last week's court of inquiry focused on Bucher, his testimony cast a dismal light on the entire U.S. military chain of command. Even the White House was fully informed in advance about *Pueblo* and her mission, and must have been cognizant of the serious risk of provoking retaliation from the belligerent North Koreans. Yet the ship's dangerous, unprecedented mission was approached with extraordinary nonchalance.

Why, for example, was Bucher given as his first command so highly sensitive an assignment? And why, once he had been given command, was he not allowed access to the classified material for which he might ultimately be responsible? Why was an ancient rust bucket like *Pueblo* chosen for conversion into a spy ship? Why were Bucher's requests for essential gear and weaponry repeatedly turned down? Why, if the Navy lacked the money to equip the ship properly, was *Pueblo* stationed off North Korea in the first place? Why no air cover? And why did the Navy steadfastly assume that North Korea, which is not a naval power and has no strategic reason for respecting the freedom of the seas, would never attempt to pirate a U.S. spy ship in international waters?

False Security. Even at a lower level of command, where operational difficulties are more apparent, Bucher received little help or guidance. Rear Admiral Frank L. Johnson, commander of U.S. Naval Forces, Japan, was made fully aware of *Pueblo's* limitations by Bucher. Yet he did nothing to upgrade the ship. Indeed, Bucher testified that Johnson had assured him that his guns would never be needed, and in fact advised the skipper not to show "any aggressive intent" if harassed by North Korean or Soviet vessels. This attitude seemed to lull Bucher into a false sense of security, which may explain his rather slow realization that the North Koreans meant business. But, as a result, he was plainly in no position to resist capture.

Finally, the inquiry also raises questions as to the validity of the Military Code of Conduct (see ESSAY), which requires brave men of conscience like Bucher to endure vicious treatment rather than sign false confessions that are of dubious value anyway. Fiercely loyal to his crew, orphanage-raised Bucher could only be made to sign such a document when he believed his men—his military family—would be shot one by one. Whatever the court of inquiry decides, it is clear that the Navy's investigation will not satisfy Congress. Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield predicted that both the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the Senate Armed Services Committee will want to know a great deal more about the whys, whats and hows of a case in which the Navy may be, for good reason, less than eager to settle for a definitive investigation.

TIME ESSAY

NEW COMPASSION FOR THE PRISONER OF WAR

THE choice that faced Commander Lloyd Bucher was between seeing his men shot one by one before his eyes or signing a false confession. He signed—and in that act illuminated the whole agonizing dilemma of weighing military duty against elementary humanity—and often against self-preservation.

The U.S. defense establishment is thoroughly divided on the issue. The Army still insists that P.O.W.s reveal nothing more than name, rank and service number, as prescribed by the Code of Conduct. "It is a simple, single, clear standard to all services," says former Army Chief of Staff General Harold Johnson. "If you have mushy instructions, you have mushy performance." The Air Force, on the other hand, draws an informal distinction between disclosing military intelligence and signing propaganda statements. It values its flyers too much to sacrifice them just to avoid some national embarrassment. Hence, they are tacitly permitted, if shot down, to cooperate with the enemy to preserve their lives and well-being.

The U.S. Navy is obviously groping for a standard. The Judge Advocate General ruled that the *Pueblo* crewmen were not prisoners of war since the U.S. is not at war with North Korea; instead, they are "illegal detainees." Paul Warnke, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, finds it "unthinkable that these men will be court-martialed for signing a false statement. All the confession shows is the bestiality of the treatment they received. The harm done to the national interest is next to nil."

Focus on Confession

Modern times have placed new emphasis on the P.O.W. In wars gone by, a man taken prisoner was considered to be out of the war. Often enough, he was killed on the spot; if he lived, he was often mistreated. As far as his superiors were concerned, he had proved himself on the field; they were happy if he did not defect to the enemy. But in this century of total war, the prison camp has become an extension of the battlefield. Totalitarian nations are not content merely to extract information from a P.O.W. They often hound and harass a man for months and even years in order to win his mind and soul, to reduce him to an instrument of propaganda. It is, of course, a tactic that the Soviet Union devised for use against its own political prisoners, as dramatized with terrifying realism in Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* and

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George Orwell's *1984*. In this sense the prisoner of war has become a symbolic stand-in for all men in this century who are subjected to the relentless pressures designed to capture and transform their minds.

That is one reason why brainwashing became a subject of morbid fascination in the 1950s, popularly expressed in the movie *The Manchurian Candidate*. The Communists seemed to have the capacity to break anyone—Cardinal Mindszenty, for instance, or the U.S. journalist William Oatis, who in 1951 confessed to a charge of espionage in Czechoslovakia and spent more than two years in jail. The Korean War confirmed the worst U.S. expectations. The Chinese not only broke down many P.O.W.s, causing them to collaborate; they also persuaded 21 P.O.W.s to settle in China.

The U.S. public turned fiercely on any manifestation of weakness. P.O.W.s who collaborated were condemned as a disgrace to the U.S. military tradition. Marine Colonel Frank Schwable, who confessed under sustained torture to the U.S. use of germ warfare, was cleared by a court of inquiry, but his career was ruined. The hysteria was climaxed by a rigid superstoical Code of Conduct promulgated by President Eisenhower in 1955. Still in force technically, it requires every P.O.W. to resist his captors, to try to escape and help others escape, to reveal nothing beyond name, rank, number and date of birth—all "to the utmost of my ability."

Wouldn't Everyone Talk?

Defenders of the code insisted it was necessary to discipline P.O.W.s, whose stamina had supposedly declined so sadly since World War II. But as Defense Department researchers continued to look into the matter, the truth turned out to be otherwise. Prisoners in Korea held up no better and no worse than P.O.W.s in other wars. In World War II, so many U.S. prisoners in German and Japanese camps talked so freely that a Defense Department report concluded: "It is virtually impossible for anyone to resist a determined interrogator." In addition to revealing military facts, U.S. prisoners in World War II signed occasional false confessions; yet nothing much was made of it in the U.S. The onus was all on the enemy. Nor did enemy soldiers demonstrate any greater staying power in World War II. From Germans captured at Stalingrad, the Russians learned all of Hitler's plans for their conquest.

The techniques used on prisoners by the Communists today have become painfully familiar, even though the beatings, threats and psychological pressures given Bucher and his crew were so horrifying as to stun the world anew last week. To some extent, the techniques consist of old-fashioned torture protracted and refined, in a mixture of mental and physical ordeals. The P.O.W. may

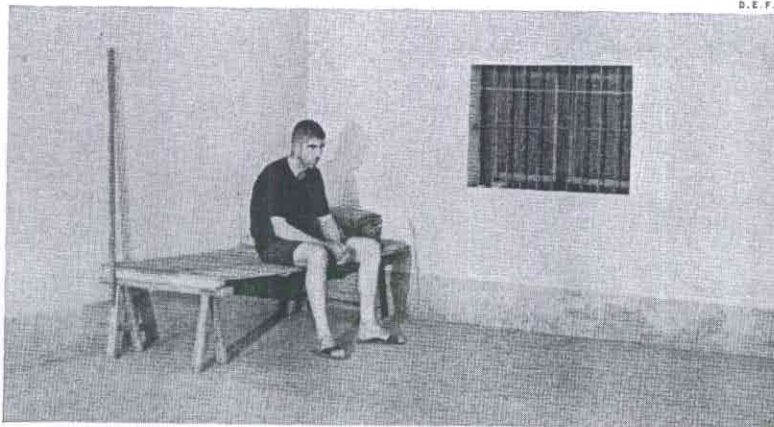
be kept in utter isolation or thrust into a cell group without a shred of privacy. He may be forced to sit or stand in the same position for hours on end until his bodily functions go awry. His interrogators may keep him constantly unnerved, preventing him from sleeping, exploiting his normal feelings of guilt by focusing on painful events in his life. The interrogator may alternate kindness with brutality; a strange bond, which does not exclude a measure of affection, develops between captor and captive. Write Psychiatrists Lawrence E. Hinkle Jr. and Harold Wolff: "The interrogator is dealing with a man who might be looked upon as an intentionally created patient; the interrogator has all of the advantages and opportunities which accrue to a therapist dealing with a patient in desperate need of help."

Now that they have a broader un-

ical serviceman's lack of ideology may be his strongest defense. The P.O.W. who "plays it cool," who makes superficial compromises without giving too much away, is sometimes the toughest to crack. Often those who resist most strenuously ultimately break down most completely.

In cases where prisoners finally do break down and sign incriminating confessions, the rest of the military should perhaps follow the lead of the Air Force and discount the propaganda loss. Anyone, friend or enemy, who is persuaded by a forced confession doubtless had his mind already made up. Moreover, propaganda can backfire. The fact that it has been gained through the abuse of prisoners repels people. When the North Vietnamese put captured U.S. flyers on exhibit in Hanoi, foreign reaction was so adverse that the Viet-

D. E. F. A.



LIEUT. COMMANDER RICHARD A. STRATTON IN P.O.W. CAMP NEAR HANOI IN 1967

derstanding of the plight of the P.O.W., some factions within the State and Defense departments want to liberalize the Code of Conduct. They include Averell Harriman, who was put in charge of P.O.W. affairs at State almost three years ago. Flyers imprisoned in Viet Nam have signed many confessions—a situation that Harriman's aide, Frank Sieverts, finds predictable enough. "The code says a prisoner can't sign anything, but those who have given it any thought know the only practical answer is 'yes, he can sign,'" says Sieverts. Neither the U.S. military nor the public seems as angered by the confessions as they were in the Korean War—although leniency still does not extend to P.O.W.s who have harmed fellow prisoners by cooperating with the enemy. Says Paul Warnke: "You're allowed to sign a propaganda statement to save your own skin but not to save your skin at the expense of another's."

While the U.S. military has traditionally stressed stoical resistance and ideological conviction as the best defense against Communist brainwashing, others have begun to take a different approach. Social Scientist Albert Biderman, for example, thinks that the typ-

name never restaged the spectacle.

Some people in the Defense Department have proposed that the U.S. ignore confessions altogether. They argue that P.O.W.s should sign anything, as long as they do not divulge classified military information or imperil other prisoners. A well-publicized official policy to this effect would drain confessions of any real significance, in the manner of the disclaimer that preceded the Government's own "confession" last month that the *Pueblo* was inside North Korean waters.

This is not to deny that the men who resist the will of their captors often perform feats of heroism and that some would hold themselves in contempt if they failed to try. The struggle against the captor can become an obsessive way to assert one's defiance of a hostile universe. But the majority of men are not assailed by such temptations of existential heroism. For the most part, the U.S. serviceman fights hard, risks his life and sometimes gives it in the service of his country. It seems unreasonable to ask him to continue risking his life in prison merely to avoid signing a scrap of paper that nobody takes very seriously anyway.