

'Assumed' Secrets Destroyed—

By George C. Wilson

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CORONADO, Calif., Feb. 13—Cmdr. Lloyd M. Bucher of the Pueblo, recalled as a witness on the 25th day of the Naval Court of Inquiry, said today that he assumed secret material from the ship's intelligence center was being burned or being tossed over the side as North Korean gunboats closed in.

He told the court of five admirals that while he was running the ship from the flying bridge and later the pilot-house that he assumed destruction of secret materials was progressing below decks.

Asked if he realized that closing the ship's ventilators while the Pueblo was under attack had made it harder to burn secret papers, Bucher said: "No, sir, that condition was never reported to me."

Ventilators Closed

He conceded, however, that he should have anticipated that problem when he worked out emergency procedures for the Pueblo. The ventilators were closed to minimize the chance of fire spreading within the ship if it were hit by enemy fire.

(Lt. Stephen R. Harris, in charge of the Pueblo's intelligence center, had testified previously that enemy fire kept men from taking papers to the exposed incinerator on deck and that burning below decks was difficult for lack of ventilation. As many as 11 bags full of classified material fell into the hands of the North Koreans Jan. 23, 1968, when they captured the ship.)

"No one ever made me aware," Bucher testified today, "that no one was coming to that incinerator." He

said he saw lots of papers burning there. "I certainly assumed a good portion was coming out of the research space. I never thought otherwise."

He ordered general quarters as the Pueblo came under attack but told the men to stay below decks to escape the machine gun fire from the four Korean PT boats surrounding the ship.

Testimony from crew members assigned to the intelligence center indicated this order might have been interpreted as constringing them from attempting to put papers into the incinerator on deck. Bucher said this was not his intention.

Harris Testimony

Another conflict about the destruction process remained unresolved today, despite attempts by the court to clear it up.

Lt. Harris had testified that one man from his intelligence center—Communications Technician 2/C Peter M. Langenberg of St. Louis—was wounded in trying to jettison secret material over the side. Harris said jettisoning thus was not feasible.

Langenberg himself, in testimony today, said he threw a bag of material over the side after he was wounded and met no enemy fire. His wound, he said, was inflicted by a piece of the 57-millimeter shell that killed a shipmate, Fireman Duane D. Hodges.

"Following orders," Langenberg said, "I didn't go topside" to jettison more material than the one bagful. "I threw some electronic gear out of a porthole in the Chief Petty Officers quarters."

At some point in the furious and confused destruction ef-

fort below decks, Langenberg testified, "I had received word from Lt. Harris not to jettison anything—the depth wasn't sufficient."

Unhappy Relationship

He also said he went to a locker below the intelligence center to get about 10 weighted bags for throwing secret material overboard. Langenberg—and apparently nobody else—knows what happened to those bags.

The court is trying to find out why the destruction effort was so incomplete—and apparently fouled up. At the moment, Lt. Harris is in the spotlight since the secret material he signed for appears to be that which the Koreans obtained.

While testimony over the last several weeks has portrayed Bucher and Harris at odds on the destruction issue, today brought out the first hints of an unhappy relationship between Bucher and his executive officer, Lt. Edward Rene Murphy Jr. of San Diego.

Under questioning by Rear

Adm. Allen A. Bergner, Bucher said "perhaps I expected too much of Mr. Murphy in helping to prepare the ship's organization plan," declaring there were "minor differences of opinion."

Right-Hand Man

Bucher insisted these differences stemmed from Murphy's coming from the surface Navy while Bucher came from the submarine service. "Never at any time was there a personality clash per se," Bucher said.

But it was brought out that it was Chief Warrant Officer Gene H. Lacy of Davenport, Wash., not Lt. Murphy, who

-Bucher

was Bucher's right-hand man on the bridge during the Pueblo's grave hour last January.

Neither Bergner nor anyone else on the court pursued the question in open court today. But it was obvious they had heard testimony in closed session indicating some differences between Bucher and his "exec."

Steering From Below

Rear Adm. Marshall W. White of the court questioned Bucher today on whether he could have steered the Pueblo out to sea from below decks while she was under fire

rather than surrender the ship.

Bucher said he could have worked the electrical steering from the engine room by bridging the connections there with a screw driver. He said steering by the throttling of the engines—one going fast and the other slow to turn, for example—would have been the harder way because the light bow of the Pueblo would keep swinging off course.

Steering the ship from the engine room, Bucher said, could have been done "with difficulty. I might add with great difficulty."