

PRESS RELEASE

USS Pueblo

COMMAND INFORMATION BUREAU

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PROCEEDINGS OF THE COURT OF INQUIRY AM & PW 21 FEBRUARY 1969

The court convened in open session at 9 a.m. on February 21st with Lieutenant Mate First Class Norbert J. Klepac, 15, testifying. He noted that he had not received any SERE training and received training in the Code of Conduct in boot camp and had read it when he shipped over. He had heard the word passed aboard the USS Pueblo before capture to remember the Code of Conduct.

He believed that he was not interrogated during captivity because of his rate. However, the guards did mistreat him. He said that the crew received guidance from the commanding officer and leading petty officers to resist as much as possible. He provided the North Koreans with name, rank, serial number, and personal history data only.

Occasionally he had an opportunity to lead the crew in athletic exercises which kept the morale of the eight men in his room up. He noted that he had received an open wound in his leg from a guard's kick and it was treated by a North Korean doctor and did heal.

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He was served alcoholic beverages before one of the press conferences, during the KPA birthday, and in the "gypsy tea room." They were given lectures in their rooms, tours and movies on Korean communism, but they were not effective. He noted that although there was talk of escape, to his knowledge no one tried to escape.

He wrote two letters to his wife, and one to the Governor of Texas, and signed the letter of apology to the government of North Korea and the petition to the President. The first time he saw the commanding officer since capture was in connection with the letter to the President. He said Cdr. Bucher looked so bad that he hardly recognized him.

Klepac described the commanding officer as showing great weight loss, looked as if he had no sleep, with clothing in poor shape. He believed, from seeing the effects of interrogations on others, that the North Koreans would eventually get whatever they wanted out of someone. So he signed the petition. It was explained to them by the commanding officer and he had a chance to read it, but he signed without reading it. In the letters to his wife he used the phrase "Democratic People's Republic of Korea" a lot and signed them with his whole middle name so she would not believe the contents.

He noted that they were beaten any time of the day or night during "Hell Week." He was questioned about his personal life by two civilians in the "gypsy tea room" and they told him of a crooked U. S. Government.

Seeing his shipmates all in pain following an interrogation impressed him most during captivity. His religion helped ease his mind during the ordeal.

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He said that he had harrassed Colonel "Specs" during indoctrination sessions. In noting they were forced to record every letter they wrote and the two confessions, he said that he spoke fast in an unnatural speed and tone to jam the words together so they sounded like "Donald Duck" talking.

Klepac said he did nothing to harm any of his fellow crewmen or anyone in the Navy.

Chief Engineer Monroe O. Goldman, 37, was the next witness. He said he received no SERE training and had read the Code of Conduct several times before capture. He explained in detail his understanding of the Code. Although he did not hear the word about the Code passed before capture, he was told about it from a man stationed near one of the engine room's two I/E speakers to relay the word. He noted that when underway the engines made too much noise to hear the speakers in the engine room. Goldman said that he felt the Code applied to him during captivity. Goldman said that after 30 to 35 minutes of beatings he filled out a personal history form for his captors. He did it because he knew the North Koreans had the ship's personnel records and he heard the tape of the commanding officer's confession. This tape was played for him and his roommates Berens, Peppard and Irudale. Later his roommates were beaten from 8 p.m. till 10:30 when they acknowledged the tape was the commanding officer's voice and they believed what he was saying. He did not know why he was not beaten at that time.

Later in the detention period his captors wanted to know the relationship between him, Law and the commanding officer, since they were providing leadership for the crew. He noted that Law kept him informed of what was going on in the crew and they worked with the commanding officer to provide leadership. In addition to his other roommates, he now roomed with Law, Layton, Bland, and Scarborough. He never received any information that members of the crew were cooperating with the captors.

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He said he received on one occasion a bloody nose and a black eye in a 25-minute beating from the "Bear" over the published "finger" picture. He was dazed and received a bleeding ear and a busted lip. He said in the first six weeks he only saw the officers a couple of times and never saw an officer or an enlisted man getting beaten. He did not participate in any of the press conferences and was proud of the way the crew acted in captivity.

Goldman said he believed the commanding officer's main concern was getting the crew out of there, and the commanding officer felt responsible for them. Goldman broke down and wept when asked what the Koreans' reaction was to the fact that he had served in the Korean war.

Communications Technician First Class Layton was the next witness. He stated he had no survival, evasion, resistance and escape training, had read the Code of Conduct when he reenlisted, and he briefly explained the meaning of the Code. He had tried to adhere to the Code at first and did not recall any direction received from his seniors about adherence to the Code following capture.

His first interrogation was by four North Korean officers about a week after capture and consisted of threats on his life, but no mistreatment. At the second interrogation the Koreans knew exactly where he worked, although he had previously told them only that he was in communications. Having heard recordings of confessions by the research officer, executive officer, commanding officer and operations officer, and knowing the Koreans had the ship, he acceded to their demands that he diagram the research space. However, the diagram did not contain anything they did not already have. He said the officers' taped confessions were played for him and his three roommates by their captors. He was subjected to no further interrogations, although he was mistreated throughout the captivity and during "roll back." Sentries of his room (number 13) were beaten most during "roll back"

for their captors knew the crew looked to that room for guidance and leadership. He was given 30 ^{shots} sets of penicillin for a fungus infection in his leg which cleared it up.

He emphatically stated the chain-of-command was definitely maintained. As far as he could see, the crewmembers were all treated the same.

Layton related a tentative escape plan that he, Scarborough and Barens were considering. However, they decided to see if they were released in a year's time before trying it in the summer. He noted that when the plan was firm he would have gotten the commanding officer's approval before carrying it out.

He was forced to write an individual letter to the President, Senator Robert Kennedy, his parents and his wife. He saw the condition of men in his room who were beaten and he believed the North Koreans would kill him. Therefore, he complied with their demands. He noted that there were several incorrect references to individuals and a nonexistent person in his letters hence to make them invalid.

He described Cmdr. Bucher's appearance at their first meeting (the petition to the President) as looking like a physical wreck. He said he felt the commanding officer's actions were for the crew's own well being.

He said that at the "Tea Party" he was fed good food and alcoholic beverages and asked by civilians to contact their friends in the United States. He declined, saying he was a military man and could not do that.

He noted the commanding officer put out the word that the crew would call the "finger sign" the "Hawaiian good luck sign." In the one press conference he took part, foreign journalists were not accepting the rigged material presented by the North Koreans. He called Cmdr. Bucher the greatest commanding officer in the world.

The next witness was Communications Technician First Class D. R. Peppard who said he was familiar with the Code of Conduct, had no formal training or indoctrination on the Code, but understood its provisions. He didn't recall receiving guidance on how to act from his superiors while in detention.

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Peppard wrote four letters home and received seven. A letter from his German-born wife was written in German. He was not questioned about this. He could write personal items to his family and included in his own words the desires of the North Koreans. The letter sent to President Johnson was signed after Cmdr. Bucher requested signature. He didn't read it, and had only a vague idea of its context. No one, to his knowledge, resisted signing.

During "hall week" all in his room were beaten. The only things confessed were items the North Koreans were "well aware of." He, as others, wrote confessions during this week. Many times during detention he was mistreated.

Peppard was also hit about the head and shoulders the day of seizure when he was offloaded from a bus. He believed no friendships with the guards existed, that no one received favors, and that no North Korean indoctrination was swallowed. As a gesture of defiance, he carved a cross, which the Koreans tore apart several times, only to be built again. Finally, the guards removed it from the room.

Peppard discussed escape plans with his roommates but no plans were deemed feasible.

Peppard recalled being visited by civilians in the "Gypsy Tea Room" which, he believes, was an effort to "test the crew's sincerity." When asked why the crew had not returned to the United States, he gave the stock answer, "The United States has not made an apology yet."

His reason for departing from the Code of Conduct was the North Koreans had gotten to his officers and that they could beat ^Aconfession out of him. Although he believed they would kill him, he realized that he may have wished that he were dead.

In response to questions from the court, Peppard said he heard voices of Cmdr. Bucher and other officers which sounded like they were reading ship's documents. He

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wouldn't believe the voices he heard and they had no bearing on him. He was never interrogated as to what classified material he maintained and was referred to as the "typewriter."

Pappard kept a diary until it was found during "hall week." When given a copy of the communist manifesto, he told the Koreans it was confusing, outdated, and that it had no place in the United States. On leadership, he said Cmdr. Ingher did a good job in harrassing the North Koreans before the crew, which boosted morale.

Although he believed the Geneva Convention provisions should apply to them, Pappard stated the North Koreans didn't consider the crew prisoners-of-war, and the crew was told they had no rights.

Bontouxin's Mate Second Class Berens subsequently testified, and said he was familiar with the Code of Conduct through basic training and petty officer leadership school. He heard Chief Warrant Officer Lacy pass the word over the LSC to give only name, rank, and serial number at the time of capture.

He filled out personal history forms for the North Koreans since they could get the information "one way or another." He told them his job was that of a "deckhand." He had good leadership since Quartermaster First Class Lee was in his room.

Berens said he heard typed confessions of Bucher, Murphy and Schunicher subsequent to the time he filled out his personal history form. He saw Cmdr. Bucher and other officers come daily after being released to the second detention site, and Bucher encouraged him to sign the letter to President Johnson.

When directed to write pleas to United States local and state government officials, Berens was first of his roommates to stand up and refuse. After dismissal of his roommate, he was told to remain, and was severely beaten. The session ended when he wrote a plea.

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He was beaten severely during "hell week" because of the previous finger gestures and his "attitude." Throughout detention, he was kicked around frequently. In his opinion, the two Marines, Communications Technician Second Class Kisler took the most punishment. For refusing to write the plea, Kisler received greater punishment than Barons.

Baron's said the reason for deviating from The Code of Conduct was primarily because Pueblo was captured with most of its records, and out of fear. He believes that they would go to any extreme to "get what they wanted."

To obtain items which might have been helpful in an escape attempt, Barons appropriated a straight-edged razor from the North Korean duty officer's desk.

Afternoon Session

Court convened in open session at 1:30 p.m. Engineerman Second Class Blaud was called to testify. Cmdr. Busher and his civilian counsel were absent. They were represented by Capt. Keys.

Blaud said he did not have survival, evasion, resistance and escape training prior to capture and he received instruction on the Code of Conduct in basic training only. He was in the engine room when the Koreans boarded and did not hear the word passed about the Code of Conduct. He received guidance on his actions in captivity from his roommates.

He and his roommates completed and signed personal history forms before the first interrogation session, because they had received constant harassment up to this point.

During his first interrogation, two weeks after capture, the North Koreans asked him about the mission of the ship. He said he was a mess cook and did not know anything about it. They slapped and kicked him around. The second interrogation took place in the second detention center; they asked him the same questions he gave the same answers and none of these contained classified information.

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During this second phase of detention, he was in room #13. During "hell week" he was placed in isolation for one day and up till 11:30 the next night. He suffered lack of sleep and was beaten.

His only illness during captivity was a high fever and chills, for which a North Korean doctor treated him.

He was forced to write letters to his mother, father and the Governor of California. Bland said in the letter to his parents he worried two friends so that it would be invalid.

He resisted signing the joint petition to the President until the North Koreans threatened to shoot him. He said the threat of death was a more compelling force to sign than the fact the commanding officer said they should do it. Bland did not participate in any press conferences, but every member of the crew was required to watch them on closed circuit television.

His captors asked each crewmember individually if they would receive some North Korean friends when they returned to the United States. Although he indicated he would, Bland said he did not intend to do anything like that. In mentioning his departure from the Code of Conduct, he said he did not depart from it entirely and that when he did, it was when he feared for his life.

He said he emerged as a natural leader of the crew, and further, Cmdr. ~~Smith~~ supplied as much leadership as he could under those conditions.

He wrote rock and roll and western songs from memory to keep up morale, and used to spit in "CO's" tea cup to drive him crazy. He stated they were continually harassed and beaten throughout the whole period of captivity.

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The next witness was Engineman First Class Blansett. He received no survival, evasion, resistance, and escape training prior to capture and had only read the Code of Conduct. He briefly explained his understanding of the Code, and there was no misunderstanding of the meaning of the Code of Conduct for him.

His first interrogation came after 12 days of captivity. They asked about facilities at Naval Station Subic Bay, but he did not answer their questions until a second session the same day. After they hit him a few times, Blansett said he answered their questions with lies, which they accepted.

He was the room leader, selected by the crewmembers, in all the rooms (3 total) he was in during detention. There were several times when he was punished in front of his roommates for acts of someone else in the room. He did not feel any of the enlisted men emerged as a natural leader in captivity.

Blansett felt everyone had some sort of escape plan, that the North Koreans did not put much effort into the indoctrination, and that it worked the opposite of what they desired.

He wrote one letter to his parents, two to his wife, and one to the Speaker of the House. He used names of dead relatives and friends to make the meaning invalid and hinted that they would let the government handle the Pueblo release. In the letter to the Speaker of the House, he asked for help in getting the crew released. He signed the petition to the President, but did not believe that it was correct. However, he felt they could force him to sign it.

He was visited by individuals dressed in civilian clothing in a room with wine, beer, whiskey and cookies, and believed they wanted crewmembers to tell the folks at home they received good treatment.

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Blansett said the Code of Conduct was not realistic in his situation since the captors had all the information they wanted on the ship. He deviated from the Code because he could not withstand their torture.

Later in the detention period, their captors wanted a letter of appeal and a tape recording of it. His room was the last one to succumb. The sight of Communications Technician Second Class Kislar with his head looking like hamburger and three-times its normal size finally changed their minds. However, the letter of appeal was never signed nor recorded. Blansett said he did nothing during captivity to hurt any of his shipmates nor anyone in the military.

Commissaryman First Class Lewis, the next witness, related his movements on the Pueblo at the time of capture. He was in the forward compartment carrying three or four weighted bags at one time to just outside the GI shack where Foppard was standing. Lewis said he helped Grandel, who was wounded, to a forward compartment.

He had last discussed the Code of Conduct and read it in September of 1965 when he recalled and had received no survival, evasion, resistance and escape training.

All men in his room completed personal history forms. He also said their captors took Photographer's Mate First Class Mack away for about 36 hours, and he thought Mack had been killed. When Mack returned, he was badly shaken and limping. He said he was beaten and forced to sign a confession.

Two or three weeks later Lewis had a 20-minute meeting with "Colonel Specks" where he was questioned about life in the United States for Negroes. He said all Negroes were rich, and were happy and lived well in the United States.

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Every member of the crew was rotated on 30-day mess cooking duty. He did not see the food prepared, but served it to the Brazzaville mess halls. He estimated they totaled 500 calories a day. Lewis felt the food was poor in quality and quantity and barely enough to sustain life.

His treatment was no different from the others because he was a Negro. He signed the petition to the President without a chance to read it and that Cmdr. Busher looked badly beaten at that time.

Lewis said Quartermaster Lee and Engstrom, Blountt emerged as natural leaders among the crew during captivity. He used words of land relatives in his two letters to his wife so they would be less valid, but did not use anything in his mother's letter so she would not worry. They were shown movies on Commission almost every Friday; many of these were historical in nature.

Lewis felt the type of treatment the crew was receiving was the major reason they departed from the Code of Conduct.

Shipfitter Third Class Higgins was next to testify. During General Quarters on Jan. 23, 1968, he was on the mess deck and helped destroy photographic negatives for Photographer's Mate First Class Mack. He spent the remainder of the time before capture at his General Quarters station. He possessed a helmet liner, but did not have a helmet, since there was not enough to go around. He was also without a lifejacket, since he was forbidden to go outside. He was aware of the Code of Conduct, which was posted in a passageway at Pueblo.

He believed all his roommates occupied personal history books, since they thought the North Koreans had their service records. He was not formally interrogated, only questioned in his room, and never singled out for questioning.

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Higgins signed the petition to President Johnson, along with his roommates. He did so at Cdr. Bucher's request. He wrote one letter home and three to congressmen, since he felt the latter would be better able to comprehend the letter's content. He was visited once by civilians who asked him to do things in the United States; one of these things was to "tell the truth." He said conditions improved three days prior to release and they were informed of their pending release on a Friday by the general. The crew believed something was up, because hell week ended abruptly. Prior to departing, they were given new uniforms.

Storekeeper Third Class Rogala then testified that during Pueblo's seizure he was in the forward repair party until ordered to the welldeck. He didn't participate in any destruction. He had no training in the Code of Conduct, but was aware of its content. While on the welldeck, he heard Quartermaster Law tell the crewmen to give just their name, rate, serial number and date of birth. While enroute to the first detention site, he was hit with something like a rifle butt, kicked in the groin, and dragged into the bus. He received guidance from the senior petty officers in his room. He followed their examples. He filled out a personal history form after having to kneel down with his hands over his head. He was kicked and slapped. He first saw Cdr. Bucher when the commanding officer asked the crewmen to sign the petition to President Johnson. When he drafted his confession, in some code he spelled out, "This is a lie." To his knowledge, no one received any dental care.

Signalman First Class Leach next testified. Knowledge of the Code of Conduct goes back to when he reenlisted. At that time he read the Code and signed a card acknowledging he had done so. He heard Chief Warrant Officer Lacy pass the word concerning the Code at the time of capture. Enroute to the first

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detention site. He was mistreated. He filled out a personal history form after he heard two room numbers beaten in the passageway. He believed the North Koreans had all the personnel records, although he never saw his record. He only signed the personal history form and navigational charts which he worked on with Lt. Murphy and Quartermaster Law. He stated these charts were inaccurate. He was mistreated for resisting guards, causing difficulty, not accepting the guards' policy and not answering their questions. He did not instruct his three roommates in the Code of Conduct, except to remind them they were military men. He was also mistreated during Hall Week. He wrote four letters; three were sent to his parents, and one to the Secretary of State. The letters were written after resisting for two days. The letter to the Secretary of State said the Fusible's mission was espionage, that they had intruded in North Korean territorial waters, and that the North Koreans held classified publications and information. This letter was written from an outline given him. He included classified material so the United States would know who fell into North Korean hands. He signed the petition to the President upon request of Cmdr. Bucher. He stated he departed from the intent of the Code of Conduct because the North Koreans had the ship's documents, personnel records, and information to questions he was answering, and he believed the Code was not applicable to his situation.

In response to questions from the court, Leach said he knew most of the navigational records, and saw them while in captivity. He signed the navigational charts, as well as Cmdr. Bucher, Lt. Murphy, Quartermaster Law, and Electronics Technician Second Class Nolte.

The court will reconvene at 9 a.m., Feb. 25, in closed session. Communications Technician Second Class Ayling will be the witness. Following this session, the court will continue in open sessions.