

# PRESS RELEASE

## USS Pueblo

### COMMAND INFORMATION BUREAU

U.S. NAVAL AMPHIBIOUS BASE, CORONADO, CALIFORNIA

TELE: AREA CODE 714 - 435-4186

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CIB Release No. 67-69  
February 26, 1969

#### PROCEEDINGS OF THE COURT OF INQUIRY

FEBRUARY 25, 1969

#### AFTERNOON SESSION

In the afternoon closed session, Sergeant Robert J. Chicca noted that only his health record was aboard the Pueblo, that he filled out a personal history form about three days after detention began, and then was asked a few days later to fill out a similar form. While he was recovering from a shrapnel leg wound during the first week of detention, he underwent a severe beating which lasted  $1\frac{1}{2}$  to two hours.

Early in the summer he underwent an intensive period of interrogation lasting about  $3\frac{1}{2}$  days. He said that he appeared in two press conferences.

Chicca described the code of conduct as "extraordinarily faulty" and stated it "doesn't take into account reality." He further described their captivity as "unique," and added that the code "does not apply in its entirety." He had no knowledge of anyone whose conduct was out of line, although he acknowledged that some people were more passive than others.

He noted that he apparently was regarded by the Koreans as a "troublemaker" and that during Hell Week, he was singled out for special attention by the guards.

- MORE -

Chicca said it was impractical to "stand there and deny something you know they know and they know you know, since they had the ship, equipment, and some publications. By the time they got to us, they know all about us." He added that he believed it was wise to confess when he did, since the Koreans "would have gotten what they wanted anyway."

Finally, the shrapnel was removed by surgery, and he believes that the pain from this wound had some bearing on his ability to resist during the initial period of interrogation. He believed that during hell week, the North Koreans were attempting to find out how much they had been "duped."

In his opinion, he believed the crew's behavior was "pretty good" and described Commander Bucher as "pretty terrific," adding that he would be proud to serve under him again.

Chicca voiced his belief, in a final statement to the court, that the crew stuck together remarkably well, and that often when escape plans were considered, something would come up indicating their release was imminent.

He stressed the point that he did not believe Lt. Stephen Harris "panicked during the shelling" and that he believed Lt. Harris conducted himself properly during the capture phase.

Sergeant Robert J. Hammond followed Sergeant Chicca to the stand. He said that he had no Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape (SERE) training, received the standard code of conduct indoctrination, and didn't recall any specific guidance on the code of conduct in Pueblo. He understood the provisions of the code which he deemed "relatively good."

When he left the ship, he wore Marine Corps boots and trousers, and a Navy jacket with third class crew and took his ID card. Hammond took for granted that his captors knew he was a Marine from his ID card.



Hammond's initial interrogation was three days after their arrival at the first detention site, and he told his captors that he operated the Pueblo's machine guns. He was not initially mistreated except for the "gun-at-head" treatment.

On February 1st, he was interrogated for six hours to make him confess. Torture was light at first, but increased steadily. It started when he was forced to kneel down and hold a chair over his head. Then beatings commenced on his sides and under his arms, followed by kicks to the face and groin. He was often "bounced off the floor" and finally hit with a 2 X 4 plank. When he yelled the North Koreans stuffed a rag in his mouth.

The brutality continued with kicks received to his head and body and they attempted to strangle him several times. He finally agreed to confess

was followed later by 13 more hours of interrogation.

Hammond received a back sprain which healed and a sprained ankle, which a Korean doctor treated with a acupuncture that only made matters worse.

At the second detention site, the Koreans appointed Hammond as petty officer in charge of the third floor.

The guard dubbed the "Deary" In Hammond's opinion, had it in for certain people and concentrated on beating the members of Room #1 for a month and a half. To his knowledge, no one received special favors and he believed the crew followed the chain of command as far as practicable.

Hammond wrote three letters: two to his wife; and one to President Johnson. He wrote the President because he figured Johnson would realize he was under duress because "what prisoner would write the President?" He included a message in the first letter to his wife which she acknowledged in one of her letters. He signed the petition to the President on his own initiative.

During the Gypsy Tea Room session he told the Koreans that he wouldn't receive anyone as a friend, which didn't make them happy. He admitted that he deviated from the code of conduct.

When hell week began, Hammond was "quite terrorized" and believed they wouldn't be released for a year. He tried to figure out how to escape and thought about different ways of suicide--to jump out of his window, and to attack the guards and try to take a couple of them with him. He finally decided on a fake suicide, in hopes they would leave him alone.

Hammond broke a mirror and took the pieces to bed with him. In the middle of the night he spent an hour trying to cut his wrists with the dull glass.

Hammond finally cut one gash but it didn't bleed enough. He made a second effort by lying on the glass, resulting in a deep incision. This scared him because it bled profusely convincing him that he had done "too good" a job. The bleeding, however, finally stopped, and he went to sleep.

In the morning he refused to get up and told the guards to come get him. The guard was shocked to see him lying in the blood and told him to get cleaned up. Hammond told the guard that he was "chicken because he wouldn't kill me."

Hammond then cleaned himself, the room, and said that he wasn't bothered "too much" after that. However, he was lectured and upbraided by several guards and was told he had another chance. He apparently shocked the guards and officers with his faked suicide attempt.