

PRESS RELEASE

USS Pueblo

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PROCEEDINGS OF THE COURT OF INQUIRY

AFTERNOON, FEBRUARY 13, 1969

Commander Lloyd M. Bucher was the primary witness yesterday afternoon during a two-hour open session at the Pueblo Court of Inquiry. The session was devoted to clarification and elaboration in several areas of previous testimony not quite clear to the five-admiral court.

Three other crewmen answered questions for the court, including Chief Communications Technician James F. Kell who expressed a desire to be recalled to "clarify" a few points.

An explanation by Cdr. Bucher detailed his relationship with his executive officer and navigator, Lieutenant Edward Murphy, Jr. Bucher stated it was a "normal" relationship; that he required a "lot of things" of his executive officer and tried to run the ship through him.

Some previous reference to a "personality clash" between the two officers was described by Cdr. Bucher as being a "little bit too harsh." They had different ways of doing things and many differences of opinion, but Cdr. Bucher never felt that there was any kind of a personality clash.

Cdr. Bucher recapped the difficulties involved in trying to establish an after steering station and steering the ship from the engine room. He told the court that a cable with 30,000 pounds of stress had to be parted before

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after steering could commence and that once parted, the Pueblo would have to enter a shipyard to have it properly reconnected. After steering was described by Cdr. Bucher as an extremely dangerous maneuver, and that there was no way that one could practice the drill safely.

He could have steered Pueblo from the engine room using the engines and a gyre compass and a lookout from the bridge, but the ship's bow was very light and always wanted to head into the wind. This resulted in a 20-degree swing on either side of a desired course.

Other areas of previous testimony explained by Cdr. Bucher included flag signaling to the North Korean vessels, jettisoning of classified materials, and general quarters drills.

He attempted to clarify whether he in fact hoisted the signal, "I'm in international waters." He said he remembers hoisting this signal and writing it into a message. When the North Koreans transferred people from the sub-chaser to one of the PT boats, the "international waters" signal was hauled down and followed with the "thank you for your consideration, I am leaving the area" signal. This signal was hoisted by Quartermaster First Class Charles Law and Cdr. Bucher couldn't explain why Signalman First Class Wendell Leach didn't see the flags.

Cdr. Bucher said that he knew some things were being jettisoned because he saw much paper floating in the Pueblo's wake. He saw a North Korean PT boat follow along behind Pueblo and noted that the North Koreans seemed very interested. However, he didn't see whether this paper was being scooped out of the water.

Chief James Kell explained the purpose of the destruction bill for the research spaces and stated that the bill covered three areas; the research

operational spaces, the crypto spaces and administrative spaces. He said that he wasn't responsible for overseeing destruction in all three spaces. Lt. Harris informed the chief that his responsibility was for the research operational spaces and that he (Lt. Harris) "would take care of everything else."

Chief Kell said that following a conversation between Lt. Harris and the bridge, Harris informed him that permission to commence destruction was denied. Kell looked out through a port hole and saw the armed North Koreans on the PT boat 30 yards from the Pueblo. He told the men in the research operational spaces to commence emergency destruction which began immediately. Approval from the bridge arrived about two minutes after Kell gave the commence order.

Chief Kell also clarified his earlier comment concerning Lt. Harris. He said he only knew Lt. Harris for 20 days (prior to seizure) and in that short period of time, he didn't "feel qualified to give an opinion" as to what kind of officer Lt. Harris was. He also said that he thought the destruction effort was done to the best of the men's ability, that everyone was doing as much as he could do, and that the destruction was accomplished with a sense of urgency.

Concerning the burning effort, Kell said that he thought that he gave the word to "stop burning" but he couldn't remember the source of the order.

Marine Sergeant Robert J. Hammond told the court that he was ordered by Chief Kell to take classified material to the chief petty officers' quarters and "throw them overboard." After jettisoning a few pieces of material through a port hole, Hammond said that area of the ship came under immediate fire. He ceased to jettison material because he was thinking of his own safety. He said that the machine gun shells were not penetrating the side of the ship, but knew that the North Koreans had shells which could penetrate since this had already happened.

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Communications Technician Second Class Peter M. Langenberg testified that he destroyed, burned and jettisoned materials and continued his efforts after being wounded at the same time Fireman Hodges was hit.

He stated that he was told by Lt. Harris that some bags laying in the passageway were not to be jettisoned because the water depth was too shallow. Later on, he was told by Lt. Harris to get some laundry bags. He said the laundry bags were either filled or locked up, so he went to the electronic storeroom and got some weighted bags instead.

After stacking the bags outside of the research spaces, he said he became dizzy from his wound. He went to the forward crew's berthing area where the air was fresher, and got one of the other men to exchange general quarters stations with him.

Following Langenberg's testimony, the court moved to a brief closed session.