

22 January 1969

Urgent

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Pueblo 2nd Lead

By RICHARD E. MEYER

Associated Press Writer

CORONADO, Calif. AP - The captain of the USS Pueblo was told by superiors, as the intelligence ship was surrounded by North Korean gunboats, that Air Force help probably was on the way, a board of inquiry was told today.

Cmdr. Lloyd M. Bucher's attorney read into the record messages between the skipper and Navy headquarters in Japan saying word of his attack "has gone to all authorities" and "we figure by now the Air Force has got some birds winging your way."

Bucher told the board that until the moment his ship was boarded he felt it was "possible, just possible," Air Force help might arrive.

His attorney, Miles Harvey, read aloud messages from the Pueblo saying:

"Are you sending assistance . . . SOS, SOS, SOS, . . . we are helpless."

"Roger, we are doing all we can, everyone is really trying to help . . ." came the reply.

Help didn't come. No reason was given.

Bucher, who has said he used communication priority direct to the White House as well as to his superiors in Japan, also testified he received no advice or guidance on what to do about the North Koreans as they fired on his ship and he finally decided to surrender.

Bucher told; 2nd graf Pueblo Lead A031
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Bucher told a Navy court of inquiry Tuesday he ordered communication channels open as North Koreans made their first attempt to put a boarding party aboard.

Minutes later, he said, a salvo of shells from a submarine chaser raked his radar mast, wounding him and three of his crew.

"I was in constant and immediate contact with the communications in Japan," Bucher said, "and my messages of course would be relayed to the commander of naval forces in Japan."

"I don't know how rapidly the messages would have been relayed to the various addressees," Bucher said. He had said these addressees included the White House.

"At any time did you request direction?" asked Capt. William Newsome, counsel for the Navy.

"No sir, I requested no direction," he said.

"Was advice or guidance given to you gratuitously on the surface?"

"No sir, it was not."

Continuing the narrative of his capture, Bucher told about machine gun bullets striking to the right and left of him as he went down a ladder.

All this time, Bucher said, crewmen were destroying classified equipment with sledge hammers and fire axes and gathering secret codes and documents and burning them in several fires throughout the ship.

He said one of two Communist MIGs flying overhead fired four rockets, "but they went into the water about eight or nine miles ahead of my ship . . . they certainly were not intended for me."

Bucher described as "oversight on my part" that he had not considered that the Pueblo's incinerator was not large enough to handle all classified publications and that he had not sailed into water deep enough "to permit jettisoning of the publications over the side."

Before he began today's testimony, he mentioned to his wife Rose and the wife of his executive officer, Mrs. Edward Murphy Jr., seated close behind him in the audience, that he was "all motted up."

Today was the first time Bucher's wife appeared at the court. She has been in Washington attending the presidential inauguration and inauguration balls at the invitation of the congressman from Iowa.

He did not elaborate, 6th graf A031.
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Pueblo Bjt 400 2 takes, 800 total

By RICHARD E. MEYER
Associated Press Writer

CORONADO, Calif. AP - The USS Pueblo's skipper says he used a communication priority direct to the White House as well as to his Navy superiors in Japan after North Korean gunboats surrounded his intelligence ship.

Cmdr. Lloyd Bucher told a Navy court of inquiry Tuesday he kept the channels open as the North Koreans made their first attempt to put a boarding party aboard. Minutes later, a salvo of shells from a subchaser raked his radar mast, wounding him and three of his crew.

Bucher said he did not order his crew to man their two machine guns and fight because it would have meant certain death for the gunners since the sub chaser and three torpedo boats were standing at pointblank range. He said he had "no hope of outrunning them" to avoid capture.

The 41-year-old officer spoke calmly to the five admirals comprising the court, but his angular jaw dripping with perspiration—he appeared emotionally drained when he finished Tuesday. By then he had testified for 12 hours over two days.

He resumes his story today.

He did not elaborate on a brief reference to the White House, and was not questioned about it. There was no indication if he had received instructions from anyone. Navy sources said they believed this was the first public mention of messages from the Pueblo directed to the White House.

A White House spokesman said last year, shortly after the Pueblo was seized, that there had been a delay in informing then President Johnson. The delay was attributed to the time it took presidential aide Walt W. Rostow to compile information for a briefing. When the joint chiefs of staff were informed has never been disclosed but the then Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara was said to have received word nine minutes after the Pueblo sent its final message.

By then the North Koreans had taken over the ship, one crewman was wounded fatally and the other 82 aboard were headed for 11 months imprisonment.

Jabbing at a sea chart with a pointer, Bucher denied 17 times—once for every Communist allegation—that he sailed the Pueblo into the 12-mile territorial water the North Koreans claim offshore.

Bucher said earlier his assignment was to conduct surveillance on Soviet ships in the Sea of Japan and monitor North Korean radar.

It was halfway through his narrative Tuesday that Bucher told about messages designed for his commanders in Japan and ultimately the White House.

One message described the approach of the submarine chaser and its threat to open fire.

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CORONADO, Take 2, Pueblo, A031: fire.

Another, he said told of North Korean torpedo boats rushing up, two Communist MIGS flying overhead and one of the patrol boats "backing toward my bow" with an armed boarding party.

"I raised the precedence (on the messages) from flash to critic," Bucher said, a Navy priority rating that meant they went "immediately and straight to the White House." He said he told his radiomen to keep the channels open.

Bucher, describing the opening shots fired at his vessel, said the sub chaser began firing "at 1,500 to 2,000 yards."

"On the bridge were myself, Signalman 1.C Wendell G. Leach, Quartermaster 1.C. Charles B. Law and

Communications Tech. 3.C. Steven J. Robin.

"Robin and Leach and I received shrapnel wounds."

When the subchaser was first spotted, Bucher said, he went to the wardroom and looked at it through binoculars.

"There were 10 to 12 people on the bridge, most of them with binoculars trained on us and watching us. I suspected this was nothing more than routine surveillance."

But Bucher said he also noticed that the vessel's guns were manned and pointed at him, so he ordered all hands to stay below deck to avoid showing how many men he had on board.

He reported raising flags to show the Pueblo was taking hydrographic tests.

"What nationality?" the sub chaser asked.

"I was not particularly apprehensive," Bucher said but added that he ordered the engines prepared to maneuver and emergency message blanks broken out.

"There was a great deal of activity on the bridge indicating to me that they might have been surprised that we were a U.S. ship," Bucher said.

Then, he said, CWO Gene Howard Lacy "reported sighting three torpedo boats headed in our direction, operating from the same location (Wonsan Harbor) as the sub chaser.

The sub chaser then hoisted flags demanding "heave to or I will fire," Bucher said. "I was momentarily confused as to just what he meant by that message since I was dead in the water."

Bucher said he signaled, "I am in international waters." As the torpedo boats approached, Bucher said Quartermaster Law fixed the Pueblo's location at 15.8 miles from nearest land. Bucher said this was confirmed by Navigator Edward Murphy Jr. and "I myself went down to the wheelhouse and manned the radar . . . and confirmed it."

A junior officer asked about scuttling the Pueblo, but Bucher said it would have taken more than 2 1/2 hours and the vessel was in only 30 fathoms of water.

"Also the water temperature was freezing," Bucher said. "A man cannot survive but very few minutes in that kind of water—perhaps less than five minutes."

At this point, Bucher said he ordered his men to prepare to destroy the classified material. "At about the same time, two MIG aircraft, I believe they were MIG21s, passed directly over the ship. 'Friar Tuck (the nickname for the oceanographer) get that damn gear up here,' Bucher said he shouted. "I'm leaving!" I said on the bridge. "I'll be damned if they are going to get away with that." So I got under way out to sea.

"I ordered a modified general quarters and hoisted the flag signals, hoping to confuse this.

"I ordered a modified general quarters and hoisted the flag signals, hoping to confuse the sub chaser. Thank you for your consideration," Bucher said he messaged, "I am departing."

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CORONADO, Pueblo, a032 add: departing.

"They started playing porpoise, crossing my bow at 10 yards, and keeping all guns aimed at me. I did not feel at any time, though, that there was any point in going to war. I was completely and hopelessly outgunned. To man our .50-calibre machine guns would have been to send a man up to that gun, and that would have been certain death to him.

"And we would have had to remove their covers, which were in fact frozen . . . I saw no point in sending people pointlessly to their death."

Bucher said the sub chaser again signaled "heave to, or I will fire on you."

"I ignored this," Bucher said. Then, he said, the firing started.

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By GENE HANDSAKER

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Pueblo NL Bjt

By RICHARD E. MEYER

Associated Press Writer

CORONADO, Calif. AP - The Navy told the captain of the USS Pueblo Wednesday that he is suspected of violating military law when North Koreans seized the intelligence ship. The Navy also warned that anything he says about certain aspects of its capture could be held against him.

But Cmdr. Lloyd M. Bucher said he would continue telling a court of inquiry "full details" of the capture, death of a crewman and imprisonment of others.

In his testimony Wednesday, Bucher said:

-He radioed for help when his ship came under attack and later was told by Navy headquarters in Japan, "We figure by now the Air Force has got some birds winging your way." No help came.

-At no time did he receive radioed advice or guidance from superiors about what action to take.

-He had never considered the possibility of an attack and what he would do.

Capt. 3rd graf

Capt. William Newsome, counsel for the Navy, quoted this regulation to Bucher: "The commanding officer shall not permit his command to be searched by any person representing a foreign state nor permit his command to be removed from the command by such a person, so long as he has the power to resist."

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Pueblo NL insert

CORONADO, Calif. Pueblo NL A255LA, to update, insert after 3rd graf: resist.

Bucher was still giving his account as the third day of the court recessed until Thursday—the first anniversary of the ship's capture. Bucher has been the only witness so far and it appeared his testimony may take up the rest of the week at least. Bucher had, etc. 4th graf.

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Bucher had testified that the Pueblo surrendered to North Korean gunboats after being fired upon and followed them into one of that nation's ports without manning his ship's guns or otherwise resisting. He said resistance would have caused needless deaths from enemy guns at point blank range.

Before reading the regulation, Newsome said: "Cmdr. Bucher it is not

Before reading the regulation, Newsome said: "Cmdr. Bucher it is now my duty to tell you that facts revealed in this court of inquiry render you to be a suspect of a violation of U.S.N.R. Article 0730...and you are further advised that you don't have to make any further statement on it and any further statement on it may be used as evidence against you in a subsequent trial."

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CORONADO, Calif. Add Pueblo NL Bjt A255LA: trial.

Newsome made his statement as Bucher was saying that North Koreans boarded the Pueblo in Wonsan Harbor, ordered his men at gunpoint to sit on the deck and Bucher told them that he had 83 men aboard.