

Navy Gets Suspicious Of Bucher

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Coronado

The skipper of the captured intelligence ship Pueblo was notified here yesterday that the Navy now has him under suspicion of committing a crime by letting North Koreans board his vessel and seize his men "while it was in his power to resist."

Commander Lloyd M. Bucher calmly received the news during the third day of a court of inquiry convened to determine how the ship was lost and how many national secrets were lost with it.

Captain William Newsome, Navy legal officer, informed Bucher in open court he was under suspicion of violating Navy Regulation 0730. It was made clear he is not now charged with this crime; only the five-admiral court of inquiry hearing the matter can eventually recommend trial on this — or other charges — after all testimony has been taken.

PENALTY

The charge does not include a specific penalty; it would be up to a general court-martial to determine what, if any, penalty Bucher might suffer if he is ever tried and convicted.

Bucher was warned by Newsome he need not testify further, but the frail skipper "I want to tell the American people exactly what happened" — said he wished to continue describing how he and his crew of 83 were captured.

In other developments, Bucher said:

- At the time of capture

on Jan. 23, 1968, at least two big mattress covers jammed with secret documents were recovered by the North Koreans aboard ship and many more bags of compromising papers were rettisoned in wa-

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ters shallow enough to permit recovery.

- By deciding to surrender without a fight, Bucher said he "stalled for time so that I could destroy classified material, which I considered my first duty."

- Contrary to earlier reports from Washington after the Pueblo's capture, Bucher was in communication with the Navy at all times and someone in Japan told him Air Force planes were on their way to help him.

- An incinerator designed to burn secret documents was so inadequate it would have taken 12 or more hours to do the job. The Pueblo had less than two hours to burn documents before capture.

FIRES

Bucher said he decided to surrender the ship after failing to outrun enemy vessels and only after a sub-chaser fired repeatedly at him with a rapid-firing cannon and machine guns.

He added he halted the ship later once or twice in a

bid for time to destroy tons of compromising documents in a number of little fires all over the ship.

"They opened fire again when I stopped," he said, adding he tried to confuse the enemy by "waving my hands and shouting gibberish at them," all the while wearing a white ski cap with a pom-pon on it.

He never ordered his crew to man their guns — they had ten Thompson submachine guns in addition to two virtually worthless 50 caliber machine guns — because "I wanted to prevent needless slaughter," Bucher said.

ANGER

The little ship was finally boarded by a crew of some 14 armed North Koreans who, Bucher said, "tied up my men and blindfolded them and kicked me and

knocked me down several times" when he gave them what he called "smart aleck" answers to their requests.

Bucher said he was so frustrated by his plight — he

couldn't run and he couldn't fight and no one seemed about to help him — that just before capture he had a fit of pique.

"I took some of my anger out by kicking a couple of fittings and used some rather appropriate language," he said dryly.

A hint of the Navy's possible charges against Bucher came earlier when legal officer Newsome asked the skipper:

"One of the most classified (secret) elements on your ship were your personnel. When you surrendered, did you make a calculated determination to surrender (intact) one of your most classified elements?"

"That's right," said Bucher.

SECRET

Testimony revealed that a section of the ship called the Research Department was so secret that not even Bucher knew what went on there or what was stored there.

This department was commanded by Lieutenant Stephen Harris, Bucher said that when he inspected the department moments before capture "I was quite surprised at the volume of matter I saw there."

Bucher said he ordered Harris to throw the secret manuals over the side or burn them. He added that most of the secret machines used to detect enemy coastal radar and encode and decode messages had already been crushed with fire axes and sledge hammers.

MESSAGES

Portions of declassified messages between Pueblo and Japan were read into the record:

"... destruction of publications has been ineffective ... several will be compro-

mised ... we are being escorted into Wonson ... we are being boarded ... have not used any weapons ... one man has leg blown off ... please send us assistance ... we are not offering any resistance ..."

Japan replied: "... we are doing all we can ... the Air Force is going to help ... some F-105s are coming, this is unofficial ... we are staying right with you ..."

The Air Force never came and the crew was imprisoned for 11 months.

Testimony resumes today at 9 a.m. at the Amphibious Base here.