

Court of Inquiry on the Pueblo Hears Bucher in Closed Session

Skipper Appears Pale and Drawn as He Enters Heavily Guarded Room— 2 More Secret Meetings Slated

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CORONADO, Calif., Jan. 24 —Cmdr. Lloyd M. Bucher, looking pale and drawn, testified today at a closed session of the naval court of inquiry into the capture of the intelligence ship Pueblo last January.

Commander Bucher was joined in the heavily guarded session by two Navy captains who were on duty in Japan when the Pueblo was seized by North Korean submarine chasers and torpedo boats. The United States Navy headquarters in Japan served as the Pueblo's operational headquarters.

The session today, the first of three closed meetings in the inquiry, was believed to have dealt with what classified materials were captured by the North Koreans and how much electronic and coding gear was destroyed by the Pueblo crew.

Commander Bucher has testified that "very close to 100 per cent" of the electronic equipment was destroyed by crewmen with hammers and axes as the North Koreans attacked.

Some Documents Seized

He added, however, that an unknown quantity of secret in the research space of the Pueblo had been seized. The research space is the portion of the ship where most of the coding, electronic research and intelligence missions are performed.

Appearing tired and biting his lip, Commander Bucher trudged through a cold drizzle shortly before 9 A.M. and entered a conference room at the Naval Amphibious Base here. He was accompanied by E. Miles Harvey, his civilian attorney.

Moments later, the room was entered by Capt. Thomas L. Dwyer, who at the time of the capture was assistant chief of staff for intelligence for American naval forces in Japan, and Capt. Forrest A. Pease, then and now the chief of staff for the commander of those forces.

A key witness at the closed hearing was believed to have been Rear Adm. Frank L. Johnson, the former commander of United States naval forces in Japan. Admiral Johnson is now commandant of the 13th Naval District in Seattle.

Testimony on Weapons

Commander Bucher had discussed, in crucial testimony Monday, Admiral Johnson's orders to him shortly before the Pueblo left Sasebo on her mission off Korea. Commander Bucher said then:

"He [Admiral Johnson] said they [the Pueblo's two 50-caliber machine guns] were to be used in the event that all else failed in extracting ourselves from a harassment situation such as had not been experienced before.

"He was quite sure that they would never be needed, and I

was under the definite impression that everyone was not in concurrence at Commander Naval Forces, Japan, that guns should even be located on the ship.

"I received this impression from many officers up there, that they did not think that they belonged on the ship and felt a definite—they felt uneasy about putting the guns on there; that we might, in fact, by having the guns, draw the type of reaction from potential enemy forces that we did not want, which was an attack on the ship."

Defense for Surrender

Commander Bucher's major defense for surrendering his ship without a fight has rested on a single point: that he was "hopelessly outgunned" by the North Korean attackers and that any move on the Pueblo would have resulted in "complete slaughter."

The related and highly delicate issue of how much secret data were destroyed was believed to be a major topic today.

In the last few days of open testimony, Commander Bucher has indicated that the top secret research space on the Pueblo was a virtual separate division of the ship that offered limited access even to the skipper.

Fluent in Russian

The officer in charge of the research space was Lieut. Stephen Harris, a 1960 Harvard graduate who speaks several languages fluently, including Russian.

Commander Bucher has stressed that the bulk of the secret material that fell into North Korean hands were documents from Lieutenant Harris's research space. This included two mattress covers packed with secret papers.

In testimony yesterday, one member of the court of inquiry, Rear Adm. Marshall W. White, asked Commander Bucher:

"You indicated that the publications in the mattress covers were not thrown overboard. Could you give any reason why? Were they too big, or you just did not have time to get to them, or what?"

Commander Bucher replied, "No sir. I do not know why they were not thrown over the side."

Commander Bucher said that all the secret documents "I had signed for" had been destroyed. The documents in the research space were apparently under Lieutenant Harris's, not Commander Bucher's, jurisdiction.

Senator Assails Navy

WASHINGTON, Jan. 24 (AP) — Senator Peter H. Dominick, Republican of Colorado, charged today that the Navy was trying to blame Commander Bucher for the Pueblo af-

fair rather than the officials who denied him the means to destroy the ship's secret equipment.

Mr. Dominick, a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said in an interview that top Pentagon officials had not told the committee in briefings last year that Commander Bucher had requested such a destruct system.

Commander Bucher testified at the court of inquiry that he had requested the destruct system two or three times and had been turned down because of "money and time."

The Senate majority leader, Mike Mansfield, predicted, meanwhile, that at least two Senate committees would want to look into the Pueblo affair.

The Montana Democrat told reporters that he thought the Foreign Relations Committee, of which he is a member, and the Armed Services Committee would want to inquire into all aspects of the Pueblo's capture.

But Mr. Mansfield said he did not expect any action until after the court of inquiry completes its hearing and announces its findings.