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Inquiry Hears Pueblo's Intelligence Officer

Closed Session Held for Testimony by Key Witness

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The naval court of inquiry into North Korea's capture of the U.S.S. Pueblo moved into closed session today, hearing testimony by an intelligence officer who has emerged as a key, and somewhat mysterious, figure in the case.

The officer was Lieut. Stephen R. Harris, a shy, sharp-faced Harvard graduate who speaks French, German, Spanish and Russian fluently. On the Pueblo, Lieutenant Harris commanded the secret "research space," a separate division of the ship that dealt in intelligence and decoding operations.

Comdr. Lloyd M. Bucher, the ship's skipper, has testified that the bulk of the secret material that fell into North Korean hands last January was documents from Lieutenant Harris's research space. This included two mattress covers crammed with secret papers, he said.

Commander Bucher also indicated throughout his testimony last week that the research space on the main level of the Pueblo was not entirely under his control.

Declines to Comment

"Only about 12 or 13 people could be in the research space at any given time, and they had some 30 people aboard from that area," Commander



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Lieut. Stephen R. Harris in a photo made while he was prisoner of North Koreans.

Bucher said. "I did assign them to duties [but] this was a very tender area and Cincpacfleet [Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet] representatives for the research detachment on occasion made it known to me these people were not working for me."

What agency Lieutenant Harris and his staff served has never been made clear.

Lieutenant Harris drove this morning to the Naval Amphibious School here, where the five-admiral court of inquiry is holding its sessions. The rangy, 29-year-old officer stepped quickly past a group of newsmen outside the sun-dappled school.

"Were there any differences

between you and Commander Bucher?" he was asked.

"No comment," he replied as he entered the school, which is under heavy guard by armed Marines during the closed sessions.

At least part of the mission of the research space was to collect electronic intelligence, particularly of radar installations, along the coast of North Korea as well as to check on the movements of submarines in the area. The research space, as well as the entire ship, was fitted with sonars, coding equipment and hypersensitive radar.

Commander Bucher has testified that he decided to surrender the Pueblo to North Korean warships only after his ship's secret documents and material were destroyed. He conceded, however, that "Harris said he was not able to destroy all the publications he had" before the North Koreans boarded the Pueblo.

Surprised by Volume

In crucial testimony last week, Commander Bucher told the court that he rushed to the research space after the North Koreans opened fire.

"There was a steel door located in the research spaces," he said. "The door was provided with a triple locking system that was necessary because of the security of the spaces."

"The door also had an electronic lock on it which could be opened and is normally required in the spaces that required the utmost of security."

"I knocked on the door and the door was opened to me," he went on. "I came in and I

noticed on the deck, in the immediate proximity of the door, at least three large naval mattress covers, which apparently were full of documents. The mattress covers were six feet by three feet in width and length and designed to be slipped over a naval mattress."

"These mattress covers were full of documents and I was, to say the least, quite surprised to see the volume of material on the deck of the compartment, Commander Bucher said. "I did not have an appreciation for the volume of materials that was stowed in this space."

"I spoke to Lieutenant Harris and I said words to the effect, 'Let's get rid of this material right now.' And he replied to me that the material was being destroyed and thrown over the side, and further indicated that the crypto [coding] materials had been destroyed."

Commander Bucher then told of leaving the research space to send a plea for help to the commander of United States naval forces in Japan and immediately returning to the research area.

Urged Speedy Destruction

"I came back," he said, "and once again told Lieutenant Harris to get the material destroyed that was laying about, bagged up, and he said words to the effect that we are continuing to bag the material and throw it over the side."

"I departed with the feeling that the bulk of materials was pretty thoroughly destroyed and felt we had plenty of time, as we were some distance from land."

Commander Bucher said that, after the Pueblo was captured, he walked through the ship accompanied by several North Koreans.

"We finally arrived in the research space," he recalled. "The door was opened, and upon walking inside I was rather surprised to see still a couple of the mattress covers which were apparently full of classified material."

"It did surprise me, because I had seen this material there some 20 to 30 minutes before this, and perhaps as much as 40 minutes, and I had no prior indication that the material had not been jettisoned, or destroyed some other way."

Will Testify Again

Navy officials declined to discuss in detail the subjects of the session today, but the loss of the documents and the question of their specific nature were expected to be the focus for the court.

Lieutenant Harris is expected to testify in open session next week, when crew members of the Pueblo start appearing before the court.

Capt. Vincent Thomas, the public affairs officer for the commander in chief of the Pacific Fleet, said that about half the Pueblo's 82 surviving crewmen were expected to testify. Some of the crewmen have requested and received military counsel.

Besides Lieutenant Harris, the court today heard Lieut. Edward A. Brookes, a 29-year-old Philadelphian who, at the time of the capture, was assigned to the intelligence division on the staff of the commander of American naval forces in Japan. Lieutenant Brookes is now with the Defense Intelligence Agency in Washington.

The court was adjourned late this afternoon until Monday. Navy officials said that the length of the adjournment would enable Commander Bucher, the five admirals conducting the inquiry and the court staff to rest and catch up on paperwork. The inquiry, which began 10 days ago, is being conducted on a six-day-a-week, 9 A.M. to 5 P.M. schedule.