

### 3 Key Pueblo Officers Back Bucher's Decision To Surrender Bessel to North Koreans

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**CORONADO, Calif., Feb. 5—** Solemnly and unhesitatingly, three key officers of the Pueblo supported today the decision of Comdr. Lloyd M. Bucher to surrender the intelligence ship to North Korean warships without a fight.

"He's an outstanding leader and I'd follow him anywhere," said Lieut. (jg.) Timothy L. Harris, the Pueblo's 22-year-old supply officer. "I felt the captain's decision was correct under the circumstances."

Lieut. (jg.) Frederick C. Schumacher, the Pueblo's gunnery and operations officer, spoke in a quavering voice. "I personally think that Commander Bucher is one of the finest officers I know—he's an outstanding skipper," he said. "I don't personally think any of us could have made it through those 11 months [of captivity in North Korea] had it not been for Commander Bucher," he testified.

#### Thanks the Witnesses

The third officer to support Commander Bucher today at the Navy court of inquiry into the capture of the ship was Chief Warrant Officer Gene H. Lacy, the Pueblo's engineer. He was asked by Commander Bucher's civilian attorney, E. Miles Harvey:

"I'm now going to ask you

for your personal opinion, based on your experience and what you saw on January 23d [1968] immediately prior to the capture — did the commanding officer of the U.S.S. Pueblo have the power to resist the boarding and ultimate seizure of the Pueblo?"

"No," said Mr. Lacy.

As the officers testified at the Naval Amphibious Base here, Commander Bucher sat silent, gulping glasses of water and biting his lip nervously. After each testified, he rose and thanked the witness.

The bulk of their testimony focused on equipment shortages aboard the Pueblo as well as the moments when the ship was attacked and boarded by North Korean soldiers and sailors in the Sea of Japan.

#### Cites Problems on Ship

Mr. Lacy observed that the Pueblo was "old, awful small" and "hand steering problems." He also said that she lacked watertight hatches, a good communications system, damage control plating and a collision alarm.

In two and a half hours of testimony, the tall, craggy-faced warrant officer answered questions slowly and firmly.

He spoke acidly of his first impressions of the Pueblo when

the former cargo ship was being outfitted in Pueblo Sound.

"Both the Pueblo and the Palm Beach [a sister ship] were moored there, he recalled. "At first sight I thought there was one ship. When I got closer I realized there were two ships."

"I thought we were spending an awful lot of money on a small and old ship."

The five admirals of the court, sitting at a raised table four feet away, smiled.

Through the session, the admirals closely questioned Mr. Lacy, a 21-year Navy veteran, about the Pueblo's equipment shortages as well as his reactions to Commander Bucher's decision to surrender.

"Did it ever occur to you that you might have to defend yourself?" asked Rear Adm. Edward E. Grimm, a member of the court who speaks with a lingering smile. The 58-year-old admiral is head of the Pacific Fleet Training Command.

"No sir," Mr. Lacy, who is 39 years old replied, "I didn't believe we would. We were told not to uncover our guns or make any aggressive actions construed to be hostile."

The questioning continued:

Q. Did it ever occur to you that you might be captured? A. No, sir. It was more or less of a give-and-take nature. We didn't think the Russians would do anything without jeopardizing their position along our coast. As far as any actions on the Koreans'

part, I didn't believe it would ever occur.

Q. Did it ever occur to you that you might have to sink to avoid capture? A. This occurred — it was discussed, but never seriously considered. Most of the wardroom discussion concerned the stability of the ship, keeping it afloat, not scuttling it.

In his testimony, Mr. Lacy said that there had been little serious talk on the Pueblo about scuttling the ship to keep her out of North Korean hands. The Pueblo was filled with millions of dollars worth of secret intelligence equipment, hypersensitive radar and sonars.

"It would have taken two and a half hours to have scuttled the ship," Mr. Lacy said. "The captain asked [at the time of the attack] if the ship could be scuttled and I said it could not be done quickly. This was the last of any discussion."

#### Questioning Pursued

The admirals pressed their questioning as to whether scuttling could have been undertaken.

Rear Adm. Allen A. Bergner asked Mr. Lacy about the possibility of puncturing the Pueblo's hull from within as well as opening valves to flood the engine room.

"It is my opinion it was practically impossible without explosive devices," Mr. Lacy said.

Such devices were not aboard the Pueblo.

The engineer said that scuttling the ship would have meant removing 20 to 25 bolts from 15-inch pipes in the engine room and allowing water to flood in.

"As soon as you did this, you would have lost cooling water to the main engine and the ship would have been dead in the water with no power," he said. "It would have taken two and a half hours."

#### The Engineers' Problems

Speaking slowly and carefully, Mr. Lacy discussed the numerous problems that faced the engineers on the Pueblo when the ship was converted

from a freighter to an intelligence vessel. The conversion took place in the spring of 1967 in the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard, Bremerton, Wash.

"There were no specific plans for conversion except for the research [intelligence] spaces," he said.

"Our main concern was for damage control," he went on, referring to the possibility that the Pueblo might be rammed while on an intelligence mission. "We noticed there was little damage control."

"We asked for watertight hatches for the crew's berthing and office spaces, but it was not accomplished. They promised it would be done at the next regular overhaul in 1969.

"By letter we made a re-

quest for damage control books and damage control plates, and it was denied, so we made our own."

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#### Lacked Collision Alarm

"We didn't have a collision alarm," Mr. Lacy said. "It was disapproved."

He said that there was on the ship only one sound-powered telephone system for communication between stations. The request for another

phone system was denied at first, Mr. Lacy said, but equipment was provided later on the condition that the Pueblo crew install the phones themselves.

"It was never completed," Mr. Lacy said.

The inability to equip the Pueblo was attributed to a lack of money and planning. The appropriation to overhaul the Pueblo had been cut by \$1-million, and Commander Bucher has testified that the Navy "kept extending us in Puget Sound one month at a time and [long-range] work that might have taken five weeks was not

no continuation