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Pueblo Crewman Says Destruction of Papers

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The burning of the Pueblo's secret papers in the intelligence quarter of the ship lasted 10 to 15 minutes, a communications technician has told the Navy court of inquiry here.

The crewman, Chief Communications Technician James R. Kell, also testified that he never heard an order to burn documents from Lieut. Stephen R. Harris, the chief intelligence officer on the Pueblo, who was in charge of top secret material.

Technician Kell said that he himself gave the order to start burning and scuttling papers in the research, or intelligence, area of the Pueblo.

Technician Kell testified yesterday afternoon at a closed session of the inquiry into North Korea's capture of the intelligence ship on Jan. 23, 1968. Portions of the testimony at the closed hearing were released this afternoon by the Navy.

Officer Semmed 'Nervous'

At least 10 bags filled with secret papers were still undestroyed when the attacking North Koreans boarded the Pueblo. Most of the documents belonged to Lieutenant Harris's "research space," where most of the Pueblo's secret missions were performed.

Asked by the court for his

opinion of Lieutenant Harris, Technician Kell replied, "He is an average officer — nothing outstanding and nothing bad."

The Navy release said that Technician Kell "observed during the incident that Lieutenant Harris appeared nervous, as they all were, but not confused."

For more than a week the inquiry at the Naval Amphibious Base here has focused on why so many secret papers fell into the hands of the North Koreans, who boarded the Pueblo without resistance.

Had More Than Hour

Both Comdr. Lloyd M. Bucher the Pueblo's skipper, and Lieutenant Harris have stressed that the 600 pounds of secret papers on the intelligence ship were "excessive" and that crewmen were unable to burn or scuttle all the documents because of poor communications, confusion, smoky passage ways and the steady bursts of machine-gun and cannon fire that left decks impassable.

The Pueblo crew had a little more than an hour to burn the papers — from the opening salvo, when Commander Bucher ordered "emergency destruction," until the boarding of the ship, whose 177-foot hull was packed with hypersensitive radar, sonars and navigation equipment.

In the closed hearing yesterday, both Technician Kell and

Senior Chief Communications Technician Ralph D. Bouden testified that an "emergency destruction bill" was not posted in the research space until after chaser approached the Pueblo just before the attack.

Such a bill set out in detail which crewmen should destroy secret papers and equipment and how they should do it.

Previous testimony from Commander Bucher and Lieutenant Harris indicated that such bills were posted throughout the ship long before the attack.

Technician Bouden, a 15-year navy veteran who had never been to sea before going on the Pueblo, testified that during the attack "word was passed to personnel in the research spaces, mostly by phone, although personnel would come in periodically and tell what was happening."

He added that the ship's public address system was "not audible" in the research space and that he never heard Commander Bucher's order to "prepare for emergency destruction."

Commander Bucher issued the order at 1 P.M., shortly after three torpedo boats surrounded the Pueblo and a submarine chaser signaled, "Heave to or I will open fire." Within a half hour, the vessels at-

tacked the Pueblo, whose crewmen feverishly attempted to destroy secret papers.

The Navy's account of the closed hearing said:

"Kell stated that he gave the word to commence emergency destruction in the research spaces. He further testified that at no time during the destruction attempts did he receive an order from Lieut. Stephen Harris or did he hear Lieutenant Harris give an order.

Estimates the Time

"Kell estimated that burning of publications only lasted 10 to 15 minutes and was accomplished by using three or four wastebaskets. He did not use the ship's incinerator because it was on the open deck and would have exposed the men to gunfire from the North Korean boats.

"He emphasized to the court that he believed it was suicide for anyone to go on deck to jettison material and that he couldn't send a man to do what he felt would lead to 'certain death'."

Technician Kell, a 32-year-old Honolulu-born intelligence specialist, said that two vain attempts were made to toss material over the side when the North Koreans opened fire.

He ordered Sgt. Robert J. Murphy, of the Marines to

Lasted 10 to 15 Minutes

throw equipment through a porthole, across the passageway from the research space, but the sergeant was unable to open the hatch, he said.

Another attempt to scuttle material was made by Communications Technician 2d Cl. Peter M. Langenberg, he said. Almost immediately, the 23-year-old crewman was "struck in the neck by shrapnel, the witness testified.

In Technician Bouden's testimony, the 40-year-old Idahoan recalled that the crewmen were ordered to the mess deck after receiving word to stop destroying material. The order was ap-

parently issued when the North Koreans boarded the ship.

Technician Bouden said that he had walked out of the intelligence center onto the deck and had seen piles of scattered documents.

"You almost had to wade through it," he told the court.

Technician Bouden said that he had left the intelligence area gripping secret papers hoping to dump them over the side.

But a North Korean soldier ordered him to return the material to the research space, he said. He said he then thought of burning the papers, but had no matches or lighter.