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Pueblo's Skipper Tells of 'Differences of Opinion'

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—Comdr. Lloyd M. Bucher said today that he had had 'differences of opinion' with the executive officer and navigator of the intelligence ship Pueblo, Lieut. Edward R. Murphy.

"Mr. Murphy had a limited amount of at-sea experience," Commander Bucher told a court of inquiry at the naval amphibious base here. "I expected perhaps too much of Mr. Murphy."

In an unexpected appearance before the court of inquiry into the capture of the ship, Commander Bucher also disputed a crewman, Wendell G. Leach, who testified that the Pueblo had never raised the key signal "I am in international waters" to approaching North Korean gunboats off North Korea on Jan. 23, 1968.

"Leach is confused about it, I am positive," Commander Bucher said in a hoarse voice. "I remember hoisting this signal."

Sitting stiffly behind a table, Commander Bucher came under repeated and intense questioning by the five admirals on the court. Part of the questioning focused on the commander's decision not to steer the ship from the engine room after the pilot house had been struck by North Korean fire.

Admiral Leads Questioning

Rear Adm. Marshall W. White led the questioning. "Could the force on the bridge go to the engine room and conduct the ship from there," he asked.

"Yes sir, with difficulty," Commander Bucher replied. "I might add with great difficulty."

Had the force on the pilot house—the area of the ship's bridge that contains the controls and steering—moved be-

low deck into the engine room, the Pueblo could, possibly, have maneuvered away from the surrounding North Korean submarine chasers and torpedo boats.

"This couldn't be done in five minutes," said Commander Bucher. "It would have taken one hour to maneuver emergency steering under the best conditions."

"There were two 30,000 stress cables that had to be parted," he went on, staring at Admiral White. "It was extremely dangerous. They could go right through the skin of the ship and tear it apart."

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Commander Bucher had not been expected to reappear at the inquiry until the final days, possibly in 10 days or two weeks.

The 41-year-old skipper had testified emotionally, at times dramatically, during the first week of the investigation now in its fourth week in the gold-carpeted Navy Amphitheatre here.

Commander Nervous

During his hour before the five admirals today, Commander Bucher nervously bit his lip and twisted his hands. He gulped glasses of water and breathed heavily. His hands trembled as he poured the water.

One of the first questions at the inquiry today was made by Rear Adm. Allen A. Bergner.

"What was your relationship with Lieutenant Murphy?" the burly, white-haired admiral asked Commander Bucher.

The commander paused. "Well sir, Lieutenant Murphy was my executive officer. I required of him the duties that would normally be required of an executive officer."

"This relationship was always tempered by Mr. Murphy's limited amount of at-sea

experience . . . Because of his limited experience I was required to give him much more detailed instructions as to just how I wanted things to be done."

"We did have differences of opinion, but nothing that wasn't resolved readily by my making decisions as commanding officer," Commander Bucher went on.

Issue of Clashes Raised

Admiral Bergner leaned forward and asked, "Were there any personality clashes?"

"Well sir," Commander Bucher replied, "If you put it in terms of a personality clash that's a little too harsh."

"He had a definite way that he was used to doing things and I came from a different branch of the service," said Commander Bucher slowly.

"We had many differences of opinion but there was never a personality clash per se."

"Being of a submarine background I worked toward creating a ship's organization as I knew it," said Commander Bucher. "Mr. Murphy was surface ship-oriented and their organization plans differed considerably."

At this point Admiral Bergner asked: "After you stopped [the ship] did you have any discussions with Mr. Murphy on your decision?"

"No sir," replied Commander Bucher. "I only had one or two very brief discussions with Lieutenant Murphy during the entire incident."

Today's comments by Commander Bucher were the first indication of any discord between the Pueblo's skipper and his 31-year-old executive officer.

Lieutenant Murphy, who joined the Navy following his graduation in 1960 from Principia College in Illinois, had testified last week in strong support of Commander Bucher.

"I think my actions would have been essentially the same," the thin prematurely gray officer told the court.

Numerous questions have been raised, however, about the ship's steering after Lieutenant Murphy testified that the Pueblo's main navigation device—an electromagnetic system

With His Executive Officer

called the Loran — “could have been out of position by as much as five miles.”

Lieutenant Murphy had testified further that the ship's steering was poor, that overcast weather limited celestial navigation, that updated 1953 ship charts were used “with obvious errors” and that radar

was only used “five or six times” in the 10-day voyage from Sasebo, Japan, to Korea in order to check the Pueblo's position.

Lieutenant Murphy insisted, however, that the Pueblo had never violated the 12-mile territorial waters that North Korea claims.
