



Harris: Was his best enough?

\$603 million to the Federal government for offshore leases, and the Interior Department—with unseemly haste, some felt—gave the go-ahead.

“We are now in the unenviable position of saying we told you so,” seethed Frederick Eissler, a local teacher and a director of the Sierra Club. Eissler demanded that the U.S. halt all drilling in the channel. There was an outcry against new Interior Secretary Walter Hickel, though it was Hickel’s predecessor, Stewart Udall, who had given the oil companies the go-ahead. Hickel flew in, asked the drillers to stop, let them start again next day—and ordered them to stop again three days later.

In Washington, President Nixon proclaimed himself in favor of more stringent regulations, and later the White House said he was considering sending Federal troops to help clean up.

Vacuum: Hundreds of men were already busy trying, with only limited success. Inmates from state conservation camps spread straw, tale and perlite along the beaches to soak up the oil. Farm mulchers on barges spewed hay into the harbor and men in small wooden punts followed, pulling in the oil-laden straw with garden rakes. Pumpers tried to vacuum up concentrations of the oil.

All such measures were only stopgaps at best, however, as long as the oil kept flowing. And only at the weekend, after the oil had been bubbling up for 12 days at 21,000 gallons a day, could immensely relieved Union officials claim to have halted the flow. Huge amounts of a viscous chemical “mud” plus cement forced down the ruptured shaft finally did the trick. There was still all that oil on the water, however, at least 300 square miles of it, and there was no telling quite when Santa Barbara’s black plague would end.

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THE NAVY:

The Pueblo’s Chief Spy

At first glance, he did not quite seem to fit the mold of a career Naval officer. A onetime Harvard English major with a speaking facility in four foreign languages, he dabbled in the esoteric history of streetcars and loved Rachmaninoff. But he had been tempted to try the sea by his New England family tradition; numerous of his forebears had been sailing captains and the family motto was *Amor Patriae Exitat*—Love of Country Motivates Me. He found life in the modern Navy both motivating and rewarding. He rose to become chief intelligence officer aboard the ill-fated spy ship U.S.S. Pueblo. And it was in that capacity that Lt. Stephen Harris, 30, moved into the witness chair last week to tell the Court of Inquiry in Coronado, Calif., what happened in the vessel’s secret “research center” in the critical moments before its capture.

Harris’s appearance forcefully raised one of the most intriguing questions of the Pueblo affair. Was the quiet, self-effacing officer, in many respects, skipper of a ship within a ship, in effective command of 28 technicians who manned the Pueblo’s electronic eyes and ears? In a new Navy experiment, Harris and his intelligence crew had come aboard as a semi-separate “detachment” with a line of command on technical matters to the Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet, in Hawaii. Skipper Lloyd Bucher did not have the authority to write Harris’s primary fitness report and the proceedings in the “research center” were available to the skipper only on a “need to know” basis.

Let Go: On occasion, it seemed, the differences between the outgoing Bucher and the introspective Harris went beyond matters of command. Once in Yokosuka, Japan, at a “wetting down” party to celebrate his promotion to commander, Bucher had watched his junior officer really let himself go. After several rounds of black-velvet punch, Harris methodically popped a batch of 150 balloons with his cigar. At that moment Bucher apparently concluded that the taciturn lieutenant might turn into one of the boys after all. But at sea, Harris tended to keep pretty much to himself—and then came the agonizing moment of truth off Wonsan Harbor.

When the attack came, Harris failed to hear the first call to “general quarters” because of a communications snafu. What’s more, he explained, “It must be understood that we were under heavy gunfire.” As a result, he contended, both the incinerator on deck and the sea itself were virtually inaccessible, and destruction of classified material, by burning and shredding, had to go on mainly below decks in the cramped “research center” itself. “Part of a body had exploded in the area,” he went on (referring to Fireman Duane Hodges, killed in the at-

tack). “There was flesh and blood all over . . . we had to do the best we could under the given conditions.”

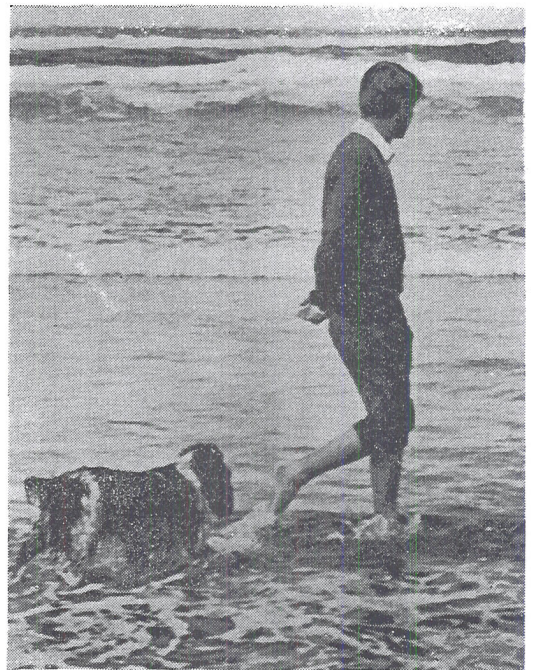
In the end, between ten and twelve bags of classified data—an estimated total of some 600 pounds—fell into North Korean hands. On that count alone, it seemed, Harris’s best was far from good enough to relieve the heat on Bucher. As the young career officer concluded, reiterating he had done his best, he looked almost beseechingly for some sign of approval from Pete Bucher. The Pueblo skipper had warmly shaken the hands of every other Pueblo officer who had testified. But this time he didn’t even raise his eyes from the yellow legal pad before him.

POLITICS:

RFK Against Himself

It was an 85-day happening in a nation that began 1968 assuming the inevitability of Lyndon Johnson and wound up acquiescing in Richard Nixon, and in the end it was almost as if Robert Kennedy had not existed at all. Yet his brief, headlong pursuit of the Presidency was a metaphor for the whole tumultuous political year—a year of convulsive change in a nation not quite prepared to risk the full consequences of change. Events caught Kennedy, too, unprepared, forcing him to make his move too soon by the conventional wisdom of the old politics and too late for the moral passions of the new. “He was a transitional figure in a transitional year,” David Halberstam writes in a newly published book on Bobby’s campaign—and part of the tragedy of his death was that it kept Kennedy and the nation from seeing where the transitions might have led.

The Kennedy adventure now is the



RFK: Entry too late, exit too soon

Newsweek