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CORONADO, Calif. AP — The USS Pueblo's youngest officer burst into sobs Wednesday as he told a court of inquiry he wanted to commit suicide while a captive of the North Koreans—but killed instead a potted plant they gave him.

Freckle-faced Lt. J.g. Timothy Harris, 23, cried and gasped and buried his head in his hands and finally halted his testimony and stepped outside into the rain to compose himself so he could continue.

A lieutenant and a chief warrant officer told the court — now in the captivity phase of its investigation of the intelligence ship's seizure and the 11-month imprisonment of its crew — that they were struck repeatedly by captors in quest of spy confessions. Both said — testifying calmly — they felt that they violated the U.S. Code of Conduct for prisoners.

Said Lt. Stephen Harris, in charge of the Pueblo's intelligence operation: "They threatened that the men who worked for me would be shot. I couldn't see that happen. I felt that they meant business."

CWO Gene Howard Lacy, engineering chief on the Pueblo, said the North Koreans made him remove his trousers, put a stick behind his knees and crouch holding a chair over his head.

He said he was beaten with a rifle butt, kicked to the floor and "then they sat me on a hot water radiator."

The most dramatic testimony, however, came from Timothy Harris, who was asked after he stopped crying:

"Was there a plant in the room?"

"I killed it," Harris replied.

"I urinated on it. I had an extreme hatred for everything there and when they gave me this damn plant it took me four months but I finally killed it."

Timothy Harris broke down when Rear Adm. Allen Bergner, a member of the court, asked: "After the initial phase of the captivity, what was your mental attitude?"

"Extreme hatred for the Koreans," Harris replied, his voice beginning to shake.

"At that time the only thing that I wished . . ."

He buried his face in his hands, looked down at the witness table, drummed his fingers, wiped his eyes and his mouth, folded his hands and gritted his teeth.

"Well . . ." he muttered.

"Could I rephrase my question?" Bergner said.

"After the initial phase did you get stronger in your resistance?"

"Yes sir . . ." Harris said, breaking into sobs, gasping, and burying his face in his hands again.

"I withdraw the question," Bergner said.

"Let's wait a moment here," said Vice Adm. Harold G. Bowen Jr., president of the court.

Attorney E. Miles Harvey, representing Bucher, put a hand on Harris' shoulder and they walked outside together.

After they returned, Harris told about wanting to commit suicide and then added, "I just want to apologize to the court for breaking down, that's all."

"No apology is required," said Bowen.

Stephen Harris said he was baten and threatened with death when he tried to argue the North Koreans out of asking him about secret equipment on the Pueblo.

"Did you provide this information?" asked Capt. William Newsome, counsel for the court.

"I did provide them with information I knew was not classified . . . most of the time false information I knew they could not verify."

"Did they express particular interest when they found out your particular duties on the ship?" asked Newsome.

"No they did not, which surprised me."

Harris said he deceived the North Koreans by referring to orders from Capt. Maxwell Smart of the Office of Naval Intelligence.