

Weeping Pueblo Officer Tells Court of Inquiry on

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CORONADO, Calif., Feb. 19—The Pueblo's youngest officer buried his face in his hands today and cried before the five admirals conducting the court of inquiry into the capture of the intelligence ship.

Shaking with sobs, Lieut. (j.g.) Timothy L. Harris, 23 years old, whispered:

"What I wanted to do was to take my life. I couldn't do it. I couldn't do it."

For nearly three minutes the sandy-haired officer sat at a table and struggled to speak. Trembling, he pressed his fingers into his eyes and shook his head. Then he bit his lip, shrugged and dropped his head on the table, covering his face with his arm.

Lieutenant Harris, the Pueblo's supply officer, broke down as the admirals on the court questioned him about the crew's 11 months in a North Korean prison.

Mental Attitude Questioned

Rear Adm. Allen A. Bergner asked the freckle-faced officer, "After the initial phase of captivity, can you describe your mental attitude?"

"Yes sir," the witness said slowly. "I had extreme hate for the Koreans. The one thing I wished more than anything was that . . ."

Lieutenant Harris stopped and turned away. His face reddened. He slapped his palm over his eyes and shook his head. He breathed heavily.

"Take your time," said the white-haired admiral.

Lieutenant Harris began, "Uh . . . well," and stopped again.

"Could I rephrase the question?" Admiral Bergner said. "After the initial phase, as time went on, did you start getting stronger?"

"Yes sir," replied Lieutenant Harris, starting to weep and shake his head.

Admiral Bergner said quietly, "Let me withdraw this question."

Admiral Bergner leaned forward and folded his hands beneath his chin. Two others on the court—Rear Adm. Richard R. Pratt and Rear Adm. Marshall W. White—turned away and stared at the yellow wall. Rear Adm. Edward E. Grimm watched the young officer in silence.

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

E. Miles Harvey, the civilian attorney for Comdr. Lloyd M. Bucher, the captain of the Pueblo, rose and placed his hand on Lieutenant Harris's shoulder. The young officer raised his head and the two stepped outside the courtroom into the rain.

They returned in several minutes. Lieutenant Harris sat down and murmured:

"I want to go back to the question. What I wanted to do was take my life. I couldn't do it."

He drummed a pencil on the

Vietnam Casualties

WASHINGTON, Feb. 19 (UPI)—The Defense Department today identified the following servicemen from the New York area as having been killed in Vietnam:

Army
MENDEZ, John W., Specialist 4, Maywood, N. J.
Marine Corps
KUCHTA, John V., Lance Cpl., Port Jefferson Station, L. I.

green-felt-covered table and wept again.

"I was hoping that eventually I would hear some bombers," he then said.

As Lieutenant Harris wiped his eyes with a handkerchief, Admiral Bowen said, "Why don't we take time and resume another subject?"

There was another brief pause. Then Mr. Harvey, 38, a business lawyer from San Diego, turned to Lieutenant Harris and asked "did they give you anything?"

"They gave me a plant," the witness replied.

"What did you do with it?" he was asked.

"I killed it, I killed it, I urinated on it," Lieutenant Harris said. "It took me four months but I killed it. I had extreme hatred for everything there."

As the officer, a Floridian who has served two years of active duty, completed his testimony, Admiral Bowen asked if there was any further comment he wanted to make.

"I just want to apologize to

the court for breaking down, that's all," Lieutenant Harris said.

"No apology is required," Admiral Bowen said.

Lieutenant Harris, whose father, George, is a master chief petty officer, rose and stepped quickly outside the amphitheater on the naval amphibious base here.

Through the testimony the last few days, the Pueblo's officers have discussed in detail the beatings and emotional tortures that led to false confessions that the Pueblo had been engaged in espionage within the 12-mile coastal waters of North Korea.

Bucher Is Supported

The crewmen have steadfastly supported Commander Bucher.

"I just can't say enough about the captain," Lieutenant Harris testified. "He kept our spirits up."

Another witness today, Chief Warrant Officer Gene H. Lacy, 37, said:

"At the first interrogation, the captain arose and said he was responsible for the ship and crew and if anyone was going to be shot it should be him and the rest of the crew should be released.

"If it had not been for the leadership of the commanding officer, things could have been a lot worse than they actually were."

Mr. Lacy, like other Pueblo officers, said that confessions had been signed partly because the North Koreans had seized

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numerous secret documents that detailed the Pueblo's secret mission.

"There was no sense in being beaten for information they already knew," said Mr. Lacy, a close friend of Commander Bucher.

Sitting stiffly beside a microphone, Mr. Lacy also recalled beatings in his cell and threats that he would be placed on a steaming radiator.

"I decided that instead of holding out any longer I'd attempt to lie and give them some statement," he said.

Capt. William R. Newsome, the court's counsel, asked, "do you think they could have gotten everything they wanted?"

"I think they would have eventually, yes sir," Mr. Lacy replied.

Intelligence Chief Testifies

Another witness, Lieut. Stephen R. Harris, 31, the chief intelligence officer of the Pueblo, was asked by Captain Newsome:

"Did they take a particular interest in you, other than finding out what your duties were?"

"No, they did not, which surprised me," Lieutenant Harris, a Russian-speaking Harvard graduate replied. "They were aware of the duties I was performing but not aware of the significance of the duties."

Captain Newsome gazed at Lieutenant Harris and asked: "What was the single most important factor that led you to violate the code of conduct?"

The code specifies that Amer-

ican prisoners of war must tell only their name, rank, serial number and the date of birth to captors.

"When I didn't sign the confession I was told that the men who work for me would be shot," Lieutenant Harris said. "I couldn't see that happen. I felt they meant business."

"The code of conduct kept going round and round in my mind and it emerged we were not involved in any war with these people. We were not prisoners of war and it was there-

fore difficult to know if the code of conduct applied."

Admiral White said:

"A country has fired at you. The technical difference of a declaration of war made a difference?"

"They said we were criminals," Lieutenant Harris replied. "They said it was an internal matter. Our status was unclear. I had attempted to be loyal during this period under these confusing conditions."

The three officers who testified in open session today indicated that the crew felt in

the early days of captivity that the United States would retaliate against North Korea for seizing the Pueblo.

"I felt that the United States would definitely retaliate and we'd be shot," Mr. Lacy said. "I got the impression that they [the North Koreans] bit off more than they could chew. Some of them were quite nervous."

"Once when one of their jets flew over, some of the interrogators said they thought it was a retaliation force and if so we'd be shot immediately."