

1288LA

28 FEB 69
502 PPS

lbylryyrryrrLA

Pueblo NL 420

By RICHARD E. MEYER

Associated Press Writer

CORONADO, Calif. AP — The USS Pueblo's skipper began sobbing convulsively Friday and had to be led from the hearing room after a 20-year-old Mexican-American said "faith in God and my country and the decisions of my commanding officer" brought him through North Korea torture.

Cmdr. Lloyd Bucher began crying softly midway in the testimony of Sotrekeeper 3.C. Ramon Rosales, who told of being tortured because he was thought a South Korean spy.

When the court asked the routine question—"what do you think was the main thing that got you through the 11 months?"—and Rosales answered, Bucher's head sagged to the table he was sitting at and he began crying uncontrollably.

"He'll be all right," his attorney. E. Miles Harvey, said later. "He just needs to be away from here for a while and I've gotten him away."

It was Harvey who helped Bucher from the room. Bucher has attended all sessions of the six-week-old inquiry.

Rosales, of El Paso, Tex., gave a gently told story of his captivity. He told about practicing religion "behind our beds," because his captors forbade it; about hours of torture and of suffering meningitis with pain so severe he couldn't turn over in bed.

Rosales described a day of unspeakable horror when North Koreans first boarded the Pueblo last year. They eyed his black hair, high cheekbones and oriental cast of his dark eyes and beat him mercilessly, Rosales said, while he pleaded: "I am an American!"

Once, during an indoctrination lecture, Rosales said, "they told us there was no God. I stood up and said there was a God."

"He said, 'Did you ever see Him?'"

"I told him I see Him every day in the flowers, in the trees, that God is life. He got shook up when I said that."

This was the second time the 41-year-old Bucher broke into tears during the inquiry. The first was when he told about mental torture severe enough to wring a spying confession from him and bring him to his knees, saying, "I love you Rose. I love you Rose."

Rose, his wife, was in court then. She was not present Friday.

"Rosales," asked the court, "What more than anything else made you depart from the code?" The U.S. code of conduct for prisoners of war says they must give captors nothing more than name, rank, serial number and date of birth.

Rosales lowered his eyes. "I knew I couldn't hold out forever abiding by it," he said.

Engineman 3.C. Lawrence Wtrickland, of Grand Rapids, Mich., replied to the same question: "Sir, I don't really feel that I did depart from the code of conduct. I tried..."

"I knew they wouldn't kill me, but I knew I might wish I were dead...We used to pray the Americans would drop a nuclear bomb on that place."

"We were at ground zero. We figure it would be worth it if we could see the flash."

At one point, Strickland leaned back in his chair, slapped his knee and laughed out loud, recalling a trick he and his prison roommates played on a guard.

But Strickland choked up when he was asked if he had any statement to volunteer.

"I feel we owe quite a bit to the captain in all the things he did to get us through," Strickland sobbed. "He was willing to sacrifice himself and his career to see to it that we made it through the whole ordeal."

T502pps Feb 28