

BUCHER TELLS NAVY INQUIRY THAT HIS PUEBLO MISSION WAS UNPRODUCTIVE

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CORONADO, Calif., March 12—Comdr. Lloyd M. Bucher has told the court of inquiry here that the U.S.S. Pueblo's intelligence mission was unproductive during the 11 days that the ship sailed from Japan before she was captured by North Korea.

As the court moved into its closing hours, the Navy released a summary of Commander Bucher's testimony before a closed session of the inquiry yesterday afternoon. In the one-hour appearance, the Pueblo's skipper said he was informed one day before the capture that some of the 29 crewmen in the "secret research space" had "low job-proficiency levels . . . which lessened their intelligence collection capability."

Commander Bucher said he was told of this by Lieut. Stephen R. Harris, a Russian-speaking Harvard graduate commanding the "research space" crewmen who performed the bulk of the Pueblo's intelligence work.

The Pueblo skipper appeared before a closed session of the inquiry yesterday to discuss the Pueblo's intelligence missions as well as his delicate and still cloudy relationship with Lieutenant Harris. It was Commander Bucher's final turn to answer questions before the court of five admirals.

This morning the inquiry heard in closed session two intelligence specialists on the Pueblo and a former commanding officer to Commander Bucher, Comdr. Peter F. Block. This afternoon the inquiry court held an open session with Capt. Albert S. Giorgis, a naval expert in scuttling ships.

Closed Session Today

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Tomorrow Commander Bucher is scheduled to make a closing statement and the court is scheduled to end. The five admirals will meet secretly for about 10 days and then make a recommendation to Adm. John J. Hyland, Commander in Chief, United States Pacific Fleet. Admiral Hyland will then make his own recommendations to Washington.

It is up to the Secretary of the Navy and the Chief of Naval Operations to decide what action, if any, should be taken against Commander Bucher for surrendering the Pueblo without a fight on Jan. 23, 1968.

The Navy summary of Com-

mander Bucher's testimony said that the Pueblo skipper "first learned of his forthcoming mission during briefings received in Hawaii, and discussed it with Lieutenant Harris and Lieutenant Murphy [Lieut. Edward R. Murphy Jr., the Pueblo's executive officer] while the ship was in the area."

The summary went on: "In those Hawaii briefings, he was informed support forces would not be available to protect Pueblo in event of attack, but felt it prudent to keep this to himself in order not to endanger crew morale."

"While in Japan, he was told again that there would be no 'on-call' support forces."

Sailed From Japan

"Both he and Lieutenant Harris thought the ship's mission was unproductive up to the point of seizure."

The Pueblo sailed from Sasebo, Japan, at 6 A.M. on Jan. 11 and proceeded in international

waters toward North Korea, where the ship was seized on Jan. 23. The Pueblo's mission was, basically, to check on radar installations along the Korean coast and pick up the movements of submarines in the area.

Informed of Job Levels

"The day prior to seizure," the Navy summary said, "Lieut. Harris informed him [Commander Bucher] of certain low job-proficiency levels among the research personnel, which lessened their intelligence capability."

"Because Lieutenant Harris indicated these personnel could possibly fulfill their duties to some extent, Commander Bucher did not consider aborting the mission."

Most of the intelligence crewmen on the Pueblo are termed "communications technicians." On the ship, they decoded messages and operated hypersensitive radar and equipment be-

hind a triple-locked steel door on the main deck. Most of the Pueblo's crewmen were barred from entering this "research space."

Commander Bucher had emphasized in his earlier testimony that the intelligence personnel "were not working for me" and indicated that Lieutenant Harris commanded these crewmen and was responsible for the sacks of secret papers from the research area that fell into North Korean hands.

Holds Himself Responsible

In open-and-closed testimony yesterday, however, Commander Bucher blamed himself for the loss of secret documents to North Korea. "I hold myself accountable," he told the court in open session.

In his closed testimony, the Navy said, Commander Bucher "assumed full responsibility for all destruction processes aboard the ship," including the intelligence areas.

Commander Bucher also indicated at yesterday's sessions that he was treated better than most of the crew during the 11 months of captivity in a North Korean prison.

The Navy summary said: "He was subjected to less than 10 true periods of interrogation, the bulk of which occurred during the initial week-and-a-half of captivity."

"He was not mistreated during these interrogations, and subsequent to his initial confession, felt the atmosphere was almost 'cordial.'"

"Some mistreatment occurred at the hands of junior officers . . . interrogations centered around personal background, family and previous service. He was not questioned about technical matters. He though notes of all interrogations were translated and passed to senior officers."

Once again, Commander Bucher supported the crew's

behavior in prison, especially the efforts to mock and humiliate the North Koreans in photographed gestures of contempt, double entendres in letters and the absurd use of English phrases in confessions.

In Commander Bucher's estimation, the Navy summary said, the crew "kept within the spirit of the code of conduct and maintained and enforced the chain of command. In fact at one point he [Commander Bucher] told the crew to 'tone down' the resistance, when their enthusiasm might have brought beatings."

The summary added that one of Commander Bucher's "primary aims" was "to let the country know the Pueblo was pirated on the high seas and they were receiving inhuman treatment. He knew [this] was accomplished when upon his release, State and Defense Department representatives informed him his messages 'came through loud and clear.'"