

HOME IS THE SAILOR....



FREE AT LAST Bucher smiles in relief as he is greeted in South Korea.

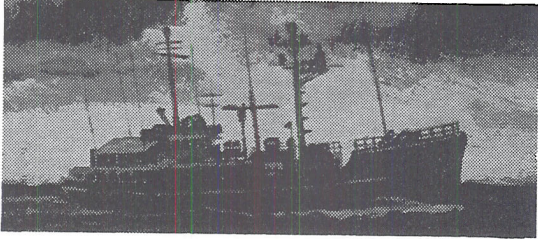


A KISS OF JOY. The skipper is welcomed home by his wife.



A TALE OF SORROW. Cmdr. Bucher, with his wife, meets the mother of Duane Hodges, the only crewman lost in the seizure, as the men of the Pueblo come home to San Diego.

23. RETURN: who's accountable, who's to blame?



They were not yet home, but they were out.

The Navy quickly issued them clothing. In Seoul they paused long enough for the skipper to hold a press conference—a real one this time—at which he began to fill in the blanks. He praised his crew.

“Those guys were simply tremendous.”

He denied any intrusions and defended his actions.

“I never doubted in my mind that the United States government ever considered that I had disobeyed wilfully, intentionally or unintentionally the instructions I had received.”

Then they boarded two C-141 Starlifter transports to begin the long voyage back over the Pacific they had crossed in their ship more than a year before, then obscure sailors, but now . . .

“As far as the U.S. Navy and the nation are concerned now, these men acted honorably,” said Rear Adm. Edwin M. Rosenberg, in charge of getting the men home. And Lloyd Bucher, he said, was a “hero among heroes.” In the holiday mood of the nation, none spoke otherwise.

Home at Last

On Christmas Eve, the planes landed at the Miramar Naval Air Station at Coronado, Calif., just across the bay from San Diego. They were back in port. A band struck up “The Lonely Bull.” Families and friends hurried to greet them. Tears. Embraces. A glance to see that it was really true. Another hug.

Then an honor guard of sailors carried out the casket of Duane Hodges. Trumpeters played “The Navy Hymn.” An honor guard fired three rounds into the air. Bucher, after embracing Hodges’s mother, bowed his head. Then a gray hearse drove Hodges’s body away from his shipmates. They saluted.

Time had changed them and the lives they had left behind. There was so much to catch up on. So Nixon was elected? Who won the World Series? What kind of year had it been back home?

Ralph Reed, who at 132 was 68 pounds underweight, just wanted to eat. But he figured he’d been too fat anyway and planned to stop at 165. Was it true he’d eaten eight eggs for breakfast after his arrival?

“No, that was just a rumor. I actually had nine.”

Karnes, who scarcely had two cups of coffee a year, now couldn’t drink enough.

For the first time Murphy saw his new nine-month-old daughter. Hammond, Chicca, Hagenson and four others met their new



ANOTHER PRESS conference, this time in Seoul without the *Glorious General*.

babies. Murphy also got a telegram from the three fishermen he’d saved two years before.

But the 11 months had left their scars. Arnold still had not regained feeling in two fingers of his left hand. Navy doctors told Law his eye damage would be permanent due to malnutrition. And the skipper?

“When I first met him, I thought he was a guy totally in control,” said Schumacher. “He completely filled a chair. Now he was 30 pounds underweight. He was withdrawn and confused: why would he pick up a copy of Newsweek and find himself on the cover?”

The Mood Changes

His crew, under orders not to talk of the Pueblo or their confinement, were open in praise of their leader. “If it hadn’t been for the leadership of the commanding officer, things could have been a lot worse than they were,” said Lacy.

“We were able to survive and come out fairly well, I think,” said Steve Harris, “and I want to say this is due to the fine leadership of the commanding officer. I observed a man who bore the burden of all the 81 other crewmen. He inspired all of us to respect and follow him, which I’m sure all of us would like to do in the future.”

But as the holiday season passed and the Navy announced it would hold a court of inquiry, something Bucher knew all along was standard procedure when a ship is lost, other and blunter questions were being asked.

“These men are being hailed as heroes,” said George Russell, head of the Senate Armed Services Committee. “They are heroes in the sense that they survived the imprisonment, but they did sign a great many statements that did

hold where honor, as we define it, is not understood and does not exist?”

Another Attack

Congress began an investigation under Otis Pike who wondered aloud how the nation could expect to be able to muster the instant response to a missile attack in light of the communications foulups of the Pueblo incident. When the North Koreans shot down an EC121 spy plane in April it only heightened such concern. It was asked, anew, if ELINT was worth the hazard.

After the Pueblo seizure, McNamara said: “I doubt that we will learn anything that would prevent a recurrence of this kind of incident.” He recalled that his daughter had been robbed one night directly in front of his Washington home.

“I didn’t learn anything from that that would prevent a recurrence. As a matter of fact, it happened two months later to the woman next door. I suspect it is a risk we are going to have to continue to accept if we want the intelligence that it provides us.”

And what of the Code of Conduct? In a confidential memorandum prompted by the Pueblo, the Navy Chief of Personnel, Vice Adm. Charles K. Duncan, reportedly said there was “no acceptable alternative” to it. But in an editorial in the magazine “Army”, Col. Robert B. Rigg, a former POW of the Chinese and who had worked on the Code in

1955, pointedly raised another question:

“If a general officer at a peace table can sign a ‘confession’ to free POWs, why can’t an American general imprisoned by an enemy do the same thing for the same purpose? . . . In these circumstances a POW of any rank could now reason that his signature on a written ‘confession’ could hurry his release . . . but when he does so, he is violating the letter and spirit of the Code . . . even if it was done for the humanitarian purpose of releasing prisoners . . . Plainly a precedent has been established in the peculiar way the Pueblo crew was released and we now have a double standard.”

And then there was an officer, a former POW, who wrote Otis Pike: “I just don’t want to be a member of a military where the world could say anything I say is a lie.”

Meanwhile, the court of inquiry convened in Coronado in January, a procedure criticized as the Navy sitting in judgment of itself on matters that were not only its own business but the nation’s. There was widespread sympathy for Bucher, who having lived through one ordeal, would have to go through another. It seemed like Boy’s Town vs. Annapolis, a popular hero against the five Naval Academy admirals on the court. But the admirals showed they could be hard on their own.



HEROES’ WELCOME. The officer who escorted the Pueblo crew home, Rear Adm. Edwin M. Rosenberg, said: “As far as the U.S. Navy and the nation are concerned now, these men acted honorably.”

Vice Adm. Harold G. Bowen, Jr., Annapolis '33, and Rear Adm. Marshall W. White, Annapolis '34, sharply questioned Adm. Johnson on why no alert forces had been on call for the Pueblo.

White: "Then, when we add it up, we had (on call) forces that did not exist?"

Johnson: "That is correct."

Bowen: "You have repeatedly referred to 'on call'. It is somewhat misleading since nothing was on call."

Johnson reddened.

The hearings went on for eight weeks. Bucher tried to appear firm, in command. But his lips sometimes trembled. His voice broke and faded. He wept. His face was the only witness needed—words weren't—to tell the torment of the voyage of the Pueblo and of her commander.

His civilian attorney, E. Miles Harvey, called the court "... a cruel business ... It cannot bring back Duane Hodges, cause the return of the USS Pueblo, completely heal the scars that many of the crew will carry for the rest of their lives. Probing into disasters at sea may seem merciless because almost everywhere else we, as a nation, have abandoned the requirement of accountability. However, on the sea there is a tradition older than the traditions of our nation and wiser in its trust than our new morality. It is the tradition that with authority goes responsibility and with both goes accountability."

True. The Navy is a chain of command: orders from the top down, obedience from the bottom up. Perhaps it can be no other way, the only way to run a Navy.

Bucher's Defense

Harvey went on, scoring direct hit after direct hit.

"The fact that his (Bucher's) immediate superiors should chastise him in a fitness report for attempting to obtain those things which are now minimum standard items on AGERs is one of the tragic footnotes to the story this court has heard. Cmdr. Bucher now appears either as a prophet or a man ahead of his time ... Destruct gear now installed has been described by experts with great pride. Cmdr. Bucher would have settled for three cans of TNT. We have seen demonstration of water soluble paper. Cmdr. Bucher would have

settled for reduced publication allowances ... The .50-caliber machine guns have been removed. Cmdr. Bucher thought they were inappropriate when put aboard ..."

When the court closed in mid-March, its verdict was expected in two weeks. It took almost two months to climb the chain. The court ultimately recommended a general court martial for Bucher and Steve Harris: the skipper for permitting search of his vessel, for following the SO 1 into Wonsan, for failing to complete destruction and not properly drilling the crew to do so. Harris was to be tried for dereliction of duty in not taking effective destruct action, failing to inform Bucher of unspecified deficiencies in the intelligence section and for not drilling his men in destruction. Murphy was to get a letter of admonition for failing "to organize and lead the crew on the day of seizure."

Adm. Johnson was to receive a letter of reprimand for failing to plan effective emergency support as was Capt. Everett B. Gladding, former director of the Naval Security Group in the Pacific, for failure to coordinate back-up intelligence support to the Pueblo and insure the readiness of the men of the Sod Hut for their mission.

Court Overruled

Then, on May 6, the man at the top of the chain, John H. Chafee, Secretary of the Navy, announced the court's conclusions—and his. There would be no court martial, for anyone, no letters of reprimand for anyone.

As for Adm. Johnson and Capt. Gladding, Chafee said: "The consequences must be in fairness borne by all, rather than one or two individuals whom circumstances had placed closer to the crucial event."

The Secretary said he was not passing judgment on the guilt or innocence of Bucher, Harris or Murphy. He said, simply, "they have suffered enough."

He did note that the admirals of the court had found that during detention Bucher "upheld morale in a superior manner ... he contributed to the ability of the crew to hold together."

There were some footnotes. The day after Chafee's an-



THE PUEBLO COURT OF INQUIRY which sat for eight weeks at Coronado, Calif., left to right: Rear Adm. Richard R. Pratt, Rear Adm. Marshall W. White, Vice Adm. Harold G. Bowen Jr., Rear Adm. Edward E. Grimm, Rear Adm. Allen A. Bergner. Adm. Bowen was president of the court.

nouncement, the Navy said Bucher was to be reassigned to its postgraduate school to work on a master's degree in business administration, possibly a departing kindness for a man who may have held his first and last sea command. Steve Harris was assigned to intelligence in Washington. Murphy decided to quit the Navy. Thirty-nine of his shipmates had already. Only one of the Pueblo's men—Wendell Leach, the signalman—was ordered back to sea.

The finer print of Chafee's statement also revealed some interesting items. One was that the court's report—the official result of the Navy's self-examination—was to be classified save for the amount released by Chafee. Because some of the rest covered secret matters, all of it would be kept from the public eye. The citizen did not stand in the chain of command. He could hear much of the testimony but not all of the verdict. The Navy sailed on, answerable to its own helm.

Whose Blame?

Then there were Adms. Hyland and Moorer. They had approved the court's recommendation to reprimand Johnson in so

far as he failed to prepare emergency support. But ... those admirals, personally, had been in the chain of command that reviewed and approved the Pueblo's mission, Moorer being his service's ultimate evaluator. He saw nothing wrong with Johnson's plans. Yet he would have admonished his subordinate.

Miles Harvey had talked about authority and responsibility and accountability. Who, then, was accountable? Bucher? Yes. The court was willing to have him tried. Johnson? Yes. The court recommended reprimand. Hyland? Moorer? Yes. A chain is all its links, not just some. But in reviewing the investigation of the mission they approved, they made no public comment on their own wisdom, accountable as they were to their service and the people they served.

And what of the ship, herself? Yes, she had been seen since her seizure. Oh? Where?

Classified.

One day, some months after his release, Skip Schumacher sat with a beer in the tap room of his college fraternity's club in

midtown Manhattan. No one noting him casually would have suspected what he had gone through. In his gabardine suit, regimental tie and close-cut hair he looked the young executive. Confident. Relaxed. The marks of the beatings had gone. His weight was good. He smiled easily.

The Yankees were beating the Senators on the television set, but Schumacher was thinking of the Pueblo. After several hours of talk, this man who joined the Navy to get to know his fellow Americans was asked what he thought of it all.

"It was a firming up in a lot of guys' minds," he said. "Of what they were fighting for. And against."

But of some of the other questions—the Code of Conduct, the surrendering of ships, the morality of a country signing a lie but asking its warriors not to, the morality of sending ships' bakers to spy—to these he had fewer answers. As did his countrymen.

Despite all the hearings, all the thousands of words, the questions remained.

Long after the little freighter was gone, they circled in her wake, like an albatross.

The End

JUDGMENT

'When a war can be decided in 20 minutes, the nation that is behind will have no time to catch up.'

-President Nixon

On July 28, 1969, a year and a half after the *Pueblo's* capture, more than seven months after its crew's release, Rep. Otis Pike's special nine-man Armed Services subcommittee completed its investigation. Its findings constituted a carefully documented 77-page indictment of the American military's ability to respond swiftly to major crises. Its failure to do so in the case of the *Pueblo*, the subcommittee determined, held "frightful implications" for the nation.

The report came to this "reluctant but inescapable" conclusion: "Because of the vastness of the military structure, with its complex division into multiple layers of command, and the failure of responsible authorities at the seat of government to either delegate responsibility or in the alternative provide clear and unequivocal guidelines governing policy in emergency situations, our military command structure is now simply unable to meet the emergency criterion outlined and suggested by the President himself."

And to this recommendation:

"A complete review of our military-civilian command structure and its capability to cope with emergency situations."

Specifically, the subcommittee discovered that the message from the *Pueblo* reporting that it was being boarded reached the Pacific Command headquarters one hour and 17 minutes after it was sent. That wasn't the whole of it. "The advantages of speedy, modern and sophisticated communications equipment were often more than offset by the indecisive and inefficient handling of these communications by the various commands involved."

Item. The National Security Administration message sent to the Pacific warned against sending the *Pueblo* alone on its mission. The message was dispatched Dec. 29, a day short of two weeks before the ship put out from Sasebo. The message never came to the attention of Adm. Sharp, the commander in chief of U.S. forces in the Pacific. Someone down the line in Honolulu—the subcommittee did not discover who—rejected the warning without informing Adm. Sharp.

Indeed, the nation's entire intelligence apparatus, the subcommittee concluded, made no more than "token effort" to scrutinize the possible hazards of the *Pueblo* mission. "Failure . . . to provide essential and available information to potential consumers in a timely fashion necessarily raises serious questions concerning the effective operation and administration of these [intelligence] organizations," it said.

The subcommittee disclosed that a supersecret civilian review panel, called the 303 Committee, also passed on intelligence missions and had approved the *Pueblo's* without reservation. The subcommittee did not reveal the names of the 303 Committee members but it is known to include the Deputy Secretary of Defense, the Undersecretary of State, the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency and the President's assistant for National Security Affairs.

As Cmdr. Bucher had been dismayed at the sight of the bags of documents lying intact on his deck, so the subcommittee was appalled by the amount of sensitive material lost to the North Koreans. Its report said the ship's capture resulted in "a serious compromise of our nation's intelligence capability" and of "a great deal of classified information involving naval operations."

The subcommittee also wondered whether *Pueblo*-type spying missions were worth the expense and risk but hedged a bit in its conclusion. It acknowledged that such missions ought to continue but said it was "not convinced that the magnitude of this intelligence reconnaissance activity is completely justified."

In any case, the Secretary of Defense announced almost simultaneously with the release of the subcommittee's report that new orders to U.S. spy ships require them to use "all measures available to protect the ships from search and seizure" and that such ships now were provided with new scuttling devices, smaller crews and a lesser amount of classified cargo. Cmdr. Bucher might have found a measure of belated satisfaction in that.

The Pike subcommittee did not presume to judge whether Bucher acted rightly or wrongly, honorably or dishonorably, in surrendering his ship without a fight. Pike himself, commenting afterward, said he felt he "would not have reacted in the same way" but would not go beyond that. Rep. William G. Bray, a 66-year-old subcommittee member who won the Silver Star as a tank officer in World War II, went further. "Very frankly," he said, "I would have shot it out."

What of the behavior of the *Pueblo* crew while in prison camp? Again, the subcommittee passed no moral judgments. It did, however, counter the prevailing military opinion that the Code of Conduct for prisoners was not in need of change.

"At the very least," said the subcommittee report, "clarification is required as to the applicability of the Code of Conduct in those instances in which detainees are not prisoners of war and are not accorded the protection of the Geneva Conventions." When the prisoner is not given such protection, the report said, the code "should provide some latitude for the detainee."

The subcommittee took issue with the military's "demonstrated lack of candor" in testimony involving the *Pueblo*. It said witnesses had indulged in "half truths," had made "a deliberate effort to bury and obfuscate," had, in sum, been "less than forthright" in their testimony.

Thus, in 77 pages, were the failures of all concerned with the voyage of the U.S.S. *Pueblo* officially brought to light.

Perhaps those failures will be corrected: technological and bureaucratic efficiency, even perfection, presumably is within the capability of man. Human perfection, just as clearly, is not. At least not by technocrats or bureaucrats or subcommittees or courts of inquiry or impassioned disputants at officers' club bars. And so the larger questions continue to circle, circle, circle.

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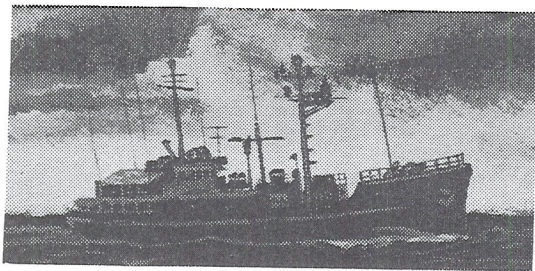
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