

Pueblo Crew, Families In Joyful Reunion

San Diego

The men of the Pueblo came home yesterday to a joyful Christmas Eve reunion with the families who waited 11 months for them to gain them freedom from North Korean captivity.

Two big Air Force transports touched down at Miramar Naval Air Station at 1:58 and 2 p.m. and the 82 survivors of the intelligence ship swarmed off to greet about 170 wives, children, parents and other relatives.

First to debark was the skipper, Commander Lloyd M. Bucher, 41, who — as the Navy band struck up "The Lonely Bull," requested by the crew — embraced his wife, Rose.

LIMP

Bucher, his face drawn, walked with a limp. But he smiled and waved to the crowd.

He was followed by crewmen, walking slowly and single file out of the high-tailed C141 Starlifters that had ferried them from Seoul.

They strode 75 yards across the apron to where their families were massed, their faces lighting up as they recognized and heard the cries of loved ones. Husbands and wives embraced and broke into tears, or smiled, or simply looked numb.

Within a minute the crowd began breaking up as the families bunched in small groups.

Children danced and were lifted on high by fathers long away. Little family knots formed, with the crewmen the nucleus, as the sailors waded into the happy throng.

BAND

Some appeared a bit dazed by the attention. All the while, the band played — "California Here We Come," then "This is My Country."

During the wait Mrs. Bucher stood with Mr. and Mrs. Duane Hodges, parents of the Pueblo crewman, Fireman Duane R. Hodges, 22, of Creswell, Ore., fatally wounded when the ship was captured.

When Bucher arrived he embraced Mrs. Hodges, then put his arms around both parents and spoke to them at length.

Later, turning to newsmen, Bucher said: "It's so great to be home. You'll never know. Jesus, I'm absolutely thrilled. How great it is to be

a citizen of the United States. It's the greatest country."

The crew was freed Sunday and, during a stop at Midway Island on the flight home the Pacific Fleet commander, John J. Hyland, called them "a group of young heroes."

CROWD

Their skipper told a crowd on Midway that every crew member was "subjected to terror of some kind at one time or another," including beatings.

Governor Ronald Reagan and Senator Margaret Chase Smith of Maine gave brief speeches, but few seemed to listen. Crewmen and families were too busy getting reacquainted.

Bucher made a brief talk.

"Some 11 months ago," he said, "we were very unfortunate . . . there were just too many of them and just too little of us (referring to the Pueblo's capture)."

He said four of the crewmen had been wounded because they were fired at "at

point blank range and could not return the fire." One of the four, Hodges, died.

"We spent many, many months in that land completely devoid of humanity," Bucher said.

SHIPS

"My primary thoughts were the embarrassment to the United States by losing one of its fine ships to the North Koreans, and that thought preyed on my mind continuously."

He described the North Korean captors as, "so completely devoid of humanity, so devoted to the enslavement of men's minds."

He thanked those who had come to greet the returning crewmen for "making our return to the United States even more glorious than I thought possible."

As Bucher finished speaking the band played the Navy hymn softly and an honor guard of six sailors in white gloves and white leggings slowly carried Hodges'



AP Wirephoto

MRS. RONALD REAGAN
Tears of joy

flag-draped coffin from the plane to a waiting gray Navy hearse.

Bucher said Hodges told him before he died that "It was a privilege to serve in the United States Navy." He said he considers Hodges "a hero in every sense of the word." He asked the crowd "to join me in a few minutes



A Pueblo crewman got an emotional greeting from his parents

UPI Telenote

of silent prayer and thanksgiving to God that we have men of the caliber of Duane Hodges."

Then the band played "Anchors Aweigh" and "Santa Claus is Coming to Town," ending the airport ceremonies about a half hour after the planes landed.

Families and crewmen rode together in 15b buses to the hospital.

The Pueblo was seized last January 23 when, North Korea said, it invaded territorial waters, which the United States has denied.

Crew members will undergo intelligence debriefing at the San Diego Navy Hospital. For the first 36 hours they are to be kept under strict security wraps. Newsmen were not allowed to question them individually.

The crewmen will stay at the "Pink Palace," a four-story building on the hospital grounds. Families are staying at a downtown hotel, but will be permitted to visit the crewmen at their "Palace" rooms and also join them at the R X Club, a hospital recreation center.

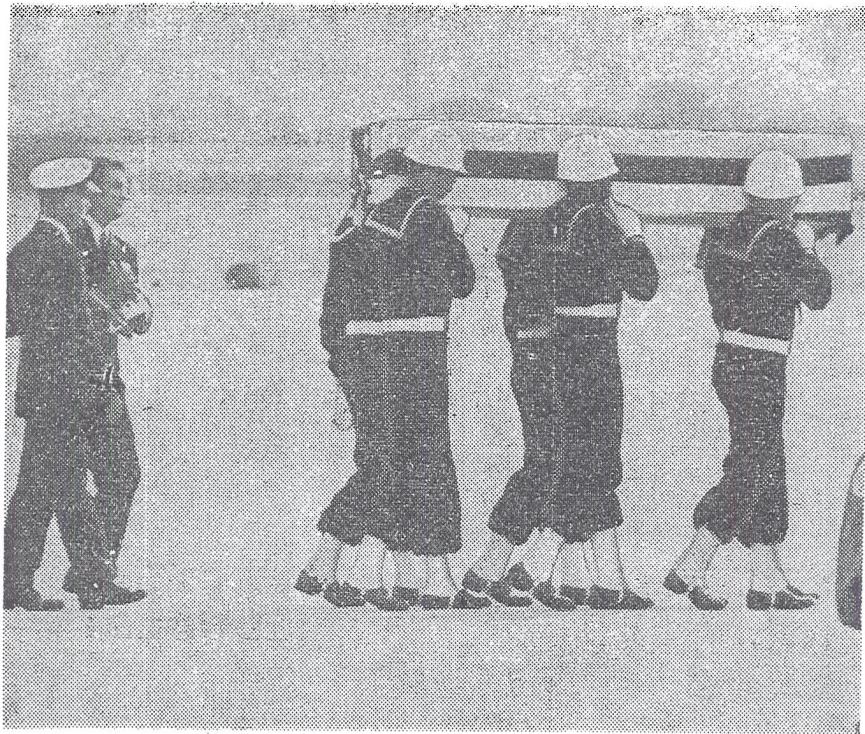
Associated Press



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Commander and Mrs. Bucher (right) talked to Mrs. Jesse Hodges, mother of the slain Pueblo crewman.

Grim Homecoming



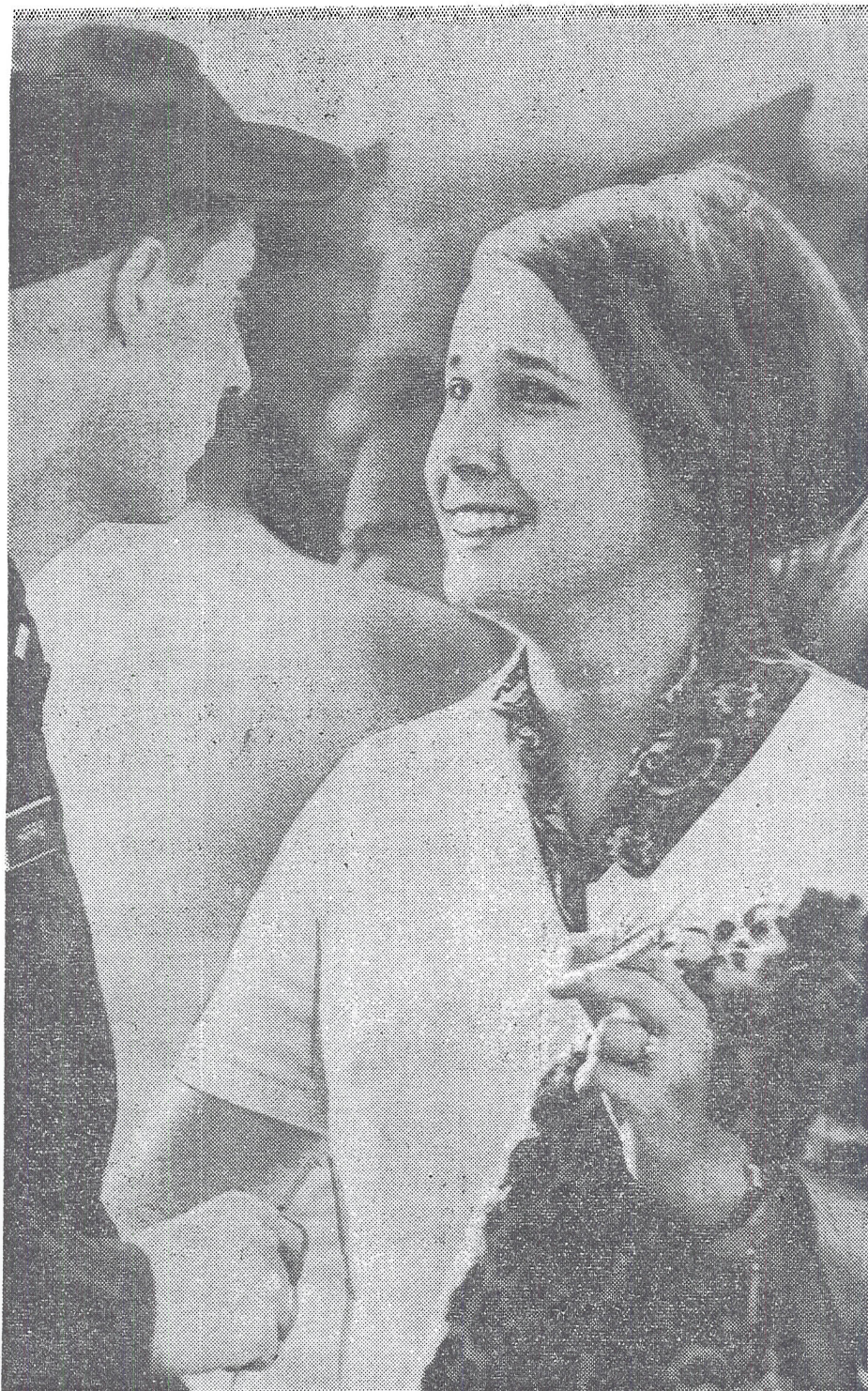
AP Wirephoto

THE REMAINS OF DUANE HODGES CAME HOME
He was the only fatality in the Pueblo incident



UPI Telephoto

His hat askew, Monroe Goldman held the baby daughter who was born after he was taken prisoner.



AP Wirephoto

Mrs. Stephen Harris seemed to be saying 'Let me look at you' when she was reunited with her husband in San Diego.