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PUEBLO CREWMEN GREETED ON COAST; CAPTORS ASSAILED

Relatives Weep and Scream —Captain Asserts North Koreans Are Inhuman

By BERNARD GWERTZMAN
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SAN DIEGO, Dec. 24 — The crew of the intelligence ship Pueblo returned to the United States today in time for Christmas with many of their families.

Led by Comdr. Lloyd M. Bucher, the 82 survivors arrived at the Miramar Naval Air Station outside this city and were met immediately by emotional, sometimes hysterical, greetings and embraces of wives, mothers, fathers and children.

The one man who did not return alive, Duane D. Hodges, was carried from one of the C-141 transports in a flag-draped coffin while the air station band played the Navy hymn.

Commander Bucher, apparently overwrought with emotion, spoke in a low voice, his teeth gritted, as he told the more than 250 relatives, the 300 newsmen and the national television audience about the 11 months his crew spent in North Korean captivity.

Calls Captors Inhuman

He described North Korea as a land "completely devoid of humanity, completely devoted to enslavement of men's minds."

[In Washington, the Navy named Vice Adm. Harold S. Bowen to head a court of inquiry into the Pueblo incident.]

Commander Bucher said that, during the months in North Korea, "the thought that preyed on my mind was the embarrassment to my country because of the loss of one of its fine ships."

Paying tribute to Fireman Hodges, Commander Bucher said that his last words as he was dying were that he was "privileged to serve in the U.S. Navy." Commander Bucher said that Fireman Hodges had said that he "hoped his small part

Continued on Page 2, Column 1

Continued From Page 1, Col. 1

in our effort had been worthwhile."

The arrival of the two giant C-141's carrying the 82 survivors, the coffin and other Navy officials ended a long, tense period of waiting by the relatives. They had been flown here at the Navy's expense from all parts of the United States.

Three Hectic Days

The families are staying at the El Cortez Hotel as the guests of the San Diego Chamber of Commerce. Many of the next-of-kin had gone three days with little sleep in a rushed effort to buy Christmas presents and to arrange household matters so they could be here to meet their loved ones.

Before the planes landed on their flight from Seoul, South Korea, the mood of the crowd here was restless, but subdued. Even the little children seemed well behaved.

The first man off the lead plane was Commander Bucher, dressed as all the other men in blue submarine coveralls, with his command pin on his right breast. He walked down the line where the families stood waiting and embraced his wife, Rose, who stood with their two sons.

He seemed to walk somewhat unnaturally as did many of the other crewmen, perhaps indicating their weakened physical state after months of what Navy officials have called "inhuman treatment."

But the majority of the crew appeared in good shape.

As each man walked down the aisle that separated the families from newsmen there were screams of joy and crying from both the returned prisoners and by the families. There were even tears on the faces of some of the newsmen.

At the airport ceremony, comments were made by Gov. Ronald Reagan of California, Senator Margaret Chase Smith of Maine, Mayor Frank Curran of San Diego and Vice Adm. Allen M. Shinn, commander of the Naval Air Force, Pacific Fleet.

After the ceremony, the Pueblo members and their families embarked on a fleet of 15 Navy buses for the 20-minute ride to the Navy Hospital in San Diego, where they will spend most of their time in coming days.

An immediate physical check-up was scheduled followed by an informal gathering of the men on base that has been decorated for Christmas.

Before the arrival of the planes, at about 2 P.M. local time, the families were assured by the Navy that they would have extensive visiting privileges tomorrow, but they were given no word on when the men could leave the base hospital either for a visit or to go on leave.

Status Is Uncertain

The mood of the families at the briefing was symbolized in a sense by the questions asked.

One father wanted to know what would happen to his son whose time in service "had run out" while he was in North Korean custody. The Navy officer said he did not know.

Christmas Day at the base will be spent by thorough physical examinations in the morning and Christmas dinner in the afternoon to which the families have been invited.

The men are scheduled to stay in private or in semi-private rooms at the hospital, but the families will have to return to the hotel in the evening.

An intensive "intelligence debriefing" will begin after tomorrow. This may continue for days and possibly for weeks.

In his brief remarks at the airport, Commander Bucher repeated in essence some of the things he said earlier in South Korea.

He said that 11 months ago his ship, filled with sensitive electronic gathering machines, had been in the "wrong place where there were too many of them and too little of us."

Hodges Called 'Hero'

He said that four of the men had been wounded because they had been fired upon "at point blank range and could not return the fire." One of the four, Fireman Hodges, died. Commander Bucher said of Fireman Hodges today: "I consider him a hero in every sense of the word."

Governor Reagan, who flew to the Miramar ceremonies in his California Air Guard plane, also expressed sympathy to the family of Fireman Hodges and thanksgiving that the rest of the crew had returned alive.

The Pueblo and her crew were seized by four North Korean patrol boats on Jan. 23 in the Sea of Japan off the North Korean coast.

United States officials and Commander Bucher, since his release, have insisted that the ship never penetrated North Korea's 12-mile territorial waters. North Korea said the ship was seized 7.6 miles off its coast and published several alleged confessions by Commander Bucher and other members of the crew to substantiate the contention.

After months of negotiations, the 82 survivors were released on Sunday after Major Gen. Gilbert H. Woodward, chief

United States negotiator in the Pueblo talks, signed a statement in which the United States agreed to North Korea's allegations. But General Woodward and Secretary of State Dean Rusk both said that the document had been signed merely to obtain release of the crew and that its contents were completely false.

End of the Long Separation: Members of Pueblo's Crew Are Reunited With Families on Arrival at Air Station on the Coast



The scene yesterday at Miramar Naval Air Station in San Diego, Calif., as families greeted men back from North Korea



Comdr. Lloyd M. Bucher, captain of the ship, had tears in his eyes at reunion with his wife

Associated Press