

Transcript of News Conference Given

12-26-68

SEOUL, South Korea, Dec. 23 (AP)—Following is transcript of a news conference given today by Comdr. Lloyd M. Bucher, captain of the *Pueblo*, after he and 81 other surviving crewmen of the United States intelligence ship were released.

BUCHER—I can't begin to tell you how happy my crew is to see this side of that line that divides this country in two. I can't begin to tell you how totally happy we are to see American faces again—even though these faces are many miles from home—as well as our own. We are just so completely emotionally happy that this day has arrived for us that it would be impossible for me to describe adequately the feelings of my crew.

Before I say anything further I would like to say that I had perhaps the finest bunch of men that I've ever had the pleasure to serve with together with me in captivity in North Korea. Those guys were simply tremendous. They never once lost their spirit or faith in the United States of America. Never once did they give me any cause for concern.

'Typical Americans'

They were so typical Americans, so typical Americans that they thoroughly confused our captors. This happened on so many different occasions that looking back on it now in retrospect I think that they couldn't ever begin to understand us.

"I know that some of the things that you're most interested in are the reasons for our capture and this sort of thing.

Well, to begin with, I would like to set the record straight for what actually happened the day of the capture and during the entire operation that we conducted in *Pueblo* in the Sea of Japan.

My orders for this operation were contained in a message which I received from Commander U.S. Naval Forces in Japan, and those orders directed me to conduct electronic intelligence gathering operation in the Sea of Japan along the coast of North Korea and to remain outside of 13 miles from all land or offshore islands.

Denies Intrusion

During the entirety of the operation I followed these orders to the letter. I never once, nor did that ship, ever intrude into the territorial waters of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea as they call themselves, not at any time during the entire operation. I assured myself constantly of the position of that ship. The day we were captured we were some 15 to 16 miles from shore when the North Korean ship showed up and

began their harassment tactics. We—I surrendered the ship because it was nothing but a slaughter out there, and I couldn't see allowing any more people to be slaughtered, or killing the entire crew for no reason.

And I just couldn't, I couldn't fathom what was happening at the time, and to this day I'm not sure of everything that happened.

Orders Were Followed

But I'm sure of many things. I'm sure that the orders that we received were followed meticulously as I was capable of doing. In fact, I had prepared an order to my officers and officers of the deck prior to the time we departed on this operation to the effect that at no time would the ship approach closer than 14 miles from land without my presence on the bridge.

And we, on two or three occasions, went between 13 and 14 miles from land, but to the best of my knowledge—which is professional, I have spent many years at sea—I can tell you that we never once came as close as 13 miles from the land of North Korea or from their offshore islands. Not once.

And of course, these instructions together with other instructions were captured along with us and any of the instructions of this nature or evidences of this nature which would prove that we had remained outside of their territorial waters were conveniently either destroyed by them or at least never produced.

Pressed to Admit Charges

And I could not convince them from the beginning that these orders were effective on the ship, my own orders were effective. And we went through a harassment period there that was never ending, continued repetition of charges against us which eventually, of course, were admitted to by myself in order to save some people from some fairly serious misfortunes.

But I never doubted in my mind that the United States Government ever considered that I had disobeyed wilfully, intentionally or unintentionally the instructions that I had received. I've been in the Navy too long to think that I would have been doubted in my capacity that I had been assigned.

I think that I don't know what has been said here in the United States since our capture. I haven't seen a single piece of paper or magazine other than propaganda-type magazines, which I've been reading for the past year or thereabouts. I haven't seen anything that was printed anywhere other than in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. And so I

don't have the slightest idea what was said about me or about the crew.

And I want to re-emphasize once again two things. First of all, that the crew that I had on board that ship are just the most tremendous bunch of sailors that it has ever been my privilege to sail with. And this includes, of course, the two Marines who were aboard as interpreters and had just come aboard.

Both of these marines by this time have actually more Navy blood, I think. And I don't know what their intentions are for their next reenlistment but I'm going to try to get them into the Navy.

The other thing I want to say is and make clear—and make this crystal clear—and that is that no time did the U.S.S. *Pueblo* ever intrude into the territorial waters of North Korea. We never closed land closer than 13 miles—land or offshore islands.

We were attacked on the open seas and we were captured on the open seas. It is pure and simple and plain as that. All the records that we had on the ship prove that, and any doctoring of the records that has been done since that time in the press conferences that we held up North is just—would just never stand up to the court of law.

Says Records Were Faked

Even a grade school kid could tell you that the records as they showed them are completely doctored and have no bearing with the truth.

I don't know how many of you are familiar with being subjected to one continuous lie after another. It was an experience that I'll have to think about for a longtime in order to come to sensible conclusions and I'll never be able to understand it.

I have no further general statement to make except I do want very much to tell the people of the United States how much the crew of *Pueblo* and myself had faith in them in the entirety of our detention.

I had people come to me and say, on so many occasions, that they never fully appreciated how good it was to be an American until they had the misfortune to have been captured and stuck in a country that is completely devoid of humanity, truthfulness.

'People Are No Different'

Actually, the humanity they have is done for political purposes only. That was my impression. The people here are no different than they are in any other country. It's just that the direction that they receive has completely removed them from what I'm familiar with as fellow human beings.

I have, of course, one time

by Pueblo's Captain After Release

or another had a lot of time to think. And I came to a lot of conclusions. But I'm so excited now though that I would rather not try to put them into words, because I'm afraid I would only confuse you as well as myself. At some future time I will. I wonder if there are any questions?

Q. To what degree were you able to destroy the important intelligence equipment and documents aboard the ship? A. With respect to the important documents I still consider all those documents as being classified and I consider any discussion by myself in public as being inappropriate.

Destroyed Some Equipment

Q. Could you tell us if you got rid of some or part of the secret equipment? A. We made an attempt to destroy everything. Well, there—truthfully we did not complete it.

Q. Commander, you say that you admitted the lies to save certain people from misfortune. Could you tell us these people and their misfortune?

A. Well, there were threats, either direct or implied threats, made against the personnel of my ship, and these threats were pretty vivid and it just seemed to me that I had to rely on two things.

I had to rely on the faith that the U. S. Navy would have in me to do the right thing several thousand miles from home with no direction from on top.

I had to rely on the American people to believe that the U. S. Government and the U. S. Navy did not send ships to sea that would do the things that we were admitting to have done.

Crewmen Were Beaten

Q. Were the members of your crew physically beaten? A. Yes, they were beaten on several occasions.

Q. Commander, we heard that there was a man who was beaten yesterday. A. Last week, several members of my crew including myself were beaten.

Q. What form was the beating? A. Physically, with fists generally. With boards and clubs at other times.

Q. How many times during your 11 months were you beaten?

A. I was beaten less than anyone else. But I don't know, sir, that I was beaten all that much. I was mostly terrified of possible beating, and I was kept in solitary confinement during the entire 11 months and there were many occasions when I didn't think I was going to make it.

But I can't even estimate, other than that I was hit a few times. I was punched

around but only with fists. I was never hit with any kind of a stick or club.

But the Korean people are very effective with their kick—a few times, several times. They are quite good at soccer and they drill this business of karate. And it's particularly—when you're also looking down the barrel of a machine gun, it's pretty difficult to defend yourself, or in the event—some of my crew members were physically pretty well endowed.

Well, at the same time there was a hell of a lot more of them than there was of us. And people would normally be beaten individually. Commencing with the week before last, we went through the most concentrated form of terror that I've ever seen or dreamed is possible.

I haven't done that much traveling. I'm not professionally any espionage man or a spy man or any spy agent. I'm not that well read on that subject except for James Bond and a few of the other would-be agents.

Well, I wasn't prepared totally for the beatings that were handed out. I thought that they were totally brutal with no mercy of any kind. They were done for one purpose and that was to terrify people. I had about half of the crew last week beaten badly. There are still many people in the crew today who have carried black eyes and bruised ribs.

He Lost Weight

I had one man last week beaten with a four-by-four. Although at the same time I would emphasize that our life there was not made so miserable that it was unbearable. I did lose initially an awful lot of weight and got to the point where I was in danger of disappearing.

In the past few months, as I personally got more used to my surroundings, I was able to put some weight back on. And now feel in surprisingly good shape.

I think that there are many in my crew who are in very bad physical condition and just from a nutritional point of view. The bruises and that sort of thing I think are going to heal up very quickly.

Q. When did you first get the idea that you were going to be released?

A. Well, we got the idea about four days ago. Most of the things that would happen to us would be preceded by a change in the treatment by the guards or by the officers that were in charge of our incarceration, and these little clues and hints that something was going on began to occur about last Wednesday or Thursday.

I think Thursday, for sure. And we knew that we were coming home, hoped that it wasn't a trick. Thought

that we were for sure coming home Saturday.

Q. Commander Bucher, one of the news conferences that was filmed by the North Koreans showed the crew with their fingers in a very unusual position as if they were trying to tell us something.

A. They were trying to tell us that we'd been had. They were trying to tell you that we'd been had. We continued that campaign throughout the time we were there, whenever we had the opportunity to do so. We realized that if we were discovered it was going to be 'Kathie bar the door.'

But we felt that it was important that if we could in some way get that information out so that there would be absolutely no room for doubt in your minds, the American people's minds, that we'd been had.