

# Pueblo Skipper Says Navy Rejected 'Destruct System'

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CORONADO, Calif., Jan. 20—Comdr. Lloyd M. Bucher, the skipper of the Pueblo, said today that the Navy had turned down his request for a "destruct system" for the

secret electronic and coding gear on the intelligence ship.

"I made the request at least two, perhaps three times," Commander Bucher said quietly at the opening of the Naval Court of Inquiry into the seizure of the ship last January by North Korea. "I'm quite sure," he said, "that one letter was to the Chief of Naval Operations."

Standing stiffly beside a diagram of the Pueblo, the 41-year-old commander told the court of five admirals that his numerous requests to install electronic equipment, sound power phones, damage control gear and alarms had been rejected because of "money and time."

"There were never improvements that we were permitted because of money and time," said Commander Bucher, the first witness at the Court of Inquiry. "We did not get the improvements I requested."

Commander Bucher's failure to destroy secret equipment on his ship is expected to be a key issue at the Court of Inquiry on the naval amphibious base here.

Commander Bucher testified that he had requested three gun mounts on the Pueblo. Two days before the mission off North Korea, the Navy installed two .50-caliber gun mounts, he said.

"I was not opposed to the installation of these guns but I never had much confidence in them," said Commander Bucher, a thin, sunken-cheeked

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officer who has served in the Navy 16 years.

"They had to be adjusted every time they were used," he said. "The best time I had in practice was 10 minutes. The worst was one hour."

"It never occurred to me," he testified, "that I would be using them on anything other than a harassing trawler."

In his daylong appearance today Commander Bucher defended himself in a voice both slow and solemn. The Chief of Naval Operations, he said, turned down the request for a "destruct system" aboard the Pueblo because "this equipment had to be built integral to the sensitive electronic equipment on the ship."

"The equipment on the ship had already been installed," Commander Bucher said. "It was not possible because of expenses and time to rebuild the electronic equipment."

## 'I Gave My Reasons'

He said his request for a destruct system had been made between April and June, 1966, while the Pueblo, a former cargo ship, was outfitted in Puget Sound in Washington.

"I gave my reasons why I thought it was so important," he observed. "I do not have a copy of this letter because the letter was either destroyed when we were captured or it was captured with us."

The 177-foot intelligence ship was captured in the Sea of Japan by North Korean gunboats. Commander Bucher and 81 other surviving Pueblo crewmen were released last Dec. 23 after 11 months in captivity.

During his testimony today, Commander Bucher sat stiffly behind a green-felt-covered table or stood with a pointer next to a diagram of his ship. As he spoke he glared unblinking at the counsel for the court, Capt. William R. Newsome. He rarely turned to the five admirals, sitting three feet away.

## Axes and Sledge Hammers

Commander Bucher repeatedly emphasized the lack of equipment that could easily destroy secret material. "To destroy equipment, I had fire axes and sledge hammers capable of being swung by standard sized sailors," he said.

"For publications, I had an incinerator installed. It was not fuel-fed. The contents that were placed in it had to be torn up and shredded," he went on, pointing to a stack of papers on a nearby table.

"To destroy a volume of papers about eight inches high—like this stack over here—it would take 15 minutes."

Replying to a series of questions by Captain Newsome, Commander Bucher bluntly discussed the quality and needs of the Pueblo. "I needed additional sound power telephones and we did not have them by the time the ship was captured," he said.

## Steering 'Troublesome'

"The ship's steering system was an old system, manufactured by a now defunct elevator company," he went on. "The system was most troublesome. I lost steering as many as 60 times in a period of two weeks."

"It would have taken 15 or 20 minutes to make preparations to scuttle that ship," Commander Bucher said at another point. "To scuttle the ship itself would have taken 2½ to 3 hours."

Captain Newsome then asked: "How vulnerable was the Pueblo to sinking?"

Commander Bucher replied: "If the Pueblo received a hole by collision of 8 to 12 inches in diameter, the ship would not have been saved. We did not have the capability to save the ship with a hole that size and with the damage control system we had."

Commander Bucher said that the Pueblo—whose hull was crammed with sonar, naviga-



Associated Press

Comdr. Lloyd M. Bucher as he arrived for the hearing.

Inquiry is the amphitheater on the first floor of the Naval Amphibious School. The 110 seats in the amphitheater were filled by 9 this morning with newsmen, the wives of Pueblo crewmen and a handful of retired naval officers who live in this lush peninsula city facing San Diego Bay and the Pacific.

#### Marine and Navy Guards

Marine guards stood inside and outside the amphitheater. Additional Marine and Navy guards stood at the sun-dappled entrances around the three-story, gray brick school, checking visitors for entry passes and watching especially for tape recorders that could be hidden to record testimony at closed sessions of the court.

After posing for photographers, the five admirals on the Court of Inquiry sat at a table in the center of the room beneath a chart depicting in detail the steps of an amphibious landing. The amphitheater—which resembles a tiered college lecture hall—is generally

used for training sailors in amphibious maneuvers.

Commander Bucher, looking wan and thin, sat or stood to the left of the court. He was accompanied by a civilian attorney, Emile Harvey, and a military counsel, Capt. James E. Keys.

During the all-day court session, the president of the court, Vice Adm. Harold G. Bowen Jr., passed notes to Captain Newsome, apparently with questions for Commander Bucher.

#### Other Members of Court

The other members of the court are Rear Adm. Marshall W. White, former commander of naval air strikes against North Vietnam, now chief of the Navy's Pacific missile range; Rear Adm. Richard R. Pratt, head of the amphibious training command in the Pacific; Rear Adm. Edward E. Grimm, the head of the Pacific training command, and Rear Adm. Allen A. Bergner, a submarine warfare specialist who

is head of the naval training command in San Diego.

The court was appointed by the commander of the Pacific Fleet, Adm. John J. Hyland. The five admirals on the court were ordered "to inquire into all the facts and circumstances" involved in the capture of the Pueblo and the detention of the ship's surviving crewmen.

Once the inquiry is over, the five admirals will report their findings to Admiral Hyland. The Pacific commander will make his own recommendations to Washington. It is up to the Chief of Naval Operations and the Secretary of the Navy to decide whether to make charges against any of the crew that would require courts-martial.

tion equipment and hyper-sensitive radar — sorely needed "many technical improvements."

He said that the intelligence ship had only one public address system, two amplifiers "with tuning problems," a general alarm "with bugs" and no collision alarms.

"That was another thing that I requested and was turned down," he said.

Commander Bucher said that the Pueblo and a similar ship, the Palm Beach, had received a shared appropriation of \$11-million for overhaul in Puget Sound. "That was cut back by one million dollars for each ship," he said. "I'm not sure who made the decision in Washington."

#### Improvements 'Prevented'

"In many instances the improvements we had asked for were deferred," Commander Bucher said. "The cut of \$1-million prevented the accomplishment of many of the suggested improvements I had made."

"In addition the Navy kept extending us in Puget Sound one month at a time," he said. "We were supposed to leave in December and we kept receiving extensions one month at a time. Consequently work that might have taken five weeks was not recommended."

"We finally left [for Japan] in May," Commander Bucher said.

The setting for the Court of