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Pueblo's Prison Life Bjt 500
Wirephoto NYS
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CORONADO, Calif. AP - From his lonely prison room in North Korea, U.S. Navy Cmdr. Lloyd M. Bucher could hear little girls laughing.

Children went by outside singing a marching song. Things were improving. A few days before, on March 5, 1968, Bucher and his 81 men from the USS Pueblo had been moved to the prison in the countryside.

It was six or seven miles from Pyongyang, the capital of North Korea, Bucher told a court of inquiry Thursday. The court of five admirals is investigating capture of his intelligence ship.

At this new prison there were no blinds on the windows, and Bucher said he could see cooperative farms surrounded by military installations and missile batteries.

A parade of tanks went by on a nearby road almost weekly, he said.

"We were treated much more humanely," Bucher said, comparing this prison to the compound where he and his men were taken when they were captured three months before. At that compound, Bucher said, he and his men had suffered severe beatings and Bucher underwent chilling mental torture.

"There was always an aura of terror," he said. But now the men had daily sick call except for Saturdays and when doctors were not available.

"Nurses were always available and their professional qualifications were comparable to the nurses at home. But not their looks. Their looks didn't quite come up to standards," Bucher said with a grin.

"I'm sure I came close to death on a couple of occasions because of illnesses. There was typhoid, and scurvy was rampant from a lack of vitamins. Mysterious holes started appearing in our skin.

"There were the types of sores you see in the Bible in pictures of lot. By and large I thought their medical treatment, considering all things, was barely adequate. In some bases, though, it was just short of miraculous.

"They did have penicillin. But their sterilization and cleanliness standards were far below those at home.

"I'm sure that because of this several of us contacted hepatitis. I was one of those.

"At one time I had lost approximately 100 pounds."

Bucher said he was given a half a pack of cigarettes every day and he and his men were getting tooth brushes and tooth paste.

During 15-to 20-minute exercise periods in the summertake, Bucher said, he and his men were sent out to cut the grass around the prison building.

"They had not invented lawnmowers yet," he said, "and we cut it with a pen knife."

The men got to write home—but interpreters translated the letters into Korean and they were changed by officers in charge of the captivity, Bucher said.

Then, he said, the men got their letters back and were ordered to recopy them, adding the North Korean changes.

The North Koreans tried to propagandize his men with socialistic movies every Friday night and booklets and brochures about the "tremendous number of atrocities by American troops during the Korean war.

"They gave us absolutely ridiculous accounts of the war and the way things were in the world," Bucher said. "They gave us news in a way that tried only to demoralize us.

"They told us Robert Kennedy had been killed by the President of the United States."

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