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Pueblo Sailor Weeps as He Tells of Being Beaten

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CORONADO, Calif., Feb. 24—

A U.S.S. Pueblo crewman who was forced to strip naked and crawl on a prison floor while North Korean soldiers kicked him broke down and wept today before the court of inquiry looking into the seizure of the intelligence ship 13 months ago.

As the inquiry moved into its sixth week, the severe emotional strain of the beatings and torment inflicted during 11 months in a North Korean prison emerged once more in testimony by the 37-year-old enlisted man.

Chief Engineman Monroe O. Goldman recalled two occasions when North Korean soldiers beat him. One was when the short, pudgy chief petty officer refused to sign a personal history. The other was after a photograph had been published that showed the Pueblo's crewmen using a finger gesture of contempt.

Chief Goldman told the five admirals on the court that the North Koreans were furious on the latter occasion.

"I told them it was the Hawaiian good luck sign, and they told me not to lie, they knew what it was," said the sailor, an Arkansan who has served 18 years in the Navy. "They called in a guard, 'the Bear,' and some officers gave him the word and he hit me in the head and neck and kicked me."

'I Couldn't Take Any More'

"I would get up, and he knocked me down," the chief engineman testified. "This went on for 25 minutes. I had blood coming from my right ear. My lip was busted open. I just . . . I just couldn't take any more, so I told them what the sign meant."

His face reddened, and he rubbed his forehead nervously and stared at the table before him.

E. Miles Harvey, the civilian attorney for Comdr. Lloyd M. Bucher, skipper of the Pueblo, asked Chief Goldman:

"What did the North Koreans do when they found out you served in the Korean conflict?"

Chief Goldman, after a moment, began weeping heavily and silently. He shook his head, and tears rolled down his face. He turned away.

Mr. Harvey said quietly:

"Let's try another question. Chief, did you ever try an escape plan during the period of detention?"

"Yes, Sir," the sailor said,

rubbing his eyes with a handkerchief.

"What was your plan?"

Chief Goldman began, "Uh . . ." but buried his face in his hands and cried once more.

Commander Bucher, a close friend, stared down at a table and bit his lip. The five admirals also looked at the wall and ceiling.

Proud of the Skipper

"Chief, I'll accept your answer that you had an escape plan," said Mr. Harvey.

The president of the court, Vice Adm. Harold G. Bowen Jr., asked the witness if he wanted to make any further comments.

"I have nothing further to add," Chief Goldman murmured. "I'm just proud of what the captain went through with us there and he did bring us back home."

Once more Chief Goldman, the father of three small children, began to weep.

"Is there anything else you'd like to say?" Admiral Bowen asked.

"No, Sir," Chief Goldman said.

As the sobbing enlisted man stood up, Commander Bucher arose too and put an arm around his shoulder. The two men walked out of the naval amphitheater into a hallway, where Commander Bucher whispered to Chief Goldman and gripped his arm.

Throughout the testimony of the Pueblo's enlisted men today, the admirals and the two court counsel focused repeatedly on each man's knowledge of the code of conduct for American servicemen, the reasons that crewmen signed letters and confessions that the Pueblo was spying in the claimed territorial waters of North Korea and the numerous attempts to fool — and even escape from — the North Koreans.

"At first I adhered to the code," said James D. Layton, 26, a communications technician first class from Binghamton, N. Y. "But after repeated threats and being beaten, I just didn't follow."

'There Was No Choice'

"I wrote to President Johnson and, being from New York, to Senator Robert F. Kennedy," said the thin, dark-haired sailor, who worked in the secret intelligence quarters of the ship. "There was no choice. You would write it. They would see to it."

Comdr. William E. Clemons, assistant counsel for the court, asked:

"Did you really believe they would kill you?"

"I most certainly did, Sir," the sailor said emphatically.

Like other enlisted men of the crew, he testified that the North Koreans repeatedly played the taped confessions of the Pueblo's officers before the crewmen. At one point, he recalled, Commander Bucher asked the enlisted men in person to sign the petition to President Johnson.

"He [Commander Bucher] did not look well," the witness said. "He looked, to put it bluntly, like a physical wreck. He asked us to do this in our own behalf."

Some of the crewmen indicated they were beaten severely, others that they were hardly touched.

Boatswain's Mate 2d Cl. Ronald Berens, a 23-year-old Kansan who looks even younger, was scarred above the eye with a club, beaten across the face with a slipper and repeatedly kicked and pummeled with sticks by North Korean guards.

"Were these beatings because of your attitude?" asked the counsel for the court, Capt. William R. Newsome.

"Yes, Sir," the thin sailor replied.

He had refused to sign confessions and mocked North Korean guards.

Tells of Fear

"What was the single most important factor that led you to depart from the Code of Conduct?" asked Captain Newsome.

The Code directs all American servicemen that if captured they are to give only name, rank, serial number and date of birth and to "resist by all means available."

"I'd say knowing that they'd go to any extreme to get what they wanted," the sailor replied.

"Was it fear of getting injured or maimed or killed?" asked Captain Newsome.

"Oh, yes," Boatswain's Mate Behrens said. "I'd say fear played a part in it . . . and knowing they captured all the documents with our personal records."

"Do you think you resisted to the fullest extent that you were capable?" Captain Newsome asked.

There was a long pause.

Boatswain's Mate Behrens shook his head and murmured finally, "I wouldn't say to the fullest."

The crewmen testified that their resistance was mostly aimed at seeking to fool or mock their captors in their taped confessions, as well as in letters and photographs home.

Boatswain's Mate Norbert J. Clepac said he had spoken English so quickly in a recording that "it sounded like a Donald Duck cartoon."

Communications Technician 1st Cl. Donald R. Peppard said he had written a letter to his father referring to a fictional friend, Garba Gefollows. The name can be read "garbage follows."

Other crewmen asked their parents about dead relatives or signed their letters unnaturally, with a large scrawl and using first, middle and last names.

A Vague Escape Plan

Under questioning, the crewmen said that escape plans were discussed but none came close to fruition.

Communications Technician Layton and two other crewmen discussed a vague plan to flee the Pyongyang prison in the summer — when rice fields and paddies would cover their movements — and follow power lines to a dam, then a river and possibly the Sea of Japan.

"The one problem was we heard a rumor that within a year captives on either side would be returned," he said. "We were going to give them a year to return us, then wait until summer."

While the crewmen were interrogated by the North Koreans about the Pueblo's mission — and shown films that glorified North Korea — little apparent attempt was made by guards to indoctrinate or "brainwash" them. One of the Pueblo's two Negro crewmen, for example, indicated today that he had received no special treatment.

"They asked me about life of Negroes in the United States, how we lived," said Commissaryman 1st Cl. Harry Lewis, a 32-year-old cook from East Meadow, L. I.

"And what did you tell them?" asked Captain Newsome. "Did you answer truthfully?"

"I told them we were all rich and lived happy" said Commissaryman Lewis, with just a trace of irony in his voice.