

# Marine Sergeant on Board Pueblo Planned Suicide

By **BERNARD WEINRAUB**  
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—A 24-year-old Marine sergeant on the Pueblo planned to jump out a prison window and kill himself after fierce and repeated beatings by North Korean guards.

The marine, Robert J. Hammond, told a closed session of the Navy court of inquiry yesterday afternoon that he had often been "bounced off the floor," hit by a 2-by-4 plank and kicked in the face and groin.

When he shrieked, he said, his North Korean captors stuffed a rag in his mouth.

A portion of Sergeant Hammond's testimony was released

today by the Navy. His consideration of suicide was the third such development to emerge in the six weeks of hearings into the seizure of the intelligence ship and the imprisonment of her 82 survivors.

### Photograph Recalled

The Navy said that Sergeant Hammond, a Vietnam war veteran, yearned to die at the start of "hell week," when the Pueblo crew underwent especially severe beatings last December, shortly before their release.

One of the reasons for "hell week" was the widely published photograph that showed Pueblo crewmen using a gesture of contempt for the North Koreans.

The Navy said: "When 'hell

week' began, Hammond was 'quite terrorized' and believed they wouldn't be released for a year. He tried to figure out how to escape and thought about different ways of suicide—to jump out of his window and to try to take a couple of them with him.

He finally decided on a fake suicide in hopes they would leave him alone."

"Hammond broke a mirror and took the pieces to bed with him," the Navy summary went on. "In the middle of the night he spent an hour trying to cut his wrists with the dull glass.

"Hammond finally cut one gash, but it didn't bleed enough. He made a second effort by lying on the glass, resulting in a deep incision. This scared him because it bled profusely, convincing him that he had done 'too good' a job. The bleeding, however, finally stopped, and he went to sleep.

"In the morning he refused to get up . . . The guard was shocked to see him lying in the blood and told him to get cleaned up. Hammond told the guard that he was 'chicken because he wouldn't kill me.'

"Hammond then cleaned himself, the room, and said he wasn't bothered 'too much' after that. However, he was lectured and upbraided by several guards. . . . He apparently shocked the guards and officers with his faked suicide attempt."

### Dramatic Testimony

Yesterday's session with Sergeant Hammond and Sgt. Robert J. Chicca, another marine on the Pueblo, apparently evoked some of the most dramatic and blunt testimony in days.

There was some confusion on why the session had been closed to the public, but the overriding reason appeared to be the delicate intelligence jobs that they had performed on the ship.

The two marines were identified only as having "special qualifications" to serve on the intelligence ship. It is generally assumed that they spoke Korean and served as interpreters in the secret "research space" on the main deck of the ship, whose 177-foot hull was filled with sonars, navigation equipment and hypersensitive radar.

In testimony over the last few weeks, Pueblo crewmen have pointed out that the two marines had often been selected for especially severe beatings by North Korean guards, who considered both as "trouble-makers."

Sergeant Hammond said that, at first, he refused to confess that the Pueblo had been engaged in espionage in the claimed territorial waters of

North Korea. A revolver was placed against his head, and he was told to sign. He refused.

He was later interrogated for six hours and then forced to kneel down and hold a chair over his head.

"Then beatings commenced on his sides and under his arms, followed by kicks to the face and groin," the Navy said.

"The brutality continued with kicks received to his head and body, and them attempted to strangle him several times. He finally agreed to confess and was followed then by 13 more hours of interrogation."

The closed session yesterday—and the open hearing today—focused in part on the beating of the Pueblo crewmen, which was linked to their decision to depart from the code of conduct for American servicemen.

The code tells all servicemen, if captured, disclose only name, rank, service number and date of birth.

### Code Termed Faulty

Virtually the entire crew departed from the code and signed confessions. Sergeant Chicca told the court that the code was "extremely faulty" and "doesn't take into account reality."

The 24-year-old marine said that it was impractical to "stand there and deny something you know they know, and they know you know, since they had the ship, equipment and some publications."

"By the time they got to me, they knew all about me," he said, "and would have gotten what they wanted anyway."

This theme was echoed today in the half-filled naval amphitheater here.

"They had me take off my pants and walk around on my knees on the wooden floor until my knees were bleeding," recalled Communications Technician 1st Cl. Victor D. Escamilla. "I believed I was taking punishment for something these people already knew."

Like other enlisted men, he said that he had been taken before Comdr. Lloyd M. Bucher only days after the capture and told by the skipper to sign a petition to President Johnson.

"He had a dry look in his face, he looked sunk in," said the 27-year-old Texan. "He didn't look like he looked before. He looked like he lost a lot of weight."

It was in this period, shortly after the capture, that Commander Bucher tried to drown himself by burying his head in a bucket of water.

Another crewmen, Lieut. (j.g.) Timothy L. Harris, testified last week: "What I wanted to do was take my life. I couldn't do it."