

Pueblo Captive, Assigned to Scrub Bucher's Floor,

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CORONADO, Calif., March 3 —Every morning in North Korean prison, a 22-year-old crewman of the U.S.S. Pueblo walked into Comm. Lloyd M. Bucher's dank, chilly cell and scrubbed the floor. Every afternoon the crewman left with secret orders.

"The captain passed the word every day," the crewman, Electrician's Mate Third Class John A. Mitchell, told a court of inquiry today. "He told us to try to put things in letters, photographs, recordings, that people back home would understand but the Koreans wouldn't understand."

"I'd take this back to my room and it would be passed on to the crew," the lanky Californian said. "The captain passed the word through me and the mess cooks and whoever he met outside."

Electrician's mate Mitchell, who was assigned by the North Koreans to scrub and dust Commander Bucher's 12x20 foot room, said that interrogators often pressed him about what he and Commander Bucher had whispered about.

"They asked me what we talked about and I told them we talked about home, cars, girls, food, the basics of life more or less," said the crewman in the half-empty naval amphitheater here.

Inquiry in Seventh Week

"And they bought that story?" asked the assistant counsel for the court, Comdr. William E. Clemons.

"Yes sir," said Electrician's Mate Mitchell.

As the court of inquiry started its seventh week today, the five admirals and their counsel focused once more on the 11 months that the Pueblo's 82 surviving crewmen spent in prison outside Pyongyang, North Korea.

During the questioning, the crewmen were asked basically the same questions: Under what circumstances did each man sign a confession that said the Pueblo was spying in the territorial waters of North Korea? How badly was each crewman treated, physically and mentally? What was the key reason that the crewman departed from the Code of Conduct, which tells American servicemen to yield only name, rank, serial number and date of birth if captured?

"Why did you write this [confession]?" Commander Clemons asked Electrician's Mate Mitchell.

"To exist, I guess," the young crewman replied.

'Never Scared Like That'

Another crewman, Chief Communications Technician James R. Kell, said intensely: "I was scared before in my life but I was never scared like that. I wasn't afraid to die. I believe I made peace with my Maker. But I wasn't prepared to accept any torture."

"There are certain points in which a person can endure physical or mental pain," the trim, crew-cut 32-year-old intelligence specialist said quietly. "I don't think these people would have stopped until they got what they wanted."

During today's testimony, as well as the last few weeks, the crew firmly supported Commander Bucher and told of the skipper's numerous attempts in prison to "improve the morale" of the prisoners and "keep everyone's spirits up" and "watch our" for his crewmen.

The 41-year-old skipper mocked the North Korean guards in front of his crew, used double entendres and obscenities in statements and urged the crewmen to use a finger gesture of contempt when the North Koreans photographed them.

Commander Bucher and the crewmen told their captors that the gesture was "the Hawaiian good luck sign" and were later

severely beaten when the North Koreans found out what the signal meant.

"The captain tried to act peculiarly at times," Electrician's Mate Mitchell said today. "The guards would try to listen or watch when I was there and the captain would act like he was shoeing flies towards the door."

"The guard got totally confused and when he stepped out of the door the captain slammed it and the guard never came back," the crewman said.

One officer, Lieut (jg) Frederick C. Schumacher Jr., has testified that Commander Bucher's behavior "set the spirit of resistance and just

manifested itself over and over and over."

"Every time we did an about-face the commanding officer did it the wrong way," the lieutenant recalled. "We were supposed to lead off with the left foot and he was always leading off with the right foot."

Testimony on Seizure

"In front of the crew . . . he would say anything to indicate that we didn't want to do any of this," the 25-year-old Trinity College graduate said. "But as long as we were being forced (he said) we may as well accomplish something so that if it would appear, Americans would laugh at it."

Although most of today's questions centered on the imprisonment of the crew, there was some testimony involving the seizure of the Pueblo in January, 1968, in the Sea of Japan off North Korea.

The first witness of the morning, Storekeeper Second Class Earl R. Phares, told the inquiry that his "general quarters" or battle job on the intelligence ship was loading the forward machinegun. He said, however, that he had "no idea" how to get ammunition for the weapon.

The 20-year-old crewman said that a gunner's mate on the ship, Kenneth R. Wadley, carried a key for the ammuni-

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Secret Orders to Crew

tion lockers to the two 50-calibre machineguns mounted on the Pueblo. Each weapon had its own ammunition locker, the crewman indicated, but no plan had developed to open the locker for the forward gun in an emergency.

"What did you do when the North Koreans opened fire?" Capt. William R. Newsome, the court's counsel, asked the nervous, dark-haired youth.

"I went to the forward 50 topside," Storekeeper Phares replied. "Then I was ordered below."

"Did you know how to make ammunition available?" asked Captain Newsome.

"No."

"Did you know the locker was locked?" Captain Newsome persisted.

"Yes," replied Storekeeper Phares.

"How was it to be opened?" The sailor paused. "I have no idea," he said.

Confusion and Delay Seen

Testimony earlier by Gunner's Mate Wadley and Engineer Third Class Roy J. Maggard had pointed up that there would have probably been confusion and delay if Commander Bucher had ordered the two machineguns fired because of the scarcity of keys to the ammunition lockers.

Through the testimony to-

day, more details of the crewmen's detention and the behavior of North Korean guards emerged. The crewmen said that the guards and interrogators were constantly taunting them about believing in the United States and having religious faith.

"They tried to tell us that God didn't exist, that they shot Him down with a missile," said Communications Technician

Kell. "But any reference to God made them very uneasy, as if they didn't believe in Him but couldn't deny Him either."

"They asked me if I wanted to come back to Korea someday," the Navy veteran of 15 years said. "They told me

they could take care of all the expenses, that I would go to Czechoslovakia, Russia and the Korea. I said when the State Department approved I'd like to come back for a visit."

During the detention, North Korean guards consistently stole food and cigarettes from the prisoners, although both items were rarely distributed in quantity to the Pueblo crewmen.

"The guards made daily runs on our room," Communications Technician Charles R. Sterling said. "The North Koreans would issue us cigarettes and we would save our supplies. But the guards would scrounge and steal them back."