





Not quickly, he answered. Two-and-a-half to three hours. The TNT Bucher had looked for might have been able to blow a hole in the side. But as it was, the engines would have to be closed down with no chance of starting them again should help arrive. And without power, the radio would be dead. Moreover, the Pueblo was only in 30 to 40 fathoms, within reach of skin divers. The water, too, was almost freezing . . . 34 degrees. Bucher decided to sail on.

His primary concern now was to destroy the classified materials. And . . .

"I really felt strongly about my orders about not provoking an international incident," he said later. "I think this more than anything else guided my actions on this day."

He called Steve Harris. Harris reported first destruction was of registered publications and had been largely completed. Encoding discs had been smashed to powder. Smoke from all the burning wreathed the ship, adding to the confusion.

#### Shells Came Close

From the pilot house, Bucher watched the machine gun bullets bounce off the three-eighths-inch hull plate. Most did not penetrate. But the shells did.

Up in the pilot house a shell whistled in one window, hit the

captain's chair but didn't explode. Another flew in a window, just missed Tim Harris's head and went out another window. Harris went into the chart room to continue the narrative. Bucher, himself, wondered how he had managed not to be hit. The Pueblo sailed on. But now the P 4s had forced her to swing farther south: 140°, paralleling the coast. A further turn would have brought the ship heading towards shore.

Besides keeping his narrative, Tim Harris was taking papers from the pilot house along with Robin, whose neck wound was slight, Hayes and radar man Cliff Nolte. They were exposed to gunfire, but were not shot at.

When the shooting started, Nolte, Law's assistant, threw some gear off the flying bridge, then emptied the bridge safe and took the papers to the incinerator. He and Law ran to Schumacher's room and on their own threw a bunch of classified papers into a burning wastebasket. Nolte helped Hayes burn his classified radio papers. They gathered them in a weighted bag, tied it to Hayes's 40-pound tool box, threw it all overboard and watched it sink.

Kell, meanwhile, handed Hammond an armful of six encoding plates. Hammond opened a porthole. The P 4s immediately opened fire on him. He threw out

a handful and took the rest back to the research area to be smashed.

#### Pleas For Help

C.T. Barrett, even before the shooting had begun, had told the technicians to get ready to destroy. Passing by the skipper's safe, he noticed the door was open and classified material still inside. He gave some of it to Chicca to destroy and carried the rest to the mess decks to be burned.

As the Pueblo steamed on, a growing train of paper littered her wake. The P 4s radioed each other about the paper, but Bucher did not see any of them stop to pick any up.

Bailey: "Please send assistance."

The two paper shredders could only handle an eight-inch stack every 15 minutes. Not fast enough. Bucher figured the concussion grenades aboard would only blow papers around the Sod Hut, not destroy them. He could have ordered all paper thrown into the head, doused with fuel oil and lit. The thought did not occur to the captain until later. There was also available a 50-gallon oil drum cut in half that was used for barbecues. No one thought to use that, either.

Kell didn't know the weighted bags were aboard. But Langenberg did. Harris sent Langenberg

to get some laundry bags to fill with documents. He found the bags, but they were filled with dirty wash. Then he remembered the weighted bags and brought them instead.

C.T. Francis Ginther was swinging his sledge hammer at the last of the electronic equipment. When his arms got tired, C.T. Bradley Crowe relieved him. On the phone, Harris told Bucher very little remained to smash but that possibly not all would be accomplished. Bucher asked if any cryptograph material remained. Harris said no.

Gunfire was still hitting the ship—some 1,000 machine gun bullets denting the hull in all. Because of the angle of fire, the 57-mm shells could only penetrate a few inches below the waterline. Conceivably the men could have gone into the engine room beneath the waterline, but Bucher would have been steering blind.

#### Slaughter Was Senseless

When it was all over, Bucher said: "I couldn't see allowing more people to be slaughtered or killing the entire crew for no reason." He decided that if destruction was progressing successfully, and depending on the North Koreans' subsequent actions, he would halt the Pueblo. No one told him smoke was hindering the

destruction.

Mack decided to expose his film. Then he threw his cameras overboard and went below to burn his film on a tray from the mess.

Lacy asked the captain if he wanted the engines halted, at least to see if the firing would stop and permit destruction to be completed. And so it had come to that.

All during the shooting, Bucher had not radioed Japan for advice. He was on his own, the commander at the scene. The judgment was his. He knew it. That was the Navy way. But how was he to judge his orders? One said don't start a war. Would shooting back do so? Another said don't use your guns except when survival of your command is at stake. Would manning two naked guns save his ship? Should he let the North Koreans scuttle his ship by blowing it out of the water? But then there was the regulation not to scuttle in less than 100 fathoms, and the Pueblo had not reached that depth.

Then there was the man, himself, an orphan who had truly found a home in the Navy, a man who had love for his country, his command. And for his crew.

It was about 1345.

He gave Lacy his answer and it was relayed to the engine room. The Pueblo stopped.



## 7. REACTION: the button had a late push



The first words to the outside had been almost chatty.

The routine of spying had been getting Bailey down. ". . . I sure could use some liberty now," he teletyped Japan. "That part is starting to get rough. Didn't think I would miss the old lady so much."

Then, at 1252, came the initial Pinnacle message telling Japan about the first "heave to" signal. The Navy took the message in stride. The Banner had sent similar ones.

But at 1306 there was another message—from the SO 1. It gave her position: 39°26'N, 128°02'E, a point 21.3 miles from the nearest land. Then came its intent to board message.

The Navy has classified how this message was intercepted. If it was by Hammond and Chicca, the two Korean interpreters, there is no public record of it. Nor will the Navy say if anyone heard the message live or if it was recorded by a machine monitoring North Korean frequencies and played back later after it was too late.

There is evidence the Pueblo was having some luck eavesdropping on the Communist flotilla. At one point an intercept was made—by whom or where is classified—of the SO 1 ordering the P 4s to stand clear, as she was about to shoot. Moments later, at 1326, Bailey radioed the "they plan to fire" message although no

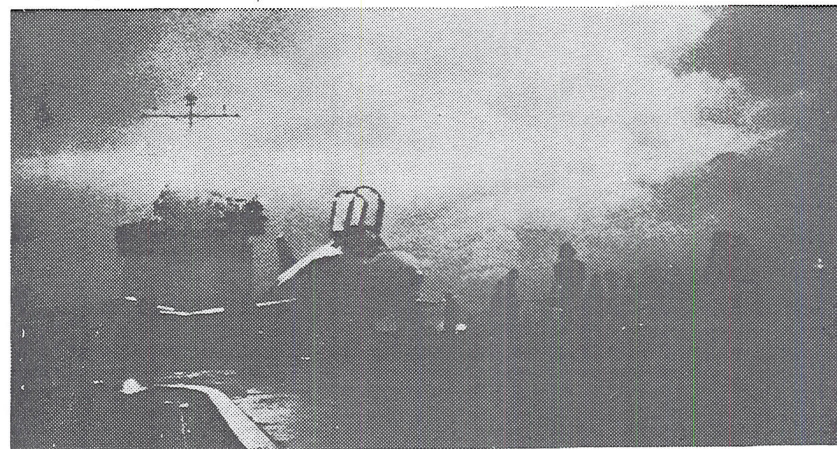
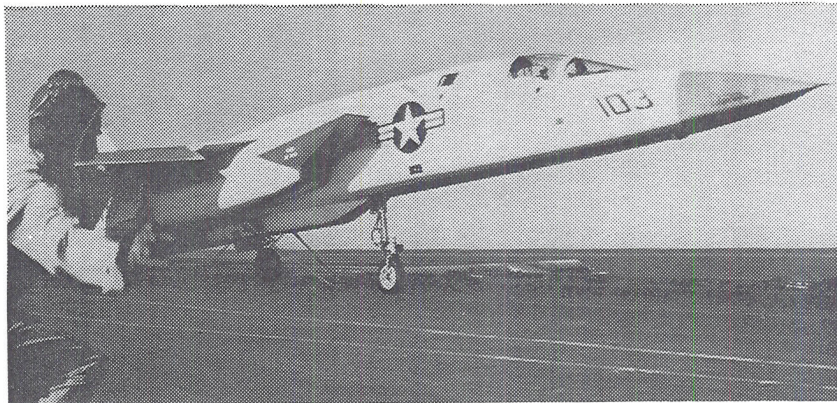
shooting had begun. A minute later came the erroneous message about boarding. Whether that message was based on misinformation from the bridge or a delay in translation of the SO 1's report at 1306 that she intended to board the Pueblo, the delay in putting the intercept into action cost 21 critical minutes of possible reaction time.

In any case, the boarding message was the one that snapped the Navy alert. The Banner had never sent one of those. At Adm. Johnson's headquarters in Yokosuka the intelligence officer, a Lt. Cmdr. Hokanson, took the message to the admiral's staff office 20 feet away where a Capt. Pease read it. "This looks like trouble," he said.

He ordered the message retransmitted by the Naval Communications Station, about three minutes distant, to Washington, Honolulu and other commands. The operations officer was also ordered to notify the Fifth Air Force on Okinawa which had the alert responsibility for the area and tell them to "push the contingency button."

About 1335 Yokosuka started calling Okinawa on a scramble phone, an instrument that requires very precise calibration. The phone, as Johnson said later, "didn't work out as well as it should."

One of the most inglorious days in the history of the Navy had begun.



PLANES WERE READY around the clock . . . but no orders came to the Enterprise.



## 8. SURRENDER?: one thing that isn't taught



Meanwhile, aboard his battered ship, Bucher debated with himself.

Surrender? Or fight?

His men? Or his ship?

Bucher's cruel dilemma had been answered as clearly as words could make it down through the 193 years of the United States Navy. It had been written in blood. It had been written in law. It was a Pole star of the unwritten tradition of the service.

"There's one thing that doesn't have to be taught at the Naval Academy," said a captain. "That is: you don't give up the ship."

Those were the very words of Capt. James Lawrence in 1813 as he lay dying, words no less honored for having been spoken while he was delirious and a prisoner aboard the British frigate that had taken his own, the Chesapeake.

Even before Lawrence there had been John Paul Jones, the patron saint of the Navy, shouting defiance: "I have not yet begun to fight."

"If we surrendered every time we were outgunned, there wouldn't be a United States," said an officer.

Even before there was a United States the regulations for the Colonial fleet, written largely by John Adams, said: "Any captain or other officer who shall basely desert their duty . . . and run away while the enemy is in sight or in time of action . . . shall suffer death or such other punishment as a court martial shall inflict."

In the age of the atom, the words have changed. The law has not.

### Laws of the Sea

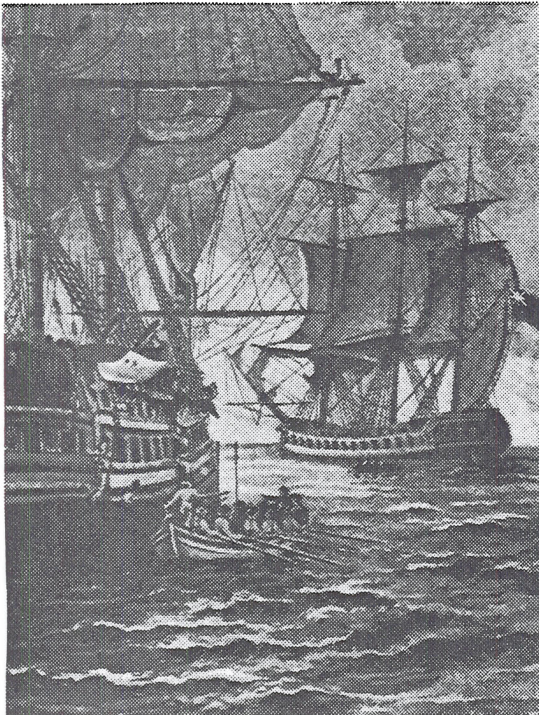
Under Article 99 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice a commander who "shamefully abandons, surrenders or delivers up" a command can be punished with death. And yet . . . Rear Adm. Joseph B. McDevitt, Judge Advocate General of the Navy, was to admit later there is no law forbidding a presumably shameless surrender.

The law—Article 0730 of Naval Regulations — also says: "The commanding officer shall not permit his command to be searched by any person representing a foreign state nor permit any of the personnel under his command to be removed from the command so long as he has the power to resist."

Yes, but . . . what power did the Pueblo have to resist?

In any case, Lloyd Bucher scarcely had any time to rummage about the Pueblo for a law book. There was, however, the guide of tradition.

"To the captain of a fighting ship, there is never any question of surrender," said retired Rear Adm. C. C. Hartman, Annapolis '20 and a commander of destroyers and cruisers in World War II. "Your job is to fight the ship to the end. It is a weapon. You stick with it and go down with it. If you give a man the option of quitting, who knows what might happen in the next half hour if he kept fighting?"



IN 1807 THE CHESAPEAKE surrendered to the British frigate Leopard (left) which shocked a young nation which

Yes, but . . . was the Pueblo a warship?

Her skipper didn't think so. Long after his choice had been made, he said: "I was not commanding a ship of war. I was commanding an auxiliary ship."

Yes, but . . . as defined by the Convention of the High Seas signed by the U.S. and other nations in 1958, the Pueblo was a warship.

### One Other Capture

Only once in American history had a peacetime commander decided to surrender his ship. In 1807 Commodore James Barron had just taken command of the Chesapeake, the same frigate on which Lawrence was mortally wounded. As Bucher, Barron had gun troubles. When the Chesapeake sailed down the Potomac to Hampton Roads, she was unable to fire the traditional salute passing George Washington's home at Mount Vernon because her sponges and cartridges were too large for her cannon. Shortly after putting to sea, the Chesapeake was accosted by the British frigate Leopard which suspected, correctly, a deserter or two might be aboard the American vessel. The Chesapeake's guns were totally unprepared to answer the Leopard's devastating broadsides.

"Go down to the gun deck," Barron cried to one of his officers, "and tell them for God's sake to fire one gun for the honor of the flag." Someone managed to touch off a gun with a hot coal from the galley stove just as Barron struck his flag. (Although he was reinstated after a five-year suspension for neglect, Barron was never given a sea command again.)

Bucher knew the hard dictates

of his duty. And he would understand the act of one of the lawyers that would one day sit on the hearing of his conduct of that duty. That man, Cmdr. William Clemmons, had thrown potatoes in frustration at attacking Japanese dive bombers from the deck of the doomed battleship Nevada at Pearl Harbor.

Clemmons would once say: "It is not fair to ask whether a ship is more important than the lives of its crew. A ship is not just a piece of steel. It is a piece of America afloat on the sea."

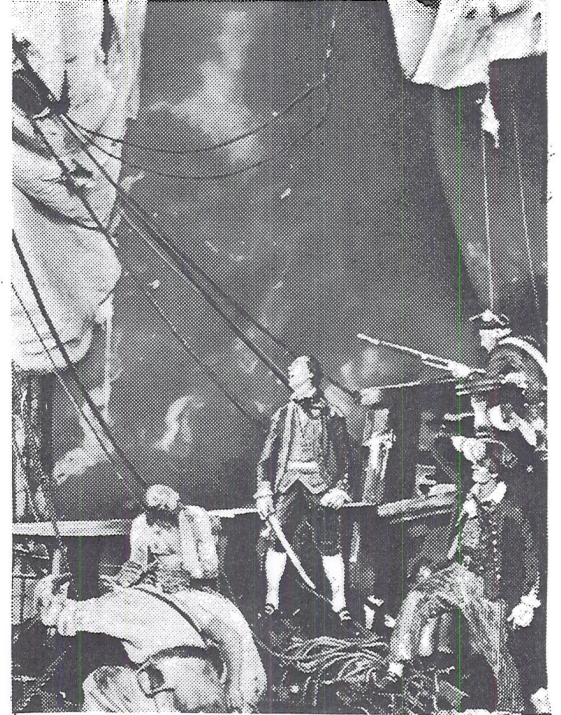
Yes, but . . . there were also 83 Americans afloat on the sea and Navy law is specific on the commanding officer's responsibility for their safety. Is there room in the stoic mold in which the Navy hopes to cast its leaders for one human being's concern for another? Room for a man raised familyless who was now the guardian of 82 men?

### A Captain's Duty

"The captain has to take an objective view of his ship and his crew," said Adm. Hartman. "He does not send an individual to man a gun. He sends a gunner. The captain must maintain a distance from his men for that very reason. On a small ship, this is all the more difficult. I missed the close association with my other officers, but I think it is a good system."

Perhaps that is the only way navies can be run, the only way to buy victory, and the loneliness—sometimes the seeming heartlessness—of command is its price. The sea and its ways are not so much cruel as indifferent.

But . . . the beleaguered Pueblo was to send back another pivotal question to her homeland: if the



had been inspired by John Paul Jones's cry, "I have not yet begun to fight!"

nuclear age had spawned a non-war, non-peace world, were military commanders expected to behave as if nothing had changed and all the old rules still applied? Should the Navy—or any other service—damn the torpedoes and steam full speed ahead even if such stubborn heroism courts holocaust, not just for a ship and her men but the world?

Knowing his orders forbade him from provoking just such a war; knowing what surrender could mean to his men, himself and even his career; knowing all this, might it not be said that Cmdr. Lloyd Bucher, a dedicated and vigorous man of action living in a world John Paul Jones could not have dreamed of, would show as much personal courage in going against his nature and training by surrendering as he would by fighting?

### The Sinai Incident

What does a man do when someone breaks the gentleman's agreement and begins taking pot shots at a spy ship? The Navy has in its files—and now in its tradition—what one man did.

He was William L. McGonagle, now a captain, and on June 8, 1967 a commander in charge of the USS Liberty, an ELINT ship listening off the Sinai Peninsula to the roar of the Israeli-Egyptian war. As with the Pueblo, there were communications foul-ups. The Pentagon had radioed her to move farther to sea, but the message was misrouted and not received until after the Liberty had been holed 821 times by strafing Israeli jets, hit by a torpedo and had had 34 of her men killed and 75 wounded, including McGonagle.

Her compass out, her heavy

rudder manhandled by the crew in place of her destroyed steering gear, the Liberty staggered seaward. McGonagle, faint from the loss of blood that squished in his shoe, occasionally lay down on the deck of the bridge. But he kept the conn for almost 17 hours, steering by the North star and checking the ship's weaving wake.

Said the Liberty's doctor: "Having the conn and the helm through the night and calling every change of course was the thing that told the men 'we're going to live'. When I went to the bridge and saw this . . . I knew that I could only insult this man by suggesting that he be taken below for treatment of his wounds. I didn't even suggest it."

"It would have taken 10 men the doctor's size even to begin to get him off the bridge," said an ensign.

### A Hero's Medal

A reserve yeoman was later asked at a court of inquiry if it had ever been considered to abandon ship. "No, sir," he replied. "In the Navy you don't abandon ship."

McGonagle, who brought his surviving crewmen and ship home, was given the Medal of Honor. When the ship was back in Norfolk, her home port, the parents of one of his slain crewmen drove all the way from New England to ask McGonagle a question, one that might have occurred to Pete Bucher as he stood on his bridge and faced the fire of an enemy.

"Captain," the parents asked McGonagle, "was it all necessary?"

"Yes," he replied. "It was." That seemed to satisfy them.





## 9. BURNING: “...sure could use some help”

The Pueblo bobbed idly in the water within the circling PTs. Bucher told Lacy to take the conn and went below to his stateroom. He made a hurried inspection, destroyed a few remaining papers, and remembered two other items he did not want to fall to the enemy. His pistols. By history's strange customs of men and arms, a tactical military surrender somehow becomes a matter of private ignominy if one yields his sidearms. Bucher rummaged in his gear, gathered up his personal .22-caliber and .38-caliber revolvers, handed them to a sailor and ordered him to throw them over the side.

Hurrying back to the pilot house he noticed Law and Alvin Plucker, a quartermaster, burning publications and Nolte swinging a sledge hammer. He told Nolte not to destroy the radio transmitter; help might yet come and he wanted to be able to communicate.

Bucher also observed that both crypto safes were open, their contents gone. He considered the crypto gear the most sensitive material aboard. Steve Harris had reported that it had been destroyed, and Bucher was relieved to see for himself that it was so.

Back in the pilot house, he ordered the engines started again—at one-third speed, about four knots, scarcely enough to ripple the water. He put the rudder over five degrees and the Pueblo began a wide, lazy circle toward the wake of the SO 1, which was heading into the sun, shoreward. The time was approaching two o'clock.

Bailey: “We are now being escorted into probably Wonsan. Wonsan. Wonsan.”

### Racing for Time

The ship continued its slow arc. The SO 1 pulled away, about 300 yards ahead. Bucher wanted as much time as possible to finish destroying classified material. Earlier, running at full speed, he had maneuvered the Pueblo 20 to 25 miles from land, thus was still a healthy distance from the 12-mile zone.

Bailey: “Are you sending assistance? Are you sending assistance?”

Japan: “Word has gone to all authorities. COMNAVFOR-JAPAN is requesting assistance. What key lists (of crypto material) do you have left? Please advise if it appears your communication space will be entered.”

The PT boats kept their distance, for a time. Then one pulled along the Pueblo's port side and its skipper motioned to Bucher to go faster. Bucher looked down at the PT over the wing of the bridge and shrugged. The Pueblo held her speed.

Impatient, the PT skipper again motioned to Bucher to speed up. Equally impatient, Bucher shouted a stream of untranslatable gibberish and waved his arms in crazy gestures.

If the antics did not confuse the PT skipper, they at least seemed to satisfy him. He pulled away, and he and the other PTs contented themselves with playing porpoise with the Pueblo, weaving arrogantly back and forth 30 yards in front of her bow.

Bucher needed time. Time to destroy documents. Time to allow help to arrive. Time to see for



himself how far the destruction had progressed. Time to think.

What would happen if the Pueblo stopped? Just stopped? Bucher decided to try it once more. He rang up full stop and the engine room responded instantaneously.

### First Blood

So did the North Koreans. The SO 1 wheeled in a spray of foam, sped toward the Pueblo and opened up with its cannon. The PTs raked the vessel with machineguns.

A cannon shell split the hull like a can opener and exploded in the laundry room. Another blasted the main mast and showered the deck with debris. A third slammed through the starboard side into the passageway outside the officers' staterooms where sailors were burning papers in blazing trashbaskets and when it exploded a cry went up.

“Corpsman! Corpsman!” Duane Hodges's leg was gone and half his abdomen. Hot shrapnel ripped open Steven Woelk's pelvis and cut into his thigh and chest. Blood pulsed from Bob Chicca's thigh and Harry Crandell's legs. Bits of red flesh splattered the bulkheads and the passageway and blood soaked the papers at the door of the Sod Hut so they would not burn.

Bucher ordered the ship underway at one-third speed. As she moved the firing stopped, except for occasional machinegun bursts. He gave the conn to Lacy and went below to check the damage.

Corpsman Baldrige was ministering to Hodges and Woelk in the wardroom. Bucher examined both men and asked Baldrige if he were going to amputate what remained of Hodges's leg. Baldrige shook his head. He told Bucher he needed morphine, and Bucher said to find Lt. Murphy, who was narcotics control officer, and get it. “For God's sake help this man,” Bucher said, “he's dying.” Baldrige knew as much. He gave both men drugs, elevated their legs, covered them.

Bucher made his way through the mess of papers and gore and smoke to the Sod Hut. The door was locked. He pounded on it

and when it opened he saw the men sprawled amid the documents. Machinegun fire rattled against the hull.

### Destruction Hurried

“Get the hell off the deck and turn to with this destruction!” he shouted.

The sight of the supine crewmen was not all that startled Bucher. He also saw three large bags—he assumed they were mattress covers—jammed full of documents. It astonished him that there was that much classified material aboard. “Let's get rid of this stuff,” he said to Lt. Harris.

The men were doing their best. Sledges and fire axes were flying. Trashbaskets blazed in the Sod Hut office and in the passageway, where the heat blistered and warped the bulkheads. Teams of men were stuffing into bags the papers scattered a foot deep on the passageway deck. The papers had been bagged once, but the men emptied the bags when someone had the idea to pile all the papers on the deck and set fire to the whole passageway. But then someone else remembered that the fuel tanks were beneath the passageway. Lt. Harris ordered the papers bagged up again.

At least one bag was tossed over the side. Peter Langenberg ran to the rail and dumped it even though he had been wounded slightly in the neck on a previous trip to the side with handfuls of equipment.

From his own observation and from what Harris told him, Bucher reckoned it would take another half hour to get everything destroyed, or nearly everything.

At 1405 he went to the radio compartment and drafted a hurried message to Japan:

“Have been requested to follow into Wonsan. Have three wounded and one man with leg blown off. Have not used any weapons nor uncovered .50-caliber machineguns. Destroying all key lists and as much electronic equipment as possible. How about some help? These guys mean business. Have sustained small wound in rectum. Do not intend to offer any resistance. Do

not know how long will be able to hold up circuit and do not know if communication spaces will be entered.”

### Help Coming

Japan: “Roger. Roger. We doing all we can. COMNAVFOR-JAPAN on hotline. Last I got was Air Force gonna help you with some aircraft but can't really say as commander coordinating with I presume Korean force for some F105s but this is unofficial, but I think that's what will happen. Keep on the air as long as you can. We staying right with you.”

Bailey: “Roger. Will keep this (circuit) up until the last minute and sure could use some help now.”

Japan: “Roger. Roger. We still with you and doing all we can. Everyone really turning to, and figure by now Air Force got some birds winging your way.”

Bailey: “Sure hope so. We're pretty busy with this destruction right now. Can't see for the smoke.”

Japan: “Roger. Roger. Wish I could help more. All information you passed being sent to area commander and they in turn coordinating for whatever action gotta be taken. Sure process already being initiated for some immediate relief. COMNAVFOR-JAPAN got all info.”

Bailey: “Roger your last and sure hope someone does something. We are helpless. Cannot do anything but wait.”

Bucher headed back to the pilot house. Just before he entered he paused for a moment to contemplate his predicament. “Helpless . . . cannot do anything but wait . . .”

He clenched his fists and raised his voice in the saltiest outburst of profanity he could muster. He drew back his foot and kicked a pipe fitting. Then he cursed again and kicked another pipe fitting. Then he went inside.

Nolte was busy dismantling the radar and throwing the pieces over the side. Law was destroying gear in the chart room.

In the pilot house were the quartermaster's notebook, the deck log, the chronometer log, the loran record book, position and contact logs and observation sheets. Murphy decided all these should be kept intact: they offered proof, in his mind, that the Pueblo had not intruded into the 12-mile zone and had been attacked on the high seas.

Once again a PT hove alongside and its captain motioned angrily to Bucher to speed up. Bucher shouted another stream of gibberish, this time through a megaphone. He held the Pueblo steady as she went.

How was the burning progressing? Bucher went aft to the stack, saw that the incinerator was going with Schumacher and Hayes ripping pages from binders and feeding the fire. Bucher picked up a publication himself, tore it up and threw it in the incinerator, then returned to the bridge.

The phone rang; it was Lt. Harris. How close was the inevitable? Not much time left, Bucher told him. Could he send a message to Japan notifying them that he would not be able to complete destruction? Bucher asked again if all the crypto was destroyed. Harris assured him it was. Bucher assumed the three large bags he had seen in the Sod Hut were by now

at the bottom of the sea and did not bother to ask Harris if that were the case. He told Harris to go ahead and send the message.

Japan: “Who I got that end of circuit? What status of classified material left to destroy?”

Bailey: “We have the K2KW7, KW7 and some cards. The 3 and 14 left to smash. Think that just about it. Destruction of publications has been ineffective. Suspect several will be compromised.”

### Time Runs Out

At 1425 Tim Harris went to his stateroom to check for classified material. He found none, returned to the pilot house and destroyed the narrative he had been keeping. Bucher likewise tossed his tape recorder over the side.

Murphy went below to check his stateroom and saw Ralph Reed there applying a battle dressing to Bob Chicca's wounded leg. He went to the wardroom to check on Hodges. Hodges was conscious, resting easily, apparently in no pain. Baldrige was administering oxygen. He told Murphy he could feel no pulse. Murphy nodded.

Above, in the pilot house, Bucher watched the PT boat hoist a familiar semaphore: “heave to.” Bucher obeyed.

The PT with the boarding party approached from the port bow. Bucher expected it to stop on the forward section where the well deck rail was low to the water. The boat continued aft. As it passed the Pueblo's bridge, Bucher, in one final act of anger and frustration, snatched a coffee cup and flung it at the boat. It crashed against its deck.

“Prepare to receive the North Koreans aboard,” he said into the ship's amplifier.

Lacy asked the captain if he should caution the men to give only their names, rates and service numbers. Bucher said yes. Lacy broadcast the instructions.

Japan: “Can you give me a list of what you haven't destroyed? Can you give me a list of what you haven't destroyed?”

Bailey: “Have been directed to come to all stop and being boarded. Being boarded.”

Japan: “Roger. Your last on way to COMNAVFORJAPAN.”

Bailey: “Got four men injured and one critically and going off the air now and destroying this gear.”

Japan: “Can you continue transmitting? Can you continue transmitting?”

Silence. It was 1432.

### Klepak Scoffed

Taking stock, Bucher suddenly realized he was wearing nothing to identify himself as a naval officer, the captain of the ship. He raced below to his stateroom and grabbed his hat with gold braid on the visor. He also hurriedly wrapped his bleeding right leg with a pair of black Navy socks. Then he went topside to present himself to his captors.

The PT pulled alongside the stern to port. It swerved too far out, however, to get a line to the Pueblo, and Bosun's Mate Norbert Klepak, awaiting the line with deckhands Willie Bussell and Harry Lewis, sneered at the helmsman's seamanship.

On the PT's second approach the line hit the Pueblo's deck. Wordlessly, Bussell slipped it over a metal bit.



## 10. RESCUERS: just what is a Pueblo?



Late, but maybe not too late, the military began coming to the rescue. Or at least began planning to.

When Adm. Johnson's headquarters called Okinawa, they also reached him in Tokyo where he had given the welcoming address of the annual Pacific Command Tropical Cyclone Conference at the Sanno Hotel. He was called on an unsecure phone so was briefed rather sketchily that the Pueblo was in trouble and was "probably gone." He thought that meant she had been sunk. He asked if Fifth Air Force had been notified and was told yes but that search and rescue was not yet underway.

1355: About this time—it is not clear when because the time was not logged — Okinawa finally received Yokosuka's call. The man who took it, Maj. Raymond Priest, was aided in approximating the time by the fact that he had had a 12:30 luncheon date with his wife and she had been exactly 20 minutes late.

When told there was a secure call, Priest left his office for the command center about a minute away. A partial transcript of the call reads:

"This is Lt. Cmdr. Wilson. I have a (not understood). The following message was received from the Pueblo . . . two MIGs circling and three boats." Wilson gave Priest her position.

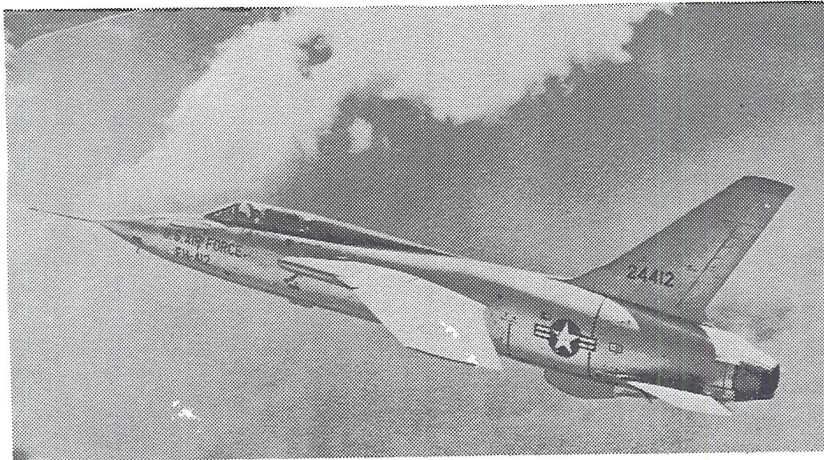
"It was my initial belief that because no priority was provided in the message and no supplementary information, the contents of the message related to an exercise," said Priest.

But he turned it over to the Seventh Fleet liaison officer at Fifth Air Force Headquarters who in turn notified the Fifth's command center and the assistant deputy chief of staff of the commander, Lt. Gen. Seth McKee.

### The Alarm Spreads

1410: The National Military Command Center in Washington, already alerted, notified CINCPAC.

1415: McKee's staff reached him, and he went immediately to his command center two or three minutes away. He placed nearly simultaneous calls to the 18th Tactical Fighter Wing on the island and to CINCPACAF in Hawaii to advise its commander, Gen. John D. Ryan, that he had or-



THE F 105s FROM Okinawa were the only planes airborne that day. And they were too late.

dered planes to go to Korea, to "refuel and strike."

McKee recalled seven F105s from training flights and diverted six from training preparations. He ordered them armed with 20-mm guns only, to expedite loading.

McKee also contacted his division commander in South Korea, where he would have had alert aircraft ready instead of Okinawa had any been requested.

The seven Air Force fighters in South Korea, F4Cs, were configured for nuclear weapons. They would have had to have been reconfigured with conventional bomb racks. The nearest racks were in Japan. The soonest the F4Cs could be over the target was estimated at three hours and 38 minutes.

McKee also asked his deputy to determine the availability of South Korean fighters, old F86s from the Korean War. Gen. Charles Bonesteel, UN commander, told McKee's deputy not to contact the South Koreans.

"They are a pretty gung-ho bunch of guys," said a State Department official. "Once they began shooting, there's no telling where they'd stop."

1423: McNamara was notified in Washington, where it was just after midnight.

1430: The atomic carrier Enterprise, the world's biggest warship, received a Pinnacle message "scattered buckshot" to all commands by the Navy although McKee knew she was in the area

and had suggested CINCPACAF have her alerted to launch planes. The message the Enterprise finally got had been sent 39 minutes before.

### Enterprise Alerted

The Enterprise, escorted by the nuclear frigate Truxtun, was steaming southeast at 27 knots four hours out of Sasebo. She hadn't launched planes since before Christmas and was on her way to the Philippines for flight exercises before heading for combat duty on Yankee Station in the Gulf of Tonkin.

The commander of the task group, Rear Adm. Horace Epes, had never heard of the Pueblo. "The first thing I did was to send for a publication to find out what kind of ship she was."

Then he asked how long it would take to get planes up after briefing pilots on weather and locating folders for the area. He was told 90 minutes. That meant it would take three hours to get aircraft over Wonsan, 510 miles away. The weather there was overcast, snow flurries, visibility seven miles. Not the best conditions for finding ships.

The Enterprise had four F4Cs on five minute alert as standard operating procedure and another four on 30-minute alert. But besides briefing the pilots a decision would have to be made as to what armament to carry. They normally carried four Sparrow electroni-

cally guided missiles and four heat-seeking Sidewinder rockets, neither designed for air-to-ship combat.

Any order to launch planes would have come normally from the Enterprise's command, the Seventh Fleet. But it never came.

### More Delay

1432: The Pueblo radioed "... going off the air now..."

1439: An Army helicopter picked up Adm. Johnson to take him to Yokosuka.

1445: McKee finally got through to Gen. Ryan. It took 20 minutes to calibrate the secure phone, place the call and locate Ryan who wasn't in his office, it being evening in Honolulu.

1510: Adm. Johnson arrived at his headquarters and was briefed. His headquarters had sent no orders to the Pueblo, something a critic of the affair was to call "dead wrong. Wouldn't it have helped to be told at least what was being done to help? I pressed the Navy on this and they finally admitted, 'yes, it would'."

But Johnson felt only two possible messages could have been sent, one that planes had been asked for and the other for Bucher to follow his orders.

"It would have been most inadvisable for me or my staff to advise or instruct the commanding officer of a ship far away. The situation was very vague," said the admiral.

Later it would be argued that

when Bucher radioed he had not uncovered his guns or shot back, the Navy had implied consent for his action by telling him nothing.

1515: Walt Rostow, President Johnson's security adviser, reached the White House.

1611: The first F105s—two of them — took off from Okinawa bound for Osan, South Korea, 650 miles away, to refuel. They were to be on the ground there 20 minutes. Flying time from Osan to Wonsan was 28 minutes.

### Too Many MIGs

McKee thought his planes could handle some of the North Korean planes such as the MIG 17s. But against the MIG 21s, it would be "nip and tuck." And the 105s were not carrying air-to-air rockets because it would have taken too much time to mount their launching rails.

They were flying into an area that had an air base only 25 miles from the site of the seizure with 65 MIG 17s and five MIG 21s. It was defended by 14 anti-aircraft batteries of six guns and two SAM ground-to-air missile sites.

"It was a hornet's nest," Gen. Wheeler said later.

1700: Adm. Sharp, who had been conferring with Gen. William Westmoreland about the war in South Viet Nam, arrived aboard his flagship, the carrier Kitty Hawk, after an hour's flight from Da Nang and was told about the Pueblo. His chief of staff in Hawaii had been informing other commands of what was happening and was authorized to do whatever he thought advisable in his superior's absence. Sharp thought the Pueblo was probably in port by then and that there was nothing he could do at the moment, Seventh Fleet already having ordered the Enterprise to head north. The admiral radioed the Joint Chiefs his evaluation of the situation.

"I viewed it from this point on as one involving major forces in a confrontation that could result in a second Korean war."

1735: The first F105s reached Osan.

1741: The sun set at Wonsan. Darkness fell 12 minutes later.