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The capture of the U.S.S. "Pueblo" by a third-rate power provoked an internal conflict between the forces of domestic public opinion and the U.S. Navy. Public sentiment, as reflected in news accounts, editorials, letters, and congressional statements, had a significant effect on the behavior of Navy officials dealing with the problem. The apparent public hostility during the Court of Inquiry was possibly a factor in determining final disposition by the Navy. A recognition and analysis of the factors contributing to public hostility toward the Navy suggest the inevitability of the public opinion crisis over the "Pueblo" affair and its outcome.

THE PUEBLO CRISIS AND PUBLIC OPINION

A research paper prepared
 by

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INTRODUCTION

Public opinion has historically been a potent force to be reckoned with in American political history. On the military scene, however, its influence and impact have been less easily discernible. Public support for the Armed Forces, though subject to periods of stress, has generally remained loyal and steadfast. During the past few years there has been a clearly discernible shift in the climate of public opinion, and the military services find themselves increasingly confined by the pressures of capricious public sentiment. For the Navy, the *Pueblo* incident dramatically reflected the shift.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the *Pueblo** crisis from a public relations perspective, to determine those factors which contributed to public hostility toward the Navy, and to determine what effect hostile public opinion had on the Navy's handling and eventual disposition of the case.

The paper is not concerned with the merits of the issues involved except to the extent that they influenced or affected public opinion and vice versa.

*Constructed as a U.S. Army cargo vessel in 1944, the *Pueblo* (AGER 2) was converted to an auxiliary general environmental research vessel in 1967 and was captured on its first mission on 23 January 1968.

Commander Bueher is given a principal role in this study, as indeed he must. The paper is not concerned with trying to second-guess his decisions or actions nor those of other Navy and Government officials. It is concerned with the effect such decisions, actions, or statements may have had on the American public.

BACKGROUND

Neither the fury of battle, the anguish of a mortal wound, nor the horrors of approaching death could subdue his gallant spirit. His last words were "Don't give up the Ship."¹

On 1 June 1813, Captain Lawrence uttered those five immortal words as he lay dying aboard the American frigate, U.S.S. *Chesapeake* following a losing battle with H.M.S. *Shannon*. Six years earlier the crew of H.M.S. *Leopard* had boarded the *Chesapeake*, the last American naval vessel to surrender in peacetime—the last until 23 January 1968, when a U.S. naval auxiliary, U.S.S. *Pueblo* (AGER 2) surrendered to a North Korean boarding party. No single event since Pearl Harbor has had such a profound effect on the U.S. Navy. Nothing in recent memory has so aroused the emotions and confused the mind as the story of U.S.S. *Pueblo*.

In considering the crisis and its relationship to public opinion, it is necessary to keep in mind the unique role of public opinion in a democracy. Harold Lasswell reminds us that the "level of democratic attainment depends upon public opinion, and that opinion, like democratic government itself, is a social variable of ever shifting scope, direction and intensity of expression."²

The *Pueblo* crisis is considered by the author to be a significant indicator of a fundamental shift in American public opinion. Supporting this belief is the contention by many Americans that had the *Pueblo* incident occurred 20 years

earlier, the outcome would have been "different." Obviously such a statement cannot be proven; however, what is implied is a belief that, given the national mood or sentiment of the period shortly after World War II, the piracy of the *Pueblo* was unlikely. If it had occurred, the national response would have been swift and unmistakable. Further, had an American naval vessel surrendered without a fight, court-martial for those responsible for the surrender would have seemed a certainty.

The *Pueblo* crisis dramatically illustrates the dilemma the Navy faces in dealing with a hostile public and thus provides the vehicle for this analysis. The paper is concerned with public opinion as reflected in the Nation's news media and statements of elected officials. The fundamental question posed concerns the restraints imposed by public sentiment and pressure upon the Navy's disposition of the case.

Despite the advent of other news media such as radio and television, the Nation's press continues to play a major role in molding public opinion. Ideally, bias in the press is limited to the editorial pages. But content studies have established that newspapers tend to favor in the news columns those issues and candidates supported editorially. Through the use of sensational headlines and emotional picture words, the press can convert "objective" news reporting into a partisan viewpoint. This technique was used extensively by the press during the *Pueblo* crisis and must be credited with a major contribution in portraying the Navy as the oppressor and the *Pueblo* crew as the oppressed.

THE CAPTURE AND RESPONSE

1411 *Pueblo* sent, . . . sure could use some help now.

1412 *Kamiseya* sent, . . . We still with you and doing all we can . . . figure by now Air Force got some birds winging your way.³

Military. One fact that surfaced from the Navy's investigation into the *Pueblo* affair was that the entire mission was generally considered to be one of low risk. It appears that the rationale for this assumption was that all nations would observe international law with respect to the right of U.S. ships to traverse the high seas. This faulty assumption is the apparent reason that the Navy neglected to develop a contingency plan to provide for aid to *Pueblo* in the event of an emergency. Thus, when *Pueblo* called for help, there was no help to send—at least in time to be of any assistance.

Incredible as it may seem, the vaunted military power of the United States proved impotent to deal with this crisis. "What the piracy of *Pueblo* did rehearse for the nation—and its adversaries—was a dismaying litany of military procedures and political assumptions that proved in the crunch to be inadequate, unimaginative and unbelievably overconfident."⁴

National. The first messages on the *Pueblo*'s difficulty arrived in Washington shortly before midnight Sunday, 22 January, approximately one-half hour before the *Pueblo* was boarded. The President received word of the incident around 0200 on the 23d. At 0830 that morning the Pentagon made the first public disclosure of the incident and candidly described the vessel as an AGER utilized for intelligence collection.⁵

The national reaction proved predictable and followed the usual crisis pattern of response American Presidents have resorted to since the advent of the cold war. The White House, in an effort to underline the urgency of the situation and thereby stimulate public opinion, ordered a partial mobilization of the Reserves. Some 14,787 Navy and Air Force reservists were called to active duty.⁶ The Navy responded by sending

a carrier task force to the crisis area. *Enterprise* was diverted from her Tonkin Gulf destination and directed north into the Sea of Japan. "Admiral Hyland, Commander in Chief of the Pacific Fleet, notified the Seventh Fleet to position units off Wonsan in international waters . . . to provide air coverage and prepare to recover or tow the *Pueblo*."⁷ The White House also directed Ambassador Goldberg, U.S. Representative to the United Nations, to bring the matter to the attention of the Security Council. Thus, the Nation was now ready to deal with the situation as demands for action issued forth from the Halls of Congress and elsewhere across the land. Congressional reaction generally followed predictable lines, with those usually identified with conservative and hawkish positions demanding a quick military response, while those more disposed to a liberal image counseled restraint. To be sure, however, there were significant defections from both sides. Senator Richard B. Russell, Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said that the action was "A breach of international law amounting to an act of war . . . it certainly behooves our Government to take a very strong position in demanding release of the ship and return of the men."⁸

Representative Bob Wilson, a member of the House Armed Services Committee, in calling for recovery of the ship and crew, stated that "If this means sending in military and naval forces, including air cover, it must be done—and done at once."⁹

Senator Strom Thurmond recommended to the President that the United States deliver "the North Koreans an ultimatum that the *Pueblo* will be taken by force if it is not delivered within a specified period of time."¹⁰

Somewhat surprisingly, Senator Frank Church of Idaho called the seizure ". . . act of war against the United

States. The ship must be returned at once, with all Americans aboard. Our national honor is at stake here."¹¹

Governor Ronald Reagan of California urged that warships be sent into Wonsan harbor and "get the ship back if it isn't released in twenty-four hours."¹²

On the other side of the debate, moderate voices urged restraint. Senator John Stennis, normally identified as a Senate "hawk," cautioned Americans to "avoid precipitous and rash over-reaction. Despite the anger and resentment we all share, we must proceed without panic."¹³

Senator Mansfield of Montana, in calling for "caution, coolness and restraint," said "any rash action would not only . . . seal the doom of the 83 Americans of the U.S.S. *Pueblo*, it could also bring about another bloody and prolonged involvement in Korea. . . ."¹⁴

Vietnam critic Senator Fulbright said, "The fact that we are deeply committed in Vietnam undoubtedly contributes to other countries feeling more free than normal from serious retaliation."¹⁵

The *Pueblo* seizure was similarly tied to Vietnam by Senator Symington who said that the North Korean action "verified the reservations I have had about the degree of our commitment in Vietnam."¹⁶

President Johnson, concerned over the rising level of emotion, set about to keep it under control. In a meeting with key congressional experts on foreign affairs and atomic energy, he emphasized the need for a calm approach, giving diplomacy every opportunity to work.

In assessing the mood of the United States during the period immediately following the *Pueblo*'s capture, Soviet news accounts are perhaps worthy of note. A *Pravda* dispatch of 25 January described the Washington scene as follows: "Commentators here point out

that the events off the coast will to some extent intensify chauvinist passion among certain segments of the U.S. population . . . as for sober-minded Americans, they do not believe the Pentagon statement that the *Pueblo* was supposedly seized in international waters."¹⁷ *Izvestia* reported from Washington on the same date that: ". . . In order to divert public attention from the U.S.A.'s aggressive actions against the Korean People's Democratic Republic, the American press has raised a provocational uproar. . . ."¹⁸

Contrary to *Izvestia*, however, the tone of the American press was surprisingly restrained, perhaps unconsciously recalling the U-2 and Bay of Pigs incidents in which American involvement was subsequently revealed, to the embarrassment of the Nation at large. There were exceptions, of course, but a *Wall Street Journal* editorial entitled "The Momentum of Belligerence" reminded its readers that the United States was in "fairly poor shape to wage a new Korean War" and urged moderation.

In an editorial entitled "The *Pueblo* Incident," *The New York Times* said: "Remembering the Gulf of Tonkin, Americans would be wise to keep cool and not leap to conclusions . . . about the North Korean capture of the American naval intelligence ship. . . ."¹⁹ Even among those sectors of the press normally identified with hawkish viewpoints, moderation was urged. For example, the ultraconservative Blackstone, Va., *Courier-Record* commented: "The score with North Korea will one day be settled but it is not in U.S. interests right now to be provoked into a war in Korea. . . ."²⁰

In reviewing the Nation's response immediately after the *Pueblo*'s capture, one senses an attempt to react in the classic manner of another era. The surprising fact though is how rapidly this indignant, belligerent attitude dissipated, or at least was directed into

other channels. To be sure, there were the hardliners who remained unmoved in their desire for positive action right up to the release of the *Pueblo's* crew, but this element, if not silent, at least appeared to be in the minority. Adm. Daniel Gallery, USN (Ret.) has written a rather volatile and emotional book on the *Pueblo* incident in which he describes the *Pueblo* case an "an ominous symptom of decay in our national character."²¹ Alan L. Otten, in a *Wall Street Journal* article, suggests, however, that the response is a sign of national maturity:

Perhaps, the United States, after decades of almost adolescent confidence in its infinite ability to shape and reshape conditions at home and abroad, is beginning to comprehend the confines of power. This long delayed maturing results, at least in part, from the nation's Vietnam involvement; it is an unexpected but valuable by-product of the war.²²

Whether character decay, national maturity, or whatever term is used, as a Nation we seemed preoccupied with other things.

Public frustration is shown in the results of polls taken by the American Institute of Public Opinion (Gallup) and Lou Harris in early February 1968. The Gallup poll sampling indicated Americans would like to make the North Koreans back down; while at the same time they were fearful of military involvement. Gallup revealed that four out of 10 Americans favored using force, if necessary, to get the ship back.

The Harris poll, on the other hand, showed that, of those polled, 76 percent believed that a prisoner exchange should be negotiated with North Korea. The Harris survey also showed that 58 percent of the public believed the crisis would be peacefully settled. "It is clear," the Harris survey pointed out, "that the American people are prepared to back military action in Korea, but they do not feel the *Pueblo* incident justifies another war."²³

Gallup poll (completed 6 February 1968)²⁴

1. "Do you think the present North Korea situation is likely to lead to war or not?"

Results:

Is likely	45%
Is not	40%
No opinion	15%

2. "What, in your opinion, should the U.S. do in regard to this situation?"

Results:

Get the Ship back—use force if necessary	40%
Negotiate as at present	21
Negotiate to a point—then use force	6
Too late now—should have taken ship back earlier	3
Declare war against North Korea; other extreme "hawkish" comments	3
Apologize for spying	2
No opinion	20
Other responses	<u>5</u>
	100%

3. "What do you think are the main reasons behind North Korea's action?"

Results:

Diversionsary tactic	29%
Communist plan; Russia, Red China are behind action	29
Harassment	13
Thought we were spying	3
Other responses	9
No opinion	22
	<hr/>
	105%

(Note: table adds to more than 100% because of multiple answers.)

4. "Do you approve or disapprove of the way President Johnson is handling the North Korea situation?"

Results:

Approve	46%
Disapprove	33
No opinion	21
	<hr/>
	100%

As with any poll, diverse conclusions can be drawn from the results of both these surveys. To this observer the results suggest national frustration rather than national maturity. While there was no clear mandate for massive retaliation to avenge the national honor, there definitely was no sentiment for acquiescence. Within a short time span the American public faced a number of mini-crises: Khe Sanh, the Vietcong Tet offensive, a lost H-bomb over Greenland, and civic violence. It seems likely that aggressive instincts of the majority were diverted by concern over these other problems as well.

IMPRISONMENT

While the Government continued to seek the release of the *Pueblo* and her crew through diplomatic channels, the American public began to ask agonizing questions regarding the events surrounding *Pueblo* and demanded forthright answers. From the outset, the Defense Department assumed a defensive position from which it never quite recovered. Initially, there were press

reports that Commander Bucher had made a number of calls for help, but the Department of Defense (DOD) quickly responded by saying these reports were wrong.²⁵ The questions concerning the lack of timely response received vague and often contradictory answers, but the Pentagon response was that "time and distance factors made it impossible to respond to the call that was made when the ship was boarded."²⁶

During a "Meet the Press" television broadcast on 4 February 1968, Defense Secretary McNamara was asked why the *Pueblo* could be captured so easily and why it wasn't better protected. McNamara replied: "... first, to have protected it would have been a provocative act. Secondly, it would have compromised the mission... And finally, the protection itself always runs the risk of leading to military escalation."²⁷ In responding to a question as to why we failed to rescue the *Pueblo* during the hours it took to tow the vessel into Wonsan, the Secretary stated:

... First, it was necessary to find out what happened, and it

takes time . . . Secondly, we do not maintain contingency plans to prevent the hijacking of each individual American ship operating on the high seas. Thirdly, any reaction force that would have moved into the area would have moved into the air control sectors of the North Korean Air Defense, manned by about 500 aircraft . . . And finally, I think it is quite clear with hindsight that no reaction force could have saved those men.²⁸

Other perplexing questions bothering many in the Nation were those to which the answers would have to wait for the crew's release. They, of course, concerned the *Pueblo's* actions as they were known then.

It appeared at first that Bucher might have been remiss for not having summoned help immediately, for not fighting back, for not scuttling his ship when it was obvious that she was going to be captured and, finally, for not attempting earlier to destroy the gear and intelligence that fell into Communist hands.²⁹

Admiral Moorer, in replying to questions concerning Bucher's actions, stated his support for the *Pueblo* skipper: "From what we know Bucher behaved well."³⁰ Despite this support from the Chief of Naval Operations, many naval officers were disturbed by the events surrounding the *Pueblo's* capture. Hanson W. Baldwin, the military affairs expert for *The New York Times*, wrote in March that "naval officers were generally shocked that the *Pueblo* had been captured by the enemy without a serious fight and that she had been taken into Wonsan harbor apparently without any attempt by her crew to sink her."³¹

The primary concern of the American public was the release of the crew. As early as 27 January, Senator Mansfield urged the United States to put all questions of fact aside and make any apologies required to free the *Pueblo's* crew and avert war.³² Involved in the question of an apology was, of course, the admission on the part of the United States that *Pueblo* did indeed violate North Korean waters. While all available evidence supported the U.S. position, no responsible Government official was ready to state unequivocally that *Pueblo* did not intrude. This reluctance brought forth a wave of skepticism as journalists and pundits reminded their readers of the so-called credibility gap ascribed to the Johnson administration. Norman Cousins, editor of the liberal *Saturday Review* wrote: "If we are lucky, we may have learned that there is something even more costly than the loss of an electronic-intelligence ship. That is the loss of confidence by the American people in what their government tells them. . . ."³³ The administration, the so-called military-industrial complex, the establishment, all were viewed as involved and the *Pueblo* just one more chink in the armor of American moral invincibility.

The attitude of some seemed to be influenced by the more sinister connotations attached to the *Pueblo's* intelligence mission. The tendency to view the incident as another abortive intelligence effort undoubtedly was a significant factor in the relative calm which followed the *Pueblo* capture. The public concern became a humanitarian one—do what is necessary to effect the safe return of the *Pueblo* crewmen. The circulation by North Korea of photographs allegedly showing *Pueblo* log entries within North Korean territorial waters prompted *The New York Times* to suggest editorially that the time had come to "introduce greater flexibility into the American position . . . The

chief objective now is to free the *Pueblo* crewmen."³⁴

The geographic center of public concern and activity in behalf of the *Pueblo* quite naturally was San Diego. Newspapers in the city were among the most vociferous in demanding action on behalf of the imprisoned crew. One, *The San Diego Union*, daily reminded its readers of the number of days *Pueblo* had remained in captivity. It deplored the lack of response by the Government: "The men still held by the North Koreans, the crew members of the ship, have been let down by their country. The nation has in turn been let down by the present administration."³⁵

A 14-year old school girl gained widespread publicity for her efforts to rally support for the *Pueblo* crew. A prayer vigil she organized drew a crowd of 800 persons to San Diego's Balboa Park.³⁶ Several organizations developed the common goal of putting pressure on the U.S. Government to gain release of the *Pueblo*. The strongest and most vocal operated in the San Diego area with their principal energies directed toward distributing bumper stickers (Remember the *Pueblo*!), gathering signatures on petitions, and writing Senators and Congressmen. The wife of Lt. Comdr. Alan Hemphill, close friend of the Buchers, headed what was described as a nationwide campaign to free the crew. In November, Mrs. Hemphill reported that some 75,000 bumper stickers had been distributed and 25,000 letters had been answered.³⁷

In early December, Mrs. Bucher accepted petitions containing 8,500 signatures collected by the 800-member "Release the *Pueblo* Committee" of San Diego. Another group on the west coast known as the "*Pueblo* Committee" reportedly collected some 100,000 signatures which were sent to the President and to members of Congress.³⁸

On the east coast a New York-based organization called the "National Committee for Responsible Patriotism"

gathered some 500,000 signatures and organized a motorcade to deliver them to President-elect Nixon.³⁹ Another group calling itself the "Remember the *Pueblo* Committee" was organized by the Reverend Paul Indstrom, pastor of the Church of Christian Liberty in Prospect Heights, Ill. Little is known about this organization except that it was viewed as a maverick or rump group by those based in the San Diego area. This may have been caused by Lindstrom's peculiar brand of concern for the crewmen. During a television interview, Reverend Lindstrom allegedly declared that national honor required that we get our men back even if they ended up getting killed in the process.⁴⁰ Despite the efforts of these groups, however, the *Pueblo* issue remained unresolved as the Government periodically announced that no progress had resulted from the negotiations with the Koreans.

During the summer months when the Nation went through its quadrennial ritual of electing a president, the case of the *Pueblo* became a partisan one, with Republicans avowing that such an act of international piracy would not be condoned by a Republican administration while Democrats generally avoided the issue. Meanwhile, the State Department continued to pursue its quest for release through diplomatic channels, and by the middle of October 1968 there were persistent reports that the release of the crew was imminent. Along with these reports were suggestions that the United States would apologize to the North Koreans, thus conceding a violation by *Pueblo* of North Korean waters. In retrospect, of course, it appears that the Government was using an oft-tried ploy of "leaking" stories to gauge the reaction of the American public.

Apparently, Government officials were satisfied that the step could safely be taken, for on 22 December 1968 the State Department released the following statement: "The crew of the U.S.S.

Pueblo was freed today at Panmunjom. They will immediately be given medical examinations and returned to the United States. Their families will meet them in San Diego. . . .⁴¹ The statement continued to describe the agreement reached by both sides, including the unprecedented and bizarre admission of guilt by the United States which was promptly repudiated by our negotiator at Panmunjom, General Woodward:

. . . The position of the United States Government with regard to the *Pueblo*, as consistently expressed in the negotiations at Panmunjom and in public, has been that the ship was not engaged in illegal activity . . . and that we could not apologize for actions which we did not believe took place. The document which I am going to sign was prepared by the North Koreans and is at variance with the above position, but my signature will not and cannot alter the facts. I will sign the document to free the crew and only to free the crew.⁴²

Before proceeding with the events attendant to the release, some mention should be made of Defense's plans for this historic occasion. Few events in the recent history of the Defense Department can rival the *Pueblo* crew release in terms of planning; particularly public affairs planning. Many of the plans dealt with contingencies such as releasing the crew at various areas around the globe other than Korea. Others, of course, dealt with the more sensitive aspects relating to the crew's mission and debriefing arrangements. Of particular interest were copies of texts to be used in situations such as briefing for *Pueblo* dependents, newsmen on legal aspects of processing crew members, and canned statements to be used by the official welcoming delegation.

The Navy and DOD each had special *Pueblo* committees designated to handle the myriad problems involved. Richard Fryklund, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs) headed the DOD task force. Capt. William Crowe was *Pueblo* action officer for the Navy. Later, Rear Adm. Leslie J. O'Brien was designated by CNO to answer all queries about the *Pueblo* for the Navy. One of the principal functions of the Fryklund group was to coordinate various plan preparations with the State Department. Capt. Vincent Thomas, at the time Public Affairs Officer for CINCPACFLT, was designated as head of the Command Information Bureau established in San Diego after the release.

Clearly, the extent of preparation and overriding concern for the public affairs aspects demonstrated DOD awareness and understanding of the public's interest and a new maturity in public relations planning. It was obvious to many in the Navy's Information Office, however, that the military position had to be a defensive one. Even then, the mail arriving at the Pentagon portrayed a marked belligerent, anti-Navy tone. While the volume of letters to the Information Office was not particularly heavy,⁴³ few had sympathy for the military position, and most condemned the lack of support and protection for the *Pueblo*. Thus, great care had to be taken to avoid further inflaming of public sentiment.

THE RELEASE

The manner in which the U.S. Government gained the release of the *Pueblo* crew prompted an initial outburst of editorial disbelief around the country. Critical appraisal, however, soon dissipated as the American people prepared to welcome the crew back from 11 months' imprisonment. *The New York Times* said in an editorial:

. . . Neither the United States nor North Korea emerges with un-

tarnished honor . . . America's already strained credibility was put deeper in doubt by the bizarre circumstances surrounding the crew's release. The one area in which the United States did distinguish itself, however, was in the Administration's unflagging concern with its humanitarian obligation to put the safety of the men ahead of all considerations of face or political prestige.⁴⁴

Secretary of State Rusk, in defending the action, stated that lengthy negotiations had failed to turn up any other way to effect the crew's return.

At 2130 (e.s.t.), 22 December 1968, Bucher and his crew were released at the bridge marking the dividing line between North and South Korea after almost a year as captives of the North Koreans. Up until the moment of actual release, U.S. officials expressed concern that the North Koreans might at the last minute renege on their part and not release the crew. Only three U.S. military photographers were permitted to record the signing of the agreement, which led to the crew's return, and to be present at the end of the bridge where the crewmembers actually returned to U.S. custody. This was a major point of protest of civilian news media representatives.⁴⁵

Once it began, the transfer proceeded smoothly, and the crew arrived shortly at the U.N. advance camp, approximately 4 miles from Panmunjom. There they were greeted by Gen. Charles H. Bonesteel, III, commander of U.S. and U.N. forces in Korea, and then transported by helicopter to the 121st Army Evacuation Hospital near Seoul for thorough medical examinations. However, prior to his departure for the hospital, and after it was ascertained that he was in good enough condition physically to appear briefly before the press, Commander Bucher held a short press conference. In his initial state-

ment, he attempted to answer one question that was foremost in the minds of many Americans—did *Pueblo* violate North Korean territorial waters?

. . . that at no time did the U.S.S. *Pueblo* ever intrude into territorial waters of North Korea. We never closed land closer than 13 miles—land or offshore islands. We were attacked on the open seas and we were captured on the open seas. It is pure and simple and plain as that.⁴⁶

The following day, after the crew had received their physical examinations, Rear Adm. Edwin M. Rosenberg, the senior naval officer on the scene and the Navy's official representative, and the commanding officer of the hospital met with the press. At that time Rosenberg, who by now had had the opportunity to meet and talk with each member of the crew, to note their physical condition, and to learn something of their treatment at the hands of the North Koreans, made the following observation: "From what I have seen the last day and a half, I have the utmost admiration for Captain Bucher and his crew . . . These men are heroes as far as I am concerned." At that time he also referred to Bucher as a "hero among heroes."⁴⁷ These phrases were not included in the prepared briefing referred to earlier. The text of that brief avoided any sensitive phrasing and generally took a low-key approach, using the phrase "pleased to have you." The remarks made by Admiral Rosenberg were apparently his own. One witness on the scene at the time suggests the admiral made them with regard to the crew's behavior while interned, for one of the striking things about the return was the unexpected preservation of the *Pueblo's* unit integrity—they were still a crew, and their morale was high. However, as a correspondent for a major daily subsequently noted, Admiral

94 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

Rosenberg would not respond to questions concerning the surrender of the ship, stating that he could not answer such questions because he did not want to prejudice the case.⁴⁸

Admiral Rosenberg's remarks were given prominent display on the front pages of newspapers across the Nation and were widely reported in television and radio reports.

While they were at the hospital and on the aircraft bringing them home, Bucher and his crew received a number of briefings. Among other things, these briefings stressed the importance of public affairs but cautioned crewmembers to limit their contact with the news media until the intelligence briefing had taken place. Stress was laid on the tremendous amount of public interest in them in the United States; however, crewmembers were advised that they did not have to participate in interviews at any time if they did not desire to. Crewmembers were also given copies of a DOD directive which spelled out the restrictions regarding information which could be given to the press.

It was to be Navy policy from the outset that the public be made as fully aware as possible of the activities of the crew, limited only by national security considerations and individual rights.

Air Force C-141's bringing the crewmembers back to the States made a brief refueling stop at Midway Island. While there, a small pool of newsmen who had accompanied Adm. John J. Hyland, Pacific Fleet Commander from Hawaii, heard a long statement from Bucher and then were afforded a very brief opportunity to question him. The last question of the conference was "Why didn't you fire your guns?" His response—an extremely emotional one—was never either officially released by the Navy nor used by the newsmen present; it was put "off the record" at that point primarily because all concerned readily recognized that any discussion of this subject by Bucher

should properly take place before the upcoming court of inquiry and not during a press conference at a time when he was physically and mentally exhausted.

The Navy and the City of San Diego had cooperated in preparing for the return of the *Pueblo* crew. The Navy flew the families of the crewmembers to San Diego so that a reunion in time for Christmas was possible. The San Diego Chamber of Commerce provided, at the chamber's expense, lodging for the families at the El Cortez Hotel. Some 72 hours after they had crossed the bridge at Panmunjom, the *Pueblo* crewmembers were reunited with their families. An entire Nation joyfully witnessed the emotional reunion via live television from the Naval Air Station at Miramar. The scene might be described as a massive national catharsis—the Nation wept tears of relief and happiness. Said *The San Diego Union* in an editorial on the day of the crew's return:

... Today San Diego is again happy with tears as 82 men whose names will be permanently inscribed in history . . . come home to San Diego. We are proud to represent the entire nation as the host for these gallant men. There could be no better Christmas present. It is fitting and proper that San Diego should be selected as host for the returning heroes and a place for them to rest and relax. . . .⁴⁹

At the airport ceremony, comments were made by Governor Ronald Reagan, Senator Margaret Chase Smith of Maine, Mayor Frank Curran of San Diego, and Vice Adm. Allen M. Shinn, Commander, Naval Air Forces Pacific. The welcome was the type the country normally reserves for heroes and, so it seemed, to much of the Nation they were. To be sure there were those who questioned the praise and adulation heaped upon

the *Pueblo* crew. For instance, Admiral Gallery in his book on the incident stated:

We are becoming a nation of phonies. What you are doesn't matter much—it's your public image that counts... when the *Pueblo's* men were brought back to the United States, their arrival was featured on nationwide TV and they were hailed as conquering heroes. While a prisoner, the *Pueblo's* skipper... was made an honorary citizen of Pueblo, Arizona [sic]. Upon his return, the town gave him a triumphal welcome and civic reception. Proposals have been made to award medals to all men in his crew... Bucher and his men are products of their times... Our way of life has produced a generation of sailors and officers who surrender without a fight, and millions of Americans applaud them for it!⁵⁰

Senator Russell likewise questioned the hero appellation for the crew: "Those men are being hailed as heroes. They are heroes in the sense that they survived the imprisonment. But they did sign a great many statements that did not reflect any great heroism in my mind."⁵¹

But like the cries for action sounded almost a year earlier when *Pueblo* was seized, these, too, seemed strangely anachronistic. After all, the American public had not been given reason to think otherwise of Bucher and his crew. At least the official Navy statements gave no hint of disfavor with Bucher. The speeches at the air station by the assembled dignitaries did nothing to detract from the hero image.

Bucher, during the course of an emotional statement at Miramar upon the crew's return, described North Korea as a land "completely devoid of

humanity, completely devoted to the enslavement of men's minds." Later the same day, after the crew had been transported to Balboa Naval Hospital from Miramar, Rear Admiral Rosenberg appeared at a press conference with Lt. Edward Murphy, *Pueblo's* executive officer, at which time Murphy gave his impressions of life in custody. According to *The New York Times*, Murphy seemed "willing to discuss the entire *Pueblo* story with newsmen but indicated he was under some sort of wraps from higher authority." Newsmen then confronted Admiral Rosenberg with the charge that a "lid" was being put on information. In support of their contention, they recalled earlier that "when Commander Bucher began speaking, somewhat emotionally (at Miramar), about the shooting of four men in the crew, Navy officers next to him appeared to be cautioning him against too much discussion."⁵² Admiral Rosenberg replied merely that the men had been advised of their rights and of the fact that discussion before the inquiry was held might prejudice their case. This point was subsequently re-emphasized to newsmen almost daily by Captain Thomas. However, this guidance had no relation to the alleged incident at the time of arrival on which newsmen were attempting to base their contention of a "lid"; in the latter circumstance, senior personnel, and in particular the senior medical officer who had traveled with the crew from Korea, were concerned for a very tired and emotionally spent Bucher and did not want to see him embark on a lengthy emotional statement that might not be in his own best interests.

The news media, stymied in their quest for individual eyewitness accounts of what actually happened, occupied themselves with reassessing the chain of events as known up to that point; reporting on the Navy's preparations for the inquiry and other associated trivia to fill up the public's voracious appetite

for *Pueblo* stories. In a day-after-Christmas postmortem, the *Christian Science Monitor* editorialized:

Welcome as is the news of the release of the crew of the U.S.S. *Pueblo* that whole affair remains highly messy and unsatisfactory. It should and we trust that it will become an object lesson from which future American surveillance efforts will profit. . . . Meanwhile Christmas for all America was happier knowing that the 82 crewmen of the *Pueblo* were back with their families for the holiday. The past year has been a turbulent one in the United States. It was a far rougher one for those brave men, who, doing only their duty, suddenly found themselves in the bitterest kind of captivity.⁵³

On the same day, *The New York Times* carried a story on the front page which discussed the upcoming inquiry and subtly suggested that Bucher's behavior just might be suspect after all. In referring to the inquiry as "one of the most sensitive in recent naval history," the article quoted one naval officer as saying, "Every man in the Navy will be watching to see what the court recommends. . . . was Commander Bucher right in surrendering his ship without a fight? . . . and what about the confessions? They certainly told the enemy more than name, rank and serial number." The column acknowledged that "there is tremendous sympathy for Commander Bucher and the 81 other survivors of the intelligence ship. . . ." ⁵⁴

Joseph C. Harsch, noted columnist for *The Christian Science Monitor* devoted one of his columns to a discussion of the *Pueblo* affair.

Questions are now being asked about the behavior of skipper and crew, both when the ship was

taken and afterward in prison. Did they do all that a country with a proud naval history expects of its warrior seamen? Is this the way Decatur or Preble or Lawrence would have behaved? What would admirals like Farragut or Porter have to say? Above all, what would John Paul Jones think?⁵⁵

In answering the above questions Harsch drew a distinction that would subsequently provide an alibi of sorts for naval officers genuinely concerned over the surrender of *Pueblo*, namely that the reputations of Decatur, Preble, et al., were all made and those traditions were all established by fighting seamen aboard ships of the battleline of the U.S. Navy. The *Pueblo* was not a "ship of the line" of the U.S. Navy. And it was not manned by men trained for war. Thus, having drawn a distinction between ships of the line and those not equipped for war, Mr. Harsch renders a judgment of Bucher's behavior: ". . . so far as present evidence permits it would be fair judgement that captain and men behaved about as must be expected with ships of this kind engaged in the kind of work the *Pueblo* was doing when taken."⁵⁶

As the crew continued to undergo intensive intelligence debriefing, Secretary of Defense Clark M. Clifford ordered Secretary of the Navy Ignatius to "conduct an inquiry into the treatment of the crew of the U.S.S. *Pueblo* by the North Korean authorities."⁵⁷ This, of course, would be in addition to the regular Navy Court of Inquiry scheduled for mid-January. The latter had been delayed due to the strain of the intelligence debriefing or by what doctors termed "physical and emotional exhaustion of Commander Bucher."⁵⁸ The court itself would be headed by Vice Adm. Harold G. Bowen, Commander, Antisubmarine Warfare Forces, Pacific, and would, for the most part, be conducted in public. Said *The Christain*

Science Monitor: "A navy court of inquiry is to look into all aspects of the seizure and the ensuing captivity. The Navy has been careful to point out that the inquiry would be expected regardless of any possibilities of wrongdoing." With regard to the Navy's position on the crew's behavior, the same article stated: "So far, the Navy has been going out of its way to give the impression through a well-managed public relations campaign that the Navy benevolently views the crew as young heroes.⁵⁹ And so it appeared.

THE COURT OF INQUIRY

Prior to the start of the Court of Inquiry, the Navy announced several legal decisions with direct bearing on the upcoming hearing into the *Pueblo* crew's behavior. On 28 December 1968 the Navy issued a public statement which advised that the Military Code of Conduct was only a guideline telling servicemen how they should behave in combat or captivity and violating it was not a criminal offense. Any misconduct, however, on the part of those involved would be tried under the Uniform Code of Military Justice.⁶⁰

Then, on 13 January, the Navy announced that the Judge Advocate General had ruled that the *Pueblo* crewmen would be considered as "illegal detainees" and not prisoners of war. Further, the Navy had ruled that North Korea could not be considered an "enemy" because the United States and North Koreans had ended hostilities.⁶¹ The effect of these rulings was to sharply limit the grounds on which a court-martial could be based. In commenting on these decisions, Capt. William R. Newsome, legal counsel for the Court of Inquiry, said, "Since they (the North Koreans) are not the enemy we don't have prisoners of war. And when we don't have prisoners of war we don't have the application of the code of conduct."⁶² Captain Newsome was

then asked whether one could surrender to a nonenemy and he replied, "Well, I don't know, I honestly don't know."⁶³

The Court of Inquiry began on Monday, 20 January 1969, in an amphitheater on the Naval Amphibious Base, Coronado, Calif. According to Bernard Weinraub, who covered the court proceedings for *The New York Times* and other newspapers across the Nation, "The peninsula of Coronado swarmed with reporters and rumors. The inquiry would be a coverup, a whitewash, the British journalists were convinced . . . a pudgy American magazine writer insisted it could be nothing more or less . . . the Navy would not tolerate . . . the truth."⁶⁴

The news media, whether conscious or not, conveyed an underlying tone of skepticism about the fairness of the Court of Inquiry. The image conveyed to the public unfortunately appeared to place the Navy in the role of the "oppressor" while Commander Bucher and the crew remained national heroes. The carefully planned Navy public affairs program undoubtedly blunted much of the media effort, but bias was obvious nonetheless in the reporters' use of such phrases as "the brass," "Drumhead court," "Kangaroo Court," et cetera.

The daily dispatches constantly portrayed Commander Bucher as "wan and thin," "weeping and trembling," "pale and drawn," and when he spoke it was usually in a "choked voice" or with "quivering lips." Commander Lloyd Mark Bucher recounts his story of the seizure of the *Pueblo* in a monotone that rarely breaks. He appears tired and powerless before the admirals who sit behind an elevated table and watch him . . .⁶⁵

Other stories dealt with Commander Bucher's background and his deprived childhood, his life as an orphan at Boys Town, Nebr., his devoted family, all of which undoubtedly had a tremendous impact in generating an outpouring of

public sympathy for him and, conversely, contempt for those who would "persecute" him further. Senator Dominick, Republican of Colorado, charged that the Navy was trying to blame Bucher for the *Pueblo* affair rather than the officials who denied him the means to destroy the ship's secret equipment.⁶⁶ And Senator Mansfield, the Senate Majority Leader, indicated that at least two Senate committees would want to look into the *Pueblo* affair.⁶⁷ Editorials deplored the personalization of the inquiry:

The Navy Court of Inquiry . . . has now degenerated into a personalized inquiry into the conduct of Commander Lloyd M. Bucher, the skipper who gave up his ship . . . what is shockingly clear is that, only weeks after being freed from this harrowing experience, Commander Bucher is being forced to undergo the excruciating emotional agony of an inquiry that is almost a trial . . . The real problem in the *Pueblo* inquiry is to bring up to date the rules that govern command and intelligence in vessels operating under Pentagon orders. Then their officers and crews will have a clear idea of their obligations under attack. Certainly now there is neither need nor excuse for subjecting Commander Bucher to the emotional trial he is being forced to endure.⁶⁸

If there had been any doubts as to where the public's sentiment lay, these were dispelled by the reaction to the session of 23 January. As Commander Bucher began discussing the boarding of the *Pueblo* he was interrupted by Captain Newsome who read the following statement: "Commander Bucher, it is my duty to apprise you of the fact that the facts revealed in this court of inquiry render you to be a suspect of a

violation of Navy regulations, Article 0730."⁶⁹

The Navy had anticipated and prepared for this moment with utmost care. Commander Bucher and his civilian attorney, Miles Harvey, had been briefed on the procedure and were aware that, as required by the Uniform Code of Military Justice, a warning would be given him at the appropriate time. According to Capt. Vincent Thomas, the Public Affairs Officer, the press likewise had been briefed prior to the session of 22 January to expect the warning as a required, routine, legal procedure.⁷⁰

The reaction was immediate, swift, and overwhelming. Despite the meticulous care and advance planning, Navy explanations were drowned in a cacophony of strident criticism. The stream of letters that had been arriving at the Pentagon since the *Pueblo* capture suddenly turned into a torrent. The sentiments were strong in their support of Bucher and extremely critical of the Navy's efforts to "punish Bucher." An estimated 3,000 letters poured into the Navy's Information Office at the Pentagon from all parts of the country. The volume and tone were described as "unprecedented" by a veteran public affairs officer. Each letter received an official reply in which the Navy attempted to answer the charges.

In a speech before the American Bar Foundation in Chicago, on 25 January, Admiral Moorer, obviously upset by the barrage of criticism, stated that the Navy "is searching for facts—not scapegoats." In attempting to put the nature of the inquiry in proper perspective, Admiral Moorer wanted to "reassure the American people that the Court of Inquiry is being conducted in a straightforward, legal and objective manner." He stated that he was "deeply troubled—the Navy is deeply troubled—that what was a routine and totally correct legal procedure has been widely misinterpreted."⁷¹ The admiral stressed the

fact that the warning was not unexpected by Commander Bucher and his counsel and repeated the counsel's reply to Captain Newsome:

We have discussed this matter with Commander Bucher in some detail. As you know, we had some preliminary conversations with you before this Court of Inquiry convened as to the procedures that would be followed and the manner by which Commander Bucher's story and the story of the U.S.S. *Pueblo* could be presented to this Court. We obviously anticipated the situation that we find ourselves in at the present moment . . . In view of your warning, Commander Bucher persists in his desire to fully and completely tell this Court of Inquiry the details of the 23rd of January and the events subsequent thereto.⁷²

Press accounts of the warning incident reported that Commander Bucher was visibly stunned and shaken by the warning. Some reports said that tears welled in his eyes. "There was another aspect to the hearing: a feeling that Commander Bucher had decided to shake the Naval establishment, to thrust his case before the public and stir the compassion of the American people, severely damaging his career but vindicating his actions."⁷³

Commander Bucher undoubtedly was aware of the public sympathy and sentiment in his behalf. What is not known, however, is the extent to which he directed his remarks toward that support. It is the feeling of some public affairs officers who know Commander Bucher and who worked with him that he did not consciously exploit public opinion for his own purposes. The debate continued, however, and a hostile (to the Navy) press became even more so. Anti-Navy sentiment cropped

up in "Letters to Editor" columns: "The majority of citizens of the country admire the moral courage and the common sense and humanity of Commander Bucher in saving the lives of his crew. Let us not allow the situation to be confused by any 'mumbo jumbo' about the technicalities of Navy regulations."⁷⁴

The furor over the "warning" was having a profound effect upon the Court of Inquiry and the Navy itself.

At a brief news conference on the 27th, Miles Harvey made a statement for the *Pueblo* skipper in which he described the Court of Inquiry as being "completely fair."

Commander Bucher feels an over-reaction has set in concerning the warning of the court. In his mind and our mind the court of inquiry has been completely fair . . . Commander Bucher sees all of this as an opportunity to clear any slur that might have existed on his name and present the facts to the entire nation . . . The record of these proceedings will tell the full story of the *Pueblo* and answer all the questions that need to be answered.⁷⁵

Harvey acknowledged that Bucher had received about 300 telegrams of support since the Court of Inquiry began. "Many of the telegrams show concern for his physical health . . . I can assure you he is in good physical condition and mentally alert and these proceedings have not been trying on his physical or mental health."⁷⁶ There is no evidence to indicate that the Navy urged Bucher or his attorney to issue such a statement. It was, however, welcomed by harassed naval officials. Captain Thomas noted that the court had received several hundred letters and telegrams and that the general tenor was a source of considerable concern for the court. The telegrams and letters indicated that in the mind of many people "Commander Bucher was being court-martialed."⁷⁷

100 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

Congressional interest remained at a peak, reflecting constituent sentiment. Senators Dominick and Young (Democrat, Ohio) called for Congressional investigations of the *Pueblo* incident. While Representative Edwin D. Eshleman (Republican, Pennsylvania) urged newly appointed Secretary of the Navy Chafce to halt "An inquisition of a man who is neither physically nor mentally in position to be subjected to the kind of investigation being conducted."⁷⁸

The Navy, facing a storm of public criticism, continued its efforts to "educate" the public as to the real nature and purpose of the proceedings. The press received daily reminders from Navy lawyers and public affairs officers that the investigation was an "inquiry" and not a trial, stressing that the word "court" was a misnomer. Naval officers might have been divided on the merits of Bucher's behavior, but they generally agreed on the need for a full-scale inquiry into the *Pueblo* story. The problem was in convincing the public. Much of the criticism undoubtedly was generated by a lack of understanding of the military judicial system. From the outset the procedures were explained, and, as outlined previously, great care was taken to see that the public was informed on all aspects of the case except those of a sensitive security nature. Again, emotion tended to obscure rational understanding of what was transpiring at Coronado. Some writers did make honest efforts to understand the Navy's position. As an example, Vermont Royster writing in the *Wall Street Journal* stated: "... the Navy is doing not only what it has traditionally done but what it ought to do. For that much, at least, there should be public praise, not public censure... when men accept responsibility they should also accept accountability for what they do with it..."⁷⁹ And *The New York Times* said in an editorial:

... The hearings are putting an excruciating emotional strain on Commander Bucher... but the fairness with which the Navy is conducting them provides needed reassurance that they will result in a clarification and modernization of the rules governing command in vessels under Pentagon orders, not an effort to find personal scapegoats.⁸⁰

Support or even tacit approval of what the Navy was doing, however, was slow in coming if, in fact, it was ever admitted by the news media. The fact is that the press generally remained antagonistic toward the Navy. Captain Thomas attributes the basic misunderstanding of the warning given Bucher to this fact.

Conceding press hostility, the Navy did little to improve its standing with the fourth estate by denying requests from *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Reader's Digest* for transcripts of the Court of Inquiry proceedings. According to knowledgeable sources in the Navy, the question was debated in Washington with legal and public affairs officials agonizing over why could the press not be provided transcripts. High-level Navy officials apparently found the arguments for doing so unconvincing. Navy Regulations, article 1251, states that records of Navy courts of inquiry "are intended solely for use in the naval establishment and are privileged" and "confidential."⁸¹

The rationale behind the Navy decision, however, appeared to be a fear that in releasing the transcript to newspapers all over the country, some might print only parts of the proceedings and therefore convey a misleading impression. This reasoning, if in fact valid, seems inadequate in view of the situation prevailing then.

The Navy's action, in regard to the

transcript question, was certainly not a fatal or even major error in the *Pueblo* chain of events. By that time the lines had been drawn in the public mind; it is doubtful whether the Navy had any remaining options that could have changed national sentiment. The task became one of keeping the situation from getting any worse, for it began to appear that the Navy, not Commander Bucher, was being tried—a trial conducted in the pages of the Nation's press.

A cartoon by Bill Mauldin portrayed an admiral dangling from a giant crane, holding a Navy commander in front of him saying, "Bucher, I'm afraid you might be on a bit of a hook";⁸² while Oliphant, cartoonist for the *Denver Post* showed four Navy admirals in a rowboat named "Navy Brass" approaching a mine labeled "Bucher's *Pueblo* Testimony." The cartoon was captioned "Explosive Issue: A peril for the probers no less than the probed."⁸³ *The Christian Science Monitor*, in an editorial, stated:

The Coronado inquiry is far from over. But . . . Commander Bucher may be well on the way to becoming America's newest anti-hero. And if anybody is on trial—at least in the view of the general public—it is men much closer to the top in the United States Navy than he.⁸⁴

Also indicting the Navy, James Reston said: "Not only Commander Lloyd M. Bucher, the *Pueblo*'s skipper, is suspect in this tragic incident, but the Navy and the Defense Department are also under suspicion, and the latter are in effect sitting in judgment on themselves."⁸⁵

The Navy's less than successful efforts to convince the American public that the Court of Inquiry was not a "trial" was vividly demonstrated during a Presidential news conference held on 6 February 1969. In response to a re-

porter's question as to whether it was proper for the Navy "to be in effect sitting in a judgment on itself," President Nixon replied:

. . . As a Navy man, I know that the Navy has procedures which I think very adequately protect the rights of defendants in courts martial. Second, I believe those procedures from my investigation to date have been very scrupulously followed . . . I . . . will examine the whole record myself both with regard to the individual guilt or innocence of the people involved and also with regard to the even more important objective of seeing to it that this kind of incident can be avoided in the future.⁸⁶

The President's use of the terms "guilt" and "innocence" emphasized the very misunderstanding the Navy had taken great pains to clarify, namely that in the proceedings underway at Coronado the guilt or innocence of the *Pueblo* crew was not at stake. Subsequent clarification by the White House that the President only wished to emphasize that he would give the *Pueblo* matter thorough review provided little comfort to discouraged Navy officials.

On 18 February 1969, L. Mendel Rivers, Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, established a special subcommittee "to conduct a full and thorough inquiry into all matters arising from the capture and internment of the U.S.S. *Pueblo* and its crew by the North Korean Government."⁸⁷ The subcommittee, headed by Otis G. Pike (Democrat, New York) began formal hearings on 4 March 1969. Unlike the Coronado proceedings, the Pike subcommittee appeared to concentrate more on the larger questions of Navy preparedness, code of conduct applicability, and intelligence operations. Like the Navy Court of Inquiry, however,

102 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

they provided additional grist for America's press mills.

The *Pueblo* remained front page news, much to the Navy's discomfort. The headlines generated out of Washington reported a discouraging picture of a Navy caught ill-prepared to deal with a *Pueblo*-type emergency, of serious deficiencies in the military command structure. The stories emanating from Coronado continued to recite the distressing litany but in human, emotional terms.

On 13 March 1969, almost 8 weeks after it started, Admiral Bowen announced that the Court of Inquiry was completed. In reviewing the almost 8 weeks of testimony, the news media remained firmly in the camp of the *Pueblo* crew. The harsh criticism to which the Navy had been subjected for most of the court was muted somewhat, but there was no mistaking the dominant sentiment. The *Wall Street Journal*, in a postinquiry editorial opined:

If the court of inquiry's findings are as fair as its hearings have been, then, they will show that whatever questions there may be about the commander's conduct, the big mistakes were made at far higher levels. For the Navy, the lesson of the *Pueblo* is an old one: If you send men on a difficult mission ill-equipped, ill-prepared and ill-instructed, you cannot expect exemplary performance.⁸⁸

The Pike inquiry would provide the press *Pueblo* continuity for another 2 months.

THE DECISION

One point not elaborated upon earlier in this paper is the Code of Conduct. While it not intended to investigate the applicability of the code, the prominent role given it both by the Navy and the news media before,

during, and after the Court of Inquiry requires that it be discussed. As noted earlier in this paper, prior to the beginning of the inquiry the Navy had defined the code as a guideline for servicemen—nothing more. Captain Newsome told reporters the code was “like the Ten Commandments. It's not something you can violate punitively.”⁸⁹ Yet, during 8 weeks at Coronado the code dominated much of the proceedings as the crew's performance was measured against it by the court.

Each crewmember was asked to describe his reasons for violating the code. This testimony provided much of the drama and emotional copy for reporters. At one point during the hearings Captain Newsome asked Bucher: “Do you feel there was proper indoctrination of the Code of Conduct for members of the crew?”⁹⁰ Bucher, after commenting that the evaluation was hindsight, replied: “Considering what happened, neither myself nor the crew had adequate training in the Code of Conduct.”⁹¹

The Navy's original position to view the code as inspirational rather than penal appeared to undergo a change during and subsequent to the Court of Inquiry. For instance, on 20 February, Captain Newsome said that, “It has become obvious that the Code of Conduct is applicable in this situation.”⁹² If the public was bewildered and confused, they were not alone; the Pike subcommittee shared this sense of bewilderment.

Testimony received by the subcommittee from representatives of the Department of the Navy resulted in a very confusing picture as to the applicability of the Code of Conduct to the members of the U.S.S. *Pueblo* crew. Also confusion was created in the minds of the members of the subcommittee as to whether or not a violation of the Code of Conduct constituted

an action punishable under the Uniform Code of Military Justice.⁹³

In testimony before the Pike subcommittee, Rear Adm. Joseph B. McDevitt, the Navy's Judge Advocate General, stated that the code was "not a punitive article on which punishment can be based." But then, under questioning by members of the subcommittee, he admitted that all violations of major provisions of the code were punishable as breaches of the code general orders and of the Uniform Code of Military Justice.⁹⁴

The ambivalent views of the Navy as expressed above vividly demonstrated the dilemma it faced—weighing military duty against humanitarian considerations.

Admiral Gallery severely chastises the Navy in this regard. In referring to the "Ten Commandments" view expressed by Captain Newsome, Admiral Gallery relates:

When I learned the Ten Commandments I was told that a rather severe penalty eventually was attached to violating them. Of course, those who don't believe in this penalty don't take the Ten Commandments very seriously either. But it seems to me an executive order from the President should be taken very seriously indeed by members of our Armed Forces.⁹⁵

The retired admiral goes on to suggest that the Navy simply sought to avoid the extremely unpopular task of court-martialing the *Pueblo* crew for violating the code. It would indeed appear that the Navy's vacillation was generated to some extent by a desire to avoid the issue in the face of strong public hostility.

The unfortunate conclusion must be drawn, however, that the Navy's

handling of the Code of Conduct dilemma did little to improve public understanding of the issues involved and may, in fact, have had just the opposite effect. While the Navy may have hesitated to take a stand, the news media as well as Congressmen called for changes to the code to reflect behavior that could be realistically expected of normal men. Not a few reminded their readers and constituents of the precedent set by the Government in signing a false confession to obtain the crewmembers release.

In the few days following the end of the Court of Inquiry at Corouado, Navy officials in the Washington Public Affairs Office concerned themselves with formulating a plan for handling the next and possibly the most explosive (public relationswise) event in the *Pueblo* case, the Court of Inquiry's decision. Here again the situation was fraught with complexities. Inasmuch as the court had been ordered convened by Adm. John J. Hyland, Commander in Chief of the Pacific Fleet, the findings would be forwarded to him for further action, and then up the chain of command to the Secretary of the Navy. Conceivably, there were at least four reviewing points along the chain of command that could pose problems for the Navy of a public relations nature. Sensing this, public affairs officials argued successfully that the decisions and recommendations should be announced only once—at the top—rather than at each point along the chain. The public relations rationale behind this, of course, was that one bad headline was better than four!

On 6 May 1969, at 11:30 a.m., Secretary of the Navy Chafee read a statement to an assembled press conference at the Pentagon. In his statement, the Secretary reviewed the findings, opinions, and recommendations of the Court of Inquiry and the recommendations of the subsequent reviewing authorities. The Court of Inquiry had recommended that Commander Bucher

and Lieutenant Harris (Officer-in-Charge of the Intelligence Detachment aboard the *Pueblo*) be tried by general courts-martial; that Lieutenant Murphy (Executive Officer), be issued a letter of admonition; and that Rear Adm. Frank L. Johnson and Capt. Everett B. Gladding (Director Naval Security Group, Pacific) each receive nonjudicial punishment in the form of a letter of reprimand.

The convening authority, Admiral Hyland, recommended letters of reprimand for both Bucher and Harris instead of courts-martial. Recommendations in the cases of Murphy and Admiral Johnson were approved. The recommendation to issue a letter of reprimand to Gladding was withdrawn by Admiral Hyland. The Chief of Naval Operations concurred in the recommendations of Admiral Hyland.

The Secretary then stated:

As a result of my review, I have decided that no disciplinary action will be taken against any of the personnel involved in the *Pueblo* incident... I make no judgment regarding the guilt or innocence of any of the officers of the offenses alleged against them... I am convinced, however, that neither individual discipline, nor the state of discipline or morale in the Navy, nor any other interest requires further legal proceedings with respect to any personnel involved in the *Pueblo* incident.

Secretary Chafee reviewed each of the recommendations and added his own assessment. He concluded the statement by saying:

In light of the considerations set out above, I have determined that the charges against all of the officers concerned will be dismissed and I have directed the

Chief of Naval Operations to take appropriate action to that end. Every feasible effort is being made to correct any Navy deficiencies which may have contributed to the *Pueblo*'s seizure. The Navy's leaders are determined that the lessons learned from this tragedy shall be translated into effective action.⁹⁶

The decision produced a somewhat mixed reaction in the press and among Congressmen. The press generally appeared caught by surprise not only at the final outcome, but with the unusual manner in which the Navy handled the announcement. Key congressional figures indicated they accepted Chafee's decision. Senator Richard Russell, who had earlier questioned the hero role for the *Pueblo* crew, accepted Chafee's conclusion on the basis that "there was dereliction all down the line... It wouldn't have been fair to punish or admonish the juniors in the matter if it hadn't also gone across the board to the joint chiefs."⁹⁷ Representative Pike, then conducting his own inquiry, commented to reporters: "The Navy took a hardline position which the Secretary tempered with mercy."⁹⁸ Senator Dominick, who earlier had charged the Navy with trying to make Bucher a scapegoat, called the recommendations of the Court of Inquiry "simply ridiculous" and indicated his intention of pressing the case.⁹⁹ The press, clearly retaining its sympathy for the crew, generally supported Secretary Chafee. Said *The New York Times* in an editorial:

Lawyers have a saying that hard cases make bad law. Secretary of the Navy John H. Chafee may have had this maxim in mind when he wisely decided against a general court-martial for Cdr Lloyd Bucher and Lt Stephen R. Harris... In tempering justice

with compassion, Secretary Chafee probably reflects the view of most Americans, summed up in his comment that the principals in the *Pueblo* case "have suffered enough."¹⁰⁰

EPILOG

The power of public opinion must be faced, understood and dealt with. It provides the psychological environment in which organizations prosper or perish.¹⁰¹

During the course of the unfolding events of the *Pueblo* crisis, the U.S. Navy recognized this "power of public opinion" and, for the most part, appeared to understand it. The efforts in dealing with it were caused by a number of factors, many of which, as we have seen, were simply beyond the Navy's ability to influence. If public relations considerations were not paramount in the *Pueblo* case, they were at least of primary importance; the extensive planning and attention to public relations detail demonstrated this. The final decision by the Secretary of the Navy, in the author's opinion, represents an unmistakable compromise with the forces of public opinion in this country. The news media, admittedly hostile, undoubtedly were able to influence public opinion to a degree. More accurately, however, the press reflected or mirrored sentiments shared by many Americans. To be sure, the initial reactions to the *Pueblo* seizure followed the somewhat predictable conservative-liberal dichotomy, but lines rapidly blurred as public indignation shifted from the North Koreans to the Government at home. Political identification, notwithstanding, there appeared to be a genuine reluctance on the part of the American public to take a stand until more was known—a reluctance born of experience with the U-2 and Bay of Pigs. Americans generally united in their

efforts to gain the crew's release, and this unity was reflected in editorial content of both the liberal eastern press and the more conservative rural and western press. The effort became a humanitarian one, a not unimportant byproduct of which was the tremendous amount of public sympathy for the crew during the inquiry. Here the Navy fostered this mood by indicating its support for the crew through statements issued by its leaders.

The extraordinary means the Government used to retrieve the crew strongly suggest official recognition and surrender to popular sentiment. There were few diplomatic precedents offered in explanation. The Navy, accurately gauging national sentiment and latent hostility from the outset, assumed a defensive position vis-a-vis the media. Arrayed against the Navy was a hostile press waiting for an opportunity to strike were the Navy to take a wrong step. In assessing the reasons for this phenomenon, several key factors emerge:

- **Credibility Gap of the Johnson Administration.** It may be recalled that domestic criticism of the administration reached a peak in the winter of 1968. Vietnam and our involvement there proved the major contributor with the February 1968 Vietcong Tet offensive acting as a catalyst. There was a marked cynicism evident in the mood of the press. Editorialists and pundits assumed a skeptical stance in relation to Government pronouncements. *Pueblo* occurred during this period of dwindling confidence in the American Government.

- **Antimilitarism.** For the first time since before World War II, the military became the target of heavy domestic criticism. Much of this can be ascribed to the general disenchantment associated with the credibility gap cited above. For the Navy and the *Pueblo* crisis, however, the unfolding story

simply aggravated public manifestations of antimilitarism and conversely promoted a hero image for the *Pueblo* skipper and his crew. Related to this was a general public concern or feeling of helplessness in the face of huge impersonal bureaucratic institutions. Many, frustrated by the system, found it easy to identify with Commander Bucher—a helpless victim of an insensitive, unresponsive, military bureaucracy. Not surprisingly, a considerable amount of sympathy for the *Pueblo* skipper could be found within the Navy, particularly among more junior officers who seemed to vicariously share Bucher's sense of frustration. Admiral Gallery in noting this situation said: "... one of the frightening aspects of this case is that if the Navy did decide to court-martial Bucher, a court composed of the rising generation of naval officers might acquit him."¹⁰²

● **Humanitarianism.** As a Nation we have taken pride in our basic humanitarian approach to world problems. Our high regard for human life supposedly distinguishes us from other cultures in the world. Thus, in the spirit of this tradition, the U.S. Government humbled itself before a third-rate power for humanitarian reasons—to gain release of the *Pueblo* crew. This humanitarian concern manifested itself again in the form of support from liberal elements of the public for the *Pueblo* commander who gave up his ship to save the lives of his crewmembers. He was portrayed as a "new breed of hero, a skipper who recognized the realities and chose to save his crew rather than sacrifice it."¹⁰³

● **Morality.** From the day *Pueblo* was captured, the American people were continually reminded of the fact that the vessel was a "spy ship." For many Americans the term carries romantic, albeit unsavory, connotations. The knowledge that the ship engaged in

covert activity allowed for public rationalization of the crew's behavior. The intelligence ramifications posed a dilemma for the Navy of a different sort—how to measure the performance of a commanding officer given the traditional total responsibility over his ship but only part of the authority. The *Wall Street Journal* asked if Bucher's "very mission was a contradiction of sorts to the gentlemanly code laid down by John Paul Jones."¹⁰⁴ This ambiguity further clouded the issues in the public mind.

Thus, in assessing the mood of the country and determining reasons for public hostility toward the Navy, the above four factors emerge. These were factors over which the Navy had little or no control. They provided the inhospitable stage for the *Pueblo* drama. Navy mistakes were made, however, which intensified public hostility. While these mistakes, in the opinion of the author, were not of sufficient magnitude to have substantially altered the eventual outcome of the case, they are considered of major import in determining reasons for public resentment and hostility toward the Navy.

Navy Ambivalence. Up to the commencement of the Court of Inquiry, Navy statements conveyed to the public a position of support for the *Pueblo* skipper and his crew. Whatever the reason for this, available evidence indicates public shock and anger over events subsequent to the court beginning. In particular, the warning given to Bucher represented, in the public eye, a fundamental shift in the Navy's position. As noted earlier in this paper, the Navy took great care in defining to the press and court participants the strictly legal, procedural necessity for this step. Surely if this were all that it meant to the public, reaction to the incident would be hard to explain. Clearly, something else was involved. Up to that moment Bucher had been proclaimed a

hero; a proclamation shared and fostered by official Navy statements. The warning was the first manifestation that the Navy thought otherwise! Even the decisions regarding the Code of Conduct appeared to have been stretched to fit the view that the *Pueblo* crew had done no wrong. It seems reasonable to assume that had the Navy's official public position from the outset been one of skepticism and doubt concerning Bucher's behavior, the warning would have been more properly portrayed in its true context. As it was, however, it represented an emotional juncture that was disastrous for the Navy from a public relations perspective.

Court of Inquiry. Despite a resolute public affairs effort, the American people never became reconciled to the fact that the proceedings at Coronado were not a trial! Here again the Navy proved to be its own worst enemy. Although there have been courts of inquiry for many generations, in the circumstances of this case, the very use of the word "court" may have created in the public mind the type of adversarial image normally associated with the word in the civilian judicial context.

The decision by the Secretary of the Navy was a skillful one, yet it is hard to imagine how he could have acted otherwise, in the face of public opinion. On the one hand, the Navy's tradition of military responsibility and accountability was at stake; while on the other, the climate of public opinion clearly would not accept punishment of the crew. The Navy simply could not have withstood another long siege of adverse, page-one publicity that a court-martial

would most certainly have aroused. The experience of the preceding 5 months at least made that painfully clear. Public opinion, like it or not, proved the final arbiter in the *Pueblo* case!

For better or worse, the military as a whole finds its options for freedom of action increasingly restricted or curtailed by public sentiment. In the *Pueblo* case the Navy simply had no option—it was up to the civilian Secretary to salvage the situation. Secretary Chafee's decision appeared deliberately designed to blunt the public outcry but at the same time allowed the Navy to keep a measure of its self-respect. Navy submission may be distasteful to some, but one incontrovertible fact remains—the support of the American people is a must if we are to continue to maintain a strong, effective naval force.

BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY



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FOOTNOTES

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110 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

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... a popular outcry will drown the voice of military experience.

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