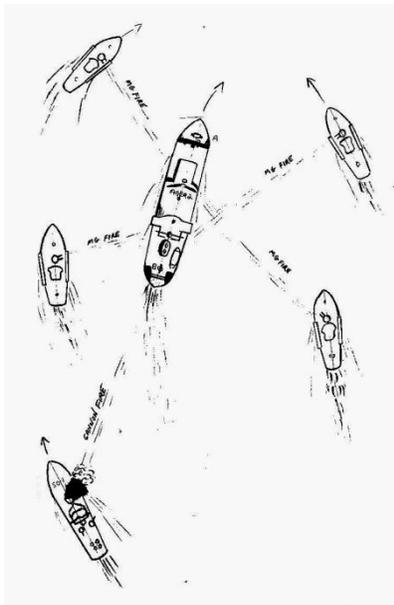


Stop firing you bastards!

The Seizure of the USS Pueblo — The NSA's Version
(declassified and uncensored)

On January 23, 1968, while in international waters off the coast of Wonsan, North Korea, the USS Pueblo, an AGER-class Technical Research Ship (TRS) with \$1.5 million in intelligence-gathering equipment on board, was surrounded by North Korean gunboats. To prevent the ship's highly-classified SIGINT (signal intelligence) material and equipment on board from falling into North Korean hands,¹ the Pueblo crew desperately began burning documents and throwing things over board. During the altercation, when the North Koreans saw smoke rising from the ship's research area, they began



opening fire on the lightly-armed American spy ship. Several men were seriously injured, one fatally. Fearing a massacre, the captain of the ship, Commander Lloyd M. Bucher, had ordered his men not to return fire.

After being tortured and otherwise mistreated for eleven months, 82 members of the Pueblo crew, and the coffin of Fireman Duane D. Hodges crossed the “Bridge of No Return,” Panmunjom, DMZ into South Korea and freedom on December 23, 1968. Not long after their return to the States, the U.S. Navy held a court of inquiry to determine the circumstances leading to the capture of the ship.

In February 1969, Bernard Weinraub, the *New York Times* reporter who had attended the court of inquiry, reported on the crew's desperate attempt to destroy documents. Quoting Lieut. Stephen R. Harris, the Russian-speaking Harvard graduate who was in charge of the ship's “research section,” there was “a great deal of confusion. The plan for shallow water destruction entailed making various fires in whatever was available, mostly wastebaskets... You must understand, we were under fire and one man had been severely wounded and part of his body exploded into the area where the destruction of classified was taking place...”²

Fifteen years later, the National Security Agency (NSA) published, *On Watch: Profiles from The National Security Agency's Past 40 Years*, a top-secret condensed history of the Agency's many accomplishments. Chapter 1 discussed MAGIC, an Allied cryptanalysis project to break the Japanese code during WWII. Chapter 2 covered the shift from war to peace and the emergence of a National Cryptologic Authority. Chapter 4 covered the decade of the 1950s. And Chapter 8, which spanned the 1960s, contained an article titled “The Loss of the USS Pueblo,” the NSA's uncensored version of the events preceding the North Korean seizure of the USS Pueblo and its crew.

¹ In a January 28, 1968 SITREP, the CIA speculated that the Antonov An-12 aircraft that landed in North Korea had brought Soviet personnel to assist in exploiting the captured vessel. The CIA thought it unusual for Pacific Fleet aircraft to be used for international flights, and, therefore, the flight may have been related to the Pueblo Incident. “It may have been bringing Soviet personnel to examine the Pueblo and whatever equipment was not destroyed,” that CIA report said.

² Weinraub, Bernard. “Pueblo Intelligence Officer Says 10 Bags of Secret Papers Were Lost When Took Ship,” *New York Times*, Feb. 5, 1989, p. 16.

Although *On Watch* (TS) was approved for release by the NSA in 2008, large sections—both Chapters 9 and 10, and their titles—remain entirely redacted, either because of (b)(1), since it contains national security classified information, or (b)(3), since it contains information specifically exempted from disclosure by statute. The following briefly describes how *On Watch*, an NSA publication, came about.

On July 17, 1984, Lt. Gen. Lincoln D. Faurer, the Director of the NSA, asked the National Cryptologic School to produce a "popular history" of the Agency, aimed principally at new employees who "perhaps were unaware of the past accomplishments of NSA." As the project evolved, the National Cryptologic School envisioned an informal collection of significant experiences from the Agency's past, which stressed NSA accomplishments as the best way to make new employees aware of the unique history of the NSA and the efforts of U.S. SIGINT (signal intelligence) and COMSEC (the protection of traffic on military communications networks including voice, video, and data). Below is a reprint of "The Loss of the USS Pueblo," the NSA's uncensored and now-declassified first-hand account of the events surrounding the North Korean seizure of the USS Pueblo:

ON WATCH

Profiles from The National Security Agency's Past 40 Years

"The Loss of the USS Pueblo"

As far as the officers and men aboard the USS Pueblo were concerned, the forenoon of January 23, 1968, was like any other winter morning in the Sea of Japan.

Although low-lying haze to the west obscured the crew's visual observations, the ship's position was easily verifiable by radar, which showed the distinct outlines of the peninsula of Hado Pando and the two off-shore islands, Yo Do and Ung Do, the latter being closer, the other farther south.

The Pueblo's executive officer, Lieutenant Edward R. Murphy, gave Petty Officer Skip Schumacher the position for inclusion in the second SITREP of the day: 39 degrees 25.2 minutes North, 127 degrees 55.0 minutes East, 15.8 miles off Ung Do.

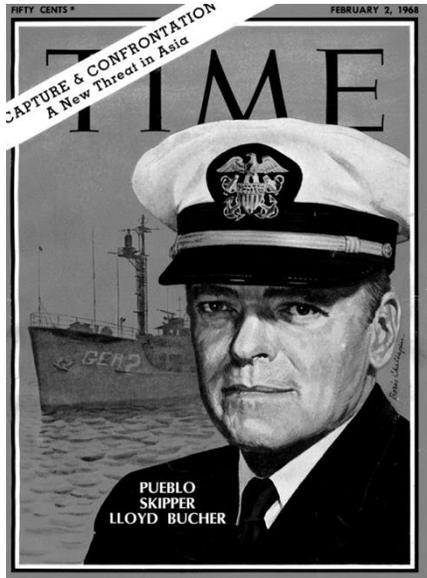
Lieutenant Steve Harris, officer-in-charge of the Special Operations Detachment—the SIGINT unit below deck—reported no significant [deleted] although the Pueblo wasn't far from Wonsan. Over the previous couple of hours, the communications technicians had picked up an unusual amount of radio chatter, but it was too fast for Harris' two Marine interpreters, Chicca and Hammond, to make out. They recorded it, intending to play it back later with Korean dictionaries in hand.

Shortly after 11:00 a.m. Steve Harris posted the ship's destruct bill on the door of the SIGINT spaces, listing the priority order for destruction of classified documents and machines in an emergency, and tasking individual men with specific assignments.

Around noon, luncheon chatter in the wardroom was interrupted by a call from the bridge, Quartermaster Law reporting that a vessel had been sighted about eight miles to the south and appeared to be approaching.

No one aboard the Pueblo considered the sighting of a vessel eight miles away anything out of the ordinary, until Law's second call from the bridge, saying that the vessel had covered three miles in four minutes, a speed of better than 40 knots.

The Pueblo's captain, Commander Lloyd M. Bucher, excused himself from lunch and hurried to the bridge. The ship was now less than three miles away and closing fast. There was no longer any question of its direction. It was headed straight for the Pueblo.



On reaching his observation platform on the signal bridge, Bucher yelled down the voice tube to the pilothouse that he wanted Lieutenant Steve Harris, officer-in-charge of the Pueblo's SIGINT detachment, to report to him immediately with his identification manuals. Because there was no telephone link between the signal bridge and the SIGINT spaces, each order had to be repeated by whoever was manning the phones in the pilothouse, a waste of precious time and potentially a source of confusion.

Visibility was good enough for the Pueblo's executive officer, Lieutenant Murphy, to spot the distant shape bobbing toward them through the white flashes of a powerful bow wave. The approaching vessel showed enough detail for

Murphy to make a tentative identification: a submarine chaser flying the North Korean ensign bearing down on them at flank speed.

When the subchaser kept coming on without change of speed or course, Bucher decided to make sure his ship looked in every respect what he wanted to appear to be—an oceanographic research vessel. The international day signals indicating such activity were hoisted. Bucher sent Lieutenant Murphy scrambling down the ladder to the pilothouse to check their position to make sure they really were in international waters.

They were. The Pueblo was 15.9 miles off the island of Hung Do, lying dead in the water with a slight southeasterly drift.

In the crypto room, Radioman Don E. Bailey interrupted the message he was transmitting to Kamiseya, Japan, to quickly tap out the words "COMPANY OUTSIDE."

"You should hear things buzzing down there!" Harris exclaimed excitedly coming up off the ladder. "They must have every fire-control radar in the country locked on us."

By this time the North Korean ship had closed to less than a mile. Taking the glasses, Steve Harris identified the vessel as a Soviet-type SO-1 subchaser, armed with twin 57-mm cannons. She was flying the North Korean ensign, and her men on deck were at battle stations. She was a warship, primed and ready for action.

Bucher watched the subchaser heading straight for the Pueblo at close to flank speed and said to Harris, "Now, get below and find out if your CTs can eavesdrop on any talk with her base. It might be fun to know her impressions of us."

Bearing in mind that he shouldn't show more crew than the normal 30-odd men carried by a legitimate oceanographic research vessel, Bucher ordered everybody not engaged in official topside business to remain below and out of sight.

The SO-1 closed to a thousand yards, her bridge crowded with men scrutinizing the American vessel. Bucher decided to bluff. He gave no engine orders. The Pueblo remained dead in the water. Bucher ordered Signalman Leach to hoist flags identifying the Pueblo as a hydrographer.

Churning up the Pueblo's port side, the SO-1 suddenly reduced speed and began circling in a clockwise direction. Her signalman ran up an international signal flag, the first attempt to communicate with the American ship: WHAT NATIONALITY? Bucher answered by having his signalman raise the American flag.

The subchaser was now close enough for the Pueblo's crew to see about a dozen North Koreans wearing quilted green uniforms. Almost all carried automatic rifles. They were watching the Americans through binoculars and the gun sight of the twin 57-mm cannons.

By the time the Koreans completed their third circle, they lowered their original flags and replaced them with another set: HEAVE TO OR I WILL FIRE.

"What the hell does he mean by that?" Bucher wondered aloud. "We are already lying dead in the water!"

According to Lieutenant Murphy, the Pueblo was then 15.8 miles from the nearest land, the island of Ung Do.

There was not even the remotest possibility that the ship was inside North Korea's claimed territorial waters.

Bucher had Leach hoist a new set of flags: I AM IN INTERNATIONAL WATERS.

By now, Skip Schumacher and Ensign Tim Harris had joined Bucher on the bridge. Bucher ordered Schumacher to, "Get going on the messageform for a JOPREP Pinnacle report. Contact is a KORCOM, modified SO-1 submarine chaser, challenging and receiving confirmation of our nationality."

At that moment, Gene Lacy suddenly sang out, "Three high-speed torpedo boats, bearing 160, range short, ten thousand yards, with zero angle on the bow!"

Bucher called after Schumacher, "Add that to the JOPREP Pinnacle! Ask them to keep the circuits open for more."

Three torpedo boats coming from the general direction of Wonsan were now within a mile and approaching at full speed. The SO-1 continued circling, her signal fluttering from her yardarm and her cannon trained directly at the Pueblo, gun crews ready.

Steve Harris, secluded in the SIGINT spaces with his communications technicians, was trying without much success to interpret the Korean voice communications filling the receivers.

The torpedo boats were closing, and fast, their blurred white wakes changing to sharp configurations. Steve Harris identified them as North Korean P-4 motor torpedo boats, maximum speed 50 knots, four times faster than the Pueblo.

Bucher barked orders. Schumacher was to prepare a new Pinnacle, informing COMNAVFORJAPAN and CINCPACFLT of the worsening situation. At Schumacher's suggestion, Bucher upgraded the message from Flash to CRITIC. A CRITIC would indicate a possible impending international incident and would be passed all the way up the chain of command to the White House.

Still Bucher gave no engine order. And no order to man the machine guns.

Bailey kept the circuit up with small talk. "I SURE COULD USE SOME LIBERTY NOW...I DIDN'T THINK I'D MISS THE OLD LADY SO MUCH..."

Schumacher interrupted him with the first Pinnacle. Bailey transmitted it at 12:54 p.m.

The P-4's approached on the Pueblo's port beam, all guns pointed at the Pueblo. The lead torpedo boat swerved under the Pueblo's fantail, passed down the starboard side and then steamed over to the subchaser, now idling some two hundred yards away.

On the other end of the teletype link, the operator in Kamiseya wanted to know, "DO YOU HAVE ANY MORE TRAFFIC? HOW IT FEEL TO BE THREATENED?"

Bailey replied, "GOT SOME MORE COMING IN A MINUTE BUT DON'T HAVE IT IN COMM YET. WE WILL PASS IT AS SOON AS I GET. IT IS WORSE OUT HERE NOW, GOT MORE COMPANY AND NOT DOING SO GOOD WITH THEM..."

Bucher asked if the ship could be scuttled quickly. The answer was far from comforting. About two hours to flood the main engine room after unbolting and disconnecting the salt water cooling intakes. Then she would not sink without breaching the bulkhead to the auxiliary engine room.

Bucher called down the voice tube for depth recorder soundings.

"Thirty fathoms, sir!" came the immediate reply, driving all scuttling considerations out of Bucher's mind. Too shallow to justify an action that would take too long and which could be easily thwarted by Korean divers who would eventually recover the ship's contents.

The three torpedo boats were circling within fifty yards with their machine guns aimed at the Pueblo's bridge and their decks filled with what looked like soldiers or marines armed with Russian-type automatic carbines. The SO-1 was jogging a little farther off the port quarter, its 57-mm cannons ready to fire at pointblank range and her threatening signal of HEAVE TO OR I WILL FIRE still fluttering from her yardarm.

To his answer of AM IN INTERNATIONAL WATERS Bucher added the international signal for INTEND TO REMAIN IN THE AREA.

The four torpedo boats closed in, broke their loose formation, and deployed to cover the Pueblo from all sides, near enough for Bucher to see their fully manned machine-gun mounts with the naked eye.

At 1:15 p.m. came the unmistakable roar of jets as a pair of MIGs zoomed over the Pueblo in a single, quick pass.

A fourth torpedo boat appeared out of nowhere, less than a mile away, bearing down on the Pueblo. And to further complicate things, another small but rapidly swelling shape was cutting a white wake over the leaden seas outside Yong Hung Bay—another subchaser.

Skip Schumacher returned to the flying bridge, and Bucher said to him, "Did you get off that JOPREP?"

Schumacher nodded, staring in shock at all the activity around them.

"Okay!" Bucher snapped. "Then get set to plug in number two!" Bucher rattled off the bare facts describing developments over the past ten minutes to supplement his first report. But things were happening too fast for him to keep up with the message content.

One of the torpedo boats drew close alongside the SO-1 flagship, communicating first by semaphore then by megaphones, loudly enough for the men on the Pueblo to hear the voices echoing across the three hundred yards of slow swells. Moments later, a chill ran down Lieutenant Murphy's spine as rubber tires and rope mats were slung over the side of the P-4, and a dozen men wearing helmets and carrying automatic arms moved from the SO-1 to the deck of the P-4. It was a boarding party.

As Bucher watched, quivering with anger, the P-4 began backing down on the Pueblo's starboard bow, fenders rigged for boarding.

Bucher knew the time had come to remove his ship from a situation that seemed on the brink of getting out of control. He called down the voice tube. "All ahead one third! Navigator! Give the best course to open from land!"

"Zero-eight-zero, sir!" came Lieutenant Murphy's reply.

"Steer zero-eight-zero," Bucher confirmed. "Build up speed to two-thirds, then full. We are making a dignified withdrawal, not a run for it."

A series of hacking coughs erupted from the Pueblo's stack as the engine room threw the diesels into gear and advanced the throttles. The rumbling and belching of smoke was way out of proportion to the Pueblo's ability to overcome inertia and get moving. For a moment it looked as if the torpedo boat foaming full astern, her decks crowded with armed men, were going to touch the Pueblo's sides. The boarding party was braced to jump over the railings when the Pueblo at last began gathering speed and the gap between the two ships widened again.

Bucher ordered the word passed to prepare for destruction of all classified material, then he had Leach hoist a long signal which he hoped would cause a stall while the Koreans broke it down.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION, read the new flags. I AM DEPARTING THE AREA.

To Helmsman Ronald Berens he shouted down through the voice tube, "All ahead full."

Swinging around in a wide circle, the Pueblo, still surrounded by ships, started for the open sea. The P-4 began backing down again. She came to within twenty feet. The men at the Pueblo's rail could look right into the unsmiling North Korean faces.

While two of the P-4's played porpoise across the Pueblo's bow, weaving back and forth at no more than twenty yards in spurts of spray, the SO-1 began closing on the Pueblo's port quarter, trying to force her in toward land.

The SO-1 hauled down her HEAVE TO OR I WILL FIRE signal and appeared to jog along indecisively in the Pueblo's wake, dropping behind more than two thousand yards. But the torpedo boats stayed close. Two of them hovered around the stern, the other two porpoised around the bows, zigzagging as close as ten yards to block the Pueblo's withdrawal.

The second SO-1 subchaser joined the fray. The calm seas allowed all six hostile vessels full use of vastly superior speed. They were having no trouble at all keeping up with Pueblo's plodding 12 knots, nor in training their weapons on an easy target. But the Pueblo kept stubbornly pressing ahead, and for a few moments it looked as though she might bluff her way through.

By this time Pinnacle 2 had gone out. Bailey, in the crypto space, couldn't see what was happening. He had to rely on what passing crewmen told him, and someone confused rumor with fact.

At 1:26 Bailey sent, "AND THEY PLAN TO OPEN FIRE ON US NOW. THEY PLAN TO OPEN FIRE ON US NOW. THEY PLAN TO OPEN FIRE ON US NOW..."

Bucher was trying his best to extricate his ship, but every time he ordered a course change, the faster SO-1 compensated. Moreover, Bucher's course changes were gradually turning the Pueblo back toward land.

The emergency had reached the point where the use of voice communication with Japan was justified, and Lieutenant Murphy, with Bucher's assent tried to reach Kamiseya on the high frequency voice link to let them know what was happening. The direct voice link wasn't secure, but at that stage, as far as Murphy could see, encryption was no longer of any importance.

The first SO-1 began speeding up, rapidly regaining the distance she had lost during her brief hesitation. A now familiar hoist of signal flags shot back up her yardarm: HEAVE TO OR I WILL FIRE!

To present the smallest possible target, just in case her intentions were serious, Bucher shouted down the voice tube, "Come right ten degrees!"

The SO-1 easily countered this maneuver by pouring on more speed and turning outside to give her gunners a broadside shot.

"Come right ten more degrees!"

Again the SO-1 adjusted to the evasion tactic.

Murphy checked the Pueblo's position, now 15.6 miles from Ung do, and reached for the phone.

The subchaser suddenly opened fire—a long, sustained burst from her 57-mm cannon. Shells screamed overhead, exploding against the radar mast, the whine of splinters drilling through the Lucite windscreen of the flying bridge.

In a reflex action, everyone hit the deck. Bucher threw himself down, barely in time to dodge the lethal hail of shattered steel and plastic, feeling pieces of shrapnel slashing into his legs and buttocks.

Seconds later a second volley, intermingled with a rattle of machine-gun bullets hammering against the metal stack and superstructure, crashed into the radar mast. The torpedo boats had opened fire. The salvo lasted for perhaps five or six seconds, leaving shattered glass all over the pilothouse, blasting to shambles not only Bucher's bridge but all the high-level briefings, his guidelines for the mission.

As the crew got back to their feet, Law ran topside to see if anyone had been hurt.

Murphy became aware of a voice speaking directly into his ear. In diving for the deck, he'd held onto the radiotelephone.

"Stand by to change frequencies," the operator in Japan kept repeating. "Stand by to change frequencies."

At the very moment Murphy needed to get through to Japan, he was caught in one of the twice-daily frequency changes. He tried repeatedly to break in, but the operator wouldn't stop talking long enough to give him a chance.

"Commence emergency destruction of all classified pubs and gear!" Bucher shouted. "Be sure the word is passed on down to Lieutenant Harris in the SOD hut!"

The order was relayed, everyone forgetting in the excitement of the moment that there was no loudspeaker in the SIGINT spaces. Neither were there portholes, Steve Harris and his communications technicians were completely out of touch with what was going on.

As Signalman Leach and Communications Technician Robin, on the bridge to aid in ship identification, pushed themselves up from the shards of glass littering the pilothouse, Bucher saw that both men had been injured. Leach had pieces of shrapnel in his leg; Robin had a lacerated arm and was bleeding from a neck wound, while one metal splinter had creased Bucher's ankle and still another lodged in his rectum.

Quartermaster Law came bounding up the ladder, exclaiming, "Is everybody okay here, sir?"

"A few nicks. How about below?" "No casualties reported yet, sir," he answered.

Schumacher asked Bucher if he wanted him to man the machine guns.

The captain's reply: "Negative."

Bucher's instinct was to bring his ship to general quarters and battle stations, but there were in fact no battle stations on the Pueblo. The Pueblo's 50-caliber machine guns were no match for

57-mm cannon. Moreover, the Pueblo's gunners would have had to cross exposed decks, risking raking automatic weapons fire from a range of thirty yards as they unlash frozen tarpaulin covers, opened ammunition lockers, and attempted to fire totally exposed weapons. It would have meant certain death to even try.

The Pueblo would not fight back. Not a shot would be fired, in anger—or defense.

"Set a modified General Quarters!" Bucher ordered. "Nobody to expose themselves topside! I have the deck as well as the conn. Left full rudder, all ahead full!"

As futile a gesture as it might seem, Bucher ordered Leach to haul a protest flag up on the yardarm and pressed his ship on toward the open sea.

Lieutenant Murphy, still caught in the frequency change, was trying both the old and new channels.

Another salvo from the 57s ripped into the Pueblo.

Murphy kept trying to get Japan on high frequency voice, unaware that the antenna coupler had just been shot off.

Radiomen Hayes and Crandall started carrying out files from their cubicle and rushing them to the incinerator behind the stack; swirls of smoke smelling of burning paper told Bucher 'that primitive destruct equipment was functioning. Quartermaster Law, Signalman Leach, CT Robin, together with lookouts and photographer were helping them pass out a mass of classified materiel and documents.

"Watch yourselves out there and take cover behind the whaleboat if the shooting gets hot," Bucher warned them. "But keep that stuff burning...burning to ashes!" There was a roar overhead as the pair of MIGs made another threatening pass. The lead plane fired a rocket that streaked high and far ahead of the Pueblo, exploding in the sea a good eight miles away.

The North Koreans opened up with another salvo. A stream of shells yowled through the Pueblo's rigging, some bursting against the masts and scattering another shower of shrapnel downward. Others slammed through the stack and superstructure. The torpedo boats cut loose with their machine guns at the same time, stitching through the pilothouse from both sides.

As soon as the cannon fire let up, Bucher shouted, "Clear the flying bridge!"

Bucher was somewhat relieved by the report he was getting from Steve Harris. "Emergency destruct is in progress, Captain, and communications are open with Kamiseya."

"Good! Keep up the destruct, but don't destroy today's crypto codes until I give the orders. I'll have another CRITIC message to do soon."

Temporarily reassured that matters were being taken care of in the SIGINT spaces, Bucher gave his full attention to the bridge. He was still angling out to sea at 135 degrees, All Ahead Full. Depth soundings were still 30-35 fathoms, too shallow according to accepted standards for effective dumping of classified material in weighted bags. Even if the Pueblo had reached a

depth of 100 fathoms, the time element probably would have prevented any successful scuttling action.

Radioman Bailey, still in contact with Kamiseya on the secure teletype, commenced sending, "S-O-S S-O-S S-O-S WE ARE HOLDING EMERGENCY DESTRUCTION. WE NEED SUPPORT. S-O-S S-O-S S-O-S, PLEASE SEND ASSISTANCE..."

Gene Lacy was returning to the bridge after checking in with Central Damage Control. His face was ashen, but his voice steady enough as he reported to Bucher: "No damage below, sir, except minor hits above the water line."

"Okay, Gene. We're still afloat and under way. We'll keep trying to bull our way through," Bucher picked up some papers from the chart table and shoved them into Crandall's arms as the sailor rushed another load toward the incinerator.

Then the North Koreans opened up with another salvo, aimed directly at the Pueblo's bridge. The 57-mm shells preceded the sound of their thumping muzzle blasts. One round zinged through the pilothouse, drilling the remaining glass out of one window, passing within inches of Gene Lacy's head and scorching Tim Harris' left ear before whistling into the sea a hundred yards beyond the ship.

Bucher was stunned by Gene Lacy's wild-eyed look as the sailor dragged himself back to his feet and suddenly yelled at the captain, "Are you going to stop this son-of-a-bitch or not?"

There was only a fraction of a second's hesitation before Lacy reached out and yanked the annunciator to All Stop.

Three decks below, the isolated engineers instantly rang the answering bells.

Then came an abrupt break in the wheezing throb of the Pueblo's perforated stack and a rapid deceleration from her 12-knot speed.

Bucher stared at Gene Lacy in disbelief for another fifteen seconds before the utter uselessness of further resistance flooded through his brain. Instead of lunging for the annunciator and racking it back to All Ahead Full, Bucher walked out on the starboard wing of the bridge, It was painfully obvious to Bucher that failure to halt would only result in their being shot to pieces with a lot of good men killed to no avail. In the end, the North Koreans would get most of the classified documents.

The shooting had stopped.

Forty yards off the Pueblo's starboard quarter, one of the North Korean torpedo boats was bobbing along, the grim, impassive faces of her machine gunners staring back at Bucher over the sights of their weapons. As the Pueblo coasted to a stop, the subchaser, smoking cannon still aimed at the American ship's vitals, reduced speed.

At 1:37 p.m., Bailey sent, "WE ARE LAYING TO AT PRESENT POSITION...THIS CIRCUIT ONLY CIRCUIT ALIVE...PLEASE SEND ASSISTANCE. WE ARE BEING BOARDED..."

Kamiseya replied at 1:38. "QSL YOUR LAST AND PASSING ALL INFO."

Bailey was wrong about the boarding. The subchaser had now raised a new set of signal flags: FOLLOW ME. I HAVE A PILOT ABOARD.

This time, on his own initiative, without prompting, Bucher ordered, "Ahead One-Third."

The Pueblo began following the SO-1.

Bailey, at 1:45: "WE ARE BEING ESCORTED INTO PROB WONSAN REPEAT WONSAN. WE ARE BEING ESCORTED INTO PROB WONSAN REPEAT WONSAN..."

Despite the frantic activity, destruction of classified material was proceeding very slowly. The Pueblo's two paper shredders were woefully inadequate and could chew up only an eight-inch stack of paper every fifteen minutes. Then the shreds had to be burned. The incinerator had a three-pound limit, and only loose sheets at that. Each bound publication—there were dozens of them—had to be torn apart sheet by sheet. Stacks of paper were piling up next to the incinerator, growing higher by the minute.

Below, small fires smoldered in the passageways. Because the ship had been sealed when the crew went to modified general quarters, the portholes were closed, ventilation shut off. Now clouds of acrid smoke lingered, scorching eyes, throats, nostrils.

The SIGINT space was like a scene out of Dante's Inferno. Three or four small fires were burning. With no way for the smoke to escape, it just grew thicker and thicker. One CT swung a sledgehammer against a radio console and broke the handle. Others wielded sledgehammers and fire axes and found they simply rebounded off the metal. Sensitive the equipment may have been, delicate it was not. But with aching arms the crewmen hacked away until piece after piece was reduced to a mass of twisted steel.

Adding to the confusion was the unresolved question of whether classified documents could or could not be jettisoned. Earlier, Steve Harris had told his CTs that nothing should be thrown overboard until they reached a depth of 100 fathoms. Anticipating that moment, two huge laundry bags had been filled with documents. But the situation had changed, drastically. The Pueblo was now being led into even shallower water.

CT Peter Langenberg took it upon himself to haul one of the bags to the rail and pitch it overboard. He intended to do the same with the second bag, but he never got the chance.

Bucher went below to check on the progress of destruction and was enraged when he saw how much classified material remained in the SIGINT spaces. Steve Harris and his men pressed on. Most of the SIGINT and cryptographic equipment had been smashed beyond repair, and the encoding disks had been reduced to powder. Still, much sensitive material remained intact.

Executive officer Murphy's advice was to stall. "We need every minute we can get to complete the destruction." In the back of his mind was the hope that, with enough time, the Navy or the Air Force might be able to rush aid to them.

Despite angry signaling from the SO-1 for the Pueblo to increase speed, Bucher continued to follow at One-Third.

In addition to the burning, the crew was now jettisoning material over the side, despite the shallow water, hoping to keep as much material out of North Korean hands as possible.

Bucher decided to gamble again. He said later he wanted to see what would happen if he ordered the Pueblo brought to Full Stop. The answer came quick enough.

Dropping back, the SO-1 unleashed a barrage of shells that smashed into the center part of the ship on the starboard side, the area from which most of the smoke was coming.

The North Koreans' action seemed to stun Bucher. A full minute passed before he ordered, "Ahead One-Third. "

"Damage Control Two reports three casualties, one critical!" This was followed moments later by, "Mr. Murphy, we need morphine!"

Lieutenant Murphy, as the ship's medical officer, kept all the drugs on board stored in his office safe. He ran down the inside ladder. At least one shell had gone through the passage between Bucher's stateroom and the officers' wardroom. Three men burning papers from the cryptographic safe had been hit. Marine Sergeant Robert Chicca had a hole the size of a silver dollar in his upper thigh. Fireman Steven Woelk had been seriously wounded in the lower abdomen. Worst of all was Fireman Duane Hodges. A shell caught him almost squarely in the groin, ripping his intestines open and partially severing his right leg.

McClarren had temporarily replaced Bailey on the teletype and was in contact with Japan, asking, "ARE YOU SENDING ASSISTANCE? ARE YOU SENDING ASSISTANCE? ARE YOU SENDING ASSISTANCE? ARE YOU SENDING ASSISTANCE?"

Kamiseya replied with, "WORD HAS GONE TO ALL AUTHORITIES. WORD HAS GONE TO ALL AUTHORITIES. COMNAVFORJAPAN IS REQUESTING ASSIT. WHAT KEY LISTS DO YOU HAVE LEFT? LAST WE GOT FROM YOU WAS 'ARE YOU SENDING ASSIT.' PLEASE ADVISE WHAT KEY LIST YOU HAVE LEFT AND IF IT APPEARS THAT YOUR COMM SPACES WILL BE ENTERED?"

Bucher entered the crypto room and had McClarren send out his reply: "HAVE 0 KEY LIST AND THIS ONLY ONE HAVE. HAVE BEEN REQUESTED TO FOLLOW INTO WONSAN. HAVE THREE WOUNDED AND ONE MAN WITH LEG BLOWN OFF. HAVE NOT USED ANY WEAPONS OR UNCOVERED 50-CAL. MAC. DESTROYING ALL KEY LISTS AND AS MUCH ELE EQUIPT AS POSSIBLE. HOW ABOUT SOME HELP. THESE GUYS MEAN BUSINESS. HAVE SUSTAINED SMALL WOUND IN RECTUM. DO NOT INTEND TO OFFER ANY RESISTANCE. INTERROGATIVE QSL. INTERROGATIVE QSL. DO NOT KNOW HOW LONG WILL BE ABLE TO HOLD UP CIRCUIT AND DO NOT KNOW IF COMM SPACES WILL BE ENTERED."

Kamiseya: "ROGER, ROGER. WE DOING ALL WE CAN. CAPT HERE AND CNFJ [Commander, Naval Forces Japan] ON HOTLINE. LAST I GOT WAS AIR FORCE GOING HELP YOU WITH SOME AIRCRAFT BUT CAN'T REALLY SAY AS CNFJ COORDINATING WITH I PRESUME KOREA FOR SOME F-105. THIS UNOFFICIAL BUT I THINK THAT WHAT WILL HAPPEN."

Bailey resumed his position on the teletype at 2:09 with, "ROGER YOUR LAST. ROGER YOUR LAST."

On deck there was little room for optimism. The P-4s had now commenced firing. Sheets of paper stamped SECRET, from the ship identification pubs, were scattered all over the Pueblo's deck.

Meanwhile, below, Bailey kept up his running contact with Japan. "SURE COULD USE SOME HELP NOW."

To which Kamiseya replied, "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, still hopeful, sent, "ROGER, ROGER. SURE HOPE SO. WE PRETTY BUSY WITH DESTRUCTION RIGHT NOW. CAN'T SEE FOR THE SMOKE."

Kamiseya: "ROGER, ROGER. WISH I COULD HELP MORE. ALL INFO YOU PASS BEING SENT TO AREA COMMANDER AND THEY IN TURN COORDINATING FOR WHATEVER ACTION GOT TO BE TAKEN. SURE PROCESS ALREADY BEING INITIATED FOR SOME IMMEDIATE RELIEF. COMSEVENTHFLT, CNFJ, AND NSA GROUP PAC ALL GOT INFO RIGHT AWAY."

Bailey, at 2:15: "ROGER YOUR LAST AND SURE HOPE SOMEONE DOES SOMETHING. WE ARE HELPLESS AT THIS TIME. CANNOT DO ANYTHING BUT WAIT."

Bucher was on the port wing frantically waving his white stocking cap at one of the P-4s, yelling over and over, "Stop firing, you bastards!"

Lieutenant Murphy, who had come on deck to throw more classified papers over the side, saw the captain "waving the white emblem of surrender." Murphy would later write, "I realized for the first time that Bucher intended to give up the ship, that he was, in fact, at this very moment doing exactly that."

Bailey unaware of what was happening out on deck, continued to keep Kamiseya informed. "DESTRUCTION OF PUBS HAVE BEEN INEFFECTIVE. SUSPECT SEVERAL WILL BE COMPROMISED."

"CAN YOU GIVE ME A LIST OF WHAT YOU HAVEN'T DESTROYED?" Kamiseya wanted to know. "CAN YOU GIVE ME A LIST OF WHAT YOU HAVEN'T DESTROYED?"

The P-4 with the boarding party came alongside on the Pueblo's starboard quarter. The subchaser signaled the Pueblo to come to All Stop.

On the bridge, following Bucher's order, Lacy pulled the annunciator back. Then came Bucher's voice over the loudspeaker. "Lay aft to the starboard quarter to assist the boarding party."

Bailey, 2:32, informed Kamiseya, "HAVE BEEN DIRECTED TO COME TO ALL STOP AND BEING BOARDED AT THIS TIME."

Kamiseya, helpless, could only reply, "ROGER YOUR LAST. IT ON WAY TO CNFJ."

Bailey: "FOUR MEN INJURED AND ONE CRITICALLY AND GOING OFF THE AIR NOW AND DESTROYING THIS GEAR."

Kamiseya, acknowledging at 2:35 p.m. on January 23, 1968, sent, "ROGER, GO AHEAD. CAN YOU TRANSMIT IN THE CLEAR?"

There was no answer from the USS Pueblo.

The Pueblo's crew spent the next eleven months in brutal captivity.

The SIGINT damage that resulted from material falling into North Korean hands was among the most serious compromises in U.S. cryptologic history.

THE END ... or JUST THE BEGINNING
