



Richard J. Rogala
U. S. Navy
Korea—USS Pueblo
SK3

Richard J. Rogala

**Veterans
History
Project
Transcript**

**Interview conducted
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**Niles Public Library
Niles Public Library District
Niles, Illinois**



Niles Public Library District
Veterans History Project Transcript

Veteran: **Richard J. Rogala**

Rank: **SK3** (SK=Storekeeper)

Branch of Service: **U.S. Navy**

Theater: **Korea**

Unit: **USS Pueblo**

Interview Date: 9/29/2007, 10 a.m.

Place: Library Group Study Room

Interviewer: Neil O'Shea

Equipment: Panasonic Standard Cassette Transcriber and Philips Digital Pocket Memo Recorder.

This Veterans History Project interview is being conducted on Saturday, September 29th, in the year 2007 here at the Niles Public Library, and we're meeting in the Group Study Room off of the Reference Department on the 2nd Level. And I'm very pleased and privileged to be meeting today with the veteran Mr. Richard Rogala who is here with his wife and his father who is a World War II veteran, and we look forward to interviewing Mr. Rogala, Sr. in the weeks to come.

Mr. Rogala, Richard, was born in Chicago, Illinois, and he was born on the 13th of August, 1947. He has kindly consented to be interviewed for this project, and we're very grateful.

Mr. Rogala, when did you enter the service? (Interviewer's words)

I was actually a Navy reservist, came in September, 1966 as a reservist and attended meetings down at Monroe Harbor in Chicago for a year then I then I received papers in September of 1967 to go to Treasure Isle, San Francisco, where I was in a transit warehouse for three weeks. And then, I received orders to report to the USS Pueblo on Friday, October 13th, 1967.

Was it, now, if I may ask you, you were a Reservist, how or why did you decide to become a Reservist?

Well, it was the build-up of the Vietnam War, and rather than get drafted, I said, "Well, I'll serve my country in another way. I'll go in the Navy," because I preferred the Navy.

Well, your dad, who we mentioned in introducing this interview, he was a World War II veteran?

Correct.

And he served in the?

Air Force.

Air Force, but you didn't want to--

The Air Force.

I didn't really want anything to do with that.

Nor the Army.

Right.

So, you chose the Navy?

I chose the Navy. In fact, I got my draft papers a couple days after I got sworn into the Navy Reserve, and then a day after, a cancellation of it. So, I knew I was going to get drafted, because the people then were either getting married or going to college, and then they didn't have to go in the Service. But I elected to do it.

Could you swim?

Yes.

Oh, yeah. When I was a little kid, we were at the lake all the time. So that's where the relation came. We use to go to lakes in Northern Illinois, or Southern Wisconsin, and I learned to swim at a young age. I wasn't afraid of the water.

Yeah.

In fact, when we were going across the Pacific, I was in the Pacific Ocean once. But we didn't stay in long. But we did jump in.

Neat. Swimmers. It wasn't fear.

Yeah. It didn't bother me.

What high school did you attend?

I attended Holy Trinity High School in Chicago.

Is that down on Division or--

Division, right off the expressway. It's still there after all these years. Most high schools in that area have gone away, but Holy Trinity is still there.

And you graduated from high school in?

May, 1965.

'65. So, did you have a draft number then, or was there, Selective Service, were you given a number in the draft?

No draft number. We had the Selective Service then, and anyone turning 18 was called in for a physical.

They were just taking anybody and everybody for Viet Nam! It was the premier build-up of the Vietnam War when they had built troop levels up to 750 to 800,000, an unbelievable amount. The build-up peaked, right around the time it was time for me to serve.

Your parents, they thought it was a good idea for you to go into the Reserves, or it was-- everybody at home thought it was a good idea?

Yes, considering what my options were.

Yeah?

As a reservist, I was going to serve two years active duty.

Yeah.

I knew I was going to go on active duty, but little did we know!

So you entered the Service then at Fort Sheridan, or it was a different process, or--

Well, I went--

Or Great Lakes?

Great Lakes was where I entered. I went to boot camp for two weeks. And then I was aboard a ship in Portage, Wisconsin, for two weeks of additional training. That was early in '67. And then I attended meetings in Chicago at Monroe Harbor, at the naval center for a year.

So was there-- did you have any difficulty making adjustments to military life? Or most of the guys were pretty nice or--

You're flexible at age 19. You kind of take it as it comes. I look back now at all of this that happened and it is like how did I get through it!

So were there any memorable instructors, or nasty trainers, or--

During boot camp our Navy company, scored real high, since our platoon leader had gone over the records of what was going to be on the test the night before. So, we all scored really high. This particular platoon leader would always score the highest, because of what he was doing. But that was something you just can't forget! We were doing this in the middle of the night cramming for the big test, so you pass.

And that was in Wisconsin?

That was in Great Lakes, Illinois.

That was in Great Lakes.

Right. Yeah.

So, then within the Navy, did they direct you to a position, or a pharmacy, or medic, or navigation, or electronics, or something?

On aboard ship?

Yeah.

We were an intelligence gathering ship. But I wasn't on there for that purpose. I was on there as part of the deck crew, which is ship maintenance, washing clothes, painting, serving food. I was very green.

So, when you come out of the Navy boot camp, or whatever the proper term is, you don't know yet what you are going to be in the Navy?

Right. You have no idea. That's just basic training.

So when you finish Great Lakes, then you--

Well, I was still working then at a National Supermarket and went to the meetings for a year.

And then when you go into-- when you are called into the Navy proper, active duty, where are you sent then?

We went to Treasure Isles, San Francisco. That's an in-transit warehouse for people going into the military. They send you there until you get your orders. They basically process you to get you ready to send you somewhere.

And were you still with the same group of guys from Great Lakes?

No.

No?

It was individuals from all over the country. In fact, I had a friend that was my same age that went. He and I signed up together, so he went there at the same time as me, but then he got orders to a different ship. But we did meet up in Japan once before this all happened, so--. Yeah.

So you were in San Francisco, and then you get assigned to--

Right.

to the Pueblo?

Right. And it was ironic this happened, but it was on Friday, October the 13th, 1967.

Oh, right. Yeah.

I am superstitious. I will be for the rest of my life. I was born on the 13th. I went aboard the ship on Friday, the 13th. On the 13th day we got captured. I received a Purple Heart Medal when I got back. The notice came on the 13th. And my name, Richard Rogala, has 13 letters. So, I'm very superstitious about the number 13.

Yeah. Yeah. Wow.

So, I've got all these thirteens behind me, and twenty years ago I met my wife to be, Regina. And her birthday is the same day as mine, August 13th. And so it just goes on and on. It was like what's going to happen next! But in the last several years, I've adopted a thought process that something good's going to happen someday, and it's going to happen on the 13th!

So, the Pueblo sailed out of San Francisco?

I reported to the USS Pueblo in San Diego.

In San Diego.

That's where it was at the time I boarded. It was commissioned in Bremerton, Washington.

So it was a new ship?

No, it was an old-- it was built in Kewaunee, Wisconsin. And it was a cargo ship during World War II. They took it out of service, and then they refurbished it, and put it back into service.

They jammed eighty-three people on a two hundred-foot ship. The racks where we slept, were one on top of another. And I was the fourth one on up towards the ceiling. And I had about one foot between the bed and the ceiling. So, I had to sleep flat. And then there was a pipe coming across on the end of the rack, so I had to kind of sleep to the side. But that was the sleeping quarters I had to go through when I was on the ship. It was pretty unique.

When you were in basic training, did you have to learn to sleep in a bunk?

Yes. So, I got some experience with going up a ladder. Then it prepared me for a much higher bunk on ship.

It was a good thing you weren't-- you didn't suffer from claustrophobia!

It was such tight quarters. It was unbelievable how we got so many people aboard there.

And why did there have to be so many people on board the ship?

Well, there were-- half of them were the intelligence people and half of them were maintenance people, but the-- half were communications technicians, and they were the ones that did the work collecting the intelligence information. So that's why I think there would have been so many. We also had two oceanographers aboard the ship that were not in the military, that were oceanographers. And they collected water samples, and that was kind of a cover for the ship of what its main purpose was.

So when you left, when you got your assignment to the Pueblo, you just figured, well, this was just another-- you didn't have any views one way or another?

I knew I was heading to Japan with a stop in Hawaii. And I have fond memories of Hawaii, because many of us turned legal age there. There it was twenty, not twenty-one, so we had some really great liberty. We stopped there for four days, and we had some wonderful days there in that a quarter of the crew was about the same age as me, we were just kids-- twenty years old. In fact, while I was in North Korea during 1968, I spent my twenty-first birthday there.

So to Japan.

Right.

And you get shore leave in Japan or you get to go in--

We arrived in Japan, like early December, and we stayed there 'til early January. We spent the holidays in Japan. We headed out on our mission January 5th of 1968 with a stop in Sasebo. It was 13 days later on January 23, 1968 that the trouble started.

When you left Japan, did you know that you were going to be going into international waters?

I knew nothing. The communications technicians knew a fair amount, but I knew nothing. I had no idea where we were going.

And was that the case for most of the crew, or half of the crew, or--

At least half of the crew or more.

Yeah. So, on ship--

When this all started happening, it was like what the heck's going on. What is this all about? Little bits and pieces started coming out.

So, on the-- your rank in the Navy was SK3. What does that denote?

That ranking I didn't really get until after I was out. I was actually a seaman apprentice when this all happened. The lowest rank you could possibly be.

So, your typical day on ship would have been getting up at a certain time or--

Getting up at a certain time, standing watch when we were out to sea, I had two four hour watches which would be a typical day out at sea. When in port it was keeping the ship in tip-top condition.

Are you looking through binoculars or?

Yes, but it was pitch black. You couldn't see.

Going out there when it was pitch black was just unbelievable. Your eyes wouldn't adjust. It was like walking in the dark, and you couldn't see, so you had your eyes covered, because we'd have to walk out to the area where we would be doing the watch in the front of the ship.

Did you have to report any funny sounds at night or anything?

Anything we saw, we reported to the one that was steering the ship. There was communications if we saw anything at all. I wasn't on watch when this all started to happen on the 23rd.

So what is this thing that is going to happen? What happens-- what was that day like?

Well, at first, it was a joke. We didn't know what was going on. We didn't think anybody was serious.

There were torpedo boats that were taking pictures of us, and eyeing us.

These were North Korean?

Then there were planes overhead, like three planes, and six torpedo boats. And they surrounded us, and we started heading out to sea, and then they started firing upon us.

Where were you when that happened?

I was at general quarters and everybody was on the floor. I was at the front part of the ship laying on the floor, on the ground, and every time you heard a bullet go off, it was like, oh! You know, your heart kind of stopped for a second or two, because you didn't know where it was going. But one of the crew members got killed during that ordeal. Wayne Hodges got killed, and twelve got injured.

By bullets?

Right. Wayne Hodges got killed. He was throwing classified material over the side of the ship.

Was it papers, or electronics, or--

Papers, sledge hammers on the electronics, and stuff like that. So it's come out that, in the last few years, that Russia had something to do with this whole thing, because you wondered what the hell a place like North Korea would be taking us, and it's come out in years where some guy by the name of Walker was doing a study. And the study had something to do with-- they wanted some of our intelligence gathering information.

So the waters where they approached the ship and started firing, those were the waters between Japan and Korea?

Well, we were off the coast of North Korea

Off the coast on the?

We were off the coast, like fifteen miles, that's what our records show. Well, they claimed we were nine miles out from some island. International waters was twelve miles. So, if you're thirteen miles out, and you're taking information from the country, picking up signals, etc, it's legal. If you're ten miles, it's not legal. All countries have international waters of twelve miles. So that's where the argument came in, why they took us.

But even on the day that the torpedo boats came, you still didn't know that you were intelligence gathering, did you?

No.

No?

I didn't know that until when we were taken. That day, we started finding stuff out. It was like, what are we doing here! I didn't know where we were at. It was kind of like sssh-sssh, you know.

So you--the ship tries to evade them, right, go out to open sea?

Right.

And they cut them off, or something, or?

They started firing.

So, was the Pueblo armed with guns, or anything, or--

Two 50 caliber machine guns that were not even mounted, that we practiced on once.

They were frozen. (Mrs. Rogala)

They were frozen. I mean, this was January. It was cold outside. There was no way that we were going to use them. I practiced on them once, though they weren't even mounted up on the ship. So, it wasn't going to happen. So, we were totally unprepared for the task at hand.

And, basically, other ships in the past that had gone to China and Russia, off their coasts, and did the same things, they never were fired upon. They were escorted out further to sea, or told to move on, or something, but, never, nothing like this. There was no history to say anything like this would happen. We had another ship like the Pueblo that did this kind of mission, the USS Banner to other places. And nothing ever happened. So, it was supposed to be a non-risk mission. Not a whole lot was supposed to happen.

So, the torpedo boats kind of had the ship corralled or something?

Yeah, surrounded, yeah.

And then did they start talking to you, or sending

They first-- They started talking to us, but we had no idea what they were jabbering. We tried to get the heck out of there, and when we tried, they started firing. And then they started getting closer and closer to us, so we just kept trying to run for a while. And, after a while, after all the injuries and everything, we decided just to stop and let them board us, because there were all those injuries already, and one guy was killed already. Well, we knew he wouldn't live very long. So, we let them board us, and they took over the ship, pulled us in to Wonsan Harbor. And they took us off the ship, and gangplanked down to the ground. They put us on a bus, and then we went to the train station. We boarded a train for an overnight trip.

Blindfolded, off the ship. (Mrs. Rogala)

We were blindfolded, and we were in downtown Pyongyang at night. They had us have our hands up in the air. It is one of the famous pictures of all of us holding our hands up in downtown Pyongyang in the dark.

You almost fell off the gangplank. (Mrs. Rogala)

Yes, walking off the ship. There was a little gangplank. I thought I was falling. Somebody caught me since I was blindfolded. I didn't know what I was doing. But it was scary. Then they took us to someplace, and they said, "If you follow our laws and obey our rules, everything will be okay." Well, I misunderstood them. I thought they said, "Since you did not follow our laws, you're going to be done away with." So, it was kind of a scary thing. But then we were put on a train. And some guards were stuffing bread into our mouths. We didn't know if we should eat it, or what. Most of us were spitting it out, because we didn't know what the heck they were giving to us. So, then, they took us to some military complex. And we got there by blindfold, so we didn't know where we were exactly at. But we stayed there for about three months. And they moved us to another complex.

During those three months, were all the days similar to one another, or did they talk to you, or try to tell you what a great country--

Oh, yes. We underwent modern brainwashing. We had literature to read. We had books to read. They talked to us about their country, how nice it would be to live there. And one of the unique things that they showed us, pictures of Americans that defected to North Korea. And I thought it was BS until about within the last year, I found out it wasn't, because CNN aired this documentary where this one guy that's been living there for forty-five years. He went across the line from North Korea across the DMZ to the South during the war on his own free will. So did three other people. They actually defected from the United States and went to North Korea, where, this one guy became a teacher over there teaching propaganda and anti-Americanism to all of them. He's still alive, and he says he will never leave. He says, "They have been good to me." Three others-- two have died that lived there, and one went back to. But it's amazing what you find out over time that really is intriguing, to say the least. They show these pictures, and they were Americans, and it was like, yeah, right, who the hell in their right mind would want to stay over there! We were over there, and it was--

Yeah.

You know, it was terrible.

You weren't getting any news from the outside world at that time?

Nothing. We received after about five months letters from home. Letters were sent, and they gave us some of this mail. They also let us send out mail. They sent three copies out, sending them through different routes to make sure they would get to them. And I think they all did get to my parents. And in these letters, we all put a lot of BS stuff in there, like say hello to so and so that was dead three years ago. We were saying stuff that didn't make sense.

Your dad knew that when he got the letter.

Exactly. "What the heck is he talking about!" Yeah. So, we were all sending little bits and pieces of stories made up.

And what was the government, what was the American government doing to get you out of there?

Well, they were negotiating at the DMZ. They were trying to get us out during that whole time. But they never came in to try to get us out or anything. They just let us sit there. And it was like we never thought we would be there very long. So, at first, it was like, yeah, we'll be here a week or two, and then they're going to come and get us. How could a little country like North Korea do what they did? It was like-- it was just unbelievable what was happening, because if it was Russia or China, that's one thing, but when you have a little country like North Korea doing this kind of stuff it was like, yeah, we'll be out of here soon and--

And there were over two hundred American Navy personnel in captivity?

Eighty-three.

Eighty-three on board the ship.

Right. Eighty-three were on the ship. So, they had us all in-- the officers were all in their each individual room. Both of the places we stayed, I think, were military complexes, and they were in North Korea. But you could see out the window, and you see the peasants come out at six a.m. doing their exercise. And they live in shacks. You saw men and women outside, and the women would be carrying all the stuff, and the men would be walking at the side of them smiling. And the women were like-- it was like totally different than our environment.

What about those outbuildings? The outbuildings where they would take the officers for questioning. (Mrs. Rogala)

There were the officers who were kept separate, and they endured the greatest beatings because they obviously knew the most. They did get our service records. I don't think we did-- I don't know if they totally got destroyed. I think they got partially destroyed, but I think they were able to capture information on who was who.

So, as far as the crew members, we were all in rooms kind of together. Like for a while there, I was with three other people. And the other, most of the time, I was with seven other people in the same room. We each had our own rack, our own bed, it was like a twin bed with a very thin mattress. So, we kind of survived the whole eleven months we were there by talking to each other. When I was having a bad day saying, "This is never going to end. I'm never going to get out of here," the next guy said, "Nah, that ain't true. We will be out of here in no time." And then we tried to brainwash the guards, told them stuff about how wonderful America is, and some would listen, and some wouldn't. And, so, we had some guards that were very nice to us. Other guards, though, they beat the shit out of us.

Really.

Stuff like that. Well, the worst of it was hell week. Towards the end of my eleven months there, *Time* and *Newsweek* published the front page article of some members of the crew in North Korea that they got a hold of. In the picture of a group of eight of us, several of them were giving them the finger. We had them convinced it was a Hawaiian good luck sign. It was an act of defiance. And, holy shit, we went through hell! I got my teeth knocked loose. We had to keep our head down to our neck. And I was accused of moving it to the left, so I got two fists to the mouth. My teeth, I remember wiggling them. I still have them, but I remember wiggling them. They reset themselves.

You got hit in the head with a fist. (Mrs. Rogala)

I got punched twice in the face, also when I was over there, I was interrogated a couple of times. And they wanted info, and I was like, "I ain't telling you nothing! If I have to stay here the rest of my life, I'd rather die." So, I didn't tell them nothing. "So you're going to be shot at dawn." "Okay." And they did this to pretty much most of us. I said, "Okay." Well, those days never

came. I'm here. It was like, "I don't want to live there. This place is a hole in the ground. America is America." America is the land of opportunity. So, I'm really, really pro- America now, in a lot of different ways. And I'm very opinionated about politics.

So, after eleven months, negotiations succeeded in obtaining the release of the captured?

The United States signed a letter of apology and then instantly repudiated it to earn our release. So, it came, after this hell week, about two weeks later. We thought, just before hell week, we were going. There were a couple of signs that we were going home before, because our treatment improved. This time, the treatment changed suddenly. And then they told us we'd be going home. We were issued new clothing. We got released on December 23rd. So, the timing was good -- so, the 24th, we were in San Diego with our families.

So, did you get sent over the border then?

The bus took us to the DMZ where we came off the bus, as each person's name was read, and accounted for. Then we went to a naval hospital via a helicopter.

What was the bridge called? (Mrs. Rogala)

It was the Bridge of No Return. We came across-- that's what it is called today. Go one way or the other, but you never can go back!

So they took us via helicopter to a military hospital, and then they took us across the street from the hospital to some EM club. And there I had the best meal that I could ever remember in my life. It was a ham and cheese, and some chicken noodle soup, and some coffee and orange juice. And, oh, my God, was it good! I'll never forget it. We were given medical treatment in hopes of getting home for the holiday to be with our families. So, December 24th, we arrived in San Diego and met Governor Reagan. And they had a parade from the airport to Balboa hospital, people lined the streets four or five deep for a twelve mile stretch! It felt really good to see so many smiling faces.

Did you have to undergo some kind of a debriefing, or did they ask you to explain or share your experiences, or what you should say?

There was a Navy Court of Inquiry which convened a couple of months later in Coronado, California, where we all had to testify. I told them I didn't want to, that I knew nothing. I shouldn't have said that, because they didn't let me come home to Niles here until the end of March. And this was the end of December. A lot of the guys got to go home for a week or two, like in January or February, and then come back for the Court. Well, they wouldn't let me go, because I said I had nothing to say. So, then when they interrogated me. They asked me a few questions, and I was done. But, during this court, they made this big thing of like, oh, we gave up the ship. We were dishonorable and all this stuff. Bottom line none of that stuck. They said, hey, these guys were in captivity for eleven months. They went through hell, and you're going to forget it.

And, we weren't "X-POWs" for a long time. We were "Detainees" for twenty-some years. The government wouldn't recognize us even though the Navy was at fault. We didn't get POW status until the early nineties. It took the government all that time to give us any kind of VA benefits. Yeah, I was getting benefits before that, but it was very minor. It wasn't anything related to POW status.

The-- I seem to remember a picture of the captain. His name was?

Lloyd Bucher.

Lloyd?

Bucher.

He seemed to be-- he always appeared kind of ashen in all the pictures. He must have gone through a hard time.

The first month he was there, he was forty years old when this happened, after a month, I thought he was eighty. He definitely was worked over real well.. And when we got back, the Captain stood behind us, in every way, shape, and form.

Well, they were going to court-martial him, right? (Mrs. Rogala)

They were going to court-martial him, but they said he suffered enough. They wanted to nail him. They were talking about throwing the book at him and the other officers for not performing.

For allowing the ship to get caught. (Mrs. Rogala)

Right. They said he suffered enough, so they forgave him like it was his fault.

Somebody was suggesting that the captain should have fought?

Right.

And that would have been the end of his--

That would have been the end of everyone's life. (Mrs. Rogala)

You wouldn't be talking to me today.

So the captain probably made the right call, right?

Oh, yes. I'm bitter towards President Johnson. He was the worst president we ever had, bar none. He was the one-- the chief executive at the time that did nothing to get us back. They should have went in right away, and got us out. We have enough military power, where in a day or two in, we could have been released. And the best president we ever had in the United States was

Richard Nixon, bar none. I was invited to his inauguration, but I didn't go. But he was the one that I think convinced the Chinese to tell the North Koreans to let us go. I'm firmly convinced that's what happened. That's how we got released or we could have been there a much longer time.

He had good rapport with China. (Mrs. Rogala)

He just got elected in November`68, and then, within thirty days, we were sprung.

Yeah.

So, I mean, the connections are all there.

Even before he was sworn in.

Right.

Yeah.

I think they were afraid of him. He had good connections with China and they were like, oh, gosh, we can't mess with this guy. (Mrs. Rogala)

Even though Nixon got caught with Watergate he was a great president.. But they all do it. They're all guilty (politics) in one way or another of doing stuff that maybe isn't lawful. Some are caught and others are not.

Did any of the crew suffer, like have a difficult time adjusting to life back home?

Oh, yeah, big time. I have I still have issues. Any time the word North Korea comes up, I get chills. It's like what's this all about now. But, yes, I have post traumatic stress disorder that I'm being treated for. And several of the guys, though, have injuries which will be with them forever like Rosales' back being broken.

He was hit on the back with a two by four.

They picked on him because he was Mexican.

And the blacks. (Mrs. Rogala)

And the two blacks. They went after them too because they knew they were a minority in America and they were going to make them feel like a first class citizen if they stayed.

This Mr. Rosales, the other gentlemen, proved to be good soldiers.

Oh, yes.

What about the nurse? (Mrs. Rogala)

Yeah. While we were there, they supposedly gave us medical treatment with a nurse. Everything was penicillin pills. Didn't matter what was wrong with you, that's what you got.

What was her name? (Mrs. Rogala)

We called her Lotus Blossom.

Lotus Blossom.

We had names for everyone.

I imagine.

But every room had different names. But me and my other seven people in the room, all knew who was who. Who's the guard of the night? Oh, Teacher is, or Pighead. One guy's face looked something like a pig, Pighead. And it went on and on. We had all kinds of names. We got goofy names.

Yeah.

We played games with them. We had no air conditioning except for opening the windows, so we had all these flies in the room. They gave us a little twig with a little piece of rubber on it, and they wanted us to kill the flies. This one officer, when he was on duty, would give you an extra hour of playing cards if our room was the one that had caught the most flies. We had a little cup, and we collected all the flies. We had a big stack, and he'd want to know how many we had. So we made up, we had 128, the next room 100. And he believed all this. That's how we kept ourselves going.

But they antagonized us. We had to clean the floors. We cleaned the john. The john, there were urinals on the wall. Liquid would come right out the bottom, and then they'd have us clean the floors. And these rags would just stink!

So, we had to, somehow, survive. We survived by being together. They could have really broke us down a lot more by keeping us separately like World War II, where they put everybody in a box for a period of a time, and you were in solitary confinement. I always had somebody to talk to, so that helped the whole situation.

The officers were in solitary confinement. (Mrs. Rogala)

Right. And my age, being twenty-one years old. I could endure a lot at that kind of age.

It was like we just couldn't believe what was happening, the whole thing was like an unbelievable event, the United States versus this little place. Knowing what's going on forty

years later, they're no different. They're still the same. If you look for any information or read about it, they're the same people, except they got a new leader. They got the son running -- the father died.

Yeah.

The hero of the past, Kim Il Sung, died. Now it's Kim Jong-il. And he likes American things. So, I really think they should let the country reunite. And I think we would be better off. Look at Vietnam. That's one country. Well, why can't Korea be? These people are starving in the North. They're so backwards over there. And then South Korea is so prosperous with some of their companies. It would just be the right thing to do, human rights, etc. for them to unite. We should get the heck out of there. We still got thirty thousand plus troops there. What the hell are they doing there?

Yeah.

So, you're still in the Service until May of '69, right?

Well, yes. We got released in December of '68. And then until the end of March, I was active. And then the separation papers came shortly after that for me.

So, May of '69 then, did you come back home?

I came back home March of '69 here to Niles.

Where did you live in Niles at that time?

On Farnsworth Drive.

And that was a big event in Niles when you came home, right?

Oh, yeah. That following weekend late March, 1969 was a big event. There was a Jewel on Oakton right near Prospect, they had a big picture in the window: "On Saturday, come and meet me." They had cake and stuff. And they offered me a scholarship. National Supermarkets, at the time, also offered me a scholarship so I got to go to college. I'm a college graduate, because, when I came back, people asked me what I wanted to do. And I go, "Yeah, I'm going to work." "You don't want to work in a supermarket, be on your feet. Why don't you go to college?" So, I had scholarships from two companies. I took the one from National. Also Niles had a big homecoming that Sunday at Notre Dame High School. They had like 450-500 people attend. And Mayor Blase was there along with Roman Pucinski and Adlai Stevenson. There might have been a couple of others. But it was a big get-together.

So that must have helped you to sort of accept the experience then a little bit, did it?

Yeah. It was heartwarming.

So the people at home

Uh-huh

realized what you guys had gone through

Uh-huh.

and your performance shouldn't be questioned in any way, right?

Yeah. There were a couple of people here in Niles, the Dachmans who started writing a book about me, and they were handling my affairs when I came back. I was in the *Chicago Today* for a week, and I was doing speaking engagements for like a year or two after until it dried up. I'd go different places and make speeches. And the title of my speech was *Communism Versus Freedom: The Choice Is Yours*. So, it was pretty neat. It was Niles, who were talking about giving me a car. Then they didn't, because then they would have to do it to everybody else at the time, but--

You got a key to the city. (Mrs. Rogala)

I got a key to the city.

You actually get a key?

That's in that box. Yeah, it's a gold key with Mayor Blase's name on it.

Yeah.

Now the other-- Your other six close friends, because it comes to mind now, there's been treatments in books and plays about people who undergo hostage situations and captivity. About they survive and form friendships. Did you stay in touch? ~~~~

Yes, but not until 17 years had passed. Since then, we have had reunions every 2-3 years, and we go back and forth on emails to keep the lines of communications open.

Several.

Have there been any books written on the USS Pueblo?

Bucher's Story. (Mrs. Rogala)

You know what, I haven't read most of them.

It's like—I don't want to relive this!

Bucher's Story, that's the name of the book. (Mrs. Rogala)

Bucher, My Story.

Bucher, My Story. It tells his story from the minute The Pueblo left San Diego until the time they came back to San Diego. And actually it's how he was tortured, too. I mean, he was tortured the worst. He lost sight in one eye. It was a mess. But that's an excellent book. Some officers wrote them, too, but that's telling their side. By the way, it's going to be three years since the Captain passed away.

Yeah.

He died like at the age of seventy-six.

So did he continue in the Navy after that or was he--

He stayed in for a while, but did not get a specific assignment. He went around the country talking about the Pueblo incident while in the Navy.

Did you meet your wife during this period at all or

No.

No.

The-- Was there an incident later, during President Ford's time, with the Mayaguez?

Uh-huh, yeah, it was a few years after. The outcome was like what we thought was going to happen to us. I believe that was in 1973 or '74. They captured that ship, but within a couple days they were released. It was a couple of Cambodians which captured the crew. And there were like twenty of them. And they held them for a couple of days. And they released them. So, that's what I thought was going to happen to us

So the Pueblo-- you weren't the only ship that was engaged in gathering intelligence, or do you think you were?

We were not. There were others.

There were others, but they chose to, do you think they chose to make something of the Pueblo to cause an incident, or was it--

I think that's what they're saying now, that Russia was interested in some of our intelligence information, so they asked North Korea to try to take us.

Which would mean then that-- which would suggest then, that there was no question then. You weren't in too close.

Right.

You were an able seaman on that ship, and you were positioned in the right place, and they chose to come out and make an issue of it.

Yes. This came out twenty-five years later; little dribs and drabs are starting to be put together on this whole thing

Yeah.

I'll know some more about it.

Is it on the DVD we got about the interview of the Pueblo that guy brought back from North Korea? (Mrs. Rogala)

We got a copy of the tape.

We had copies made. I have it..

It's a tape of-- an American who went to North Korea, and you're not allowed to bring cameras on the Pueblo, because it's a tourist attraction but he hid it very well - so he narrated it. They got bullet holes circled and other areas of interest.

So this is something you mentioned before the interview, the ship, the Pueblo, today is still in North Korean hands in some port.

Yes. It's in Pyongyang in the harbor. I want that damn thing back. I need to put this behind me and that's the only way we're going to.

So I want to put the word out to as many people as possible that that's my wishes and let's do something about it now.

Richardson was running for President.

Bill, the Democrat from New Mexico.

This was also in the article that he was there. He asked for the ship back, and they said, "Well, it's possible." There were a couple of times we were close to getting it back, and then it fell through. But I guess now we're close again, because before the end of the year, they're supposed to abandon all their nuclear stuff. It's supposed to happen by the end of the year. And if they do, we're going to-- so maybe something could happen. Maybe we need just a little push. Next year's an election year. Maybe we could use a little push. So I'd be willing to tell all that I want the ship back. And anybody that could help me should contact their congressman.

We'd like to get hold of Hillary Clinton, only because she was born in Park Ridge. She was raised in Park Ridge, you know. That's a neighboring town.

I've already contacted Obama and Durbin, but I don't get anywhere. You get their offices, and you tell them a little bit about it, and those people don't know enough. They're youngsters that are working in those offices, and they don't really pass it on. So, I got a letter from Senator Durbin that said they're going to pass it through to Navy officials. It has nothing to do with Navy officials. So how do I get to these kind of people to tell them? I'm looking for a way.

Yeah. You'd be willing to talk to a newspaper person, right, if they wanted to interview you or something?

Uh-huh, yeah. For a lot of years I wasn't, but now I am, because I want the ship back. Forty years is too long.

Yeah.

During all this time, his brother, he's got a younger brother, was also in the Navy. Tell him that story, that they wouldn't allow him to go on a ship because of you.
(Mrs. Rogala)

Yeah, he was going to get orders to the USS Enterprise, but they turned him back, because I was in North Korea.

They wouldn't put him on a ship. They kept him in San Diego.

Two people in the same family being in

Harm's way.

Yeah.

So he just completed his service without incident or without any issues?

Right, yeah.

They just kept him stateside.

His parents went through a lot having him as a POW. They couldn't handle another one, you know, something happening to the other one. So, they kept him stateside in San Diego, correct? (Mrs. Rogala)

Yeah.

Yeah. Matter of fact, he heard about the capture of the Pueblo first, before your parents did, right? (Mrs. Rogala)

He worked nights at a place in Park Ridge called Centel Phone Company. And he heard it on the news like at 3 o'clock in the morning. So, he called them, woke them up from their sleep.

Before anyone else. (Mrs. Rogala)

Before the media or before anybody contacted them, or anything. That's how they found out.

Did your dad think you would be coming home sooner than you did or--

I don't know. I think everybody kind of did. (Mrs. Rogala to Mr. Rogala's father)

I don't remember now. (father)

It was a hard time for you, though.

Yeah. (father)

And then all of Niles was behind them, hoping that he would come home soon. And his mom wrote letters to anybody and everybody she could think of to get the government to get these guys out. And like he said, it wasn't until Nixon was elected, and Nixon having those close ties to China, and now finding out that maybe China was involved, it was like we'd better get those guys out of there. Nixon is in here, so-- but his mom wrote lots and lots of letters all over the place to everybody and anybody that would read it. (Mrs. Rogala)

Correct. She wrote a letter to the president of National Tea. That's how I got that scholarship.

Right.

So what school did you decide to go to?

I'm a graduate of Western Michigan in Kalamazoo, 1973.

Broncos.

Yep. Yep.

What did you major in, business, or?

Food distribution, which was the supermarket business.

Had you worked in a Jewel before you--

Uh-huh. I worked in the National, yeah.

I worked at Harlem & Irving and Golf Mill Shopping Center. That's when I came back. They put me in that store for training, before I moved on to other things, and went to college after that.

So, and then the veterans' associations, you belong to some of those or--

Oh, yeah. I belong to Veterans of Foreign Wars in Elk Grove. I'm also a member of Disabled Veterans and Ex-POWs. I do go to meetings of Ex-POWs in Batavia.

So, we don't have anything planned, but if there was an opportunity to speak at the Library, you'd be willing to, you wouldn't mind doing that either, possibly?

It would be very informal.

Yeah.

Like this.

Yeah.

It would be questions and answers, and that kind of stuff. I could just give a synopsis, a little bit of what happened, and then questions from there.

Yeah.

Usually, there are a lot of questions that do come up.

Yeah. Usually at this stage of the interview, we ask the veteran if their-- how their experience in the military changed their lives. Do you think being in the--well, I would imagine it did, because you're still aware of this all the time.

It changed my life a lot-- a lot of different aspects.

You grew up very fast. (Mrs. Rogala)

You grow up real fast when you're twenty years old. Everything then in life is more serious.

Yeah.

Going to college was important. I talked to people that I looked up to, and they said, "Hey, college is important. Study hard." "Change your life that way." And then just going through life every day with thoughts that come into the picture day in and day out of the incident-- I mean, I didn't eat rice for twenty years.

He won't touch a turnip. (Mrs. Rogala)

Turnips I won't touch. We had turnips, rice, and bread. That was our diet for eleven months. I lost 40 pounds, from 170 to 130.

Wow, your parents must have--

I lost a lot of weight, but I was starting to gain weight as I went into the military, so part of that was good to take off. There was one guy that lost 90 pounds, though.

It changes your life and you just don't know when something is going to come up, though. I mean now--

To trigger something, yeah.

It just triggers all kinds of different incidents. In every given week, if you talk to me, you go out and there will be nothing, but then the week after, something with North Korea, and something to talk about. And as you get older, you--

He won't watch any type of war movies. They just-- they affect him too much. And, every now or then, he'll dream at night. And I will hear, you know, yelling, and I know it is related to that, because it only happens when something is on the news that upsets him, and then, that night, he'll-- he doesn't realize it, but I do, and it's like, Oh, God, you know. (Mrs. Rogala)

The start of the war that we're currently in, the Iraqi War, that turned out to be a real nightmare for me.

Yeah.

With those prisoners.

Yeah.

What was her name, Jessica? (Mrs. Rogala)

That really drove me crazy. Everything was coming back to light. Somebody's in there, and she was captured, and then how they got her out. Everything would come to light. They would say, this is happening, this is happening. Oh, this is what happened to me. This is what happened to me. And then I was up half the night thinking about all this.

Yeah.

And then I started having this problem with breathing, and they can't find nothing wrong with me. I've had the VA do several tests. And they can't find nothing wrong with me. I have a breathing problem, and it all started right at that time with the Iraqi War. I went to the emergency room. "I can't breathe." Well, they did every test imaginable, and I still got that sensation, and nobody knows what it is. It could be connected. I don't know. It's pronounced. And I don't

know. It's been on and off. I'm seeing a psychiatrist to go over that. When I think things are better, I stop.

Yeah.

And it's really a need when there's a lot of stuff going on.

Yeah.

When stuff comes up about North Korea, it's very intense.

Yeah.

Well, we're honored that you came in to give your memoir today.

Thank you.

It can't be completely pleasant, some of the stuff you're thinking about. So, thank you.

Therapeutically, It's good for him. (Mrs. Rogala)

When they go to the reunions, some of the guys won't talk about it at all, and they're the ones that are having the worst time.

Yeah.

Whereas there are some, about half or three quarters, will sit and talk about it. Oh, remember this, remember that. (Mrs. Rogala)

Yeah.

Remember the nurse, whatever her name was. Remember that guy, and then I'll say to him, you never told me about that. He blocks or blocked a lot out. That was his way of coping with what happened, correct? (Mrs. Rogala)

Yes.

At the last reunion a year ago, we had this couple from Oregon that came. They were invited to our reunion. They are the people that are taking care of—(nobody in their family is doing it.) so they started doing it, Wayne Hodge's grave. It was all weeds and everything. They took an interest in starting to take care of it and put flowers there and made it look real nice. There's a connection there, somebody in the family, these are friends of somebody in the family. But, anyways, they wanted to come to our reunion, so we invited them. And the day we got there, after a couple of hours or so, they started shooting all these questions at us. There was like twelve of us sitting in a circle and we were answering all these questions.

all these questions at us. There was like twelve of us sitting in a circle and we were answering all these questions.

This was last year?

Pueblo, Colorado.

Yeah, in Pueblo.

At the reunion.

So they had nothing to do with the Pueblo. They were friends.

Just happened to--, yeah.

And they took care of the grave. And they brought us pictures of what the grave looked like

He didn't get a medal for valor or anything, Mr. Hodges?

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

He gave his life to protect us.

And they kept him. He was released with the crew, in a casket. (Mrs. Rogala)

Yeah.

But we have a USS Pueblo Veterans Association, a nonprofit organization. We, through the years, received monies from some of the politicians who came to our reunions, etc. In Pueblo, Colorado, if you go to the convention center downtown, there are plaques outside of there with all of our names on it. This was how many years, four years ago or something?

It was six.

Six years ago, they commemorated-- there was a statue, and then with names of all of us there.

They had a huge rock. (Mrs. Rogala)

Big rock with our names on it. That's kind of neat. And when the ship comes back some day. We have land donated for us to put it. It's going to go there.

They're going to dig, and put water in there, and put the ship in the water. (Mrs. Rogala)

The land's been given to us. It's been donated to us.

Wow. Was the ship named for Pueblo, Colorado? Oh, I get it.

Yes, we had several reunions there. The first one was like on Fourth of July. They had a ticker tape parade on the Fourth of July years ago. But we didn't have reunions for twenty years. Nobody wanted to relive this for a long time. Reunions came later on. And I didn't even want to associate when I was younger.

There are still some guys that will not come to them, period. (Mrs. Rogala)

Yes, they never came to a reunion, because they want no part of thinking about it again. It would be too traumatic.

There's another reunion you mentioned scheduled for this year.

Next year. (Mrs. Rogala)

In September, 2008.

In Burlington, Vermont.

In Burlington, Vermont. And you mentioned something interesting about a play being held

Right

developed, or written and performed.

Right. They're going to do the play for us in Vermont, and then they're going to do it in Washington, D.C. for the general public. And they're going to see how it goes, and they may take it around the country. It will be the second time ever. They had a play in 1971 in Washington, D.C. for a while on the Pueblo. And was a movie in the early seventies. I don't know if you remember the movie.

Hal Holbrook. (Mrs. Rogala)

Hal Holbrook played Commander Bucher

Bucher, yeah.

Is it a good film?

It's a one man biography. It's Bucher just sitting there, Hal Holbrook just sitting at a table as Bucher reminiscing about the whole thing. And then flashback pictures of the crew and like the signing, and the Bridge of No Return, they would flash pictures like that.
(Mrs. Rogala)

I've got a DVD that has the movie on it. It has several of our recent reunions, and it has the North Korean tour of the Pueblo. McClintock who works for a radio station put this together.

He combined them all onto a DVD. (Mrs. Rogala)

So, I have the DVD.

There's a lot of information still coming out. Some of the crew have passed away. How many are dead now, eight or ten? (Mrs. Rogala)

Eight

Eight.

Eight have passed away, out of the eighty-two, so there's still, like you said, they were all younger, so there's still quite a few left.

With this play coming out, and more and more information, and maybe documents become declassified in time, we get more of the real-- more people will know what the true story probably was?

That's what we're guessing. (Mrs. Rogala)

If you have an e-mail address, I can send you some info on it.

Oh, sure.

If you want to give me that.

Yeah. Yeah.

It was great returning to the U.S. at the San Diego Airport.

When you got here, it was something else. You had a real, a lot of people involved. John Wayne—(Mr. Rogala)

Oh, he's got pictures with Zsa Zsa Gabor and John Wayne. (Mrs. Rogala)

What's the lady's name? (Mr. Rogala's father)

Zsa Zsa Gabor. (Mrs. Rogala)

Zsa Zsa Gabor.

John Wayne.

John Wayne.

All sorts of pictures.

Yeah, the song by the Tijuana Brass was our theme song.

"The Lonely Bull." (Mrs. Rogala)

"The Lonely Bull," that was our theme song. They were at our reunion when we had the dance, when we came back to San Diego. John Wayne was there. The Tijuana Brass was there.

Wow.

I received an autographed album that the Tijuana Brass. It was a great dinner-dance.

Yeah.

As you get older, you can't remember what you do yesterday, but you remember a lot of this stuff, because it's fond memories. Or it is excruciating, one or the other.

Yeah, it's

And again, as he talks about it, he remembers more, and that's good therapy for him.
(Mrs. Rogala)

Remember we went to the airport to pick you up. We were escorted by the police department. (Mr. Rogala's father)

Oh.

Skaja's provided the limousine, yeah, right here at O'Hare Airport.

Well, you were the only one from this town so it was a big story. (Mrs. Rogala)

Have you lived here a long time?

Yes

*I lived on the north side of Chicago, so I know a little bit about the northern suburbs.
Where did you live?*

Belmont and Milwaukee Avenue.

Yes.

I moved out here to Niles when I was like eighteen.

Yeah.

Just before you were drafted-- or just before you enlisted. (Mrs. Rogala)

A year or two before that, yeah.

That's interesting. (Mrs. Rogala)

The question comes to my mind; did religion help to get the men to survive in that period?

For me, hell, yeah, oh, yeah.

They always say there are no atheists in foxholes.

Yeah, definitely played a part.

Yeah.

Yeah, it's when you're fired upon, you don't know where the bullets are going, that brings you right there, and then it went on from there. That's where it started. You thought you were going to die. But it was a personal thing. It wasn't anything--

Yeah.

that we all did together.

The threat of being shot in the morning really, for him, really turned him to God. He prayed a lot, because that's how they would control these guys is to threaten them with stuff like that, right? (Mrs. Rogala)

Yeah. That came out. I brought that up in an interview at a reunion. The *Pueblo Chieftain* ran us front page every day for our reunion last year when we were down there. And in one of them, I happened to be in the picture, the guy asked me about life over there. It was kind of funny, because I said, "Yeah, I was going to be shot at dawn." And the others started laughing. "Yeah, you, like the rest of us." It was all of us.

That's how they threatened them. (Mrs. Rogala)

They did it to all of us, like twice to me, and I don't know--

Yeah, the first time.

They were going to shoot all of us at dawn, but nobody broke. That was the neat thing about it. Nobody really cracked. There were a couple of rumbles about stuff, but I don't think they were serious.

Yeah.

One of the crew I heard did a little talking; he's never come to a reunion or anything. He passed away a few years ago, but I don't know if they kind of broke him down. He was a little-- one of the older people, so he probably had a rough time.

That's why he never came to the reunion. (Mrs. Rogala)

That's why he wouldn't want to, yeah. There was one person, but, other than that, I don't think they really broke anyone down. They tried all kinds of methods. They tried once with, we called it the Gypsy Tea Room, they had food and drinks, like we were going to a banquet. And then they were saying, they started asking us about, "You think you might want to live here? We can give you a new car, any kind you want. Where do you want to live, you pick it." Then they have all of this foods and drinks in front of them.

No, thanks.

Then they look out the window and see the poverty. (Mrs. Rogala)

They paraded us all in, like two or three at a time. They gave us a little party for an hour or two.

The picture

They gave us a beer, too. We were drinking a beer, you know. They figured it would loosen us up. I think they tried everything, you know. It was like--

That famous picture where you were giving the Hawaiian good luck sign--

Uh-huh.

Who took that picture? How did that picture get into Time or Newsweek? Did they--

They took pictures of us to send back home to prove that we were okay.

So, did you all do that, or just one of you, or--

There were a couple in each of the pictures. No, not all of us. A couple of the guys in each of the pictures.

Were they officers?

No. Just various people. I wasn't one that did that. I didn't have enough gall to do that.

Yeah.

No. It was printed in *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines.

Right, but how did they get the picture? Whoever that picture was sent to, somebody gave it to-- Security members gave it to-- (Mrs. Rogala)

They picked up on it. Obviously, it was a great story. It was a great front page story for those kind of magazines.

But North Korea got hold of it. (Mrs. Rogala)

Through Britain or somewhere, through a third country, it came back to them. Oh, man, they weren't too happy!

And, to this day, when they have a reunion, the guys all get together.

That's good!

Pictures taken with that. It's like their symbol. (Mrs. Rogala)

They called us up, and they came and picked us up, and took us to Navy Pier, I believe, and they showed us you, you know, the picture that they had of you. Nobody had it yet. We just got it. And it was at Navy Pier. (Mr. Rogala's father)

Wow.

Are you in that picture, the one that Time magazine printed? Are you in that particular group? No?

No.

They were some officers. I think there was a combination. I'm not sure who was in that, because there were several pictures that were like that. I wasn't in any--the one I was in, I don't know if it even had the finger in it or not.

It would be in the scrapbooks. He's got two scrapbooks about this big, like this, that his mother did from the time he was captured until the time he was released. So it might be in one of those.

And next year at the reunion in Burlington, Vermont, you'll probably have, you probably get to salute again, right?

Absolutely. Forty years later. They did it in Branson. They did it in Vegas. They did it in Pueblo. (Mrs. Rogala)

Yeah.

We try to have a reunion like every couple of years now.

Well, we salute you for coming in today, and--

Nice to be here.

Is there anything you'd like to add at this point that we haven't covered, or that you think is important?

Nothing I can think of now.

Thank you for a historical, engaging, fascinating interview. And to have your family here adds a dimension to it, so--

Right.

I'm really privileged. This will be a great memoir, very informative. Thank you.



Readers will find helpful background information by visiting these two web sites:

<http://www.usspueblo.org/> maintained by USS PUEBLO Veteran's Association.

<http://www.globalsecurity.org/intell/systems/ager-2.htm> This Global Security web site provides access to now declassified aerial imagery and more photographs of the 850 ton reconditioned World War II ship, the USS Pueblo.

The following Appendix of 8 pages illustrates the experiences recounted by Mr. Rogala. The last item is a scanned copy of the lengthy interview Mr. Rogala gave to the Niles Herald Spectator and appeared in the 2/07/2008 issue on page 51.

Life Magazine devoted its cover story to Commander Lloyd Bucher in its February 7, 1969 issue. Entitled "Bucher of the Pueblo: The Cruel Dilemmas of Duty," the story runs from pages 14 through 22 and is available at the Niles Public Library.



Close-up digital photograph of Mr. Rogala's framed picture of the USS Pueblo.



Mr. Rogala holds his framed picture of the U.S.S. Pueblo against the wall of the Group Study Room at Niles Public Library. The reflections of his wife and father who were present during the interview are visible.



2nd generation copy of photocopied photograph that appeared in Time Magazine issue of October 18, 1968. 3 of the crewman can be seen displaying the middle finger, "Hawaiian good-luck" sign of contempt.

Web site <http://www.usspueblo.org/v2f/captivity/goodluck.html> explains that the crew had used the gesture in many of the North Korean propaganda pictures taken of them. The North Koreans beat the crew when they learned from The Time caption that the Navy crew was signaling their contempt for their captors.

Scan of Mr. Rogala copy of Chicago Tribune's front page on Monday, December 23, 1968—the day of the release of the Pueblo Crew. Mr. Rogala's family appears in the lower left.



Chicago Tribune

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1968 YEAR—No. 35 A 1968 Chicago Tribune

MONDAY, DECEMBER 23, 1968

34 PAGES, 4 SECTIONS 10¢

PUEBLO'S CREW RELEASED

Reds Clubbed Men, Captain Says

U.S. REPUDIATES ITS STATEMENT OF 'APOLOGY' PRIOR TO SIGNING

No. Korea Says It Will Keep Spyslip

(Continued on last page)
PANNUNJONG, Korea, Dec. 22 (Monday)—The 12 crewmen of the United States navy intelligence ship Pueblo said it was the most terrifying experience of their lives when they were taken to North Korea and held in a prison camp for 11 months in a cruel and inhuman manner. The United States signed a so-called "apology" document to free the crew, but repudiated it even before signing it.

The first to cross the bridge was the skipper, Capt. Lloyd Stark Bucher. He was closely followed by the body of the Pueblo and then the crew.

The crew was taken to a prison camp where they were held for 11 months.

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PUEBLO CREW RELEASE ENDS FAMILY'S FEAR

BY DONALD TARDINI
Eleven months of fearful waiting ended at 2:15 a. m. Monday for the Chester Rogala family of St. Louis. A Navy spokesman telephoned the happy news that the Pueblo crew was released.

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Bucher Relates Terror Week of Beatings

(Continued on last page)
Buchanan, Dec. 22—Here is the text of the statement by Capt. Lloyd Stark Bucher, captain of the American intelligence ship Pueblo, released here today by the Navy. The crew had undergone a most terrifying week of terror shortly before their release.

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First Picture of Freed Pueblo Crew
In first released photo, crew members of U.S.S. Pueblo, freed by North Koreans, are escorted by military policemen upon their arrival at army's 121st evacuation hospital at Acon City, 10 miles west of Seoul, Korea.

Text of Repudiation by U.S. Negotiator

WASHINGTON, Dec. 22—Here is the text of the statement by Maj. Gen. Gilbert H. Woodward, chief American negotiator in Pannunjon, Korea, repudiating the statement prepared by North Korea on the release of the crew of the intelligence ship Pueblo. The repudiation preceded the signing of the North Korean document.

The position of the United States government with regard to the Pueblo, an admittedly captured ship, has been that the ship was not engaged in illegal activity, that there is no convincing evidence that the ship at any time violated the territorial waters claimed by North Korea, 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.

Following is one text of the North Korean statement that Gen. Woodward signed:

"To the government of the democratic people's republic of North Korea:

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RUSK BREAKS PUEBLO NEWS ON TELEVISION

WASHINGTON, Dec. 22—The American people were informed by informed sources at the release of the 12 surviving crewmen of the intelligence ship Pueblo in a statement by Secretary of State Dean Rusk.

Rusk spoke on behalf of President Johnson who returned to the White House today from Pannunjon, North Korea, where he had been to sign the release of the crew of the Pueblo.

He said the ship was not engaged in illegal activity, that there is no convincing evidence that the ship at any time violated the territorial waters claimed by North Korea, and that we could not apologize for actions which we did not believe took place.

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Flu Perils Apollo's Orbits of the Moon

Frank Borman Hardest Hit

WASHINGTON, Dec. 22—The Apollo 11 mission, which is scheduled to launch on Sunday, Dec. 21, is being threatened by a flu epidemic that has hit the crew.

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THE WEATHER	
CHICAGO AND VICINITY	
High	41
Low	24
Wind	W, 10-15
Clouds	Partly cloudy
NORTH CENTRAL U.S.	
High	41
Low	24
Wind	W, 10-15
Clouds	Partly cloudy
SOUTHEAST U.S.	
High	41
Low	24
Wind	W, 10-15
Clouds	Partly cloudy
WEST COAST U.S.	
High	41
Low	24
Wind	W, 10-15
Clouds	Partly cloudy

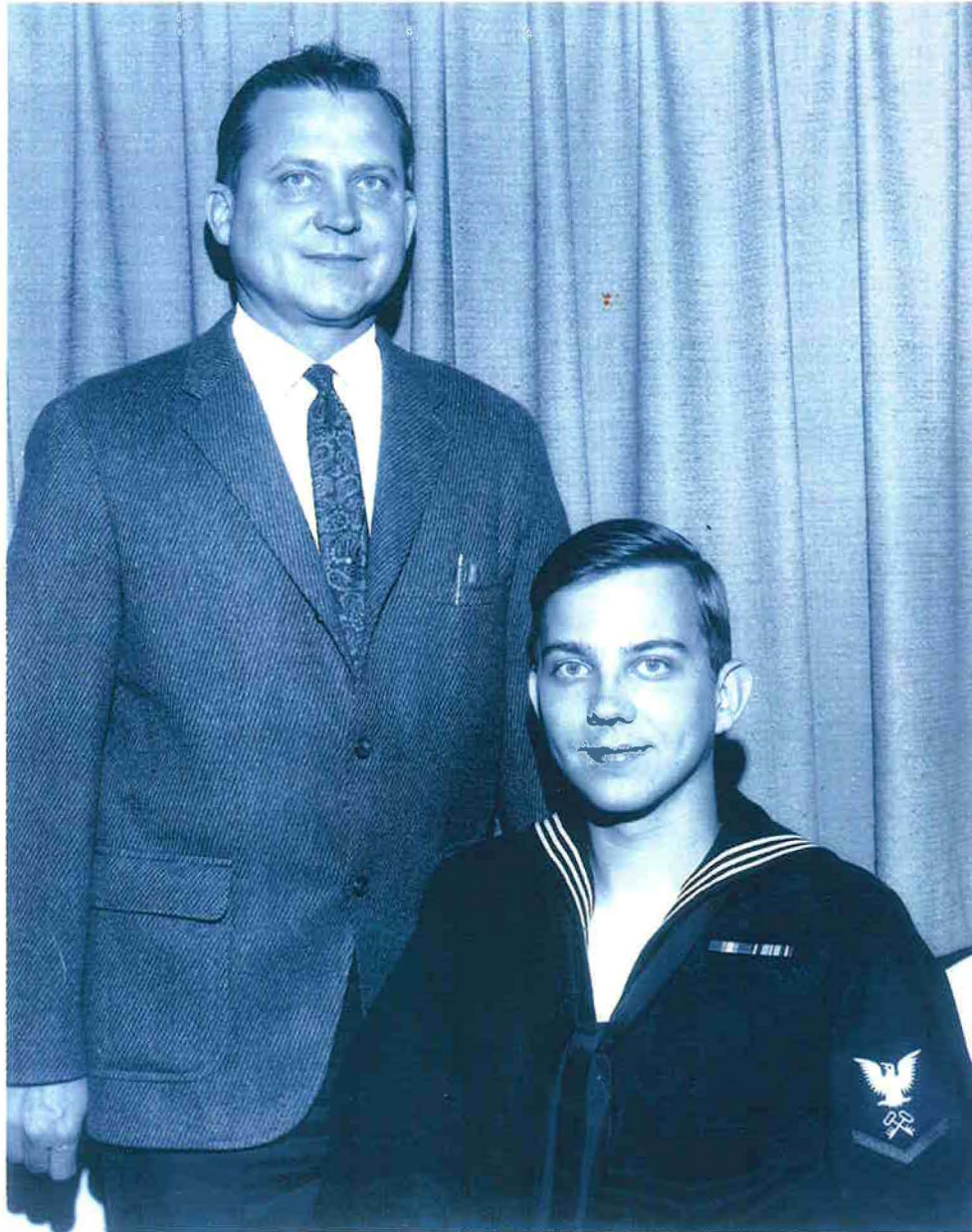


Happiness Is: A Son Free . . . A Daughter Safe . . . A Wedding . . .
Chester Rogala fears of release of Pueblo crew-member son; Barbara Mackie and father after kidnapping ordeal; David and Julia marry.



Scan of Mr. Rogala's framed medals.

Mr. Richard Rogala and his father, Chester Rogala, whose transcript of WWII service is also part of the Veterans History Project Collection at Niles.



Mr. Rogala pictured with his parents and Mayor Blase at the village reception held in his honor. on Sunday, March 30, 1969 in the cafeteria of Notre Dame High School for Boys. Mr. Rogala had been honored with a parade on Milwaukee Avenue and presented with the key to the city. According to The Bugle, 3/27/1969, the welcoming committee was comprised of the Rogala Family, Mayor Nick Blase, members of the Niles Board of Trustees, and the Niles Junior , Miss Miss Laure Kotsiris. Congressman Roman Pucinski was the guest speaker. Mr. Rogala was quoted in the following week's Bugle as saying, "I've known what is is like to live in a country which has no God or freedom . It made me realize what a great privilege it is to live in a country like the United States."

Mr. Rogala was interviewed by the Pioneer Press Reporter, Alan Schmidt.
The two-page story appeared in the Thursday, February 7, 2008 issue.

A Pioneer Press Publication

Thursday, February 7, 2008 61

IMAGES

IT'S YOUR PHOTOS
WE JUST PUT IT
TOGETHER.

Send us your family photos, your kids artwork and more, and we'll print them on our Bulletin Board page.
E-mail nwagner@pioneerlocal.com.

Pueblo — the ship that never came home

40 years later
shipmates hope
for its rescue

By ALAN SCHMIDT
Staff Writer

aschmidt@pioneerlocal.com

Approaching 60, Elk Grove Village resident Richard Rogala is looking forward to his retirement this year.

He'll have time for the usual things such as spending time with his grandchildren and enjoying the ability to escape Chicago winters by joining other "snowbirds" in the annual migration to Florida.

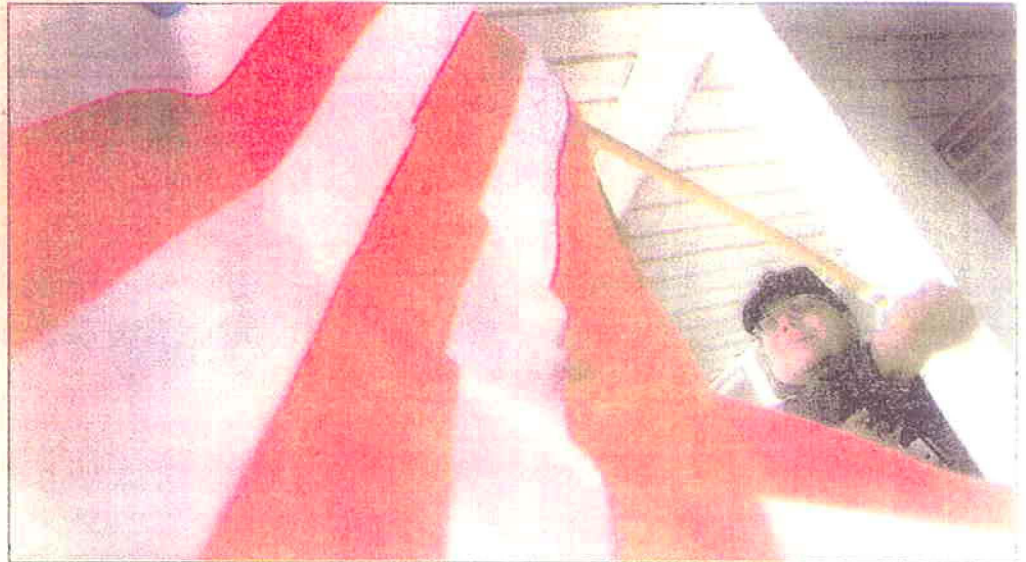
But most of all, Rogala will be able to devote himself to what will probably be the most important mission of his life: getting his former Navy ship, the USS Pueblo, back from North Korea. The Pueblo is the only United States warship that's being held by a foreign country.

It was at the heart of a 1968 hostage crisis that is often eclipsed in our national memory of that year by the Vietnam War and the turmoil at home, from the assassinations of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Senator Robert Kennedy to the anti-war protests during the Democratic National Convention in Chicago.

For Rogala, a former Niles resident, the memories of his ordeal are as fresh as if it happened yesterday, haunting him in his daily life and in his dreams.

Memories still sharp

"I think about it all the time," he said. "It's getting more pronounced as I'm getting older. For a lot of years I was able to shove it aside, but now it's there too much. I think a lot of it has to do with how I served and that the United



Richard Rogala, who spent nearly a year as a prisoner of war, hangs American and POW flags from the porch of his Elk Grove Village home.
— Mia Algotti/For Pioneer Press

States still has that ship there."

Rogala joined the Navy Reserves in 1966. With the war in Vietnam escalating, he saw the draft as a given. After a year as a reservist, he found himself drafted into the active-duty military.

A day after he made the transition to active duty, he was ordered to report to the USS Pueblo, one of three Naval intelligence-gathering ships at the time. It was armed only with two 50-caliber machine guns — which were not mounted — and whatever pistols the crew had on board. It was a small ship, about 200 feet long, with a maximum speed of 12 knots. In its former life, the Pueblo was a World War II freighter, taken out of the Navy's "mothballed" fleet to be converted for a new role two wars later.

He got his first assignment on Oct. 13, 1967, a Friday. Then, 13 days after the Pueblo left Sasebo,

See SHIP, page 52



Naval veteran Richard Rogala stands under a picture of the USS Pueblo. He was stationed on the ship in 1968 when it was captured by North Korea. The Pueblo is still in North Korea's possession.
— Mia Algotti/For Pioneer Press

HEART

Continued from page 13

before but this was the first time she was chosen. She wasn't sure who nominated her this time around.

Lange remarked that

she has a passion for teaching and is delighted with the new experiences each day brings.

"It's the children who make my job great," she said. "I enjoy the children. I enjoy the fun we have here and I really enjoy first grade. They just grow so

much by the end of the year. I love working with the parents, the teachers, and the staff."

Lange is in her 15th year of teaching. She taught preschool and kindergarten at St. Beatrice School in Schiller Park before taking a break from the profession

to raise a family. She wanted to be a teacher since she was a child. Lange played school "along with the Barbie dolls and paper dolls," when she was a little girl.

Principal Carol Styka commended Lange for being someone she "can always count on to volunteer

and for her creative ideas, her humor and support. It is evident that she truly loves her job and especially loves her students. She has taken a leadership role in several committees. She has done many, many things to light the way for all of us."

SHIP

Continued from page 51

Japan, the last port before it began its seemingly "non-risk" mission, the ship was attacked — 40 years ago, on Jan. 23, 1968.

Surrounded

Rogala, trained by the Navy as a storekeeper, was working on the mess deck around lunchtime when the 83-man crew was called to general quarters. The Pueblo suddenly had been surrounded by a group of North Korean patrol and torpedo boats, swarming around the ship like angry bees.

The Pueblo was about 15.5 miles off the coast of North Korea, operating in international waters. A country's territorial waters extend out to an internationally recognized limit of 12 miles. Rogala said all data backs up the fact that his ship never strayed inside that 12-mile limit.

The North Koreans claimed the Pueblo was about nine miles away from their coast and ordered the ship to stop so it could be boarded. Commander Lloyd M. Bucher, the Pueblo's captain, tried to make a dash for the open ocean. He ordered the crew to start a frantic effort to destroy the Pueblo's top-secret cryptographic and communications equipment, codebooks, and its large collection of classified documents. The ship's 12-knot speed was no match for the Korean boats.

Bucher did everything he could to delay the inevitable. The Koreans issued warnings and opened fire. The rounds easily passed through the Pueblo's thin aluminum hull.

"I went to my station, which was at the front of the ship," Rogala recalled.

"I was laying on the floor praying, and you could hear the bullets going over your head. We were going nowhere and they could do whatever they wanted."

Bucher took an assessment of the situation. One crewman was killed, there were a dozen injured. His ship had no means of any kind of defense. Repeated bursts of gunfire were being directed at the ship. A torpedo tube was uncovered and ready to launch on one of the North Korean boats, and Soviet-built aircraft were threatening destruction from above. Help was nowhere to be found. He was left with one option: succumb to their demands.

The North Koreans "escorted" the Pueblo inside the country's territorial waters and boarded. The crew was blindfolded, and ordered to sit on the deck while their captors rifled through the ship to confiscate everything they could.

Prisoners

Rogala and his shipmates were led, still blindfolded, to a bus when the ship was docked and began 11 months of captivity. They were transferred from the bus to a train, traveling for hours before being herded off to be paraded before the media and identified as the most severe enemies of the state to an angry crowd.

They were put back on the train and taken to a dank, frigid prison on a military installation, which would be their terrible home away from home for about two months.

The officers were separated from the enlisted personnel and submitted to sleep deprivation and severs, almost non-stop beatings during interrogations that ended with the victims bloodied, bruised, and, at times, unconscious. Bucher, in his memoir *My*

Story, wrote he was told he would be executed if he wasn't "sincere" in his responses. He felt the muzzle of a gun pressed against his head and braced for a quick death. One of his interrogators pulled the trigger, but the gun only elicited a click, signaling that it was just another element of his torture. He refused to eat until he was assured that his crewmen were well taken care of, and was summarily thrashed for his hunger strike.

Rogala saw Bucher about a month after they were captured.

"They worked over the officers from the beginning unmercifully," he said. "It looked like he went from 40 years old to 80 years old. It seemed like the officers aged just from the beatings. They got the worst of it."

The officers were kept in individual cells. Enlisted personnel like Rogala were kept in groups of five to eight in a cell. Whenever he was on the verge of an emotional breakdown and losing hope of ever getting out, his fellow crew members got him out of it, Rogala said. The others did their best to give him the ability to muddle through. After two months in their first prison, they were transported to what he believed to be a newer facility.

Torture

Their diet consisted of gummy rice, sometimes with dirt and flies mixed in, that was served in a bucket. The rice was accompanied by a side dish of turnips. Rogala ate just to survive, but lost more than 30 pounds over the 11 months. That starvation diet was sometimes alternated with trips to the "tea room" where crew members were fed well, served beer, and urged to defect

They were shown propaganda films depicting happy defectors, and were led to the roof of the prison where they were treated to a fireworks display.

He and his shipmates became adept at hoodwinking the North Koreans, giving false information, passing along surreptitious messages whenever they were photographed, filmed, and when they were allowed to write letters home. They even had their captors convinced that an upright middle finger was a Hawaiian gesture of good luck.

The North Koreans got wind that they were victims of the secret arts of subversion. In December 1968, they put the crew through what Rogala and his shipmates dubbed "Hell Week." The beatings resumed. He was forced to stand for hours with his chin to his chest, and was summoned for surprise bouts of punches and kicks to the face and body.

Shortly after Hell Week ended, they got word they would be released soon. On Dec. 23, 1968 (Korean time — Dec. 22 back in states — the North Koreans issued them new uniforms and put them on buses. They called off all of the crew members' names to get an accounting and sent them across what is called "The Bridge of No Return." Rogala and the others had their first taste of freedom on the other side when they crossed the Demilitarized Zone dividing the two Korean states and were back in American hands.

"During" his captivity at the North Korean prison, he reported being a witness to the 700 deaths, beatings and assassinations, the police beatings at the Chicago convention and Richard Nixon's election as president. Rogala and the others believed it all to be

propaganda, but later found out it was not.

Homeward bound

After a quick medical check-up, Rogala, the officers and crew boarded a plane and, after a 19-hour flight, landed in San Diego two days before Christmas.

His parents, brother and sister were waiting for him upon his return. The Pueblo's liberated crew was greeted with a ticker-tape parade from the airport to a naval hospital. He spent Christmas at the hospital with his family. When he arrived home to Miles, Rogala was given a hero's welcome and given the key to the city at a 1968 celebration held at Notre Dame High School.

Rogala says it took about 20 years before he could eat rice again. He hasn't touched turnips since his time in captivity, but admitted he never shed them much anyway.

It may be 40 years ago, but he is still determined to get the ship he served on back where it belongs. Rogala said the Pueblo is kept on display in North Korea as a propaganda tool, with circles ringing the bullet holes, and the North Koreans' version of events proudly told to visitors.

"Why is that ship still there?" he asks. "Let's bring that ship back and tell the real story."

He said he and other crew members — who make up the USS Pueblo Veterans Association — are getting ready to launch an aggressive campaign for the Pueblo's return, including a massive petition drive to bring much pressure to bear on the state to get someone to act. They would like to come home to the Colorado city for which the ship was named and establish a museum.

For further information, go to puebloinfo.org.