

PUEBLO MEN FACE SENSITIVE INQUIRY

Crew's Behavior in Capture and Captivity May Raise Many Critical Points

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SAN DIEGO, Dec. 25—Senior Navy officers here say the forthcoming court of inquiry into the capture of the intelligence ship Pueblo may be one of the most sensitive in recent naval history.

"Every man in the Navy will be watching to see what the court recommends," one officer, close to the Pueblo incident, said today.

"Was Commander [Lloyd M.] Bucher right in surrendering his ship without a fight?" he asked. "And what about the confessions? They certainly told the enemy more than name, rank and serial number. Should the regulations be changed?"

[American military authorities in Seoul said that North Korea was intensifying its military threat against South Korea and that the North's ability to have held the Pueblo crew for 11 months had stimulated its aggressiveness.]

There is tremendous sympathy for Commander Bucher and the 81 other survivors of the intelligence ship that was captured by North Korean vessels on Jan. 23. The 11 months they spent in custody was a mixture

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of "mental and physical brutality," one official said.

"They never knew when they'd get beaten up or if they'd be killed," he added.

Officers debated informally over what they might have done in Commander Bucher's position.

Commander Bucher, who is described by Navy officials as "extremely wound up," has told newsmen that he surrendered the ship to avoid useless bloodshed and that he had made his confessions "to save some people from some very serious misfortune."

His actions have received

strong support from Read Adm. Edwin Rosenberg, the senior official in charge of the Pueblo's repatriation. Admiral Rosenberg has called Commander Bucher "a hero," and his sentiments have been echoed by other naval officers who have talked with the crew.

Minimum Information

But because of the sensitivity of the inquiry, Admiral Rosenberg and Capt. Vincent C. Thomas, the senior public information officers here, have advised the officers and men to tell the press as little as possible about the capture and captivity.

Captain Thomas said that the details would become known

during the inquiry that is due to begin in about two weeks.

The court, to be headed by Vice Adm. Harold G. Bowen, commander of antisubmarine forces in the Pacific, will be open, Captain Thomas said, except when classified information is being discussed.

This would presumably include data about the intelligence-gathering machines and classified documents aboard the ship.

The crew, released Sunday by the North Koreans, arrived here yesterday to an emotion-packed welcome. The men are housed in rooms at the Naval Base Hospital and spent most of today with their families.

A Protestant communion

service was held at 10:30 A.M., and a Catholic mass at 11:15. There was also a Hanukkah service for two Jewish crew members. At noon the men and their families had a Christmas dinner in the R. X. Club, an officers' club at the hospital.

Physicals Today

Most of tomorrow will be devoted to complete physical examinations, with time off for meals with families. On Friday, extensive intelligence debriefings are expected to begin.

A team of intelligence officers, headed by Capt. Dale Everhard on the staff of Adm. John J. Hyland, the Pacific commander, has arrived here and plans to question the men at length.

Following the debriefings, the men will receive short furloughs, and then the court of inquiry will begin.

The court will report its findings and recommendations to Admiral Hyland, who then will make his recommendations to Washington. It will be up to the Chief of Naval Operations and the Secretary of the Navy to decide whether to make charges against any of the crew that would require a court-martial.

The efforts by Navy officials to maintain a lid on information has apparently rankled many of the crew who are said to be eager to tell their stories, possibly to justify their actions in captivity.