

Pueblo Inquiry Lawyer Explains How 82 Stories Are Unraveled

By BERNARD WEINRAUB

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CORONADO, Calif., March 9—Each evening, Capt. William Richard Newsome drives to a guarded pink stucco barracks here to talk for hours with a group of sailors who recount their 11 months in a North Korean prison. By the next morning, the sailors are nervously sitting in a hallway waiting to testify before the court of inquiry here.

"All these people were subject to the same detention routine, the same pressures," said Captain Newsome, the key attorney for the inquiry that is scheduled to close this week. "Yet each one is a human being with a story to tell. That's what we're trying to unravel here."

As counsel for the court of five admirals, the portly, dark-eyed lawyer conducts virtually the entire private and then public questioning of witnesses and serves, in effect, as the voice of the Navy investigating the seizure of the intelligence ship on Jan. 23, 1968.

The voice—and accent—has a marked Brooklyn overtone. The 45-year-old Navy officer grew up in East Flatbush, attended Samuel J. Tilden High School and Brooklyn College and, after serving in the Navy in World War II, enrolled in New York University Law School and graduated in 1949.

Touch of Warmth

During the seven weeks of testimony, Captain Newsome has emerged as a blunt and sharply intelligent lawyer who questions the Pueblo's crewmen with dispassion and a touch of warmth.

"I've never heard of a story that presented so many questions of values—human values, ethical considerations," Captain Newsome said last week. "Now, O.K., it may be 75 per cent tedious. But 25 per cent of it is terrific."

"You have 82 men telling a story—each one a little something different, his own attitudes," he observed. "And you can never lose sight of the fact that these men were detained for 11 months."

In serving the five admirals on the inquiry, he is calling virtually the entire Pueblo crew to testify in the amphitheater here.

"A lot of these fellows are young and from small towns and they're scared to death at all of this," said Captain Newsome, who is the staff judge advocate for the 10,000-man Commander Fleet Air San Diego.

"Sometimes at night they'll

tell fantastic stories and when they get on the stand I'm amazed — they withdraw," he said. "You anticipate they'll testify, say, 40 minutes and they don't. They see five admirals—and some of them have never even seen one admiral—and they're frightened."

"Some of them are probably more frightened than they were in North Korea."

Sitting on a sofa in a public affairs office of the Naval amphibious base, Captain Newsome said the inquiry was designed to study who—or what—was accountable for the loss of the Pueblo.

"The Navy is an institution that demands accountability," he said. "When a sophisticated piece of equipment is damaged someone must be given an accounting for the loss."

"I don't think the Navy can survive without this accountability. And when I say the Navy I really mean the taxpayers of the United States, because that's who we're supported by. People must be held accountable or we'd have no way of control."

Not a Separate Entity

"It's not as if we're operating as a separate entity," he said slowly.

The captain, who has had 21 years of active duty in the Navy, described the court as "a pretty formal, highfalutin" setup designed to investigate a case with little specific legal precedent.

"The law doesn't really play a big part in this inquiry," said Captain Newsome, who lives in nearby Imperial Beach with his wife and three children. "We don't have many legal issues. We don't have to cite authorities or have objections. This is an exercise without legal precedence."

"What I'm supposed to do here is examine all the avenues I can explore with respect to the entire incident."

Once the inquiry ends, probably this week, the five admirals will meet privately for about 10 days and then send a set of recommendations to the commander in chief of the United States Pacific Fleet, Adm. John J. Hyland. The Pacific Fleet commander will then file his own recommendations to Washington.

It is up to the Secretary of the Navy and the Chief of Naval Operations to decide what action, if any, to take against Comdr. Lloyd M. Bucher. This could range from a court-martial to a commendation.