

THE NEW YORK TIMES, MONDAY, MARCH 17, 1969

Disquiet Over Crew's Testimony Remains

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Special to The New York Times

CORONADO, Calif., March 15 — Last Thursday morning, Comdr. Lloyd M. Bucher made a final speech in a shaky voice before a Navy court of inquiry here. By 11 A.M. Vice Adm. Harold G. Bowen Jr., the president of the court, closed the folder before him, stared for a moment at the Pueblo's skipper and said: "This court is closed."

News Analysis Commander Bucher arose. Admiral Bowen and the four other admirals on the court turned and stepped quickly out of the naval amphitheater for the last time. They had heard 104 witnesses, covered 3,392 pages of testimony and followed the minute-by-minute, salvo-by-salvo account of what happened on Jan. 23, 1968, when Commander Bucher surrendered the intelligence ship without a fight to North Korean gunboats.

This weekend, the 82 surviving crewmen began taking home leaves and the admirals started 10 days of closed meetings to draft their recommendations to the commander of the United States Pacific Fleet, Adm. John J. Hyland.

Once Admiral Hyland reviews the court's findings, he has two choices. He could decide to take whatever action he thinks appropriate, ranging from a commendation to a court-martial for Commander Bucher. Or he could forward a record of the case to Washington for action by the Chief of Naval Operations or the Secretary of the Navy.

Clearly there was one overriding question in the hearing: should Commander Bucher have kept the Pueblo's two machine guns covered and silent when the North Koreans opened fire.

Focus on Crewmen

And yet the most dramatic and prolonged portion of the 11 months of detention in North Korea. The Navy's decision to summon virtually all the crewmen and shift—or broaden—the focus of the inquiry on the bitter months of imprisonment is now viewed with some unease, possibly even regret, by several officers close to the hearing.

"We did expect some witnesses to be emotional about what they went through," said one officer. "But we didn't quite expect the reaction we got."

What spurred the court to call virtually every crewman—and extend the inquiry nearly three weeks—was the decision that the Code of Conduct was applicable to the Pueblo's 82

survivors. The code tells all American prisoners of war to yield only name, rank, serial number and date of birth to captors.

Termed Not P.W.'s

Before the convening of the court in January, its counsel, said the code was "inapplicable" because the crew members were "illegal detainees" in North Korea and not prisoners of war, since the United States was not in a state of war with North Korea.

Three weeks ago, however, Captain Newsome began calling the crewmen one by one and asking the same question: "What was the main reason you departed from the Code of Conduct?"

In deciding to call virtually the entire crew—originally only half had been scheduled to appear—and focusing on their "confessions" in prison, Captain Newsome conceded that the court had reversed its opinion about the code.

"It's become obvious that the Code of Conduct is now applicable in this situation," he

said. "We received rather long and learned dissertations from other sources that indicate the code has wide applications." He declined to identify "the other sources."

Basis for Changes

Privately, knowledgeable officials say that the switch in tactics was ordered in Washington. With the Code of Conduct already under study in the Pentagon, officials say, the crewmen's testimony may very well be used as the basis for changes in the six-point guideline, which has no punitive force.

"The Code of Conduct is a moral code," said Captain Newsome. "It's like the Ten Commandments. It's not something you can violate punitively."

What emerged in the weeks of testimony that focused on the code was a dark picture that embarrassed many Navy officials. In appearances before the court, the crewmen appeared subdued and exhausted. Their voices trailed off. Many

After Pueblo Inquiry

spoke only vaguely in half phrases.

Some of the sailors, under a burden of revulsion and guilt at their plight in Korea, broke down when Captain Newsome or an admiral asked the main reason why they departed from the Code of Conduct. The testimony of sudden beatings, of crawling naked on the floor and being kicked was grimly dramatic—but unyielding in its repetition.

Conditioning Charged

"I think what happened to us was a case of classical conditioning," said Storekeeper Edward S. Russell, who earned a bachelor's degree in psychology at the University of Southern California before entering the Navy. "You got rewarded if you did well and punished if you did bad. But we did nothing to be rewarded for. We only cooperated to keep them off our back."

Appearing before the admirals in the crowded auditorium, each crewman publicly told in detail of many humiliations.

The crewmen said, yes, they understood the Code of Conduct, but in the Pueblo's case, they said, the code had to be abandoned.

"They had all our documents and our service records," said Lieut. (jg.) Frederick C. Schumacher Jr., a sandy-haired graduate of Trinity College who served as the Pueblo's operations officer. "It was not a question of giving them classified information; it was a question of admitting to information they already had."

Moreover, there were beatings, and especially the threat of torture and more beatings.

"They were going to use torture," said Photographer's Mate 1st class Lawrence W. Mack. "What information they wanted they were going to get one way or another, and they could get it from me hard or they could get it from me easy. All I could see was unending torture."

Like all the other crewmen, he signed a confession and violated the Code of Conduct.