

Report Of Pueblo Ransom Is Denied By U.S. Officials

Washington, March 26 (AP)—Reports that the United States paid North Korea a ransom for the release of the crew of the USS Pueblo were denied today by a State Department spokesman and other officials.

The officials, who spoke to a group of newsmen under rules forbidding direct quotation, also said that they do not consider the Pueblo incident closed. They still want the ship back, they said.

The ransom report was made in Chicago by the Rev. Paul D. Lindstrom, national chairman of the Remember the Pueblo Committee.

Announcement Expected

In making the denial, the officials said no concessions had been made for the return of the crew.

They said the United States had made representations for return of the Pueblo and they anticipated an announcement concerning the matter shortly, but did not disclose what it would be.

The Pueblo was seized off the North Korean port of Wonsan in January, 1968. U.S. negotiators pressed for release of the vessel and its crew during long-drawn-out talks.

The North Koreans finally freed the Pueblo sailors last December, but kept the ship.

CIA Action Alleged

Mr. Lindstrom also said that "a State Department source informed our committee that there will be no attempt on the part of our government to return the ship."

Mr. Lindstrom said the ransom "was not handled by the State Department. Information

we received December 20 stated that the CIA was involved in the ransom and we know now this was true. The exact nature of the ransom, money or some other type of financial arrangement, was carried through by the CIA."

"The ship has been transferred," Mr. Lindstrom said, "to a northernmost port of North Korea near the Russian border."

"Great Propaganda Value"

"We have also learned," he said, "from our government sources that the ship is proving of great propaganda value for the North Koreans and the Soviet Union as they have been making widespread use of it (the story of the capture) in the Middle East, particularly Egypt, and in African countries."

Mr. Lindstrom initially made his statements about the ransom in a telephone interview with the Norfolk *Virginian-Pilot*.

Senator Stephen M. Young (D., Ohio) said Friday that Mr. Lindstrom is a John Birch Society supporter and called for an investigation of Mr. Lindstrom's "security leaks."

Mr. Lindstrom is head of the Independent Conservative Church of Christian Liberty in Prospect Heights, a northwestern suburb of Chicago.

"A Reality"

He said news of the impending release of the Pueblo crew, the proposals for the ransom and the U.S. agreement to relinquish claims to the ship was released by the Remember the Pueblo Committee at a 2 A.M. news conference December 21.