

N. Korea Will Free Crew Soon, Is Claim

State Dept. Won't Deny,
Confirm Report

SEOUL (AP)—A high South Korean government source said Friday he believes the crew of the U.S. intelligence ship Pueblo will be released in two or three days.

The source said he understood the United States and Communist North Korea have agreed on the release of the Pueblo crew and only procedural matters, such as when, where and how to be released, remained to be worked out.

South Korea understood the U.S. position was that an apology must be made "for humanitarian reasons" to Communist North Korea concerning the Pueblo incident, regardless of whether the ship had actually violated Communist territorial waters as North Korea claimed.

WASHINGTON (AP) — North Korea has agreed to free soon the 82 crewmen of the USS Pueblo, a high government

U. S. servicemen released by Cambodia.
Story in Sec. 1, Page 3.

source said Thursday. But the State Department refused to encourage or discourage hope that this is true.

"I will not express an opinion one way or another, and I hope you will bear with us," the department's press officer, Robert J. McCloskey, told newsmen.

However, his wording and the announcement that U.S. and North Korean negotiators met

Cont. in Sec. 1, Page 2, Col. 3

THE TIMES-PICAYUNE, NEW ORLEANS,

PUEBLO CREW RELEASE SEEN

Continued from Page 1

for 4 hours and 50 minutes Thursday, Korean time, at Panmunjom—the longest of their 27 sessions on the Pueblo—provided grounds for optimism.

There was earlier speculation in several newspapers that the end of their ordeal might be near for the crew of the U.S. intelligence ship captured last Jan. 23 off North Korea.

Some sources here said relatives of the crewmen have been advised to stand by or leave word where they can be notified about the return of the men.

However, Mrs. Gerald Nolte of Washington, Iowa, mother of one captured crewman, Electrician Tech. 2C. Clifford Nolte, said Thursday she and her husband have received no word from Washington: "We haven't been notified of a thing."

Similar reports of no word from the Navy were made by several other families of the captured men, including the wife of the skipper of the Pueblo, Cmdr. Lloyd "Pete" Bucher.

In San Diego, Mrs. Bucher said she had no confirmation of rumors of release from any source, adding "this is not the first time such rumors have been published and I won't believe them until Pete walks in the door."

The source here who said North Korea has agreed to release the Pueblo crew—he could not be identified by name—did not rule out the possibility that the American sailors would end their long captivity by Christmas.

Such an out-by-Christmas possibility had been raised by the Boston Herald-Traveler and a spokesman for U.S. forces in South Korea would neither confirm nor deny the story.

The New York Times and the newspaper Kyunghyang Shinmoon in Seoul, the South Korean capital, also indicated that release of the crew is awaiting

only the completion of a draft of a public statement.

McCloskey confirmed that the Thursday meeting in Panmunjom lasted 4 hours and 50 minutes. And he said he does expect another session but would not indicate when this will be.

Nor would McCloskey say whether any progress was made at the lengthy meeting or whether he holds hope for release of the crew.

Informants disclosed that the United States made another proposal at the meeting Tuesday, but details were lacking on what was proposed.

The White House declined comment on the reports of an early release.

North Korea has demanded that the United States acknowledge that the Pueblo intruded into North Korean territorial waters when it was captured, apologize and promise there will be no similar incidents.

The United States has refused to do this, maintaining the Pueblo was in international waters when intercepted.

However, the Johnson administration is known to be anxious to get the Pueblo crew free as one of its last acts before leaving office. Any agreed-to statement on release of the men worked out at Panmunjom would involve long-distance consultation with top officials in Washington and Pyongyang, the North Korean capital. This is not normally a speedy process.

Only last week, State Department officials maintained their gloomy outlook, and estimated at 10 per cent or less the chances of release of the men by next Jan. 20, when the Johnson administration leaves office.

The U.S. ambassador to Seoul, William J. Porter, has been in Washington for consultations and is returning to his post. The Korean government has been informed in Seoul of the negotiations at Panmunjom.

'NO PUEBLO REPEATS'

Spy Ship Cover Favored by Nixon

By FRED S. HOFFMAN

WASHINGTON (AP)—President-elect Nixon would prevent a recurrence of the capture of the U.S. intelligence-gathering ship Pueblo by providing more and better protection for such vessels, according to his last recorded statements on the matter.

In views expressed before and during the presidential campaign, and not publicly changed since, Nixon stated:

"I say that wherever we have—and we must have ships of this type gathering intelligence so that we will not have a surprise attack—let us make sure that we have in the area other ships or planes that can come to the rescue of such a ship in the event that it comes under attack."

SOON AFTER North Korea

captured the Pueblo and its 83-man crew last January, Nixon said, "What we can do is not let this happen again."

However, Nixon stopped short during the campaign of proposing that spy ships be given escort and air cover at all times.

Nixon's view has been challenged by Johnson administration officials, spokesmen and defense officials.

BECAUSE OF the secret nature of their assignments, the spy ships cannot always be kept in the range of American naval and air units, they say.

Former Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, current Defense chief Clark M. Clifford and Gen. Earle G. Wheeler, chairman of the Joints Chiefs of Staff, all have opposed the idea of naval escort or a jet fighter cover for intelligence ships.

Clifford said last September: "You have a ship like the Pueblo there to engage in a certain important function, that is, the gathering of information that comes over the airways."

"IT CAN'T be part of a large flotilla of naval vessels because that would destroy the purpose for why it's there. You can't keep a cap of fighter planes over it. That again would destroy its effectiveness."

Wheeler testified for Congress that the cost of escorting ships like the Pueblo would be "extremely high."

In some cases, Wheeler said, it would require carrier task forces "deployed thousands of miles from our shores in order to protect the vessel, which should be able to proceed freely on the high seas in accordance with international law."

IN CRITICIZING the Johnson administration's handling of the Pueblo situation soon after the capture of the ship Nixon said

that "We should have either moved in with cover for the ship or we should have pulled it out of there."

Defense Department officials said that at the time, only 18 U.S. Air force jets were in the Pueblo's area and they could not have been put in the air in time to have helped.

There were no American naval units near enough to have aided the spy ship either, the officials said.

ONLY AFTER the Pueblo was grabbed by the North Koreans did the United States dispatch carriers and other powerful fighting units into the waters off Korea.