

PUEBLO CREW FREED; CAPTAIN DENIES GUILT

U.S. Signs, Repudiates
Statement of Apology

U. S. ADVANCE CAMP, Korean Demilitarized Zone (AP) — The Pueblo's captain emphatically denied after his release Monday that his ship had ever intruded into North Korean territorial waters before it was captured Jan. 23.

Cmdr. Lloyd M. Bucher told a news conference that at no time had his ship entered waters within 13 miles of the North Korean coastline or of North Korean offshore islands.

Bucher said he had received orders to remain at least 13 miles off the North Korean coast and that he had carried out these orders.

WASHINGTON (AP) — North Korea released the 82 crew members of the USS Pueblo Sunday after the United States signed a statement of guilt and apology for violating North Korean territory—a statement which the United States repudiated in advance as false.

Secretary of State Dean Rusk declared this "strange procedure" was used to obtain the freedom of the men and it apparently appealed to the North Koreans because they see "propaganda value even in a worthless document."

U.S. officials said privately this was a "kooky" arrangement, conceding that what it means in fact is that the U.S. negotiator at Panmunjom, Korea, Maj. Gen. Gilbert H. Woodward, had signed on instruction from the State Department a document which in the U.S. view contains lies.

The arrangement with the North Koreans covered the release of the 82 surviving members of the intelligence ship Pueblo and the return of the body of Seaman Duane D. Hodges.

Hodges lost his life at the time

four North Korean naval ships captured the intelligence vessel Pueblo last Jan. 23.

Three of the crew members had been reported wounded. State Department officials said Sunday night that North Korea had reported all three are all right.

The State Department announced the release of the Pueblo crew as taking place at Panmunjom.

It said "they will immediately be given medical examinations and returned to the United States." Officials said they would be in San Diego, Calif., by Christmas Day and their families will meet them there.

The statement which Woodward signed at Panmunjom Sunday, simultaneously with the freeing of the crew members, admitted guilt as North Korea charged and apologized, and set

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

Continued from Page 1

out assurances of no future intrusions.

Before he signed the statement, however, the State Department said, he read a formal statement of repudiation which had previously been

given to the North Korean negotiators.

"The position of the United States government with regard to the Pueblo, as consistently expressed in the negotiations at Panmunjom and in public,"

Woodward declared, "has been that the ship was not engaged in illegal activity, that there is no convincing evidence that the ship at any time intruded into the territorial waters claimed by North Korea, and that we could not apologize for actions which we did not believe took place.

"The document which I am going to sign was prepared by the North Koreans and is at variance with the above position, but my signature will not and cannot alter the facts. I will sign the document to free the crew and only to free the crew."

While the crewmen are to be hurried back to the United States and may see their families by Christmas, they will be subject to extensive "debriefing" on their captivity and their actions while prisoners. This interrogation may last several weeks.

VALUABLE PRIZE

The ship itself—a valuable intelligence prize to the North Koreans—is not being released.

First word that the crewmen were to be released came at 8 o'clock Sunday morning when a State Department spokesman released this terse announcement:

"A meeting was held at Panmunjom last night. The crew of the Pueblo is scheduled to be released at 9 p.m. EST Dec. 22. Until then we have nothing more to say."

North Korea delayed the release by half an hour after accusing the United States of violating the agreement by announcing in advance the

planned hour of the release.

North Korea had charged that the Pueblo conducted espionage operations after intruding into the territorial waters of that Communist country. The United States denied that the ship violated territorial waters and also denied that its intelligence operations constituted espionage under international law.

Negotiations between the U.S. and North Korea at Panmunjom had gone on since shortly after the ship was seized.

North Korea demanded that the U.S. admit espionage, accept crew confessions of espionage and territorial violations as valid, apologize for such "crimes" and give assurance that there would be no further intrusions by U.S. vessels.

JOHNSON INFORMED

The strange formula under which the men finally were freed was developed in the State Department and sent to Woodward in instructions signed by Secretary Dean Rusk. Officials said President Johnson was fully informed of this and all other developments and actions in the negotiation.

They said also that President-elect Nixon was informed after the proposal was made to the North Koreans. But he was not consulted in advance. He was informed through Robert D. Murphy, his representative in the State Department.

The proposal was made by Woodward to the North Koreans on Dec. 17 along with an alternative—an offer for Woodward to write across the face of the North Korean document an acknowledgment that the crew-

men had been released and to sign his name. That would have left ambiguous whether he was signing the North Korean guilt and apology statement or simply the acknowledgement of freeing the men.

The overwrite formula was discussed at three meetings in October and renewed at the Dec. 17 meeting. It was renewed along with the scheme for Woodward to sign their document and at the same time denounce it.

Woodward then told them that if they did not accept one or the other of those proposals by the end of December the whole negotiation would have to go over to the new administration.

Woodward added that the United States would like to see the men returned by Christmas.

TWO CONDITIONS

Whether the Christmas angle appealed to the North Koreans as offering propaganda advantages or whether, as some State Department officials think, they did not want to go through negotiations all over again, they nevertheless made clear on Dec. 19 that they were prepared to accept the double statement formula.

Officials said Woodward attached two conditions. One was that all 82 crew members and the body of the slain seaman had to be returned by Dec. 23. The other was that Woodward would make a public statement saying the United States did not accept the North Korean version of the Pueblo operations even though he was signing the statement they prepared.

Saturday the North Koreans said they would release the men

and go through with the rest of the deal Sunday.

One reason why they finally came to that decision may be that they simply felt they had exploited the seizure of the vessel and imprisonment of the men to the point where they no longer had anything to gain.

The ship itself, which was loaded with secret electronic gear when it was captured, is not being returned at this time.

Rusk said in the statement he recorded here Sunday for broadcast when the men were released: "We regret that the ship itself, USS Pueblo, has not yet been returned; that will have to be pursued further."

RUSK EXPLANATION

Rusk also offered this explanation for the signing of the guilt-and-apology document written by North Korea and at the same time saying it was not true:

"This government had—and has now—no reliable evidence that the Pueblo in any way violated her sailing orders and intruded in the waters claimed by North Korea.

"After 10 months of negotiations, during which we made every sort of reasonable offer, all of which were harshly rejected, we had come squarely up against a most painful problem: how to obtain the release of the crew without having this government seem to attest to statements which simply are not true.

"Then, within the past week, a way which does just that was found, and a strange procedure was accepted by the North Koreans.

"Apparently the North Koreans believe there is propaganda value even in a worthless document which Gen. Woodward publicly labeled false before he signed it."

The State Department statement said that Woodward signed "for one reason only... to obtain the freedom of the crew who were illegally seized and had been illegally held as hostages by the North Koreans for almost exactly 11 months."

The statement which Woodward put his name to "on behalf of the government of the United States of America" admitted that the Pueblo "had illegally intruded into the territorial waters of the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea.

It also said that the United States government "shoulders full responsibility and solemnly apologizes for the grave acts of espionage committed" and gave "firm assurance that no U.S. ships will intrude again in the future into the territorial waters" of North Korea.

★★★

North Korea Plans to Keep Ship



THIS PHOTOGRAPH of the intelligence ship U.S.S. Pueblo was taken prior to its capture by the North Koreans 11 months ago. The 82 surviving crewmen of the vessel were released Sunday night. The ship will presu-

ably remain in Communist North Korean hands. The body of a wounded crewman who died in captivity will probably be returned home for burial.

Pueblo Men Are Released

Pueblo Captain Addresses News Conference



STANDING, Cmdr. Lloyd M. Bucher, captain of the captured U.S.S. Pueblo, is shown as he addressed an Aug. 13 press conference in Pyongyang, North Korea, according to North

Korean sources who provided the film. He was surrounded by other Pueblo crewmen who are unidentified. The 82 surviving crew members were released Sunday night.

After U.S. Signs Apology