

PUEBLO

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CREW RETURN NEAR TOP SOURCE STATES

WASHINGTON (AP)—A responsible U.S. source indicated today North Korea has agreed to release in the near future the 82 crew members of the U.S. intelligence ship Pueblo.

The source, who could not be identified, did not rule out the possibility the Americans would end their 11 months of captivity by Christmas.

Other sources said relatives of the Pueblo crew members have been advised to stand by or leave word where they can be notified about the return of the Pueblo men. **THIS WORD** came amid speculation and various re-

ports from newspapers and other sources that North Korea and the United States were about to reach agreement on the crewmen's release.

The State Department said earlier today U.S. and North Korean representatives met at Pannunjom Thursday, Korean time, in their longest session since the ship was captured last Jan. 23 off North Korea.

U.S. officials have refused to comment on the reports. The Pannunjom session Thursday lasted four hours and 50 minutes. It followed a two-hour, 40-minute meeting Tuesday at which the United States is reliably reported to

have presented a new proposal to North Korean representatives.

The Thursday meeting at Pannunjom was the 27th between the representatives.

NORTH KOREA has demanded that the United States acknowledge the Pueblo intruded into North Korean territorial waters last Jan. 23, apologize and pledge the act would not be repeated.

The United States has maintained the Pueblo was in in-

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ternational waters when it was boarded and towed into the North Korean port of Wonsan.

The State Department's confirmation of the meeting came after both the New York Times and the Seoul newspaper, Kyunghyang Shinmoon reported that release of the 82 crewmen was only a matter of time.

The State Department has clamped a rigid policy of "no comment" on all reports that the men may be released for Christmas.

HOWEVER, there were indications of movement in the secret talks at Panmunjom.

It is known that the Johnson administration is anxious to clear the record before leaving office so that the case of the Pueblo would not be left over to the new administration.

However, State Department officials have been unusually gloomy and only last week estimated the chances for the release of the Pueblo men at 10 per cent or less by next Jan. 20.

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

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