

5-1 12-20-68

# Crew of Pueblo May Be Released For Christmas

By SPENCER DAVIS

WASHINGTON (AP)—North Korea is preparing to release the 82 surviving crewmen of the captured U.S. intelligence ship Pueblo in the near future, perhaps by Christmas, according to a high government source.

The source, who could not be identified, said he could not disclose any details, except to say the North Koreans agreed to release the prisoners following a total of 7½ hours of meetings with American officials Tuesday and yesterday at Panmunjom, site of the Korean armistice talks.

DEFENSE Department officials termed the meeting yesterday "constructive," but with "no decisions made," although developments were expected "very shortly."

The State Department yesterday had declined to express any thoughts of the release reports.

"I will not express an opinion one way or an other, and I hope you will bear with us," State Department press officer Robert J. McCloskey said. He did not deny the reports.

REPORTS HAD circulated in recent days of the possible release of the officers and crewmen of the ship, captured last Jan. 23 off the coast of North Korea.

And from South Korea came word yesterday a high government source said he believed the Pueblo crew would be released in two or three days.

The South Korean source indicated the only thing standing in the way of the release were some procedural matters, such as when, where and how the men were to be freed.

SOME SOURCES in the United States said yesterday relatives of the Pueblo crew had been notified to stand by

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for an impending announcement concerning the 82 men.

However, late last night, almost all relatives reached by the Associated Press said they had not been contacted by the government.

Mrs. Lloyd Bucher, whose husband commanded the Pueblo told the AP she had received no confirmation of the reports from official or any other sources.