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CROSSING THE BRIDGE: Comdr. Lloyd M. Bucher, captain of the Pueblo, was first to cross the Bridge of No Return between North and South Korea, after the crew's release.

Pueblo Men Appear Well, Though Some Are Bruised

By PHILIP SHABECOFF

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SEOUL, South Korea, Dec. 23—The 82 surviving crew members of the intelligence ship Pueblo appeared to be in good physical condition as they passed through Panmunjom after their release by the North Koreans this morning.

All of them came across from North Korean territory on their

Transcript of Pueblo news conference, Page 3.

own feet and there was no sign of any weakness from their 11 months' captivity.

As the Navy men crossed over the "Bridge of No Return" from North Korea, they strolled almost casually in what one South Korean observer said was "a way only Americans walk."

The young sailors stepped briskly from the buses that carried them from the Army's advance camp near the demilitarized zone to the UH-10 helicopters that brought them to the United States Army's 121st Evacuation Hospital, about 10 miles west of Seoul.

Comdr. Lloyd M. Bucher, 38-year-old captain of the Pueblo, said in a news conference held shortly after his release that many of the crew had bruises

and black eyes as a result of beatings by the North Koreans. He also said some of the men were suffering from malnutrition.

The released men are now undergoing intensive medical examinations in the army hospital. An American official said that physicians thus far had found no symptoms among any of them that would prevent them from making the long flight to the West Coast of the United States.

It is expected, therefore, that all 82 members of the crew will board planes bound for the United States by tomorrow evening, or Wednesday morning at the latest. Since they will cross the International Date Line, it would thus be possible for them to be in California on Christmas Day.

Commander Bucher's news conference was regarded by observers at Panmunjom as an impressive performance for a man who had just spent nearly a year in what he described as "solitary confinement."

Commander Bucher, whom a Pentagon official introduced as "still the commander of the

Continued on Page 3, Column 1

Continued From Page 1, Col. 3

Pueblo," appeared gaunt, pale and tense. But he spoke calmly and lucidly and displayed considerable coolness under questioning by reporters.

The only time he appeared to lose his poise was when he was asked if the Pueblo crew had destroyed the secret electronic surveillance equipment aboard the ship last Jan. 23 before being captured by the North Koreans. He answered, after some groping for words, that the crew had tried to destroy the equipment but "truthfully, we did not complete it."

The skipper, with crew cut, clad in a blue navy jacket with "U.S.S. Pueblo" printed on the back, also displayed a hint of emotion when talking about his own ordeal.

"I don't know how many of you have been subjected to one continuous lie after another," he said. "I will have to think about this for a long time and learn to live with it."

As the crew filed across the bridge to freedom, the North Koreans played a tape recording of Commander Bucher's voice repeating phrases of praise for the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and of condemnation for the "aggressive foreigners" on South Korean soil. Two hours later, in his news conference, Commander Bucher spoke bitterly about the "brutality" of North Korea.

One key question about today's events seemed to be troubling people in Seoul: Did the United States apologize to the Communist regime in North Korea for a violation of its territorial waters or not.

Apology Signed by U.S.

Maj. Gen. Gilbert H. Woodward, chief negotiator for the United States at the secret meetings that led to the crew's release, signed a statement saying that the United States, among other things, "shoulders full responsibility and solemnly



IN GOOD SPIRITS: Laughing and smiling, members of the Pueblo crew, bareheaded, arrive with their M.P. escorts at U.S. Army hospital near Seoul

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apologizes for the grave acts said at a news conference soon of espionage committed by the U.S. ship against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea." His signature on the apology was exacted as a price for the return of the 82 men.

But prior to signing the statement at a meeting marked the transfer of the crew, General Woodward declared that the document he was about to sign was at variance with the United States position that the Pueblo had not engaged in any illegal activity. He said he signed "to free the crew and only to free the crew."

The apology and the prior repudiation was the formula worked out for the release of the Pueblo crew after long negotiations. General Woodward

after the signing that the document did not in any way compromise the United States position that it was innocent of any wrongdoing. The North Korean radio said today, however, that the fact that the United States signed the document was proof of its guilt. It is a diplomatic point that undoubtedly will be discussed for some time to come.

Church Gets Beer License

ADELAIDE, Australia (Religious News Service)—The Lutheran Church of Australia has been issued a license to sell beer in its canteen at the Yalata Aboriginal Reserve. Church officials feel that the license will help curb illegal sales of whisky and wine to the 150 aborigines on the reserve.