

Viet POW Swap Sought

SAIGON — (AP) — The South Vietnamese are planning another big prisoner release in an effort to get Hanoi to free American prisoners, official sources disclosed today.

The sources said both North Vietnamese and Viet Cong would be freed during Christmas, New Year's and the Tet celebration of lunar new year in mid-February.

Saigon will also announce cease-fires for the three holidays, the sources said. The Viet Cong already has declared three-day cease-fires for Christmas and New Year's and four days of Tet.

The number of prisoners to be freed has not yet been determined, the sources reported. But the Saigon newspaper Xay Dung said the government is considering releasing about 3000 North Vietnamese and Viet Cong and granting amnesty to another 5000 Viet Cong during the three holidays.

This would be the biggest POW release of the war if carried out.

The United States is believed prodding the South Vietnamese government to

initiate prisoner releases in hopes of getting North Vietnam to respond by freeing American POWs.

To mark the 1971 Tet festival, the South Vietnamese freed 37 disabled North Vietnamese POW's last Jan. 4.

Four and a half months later, a big prisoner release fell through when Saigon came up with only 13 of the 570 sick and disabled North Vietnamese prisoners it promised. The others refused repatriation, and Hanoi refused to accept the 13.

Last Oct. 8, the Viet Cong released the first American prisoner freed in nearly two years, Sgt. John C. Sexton, Jr., of Warren, Mich.

The Viet Cong sent word with Sexton they would welcome the release of two North Vietnamese prisoners in return; three days later the United States and South Vietnam freed one, a North Vietnamese lieutenant.

The United States holds no enemy POWs.