

Saigon Announces That It Will Release 30 Ailing P.O.W.'s

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Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Dec. 22—The Government of South Vietnam announced that it had decided to release at least 30 disabled or incurably ill North Vietnamese prisoners of war next month to mark the Tet, lunar new year.

Foreign Minister Tran Van Lam said in a statement that this offer was being made for "purely humanitarian reasons to enable North Vietnamese war prisoners to rejoin their hearths and homes for Tet," which falls on Jan. 27.

The decision, the Foreign Minister said, is entirely unrelated to the proposal made by South Vietnam on Dec. 10 offering to liberate all North Vietnamese held prisoner in exchange for the release of all South Vietnamese and allied servicemen held by the enemy. This proposal, however, still stands, Dr. Lam said in his statement.

"It is hoped, however, that this gesture will be matched

with an equal measure of goodwill on the part of North Vietnam, which has here an opportunity to demonstrate that it, too, cares for its own men," Dr. Lam said at a news conference.

The government proposes that the release of the disabled prisoners—who may number as many as 50—take place on Jan. 24, the Foreign Minister said.

The prisoners, who could only be those men who want to be repatriated, would be taken to the Benhai river, immediately above the 17th parallel, which divides North and South Vietnam, and sent across in two sampans.

A Saigon official said that 8,925 North Vietnamese prisoners of war were now being held in South Vietnam.

A Government spokesman said that 3,757 South Vietnamese soldiers were missing and believed to be prisoners of the Communists.

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Some Enemy P.O.W.'s Get Taste of Christmas

Special to The New York Times

BIENHOA, South Vietnam,

Dec. 22—A colored photograph of Pope Paul VI was among the Christmas presents given today in an elaborate ceremony to several hundred Vietnamese Communist prisoners of war, including small boys who did not look as if they were 13 years old.

The prisoner of war camp, in Bienhoa, 25 miles northeast of Saigon, was decorated with banners in French and in Latin, which the prisoners of war do not understand. A French banner read, "May the charity of Christ be everywhere," and the Latin banner said, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord."

The decorations were in honor of the visit to the camp of the Most Rev. Henri Lemaître, the Apostolic Delegate to Vietnam and Cambodia.

There are 4,400 prisoners in this camp. Only 133 are Roman Catholics, an official said, and a majority are Buddhists.

Bags of Gifts

The plastic bags that were handed by the Archbishop to some of the Vietnamese prisoners included a bar of soap, a white undershirt, a face towel and some crackers that had already begun to crumble.

The prisoners, who were lined up for the ceremony well before 8 A.M., were given a signal to applaud when the Archbishop arrived a few minutes before 9 A.M. and took his seat on a platform.

Some of the South Vietnamese military police, whose white foulards, white shoulder braid and white gloves were immaculate, guided the prisoners in applauding the Archbishop, who spoke to them in French.

One of six prisoners of war camps in South Vietnam, this camp has 1,900 youngsters between the ages of 17 and 13, an official said.

There are 10 prisoners over

the age of 60 and 27 women prisoners.

The women were not in sight today for the visitors. But four American military advisers in the prisoner of war camp were conspicuous, although cautious in their conversation.

The visitors included some Vietnamese Catholic dignitaries and priests, and a group of teen-age girls from a Catholic youth Organization.

It was one of the few occasions when the Government of South Vietnam permitted American and South Vietnamese journalists to visit a prisoner of war camp. A Saigon official estimates that there are 36,000 prisoners of war, mainly Vietcong, in this country.

The tour of the camp for the Archbishop, the journalists and the schoolgirls and Catholic dignitaries included schoolrooms, a dispensary, a hospital compound for the mutilated and a workshop.

The Archbishop celebrated a mass in the camp's small Catholic church.

A majority of the prisoners are Vietcong, an official said. The only North Vietnamese are the disabled in the hospital buildings visited by the Archbishop and the journalists. The apostolic delegate, who spoke to five North Vietnamese through an interpreter, asked a blind man how long he had been in the camp.

"Three years. I can only move when someone takes me about," the prisoner said.



DISTRIBUTES CHRISTMAS GIFTS: Archbishop Henri LeMaitre, Roman Catholic Apostolic Delegate to Vietnam, handing out packages to North Vietnamese pris-

oners of war at Bienhoa prison camp in South Vietnam yesterday. Of the camp's 4,000 prisoners, more than 100 are Catholic. Camp is about 15 miles north of Saigon.

Associated Press