

Nixon May Greet POWs at Travis

Concern For GIs' Reaction

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Washington

White House aides are discussing the possibilities of a trip by President Nixon to Travis Air Force Base in California to meet the first freed American prisoners of war on their way home from Hanoi.

It was being stressed that there has been no final decision by the President to make such a trip because there are pros and cons to what undoubtedly would be a dramatic encounter both for the President, as commander-in-chief, and for the returning servicemen.

Balanced against the drama and emotion of a presidential welcome, may be the possibility of too much excitement too soon for the men returning — some of them having been captives for more than six years. There is also the prospect of some unpredictable responses by the POWs.

The first batch of returnees, however, would come to Travis only after having gone through a few days of medical checks and initial processing at Clark Field in the Philippines.

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Aside from a possible presidential visit to Travis, there have also been discussions of more remote possi-

bilities involving a trip to Clark or possibly to Honolulu, where planes carrying the men home may make a brief refueling stop.

Sources close to the POW situation said yesterday that there is still no firm information on when the first group of men is to be released. However, it is expected that a small group of Americans, including spe-

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cialists to set up communication links from Hanoi to U.S. installations, probably will land in the North Vietnamese capital in about a week.

It is also expected, though not yet firm, that about two or three days later — after some international supervisory and Red Cross personnel have gone to Hanoi — the first U.S. Air Force C-9A medical evacuation planes will land at Hanoi to pick up the first group of released prisoners.

Each C-9A normally carries a five - person medical team of doctors, nurses and technicians and can handle 40 or so patients depending upon how many require stretchers.

At this point, it is being assumed that four pick-ups, spaced no more than two weeks or 15 days apart, will be necessary to repatriate all the prisoners.

In his news conference Wednesday, presidential

aide Dr. Henry Kissinger suggested that the planes might fly to Vientiane, Laos, as a first stop after Hanoi. But now it appears that tentative plans call for the men to be flown directly from Hanoi to Clark Field in the Philippines where all is in readiness to begin the delicate process of trying to restore the men to normal lives.

Most of the returnees are expected to remain at Clark for at least a few days before being sent on to Travis and then to military hospitals near their homes.

According to current estimates, the first returnees could be arriving at Travis in about two weeks.

The first batch of prisoners must be released by Hanoi within 15 days of tomorrow, according to the terms of the peace agreement to be signed tomorrow in Paris. That would be February 11 at the latest, and Dr. Kissinger said at his press conference that "it could be faster."

(EX POST)
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