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**Saigon Gives
 Amnesty to
 3000 POWs**

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SAIGON — The South Vietnamese government today announced amnesty for nearly 3000 Viet Cong prisoners of war to celebrate the inauguration of President Nguyen Van Thieu for a second term. It was the largest freeing of prisoners in the Indochina war.

The Ministry of Defense said 618 prisoners, 176 of them partly disabled, were being released outright from POW camps throughout South Vietnam.

Another 2320 prisoners including 36 disabled POWs are to be designated ralliers to the South Vietnamese side under the government's so-called "open arms" program for defectors. They will be freed after perhaps three months.

The Defense Ministry said the POWs involved were Viet

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Cong, and no North Vietnamese troops were included.

The amnesty announcement coincided with reports from the United States that members of the U.S. Senate were told that a major breakthrough on the prisoners of war issue might be imminent. The report could not be verified.

The Chicago Tribune reported today that some Republican senators say administration officials told them Fitzsimons General Hospital in Denver had been alerted to handle up to 200 returning U.S. POWs soon. The White House, the Pentagon and the hospital all denied that any such alert had been issued.

Later, Pentagon spokesman Jerry Friedheim said the Pentagon called every next-of-kin family during the night to reassure them the story was incorrect.

"We have no information now that will lead us to anticipate," the release of POWs, he said.

"There are contingency plans to handle on short notice any prisoner release," he added. He said the military is always prepared for this and Fitzsimons is one of the hospitals that would receive any POWs.

The Saigon announcement came 20 days after the swap of Sgt. John C. Sexton Jr., of Warren, Mich., for an unidentified North Vietnamese lieutenant.

The South Vietnamese Defense Ministry said, however, that the amnesty to the 2938 POWs had nothing to do with any prisoner exchange and was entirely in honor of Thieu's inauguration Sunday.

The communique said, "The released POWs are being given clemency from the government of South Vietnam. They have shown repentance and good discipline during their detainment. They have submitted demands to be released or to enjoy the status of ralliers. The release is being done as a humanitarian gesture."