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Alert 400 Two Takes 550
By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Sources at two U.S. Air Force bases reported Sunday special alerts of air transport units, which they said possibly were in preparation for evacuation of U.S. prisoners held by North Vietnam, had been cancelled. The Pentagon, meanwhile, said no "unusual action" had been taken with regard to the POWs.

The reported alerts, combined with published reports that an agreement for ending the hostilities in Vietnam was near, had given rise to speculation that measures were being taken to fly freed American POWs out of Indochina.

Defense Department spokesman Jerry Friedham, however, said Sunday, "The Department of Defense knows of no imminent release of POWs and we have taken no unusual action in this connection."

The removal of the units from standby status was reported by sources at McGuire Air Force Base in New Jersey and at Travis Air Force Base in California. The cancellation of the alerts affected units at other locations where alerts had been reported, the sources said.

A pilot at McGuire said the stand-by alert was lifted Sunday afternoon, about 32 hours after it went into effect. The pilot said all units on alert had been ordered to resume normal operations.

"The alert has been cancelled all up and down the line," a source at Travis said. "As far as I know the same word went out throughout the system to all MAC Military Airlift Command units standing by."

He said 30 crews from his wing - which he said was "an unusually large number" - were deployed at West Coast bases and on Guam, instead of at their home bases. He said he believed the alert was cancelled because of a shortage of navigators to fly transport planes.

At Travis, wing information officer Bill Reslie said he had no comment and added: "We were told by Washington yesterday not to comment on any question concerning the base."

A source at McGuire reported late Saturday that technical crews had worked all night Friday outfitting planes for medical evacuation. The source also said some base personnel had been placed on a one-hour alert.

The Sunday Times Advertiser, quoting informed sources, also reported the McGuire alert and said many of the planes were being outfitted with medical equipment, possibly for use if prisoners were freed.

The Trenton, N.J., newspaper reported a similar alert was in effect at Dover Air Force Base in Delaware. A Dover AFB public information officer confirmed the alert but declined to elaborate.

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UNDATED Alert Take Two: elaborate. 150

The Pentagon said Saturday there was "absolutely nothing" to the reports and the White House declined any comment.

Sen. Henry Jackson, D-Wash., said Sunday he had received a number of telephone calls inquiring about a possible alert, but said he checked with the Defense Department and "it appears at this time there is no plan involving the eminent release of prisoners of war. It appears some base commanders, due to the long holiday weekend, have cancelled some leaves. But there is no basis for any assumption regarding the immediate release of prisoners of war."

A duty officer at McChord Air Force Base near Tacoma, Wash., referred all queries Sunday to Washington, although the same spokesman said Saturday the base was on alert.

At Charleston Air Force Base, in South Carolina, a spokesman said Saturday night: "A given number of crews are on alert." He said transportation aircraft were involved ". . . because that's all we handle."

From dispatch by Keyes Beech, datelined
Saigon, SFE Examiner 25 Oct 72, this file:

There were tantalizing reports from Hanoi
[no date given] that downed American pilots
were being shifted from prison camps to a
central assembly point in preparation for
their release.