

100-Man P.O.W. Airlifts Expected to Start Feb. 10

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 25—State Department officials expect North Vietnam to release American prisoners of war in groups of about 100 men, starting about Feb. 10. And

the Defense Department has placed on alert an elaborate medical-airlift operation to start flying them home.

The start of the prisoner release must await the formal signing of the cease-fire agreement in Paris on Saturday and the establishment of the joint military and international control commission teams that under the agreement will oversee the prisoner exchanges.

Rate of Release

The rate at which North Vietnam releases the prisoners, in the opinion of American officials, will probably depend on the rate at which the United States withdraws its remaining 23,700 troops from South Vietnam.

Under the agreement, all military prisoners must be released and all American troops withdrawn from South Vietnam within 60 days after the agreement is signed, or by March 28.

The United States is not expected to withdraw the last remaining detachments of troops until there is agreement upon a virtually simultaneous release of the last prisoners of war.

In explaining the terms of the agreement at a news conference yesterday, Henry A. Kissinger, President Nixon's adviser on national security and the chief American negotiator in the Paris talks, said he expected the prisoner releases and troop withdrawals to take place "in roughly equal incre-

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ments."

Although he gave no information on the planned rate of American troops withdrawals, Mr. Kissinger said that he expected North Vietnam to release the prisoners "in roughly equal installments" at two-week intervals, starting no later than 15 days after the signing of the agreement.

Officials here saw an indication of a smooth prisoner exchange in North Vietnam's unexpected consent to have American military-evacuation planes land in Hanoi to pick up prisoners there.

That permission was granted Tuesday, the day the agreement and the accompanying protocols were initialed in Paris.

The first step in the prisoner exchange will come Saturday in Paris when the two sides exchange lists of prisoners held. The Defense Department will not make public the list supplied by the Communist side until families have first been notified, including the families of those listed as missing in action.

The department presently lists 587 prisoners—473 in North Vietnam, 108 in South Vietnam and six in Laos—plus 1,335 more men missing in action.

In addition, the State Department, in a list expected to be published tomorrow, believes that 51 American civilians have been captured in Indochina, principally in South Vietnam.

Plans for Operation Homecoming, as the plan is now

known, were more than five years in the making. They have been greatly influenced, according to officials, by a wish not to repeat the mistakes and atmosphere of the prisoner repatriation that followed the Korean war.

At the outset, the military generally treated the Korean war prisoners with considerable suspicion and cross-examined them about their action while captive. But officials emphasize that prisoners coming home from Vietnam while being questioned will be treated with dignity, respect and understanding through sensitive individual processing and care.

The Defense Department's medical-airlift operation is awaiting a prearranged signal from the Pentagon—"We have a homecoming"—to swing into action.

The Pentagon has arranged for individually tailored new uniforms for each of the prisoners and for those missing in action, to be given to them when they return to American control.

The returning prisoners will first be given medical attention on the assumption that all will require it, some much more than others, and that all will require rest and time to readjust.

The first medical examination is to be given at a repatriation point, at which reception teams will determine if prisoners are in condition for immediate air evacuation to what has been designated as "the joint central processing center," for all prisoners, at Clark Field, north of Manila

in the Philippines. If immediate medical attention is required, the prisoner will be taken to the nearest military hospital, probably in South Vietnam.

At Clark Field, the men will get a complete medical examination and go through an initial interrogation.

The sole purpose—and the reason for urgency—in this questioning, defense officials emphasize, is to obtain information on men missing or still imprisoned while the names are still fresh in the prisoners' memories.

Packages and Telephone Calls

Awaiting most prisoners at Clark Field will be packages from their families containing personal messages and photographs provided by wives and parents at the suggestion of the Pentagon. At Government expense, the men will be able to phone their families.

The length of the stay at Clark will depend upon each man's condition and his readiness to fly home. For some, the stay could be two weeks but for most it is expected to be a few days.

In C-141 medical-evacuation planes, especially furnished so that each man will have a bed and a seat, they will be flown to Travis Air Force Base in California and will be transferred to hospitals of their branch of service nearest their families. At those hospitals, Defense Department officials say, the first family reunions will take place "as soon as possible." Families will be transported to the hospitals at Government expense. The department has made arrangements for their lodgings.