

Nixon May Greet POWs in California

By Michael Getler

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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 is being stressed that there has been no final decision by the President to make such a trip at this point since 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 returnees—some of whom have been captives for more than six years—and even the prospect of some unpredictable responses.

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.

Aside from a possible presidential visit to Travis, there have also been discussions of more remote possibilities 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 was still no firm information on when the first group of men would be released. However, it is expected that a small group of Americans, including specialists 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

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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 adviser Henry A. Kissinger suggested that the planes might fly to Vientiane, Laos, as a first stop after Hanoi. But yesterday it appeared that tentative plans called 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 only 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 this Saturday, Jan. 27, according to the terms of the peace agreement to be signed Saturday in Paris. That would be Feb. 11 at the latest, and Kissinger said at his press conference that "it could be faster."

Some POWs to Return To Andrews, Bethesda

By Don Baker

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Two Washington-area military hospitals, at Andrews Air Force Base and Bethesda Naval Center, are among 31 sites being readied for the return of the nation's prisoners of war.

The reunions of prisoners and their families will take place at these 31 stateside hospitals. The family of each released prisoner will

be accompanied to the reunion site by a casualty assistance officer who has been assigned to them.

There were few signs yesterday of the impending reunions at Bethesda and Andrews.

B. R. Foro, the public affairs officer at the Naval Medical Center at Bethesda, has arranged for the hospital's 384-seat auditorium to be used as a press center.

The released prisoners are expected to be put up in Building 2, at the rear of Bethesda's 246-foot-high main tower. The area contains wards and private rooms for intensive care and surgery, plus varied recreational facilities, including a swimming pool, bowling alley and gymnasium.

Bethesda has a normal capacity of 750 beds, but can easily be expanded to care for 1,134 patients. At the end of World War II, it had a record 2,464 patients on one day.

Malcolm Grow Medical Center at Andrews is a five-story, red brick building which frequently has been used as a medical motel for ailing airmen en route to other Air Force hospitals.

The Army hospital nearest to Washington which will be used in Operation Homecoming is Valley Forge General, at Phoenixville, Pa.

The other hospitals designated in the operation are:

Air Force—Wilford Hall at Lackland, Tex.; David Grant at Travis, Calif.; Maxwell AFB, Ala.; Sheppard AFB, Tex.; March AFB, Calif.; Westover AFB, Mass.; Scott AFB, Ill.; Keesler AFB, Miss., and Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio.

Army—Brooke, Ft. Sam Houston, Tex.; Letterman, San Francisco; Fitzsimons, Denver; Tripler, Honolulu; Ireland, Ft. Knox, Ky.; Patterson, Ft. Monmouth, N.J., and Ft. Gordon, Ga.

Navy—Oak Knoll, Oakland, Calif.; Balboa, San Diego; Great Lakes, Ill.; Philadelphia; Portsmouth, Va.; St. Albans, N.Y.; Chelsea, Boston; Jacksonville; Bremerton, Wash.; Memphis; Camp Lejeune, N.C., and Camp Pendleton, Calif.