

31 Military Hospitals Await the Returning

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By Donald P. Baker
Washington Post Staff Writer

Each of the 10 rooms on the 10th floor of Bethesda Naval Hospital has been re-decorated and equipped with the latest in modern technology — a color television, Princess telephone and clock radio.

Workmen were putting finishing touches on the refurbishing yesterday — signs on the wall warned of wet paint — as the hospital prepared for its role in Operation Homecoming.

Bethesda is one of 31 military hospitals to which released American prisoners will be assigned upon reaching the United States.

The 10th floor of the 19-story tower was shown to the press yesterday, but Cmdr. Matthew Romano, who is directing Homecoming arrangements at

Bethesda, said other bed space will be made available, if needed.

Most returning prisoners will be reunited with their families at the stateside hospitals nearest their home.

Up to 100 dependents can be housed in the Navy Lodge on the sprawling grounds of the 242-acre National Naval Medical Center, as the Bethesda facility is formally known.

The 10th floor has been painted in bright oranges and greens, and newly carpeted. Each two rooms have a connecting bath, and there is a sparkling stainless steel kitchen and a lounge for visiting.

In the center receiving hall, a movie projector and eight film canisters, containing events of the last seven or eight years, await the returnees. They also will get written material to help fill

in information about the years of their imprisonment.

On a stereo player in the lounge is a stack of records that should help bring the men up to date on music of the 70s, while pleasing most tastes. The selection includes: Simon & Garfunkel, Johnny Mathis, Three Dog Night, Super Fly, Duke Ellington, Bob Dylan, Judy Collins, West Montgomery, the cast albums from Broadway hits "1776" and "Fiddler on the Roof," and the Air Force band and chorus singing "America the Beautiful."

At yesterday's press preview, the Navy provided a nurse, Christine Picchi, to fluff pillows for photographers. When the photographers learned how to pronounce her name, Miss Picchi (Peachy) got a teasing which may have helped pre-

pare her for the arrival of the POWs.

The Bethesda tower may not be home, but it does provide a scenic view: From the hallway and front rooms, patients can look out on a front lawn that features a nine-hole golf course, busy Wisconsin Avenue and the National Institutes of Health across the street.

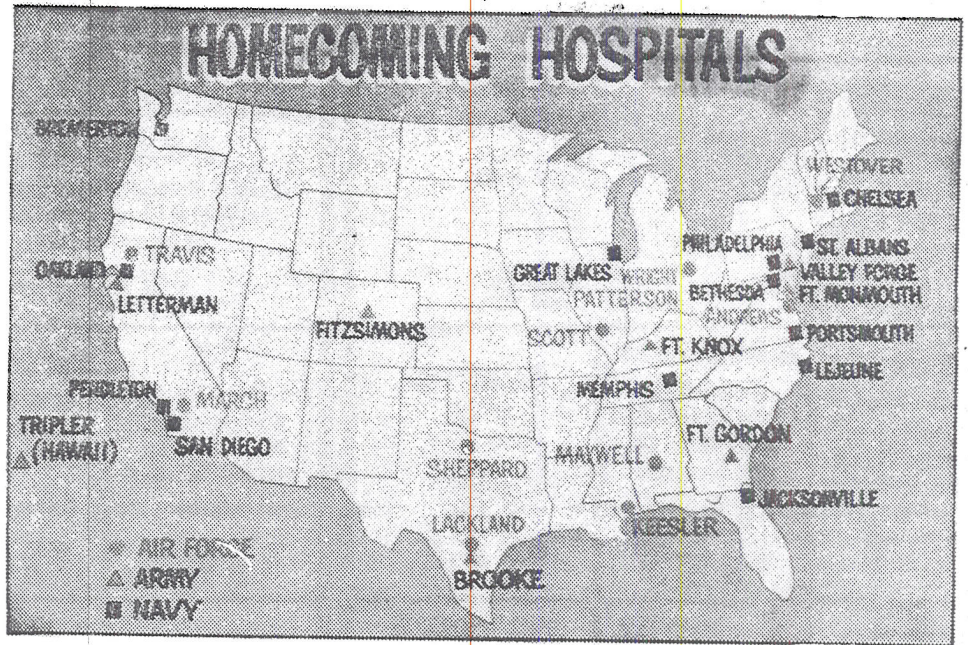
Cmdr. Romano, who has been transferred from the Pentagon for the duration of the rehabilitation period, said the plan is to give the men "as much privacy as possible. Our main objective is to ease the period of adjustment."

He said the number of released prisoners who will be assigned to Bethesda won't be known until sometime after the official list of POWs is handed over to American authorities

POWs

Bethesda is one of 13 hospitals to which returning Navy and Marine Corps personnel will be sent. There are 169 known prisoners from the Navy, and 26 from the Marines. Additionally, there are 141 Navy men and 110 Marines listed as missing. (Malcolm Grow Medical Center at Andrews Air Force Base is one of 10 Air Force receiving hospitals. The nearest Army hospital to get released prisoners is Valley Forge, Pa.

The time between the release of prisoners in Southeast Asia and their reunion with families could be "a matter of days," according to a Pentagon spokesman. The men will be permitted to telephone their families shortly after their arrival at Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines.



Associated Press

Map shows hospitals where returning POWs will be taken for treatment.