

# The Hopes for Speeding POWs Back to U.S.

## Washington

The Pentagon said yesterday it expects the first American prisoners of war from Vietnam to reach the United States during the first week of February.

This will come after at least three or four days of initial processing at Clark Field in the Philippines following their release.

The men will be able to call home from Clark immediately after their first medical exam. There they also will have available legal counseling to discuss such things as divorces during their captivity. They also will be fitted for uniforms.

### NUMBERS

The Pentagon counts 591 men as POWs but hopes some of the 1334 missing in action will turn up on the lists of prisoners which North Vietnam and the Viet Cong will hand to U.S. authorities today in Paris after the peace accords are signed.

The State Department lists an additional 40 civilians as captured by Communist forces in Indochina. Two are women missionaries.

U.S. prisoners are to be released in four roughly equal groups of 100 to 150, one about every 15 days. Half should be free in a month, the rest by March 28, as provided in the peace agreement.

### WITHDRAWAL

In parallel, the 23,700 remaining U.S. forces in Vietnam will be withdrawn. Half will be airlifted out within 30 days, the rest during the following 30 days, under the Pentagon's "Operation Countdown."

To meet another commitment under the peace agreement, the Pentagon's "Operation Endsweep," to remove mines from North Vietnamese waters, has begun to take shape.

More than 20 minesweepers, salvage vessels, tugs and other ships are forming a task force in the western Pacific. After consultations

between the North Vietnamese and the U.S. to set timing and priorities for the operation, the force will start the dangerous and difficult job of deactivating and removing the mines.

### FOCUS

Most interest centered on Pentagon plans, called "Operation Homecoming," for the returning prisoners. Some of them have been captive for eight years, which is roughly three times longer than any previous U.S. POWs, Friedheim said.

Men requiring "minor or no treatment," as determined at Clark Field, will go quickly through "administrative processing" there. They will be assigned an escort officer who will take them home. They will be

briefed on personal matters, updated on current events, see a chaplain and get a first installment of back pay.

They will also be "debriefed" for any knowledge of men missing in action. And the first ones back will be advised to be cautious in their public statements lest men still waiting to be freed are affected.

These men who need "interim treatment" of one form or another, and those requiring "intensive care or quarantine," will be held longer in the Philippines before going through the administrative processing.

But thereafter, medical evacuation aircraft, fitted out with both a seat and a

litter for every "returnee," will fly the men to Travis Air Force Base near San Francisco, and quickly on to one of 31 hospital centers around the country where they will be reunited with their families.

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