

Clark, a Little America, Awaits First Prisoners

By JAMES P. STERBA

Special to The New York Times

CLARK AIR BASE, the Philippines, Jan. 28—The bumper stickers here read, "P.O.W.'s never have a nice day." Plaques on the screen porches of officers' bungalows silently remind, "P.O.W.—M.I.A."

There are prayers for prisoners of war in the churches and bracelets bearing prisoners' names that are removed from the wrists, some officers say, only when they play tennis. It has been almost a compulsory fad here for several years—at most a deep concern for America's prisoners and those missing in action, at least easy sympathy.

Now the prisoners are about to be released, and they are to come here on their way home. Everybody knows it. Nobody really believes it. Over and over the conversations evolve into, "well, I for one will not believe it until they walk through that door."

33 Snack Bars

It is very American here, very nineteen-fifties, and easily mistakable for a suburban town in the foothills of the Rockies. It is hardly Asia. There are too many grassy lawns and broad streets. There are snack-bars. There are radio taxis, a golf course, schools, churches, basketball and tennis courts, and a television station that sometimes carries football games live.

There are more than 8,500 privately owned cars on base, and 88 of them were up for sale in the classified section of this week's base newspaper, Philippine Flyer.

Twenty-six miles of chain-link fence separate this miniature military America from the Philippines and Asia. Outside is central Luzon with its rice terraces, its squalid, dusty towns, and its farm laborers who make \$50 a year and cannot afford to send their children to school. Inside is America's largest overseas military installation, headquarters of the 13th Air Force, with 9,900 airmen, 800 civilians, 16,000 wives and children, and \$50 German shepard puppies who attend obedience classes at the youth center.

Clark Air Base started as an Army base in 1902 when some Fifth Cavalry troops found that their horses liked the grass here better than that in nearby Angeles city. A year later it was made a military reservation and in 1917, when the Army sent some airplanes here, part of the base was renamed Clark Field, in honor of Major Harold M. Clark, an early military aviation man.

The field, which was bombed and captured by the Japanese during World War II, has expanded to include about 130,000 acres, 10,555 acres of which are behind the security fence.

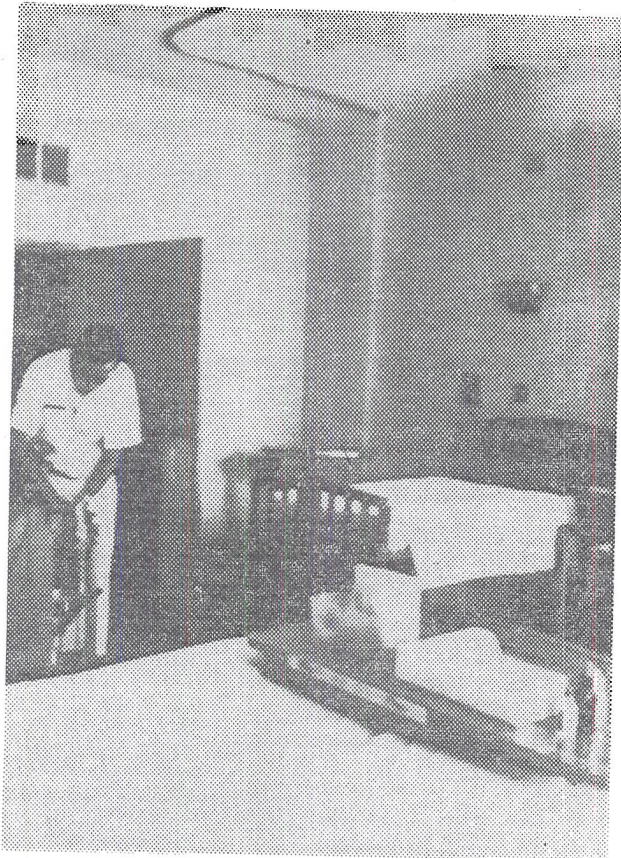
Clark's population, including more than 10,000 Filipino employees, is 44,000. There are more than 2,700 buildings on the base and military public relations men here call it "the logistics hub of Southeast Asia."

One of its major functions is medical evacuation. Its 270-bed hospital has treated sick and wounded American military men from Asia on the way back to the United States for years. Its evacuation planes still ferry 800 to 1,000 patients a month to military hospitals in the United States.

There is a mood of anticipation throughout the base, even though only a few hundred people will have a direct role in handling the returning prisoners.

About 150 newspaper reporters, photographers, radio and television teams and technicians have descended on the base and double that number is expected. To deal with them, the Pentagon has dispatched information officers from throughout the Pacific, including Hawaii and Japan. The pool tables have been removed from the main service club, which has become a press center.

Escort officers for the prisoners have been flown in and billeted. Medical staffs are standing by, along with pilots and flight crews. Otherwise, the softball games, the test flights, the grocery shopping and the supply shipping goes on as usual.



Associated Press

At Clark Air Base in the Philippines hospital beds are prepared for expected arrival of freed U.S. war prisoners.

1-29-73
NYT