

# Base on Coast Prepares For Arrival of P.O.W.'s

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TRAVIS AIR FORCE BASE, Calif., Jan. 30—For the returning prisoners of war, the first glimpse of North America will be the headlands connected by the bridge across the Golden Gate, with the lights and towers of San Francisco behind.

That will come about 17 hours out from Clark Field in the Philippines. Probably the planes will have landed for a two-hour refueling stop at Hickam Field in Honolulu. The glimpse of the mainland will come as the C-141 is in its downward glide for a landing here 40 miles inland.

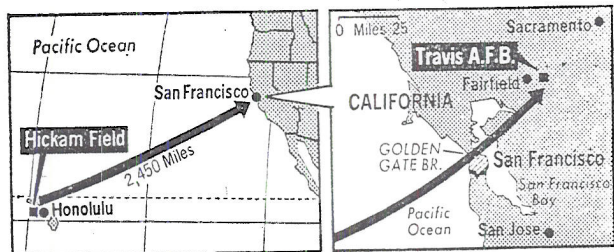
There will be a maximum of 23 former prisoners aboard each of the big jets. Unless the flight crew is able to let some come up front for a better look, their glimpses of the cliffs, bridges and lights of home will be taken in short turns at the six port-holes in the main cabin.

The C-141 is the workhorse of the Vietnam war. The 9-by-70-foot interior this time will be fitted with rows of seats three abreast, facing in military style to the back. Lines of litter racks will provide a bunk for each former prisoner, who also will have a seat he can use.

## Military Escort Aboard

There will be nurses, medical attendants, and a doctor aboard. A military escort from each service branch represented among the former prisoners will also be aboard. In the cockpit will be the flight crew of pilot, copilot, two flight engineers, a navigator, and a loadmaster.

Lieut. Col. William Reslie,



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## P.O.W. flight line crosses the Golden Gate Bridge

public information officer at this base, said that the military escort was being provided to help with advice about service-connected problems.

Although it is not expected that more than a few of the former prisoners will be unable to walk, they will be treated here almost as if they were the wounded—a class of serviceman with which this air base has had vast experience since 1965.

In those years, 493,513 wounded have come through here from Southeast Asia in an aerial evacuation program in which they fanned out to hospitals across the nation, somewhat in the same fashion that the prisoners are to be dispersed.

At times in the peak of war activity in Vietnam in 1965, about 105,000 persons passed through here each month to and from Indochina. The businesses that served this activity at the base line the streets approaching it, with, for example, signs saying "Cars prepared for overseas shipment."

Cab drivers here customarily charged a load of five returning servicemen \$6 each for the trip of about 50 miles to San Francisco Airport and the commercial flights home after the military flight to Travis.

The base was also a receiving point for planeloads of bodies of war dead.

Travis now has a force of

about 10,000 military and 2,100 civilians. It is south of the main eastbound highway from San Francisco on land that once was farms and orchards.

Originally, when it was built in World War II, it was Fairfield-Suisun Army Air Forces Base, bordering those two small towns, but in 1951 it was renamed in memory of a base commander, Brig. Gen. Robert F. Travis, who died in a B-29 crash in 1950.

Colonel Reslie said that the freed prisoner would be given a medical examination, debriefing and an opportunity to call his family after he arrives at Clark Field in the Philippines.

"Those not fit to travel, medically speaking, will stay at Clark," he said. "They will be run through the clinic to see if they have any of those exotic diseases you can get in that area."

Then they will make the flight here on the way to a hospital near home.

"If the guy is fit to travel, once in the hospital he will get his uniform, his medical check, the recommendation of his doctor and they will turn him loose immediately," Colonel Reslie said. "The object here is to reunite the guy with his family as soon as the docs give him a clean bill of health so he can go on convalescent leave with his family."

There will be no brass bands, or any banners to welcome the returned prisoners, Colonel Reslie said, adding, "We want to try to keep this on a dignified plane.

Psychologists found that the guys didn't want that kind of welcome. We don't want to overwhelm these guys."

When the plane lands, the press will be held about 25 yards away. The doctor aboard will be asked if any former prisoner wants to speak to the crowd, or to appear to wave for photographs. If none do, they will be able to walk unobserved from the plane into a vehicle pulled up to the plane door.

## Some to Cross Continent

"We don't want the guy to have to stand there and fend with the sort of thing that would come in a press conference," Colonel Reslie said.

The buses will move the planeload to a 32-room wing of the base hospital. From there they will go to other buses that will take them to service hospitals in this area, or to other planes that will deliver them to hospitals in the West and Middle West. A few planeloads will wait for refueling before continuing by C-141 across the continent.

The bus ride from the airport terminal to the hospital is about a mile. At the foot of a small hill, where the road begins to climb to the hospital, a building bears a sign that probably will be either removed or covered before the first planeload of former prisoners arrives.

"Detention facility," it reads.