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P.O.W.'s Will get the News, 1965 to 1971

By LINDA CHARLTON

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BETHESDA, Md., Feb. 9 — The first entry is the inauguration of President Johnson in January, 1965; the last, the June, 1971, Supreme Court decision on state aid to nonpublic schools. Packed into the pages between is a cram course in events that were current in the world outside the prisoner-of-war camps in Vietnam.

This thick binder of photocopied news summaries is one of the materials that will be available in the 31 military hospitals in this country to which returned prisoners-of-war are expected to be sent for whatever medical evaluation and treatment is necessary.

For "returnees" to the Washington area from the Navy or the Marine Corps, the hospital

will be the National Naval Medical Center here, a 15-minute taxi-ride from downtown Washington. Three 10-room floors in the hospital's central tower have been set aside, each room equipped with a few extra amenities such as a color television set, a clock radio and a high-intensity lamp.

'Homecoming' Crew.

And in the central lounge, furnished in comfortable motel nonstyle, with a larger color television set and a stereo, there will be available an assortment of what are called "materials" by the Defense Department's Homecoming crew — the name of the operation since someone decided that its original nickname, Operation Recap Egress, sounded more like an ornithological oddity than a plan to make the

P.O.W.'s return as untraumatic as possible for them and for their families.

The "materials," identical in each of the hospitals, include several "year" books for each year, the World Book, 60-minute sport and news films, several films on the space program, a glossary of slang and the "synopsis of news stories January 1965-June 1971."

Work was continuing late this week on the remaining 18 months, and the time capsule was expected to be up-to-date by this week, when the first prisoners are expected to be released in Vietnam.

The news digest was put together not in the Pentagon but by Peter Hackes of N.B.C. News and Gordon Hunt of Oklahoma State University, who used standard reference sources such as newspapers and almanacs.

Public Relations Aspect

Lieut. Comdr. Howie Matson, one of the officers assigned to the Bethesda Command information bureau, set up to handle the public relations aspects of Homecoming there, acknowledged that the use of relative outsiders — both Mr. Hackes and Mr. Hunt, he said,

are reservists — undoubtedly reduced possibility of criticism of the synopses. Also, he said, had it been produced by the military, it would have had a "tendency to be parochial."

It does, however, have a tendency to be puzzling, more for what is included than for its omissions. It is presented in brief, two or three-line paragraphs, one to an event, perhaps three to a page, in a nearly telegraphic style generally shorn of adjectives or commentary.

On Jan. 17th, 1965, "L.B.J. says U.S. will persist in defense of South Vietnam. . . ." And on June 30 of the same year, "Congress cuts limit on duty-free goods that tourists may bring home from abroad."

Reading the news digest is like rummaging through old newspapers or magazines in the attic; reading the 160-word slang glossary is often like a trip through the looking-glass with a prim and sheltered Alice.

Much of what is presented as "The Current Slang Expressions Being Used by the Young People of America" was also current at least half a generation before. Among these are such oldies as "chick" ("young girl") and "cool."