

140 Expected

First POW Release Sunday, U.S. Says

Prisoners From North And South

Associated Press

Saigon

The Pentagon announced yesterday that the first group of American war prisoners will be released from Communist captivity Monday — Sunday night U.S. time.

U.S. spokesmen said about 140 of the long-awaited POWs, including some sick and wounded, will be released from camps in North and South Vietnam in the first repatriation of the Vietnam peace agreement.

Hanoi will release about 115 captured airmen while Henry A. Kissinger is in the North Vietnamese capital conferring with Communist leaders on postwar relations and U.S. reconstruction aid.

Another 27 American prisoners held in jungle camps along the Cambodian border will be freed in South Vietnam near An Loc 60 miles north of Saigon.

VIETNAMESE

Three thousand South Vietnamese prisoners also will be exchanged on Monday, the International Commission for Control and Supervision of the peace agreement announced.

North Vietnam has turned over to the U.S. a list of 562

U.S. servicemen held captive and 55 who died in prison camps, leaving 1328 still missing. Of the 562 identified as alive, there are 456 in the North, 99 in the South and seven in Laos. In addition,

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The Communists list 27 American civilians as captured in South Vietnam.

The American prisoners scheduled for release Monday number about one-fourth the total, which is what Kissinger expected on the 15th day following the signing of the cease-fire agreement in Paris January 27. According to Kissinger's timetable,* there will be three additional releases in roughly equal numbers at two-week intervals until the 60-day deadline for freeing all prisoners March 28.

U.S. spokesmen in Saigon said the exact timing and other remaining details of the release will be worked out today at a meeting among delegation chiefs of the four-party joint Military Commission at the Tan Son Nhut Air Base.

While the prisoners to be released were not identified, the agreement specifies that "persons who are seriously ill, wounded or maimed, old persons, and women shall be returned first."

"The remainder shall be returned either by returning all from one detention place after another or in order of their dates of capture, beginning with those who have been held the longest," it continued. Army Major Floyd Thompson is said to have been held longer than any other American. He was captured in South Vietnam in March 1964. The second longest in captivity is Navy Lieutenant Commander Everett Alvarez Jr. 34, of Santa

Clara, Calif., shot down over North Vietnam and taken prisoner after the Tonkin Gulf incident in August 1964.

Defense Department spokesman Jerry W. Friedheim said in Washington that an 18-man team of U.S. officials will fly into Hanoi three hours before the scheduled release to assist in the repatriation. Prisoner recovery teams from the four-nation International Commission for Control and Supervision also will go to Hanoi to observe, as called for in the peace agreement.

U.S. C-141 Starlifter aircraft likely will be used to pick up the prisoners in Hanoi, American officials said. They can carry as many as 83 men and can easily make the 1800-mile, six-hour round trip from Hanoi to Operation Homecoming headquarters at Clark Air Base in the Philippines.

The American prisoners being released near An Loc in South Vietnam, expected to be mostly military, will be picked up by U.S. helicopters and flown back to Saigon's Tan Son Nhut Air Base, a 45-minute flight. At Tan Son Nhut, they will be put aboard medical evacuation aircraft for the one hour, 45-minute flight to Clark. If they are physically unfit for immediate travel, they will be taken to the Saigon Army Hospital.

At Clark, 60 doctors and 100 nurses will give the prisoners medical tests. U.S. officials say most of the men probably will be on their way home within 72 hours of their arrival at Clark.

Civilian prisoners also will be cared for by Operation Homecoming.

In addition to the 27 Americans, 700 South Vietnamese soldiers will be freed near An Loc at the same time.

Also on Monday, another

300 South Vietnamese soldiers will be freed by the Communists in Pleiku province in the Central Highlands, commission officials said. These officials said the South Vietnamese in turn will free 2000 North Vietnamese and Provisional Revolutionary Government prisoners at two sites. One thousand will be released near An Loc, and 1000 more will be freed at Dong Ha just below the demilitarized zone.

The South Vietnamese hold 9700 North Vietnamese and 28,500 PRG military prisoners. President Nguyen Van Thieu has said there are 30,000 to 40,000 South Vietnamese soldiers missing and captured but the Communist side has provided Saigon with a list of only 4000.

The U.S. command announced that American troop strength in Vietnam has fallen below 19,000.

The South Vietnamese Foreign Ministry announced it has filed a note with the supervisory group protesting 1846 alleged cease-fire violations between the starting time January 28 and February 6.

* See note with story by William Beecher, NYTimes 10 Feb 73.