



AIR FORCE COL. ROBINSON RISNER smiles happily and waves as he is the first to leave the second plane from Hanoi. At doorway is CAPT. JAMES B. STOCKDALE, the senior Navy officer to be released. —AP WIREPHOTO.

After Years in a POW Camp; 'It's Robbie, All Right'--Free

CLARK AIR BASE, Philippines (AP) — "It's Robbie, all right," said the middle-aged U.S. Air Force colonel standing in the crowd as a trim figure poked his head from the open door of the C141 and then emerged on the arm of an escort.

A roar went up from the hundreds of American Air Force men assembled at planeside. The colonel joined in and began clapping. Tears were coursing down his face.

The object of their applause straightened up as his foot touched the tarmac. He smiled and walked unescorted to a microphone and began speaking. After 7½ years as a prisoner of war, Robbie Risner was back amongst his own kind, the U.S. Air Force professionals.

COL. ROBINSON Risner, 48, was one of the 116 American war prisoners released from North Vietnam today. And he was also one of the most famous.

The daring aviator from Tulsa, Okla., is a veteran

flier, his experience dating to World War II and Korea.

Risner was a natural for the Vietnam war because he was serving as commander of the 67th Tactical Fighter Squadron at Kadena Air Force Base, Okinawa, when President Lyndon B. Johnson began the air war against North Vietnam early in 1965.

Risner took his squadron of F105 bombers to Korat, Thailand, and began launching daily missions against Hanoi supply lines and communications networks. He became so well known that he was a cover subject for Time magazine.

THEN ON Sept. 16, 1965, Risner's luck ran out. He was shot down and captured by the North Vietnamese.

The Air Force mourned the loss of one of its favorite sons.

"Just a few months before he went down I was in Washington to see him get presented with the Air Force Cross for his Vietnam flying, and that is the best medal the Air Force can give," said one

colonel watching him deplane today.

As the years went by, many more fliers were shot down over Vietnam. But the name of Risner was still a magic one among Air Force professionals. While in prison he was promoted to the rank of full colonel.

LITTLE WAS heard from the captured flier until August of 1968. Rennie Davis visited Hanoi then as the head of a pacifist mission to pick up three released U.S. prisoners of war, and reported meeting Risner and several others.

Davis reported the flier looked in excellent condition physically. That same day Radio Hanoi broadcast a statement by a prisoner identified as Risner that called on the United States "to stop all bombing and other acts of war against North Vietnam and withdraw all U.S. troops from South Vietnam."

Risner's wife said afterward she did not believe the voice of the broadcast was that of her husband.

POW Families Hold Vigil with Anxiety, Relief

By The Associated Press

"We can really relax now. He's back on U.S. soil again."

The comment by Mrs. Jay Marlowe, the sister of Navy Cmdr. Leonard Eastman, 39, of Bernardston, Mass., reflected the mixture of excitement, anxiety and relief expressed today by the relatives of American POWs freed in Indochina.

Many POW relatives watched an early morning telecast of the arrival of the prisoners from North Vietnam at Clark Air Force Base, the Philippines.

"We saw Leonard on television," said Mrs. Marlowe, whose brother was captured June 21, 1966. "He was on the third plane and we thought he looked good."

MRS. JAMES Quincy Collins Sr. of Atlanta, Ga., the mother of Lt. Col. J. Quincy Collins Jr., spotted her son quickly. "I thought he looked real good," she said. Noting that Collins, who was captured Oct. 18, 1965, had reportedly suffered a broken leg and undergone two operations, Mrs. Collins added: "I was expecting him to come down the steps (of the plane) on crutches, but he didn't even have a cane."

The wait for the news that the prisoners actually had been freed was extra long for the relatives of 19 servicemen and eight civilians released in South Vietnam. Their release was delayed by more than 12 hours by a dispute over the freeing of prisoners held by the South.

The men were told at Clark that they would be allowed to call home and their families waited by the telephone.