

FEB 12 1973

Chronicle Hanoi Frees First POWs— Release in South Delayed

SFChronicle FEB 12 1973

Prisoners

Land in

Philippines

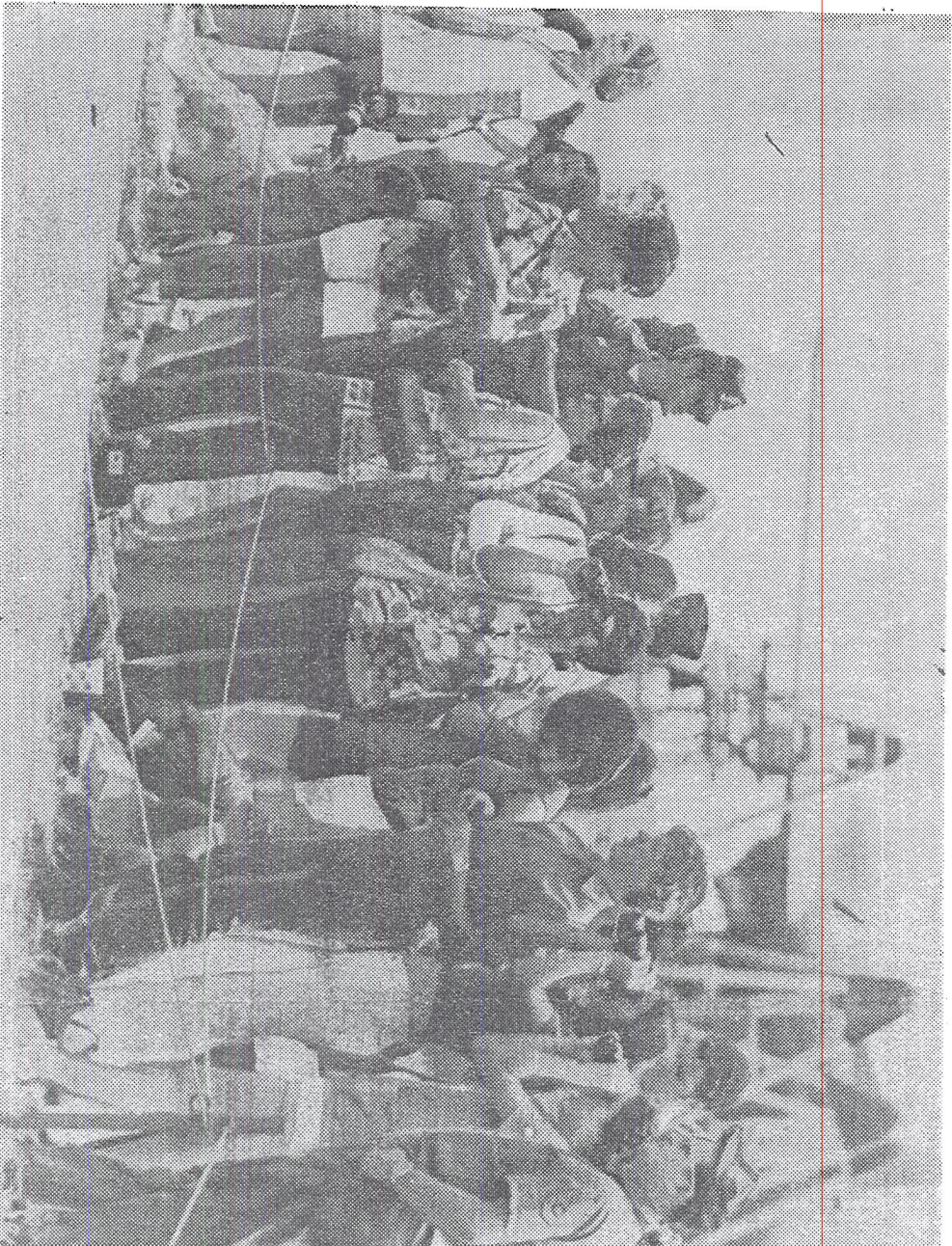
A.P. & U.P.

Clark Air Base,
Philippines

The first American prisoners of war freed under the Vietnam cease-fire agreement arrived at Clark Air Base in the Philippines at 12:10 a.m. (PST)—to the cheers of several thousand Americans gathered at the arrival terminal.

The 40 men aboard the C-141 hospital plane from Hanoi included Lieutenant Commander Everett Alvarez Jr., the first American flyer downed in North Vietnam. He was captured on August 5, 1964.

Two other hospital planes were expected to land with



People waited in the hot sun at Clark Air Base in the Philippines for the first POWs

AP Wirephoto

the rest of the 116 American war prisoners released by North Vietnam today.

FIRST

Capt. Jeremiah A. Denton Jr. of Virginia Beach, Va., was the first man to disembark from the plane.

"We are honored to have had the opportunity to have served our country," Denton said at a microphone on the runway beside the plane.

"God bless America."

A total of 116 American servicemen were released by the North Vietnamese following a brief ceremony at Hanoi's Gia Lam Airport.

This was one more than originally scheduled. The United States asked that Navy Commander Brian D. Woods of San Diego be released now since his mother is critically ill. The Communists agreed.

In Loc Ninh, South Vietnam, 27 American POWs — 19 servicemen and eight civilians — waited in the jungle to board helicopters that

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would ferry them to Saigon. From there two C-9A ambulance planes were standing by to fly them to Clark Air Base.

Their release was delayed by a squabble between the Vietnamese over release of 2000 Communist prisoners held near Saigon.

The POWs from Hanoi were aboard C-141 Starlifter transports. 1

The first plane left Hanoi at 9:36 p.m. PST and the second at 10:05 p.m., shortly after a third ambulance plane landed. The first plane had arrived in Hanoi at midnight.

North Vietnam asked the U.S. air force to speed up the arrival of the C-141 aircraft so that they arrive at intervals of 30 minutes at Gia Lam, the air force said. Originally the three C-141 Starlifter transports were due to arrive at intervals of an hour.

The delay in release of 27 POWs at Loc Ninh, South Vietnam, apparently was caused by bickering between the South Vietnamese and Vietnamese Communists.

A South Vietnamese spokesman at the Bien Hoa prison camp near Saigon said the dispute had been settled and that the first Communists would be released "within an hour," clearing the way for the release of the Americans at Loc Ninh.

But in Washington, a Pentagon spokesman said "the situation at Loc Ninh is not resolved."

The Pentagon maintained constant telephone communication with U.S. authorities in Saigon, and a spokesman said there had been no break in the deadlock that was causing the Communists to refuse to free 27 American POWs.

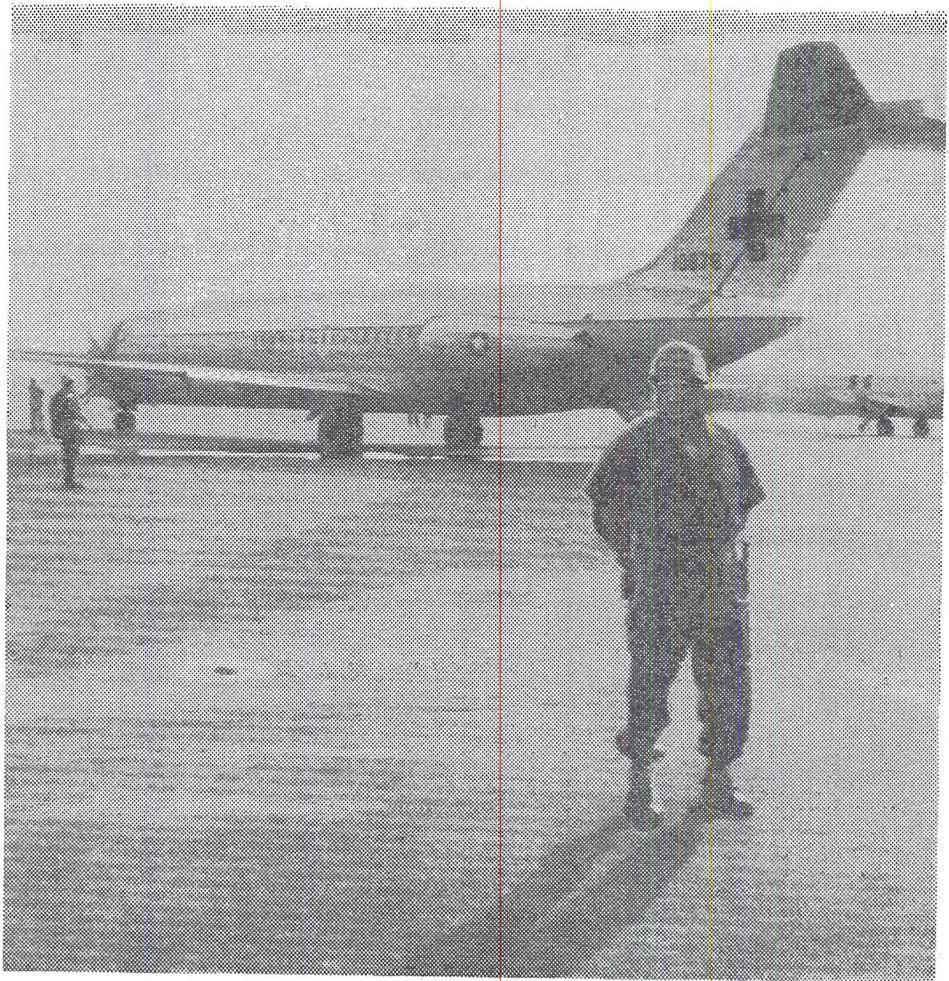
The Pentagon said two Viet Cong representatives to the four-party joint military commission departed Saigon's Tan Son Nhut Airport for Loc Ninh at 7:50 p.m. PST, accompanied by a United States representative to the military commission and a U.S. interpreter.

A statement on their departure, issued jointly at the Pentagon and by the U.S. Embassy in Saigon, did not give the purpose of the trip but it apparently was an effort to break the deadlock and get the POWs freed, although Saigon observers thought the Viet Cong might be going to tell their compatriots at Loc Ninh to release the Americans.

POWS

The 2000 Communist POWs held by South Vietnam at Bien Hoa were to be flown in two equal groups to Quang Tri, in northern South Vietnam, and to Loc Ninh.

Colonel Bui Tin, spokes-



AP Wirephoto

Military police stood by an evacuation plane in Saigon today as they waited for the delayed arrival of 27 U.S. POWs from Bien Hoa

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Extra POW Freed --Mother Is Sick

Washington

The North Vietnamese agreed to release one additional U.S. war prisoner today because of his mother's critical illness, the Pentagon announced.

U.S. officials in Hanoi were told that Navy Commander Brian D. Woods, 40, of San Diego would be added to the group.

This brings the total number of American prisoners of

war released today to 116.

The Pentagon said U.S. delegates to a joint military commission had asked three days ago that Woods be added to the group because of his mother's illness.

Woods' addition to the original group of 115 left 340 American servicemen yet to be freed before the end of March under the terms of the U.S.-North Vietnamese cease-fire agreement.

Associated Press

man for the North Vietnamese delegation to the four-party Joint Military Commission in Saigon, said that the Viet Cong was ready to release the American prisoners at Loc Ninh on schedule, but that at midnight yesterday the South Vietnamese government relayed word to the Communist side that Saigon's prisoners at the Bien Hoa camp northeast of the capital refused to leave for release points before seeing a representative of the Viet Cong.

According to Tin, the Viet Cong was ready to send a team of representatives to Bien Hoa this morning at 5 a.m., local time but the South Vietnamese did not arrive until 9:30.

"There are always new problems from the Republic

of Vietnam," he said. "The release at Loc Ninh will not take place as originally foreseen."

SENIOR

He also said the senior Viet Cong representative, Lieutenant General Tran Van Tra, would bring up the matter at a this morning meeting of the chief delegates to the Joint Military Commission.

"On our side we would like for the American prisoners to be released as soon as possible," Tin said, "but we must follow strictly the agreements on the release of prisoners of war."

U.S. helicopters flew to Loc Ninh to pick up the 27 prisoners at daybreak. Military sources said the helicopters were delayed in taking off from Tan Son Nhut because of a mixup on Com-

munist escort personnel from the Joint Military Commission.

MEMBERS

The Vietnam peace agreement requires that prisoner exchanges be observed by members of the four-party commission.

"The helicopters got there (to Loc Ninh) late," one U.S. source said. "The Communists wanted to make some personnel changes."

The helicopters left Tan Son Nhut shortly after 7 a.m. Saigon time — 3 p.m. EST — and landed at Loc Ninh about 55 minutes later.

It had been planned initially that the turnover ceremony would be completed in 30 minutes.

Other American planes flew from Clark to Hanoi to pick up the prisoners to be freed by North Vietnam. The release of American POWs, stipulated in the cease-fire agreement, is to be accomplished in four installments.

The takeoff from Clark for Hanoi was delayed for several hours by bad weather at Hanoi's Gia Lam airport. The flight from Clark requires about 2½ to 3 hours.