

## Release of Prisoners in Hanoi Is Simple and Swift

HANOI, North Vietnam, Feb. 12 (Agence France-Press)—Buses still bearing the camouflage paint of war arrived at the civilian airport at Gia Lam this morning carrying American prisoners of war in their last moments of captivity.

As the hour of release approached, the airport was aswarm with more soldiers of varied ranks and nationalities than anyone here could remember. The formalities were simple and swift. In a little more than an hour, all 116 men were headed by air for Clark Air Base in the Philippines.

"They were released as rapidly as they were captured," one North Vietnamese official remarked with a smile.

Scores of North Vietnamese officials had left their ministries to cross the Red River to the airport for what all present clearly regarded as a historic moment.

There were North Vietnamese and American officers and enlisted men; Ca-

nadians, Hungarians, Indonesians and Poles from the International Commission of Control and Supervision, and some 120 Vietnamese and foreign journalists — none, however, from the United States.

**Commission Team on Hand**  
Also present was a team from the Four-Party Joint Military Commission, formed by the United States, North Vietnam, the Saigon Government and the Vietcong, but Saigon's representatives were reported missing. [They were absent "without justification," the official North Vietnamese press agency said in a broadcast, according to a Reuters report from Hong Kong.]  
The public, however, was not admitted.

The atmosphere at the airport, which is still scarred from the bombing of last December, seemed somewhat stiff at first but rapidly became relaxed.

North Vietnamese soldiers invited the crew of one of the American medical evacuation planes to tea in a build-

ing whose windows had been shattered. In turn, a group of North Vietnamese clustered around an American jeep to study the functioning of the radio with which it was equipped.

It was 12:30 P.M. (12:30 A.M. Monday, New York time) when Lieut. Col. Nguyen Phuong of North Vietnam presented to Col. James B. Bennett of the United States the first 20 American prisoners.

The men had arrived at the airport riding 20 men to each bus. Each group on stepping to the ground was formed into two lines of 10 men each.

One by one, the prisoners passed before Colonel Phuong and Colonel Bennett, who were seated at a small table under a canopy of green parachute cloth installed in case of rain. The table was in a grassy enclosure surrounded by a wrought-iron fence.

As each prisoner's name was called, he would step into the enclosure, give his name and in a move signifying repatriation, walk past

the table. An American serviceman would then escort him about 75 yards to one of three C-141 Starlifter transports.

Some of the released men saluted at the table. Some did not. One displayed a piece of white canvas bearing, in blue, the words: "God bless Nixon and the American people."

Twenty-nine of those released today were wounded or ill. Three were carried aboard their plane on stretchers. Two were using crutches. Six of the wounded were said to have been crew members of B-52's shot down in December.

A list containing the name, rank, birthday, place of capture and condition of each of the prisoners was turned over to Colonel Bennett.

By 1:45 P.M. all prisoners were airborne, 40 in each of the first two planes and the 36 others in the third. One more aircraft followed — the C-130 that had brought a medical team, telecommunications specialists, ground crews and the radio jeep.