

20 POWs Back on U.S. Soil

HONOLULU (AP) — The first American war prisoners traveling home from Vietnam in a group returned to American soil today on a bright Hawaiian morning, stopping at Hickam Air Force Base for refueling en route to California.

The 20 men left Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines earlier today, smiling and carrying a Vietnamese puppy with them.

The men departed a day ahead of schedule. Their big C141 Starlifter hospital jet was due at California's Travis Air Force Base about 6 p.m. CST.

Forty more POWs will follow Thursday in two planes. This will leave 80 of the men freed Monday still at Clark and one in Saigon. Two others were flown home Tuesday because of serious illness in their families.

Speaking for the group which left today, Capt. Jeremiah A. Denton of Virginia Beach, Va., told the newsmen and military officials at planeside: "I would like to express our thanks to you people here at Clark. You have shown us that your feeling is as deep as ours, and that is the highest compliment I can pay for the wonderful welcome we received here.

"I WOULD like to thank President Nixon and everyone associated with this project for an experience we will never forget."

The canine passenger was a dog called Ma-co that Lt. Cmdr. Edward A. Davis of Leola, Pa., adopted during his nearly eight years at the Hanoi Hilton.

"What does Ma-co mean?" a reporter called out as Davis cuddled the pup for the photographers before taking it aboard the plane.

"They tell me it means 'dog without hair,'" Davis replied.

Flight Nurse Patricia O'Reilly, 32, of New York City, who helped smuggle the dog aboard the evacuation plane in Hanoi Monday, ran up and embraced Davis.

"I RISKED being court-martialed for insubordination by smuggling the puppy on the plane," she said, "but I figured that would be better than having to go back to get him."

Half the 20 men were dressed in pajamas.

Officials of Operation Homecoming said most of the remaining men will be back in the United States by the weekend. But doctors at the base hospital where they were quartered re-

Turn to Page 5, Column 1

Continued from Front Page

ported a few wanted to remain for plastic surgery.

"Some of these men have bad scars on their arms from being bound for a long time with wire," one doctor explained. "Others, their war wounds healed badly."

OFFICIALS ORIGINALLY thought at least three days would be needed to prepare the men for their return to America, but they speeded the timetable because of the good condition of many of the men and their enthusiasm to get going.

"The guys are exuberant; everyone wants to be on the first plane out," said Lt. Cmdr. Alex Aronis of Los Angeles, the Protestant chaplain for Operation Homecoming.

For the men left behind, a birthday party was arranged in honor of the POWs with birthdays in February. The menu was multi-ethnic — Mexican

dishes, sirloin roast, lobster, ravioli and a big birthday cake.

Meanwhile, U.S. and North Vietnamese officials met in Saigon to make arrangements for the transfer of 20 more American POWs who Hanoi announced would be released within the next few days. A North Vietnamese spokesman in Saigon said the date for the release had not been decided but the decision was expected soon.

EARLIER TODAY, Denton and two other POWs went to the Virgil I. Grisom School for children of base personnel to express the freed men's thanks for greeting cards and posters the children had drawn and sent them on their arrival Monday.

Denton was accompanied by Capt. John L. Borling of Chicago, Ill., and M. Sgt. William A. Robinson of Robersonville, N.C. They spoke briefly to the children in the school gymnasium and gave them back the posters, which the POWs had autographed.



Edward Davis brought a puppy in his duffle bag