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# North Viet POWs' Boat Ride Home

## Vietnam

The Saigon government freed 175 disabled North Vietnamese prisoners yesterday in ten fiberglass boats.

They crossed the choppy Thach Han River to Hanoi-ruled soil after a short delay caused by their refusal to board the boats flying South Vietnamese flags.

The repatriation was completed about midafternoon, after a Viet Cong officer from the four-party Joint Military Commission persuaded the POWs to cross. All reportedly had been captured three or more years ago.

## DELAY

One hundred of the POWs had been at the Phu Bai Airport 35 miles south of the release point since Monday, when they initially had been scheduled for release. Viet Cong officers in northern Quang Tri Province said they were not prepared to accept them then.

But in Saigon, the chief spokesman for the Viet Cong delegation issued a statement saying the delay was caused by an alleged 4000-round South Vietnamese artillery barrage poured into the release site area Sunday.

The additional 75 POWs were flown in a C-130 transport to Camp Evans near Hue yesterday and were brought by truck to the riverbank. The others were flown from Phu Bai by Chinook helicopters.

## FIRST

It was the first prisoner release in the far northern sector of South Vietnam.

There were no smiles until the boats were in mid-stream, at which point the North Vietnamese hoisted Communist slogans painted on strips of cloth, bandages and maroon POW clothes. Their signs apparently had been prepared beforehand.

One ex-POW broke open a wound on his body and used the blood that flowed out to paint slogans on a strip of cloth reading "Doc La," meaning independence, and "Tu Do," or freedom.

*Associated Press*