

20 Former P.O.W.'s Fly To Air Base in California

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TRAVIS AIR FORCE BASE, Calif., Feb. 14—The first full planeload of returning prisoners—symbols and victims of a decade of agonizing war in Southeast Asia—came home to night.

Twenty former prisoners boarded a C-141 Starlifter at Clark Air Base in the Philippines early today and made a refueling stop in Hawaii on their 8,000-mile journey to the continental United States. The

plane landed here at 4:27 P.M. local time.

The families of three of the men live near this huge air base 50 miles east of San Francisco and were here to greet them.

Three other men were scheduled to be taken to hospitals in the area, and the 14 others were to fly on from here to hospitals near their homes. Two prisoners arrived home last night to see their ailing mothers.

Subdued Welcome

Travis had prepared a warm but subdued greeting, in keeping with the spirit of Operation Homecoming, and only a limited number of base personnel were outside the air terminal to welcome the men back to American soil. But some emotions were spilling out.

"I got so choked up, I was almost crying," said Specialist 4 Gail Moe, 19 years old, who watched the initial release on television. "I don't know why, I was all shivery, I felt so good."

"I think it's fantastic, the best thing that's happened in a million years," added the wife of a retired Air Force officer.

Over the years, Travis has been the homecoming point for thousands of plain metal caskets, covered with American flags, and in the midst of the joy and relief that marked this day, many here found the memory of what the war had cost

Continued on Page 16, Column 2

Continued From Page 1, Col. 7

the nation hard to erase.

Twenty men returned to night. But many observers recalled that 45,000 were dead, that 1,300 were missing and unaccounted for and that hundreds of thousands had been wounded, physically and mentally, by the longest war in America's history.

It also seemed evident to some today that as the prisoners came home, the war was still going on. Servicemen crowded the terminal here, waiting to board planes for exotic places to the east—Okinawa, Guam, Thailand. And few military people here felt that the return of the prisoners marked the end of the fighting.

"They're sending out just as many as come back," said a young Air Force corporal who works at the airport. "They're all going to Thailand, they're just moving the boundaries of the war back."

"It's just like the cavalry and the Indians. We don't trust them and they don't trust us," said a sailor as he sipped beer and waited for a plane to Hawaii. A buddy added, "The war's still on, man."

Of the men who returned to night, four were captured in the last year, including two fliers shot down during the raids against Hanoi at Christmas.

The rest have been held captive since 1965 and 1966, and the changes they will encounter in this country, one man observed, run a lot deeper than the moustaches on the young soldiers and the Afro haircuts on the Wac at the Army processing center.

For example, Maj. Alan L. Brunstrom, 41 years old, who was based in Thailand and shot down over North Vietnam on April 22, 1966, has a daughter, who was then 6 and is now 12, a child turned into a teen-ager.

The wife of Comdr. Paul E. Galanti, originally of Lodi, N.J., has become a leader in the National League of Families and an accomplished public figure.

Of those who returned to night, the man held longest in captivity was Comdr. Raymond A. Vohden, whose carrier-based fighter was downed on April 3, 1965. His wife announced recently in Memphis that she had filed for a legal separation, but she now says that she will postpone the decision and try to save the marriage.

The senior officer on the

flight was Capt. Jeremiah Denton Jr., who has become familiar to many Americans in recent days because of his airport statements. During the stopover in Hawaii, Captain Denton, who again acted as spokesman for his comrades, called today "the greatest Valentine's Day of our lives" and added: "Perhaps you all have some inkling of how we feel to stand again in the United States of America."

The return of the prisoners has a special meaning for military people. A senior Air Force officer had been wearing a bracelet with the name of Capt. Darrell Pyle, who is now in the Philippines and is due home soon.

The Air Force officer had picked Captain Pyle because the captain was shot down shortly after the officer was commissioned on June 6, 1966.

"We're all in the military," the officer explained, "and we all have a job to do, and he was doing his job in a helluva bad situation. A lot has happened to me in six years, and when you think where he has been for that same time . . ."

'It's About Time'

There is also a feeling here that the men should have been back long ago. As Sgt. William Lavelle, a 20-year-old Vietnam veteran, put it, "I think it's about time. It's really just a bummer."

Pfc. Terry Burnette added: "I'm glad they're coming home, but getting captured was a chance they had to take. Most of them are career officers. This is their job, this is what they're getting paid for."

"I'm kind of shook up about the return," added Specialist Moe. "I'm afraid the prisoners won't be allowed to say what they want to say, I'm afraid they'll be suppressed."

A marine who overheard added: "It's all politics. The military knows what they're going to say and don't want you to know."

The men will be plunging back into a country turned skeptical and weary by the war. If they pick up a copy of an underground paper called *Travisty*, published just off the base, they will see a headline that reads: "P.O.W.'s FROM ONE PRISON TO ANOTHER?"

But if they wander into the bowling alley, they might see a news clipping pasted on the wall. It is an account of a wedding held on the base recently, and it describes the ceremony this way: "Each of the guests lit candles which easily symbolize the birth of a new life."



Associated Press

Lieut. Col. Alan Brunstrom of Tacoma, Wash., rushes into his wife's arms on arrival at Travis Air Force Base

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