

SFCronicle

FEB 17 1973

Alvarez Is Back-- A POW 8 Years

By Charles Howe

Lieutenant Commander Everett Alvarez Jr., the American prisoner of war held longest in North Vietnam, arrived at Travis Air Force Base yesterday after more than eight years of confinement.

Haggard and occasionally unsteady but flashing brief smiles, the 35-year-old Alvarez, whose wife divorced him two years ago, spoke to a cheering crowd of 2000.

"For years and years we have dreamed of this day and we kept the faith," he said in a firm voice. "Faith in God, faith in our President and faith in our country. It was this faith that maintained our hope that some day our dreams would come true . . . and they have!"

Alvarez was then driven to the Oak Knoll Navy Hospital in Oakland where he was reunited in private with his parents and two sisters.

SKIRTS

One of the first things he noticed after he and his comrades were released, Alvarez said, was the miniskirt. "It looks pretty good to me," he said.

He met all questions about his confinement with a brief "no comment."

Although he was not the senior officer aboard the C-141 Starlifter from Clark Air Base in the Philippines, military authorities "bent" protocol and let him come off first.

Alvarez was a 26-year-old Navy Lieutenant, married for only four months, when the A-4 Skyhawk he was flying was shot down on Aug. 15, 1964. His wife, Tangee filed for divorce six years later and has since remarried and has a daughter almost two years old. She has declined to say where she is living or to tell her new husband's name.

When the divorce was made public four months ago, Tangee said: "I just fell out of love with Everett. I'm very happy now, and I don't regret one bit what I've done. Just because I divorced Everett doesn't mean I don't have compassion for him."

The pilot's mother, Mrs. Soledad Alvarez, later told reporters that when her son learned of the divorce while

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in prison he wrote back: "I hope her present husband loves her as much as I did."

Alvarez was not asked about the divorce yesterday and he did not mention it in his brief statement.

Another former prisoner surely less well-known but of decided interest to a number of reporters was among the 60 servicemen who came home yesterday.

* Alvarez: see
Steven V. Roberts,
NYTimes 8 Feb
KCBS 16 Feb

* Springman: see
SFCron 14 Feb

* Rodriguez: see
NOSI 16 Feb
NYT 17 FEB

husband's life with quick first aid.

Mrs. Carlson, who lives in Pleasanton with their four-year-old son, Eric, spent Thursday night with her husband.

"His spirit is great," she said. "He said the whole homecoming couldn't have been better planned." And one of his first questions, she added about her career-minded husband, was;

Making a brief clenched fist sign as he stepped off the same plane carrying Alvarez, Specialist Four Richard H. Springman, 23, was quickly whisked to Letterman General Hospital in the San Francisco Presidio, where he made no statement.

Springman, captured May 25, 1970, in the vicinity of Katum, Cambodia, first came to public attention at Clark Air Base on Monday, when he landed wearing a peace emblem and a string of beads.

The military has declined to discuss the circumstances of his capture, saying only that "we are reviewing his records and will determine his status at the appropriate time."

INVESTIGATION

A second prisoner of war under investigation to determine if he was AWOL at the time of his capture declined to get off a plane at Travis on Thursday for welcoming ceremonies.

Private Ferdinand Rodriguez, 25, first listed as a deserter who disappeared in Vietnam on April 14, 1963, told officers, "I don't feel well. I don't want to go out." Later, he was flown on to Scott Air Force Base in Illinois.

Springman's arrival at Letterman, some observers noted, differed from the earlier arrivals of two other Army POWs now receiving examinations there: there was no microphone present to record a possible statement.

Press officers at the Presidio late yesterday had no immediate comment on whether Springman declined to say a few words at his own request. In any case, he was not wearing the peace medal and beads he had on when his Travis-bound plane left the Philippines.

EMOTIONS

One of the more emotional homecomings at Travis occurred when Major Norman McDaniel, 35, who had spent 6½ years in North Vietnamese captivity, stepped off the plane and shouted:

"Oh, it's so great to be home! God bless you." With a large smile, he told reporters that sense of humor, among other things, kept him going.

"You have to have a sense of humor. There was something popular among the POWs — the light at the end of the tunnel." He chuckled: "We looked at that light a long time."

CRUTCHES

The only man on crutches disdainfully waved away a proffered wheelchair as he swung down the ramp. Captain David E. Baker, 26, stashed one crutch under his arm and then snapped a weak salute before trundling on to the massive roar of applause.

Colonel Raymond J. Merritt, 53, whose Air Force F-105 was downed on Sept. 15, 1965, told reporters:

"My first impression is how good everybody looks. I've seen nothing but Orientals for 7½ years and certainly the dress and hair styles have changed . . . you all look wonderful."

CIVILIAN

Douglas B. Ramsey, 38, was the lone civilian to land at Travis. A State Department officer who was captured by the Viet Cong on Jan. 5, 1966, wore a large smile but did not speak to reporters.

He was welcomed by Master Sergeant Gene Vann, brother of John Paul Vann, also a State Department officer, who searched the jungles for six years in an attempt to find Ramsey.

Sergeant Vann said his brother, who was killed in a helicopter crash in Vietnam last June, had often expressed a desire to embrace Ramsey when he was finally freed.

"I want to do what my brother wanted to do," Vann said just before Ramsey came down the walkway.

DEBT

In other developments, the wife of an Army major who was a captive of the Viet Cong for eight months told a press conference at the Presidio that her husband owed his life to an intrepid French photographer.

Nancy Carlson, wife of Edward Carlson who came home Thursday, said that after her husband was wounded in the lung at Loc Ninh, Yves Michele Dumond, a United Press International photographer who was also captured saved her

"Where do you want to be assigned (for Army duty) next?"



LIEUTENANT COMMANDER EVERETT ALVAREZ JR.
He told a crowd of 2000, 'For years . . . we kept the faith'



RICHARD SPRINGMAN DIDN'T WEAR HIS PEACE EMBLEM
He was greeted by Brigadier General Robert Green, Letterman Hospital chief