

New POW Dispute Hits Truce Group

34 More Free

From News Dispatches

CLARK AIR BASE, The Philippines, March 5 — Thirty-four more American prisoners of war, smiling cautiously, arrived to a cheering welcome here today after being released by the Vietcong in Hanoi.

"My God, you don't know how good it is to be free," said Capt. Stephen R. Leopold, the senior man on today's flight to freedom. "The first thing I thought of was to add up the years of captivity that the men on this (plane) had served. I stopped counting at 150. A 150 years for 34 people is a long time . . ."

Leopold, 28, of Milwaukee, Wis., who was captured on March 27, 1969, led an international group of prisoners of war off the plane, including 30 Americans, two Filipinos and two West Germans. One of the Germans was Monika Schwinn, a 30-year-old nurse who is believed to be the only surviving foreign woman prisoner of war.

Even as the latest group of 34 POW's arrived here, the men released by North Vietnam Sunday—160 Americans and two Thais—were speeding through their processing and preparing to return home possibly Wednesday.

See POWs, A17, Col. 1

lay, for reunion with their families.

The chalky-faced prisoners released by the Vietcong appeared thinner and less vigorous than the 108 who arrived the day before. One was hauled in a litter from the plane that ferried them in from Hanoi.

Army S.Sgt. Bill Baird appeared in the doorway of the huge C-141 ambulance plane on crutches and then shuffled his way down the ramp with a large smile on his face.

Baird's 40-yard walk to a blue ambulance bus was painful to watch, but the 26-year-old native of Wooster, Ohio, was determined to walk to freedom. He shot off a snappy salute to Adm. Noel Gayler, commander-in-chief of the Pacific Forces, warmly shook the hand of Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos, who was on hand to welcome the two Filipinos, and then hobbled down a red carpet to the bus with the cheers of the crowd ringing in his ears.

Miss Schwinn was one of the last off the plane. She walked timidly down the ramp carrying an orange handbag and a bouquet of yellow roses, dressed in the same blue prison uniform worn by the rest of the returnees.

The new arrivals later joined those released yesterday in savoring the small pleasures of life. They gobbled steak and eggs, telephoned their families back home and tinkered with their hospital television sets.

They were to begin thorough medical examinations Tuesday. Air Force Brig. Gen. Russell Ogan, 49, of Reading, Pa., said the Vietcong told the U.S. pickup party in Hanoi that none of the men had an injury "that couldn't be fixed."

Little was known about the two Thais that the North Vietnamese released yesterday. Hanoi radio today said they were captured in 1964 and 1966 in Quangbinh and Nglean provinces, and said they were mercenaries and spies.

One official who made the trip to Hanoi commented: "Those are really fantastic guys. They really did a lot for us." He did not elaborate.

The two Filipinos released today are employees of the Office of America who were captured in Hue during the wet offensive. The families of both men were at the flight line to greet them.

The two Germans, Miss Schwinn and Bernard Diehl, were both captured April 27, 1969 while working for the Japanese Aid Service, a German Catholic charity mission, at a hospital near Da Nang.

Military sources said today that American war prisoners had cheered when they saw massive fireballs near Hanoi during the December bombing. Later the source said, the POWs learned the explosions were American B-52 bombers crashing to the ground.

Many U.S. prisoners got up last night "to watch the fireworks," and many of the older professional airmen are convinced the bombing was instrumental in helping President Nixon obtain their freedom, the sources reported.