

SAIGON AND REDS AGREE ON P.O.W.'S

Exchange Is to Begin Near
Quang Tri City Today

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, Thursday, March 8—The South Vietnamese and the Communists agreed last night on the time and place to begin their next exchange of prisoners of war, thus at least temporarily ending a dispute that had disrupted the work of the Four-Party Joint Military Commission.

The release, part of the "second phase" of prisoner exchanges, is to begin today near the ruins of Quang Tri City just below the demilitarized zone, an official American spokesman said.

The South Vietnamese are to release 500 of the 6,300 prisoners in their custody whom they have agreed to free in the second phase, while the Vietcong's Provisional Revolutionary Government is to release an undisclosed number of the 1,200 men it is scheduled to free in this stage, the spokesman reported.

Meeting Due Today

The subcommission of captured personnel of the Joint Military Commission is to meet again today in an effort to work out the details of the release of the rest of the prisoners to be exchanged in this phase. The American spokesman said no more major problems were expected in settling these details and that about 1,000 men a day would be exchanged for the next several days at Quang Tri and several other sites around South Vietnam.

In what appeared to be a compromise by the Saigon Government, the two South Vietnamese sides agreed earlier yesterday on the total number of prisoners to be set free in this phase. The compromise, in which Saigon said it would raise the number to 6,300, from 3,000, the number to end the boycott of the prisoner talks that the Communists announced Monday.

But a South Vietnamese spokesman, Lieut. Col. Le Trung Hien, said that the Communists had also compromised by dropping their demand that all civilians detained by the two sides be released before any further exchange of military prisoners.

The agreements yesterday on the total number of prisoners to be released in the second phase and the details of the exchange seemed to remove a possible roadblock to further releases of American prisoners.

Difficulty in Exchanges

But American officials pointed out that with the limited number of American aircraft now available for transportation and with only 20 days left to complete all exchanges before the March 28 deadline specified by the Paris agreement, there may be some difficulties in carrying out the exchanges of Vietnamese prisoners.

Including those to be exchanged in the second phase, there are still 21,000 military prisoners in South Vietnamese custody and nearly 4,000 in Communist hands. American officials say that under present airlift capacity only 1,000 can be exchanged a day.

In the meantime, the withdrawal of American forces continued yesterday, with 800 more American servicemen leaving Vietnam. This reduced the total of American troops in Vietnam to under 8,000 for the first time since early 1962, an American spokesman reported.

* 5,000? - see Sylvan Fox, NYTimes 6 Mar 73.

500 - NYTimes (Reuters),
9 Mar 73.