

80 Freed P.O.W.'s Off for U.S. After Warm Philippine Farewell

CLARK AIR BASE, the Philippines, March 7 (AP)—Eighty former prisoners of war headed for their homes in the United States today after a send-off that included hugs and kisses from well-wishers.

The 56 former prisoners remaining at Operation Homecoming headquarters here are scheduled to leave tomorrow in three flights.

Doctors said that all of the men were in "generally good shape" and any follow-up care needed would be given them at military hospitals near their homes.

Even S. Sgt. Gail M. Kerns of Daniels, W. Va., the only stretcher case among the prisoners who arrived here Sunday and Monday, was seen walking around the base PX last night. However, doctors refused to discuss his case.

The 80 men flew home today in plane loads of 20, taking off at two-hour intervals. The flights were bound for Andrews Air Force Base, Washington, D. C.; Kelly Air Force Base, Texas; Travis Air Force Base, Fairfield, Calif., and Scott Air Force Base, Belleville, Ill.

The three flights tomorrow will be routed to Kelly, Scott and Travis.

At the departures today many of the men stepped aside to receive hugs, kisses, bouquets of flowers and huge congratulatory signs from children and other members of the Clark Base community.

Girls 13 and 14 years old began crying as they handed the former prisoners notes or perfumed stationery.

"God bless you! God bless you all!" shouted Comdr. Edward H. Martin, 41 years old, of Coronado, Calif., holding a poster that said: "Fly Away Home—Good Luck."

Carmen Lyons, a student at Clark's Wagner High School, handed out daisies with peanut butter cookies she had made. The flowers had a tag: "Welcome home—God bless you."

'A Loving Family of Thousands'

Maj. Ronald J. Webb, 35, of Hampton, Va., carried an American flag as he saluted waiting officials and climbed aboard the C-141.

The crowd sang "Happy Birthday" for Maj. John C. Blevins of San Antonio, an Air Force man who was 34 today, and several women gave him a cake.

"We feel like we have been surrounded by a loving family of thousands," said Col. James H. Kasler, 47, an Air Force officer from Indianapolis, senior man on the second plane.

Tomorrow's flights will include 30 Americans captured in South Vietnam and released by the Vietcong in Hanoi on Monday.

Two German medical workers captured in South Vietnam, Monika Schwinn, 30, and Bernhard Diehl, 26, were also released on Monday and left today for West Germany.

Miss Schwinn, the only foreign woman held by the Communists at the time of the cease-fire described their captors as "people who don't love you—the people sometimes have smiling faces, but you had better not trust this kind of smile."