

# A Jaunty Walk To Freedom

Clark Air Base,  
Philippines

Army Major Floyd Thompson, the longest held American prisoner of the Vietnam war, walked to freedom wearing a green beret yesterday, along with 31 other POWs who completed the next to last phase of Operation Homecoming.

Thompson, 39, of new Milford, N.J., who was captured March 26, 1964, while riding a military aircraft as an observer, was the second man down the ramp of the plane that brought the men from Hanoi. The beret, which was worn by the U.S. special forces in Vietnam, was carried to him in Hanoi.

"They're going to have to fight like hell to get this off my head this time," Thompson was quoted as saying aboard the flight to the Philippines.

## CAPTORS

Shortly after the 32 arrived, 110 ex-POWs freed earlier this week started home to the U.S. aboard giant C-141 Starlifter jets.



*AP Wirephoto*  
**MAJOR THOMPSON  
Green beret is back**

Sixty left Clark in the first group.

Yesterday's release means 147 Americans remain in prison camps in Indochina. All are to be released by March 28, according to the Paris cease-fire agreement.

Also on the flight yesterday were Marine Private

First Class Ronald L. Ridgeway, 23, of Houston, who was listed as dead until his name appeared on the POW list, and Army Major Floyd H. Kushner, 31, of Richmond and Danville, Va., whose wife seconded the Democratic presidential nomination of George McGovern.

Ridgeway and Kushner walked off the plane showing little emotion.

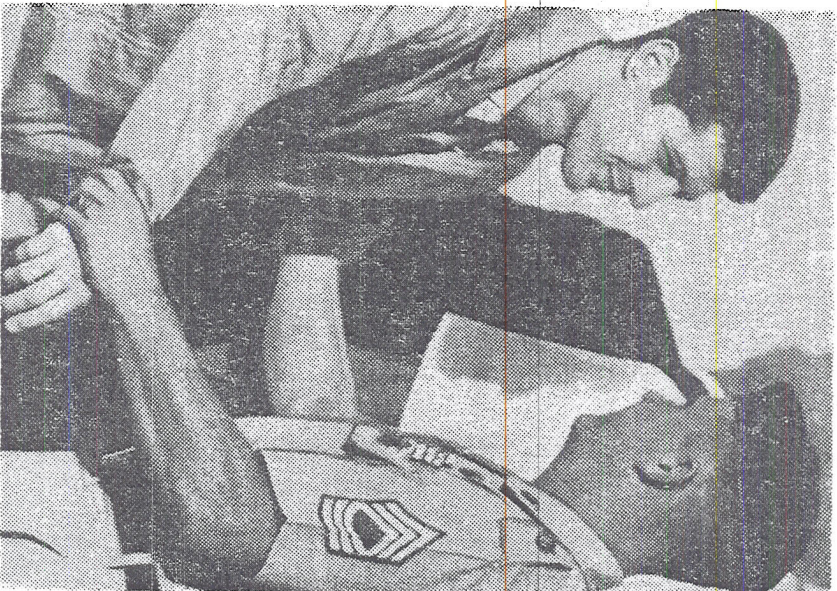
Thompson had a huge smile on his face when he saluted the flag on his arrival.

## SPEECH

The first man off the plane, Air Force Colonel Theodore Guy of Tucson, Ariz., said:

"On behalf of the men in this group, I would like to thank the President of the United States, Mr. Nixon, for bringing us home with this dignity and honor and for allowing us to return to our beloved America.

"There is no doubt in my mind that the decisions that were made in December to bomb key targets in North Vietnam hastened an end to



*UPI Telephoto*  
**Marine PFC Ronald Ridgeway (left) once officially  
dead, arrived at Clark base.**

this war and brought us home today. We are grateful that we had a President that made those decisions."

The men released yesterday did not show as much emotion as most of the POWs freed in the past, appearing somber and pay-

ing little attention to the crowd between the plane and the bus which took them to the base hospital.

Once on the bus, however, men leaned out the windows and waved, several giving the thumbs up sign.

*United Press*