

Longest-Term P.O.W. Freed With 31

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CLARK AIR BASE, the Philippines, March 16—Maj. Floyd J. Thompson of the Army's Special Forces, who spent nine years in captivity, longer than any America military prisoner of war known, was released by the Vietcong in Hanoi today.

Presented with a green beret, the symbol of the Special Forces, while on his way to Clark, the 39-year-old Major put it on and was reported to have said "They're going to have to fight like hell to get this off my head this time."

Major Thompson was among 27 American military men and 5 civilians who were turned over to United States officials at Gia Lam airfield by representatives of the Vietcong's Provisional Revolutionary Government. Among the others was Philip W. Manhard, 51, the ranking United States Government civilian captured during the war. He was a Foreign Service officer assigned as a senior advisor in Thua Thien province when he was captured in Hue on Jan. 31, 1968, during the Tet offensive of that year.

Also released today was a Marine sergeant, Ronald L. Ridgeway, 23, of Houston, mistakenly pronounced dead after a Communist ambush near Khe Sanh in 1968. The remains of an unidentified person were sent to Sergeant's Ridgeway's parents and buried under a gravestone bearing his name.

A Marine Corps escort aboard the plane from Hanoi showed Sergeant Ridgeway a news article in today's Pacific Stars and Stripes about the mistaken burial. The sergeant said that he learned about it a

few days ago when the North Vietnamese delivered some news clippings to his prison cell.

The released prisoners appeared thin, but with no obvious physical ailments as they debarked here, wearing the gray jackets and blue trousers and shirts that those released previously wore. All appeared to have recent haircuts.

Following set procedure, the senior officer among them, Col. Theodore W. Guy of the Air Force, 43, got out first and read a brief statement from a piece of yellow paper that he pulled from his jacket.

"Dignity and honor and love of country are three things most of us treasured and thought of for many years," he 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," the colonel's statement went on, "that the decisions that were made in December to bomb key targets in North Vietnam hastened an end to this war and brought us home today. We are grateful that we had a President that made those decisions.

"I would like also to thank the people of the United States, the American public and all those responsible for the wonderful reception that we have received so far. We want to thank you all very much."

Colonel Guy, born in Chicago, was on a bombing mission over Laos on March 22, 1968—long

before the United States admitted that its planes were bombing Laos—when his Phantom jet disappeared. He was listed among the 456 American military men captured in North Vietnam, rather than among the seven soldiers listed as captured in Laos, according to military officials here. None captured in Laos have yet been released.

With the releases today 146 Americans and one Canadian, captured in North Vietnam, South Vietnam and Laos, remain in captivity, according to lists that Communist officials gave American officials in Paris on Jan. 27. Under the cease-fire agreement, those listed were to be released by March 28.

Major Thompson was the first American soldier known to have been captured in the Vietnam war, though Pentagon officials said for years that the first was Lieut. Comdr. Everett Alvarez of the Navy, the first pilot shot down in North Vietnam. Major Thompson was captured on March 26, 1964, more than four months before Commander Alvarez.

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