



Newly liberated POW Lt. Col. Robert Stirm had his greatest freedom thrill when he landed at Travis AFB yesterday. His Foster City family literally

charged him, led by daughter Lori, 15, closely followed by Robert, 14, Cynthia, 11, his wife Loretta and Roger, 12. They all wound up hugging him.

—Examiner photo by Jim Domke

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Charge of the Stirm Brigade

By Larry D. Hatfield
Examiner News Staff

TRAVIS AIR BASE — Two Air Force officers who have been prisoners of war in North Vietnam for nearly six years flew into Travis Air Force Base yesterday for reunions with their Northern Californian families.

Lt. Col. Robert L. Stirm, a native of San Francisco, was swept up in the arms of his wife, Loretta, and their four children. A teenage daughter raced ahead and leaped at him, screaming "Daddy."

Colonel Stirm, who will be 40 next Friday, was shot down Oct. 27, 1967, while

flying a F-105D. He told the crowd of 175:

"This display of warmth is entirely unnecessary but it further proves to us that we had a cause."

Aid Force Capt. Carl D. Chambers, 32, a graduate of San Jose State, was welcomed by his wife, Joanne,

an elementary school teacher at their hometown, Yuba City, and by a Yuba City delegation, including teacher associates of Joanne.

Chambers dropped his hat as he rushed to embrace her.

Colonel Stirm and Captain Chambers were among 60

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returning prisoners of war who flew into the mainland on three planes from Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines. Their plane disembarked 18 freed prisoners at March Air Force Base in Southern California, then flew on to Travis.

The size of the Travis crowd was impressive in view of the fact that this was the first time a POW plane came in with fewer than 20 aboard, and the weather was unfriendly, with thunderheads, wind and cold.

Three more planes are due in today, one at Travis with 20 returned prisoners aboard. Two more planes are to arrive on the mainland tomorrow, although their destination is not yet clear.

Once these planes are in, the third phase of the operation will be over, completing the return of two thirds of

Anti-war POWs speeded home and news of Vietnam fighting, Page 18

the nearly 600 prisoners of war. The others are due in the fourth phase by March 28.

Chambers spent at least 10 minutes milling around in the group of Yuba City greeters. He accepted three prisoner of war bracelets with his name on them from friends, hugging and kissing the donors.

Both men were thin but looked in good health.

One of the greeters invited him to go sailing.

"I may not go flying for awhile, but I'll go sailing," he said.

Earlier at March AFB, those getting off included the mystery civilian, Bobby Joe Keese, who wept, grabbed an American flag and kissed it.

Keese, about 39, refused to talk to newsmen. He was described as an Army deserter who hijacked a plane he chartered in Thailand in September, 1970, and forced the pilot to fly him to North Vietnam.

He was accompanied to March AFB by a State Department official who said no charges were pending against him. When Keese arrived at the stopover in Honolulu he said, "I never thought I'd get out of there."

The State Department official, Jim Murphy, said Keese was "looking forward to getting back home (in Phoenix, Ariz.) and starting a new life."

Keese was greeted at March AFB by his father, Payton B. Keese, 75, and a niece, Keren Harring.

In Keese's background was a 1962 sentence of five years in prison for a flight to Cuba. He claimed he had

been on assignment for the Central Intelligence Agency.

The other two planes flew to Scott Air Base in Illinois, diverted from Andrews AFB near Washington, D.C., by weather, and to Maxwell Air Force Base in Alabama.

Among the 60 returned prisoners of war was Lt. Cmdr. John S. McCain III, six years a prisoner and the son of Adm. John S. McCain Jr., who retired last year as commander-in-chief of Pacific Forces.

His father greeted him in Honolulu.

"The Communists tried to make us believe the U.S. had changed, that the principles that made our country great had changed," McCain told the crowd at Hickam Air Force Base.

"The receptions we have received proved the United States is not the same country we left — it's a better one."



CAPT. CARL D. CHAMBERS AND WIFE JOANNE
In the excitement of the welcome his hat dropped off
—Examiner Photo