

Final U.S. Troop Pullout

Last POWs to Be Freed by Thursday

Nine Held In Laos Included

N.Y. Times Service

Miami

President Nixon announced yesterday that an agreement has been reached for release of the last of the United States prisoners from Southeast Asia and the withdrawal of all American combat forces from Vietnam by Thursday.

The agreement, worked out by the four-power Joint Military Commission in Saigon, and approved by Mr. Nixon yesterday morning calls for withdrawal of 148 prisoners, including nine held in Laos, in four stages, beginning today and the withdrawal of about 6000 troops from South Vietnam, also beginning today. "This does and will end the United States military presence in Vietnam," the White House announcement said.

The announcement was made by White House Press Secretary Ronald Ziegler.

"The final agreement has been reached on the release of United States prisoners of war in Indochina and the President has instructed the Secretary of Defense to proceed with the withdrawal of U.S. forces from South Vietnam," Ziegler said.

"We will have our prisoners back by Thursday our time, and our troop with-

drawal from South Vietnam will be completed by then," he said. "It is expected that the prisoners will be back and the withdrawal from the South completed by Thursday morning. The President is particularly gratified that this agreement has been worked out."

Ziegler said the exact times and final details of the prisoner release are being worked out by the commission in Saigon but would fol-

See Back Page

From Page 1

low roughly this timetable:

- The 32 prisoners held by the Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Viet Cong in South Vietnam would be released early this morning.

- The nine prisoners held by the Pathet Lao in Laos would be released early tomorrow morning.

- The remaining 67 prisoners held by North Vietnam would be released early Thursday morning.

"We will carry out the troop withdrawal tomorrow, Wednesday and Thursday," Ziegler said.

AGREEMENT

Thus, the release of prisoners and withdrawal of American forces from Vietnam are now scheduled to be completed one day past the 60-day period set for this process in the agreement signed in Paris, January 27, by the parties involved in the long conflict. That period expires tomorrow.

The commission in Saigon had been deadlocked for several days, chiefly over the release of the nine prisoners held in Laos. Release of those prisoners was not covered in the agreement, but Mr. Nixon and Henry A. Kissinger, his chief foreign policy adviser, said there was a verbal "understand-

ing" that they would be released within the 60-day period.

On Sunday, in order to resolve the dispute, Mr. Nixon issued a statement saying that U.S. forces would remain in Vietnam until all the American prisoners in Southeast Asia had been released.

Ziegler would not say whether it was the President's statement that had brought the parties in the commission to an agreement.

Ziegler said that 159 U.S. Marine security guards at the U.S. Embassy in Saigon would stay. Previously, North Vietnam and the Viet Cong had demanded that these Marines also be removed as part of the troop withdrawal. But Ziegler said that it was the President's understanding that this issue was not even mentioned in the commission meeting yesterday.

"All American embassies have military guards," Ziegler said.

In addition to the marines, some 825 U.S. military personnel assigned to the four-party commission were not included in the troop withdrawal. Ziegler would not say what the future of the commission would be after Thursday.

'TOTAL'

Release of the last prisoners on Thursday will bring to 589 the total returned to the U.S. since the agreement was signed. This is one more than was on the list that the Communists gave to the U.S. in Paris after the agreement was signed.

The extra prisoner is Lieutenant Commander Phillip Kientzler of Wyckoff, N.J., who was shot down at the time of the cease-fire. His name was on the list of Viet Cong prisoners to be re-

turned.

Ziegler, asked about the possibility of more prisoners or missing personnel who may be alive in enemy territory, said:

"There is a very clear section of the agreement that refers to the efforts and steps that will be taken by all of the signatories to look into the question of those listed as missing, and that procedure will be followed.

"We, of course, still hold out hope that some of those listed as missing in action may still be living."