

FINAL 148 P.O.W.'S WILL BE RELEASED IN NEXT TWO DAYS

Nine in Laos Will Be Freed
Under Pact Announced
by the White House

MAR 27 1973

TROOP WITHDRAWAL SET

Releases Will Be in Four
Stages Beginning Today
—President 'Gratified'

NYTimes

By JOHN HERBERS

Special to The New York Times

MIAMI, March 26—The White House announced today that agreement had been reached to complete by Thursday the release of the last of the United States prisoners of war in Indochina and the withdrawal of the remaining American combat forces from South Vietnam.

The agreement, worked out by the Four-Party Joint Military Commission in Saigon and approved by President Nixon this morning, calls for the release in four stages, beginning tomorrow, of 148 American prisoners, among them nine held in Laos. It also provides for the withdrawal, beginning tomorrow, of the more than 5,000 American combat troops still in South Vietnam.

If the agreement holds, United States military involvement in the longest war in its history will have been brought to an end.

Final Agreement Reached

The announcement was made early this afternoon by Ronald L. Ziegler, the White House press secretary, who had talked to the President at his Key Biscayne home.

"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 United States forces from South Vietnam," Mr. Ziegler said.

"We will have our prisoners back by Thursday, our time, and our troop withdrawal 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."

The "final agreement" announced today extends by one day the 60-day period that had been set for the release of American prisoners and com-

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THE NEW YORK TIMES, TUESDAY, MARCH 27, 1973

Last P.O.W.'s to Go Free by Thursday

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pletion of the American troop withdrawal in the cease-fire accord signed in Paris Jan. 27.

The Joint Military Commission in Saigon consisting of representatives of the United States, North Vietnam the Saigon Government and the Vietcong had been deadlocked for several days, chiefly over the release of the nine American prisoners held in Laos.

The Paris accord did not specifically provide for the freeing of these prisoners, but President Nixon and Henry A. Kissinger, his chief adviser, on national security said there had been an "understanding" that they, too, would be set free within the 60-day period.

The resolution of the problem this morning followed a statement by President Nixon yesterday that United States forces would remain in Vietnam until all American prisoners in Indochina were freed.

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

Demand Dropped

"We will carry out the troop withdrawal tomorrow, Wednesday and Thursday," he declared. "This does and will end the United States military presence in Vietnam." But he said that the 159 United States marine guards at the American Embassy in Saigon would not be withdrawn.

Earlier, North Vietnam and

the Vietcong had demanded that these marines also be removed as part of the troop withdrawal.

But Mr. Ziegler said it was the President's understanding that this issue was not even mentioned in the commission meeting today.

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

In addition to the marines, some 8p5 United States military personnel assigned to the joint military commission are not included in the troop withdrawal.

M. Ziegler said the freeing of the remaining American prisoners in Indochina was scheduled to begin early tomorrow Eastern standard time with the release of the 32 Americans held by the Vietcong.

He said that the nine held by the Pathet Lao in Laos would be released tomorrow evening, that 40 of the prisoners held by North Vietnam would be freed early Wednesday and that the remaining 67 held by the North Vietnamese would be released early Thursday.

The Extra Prisoner

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

The extra prisoner is Lieut. Cmdr. Phillip Kientzler of Wykoff, N. J., who was shot down at the time of the cease-

fire. He is on the list of Vietcong prisoners to be returned.

Mr. Ziegler was asked about the possibility of more prisoners or missing personnel who may be alive in enemy territory.

"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," he said.

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