

Next-to-Last Release of POWs Today

Clark Air Base,
Philippines

Forty-nine more U.S. war prisoners will fly to this Pacific check-in point today in the next-to-last day of POW release from Communist prisons.

They include nine Americans captured in Laos whose liberation came only after President Nixon held up withdrawal of U.S. forces from Vietnam. Coming out with them is a Canadian missionary who was working in a hospital for the Laotian poor when he was captured last October.

Those scheduled for release will join 32 U.S. prisoners of the Viet Cong who flew to Clark Air Base from Hanoi's Gia Lam airport last night.

"Today, 32 of us have regained our freedom and a chance to start again our life," said Colonel Benjamin H. Purcell, 45, of Columbus, Ga., to cheering welcomers at the Clark airport.

Purcell was captured Feb. 8, 1963, when his helicopter crashed in South Vietnam's Quan Tri province. As senior officer in the group, he

POW Says He Faked Anti-War Message

A returned POW said here yesterday he asked his captors to broadcast a letter containing anti-war sentiments so his family would know he was still alive.

Until the letter by Chief Warrant Officer Walter A. Sooter was read by Radio Hanoi in June, 1971, his family had heard nothing about him since his helicopter was shot down over South Vietnam in February, 1967.

The letter to his late father in Napa asked him to "write to Patsy" and tell her the couple would be married when he got home.

Sooter, 34, was already married. The reference to a future marriage was made so his family would know he didn't want them to believe everything he wrote in the letter, Sooter told a press



DAVID SOOTER
A code for his family

conference at the Presidio.

The letter stated that Sooter and his fellow prisoners "feel that the present policy

in Vietnam is wrong and that the government is going to have to change this policy to put an end to the war and bring troops home . . ."

Another returned prisoner, Sergeant First Class Dennis L. Thompson, 30, of Rainier, Oregon, said he felt the anti-war movement "prolonged the war."

But Thompson, who was captured in February, 1968 after North Vietnamese tanks and troops overran his Special Forces Camp near Laos, said he holds no bitterness toward the Vietnamese.

"The North Vietnamese believed sincerely in what they were doing . . . but I don't agree with their cause."

Both men arrived at Letterman Army Medical Center at the Presidio March 8 and have been undergoing medical tests since.

spoke on their behalf.

Four flights are scheduled in the next two days to take the remaining 116 Americans and one Canadian from Hanoi to Clark, where they

will join the 32 for medical checkups and a trip the rest of the way home within a few days.

The last 67 American POWs to be freed will board

two hospital planes in Hanoi tomorrow afternoon and return to Clark that night. All are airmen downed after December, 1971.

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