



Associated Press

Lieut. Col. William Talley of Stafford, Kan., who was shot down last May, arrives at air base in Philippines.

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49 More Americans Free; One a Prisoner Since '65

By The Associated Press

CLARK AIR BASE, The Philippines, March 28 — The Communists freed 49 more American prisoners in Hanoi today, including a charter pilot held since 1965, one of the civilian American prisoners held longest by the Vietcong.

Also among the men freed were nine Americans and a Canadian missionary captured in Laos.

Two big flying hospitals brought the men from the North Vietnamese capital to Clark Air Base, the first stop on their trip home.

The 10 prisoners of the Pathet Lao arrived first, in mid-afternoon. The 40 other Americans, who had been prisoners of North Vietnam, landed three hours later.

Along with 27 American

servicemen and 5 civilians released by the Vietcong in Hanoi yesterday and 67 prisoners to be freed tomorrow, they are the last prisoners to be released by the Communists under a repatriation program that began Feb. 12.

When the 67 are handed over tomorrow, a total of 589 American military men and civilians will have been released since Feb. 12.

They had been billed as the last Americans in Communist custody, but the Vietcong announced in Saigon today that one more United States prisoner would be released. He was identified only as Wheme, from Virginia, a captive since 1969. Officials said his release

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49 More Americans Are Freed; One Held Prisoner Since 1965

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well and all saluted smartly before coming down the ramp. The crowd of base personnel shouted greetings and waved placards with goodwill messages.

The C-141 carrying the former Pathet Lao prisoners had to circle Clark Field for 20 minutes because a T-33 trainer had blown a tire on landing and was blocking the runway.

Lieut. Col. Walter M. Stischer 42, of Austin, Tex., was the senior military man freed by the Laotians, the Air Force officer told the crowd of well-wishers: "On behalf of all of us I would like to thank you and all of the people of the United States of America for making our return possible. Thank you."

Appear in Good Condition

The 10 men all appeared in good condition. Two of them, Lloyd D. Opper, 21, the Canadian missionary from Centralia, Wash., waved their arms exuberantly. Mr. Opper and Mr. Mattix were captured last Oct. 28 when the Communists overran the town of Kengkok, in southern Laos.

Ernest C. Brace, 41, the charter pilot, appeared on the verge of tears as moved down the red carpet shaking hands with the welcoming officials. When he smiled, several of his front teeth were missing. Mr. Brace, whose wife lives in Atlanta, was captured on May 21, 1965.

One of the officers who escorted the men here said they had reported that they were transferred from Laos to North Vietnam about a year ago. He said they had been with the other persons captured in Vietnam "for about the last month." The prisoners all appeared

well and all saluted smartly before coming down the ramp. The crowd of base personnel shouted greetings and waved placards with goodwill messages.

Group Breaks Through Guard

One exuberant group broke through the security guards to hug men on the second flight.

"Every girl here has a husband who is a fighter pilot," said Mrs. Peggy Mozley of Atlanta, "We wanted to welcome them home because they went down in the place of our husbands."

Mrs. Mozley's cousin, Capt. David B. Grant, 30, of Chattanooga, Tenn., was one of the prisoners who returned.

An airline stewardess, Diane Barnett, 26, of Los Angeles, sprinted across to a hospital bus and handed a P.O.W. bracelet to Lieut. Comdr. David W. Hoffman, 32, of San Diego, Calif. She said she met him at the United States naval base at Subic Bay 20 days before he was shot down while flying from the carrier Coral Sea on Dec. 30, 1971. The bracelet had his name on it.

Col. Joseph W. Kittinger Jr., 44, of Orlando, Fla., the senior man on the second flight, thanked the cheering crowd for waiting into the evening for their arrival. The Air Force officer said their release resulted from the "will of God, the integrity of our President, the determination of the American public and the resolution of our services."

"We are very proud to be American — and back," he added.