

# Thousands Watch 67 Prisoners Depart



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HANOI: Lieut. Comdr. Alfred Howard Agnew, the last prisoner to be released by North Vietnam, being accompanied to a plane by an American officer at Gia Lam Airport.

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HANOI, North Vietnam, March 29—As tens of thousands of North Vietnamese watched and smiled and waved, the last 67 American prisoners flew out of Hanoi to freedom today.

Despite a few minor hitches in the final ceremony, several of the North Vietnamese officials seemed to be in an almost playful mood, and they drew praise from American officers who flew here to accept the release of the prisoners for "straightforward and professional" negotiating.

Col. Barney Russell of the Army came as the American representative of the Four-Power Joint Military Commission. He and his Vietcong and North Vietnamese counterparts were taken to Nga Tu So prison with representatives of the four-nation International Control Commission.

## North Vietnamese Smile and Wave at the Americans

The American prisoners, still dressed in their striped maroon and purple uniforms, betrayed no emotion on suddenly seeing a crowd of fellow countrymen in their encampment. Senior prisoners called the men to attention sharply as Colonel Russell entered their cells.

Later the prisoners boarded white and green camouflaged army buses for the half-hour ride through crowded downtown Hanoi and across the newly repaired Long Bien Bridge to Gia Lam Airport.

The prisoners stood in two columns at the airport, and Lieut. Nguyen Minh, of the North Vietnamese Army, one of

the many Communist officers at the ceremony who spoke fluent English, ordered them to advance as he called their names. When they did so, they were greeted by Brig. Gen. Russell G. Ogan of the Air Force, head of the prisoner-of-war section of the Office of the Secretary of Defense.

Each American saluted General Ogan—one saluted with his left hand while carrying the flight bag issued by the North Vietnamese in his right—and most made a few comments.

"I feel wonderful," one said. "I feel like running," another commented. A third said, "I feel like kissing you instead of saluting you."

When only one American remained, the last of the Americans held and released, Lieut. Minh delayed calling his name for a full minute. The prisoner,

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# Thousands See Release of Last P.O.W.

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Lieut. Comdr. Alfred Howard Agnew of the Navy, looked straight ahead, but showed both mild anxiety and amusement. Many of the 2,000 or so Vietnamese looking on began to giggle at the long pause, and then the name was called.

Commander Agnew, whose home was given as Illinois, was the last American shot down over North Vietnam—on Dec. 28.

The prisoners quickly boarded the two United States Air Force C-141 jet transports that were to take them to Clark Air Base in the Philippines.

The Americans, all of whom were captured during the period July 2 to Dec. 28 last year, were said by the North Vietnamese to include 27 B-52 crew members.

Two of the others were reported to have been the crewmen of an F-111 swing-wing fighter bomber. They are the only pilots known to survive among those shot down in that type of plane over North Vietnam.

The North Vietnamese officials said 43 Americans were captured in the final 12 days of bombing alone.

## No Cheers, but No Insults

Among the Vietnamese who watched the prisoners be freed were a young man and woman said to have captured one of them. The woman, 23-year-old Kim Dung, pointed to the American as he was released, smiling to friends as she identified him.

None of the Vietnamese cheered the prisoners, but no insults were shouted. Some smiled and waved.

Comments by Vietnamese chattering among themselves as they watched the prisoners file by included: "He's fat," "He is very young, poor man," and "He looks so rosy."

American officials here said they had made good progress on negotiations during the day with their North Vietnamese counterparts on other loose ends of the Vietnam war.

United States military records still show 1,328 Americans missing in Indochina. The records also show that the bodies of 1,100 who were killed in action have not been recovered.

American officers are hoping to learn the fate of all the missing and to recover as many bodies as possible. General Ogan said this afternoon that there were excellent prospects that the North Vietnamese would allow teams to begin checking crash and battle sites in Communist territory to obtain information.

Some of the men released today had skin rashes, but all walked normally and seemed in good health. One, John Clyde Ensch of Illinois, had a badly deformed left arm and hand, presumably because broken bones had not been properly set.

No members of the North Vietnamese Politburo attended the ceremony.

For the first time North Vietnam admitted a large group of Western correspondents—28 in all—to cover the prisoner release, do some sightseeing and talk with officials.

At least one American official, Colonel Russell, was disturbed by the presence of newsmen. He canceled a request he had made to interview prisoners when the North Vietnamese told him American newsmen would have to be present.

All the Americans in Hanoi today, officials and newsmen alike, were repeatedly asked for their views about the prison they had visited. Most appeared unwilling to offer any opinion, and there were many awkward pauses.

## The Prison's Future

Generally, however, the North Vietnamese assigned to guide the Americans made little attempt to press on them the kind of propaganda that foreign newsmen have met on previous visits. Several newsmen were encouraged to apply for visas for longer stays.

The Nga Tu So prison, surrounded by a high brick wall topped by barbed wire, will become what it was before, an or-

dinary government building, the camp commander said.

The cells were fairly large, each apparently housing a dozen or so prisoners. Beds were wooden platforms with mats. The courtyard contained an exercise yard and a stagnant fish pond shaded by many trees.

"This is one of several branches of what the Americans called the Hanoi Hilton," a camp officer said. "This was the one to which Jane Fonda and other American visitors were taken."

Hanoi gave the impression of a city completely at peace. The streets were busy and loud with the noise of children and of construction activity, and the markets were well stocked.

Children in huge groups—the primary schools are closed on Thursdays—tried to follow the newsmen and the bus loads of Americans, cheering and yelling as they ran.

The sidewalk air-raid shelters remain but many are covered over. The bomb damage downtown, most of it minor, is being repaired, although the several blocks of the Kham Thien district are still in ruins and large craters are visible. The heavy damage to Gia Lam Airport has been almost completely repaired. Construction crews with cement mixers, welding torches and shovels are patching up the city rapidly.