

# Last POWs Leave 'The Zoo'

## Final 67

## Released

## In Hanoi

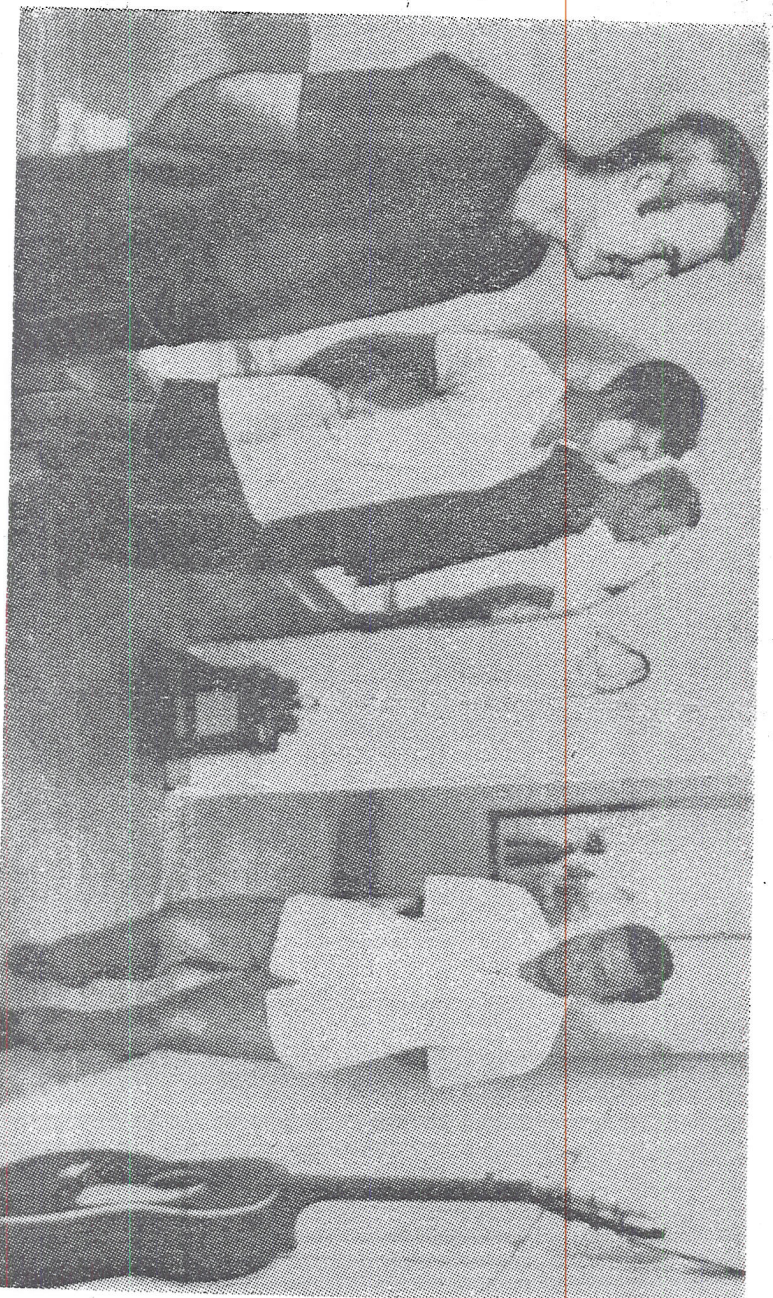
### Hanoi

The men had their last meal of soup and canned meat and waited.

"Going home, leaving this pigsty," muttered Air Force Lieutenant Duane Vavroch of Jewell, Idaho, whenever the guards got out of earshot.

The last 67 U.S. prisoners held in North Vietnam ticked off the final moments of captivity in The Zoo, the name they gave their prison compound here in Hanoi.

The men looked through the bars and saw Walter Cronkite looking in.



Three Americans awaited inspection by a North Vietnamese official at The Zoo in Hanoi

AP Wirephoto

### CRONKITE

"My God! There's Walter Cronkite," Captain Lynn Beens, an Air Force man from Salt Lake City splintered to Lieutenant Colonel John Yuill of Howell, Ind. "I can't believe it!"

The two B-52 pilots who had been shot down over Hanoi three days before Christmas were standing in identical red and gray striped pajamas when a party of 27 newsmen entered.

On the straw pallets where they slept side by side with seven others in the dingy whitewashed cell, the last game of solitaire was spread out.

At the top of each straw mat was a neatly folded pile of tattered clothing; at the bottom a peanut can held for each a razor and a tooth brush. A guitar was the only decoration on the walls, save for the camp regulations.

### TEAM

"Not allowed to talk with prisoners," the North Vietnamese guard in the pith helmet kept telling the journalists who followed the international peacekeeping team making its final inspection rounds of the last camp holding American prisoners.

There was a pathetic dignity about the men as they stood there at rigid attention in pajamas surrounded by the emptiness of moldy blankets, a few tattered paperback books, and a kerosene lamp that had been their total world for the last long months.

Dressed up in new ill-fitting blue uniforms handed out by their captors, the 67 at last were loaded onto four camouflaged buses for the journey to the airport and their last look at the city that promised never to forget them.

Passing through the gates of the prison the buses filled past several thousand onlookers, many of them children, clinging to tree limbs and standing atop wagons and carts. Some waved in a friendly manner, a few shook their fists in anger but most stood by with boundless silent curiosity.

It was very late in the day before the North Vietnamese realized they had a television celebrity on hand. A Communist reporter with a tape recorder was assigned to do an interview with the man known in Hanoi as "Walter Concele."

Associated Press