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VC Free Last Known POW

SAIGON — (UPI) — Army Capt. Robert White, the last known American prisoner of the Vietnam war, was released by the Viet Cong yesterday in the Mekong Delta and flown by helicopter to Saigon where a U.S. hospital plane was waiting to rush him to Clark Air Base in the Philippines.

His release came as a surprise since he was not on any of the lists of prisoners the Communists gave United States under provisions of the cease-fire agreement.

A native of Genova, Ill., White is the 588th American

prisoner to be released since Feb. 12.

White, 32, enlisted in the Army and worked his way up to captain as an aviator. He was on his second tour in Vietnam and had been back less than three months when his light Mohawk plane was shot down Nov. 15, 1969, in Vinh Binh province.

White was pale and thin but smiling broadly. He was wearing dark blue pajamas and rubber shower shoes and carrying a crooked cane and a bouquet of plastic flowers.

Last POW to Be Released Today

CLARK AIR BASE (Philippines) — (AP) — The last group of American prisoners freed from Hanoi prisons headed for home today and officials here awaited the arrival of an Army captain billed by the Communists as the last U.S. POW of the Vietnam war.

A C9 Nightingale medical plane left Clark at dawn for Saigon to pick up the latest returnee, Army Capt. Robert

T. White, 32, of Newport News, Va.

Officials expected White to be freed later today in the Mekong Delta by the Viet Cong.

The first of four C141 hospital planes, carrying 16 men, took off at 8 a.m.-7 p.m. yesterday PST — for Andrews Air Force Base, Md., via Hickam Air Force Base in Hawaii.

Three other C141s, their

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departures staggered at two-hour intervals, were bound for Sheppard Air Force Base, Tex., with 17 men; March Air Force Base, Calif., with 20 and Travis Air Force Base, Calif., with 16.

Returning with the 69 Americans was Lloyd Oppel, a 20-year-old Canadian missionary captured in Laos.

Air Force Capt. Keith H. Lewis of Goldsboro, N.C., limped heavily on his right leg as he prepared to leave Clark for the United States on today's first flight. But this did not prevent him from following the other men to the onlookers to thank them for their hospitality and concern.

Air Force Lt. Col. William J. Breckner Jr. of Columbus, Ohio, the senior officer on the initial flight, said the well-wishers showered the POWs with affection.

"We always knew you cared," he said. "We want you to know that it's been a mutual love affair."

"The enthusiasm and devotion of the children has been especially touching. If they are our next generation, then the future of America never looked brighter."

When White arrives at Operation Homecoming headquarters here, he will be the 588th American to make the trip out of North Vietnamese, Viet Cong or Pathet Lao captivity since the turn-overs began Feb. 12. He was captured in 1969.