

Green Berets, Too

Big S.F. Party for POWs

By Ralph Craig

The ex-POWs from Son Tay and the Green Berets who risked their lives in a futile try to free them 30 months ago are going to meet here for the first time next week.

They'll get together because Texas billionaire H. Ross Perot thinks it is a good idea and is willing to spend perhaps a quarter of a million dollars to make it happen.

Lex Byers, an executive of the Greater San Francisco Chamber of Commerce who is arranging what will be one of the city's most unusual parties, said that the former prisoners had designated San Francisco for a "reunion" with the men they had never met.

A force of some 60 Green Berets, hand-picked and secretly trained on special assignment from bases throughout the world, made a daring helicopter raid in November, 1970, on the Son Tay prisoner camp, 25 miles from Hanoi. They found, however, that all American servicemen had been moved

from the camp apparently shortly before.

The raid was angrily criticized in Congress as unduly provocative and an acceleration of the war with North Vietnam. It was defended by military leaders as essential to prisoner morale and as an expression of American support for the captives.

Perot, a computer tycoon, has been involved with the fate of the prisoners almost since the first American was captured. He sponsored a futile 1969 charter flight attempting to deliver Christmas packages to the men.

The two-day party here is certain to cost well into six figures. The Green Berets will be flown here at Perot's expense from bases in Asia, Europe, this country and elsewhere. The prisoners and their wives — numbering together about 200 — are coming from military hospitals throughout the land.

The prisoners, Byers said, decided themselves that the unique "reunion" should be held here.

The two groups, from all of the armed services, will arrive at the Fairmont Hotel Friday, April 27, and will be

honored with a motorcade parade along California and Montgomery streets to Post street at noon. The General Motors Corporation, said Byers, is donating the use of 50 new Cadillac sedans for this event.

After the parade, Byers said, there will be a luncheon at the Hilton Hotel to honor the men. The event, he said, will be open to the public at a charge of \$10 per person. Tickets are available at the Chamber offices, 400 Montgomery street.

Other private events are planned as part of the two-day program, Byers said.

Hotelman Ben Swig is coordinating the program.