

## Here Tomorrow

# Son Tay Days to Honor Ex POWs, Rescue Team

By Dick Alexander

Tomorrow and Saturday are, officially, Son Tay Days in San Francisco — days set aside by 66 ex-POWs to honor the ill-starred rescue team they have yet to meet.

But the underlying theme of the upcoming events, to paraphrase a popular song, is:

"California, here I am."

American prisoners in North Vietnamese camps sang the original to maintain their morale.

"But they couldn't sing it very loud," said Air Force Col. Robinson "Robbie" Risner, "because it would put them in an untenable position."

Risner, already an Air Force legend at 48, was vice commander of the 4th Allied POW Wing and himself a prisoner for 7½ years.

Although he was not imprisoned at Son Tay, many of his buddies were. He is one of the principal figures in the two-day get-together here of ex-POWs and the Green Beret-Air Force commandos who plunged into the abandoned camp 23 miles west of Hanoi in November, 1970.

### Would Whistle

When the POWs were able to, they would whistle "California, Here I Come," he told The Examiner by telephone from his Oklahoma City home.

"One of the favorites of the guys was 'I Left My Heart in San Francisco.' Many had planned to have their wives meet them at the Mark Hopkins or the Fairmont if we came back through here and were released."

Asked to comment on remarks made Tuesday by a colleague, Air Force Col. Theodore W. Guy, that some American POWs in North Vietnam were cowards "who openly collaborated with the enemy" and even caused physical harm to some of their comrades, Risner replied:

"The men he was talking about were captured outside North Vietnam and brought there. They were not in the 4th Allied POW Wing, nor were they known to us.

### Ticker Tape Parade

"We had no contact with them and found no cowards in our bunch," he emphasized.

Col. Risner, who with his wife will ride in the noon Friday ticker tape parade through San Francisco's financial district, is on convalescent leave assigned temporarily to Sheppard AFB, Tex., the same base where he took basic training in

April, 1943, for World War II.

But it wasn't until his recall to active duty for the Korean war that Risner's career began to zoom like a jet airplane. In September, 1952, Capt. Risner became America's 20th jet ace by downing his fourth and fifth MIGs in northwest Korea. These events followed:

- May 21, 1957—Major Risner commemorated Lindbergh's flight to Paris, flashing across the Atlantic in an Air Force Super Sabrejet in one-fifth the Lone Eagle's time.

- Jan. 22, 1959—Maj. Risner set an unofficial speed record by flying an F-100 F from San Francisco to Los Angeles in 27 minutes.

- May 14, 1965—Lt. Col. Risner became the first man to receive the Air Force Cross, highest AF award, while still living.

- Sept. 16, 1966—Lt. Col. Risner was shot down and captured in Thanh Hoa, North Vietnam.

- July 7, 1966—Lt. Col. Risner was one of group of American prisoners "handcuffed in pairs and marched under armed escort" through Hanoi streets.

- Feb. 2, 1973—Col. Risner arrived at Clark AB, Philippines, after release from North Vietnam prison. After Risner arrived at



COL. ROBINSON RISNER

A grand meeting due

Clark, President Nixon talked to him by phone for four minutes in what Nixon called "one of the most moving moments" of his presidency.

Risner's Air Force Cross was for extraordinary heroism in April, 1965, after flying his bullet-crippled plane back to his base with the cockpit enveloped in smoke and fumes. He had been on a mission against a railway and highway bridge in North Vietnam.