

How POWs Have Snapped Back

San Francisco Chronicle 15
* Tues., Nov. 13, 1973

Washington

Defense officials say former U.S. war prisoners have recovered "exceptionally well" from the physical and emotional effects of their captivity, with nearly 80 per cent of them back on military duty.

"They came through better than we expected," one official said yesterday in discussing recently analyzed results of medical and psychiatric examinations and treatment since release of 566 American POWs from Communist Vietnamese pri-

sons last February and March.

The anxieties and confusions involved in readjusting are now behind the former POWs, the official said.

"So far, they appear to be handling the situation very well," he added. "These men are back in the mainstream."

Officials emphasized that to date more than half of the returned Navy and Air Force pilots have been recertified for flying.

Last spring Pentagon medical authorities said all 566 freed POWs showed signs

during preliminary check-ups that they suffered "stress reaction," including depression, after coming home.

But now officials said mental and emotional problems have turned out to be "far less than we got ready for."

Only one man has been discharged for a psychosis and two others still are hospitalized for the same reason. However, these two men are described as "coming along very well."

Only about 20 men were diagnosed as having neuros-

es and "most of these conditions have been resolved by now," officials said.

On the physical side, officials said that former POWs have been purged of various kinds of worms and there should be no further recurrence of malaria. No cases of tuberculosis were found.

Most of the men are said to have regained their weight.

There apparently will be lasting physical effects for some, including arthritis developed in prison and damage to knees, elbows and

shoulders suffered by air crewmen who ejected from their planes and made bad parachute landings. But few of these will be disabling, officials said.

Where possible, military surgeons are correcting the results of fractures and other injuries, which accounts for many of the 32 former POWs still hospitalized and 23 who are convalescing.

The Air Force has returned 290 of its 325 former POWs to duty, although not all are flying again yet. The Navy has 104 of its 138 former prisoners on duty, the

Army 39 of 77 and the Marines 12 of 26.

Another 64 men have been honorably discharged or retired from the service. Officials said the great majority had nothing seriously wrong with them, but just wanted to get out.

Two men committed suicide several months ago, causing Pentagon officials to wonder whether former POWs of the Vietnam war might experience a high rate of violent death.

This worry seems to have receded, but one doctor said "we have no idea whether the problem of suicide is behind us."

Associated Press