

February 26, 1973

50 cents

Newsw^{er}week

HOME AT LAST!

*Lt. Comdr.
Paul Galanti
and Wife*



HOME AT LAST!

Everything was meticulously planned. The plane would land, the waiting brass would snap to attention, the men would disembark and proceed through an orderly reception line. But when Air Force Maj. Arthur Burer and four other returning POW's arrived at Andrews Air Force Base, it didn't quite work out that way. At the first sight of her husband, Nancy Burer shrieked with happiness and—with

the land, their homecoming touched off a surge of national pride and a burst of uninhibited emotion. The prisoners' return and their courageous bearing seemed to give America a new sense of hope—hope that these impressive men who had become the symbols of American sacrifice in Indochina might help the country heal the lingering wounds of war. "We want very much to

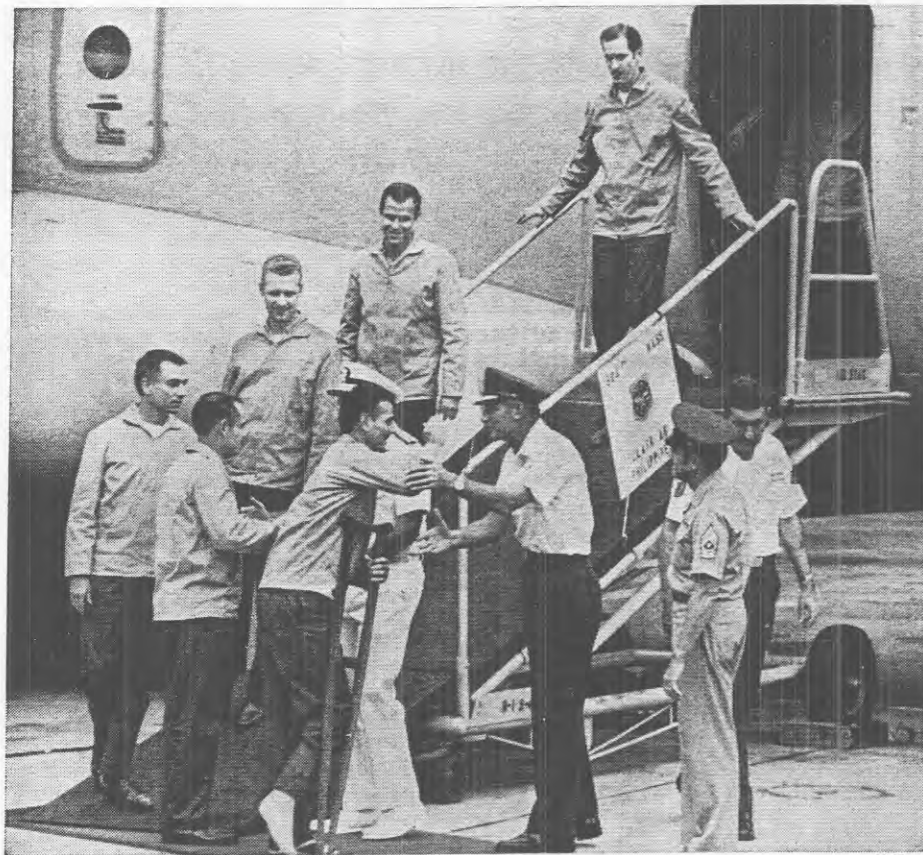
join their families. By the end of the week, days ahead of schedule, all 143 returnees in the first group had been flown to the States—and the homecoming headquarters at Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines had already rolled out the red carpet for a new batch of twenty prisoners to be released ahead of schedule by Hanoi as a goodwill gesture.

After months and in most cases years of enforced deprivation, the POW's reveled in human contact and sought maximum exposure to the sights and sounds of real life. They wanted to hug and touch and laugh—and learn as much as they could about the world they were rejoining. From their first moments of freedom, they asked anyone they could buttonhole about everything from sports to women's lib. Many of them, too, wanted to know who had won the war. Their official escorts had a carefully rehearsed reply: "South Vietnam didn't lose and North Vietnam didn't win."

A Surge of Admiration

This was one of the few sobering notes in a week of nearly unrestrained euphoria. Amid all the cheers and tears of joy, it was almost possible for a moment to forget the 45,943 other Americans who had lost their lives in Vietnam and 1,334 more who are still listed as missing and unaccounted for. The battle that still raged in the face of a supposed ceasefire (page 35) suddenly seemed very much farther away. And the domestic divisions between hawk and dove were blurred in a surge of admiration for a group of men who had endured their long ordeal by displaying what often seem the old-fashioned qualities of discipline, mutual loyalty and unyielding determination (page 21).

The POW's emerged from captivity in remarkably good mental and physical shape, but they still faced the delicate process of getting to know their families all over again and relearning normal life. For the time being, they were far too thankful for freedom to dwell on its difficulties. Virtually from the moment of their release, the men seized every opportunity to express their appreciation to their families, their country and their President. Even before the first plane-load left Hanoi, Air Force Capt. Galand Kramer flashed a hand-fashioned cloth



POW's arrive at Clark: For the nation, a rare moment of unity and joy

her children in hot pursuit—streaked across the tarmac. She leapt into his waiting arms, and he lifted her up in a bear-hug embrace and gleefully whirled her around and around.

They were home at last. The first American prisoners of war released under the Vietnam peace agreement walked into a new world to the cheers of their countrymen and the joyous greetings of their families. They had not only survived an ordeal that defied the imagination, but they emerged from their years of torment with a strength and a spirit that surpassed even the wildest expectations of their families, the military and the nation. Throughout

get on with the business of peace and reconstruction here," said Secretary of State William Rogers in Washington, his eyes brimming and his voice breaking. "I can't think of anything that gets us off to a better start than to watch these returning POW's. If that doesn't make America proud, then I don't know what will."

The country's official welcome for the returnees was to have been a low-key affair. As the Pentagon planned it, the men were to be whisked into virtual isolation, cushioned against the shocks of "re-entry" and the questioning of an eager press corps (THE MEDIA, page 55). But there was no holding back the nation's enthusiasm for greeting the POW's—or the men's eagerness to re-

Airborne reunion: Former POW Maj. Arthur Burer gets an exuberant homecoming welcome from his wife, Nancy, at Andrews AFB, Md.

Dennis Brack—Black Star

February 26, 1973



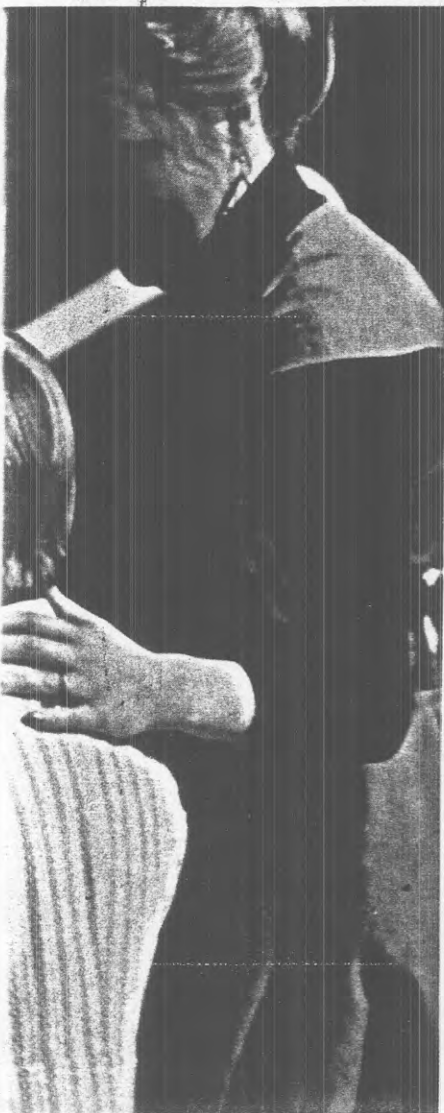


Lester Sloan—Newsweek



Photos by Paul Fusco—Magnum

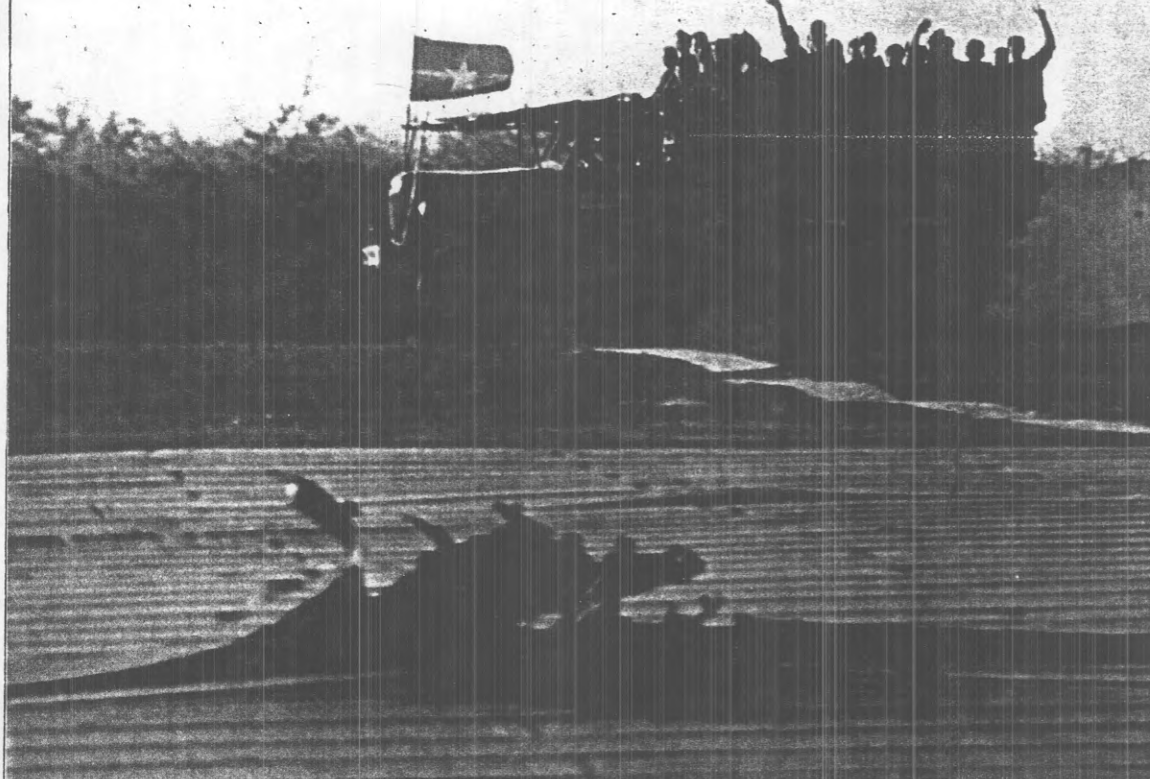




Homecoming: Lt. Comdr. Larry Spencer waves on arrival at Travis AFB, Lt. William Arcuri receives a ring from his wife (bottom left), Lt. Col. Alan Brunstrom hugs his family (above), Maj. Hayden Lockhart Jr. greets his 7-year-old son for the first time (bottom center) and Lt. Comdr. Paul Galanti embraces his wife

Don Carl Steffen—Rapho-Gullumette





USAF Photo

The returnees: American prisoners in a Viet Cong truck arrive at the bomb-scarred Loc Ninh airstrip. Haggard from their long ordeal and clad in Vietnamese pajamas, they landed at Clark that night: civilian Richard Utech gets a helping hand; Capt. John Dunn; Capt. James Walsh Jr., waving jubilantly.



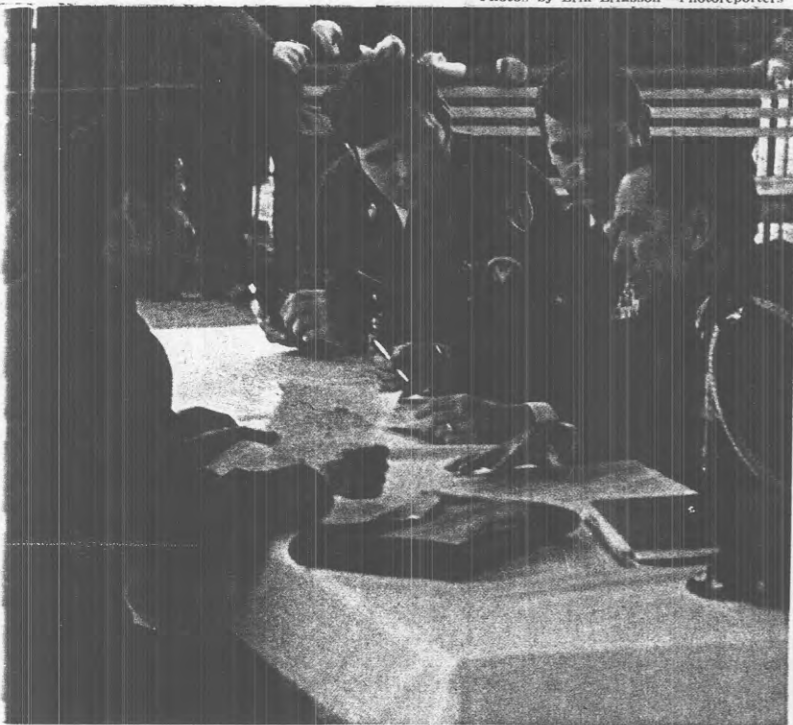
Photoreporters



Photoreporters

Wally McNamee—Newsweek





The long trip back: At Hanoi's Gia Lam Airport, North Vietnamese and U.S. officers huddle over the details of the release, and two American POW's are escorted to a plane. Back in the PX at Clark, Maj. Thomas Collins III smiles as he gets his first look at hotpants.



Wally McNamee—Newsweek





Photos by Rene Burri—Magnum



sign reading, "God Bless America and Nixon." At Clark, while other POW's telephoned their families, Air Force Col. Robinson Risner took the occasion to call Mr. Nixon. "Mr. President," said Risner, "all of the men would like to meet you personally to express their gratitude for what you have done. You will have our support for as long as we live." The President, who had stayed up through the night to watch the telecast of the men's arrival at Clark, assured Risner that he was equally eager to meet the returnees and "express gratitude on behalf of myself and the American people for your sacrifice." And though he had pledged there would be no hoopla from the White House over the POW return, he could not contain his enthusiasm. As he later told Teamsters union leader Frank Fitzsimmons, "I was never prouder to be an American."

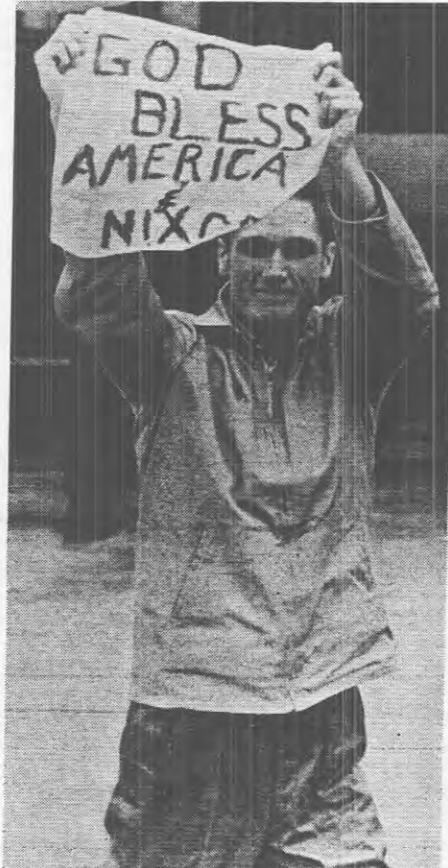
'Tears of Happiness'

At the start, the long-awaited airlift to bring the returnees home was delayed by rain and fog in Hanoi, but once the three lumbering C-141's touched down at Gia Lam airport, that end of the release came swiftly. Shielded from the weather by a canopy made of green parachute silk, U.S. and North Vietnamese officials sat at a wooden table draped with a rumpled cotton cloth. Nearby, the prisoners assembled in tight formation and watched as the officials signed each page of a POW roster. A North Vietnamese officer barked each American's name over a bullhorn and the 116 returnees marched to the table, and then—in a move signifying repatriation—strode past it. "In some cases, when you came forward to help them," said a crew member, "they'd grab your hand. They had a tendency to clutch your hand once they got you." For some ex-prisoners, the process of readjustment to the outside world began at the moment they met the air crews. "I told one guy that Miami won the Super Bowl," said a pilot, "and he said, 'What's the Super Bowl?'"

Once on board the airplanes, the returning men adapted quickly to their newfound freedom. "I had 40 tigers on board," said one flight officer. "There was hugging of each other and hugging of nurses and a tremendous elation on their faces," added another. "Tears in some eyes, yes, but they were certainly tears of happiness." The men swarmed about the jets and cheered wildly both on take-off from Hanoi and again when the flight crossed North Vietnam's border. They smoked the entire supply of cigarettes on board and pored through

the newspapers and magazines—including, on one flight, a copy of Playboy, which, as one official put it, "had some men looking rather stricken." Understandably, the flight nurses on board received no small amount of attention—and kisses. "Wow, smell that perfume," exclaimed one POW, while another chuckled, "My chromosomes may have moved around but they're still in my body."

Long before the first of the trio of jets landed at Clark, a crowd of about 1,000 had gathered around the reception area—waving banners (one, lettered in red



A homemade homecoming theme

crayon on a bedsheet, read, "Welcome Home Beautiful Men") and singing "God Bless America." In the control tower, a blip finally appeared on the traffic controller's radarscope. "Homecoming Air-Evac 177," radioed the tower, "we have radar contact. You are cleared for landing on Runway Zero Two repeat Zero Two. From everyone at Clark, the heartiest welcome." When the white and grey Starlifter settled onto the runway, a tremendous cheer burst from the crowd—a cheer echoed by the men on board. While a phalanx of Air Force police held back the onlookers, the airplane taxied slowly into position and the crowd chanted over and over, "Welcome home, welcome home."

As the whine of the jet's turbines died away, a 39-foot red carpet was rolled up to the plane and a four-man honor guard marched into place. The plane's door

opened. A gaunt, pale figure with tousled salt-and-pepper hair stood at the top of the ramp. His face was drawn. For a moment it appeared that the officer—Navy Capt. Jeremiah Denton, the highest-ranking POW on the flight—was unable to comprehend what was happening. But as he stepped easily down the ramp, a wide grin broke over his face and he snapped off a salute to the welcoming party. He moved to a microphone. "We are honored to have had the opportunity to serve our country under difficult circumstances," said the 48-year-old officer, a prisoner for nearly eight years. "We are profoundly grateful to our Commander in Chief and to our nation for this day." He paused for a second, then added in a voice quivering with emotion, "God bless America."

For the most part, Denton's fellow passengers, and those on the two planes that followed, were among the first Americans captured by the North Vietnamese. Of the group, 98 had spent more than six years in Communist prisons and two of them—Navy Lt. Comdr. Everett Alvarez, the first pilot captured in the north, and Lt. Comdr. Robert Shumaker—had been held more than eight years. But while the POW's looked uniformly pale and most had lost weight, they maintained a correct military bearing—and flashes of individuality. One man, Navy Lt. Comdr. Edward Davis, even brought an unauthorized friend back from Hanoi—a wriggling, tan puppy named Ma Co given to him by a prison guard two months ago. Rules or no rules, the military let him keep the dog.

'Somebody Pinch Me Quick'

That was not the only rule that was hedged. Despite the official ban on boisterous celebration, crowds at the base seized every opportunity to cheer the returnees—and the POW's loved it. As the men were bused to the base hospital, scores of people ran alongside clutching at the prisoners' outstretched hands, and women tossed bouquets of roses and the sweet-smelling *sampaguita*, the national flower of the Philippines. Air Force Capt. Larry Chesley, a prisoner in North Vietnam for nearly seven years, could hardly believe what was happening. "Fantastic, just fantastic," the 34-year-old fighter pilot shouted to the throng as the tears rolled down his face. "All you wonderful people, all our dreams come true. Somebody pinch me quick before I wake up and find out it's all a dream."

For another group of POW's returning from Viet Cong captivity, however, there was one last tormenting ordeal before the dream came true. The 27 returnees from the south—nineteen soldiers and eight civilians—were marched into the broiling sun in a clearing on a rubber plantation near Loc Ninh only to learn that Viet Cong officials refused to free them until a group of Communist prisoners was released by the South Vietnamese. Even at that, most of the prisoners stayed in good spirits. "They

The other side: Communist POW's in Bien Hoa, South Vietnam, squat patiently in the sun before their release. Without displaying any signs of emotion, they carry their maimed comrades to waiting transport planes.

were waving at us and shouting," said Brig. Gen. Stan McClellan, head of the U.S. reception party. "One man yelled to us, 'I told you I would be back.'" For eleven hours, the haggling went on. "It was a frustrating day," said McClellan, "and certainly there were some ill feelings on our part."

A Moment of Suspicion

The agonizing delay was caused in part by the Communist prisoners themselves, who at first balked at boarding the American helicopters provided to ferry them to Loc Ninh—principally out of fear that they were being tricked and would be pushed out of the choppers to their death. "I don't blame them," said one U.S. official, "considering the nature of this war." Indeed, given the treat-

came into view at Saigon's Tan Son Nhut airport, and the crowd broke into loud cheers as a lean, young American on a stretcher, Capt. David Baker, was carried off the first aircraft. "He was a bit shaky," explained a U.S. spokesman. "He got so excited that he passed out. He said it was so wonderful to see us." Another roar went up from the crowd when a tall, stooped man climbed out—Douglas Ramsey, a career State Department officer captured more than seven years ago. Dressed in floppy pajamas and plastic sandals—and in some cases wearing bead necklaces or peace symbols around their necks—the men moved quickly to waiting planes for the transfer flight to the Philippines.*

Despite the long delay, an anxious crowd still waited at Clark as their plane

military men freed in the south saluted the officers and flags that greeted them. Indeed, only the stretcher-borne Baker seemed exhilarated, energetically waving his arms as he was carried off the airplane. Schrump walked to the microphone and told the crowd, "It has been a long time. I want to thank each and every one of you for such a very fine welcome. Thank you."

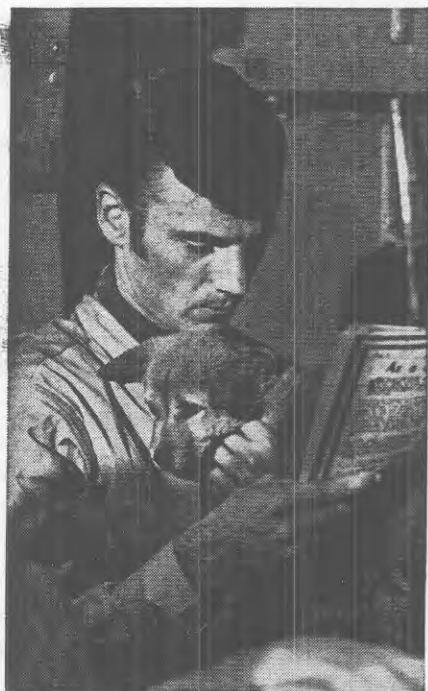
Once inside the hospital, however, all the returnees were euphoric. Their first group request, one hospital official chuckled afterward, was for a screening of X-rated movies. And even before they had fully settled into their rooms, one clique of men wanted to commandeer a bus to go drinking at the officers' club. That request denied, the returnees settled for an eating binge at the hospital mess hall. There, one more feature of the military's carefully laid plans—the bland diets specially drawn up for the ex-prisoners—went out the window. "We've been thinking of ice cream for years," one of the men whooped, and he and his comrades wolfed down so many banana splits that hospital staffers had to rush out for an emergency ration of bananas. One returnee's first meal consisted of two huge helpings of apple strudel and an ice cream sundae, while another devoured a loaf of bread—methodically buttering each slice, eating it, then buttering the next.

Jewelry and Chocolate Candy

Within 24 hours of their arrival, more of the plans for a slow and structured transition to normal life were abandoned. One POW lavishly took a 45-minute shower. Another was so eager to have his teeth fixed that he persuaded the hospital to rouse a sleepy dentist in the middle of the night. The next night, some 50 returnees armed with their allotted \$250 in "casual pay" trooped down to the base PX on a special shopping spree. Jewelry and heart-shaped boxes of Valentine's Day chocolates were the big sellers. But the men also bought items for themselves, although not without some sense of shock. Comdr. Gerald Coffee set out to find some civilian clothes. "I tried to find a conservative outfit," he said, "but I found they don't exist anymore. I tried on one outfit and felt like I was wearing a costume."

Three POW's made a special trip to Clark's Virgil I. Grissom Elementary School to thank the children for posters and place mats they had made to welcome the men to the base. Mobbed by the youngsters and teachers, the trio walked slowly through the cluster of clapping children, shaking hands and smiling tearfully. The men—Denton, Air Force Capt. John Borling and Air Force M/Sgt. William Robinson—seemed to cherish their contacts with the children. "I know that John and Bill are as overwhelmed as I," said Denton, "in being with Little America." Added Robinson: "I have a 7-year-old daughter of my

(Continued on Page 22)



Old friends, new clothes: Davis cradles Ma Co, and Kramer gets fitted for shoes



ment of Vietnamese prisoners of war on both sides, the suspicions were understandable. The Communist prisoners were on the whole in pitiful condition. Many were maimed, hobbling on homemade crutches with multiple wounds or missing limbs. Yet when repatriation came, the Communists were as jubilant as the Americans. A group of prisoners being returned to the north ripped off their maroon POW pajamas minutes after being released and, clad only in shorts, ran singing and cheering into the arms of their waiting comrades.

It was night before the choppers bearing the Communist captives landed at Loc Ninh and the American returnees were finally freed. Minutes later the twinkling red lights of the six helicopters

landed and the ranking officer, Maj. Raymond Schrump, stepped to the ground. If the men from North Vietnam looked somewhat pale and haggard, Schrump and his fellow prisoners looked as if they had emerged from a medieval dungeon. Their faces were drawn, their bodies emaciated after years of being marched through the jungles, often to escape U.S. bombing raids. "These were men," said one official, "who had come back from oblivion." Many walked away from the airplane looking dazed and bewildered. In contrast to the prisoners returning from North Vietnam, none of the

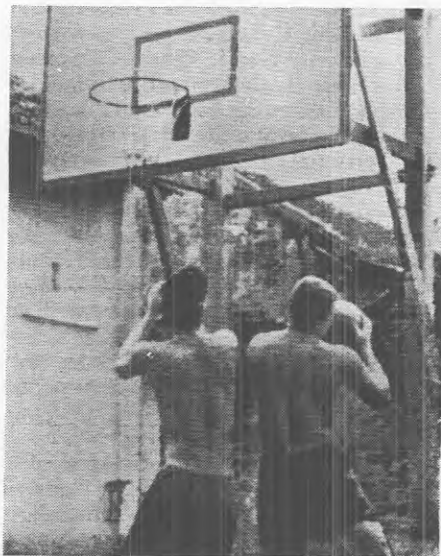
*One civilian POW, 25-year-old Richard Waldhaus, chose to stay in Saigon to look for his Vietnamese girl friend. After an exhaustive search by U.S. Embassy officials proved unsuccessful, he flew home late in the week to join his family.

LIFE IN A POW CAMP: THE WELL-TENDED GRAPEVINE

They called themselves, Air Force style, "The Allied Prisoners of War Wing," and there was good humor as well as grim irony behind the name. Through the long and bloody years of American combat in Vietnam it was an outfit that steadily grew in numbers, talent and organization—but it never left the ground. For most of the American POW's in North Vietnam, prison-camp life was at best a grueling ordeal of mind-numbing boredom relieved only by bouts of disease, the throbbing of old wounds, and the unpredictable whims of their captors. But in contrast to the every-man-for-himself behavior of many captured U.S. servicemen during the Korean war, the POW's of the Allied Prisoner of War Wing developed a high degree of organization that helped ease life in the camps somewhat. "Let me say," ventured Air Force Col. Robinson Risner, 47, wing commander at the Hanoi Hilton and a POW for seven years, "that we had a comradeship amongst us, a loyalty, an integrity that may never be found again in any group of men."

It was a passionate claim, and as the first accounts of life in the camps began to filter out last week, there seemed to be considerable evidence to back it up. Over the years, the POW wing gradually established a military command structure with local commanders, executive officers and deputies in charge of operations, intelligence and training. (For fear of North Vietnamese reprisals, the returning POW's were carefully shielding the identity of the wing commander-in-chief—who remains in Hanoi.) The senior officers within this group exercised far-reaching powers. The wing command even promoted three sergeants to officers, with the understanding that the commissions were subject to review and approval by the Pentagon, the White House and Congress. Working with their own appointed chaplains, one group of POW's compiled an abridged Bible from memory—and the wing tapped its own historian to chronicle the story of the camps.

Debriefing: The story should prove harrowing enough, but for the most part the POW's managed to cope on the strength of trust, daring and imagination. An elaborate grapevine eventually grew up linking most of the camps. Prisoners tended this intricate communications system by feigning illnesses to get medical transfers from one camp to another and even by incurring disciplinary transfers for baiting their captors. Wing veterans exhaustively debriefed all new prisoners on their arrival in the camps, and their reports on changing military policies, political trends, and new life-styles back home were quickly sent out through the grapevine. Navy Capt. James Mulligan,



Coping: POW's in Hanoi at play ...



... taking singing lessons ...



... and tending a vegetable garden

46, a prisoner for nearly seven years, learned of the sweeping liberalization of Navy hair regulations and returned last week wearing shaggy sideburns; the skin index of Playboy magazine came as no surprise to many POW's, and by last November, the prisoners were sufficiently versed in the U.S. election campaign to conduct a mock Presidential election. To no one's surprise, Richard Nixon won hands down.

Formal lectures as well as bull sessions were also a staple in many of the prison camps. In some camps, POW linguists taught daily classes in Spanish, French and German, and other experts offered lessons in mathematics, public speaking, singing, electronics and even thermodynamics. In addition to the academic exercises, some camps offered work in vegetable gardens, and most able-bodied POW's undertook substantial physical-fitness programs. Basketball, volleyball and Ping Pong took some of the gloom away in one camp, and the POW's in another established a standard routine of 30 pushups in the morning and evening as well as a cycle of isometric exercises. "We didn't want to shock anybody too much," shrugged one POW last week in the Philippines. "We were thin but we were healthy. We wanted to come home in good shape."

Leg Irons: For the most part they did. But their colleagues held by the Viet Cong in South Vietnam did not fare as well. When they were not being shuttled from place to place to avoid attacks and U.S. B-52 raids, the prisoners in the south were often kept in leg irons. One of the captives had not held a conversation with anyone for five years. The prisoners' two meals a day consisted of rice, vegetables and occasional slivers of chicken, monkey and dog meat. One POW dropped from 160 pounds to 107 pounds on this fare. Although penicillin was available and the prisoners were treated for malaria, they were left to their own devices for lesser medical problems: the standard treatment for an aching tooth was to let the gum swell until an abscess formed and then to lance it with a nail.

Thanks to the discipline of the wing and to generally healthier conditions in the North Vietnamese camps, the POW's who returned from Hanoi seemed far less ravaged by their ordeal than their comrades captured by the Viet Cong. But the worst stories of prison-camp life remained to be told: the men who came home first were ordered not to discuss the cruelties and humiliations they had suffered until the last of the POW's were safely out of enemy hands. As one U.S. official at Clark put it cautiously, "You could say that their treatment left all the men with a low opinion of their captors."

(Continued from Page 20)

own, and I haven't seen her for six and a half of those seven years." Before the men left, Denton read a letter to the school from Colonel Risner, the ranking officer among the ex-POW's: "We will always remember you," Risner's note to the children said. "The smiling faces, the waving hands, the waving flags—and we love you."

For all the hijinks and excursions, there were serious—and in some cases unpleasant—matters to attend to at Clark. For some of the men there was bad news waiting—in one case, a prisoner's wife died while he was in captivity; several other wives had divorced their husbands. The military had designed a careful program for breaking such news to the men gently but, once again, the system did not always work. One man did not learn of trouble in his family until he telephoned home. The news was often hard to take, officials acknowledged. "There were tears," said one,



POW's, schoolchildren: 'We love you'

"but they absorbed the blows and they walked out on their own. The resiliency of these guys is incredible."

That resiliency was obvious to all who saw the prisoners. Nonetheless, many were suffering from illnesses and injuries—29 were officially listed as sick or wounded. Some had to be carried on stretchers and even some of the ambulatory POW's had apparent disabilities: severe limps, withered arms and broken limbs. A few managed only dazed or bewildered stares. One hospital official said that some 15 to 20 of the pilots had suffered permanent eye damage due to vitamin deficiencies and will probably have to be grounded. But other doctors maintained that fully 99 per cent of the

returnees' physical afflictions can be treated successfully and, in general, doctors were surprised at how healthy the men were. Dr. John Ord, the hospital commander, praised the diets—and especially the dental hygiene—that the men had in North Vietnamese prisons. When asked about their treatment by the Communists, he said, "Their care must have been quite good."

The returnees were generally in such good physical condition, in fact, that within 48 hours the first planeload of twenty men was en route to the United States—and reunions with their families. (Two others, Comdr. Brian Woods and Maj. Glendon Perkins, left even earlier on a special flight to rush to the bedsides of their ailing mothers.) At California's Travis Air Force Base, the POW's first state-side stop, there were brief and simple welcoming ceremonies to celebrate the men's return. The largest crowd of the week gathered when the jet carrying the first airman captured, Commander Alvarez, arrived. "For years and years we dreamed of this day," Alvarez told the throng, "and we kept faith—faith in our God, in our President and in our country. It was this faith that maintained our hope that someday our dreams would come true and today they have. We have come home."

'There Are Miracles'

From one end of the U.S. to the other, there were ecstatic scenes of family reunion (box). When Andrea Arcuri rushed to meet her husband, Air Force Lt. William Arcuri, she almost bowled him over—then steadied him as she slipped a ring from her finger to his. Air Force Capt. Hayden Lockhart Jr. walked down the ramp of his flight at Travis to find one familiar and one unfamiliar face waiting for him. He kissed his wife, Jill, then bent down to shake hands with 7-year-old Hayden III—a son he had never seen. In San Antonio, Army Sgt. Ken Wallingford stepped off the elevator at Brooke Army Medical Center and suddenly after ten months as a Viet Cong prisoner stood face to face with his parents. "Welcome home, son," his mother beamed. "I'm so proud of you." With a quizzical grin, Wallingford replied, "I haven't done anything." Then he and his family moved off to continue the reunion in a spacious suite of rooms that had once been reserved for the late President Lyndon Johnson.

In San Antonio, smiles and tears fought for control of Dorothy Ray's face. It had been fourteen months since she had last seen her husband, Army Capt. Johnnie Ray, who was captured by the Viet Cong in last spring's Communist offensive. "He said I looked beautiful and he tore my dress on both sides, he hugged me so hard," Mrs. Ray beamed. "I showed him the bracelet with his name that I had been wearing. He took it off my wrist and he started to cry. He grabbed me and started hugging me again." And as her eyes misted over, Dorothy Ray add-

INTO HEAVEN

After 53 months apart, Brian was coming home—that was all Mrs. Paula Woods could think about as she watched the televised arrival of the POW's at Clark Air Base. Of the 116 returning men, her husband, Comdr. Brian Woods was the 116th, included at the last minute at the Pentagon's request so that he might see his critically ill mother.

All day long and through a sleepless night, Paula Woods waited for her husband's phone call from the Philippines. When it came, he told of his concern that his fragile feelings might crumble on their reunion—and of his guilt over being shot down. She reassured him soothingly. Just as she was about to tell Brian she loved him for what seemed like the eighth time, her son Michael grabbed the phone away from her. "Hello, Daddy," he cried. "I love you, too, and I'm 7 years old now."

Michael had been only 2 years old on Sept. 18, 1968, when his father gunned his A-7 Corsair off the deck of the U.S.S. Constellation for a mission over North Vietnam. Woods's plane never returned to the carrier, and within hours the Defense Department notified his wife that he was listed as "missing in action." When she tried to tell her three children, Mrs. Woods recalled, she could



In Hanoi: Woods (right) with U.S. escort officer just after release

ed softly, "I never believed in miracles, but I do now. There are miracles."

When Navy Lt. Comdr. Paul Galanti's plane arrived at a naval air station in Virginia, the waiting crowd went wild—but his wife, Phyllis, stood still. At the microphones, Galanti read a different sort of statement, a poem he had written for Phyllis on his first cruise as a midshipman: "Lonely are the days and nights, my love/That we have been apart/It seems almost forever since I held you to my heart/The moments are as restless as the waves that move the sea/But every second means a step nearer my love to thee." Then there was a

OUT OF HELL

only stumble and stutter; finally, 5-year-old Cathleen took her younger brothers aside. "Now listen boys, our daddy was shot down over North Vietnam," Cathy said. "But I'm sure the Blessed Mother had her arms wrapped around him all the time." "All I could think of," says Paula Woods now, "was: 'God, You just better come across.'"

Soon news came that Brian was alive and a prisoner, and the long wait began. Mrs. Woods wrote three times a month, but the letters never reached her husband. His letters got through, however, and he began complaining that his wife never wrote to him. "It got to the point where I just had to try to use mental telepathy to let him know I still loved him," she recalls. Then, there were the children to worry about. "All three remembered Daddy," Mrs. Woods says, "but it took me 24 hours a day to keep his memory alive." She hung photos of her husband all around the house, including a life-size poster in the hall on the way to the children's room. "And ev-

ery night," Mrs. Woods smiles, "they would kiss 'Daddy' goodnight."

But all the waiting was forgotten last week as Mrs. Woods and her children prepared to go to San Diego for her husband's arrival. She bought new stockings and, for the first time in four and a half years, had her hair done. Then she got the kids ready. "I want to wear red, white and blue," begged Cathleen, and she did. Mrs. Woods reached into her pocket and took out a small brown leather change purse. In it was a silver crucifix. "Tonight I'm going to slip this to him," she told NEWSWEEK's Peter Greenberg. "It's the most symbolic thing I have to give him, and it means a lot to both of us."

At the Miramar Naval Air Station that night, Mrs. Woods wore the same brown suede coat that Brian had given her for their last anniversary together, five years ago. The giant C-141 Starlifter touched down, and out stepped Commander Woods along with Air Force Maj. Glendon Perkins, also bound for a reunion with his ailing mother. "Which one is Daddy?" asked Michael. Commander Woods, after a two-sentence speech for the press, rushed over to his family for a teary reunion, embracing his wife and children and his 70-year-old father. Then Brian and Paula Woods climbed into a limousine for the drive to Coronado Hospital to see his mother, who is suffering from leukemia, kidney and heart disease. As the car drove off

into the darkness, Mrs. Woods reached into her pocket, took out the crucifix and pressed it into her husband's hand.

When Brian and Paula Woods arrived at the hospital, he was led immediately to his mother's bedside. "Mom, your prodigal son is home," he said quietly. "Brian, Brian," she whispered, "God has rewarded my prayers." Commander Woods stayed with his mother for 30 minutes, and later her doctor said that the visit had lifted her spirits. "It did more for her," he remarked, "than any of my medicines or treatment." As for Paula Woods, the medicine was almost beyond describing. "How would you feel," she asked, "if you were in heaven after being in hell so long?"



In California: The Woods family (left) at last reunited with their man



Photos by Lester Sloan—Newsweek

restrained hug and the couple slipped toward their car—for the real welcome home. They hopped into the back seat and, with Galanti holding up his hat to ward off the cameras, kissed long and lovingly. "Once we got in the car," Phyllis said later, "it was great."

Navy Comdr. Raymond Vohden's plane brought him home to Memphis, where his 10-year-old daughter, Connye, was all prepared with a handmade Valentine that read, "Happiness is a Dad." For Connye's parents, however, there was at least one other matter to discuss—Mrs. Vohden had filed for divorce in October. "He wrote me a letter

telling me to make a new life for myself," she explained. "I filed for the divorce because the children and I had no life; we were in prison too." But when the first hint of a peace in Vietnam came, she withdrew the divorce suit. Now, she said, she and her husband will have to "work it out day by day."

Other returning prisoners and their families will also have to work things out gradually. And even in the first few days of the homecoming, some were finding how difficult that would be. Army Warrant Officer James Hestand, 23, returned to San Antonio expecting to be greeted by his wife, Anita. But she

wasn't there. He called her, and after their conversation, a dejected Hestand said, "I may not get Nita back."

Even for families not facing marital breakups, there can—and almost certainly will—be trying moments as a result of the ex-prisoner's captivity. Mrs. Helen Brunstrom was sorting through the flight bag that her husband, Air Force Lt. Col. Alan Brunstrom, brought back from North Vietnam. In it she found the cup and spoon that he had used in prison camp. He returned to the room suddenly. "Put that stuff away," he said curtly, "and don't touch it again."

Doctors and psychiatrists warned that

more than marital difficulties and minor arguments lay ahead for the returning prisoners. Former POW's, not only from Vietnam but from previous wars, have a history of chronic illnesses caused by years of substandard medical treatment; statistically, they have a shortened life expectancy as well. Other studies show they are prone to automobile accidents and tend to suffer bouts of depression. And the Vietnam POW's will have to contend with other burdens—including

the efforts of some promoters to exploit their new status as celebrities (following story):

But if their performance so far is any indication, the returnees from Vietnam may well prove the exception to past rules. Clearly, *they* believe so. "There will be minor adjustment problems," Risner acknowledged, "[but] as far as the mental capabilities of the men that I have lived with, I think you'll be pleasantly surprised. Their minds are still alert

and their bodies are in good condition."

And the prisoners' heartiness seemed matched by a rare exhilaration in the spirit of the land they returned to. It was impossible to tell whether, as Secretary of State Rogers hoped, their arrival might somehow help to heal the wounds laid open by Vietnam. But the fact was that last week's homecoming was one of the few events in the war's long history in which Americans could join together—in unity and in joy.

BRASS BANDS IN A LOW KEY

Earlham, Iowa, is all set. Virtually every one of the town's 1,000 citizens has taken to wearing a replica of Lt. Comdr. Larry H. Spencer's wrist bracelet in the seven years since the town's only POW was captured, and all of them plan to be at Des Moines Airport when he arrives home—probably next week. A caravan of farm trucks, old buses and every other available set of wheels will honk Spencer's way home from the airport to the Earlham town hall, where Iowa Gov. Robert Ray and the Earlham High School marching band will be waiting. Sam Buck, a vice president of the local bank, is even trying to arrange a flyover of four Phantom jets, the plane Spencer was flying when he was downed.

But there is one odd thing about Earlham's plans: they are all designed to be abandoned instantly. Like so many other towns and cities, Earlham wishes to do right by its hero in the old-fashioned way, but it is having difficulty figuring out just what sort of homecoming would best fit this particular group of POW's from this particular war. Across the country, the impulse toward brass bands and celebratory hoopla has been met by an equal and opposite impulse to let everything about the war die quietly. Manufacturers and promoters offering heady gifts are being challenged about their motives, often by the very POW organizations that were supposed to be most grateful. New York has no plans for a parade before March 31, Chicago no plans at this time. "This low-key thing is getting a little out of hand," complains San Diego's Roger Chapin, promoter of a grandiose scheme to give every returning POW a car, color television and free vacation. "It'll be so low-key that no one pays any attention to these men."

Not quite. From the time the planes began landing at Clark Air Base in the Philippines, the POW's have been swamped with letters, telegrams, floral tributes and offers of free clothes, free ice cream, free taxi rides, free hair-dos for their women. The Ford Motor Co.'s dealer organization promised every man the loan of a new car—Mustang, LTD or Gran Torino—for a year, free maintenance included. Baseball Commissioner Bowie

Kuhn guaranteed free lifetime passes to all major-league games. PSA Airlines, based in California, offered to fly POW families anywhere in the state—even to Disneyland, where they would of course pay nothing. Several resorts and hotel chains—some anonymously, some not—have offered free vacations.

This outpouring has been met with an unprecedented amount of throat-clearing and disapproval by the military and POW groups. The Ford dealers' offer of a car, for example, ran against a warning by Pentagon doctors that POW driving skills will have eroded seriously during their years in prison (an earlier POW returnee was given a new Corvette by a Denver dealer and totaled it the next month). In any case, spokesmen for the POW families wondered pointedly why Ford had made the offer public if its heart was pure.

Connections: No would-be donor has faced as much flak, however, as Roger Chapin, a former real estate man who has been promoting Vietnam GI causes for five years. His plan for a monster giveaway of cars, TV sets and vacations was to be underwritten by the nation's largest corporations, promoted by the TV networks and supported by millions of grateful citizens. After discussing his idea with the Pentagon and White House, the well-connected Chapin signed up top executives from 27 large corporations—including Chrysler, AT&T and the Chase Manhattan Bank—at a

December luncheon launching Welcome Home Our Prisoners Inc. Henry Ford II, Sen. Hubert Humphrey and Gov. Nelson Rockefeller were speakers on that occasion, urging colleagues to help raise funds, donate air time to the cause and underwrite a newspaper ad campaign.

Something went awry. A New York organization that evaluates fund appeals criticized Chapin's overhead costs in previous promotions (though Chapin retorted that his overhead was less than those of many charities), and that was enough to prompt several political backers, including Sen. John Tunney and Sen. Robert Dole, to withdraw as sponsors. Networks began hedging on promises of air time. Chapin and his supporters, who had apparently envisaged a huge national resurgence of patriotic sentiment in response to the WHOP campaign, say they are flabbergasted by the indifference and resentment it inspired.

But Chapin's oversize scheme seemed to belong to some other time, some other war—an anachronism in an America in which the town of Scituate, Mass., could lower its flag to half-staff for 30 days after the cease-fire and refuse to raise it for POW's or anyone else. In the end, the issue was not the well-being of the POW's but the suitability of a national celebration. "We just want to make Lieutenant Commander Spencer feel at home," said banker Sam Buck in Earlham. "If he doesn't want a lot of ceremony, then we'll cancel it all."



Wally McNamee—Newsweek

Reception in California: Free suits, free cars and cleared throats

Newsweek, February 26, 1973