

'Re-educated' prisoners freed

161 former South Vietnam leaders spent 13 years in prison

By Ben Barber

SPECIAL TO THE EXAMINER

in time for this week's Tet new year celebration.

Like elderly schoolboys graduating and leaving their dormitory,

baskets and worn clothing.

"We did not want to be deserters and run away" with many other South Vietnamese soldiers and offi-

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VIETNAM

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fate. But we asked God to protect us.

"It would have been better to run away."

More than a dozen of the former leaders — many of whom spoke fluent, American-accented English learned at U.S. military schools —

were released. Fears they would cause trouble have been proved unfounded.

None has been allowed to leave for the West yet, but the government felt "it needed to settle the problem (of the remaining prisoners) for national and international reconciliation," said another Western diplomat.

At the Ba Sao camp, the former officers milled about their freshly whitewashed barracks and spoke to

'We asked God to protect us. It would have been better to run away'

— Former Gen. Le Trung Truc

He suggested the camp could be turned into a tourist center because of scenic hills around it. Part will be kept as a museum to recall the inmates' presence, he said.

Asked why the men had been kept so long, he said last week: "During World War II those who were

war criminals were judged by the Nuremberg trials with heavy sentences. But in Vietnam, based on hu-

manitarian policies and generosity, we have kept them away from the release of 1,000 former officials and officers from several camps, some prisoners whispered to a reporter that not all were being set free.

"They are keeping nine generals, four priests and a journalist — these people are savages," one former officer said. "They're keeping men from the CIO and CID (intelligence groups). They fool the people."

When the iron gates to the camp finally swung open last Saturday and the aging men filed out, former Min-



Ben Barber via Reuter

Các cựu viên chức lãnh đạo miền Nam Việt Nam đang sửa soạn rời trại tù "cải tạo".