

FILE SUBJ - 71  
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U.S. COMBAT FORCES IN VIETNAM TO DROP TO 45,000 IN MAY (150)

WASHINGTON -- PRESIDENT NIXON SAYS THE NUMBER OF AMERICAN TROOPS WITH DIRECT GROUND COMBAT RESPONSIBILITIES IN SOUTH VIETNAM WILL DROP TO ABOUT 45,000 BY THE END OF MAY.

WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY RONALD ZIEGLER TOLD NEWSMEN FEBRUARY 9 THE PRESIDENT HAS BEEN INFORMING CONGRESSMEN -- IN BRIEFINGS ON U.S. SUPPORT FOR THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE OPERATION IN THE LAOTIAN PANHANDLE -- THERE WILL BE A "SUBSTANTIAL REDUCTION" IN THE NUMBER OF INFANTRYMEN WITH COMBAT ROLES.

WHEN MANPOWER LEVELS REACH 284,000 BY MAY, MR. ZIEGLER SAID, THERE WILL BE 40,000 TO 45,000 U.S. INFANTRYMEN LEFT WITH COMBAT RESPONSIBILITIES, ALTHOUGH AN UNSPECIFIED NUMBER OF OTHER INFANTRYMEN WILL BE USED TO SECURE THE BASES OF U.S. AIR AND LOGISTICS PERSONNEL.

MR. ZIEGLER SAID THE PRESIDENT DOES NOT PROJECT THE FORCE LEVEL BEYOND THE MONTH OF MAY SINCE DECISIONS ON REDUCTIONS BELOW THE 284,000 FIGURE ARE YET TO BE MADE. THE WHITE HOUSE HAS SAID THE PRESIDENT WILL ANNOUNCE A FURTHER REDUCTION IN APRIL. ITEM

2-9-71 APA320P