

3 WORDS SAID IT ALL: 'GOD BLESS AMERICA'



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Col. Phones Nixon: The Men Say Thanks

SAN CLEMENTE, Calif. (AP) — President Nixon talked by telephone Monday with an Air Force colonel held captive by the North Vietnamese for nearly eight years and told him, "Your sacrifice has not been in vain."

"I want you to know how enormously proud we are of you and all the men," Nixon told Col. Robinson Risner, of Oklahoma City, Okla., who initiated the phone call from Clark Air Base in the Philippines.

In their four-minute conversation, Nixon told the officer, a prisoner of war for 7½ years, that the call was "one of the most moving moments" of his presidency.

Press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler, who relayed details of the conversation, said the 48-year-old pilot, a World War II

veteran told Nixon, "All of the men would like to meet you personally and express gratitude for what you have done."

"My time is yours on that point," Nixon responded. Ziegler said the President added that a meeting could be arranged after the prisoners are reunited with their families and loved ones.

Because "you and the men have been through so much," the President said, "Nothing would mean more to me than to meet with you personally and express gratitude on behalf of myself and the American people for your sacrifices."

Ziegler said no specific time was set for a presidential meeting with the returning POWs.

The press secretary said the colonel thanked Nixon for "his personal efforts to get us out of (Continued on Back Page, Col. 2)



Lt. Cmdr. Everett Alvarez Jr. is greeted by Adm. Noel Gayler, commander-in-chief, Pacific (center), and Lt. Gen. William G. Moore, 12th Air

Force commander, at Clark A.B., the Philippines. Alvarez had been held captive in North Vietnam since 1964. (UPI)

'It's Robbie, All Right'

Emotional Return of a Hero

CLARK AIR BASE, Philippines (AP)—"It's Robbie, all right," said the middle-aged U.S. Air Force colonel standing in the crowd as a trim figure poked his head from the open door of the C141 and then emerged on the arm of an escort.

A roar went up from the hundreds of American Air Force men assembled at planeside. The colonel joined in and began clapping. Tears were coursing down his face.

The object of their applause straightened up as his foot touched the tarmac. He smiled and walked unescorted to a microphone and began speaking. After 7½ years as a prisoner of war, Robbie Risner was back among his own kind, the U.S. Air Force professionals.

Col. Robinson Risner, 48, was one of the 116 American war prisoners released from North Vietnam Monday. And he was also one of the most famous.

The daring aviator from Oklahoma City, Okla., is a veteran flier, his experience dating to World War II and Korea.

Risner was a natural for the Vietnam war because he was serving as commander of the 67th Tactical Fighter Squadron at Kadena Air Force Base, Okinawa, when President Lyndon B. Johnson began the air war against North Vietnam early in 1965.

Risner took his squadron of F105 bombers to Korat, Thailand, and began launching daily missions against Hanoi supply lines and communications networks. He became so well known that he was a cover subject for Time magazine.

Then on Sept. 16, 1965, Risner's luck ran out. He was shot down and captured by the North Vietnamese.

The Air Force mourned the loss of one of its favorite sons.

"Just a few months before he went down I was in Washington to see him get presented with the Air Force Cross for his Vietnam flying, and that is the best medal the Air Force can give," said one colonel watching him deplane Monday.

As the years went by, many more fliers were shot down over Vietnam. But the name of Risner was still a magic one among Air Force professionals. While in prison he was promoted to the rank of full colonel.

Little was heard from the captured flier until August of 1968. Rennie Davis visited Hanoi then as the head of a pacifist mission to pick up three released U.S. prisoners of war, and reported meeting Risner and several others.

Davis reported the flier looked in excellent (Continued on Back Page, Col. 5)

By HAL DRAKE
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CLARK AB, R.P. — One hundred fifteen American pilots, released a few hours before from the darkness of a Hanoi prison, landed under an overcast sky at this base late Monday and walked into the sunlight of a vibrant, triumphant welcome — one in which the spirits of many returnees seemed to glow brighter than

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those of the 2,000 persons who turned out to greet them with cheers, banners and chants.

Several hours later 26 other Americans, including a civilian who had been a Viet Cong prisoner for a month less than nine years, were brought from Saigon on a C9A medevac plane after an earlier release had been stalled by hours of tense negotiation. All but one man walked from the plane. The 19 servicemen and seven civilians, tired but happy, were greeted by the tireless crowd. One greeter waved an American flag at them.

Hospital authorities said initial examinations showed the men to be in good health. Their morale and discipline was very good, a statement said. They were allowed (Continued on Back Page, Col. 1)