

3 Joyful POWs Free in Hanoi

By Peter Arnett

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HANOI — (AP) — Three American pilots have been released from North Vietnam captivity at a ceremony attended by relatives and U.S. peace activists who had journeyed to Hanoi.

They are Navy Lt. Norris Charles, 27, whose wife

Olga, had flown out from San Diego; Navy Lt. Markham Gartley, 28, whose mother, Minnie Lee Gartley, came from Dunedin, Fla.; and Air Force Maj. Edward Elias, 34, of Valdosta, Ga.

Overjoyed at their new freedom, the three fliers were neat - appearing in new civilian clothing provid-

ed them for yesterday's 40-minute ceremony, a unique affair in the annals of warfare.

Each pilot made a statement into microphones before the official release, held before Vietnamese and European TV cameramen.

Olga Charles, 27, who had had her hair washed and set

in a downtown Hanoi beauty shop in anticipation of the ceremony, fought through the throng of cameramen and technicians for an emotional embrace with her husband.

Minnie Lee Gartley joyfully put her arms around her Navy pilot son and said,

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Hanoi Frees Joyful POWs

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"He's even better looking than I remembered." Mrs. Gartley for the past four years has actively picketed Congress and the White House for an end to the war.

Elias, who until Saturday had expected his wife or father to come to Hanoi, said before the microphones, "I have been told that for various reasons they could not make it, but I will be seeing them soon."

Elias' father, Barney, a housing consultant, said in Jacksonville, Ill., he, his wife and daughter-in-law had decided it was "not in the best interest of all the POWs" for them to make the trip. He also said peace activists Cora Weiss and Dave Dellinger, who arranged the release and were at the Hanoi ceremony, had assured the Elias family the major's release would not be jeopardized by their not attending.

Charles, Gartley and Elias

were the first American prisoners released by Hanoi since 1969. The U.S. Defense Department prior to Sunday listed 539 Americans known to be captured and held prisoner in Southeast Asia and more than 1000 Americans missing, many of them believed in captivity.

After the ceremony, the pilots, relatives and the American peace delegation were driven to a banquet at the Hoa Binh Hotel.

Mrs. Weiss gave a toast in sweet Vietnamese cordial. Then raising a glass of scotch provided by a newsmen, Charles said, "I want to give a toast to the good people of America who brought this about."

Before the microphones, Charles said: "First, I would like to express my appreciation for my release to my family. Secondly, I would like to thank the Vietnamese people for the humane treatment and generosity they have shown me.

Finally, I would like to say that I am a happy man but I cannot truly be happy until this war is terminated.

"By ending the war, people with whom I have lived feel that much suffering and hardship will end."

Elias said at the formal ceremony, "I sincerely hope and pray that this act of release will be a great step to the end of the war, and for the future release of all POWs both here and in the South."

Gartley, shot down more than four years ago, said, "News of this release came as a complete surprise to me. I feel this is a unique and very emotional situation. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the people and government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and attendant camp authorities for the kindness they have shown me since my capture."

He added that while elated

over regaining freedom, "at the same time I realize that as long as this conflict continues the people of Vietnam, their suffering, will continue, much dissension and unrest in the United States will continue, more pilots will be killed or captured and many friends who are now in detention camps will be unable to go home. I cannot be truly happy until they come home too. I plan to make every effort for their rapid repatriation."

Freedom for American POWs has been a major political issue between supporters and opponents of U.S. policy in Indochina. President Nixon has set release of the prisoners as a prerequisite for settlement of the conflict. Peace activists argue that the fate of the prisoners remains in jeopardy as long as the United States bombs North Vietnam.