

Russ May Detour American POWs

VIENTIANE (Laos) — (AP) — There was increasing evidence today that a Soviet Aeroflot airliner expected to carry three released American prisoners of war out of North Vietnam Saturday may bypass Vientiane and make its first landing in Burma or India.

This would deny U.S. officials the opportunity to take control of the three men in the Laotian capital and get them away from the American anti-war activists who are escorting them.

The local Aeroflot office said the possibility that the plane would not land here was raised by the fact that 22 passengers booked to board the aircraft in Vientiane had been advised that they were being transferred to a "wait list," meaning it is uncertain that the plane will land as scheduled.

The Aeroflot office said the instructions came from Soviet diplomatic sources but that no reason was given.

U.S. sources say that American Embassy strategy, should an aircraft carrying the three pilots land here, would be to go aboard

if possible and advise the men that before returning to the United States they must undergo medical examination, and that to refuse could mean a medical quarantine upon their arrival in the United States.

American officials in Vientiane were accused by anti-war activists on one earlier occasion of snatching released prisoners away from their escorts.

Normal Stop

The Aeroflot plane normally stops in Vientiane to refuel and let passengers on and off, but it has overflowed the Laotian capital on previous occasions.

When that happens its route then normally takes it to Calcutta, Bombay, Tashkent and Moscow. If the freed U.S. pilots and their escorts stayed aboard all the way, they conceivably could be beyond reach of U.S. officials until after leaving Moscow.

The three freed men are Navy Lts. Mark Garelty, 28, of Dunedin, Fla., and Norris Charles, 27, of San Diego, Calif., and Air Force Maj. Edward Elias, 34, of Valdosta, Ga.