

Damage in North Vietnam

Prisoners, Relatives on Tour

By Peter Arnett

Phat Diem Cathedral,
North Vietnam

FOR two American women visitors and their loved ones, airmen freed a few days ago from prisoner camps, the journey through North Vietnam has been a jumble of pre-dawn trips down country roads and dramatic meetings with people who said they were United States bombing victims, interspersed with roadside picnics and four-hour siestas.

"I expected the Jane Fonda tour bit. We are asked to make statements, I know," said Minnie Lee Gartley on Wednesday night after two days of visiting ruined churches and schools.

"How many times can you say you're sorry? But I don't regret coming for one moment," added the Dunedin, Fla., mother who had a joyful reunion with her pilot son, Mark, on Sunday after his release.

Slim, lively Olga Charles of San Diego, clutching pieces of a terracotta statue of St. Joseph given her as a gift from a church allegedly



AP Wirephoto

Olga Charles (right) showed Peter Arnett and Minnie Lee Gartley fragment of statue from cathedral

destroyed by U.S. bombing in August, said, "It has been very tiring and emotional. But this is a once in a lifetime journey. However, Norris and I are looking forward to going home."

Mrs. Charles had a reunion with her Navy pilot hus-

band on Sunday.

The fifth member of the party was Air Force Major Edward K. Elias of Valdosta, Ga., also released Sunday.

Both women saw bomb damage on the outskirts of Hanoi on Sunday. Tuesday's

field trip began at 4 a.m. because, according to North Vietnamese guides, U.S. planes have regularly been attacking targets on the route the party was taking south to Nam Ha Province.

After a dawn roadside picnic of warm Hanoi beer and pork sandwiches, the group arrived at a pagoda converted into a rest house near Nam Dinh, the provincial capital.

A province official, Chan Hung, who said he was also with the local war crimes investigation committee, asked the pilots, "Now that you are released, are you our friends?" Elias said, "We all hope relations between my country and your country will be better."

RAIDS

As the official launched into an account of alleged raids against civilian targets in his province, Gartley told this reporter, "We were down here late last week and they tried very hard to get us to condemn the bombing, and seemed disappointed when we didn't."

The official said to the two women visitors, "We want

you, mother and wife, to tell the wives and mothers of America to put pressure on Nixon to end the war. The more he bombs, the greater our hatred of American imperialists. I am sorry to have to say that to you. Have you any message for us?"

Mrs. Gartley, in a small voice, replied: "It is not easy but we will try. We have been trying to end the war for a long time."

RUBBLE

Then the party spent two hours in Nam Dinh, walking through the rubble to hospitals and schools and what were said to be private homes. North Vietnamese guides claimed there were no military targets in the city.

Three Vietnamese officers claimed that 30 air attacks against Nam Dinh this year have destroyed more than 70 per cent of the city.

By late afternoon the group was again on the road south to Ninh Binh Province, and by daylight Wednesday it had reached Phat Diem Cathedral, or what was left of it. The west and east

chapels lay in ruins, and the main cathedral had taken numerous heavy hits.

It was during this visit that the American women had the most frightening moment of the trip.

As they were standing on an ornamental bridge looking at the ruins of a small

chapel, a gong started ringing, and guides said it was an air alert.

Gartley looked into the sky and pointed. "There they are," he said.

A tremendous roar sounded overhead. "Hey, they're F-105s and they're low," said Elias, but it soon be-

came apparent that the targets for his group of planes were farther north.

"What do you say about this?" an official asked, and Gartley answered: "I can tell you this, it's a different feeling when you're on the ground."

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