

SEP 24 1972

3 Freed POWs Still In Hanoi

SF Examiner

VIENTIANE — (AP) — Three American fliers released from North Vietnamese prison camps last week failed to arrive on a Russian commercial flight from Hanoi yesterday, apparently because North Vietnamese officials would take the freed men into their custody.

A statement signed by American anti-war activists who are bringing the three home supported the probability that the North Vietnamese decided against sending the men, the first prisoners of war set free since 1969, home through Vientiane.

The three pilots, who were freed Sept. 17, are Air Force Maj. Edward Elias and Navy Lts. Markham Gartley and Norris Charles.

Gartley's mother, Minnie Lee Gartley, and Charles' wife, Olga, went to North Vietnam with the peace activists whom the North Vietnamese want to escort the three men home. They are still in North Vietnam.

A Roman Catholic priest returning from Hanoi on yesterday's flight, Father Harry Bury of the Roman Catholic International Assembly of Christians, said he believed North Vietnam was awaiting a White House response to the activists' statement before sending the men home.

The statement, a telegraphed copy of which has gone to the President, was brought here by Marianne Hamilton, another passenger on the Russian plane.

The Vientiane control tower

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er refused to ask the Russian pilot whether the Americans were aboard, and it wasn't known if they were there or not until U.S. Ambassador G. McMurtie Godley walked to the foot of the gangway and asked.

Godley, on hand with the U.S. naval and air attaches to meet the plane, earlier told newsmen he intended to board the plane, meet the pilots and offer them his advice and assistance.

He denied planning to inform the men they were still under military orders, as had been done in previous POW releases.

Laird View

Defense Secretary Melvin Laird had told newsmen at Letter Kenny Depot, Pennsylvania, Friday that "I certainly would recommend that these men turn themselves over as soon as possible to their military command."

Laird said that "We, of course, will advise the three

officers . . . that we would recommend that they return themselves to military jurisdiction so that they can have the adequate medical checkups, that they can go forward with the kind of health reviews which we think are very important."

A clue to the North Vietnamese attitude appeared Friday in a monitored broadcast on Radio Hanoi.

The Vietnamese language broadcast said U.S. military officials were "lying in wait" at Vientiane airport in the hope of "taking possession of the three released pilots and returning them to U.S. military control."

The statement, signed by the four American anti-war activists, listed four conditions first set forth by another Radio Hanoi broadcast.

It said that in order to meet the "expectations of the North Vietnamese government and to avoid risk to future releases, the men should be allowed to fly on civilian aircraft, given a 30-day leave if they wished,

given a complete medical examination at the hospital of their choice and to do nothing in the future to further American war activities in Indochina."

'On Way Home Soon'

Mrs. Hamilton, a member of the same organization as Father Bury, said she thought the pilots and their escorts would be on their way home soon, whether Washington replied to Hanoi conditions or not.

Had the POWs been on the plane, they would also have been met by American Consul Richard S. Rand, who is responsible for POW affairs here, and Dr. Eben H. Dustin, chief medical officer of the U.S. mission.

Also at the airport were Naval Attache Capt. Lee C. Miles, and Assistant Air Force Attache Lt. Col. Kenneth W. Oliver.

Diplomatic sources said the plane was carrying a total of 61 passengers, including 33 destined for Moscow, two for Rangoon and six for Vientiane.