

Freed U.S. Fliers Leave Hanoi for China After Escorts Decide to Avoid Laos

By Agence France-Presse

HANOI, North Vietnam, Sept. 25—Agence France-Presse — The three American pilots released by North Vietnam Sept. 17, left here for China today on the first leg of their journey back to the United States.

The American delegation of antiwar activities that came here to escort the pilots home decided to travel by way of China rather than by Vientiane, Laos, after there had been reports that American officials in Laos intended to try to make the men fly home on a United States plane.

The Hanoi departure plans for the three pilots were kept secret until the very last minute. The airmen are Maj. Edward K. Elias, 34 years old, of the Air Force, who was shot down last April; Lieut. (j.g.) Norris A. Charles, 27, of the Navy, downed last December, and Lieut. (j.g.) Mark L. Gartley, 28, also of the Navy, downed in August, 1968.

Luggage that included souvenirs, gifts and last-minute purchases was loaded into waiting cars. Scores of Vietnamese gathered to watch the departure of the motorcade, which was led by a motorcyclist—something even leading North Vietnamese officials do without. About 40 minutes later, a Chinese airliner with the former prisoners and the Americans accompanying them took off from Nanning, China. The Americans were expected to spend the night there before flying to Peking.

Accompanied by 6

The pilots were accompanied by Miss Olga Charles of San Diego, wife of Lieutenant Charles, and Mrs. Minnie Lee Gartley of Dunedin, Fla., the mother of Lieutenant Gartley.

The antiwar group consists of Mrs. Cora Weiss and David Dellinger, co-chairmen of the Committee of Liaison with Families of American Servicemen Detained in Vietnam; the Rev. William Sloane Coffin Jr., chaplain of Yale University, and Richard Falk, a professor of international law at Princeton University.

There have been reports that American military and civilian officials were prepared to meet the fliers in Vietnam. The antiwar activists have said that they would refuse to take the three freed Americans back if it was confirmed that they were to be met outside the United States by United States officials. Hanoi has warned that any attempt by United States officials to take over the prisoners would jeopardize chances of further releases.

Hanoi Reaffirms Policy

HANOI, Sept. 25 (AP)—Premier Pham Van Dong of North Vietnam has reiterated the position that the North Vietnamese want to release all captured American pilots and will do so when there is agreement on ending the war.

He said in an informal 90-minute discussion yesterday, attended by a reported and the four antiwar activists who came to Hanoi to escort home the three released fliers, that President Nixon was aware of the need for a settlement before the remaining pilots could be freed. He asserted that there was no misunderstanding on this point.

The premier said a framework for a settlement had long been available in the seven-point proposal put forward by the Vietcong in the Paris talks. This calls for the total withdrawal of American forces and the formation of a coalition government in South Vietnam among other things.

Diplomacy in Sweden

By SEYMOUR M. HERSH
Special to The New York Times

STOCKHOLM, Sept. 25—The Swedish government was involved in intense diplomatic discussion today in anticipation of what some diplomats said was a possible confrontation later this week at Stockholm's international airport between United States officials and the three former prisoners of war released by Hanoi.

Diplomatic sources said that the pilots, after spending tomorrow night in Peking, would fly Wednesday on a Soviet airliner to Moscow, and leave Thursday morning for Stockholm, possibly on a chartered flight.

It was understood that there would be no public news conference until the group reached Sweden, one of the four countries in Western Europe that maintains full diplomatic relations with North Vietnam and the only one that now has an ambassador in Hanoi.

However, there was also speculation tonight that if no chartered flight from Moscow to Stockholm could be arranged for Thursday, the prisoners and delegation with them would take a commercial flight to Copenhagen, hold a brief news conference there and then go on to New York that night.

The American Embassy here was reported to have suffered at least one rebuff in its negotiations with the Swedish Government over the prisoners' arrival.

A reliable source said today that Sweden had rejected an American request to board the pilots, plane from Moscow at the Stockholm airport. Instead, the Swedish Foreign Ministry reportedly told the United States that it would ask the pilots if they wished to meet with the American officials.

In addition to demanding that the three pilots be allowed to proceed to the United States without any Government interference, the Committee of Liaison With Families of Servicemen Detained in Vietnam has requested that the prisoners be allowed to begin furloughs as soon as they return to their families before returning to active duty.

A spokesman for the committee here said today that the group "wants the prisoners to be able to speak freely and honestly about how the North Vietnamese have treated them."

"Any interference or attempts to silence these three men by the U. S. Government or the Pentagon," he said, "will severely jeopardize the release of any other prisoners of war."

A United States Embassy official, asked in an interview today about the demands, said, "We're not going to create a situation where Hanoi says never again will we let any prisoners out."

He said: "If we want to do is give these fellows a chance—with no coercion—to decide whether or not they want to go home with us. Our basic approach is that these guys have been released and they want to go home as soon as possible, and we want to help them."

"We are aware of the domestic political considerations and the implications all of this has for the other prisoners."

Clark Is Pessimistic

BOSTON, Sept. 25 (AP)—Ramsey Clark, former Democratic Attorney General who

visited North Vietnam last month, said today that he was not optimistic that Hanoi would release any more war prisoners. He said that the attitude of Government officials would be to blame if it did not.

Mr. Clark said that a Geneva convention provided that war prisoners released while a conflict was in progress must not be returned to military service. The position taken by American officials leaves Hanoi doubtful that this provision was obeyed, he said.

Propaganda Perot Says

KANSAS CITY, Mo., Sept. 25 (UPI)—H. Ross Perot, the Dallas computer millionaire who has tried since 1969 to win the release of American war prisoners, said today that Hanoi had delayed the release of the three fliers "for propaganda purposes."

He said his personal investigation of the release of the three prisoners had led him to believe that the United States was not interfering with it, as North Vietnam has asserted.

* See Clark, SF Examiner
25 Sep 72; Laird,
SF Chronicle 25 Sep 72.