

3 P.O.W.'s Land in Soviet, Reject U.S. Aid



Lieutenants Norris A. Charles, left, and Mark L. Gartley, center, and Maj. Edward K. Elias at Moscow airport. Associated Press

By THEODORE SHABAD

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MOSCOW, Sept. 27—Three American pilots freed by North Vietnam arrived here today and turned down an official American offer of assistance in their journey to the United States.

In their first meeting with a United States Government official since their departure from Hanoi Monday, the fliers declined the offer of overnight

accommodations in the Ambassador's residence and the use of a medical evacuation plane proposed by Adolph Dubs, the United States chargé d'affaires.

Mr. Dubs spoke with the pilots in a private room at Moscow's Sheremetyevo Airport shortly after their arrival from Peking. He said later that they had turned down the offer out of "concern for their fellow servicemen who are suffering the same fate they suffered" in North Vietnamese prison camps.

Instead, they told Mr. Dubs, they prefer to continue their journey to the United States by commercial airlines via Copenhagen after an overnight stop in Moscow. They were put up for the night at the Aeroflot Hotel, run by the Soviet Government airline.

Last week, the Hanoi radio broadcast terms for the three pilots' release, among them that they travel home in civilian aircraft with the American antiwar activists and the members of their families who had flown to North Vietnam to escort them.

In a hectic meeting with about 50 reporters and photographers, one of the three pilots, Lieut. (jg.) Mark Gartley of the

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Navy, who had been a prisoner for four years, said:

"As you can see we are all very tired from a very long trip. Personally I am in good health. I am looking forward a great deal to going home."

Asked why the North Vietnamese had selected him and his two companions for release, the 28-year-old Navy flier replied:

"I have absolutely no idea at all."

'That's a Difficult Question'

In response to a question whether Hanoi might now proceed to free additional pilots shot down during bombing raids over North Vietnam, Lieutenant Gartley said: "That's a difficult question for me to answer."

Released with him were another Navy flier, Lieut. (jg.) Norris A. Charles, 27, who had been a prisoner since December, and Maj. Edward K. Elias, 34, of the Air Force, who was shot down last spring.

They were accompanied by Lieutenant Gartley's mother, Mrs. Minnie Lee Gartley of Dunedin, Fla., and Lieutenant Charles's wife, Olga, of San Diego.

The two women had flown to Hanoi in the company of

four American antiwar activists to escort the American prisoners back home. The four are Mrs. Cora Weiss and David Dellinger, co-chairmen of the Committee of Liaison with Families of Servicemen Detained in Vietnam; Richard Falk of Princeton University, and the Rev. William Sloane Coffin Jr., Yale University chaplain.

Offer Resented

Some of the antiwar activists appeared to resent Mr. Dubs's offer of United States Government assistance on the ground that Hanoi, in releasing the prisoners, had expected them to proceed to the United States without official intervention.

It was for that reason that the pilots and their escorts decided to travel by Peking and Moscow instead of through Vientiane, Laos, where they would have been met by United States officials.

However, Mr. Dubs presented the three fliers with United States passports for the rest of their journey. It could not be immediately established on what papers they had been traveling from Hanoi.

The American diplomat was also observed delivering to Major Elias a letter, later described as a family message. The major's father, Barney Elias of Valdosta, Ga., and wife, Georgia, had not joined the group in the journey to Hanoi.

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