

POWs Home, Go to Military Hospitals

By The Associated Press

With the controversy over their return still brewing, the three American pilots freed by North Vietnam spent their first day back home in seclusion today, undergoing checkups in military hospitals.

The controversy focused particularly during their 12-day journey from Hanoi and on the timing of their return to active military service.

That dispute surfaced as soon as Navy Lts. (j.g.) Mark Gartley and Norris Charles and Air Force Maj. Edward Elias arrived last night at New York's Kennedy International Airport.

The men, wearing freshly tailored service uniforms, were greeted by family, friends and a delegation of ranking military men.

Then after a heated exchange between Gartley's mother, Mrs. Minnie Lee Gartley, and a Defense Department official, the three men left the antiwar activists who had escorted them home and headed for military hospitals in Alabama, California and New York.

Mrs. Gartley, who objected to her son's immediate return to military control, told newsmen today "it was not a very happy situation last night, it put a damper on a happy homecoming. It did not seem like a hero's welcome."

Mrs. Gartley, who with Charles' wife had made the journey from Hanoi, said she wanted the family to spend some time with him first.

She also said she did not

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believe the events at the airport would jeopardize future prisoner releases, even though the North Vietnamese had told the peace group that arranged the releases that interference by the U.S. military might imperil freedom for other POWs.

Mrs. Gartley said her son, who was taken to St. Albans Naval Hospital in New York, would be allowed to leave soon. "He's deeply interested in the men he left behind and seeing their families," she said.

Rejected

The freed men left the antiwar group almost as soon as they stepped off the plane. Elias went to Maxwell Air Force Hospital in Montgomery, Ala., and Charles to a naval hospital in San Diego.

The POWs had rejected offers to turn themselves over to U.S. government officials at various points along their journey, which included stops in Peking, Moscow and Copenhagen.

Elias told newsmen on the flight from Copenhagen to New York that he felt they had fulfilled the conditions of the release set by Hanoi by remaining with the accompanying peace group until they reached the United States.

'Recapture'

Elias' stand and the quick departure for military hospitals drew sharp criticism from their antiwar escorts.

Cora Weiss said she and the other three chaperones, David Dellinger, Richard A. Falk and the Rev. William Sloane Coffin Jr., had been deceived by Elias.

She said the major had indicated antiwar sentiments in Hanoi only to change his

attitude once they departed.

"We have just witnessed a recapture scene, one incarceration replacing another," Mrs. Weiss said after the three men and their families drove away from the airport in government cars.

Mrs. Gartley broke down aboard the plane when she failed to convince a Defense Department officer to let her take her son on a prearranged vacation.

"I didn't cry when you told me for years ago that my son had been captured in Vietnam, and I haven't cried

since until tonight," she told the officer, Roger Shields.

"Your son is also an officer in the U.S. Navy," Shields interjected. He also told her that Gartley was being promoted to full lieutenant.

"I just wanted a few days of freedom for him," she said. "Freedom from the military, freedom from the press, freedom from the North Vietnamese — just a few days to be alone with erry (his father) and me."

The question of whether the three released POWs would wear their uniforms

apparently was settled aboard the jetliner en route to New York.

The men were said to have voted on whether to don the uniforms, which the U.S. Embassy had given them in Moscow. They did so about 90 minutes out from New York City.

Dellinger said Defense Department officials led the men to different parts of the plane to put the uniforms on.

"It's quite clear the Pentagon and State Department want men released only if they are in uniform and speaking their lines," said the Rev. Mr. Coffin.



MRS. MINNIE LEE GARTLEY SOBS AT VETO OF FAMILY VISIT BY SON
Lt. Markham L. Gartley, ex-POW, was taken under Navy's wing in New York
—AP Photo



FREED POW AT ALABAMA AIR FORCE BASE
Maj. Edward K. Elias, wife Georgia in Montgomery
—AP Photo