

POWs Land in Uniform--
Hassle With Pentagon Aides

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3 Taken To Military Hospitals

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The three American pilots freed by North Vietnam, accompanied by their escort of anti-war leaders, arrived here from Copenhagen last night in full military uniform.

After a 25-minute shouting match aboard the parked Scandinavian Airlines System plane, the pilots were taken by Defense Department officials to military hospitals.

The dispute broke out shortly after the pilots were greeted at Kennedy airport by a high-ranking delegation of military men, headed by Dr. Roger E. Shields, the chief Pentagon specialist for prisoner affairs.

Navy Lieutenant (jg) Mark L. Gartley, who was accompanied on the four-day trip from Hanoi by his mother, Minnie Lee Gartley, objected to a demand that he travel under military escort to St. Albans naval hospital in Queens for a medical checkup.

The lieutenant had informed military officials during a stop in Moscow that he wanted at least two days to visit his family before rejoining the service. Gartley was initially captured by the North Vietnamese in August, 1968.



AP Wirephoto

NAVY LIEUTENANT NORRIS CHARLES
Members of his family crowded around

ARGUMENT

The argument broke out when Shields informed the lieutenant that his request would not be approved. Mrs. Gartley insisted that the military fulfill what she said was its agreement to permit a family visit.

We just want him to ourselves," she said, "free of the Government, free of the Navy, free of the press, free of the North Vietnamese, and now we're not going to get it."

Shields told Mrs. Gartley, "he's an officer in the United States Navy."

At that point, Mrs. Gartley began sobbing and emotionally told the defense official, "I haven't cried since the day you called me and said my son was shot down."

Gartley, obviously distressed, stepped in to tell the military delegation "my mother hasn't cried in

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years. You may have pushed this a little too far."

Throughout the exchange, Defense officials and airport policemen kept on trying to shove two reporters from the plane.

As the pilot and his mother began moving out of the plane, one Washington official said — obviously referring to the military action — "I told them not to do it."

HOSPITAL

Gartley, who is 28, was later reported by the Pentagon to have entered the hospital, at least for an overnight stay.

The other two released pilots went calmly to their destinations. Navy Lieutenant Norris A. Charles, 27, was taken — along with his wife, Olga, who flew back from Hanoi with him — to a naval hospital in San Diego. Major Edward K. Elias, 34, of the Air Force, was flown to a hospital at Maxwell Air Force Base, Montgomery, Ala. Charles was captured last December and the Air Force pilot was shot down five months ago.

All three pilots had willingly agreed before the plane landed to exchange their Hanoi-made suits for new military uniforms that were placed aboard the Scandinavian jetliner in Copenhagen.

"I see the military has even gone wide-tied," Gartley noted, after studying his new uniform, the first he'd worn in more than four years.

"I've been away so long I've forgotten how to put the insignia on," he added.

Elias declared "it feels great," after putting on his Air Force blues. Charles flashed a V sign and said, "it's okay."

ACTIVISTS

Members of the Committee of Liaison — an anti-war group that was asked by the North Vietnamese to escort the pilots home — protested both what they termed the military's urging of the men to wear uniforms and the confrontation with Mrs. Gartley and her son.

At a later airport news

He said the military's interference with the pilots would jeopardize future prisoner releases by North Vietnam. The current release, he said, "was a first step in the peace offensive. It was incumbent upon the United States to respond in a similar manner."

COMMENT

Cora Weiss, another member of the committee, said after the pilots were driven off, "We have just witnessed a recapture scene, one incarceration replacing another."

Another in the anti-war party, the Rev. William Sloan Coffin, said: "It's quite clear the Pentagon and State Department want men released only if they are in uniform and speaking their lines."

Earlier, in a news conference before leaving Copenhagen, the pilots — in obvious good physical health — expressed gratitude at their release from North Vietnam and also vowed their determination to help bring home the rest of the captured men.

"I'm going to be working for the most rapid repatriation of my fellow prisoners of war," Gartley said.

All three said they planned to resume their military careers.

SMILES

The men seemed tired, but otherwise alert and quick of mind. Charles and Gartley smiled often as they answered reporters' questions calmly.

Elias was by far the most noncommittal of the three, and appeared distinctly ill at ease during the questioning.

Asked about his political views, the major said, "as you know I've been sort of shepherded away from the actual issues. I feel there's a lot of reading I have to do."

The most specific criticism of the war came from Charles, a black who was born in Florida.

"While I was, there, I realized I have a lot more learning to do," he said of his experiences in North Vietnam. "I've studied the question — who is responsible for getting these men

Asked if he thought his release might be used as part of a propaganda war, the lieutenant said, "everybody uses everybody, but the man who speaks what he believes and what he feels doesn't care who uses what he says, as long as they do it honestly."

MEETING

The pilots, accompanied by two family members and representatives of the Committee of Liaison — the New York-based anti-war group that organized the trip home — had a brief but friendly meeting with the American Charge d'Affaires in Copenhagen, Thomas J. Dunnigan.

According to a tape recording of the private encounter that was made available to the New York Times, Dunnigan opened the meeting by stating that an Air Force jet was standing by to fly the pilots directly home. He added, "You may participate in this or you may not. That decision is yours."

Gartley was the first to respond. "Personally, I would prefer to continue on to New York under the circumstances we're in," he said. "I'm in good health, and there are other considerations now."

RESPONSE

Elias added that "I've been told by these people (the Committee of Liaison) that future releases were contingent on the way it was handled. I don't want to do anything which might effect someone else."

Dunnigan, speaking in a low-keyed manner, said: "All right. Your wishes will be respected. Let me say again how pleased we are to have you here and hope that the rest of your colleagues will be back soon."

Most of the questions at the news conference dealt with the political implications of the prisoner release. But the pilots generally gave non-responsive answers.

At one point, after a journalist quoted actress Jane Fonda as saying that all of the captured pilots she interviewed during a recent trip to North Vietnam wanted the war to end, Gartley

McGovern, the lieutenant answered, "whichever policy that can bring them home the fastest is the one I can support."

Little was said about the actual conditions of the prisoners themselves in North Vietnam or of the effect of the current bombing campaign on camp life.

Asked how he felt now, Elias, who was shot down last April, responded: "The whole thing is like another reorganization. You go through it and reorganize yourself (after the initial capture) and now I have to go through another one."

Charles, who was captured last December, described his treatment as being filled "with a lot of kindness and lot of generosity." He told of a North Vietnamese official who, shortly after his capture offered him a cigarette and then, "patted me on the knee — as if to say, don't worry, it'll be okay."

Gartley, who was captured in August, 1968, during the first air war over North Vietnam, said he became psychologically "adapted" to prison life. "The first six months are the hardest," he said. "But after that," he said, "instead of living from hour to hour, you live from month to month — just a long stretch of nothing." Gartley said he shared living quarters with as many as 25 other prisoners.

The sharpest criticism of the war came from Mrs. Gartley, who has been active for more than a year in the anti-war movement. In a reference to a speech made by President Nixon during his recent visit to the Soviet Union, in which he expressed sympathy for the "Little Tanyas" who were killed in World War I, she said caustically, "while we were in Vietnam, we saw many little Tanyas of Vietnam."