

3 Freed P.O.W.'s Return; Dispute Flares Over Leave

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The three American pilots freed by North Vietnam and their escort of antiwar leaders landed at Kennedy International Airport last night after a flight from Copenhagen,

Denmark. The pilots put on their uniforms less than an hour before the Scandinavian Airlines System plane landed. They left North Vietnam on Monday.

The men were greeted by a delegation of high-ranking State Department and Pentagon officials, and a dispute broke out immediately. Lieut. (jg.) Mark L. Gartley of the Navy initially refused a military request that he immediately go into St. Albans Naval Hospital in New York for a medical check-up.

Lieutenant Gartley, 28, who had been joined on the flight to the United States by his mother, Mrs. Minnie Lee Gartley, instead demanded that he be permitted to spend a few days at home with his family.

Shouting Match Erupts

A violent shouting match then erupted between Mrs. Gartley and a Defense Department official, who insisted that the lieutenant go to the hospital.

"We just wanted a couple of days when he could be completely free," Mrs. Gartley said amid sobs, "free of the Navy, free of the Government, free of the press and free of the North Vietnamese."

Dr. Roger E. Shields, the chief Pentagon officer for prisoner affairs, told Mrs. Gartley, "He's an officer in the United States Navy."

Lieutenant Gartley apparently agreed to go to the hospital. The other released prisoners, Lieut. (jg.) Norris A. Charles, 27, of the Navy, and Maj. Edward K. Elias, 34, of the Air Force, agreed to fly immediately with their families to hospitals in San Diego and Texas, respectively.

Earlier, in a news conference

Continued on Page 7, Column 1

Continued From Page 1, Col. 2

before leaving Copenhagen this morning, the pilots—in obvious good physical health—expressed gratitude at their release from North Vietnam and also vowed to help bring home the rest of the American prisoners.

"Looks like a Japanese camera factory," Lieutenant Gartley said with a laugh as a battery of photographers crowded around the men shortly before the news conference began.

Major 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."

Lieutenant Charles was more specific. "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 out? It dawned upon me that it was you—the American people. I and some of the men that I left have a great deal of faith and hope in the American people. I call on you to help me in bringing these men home."

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."

A confrontation between the pilots and official United States representatives—expected by some antiwar figures in Copenhagen—did not materialize.

Pilots Meet U.S. Envoy

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

According to a tape recording of the private encounter, made available to The New York Times, Mr. 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."

Lieutenant 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."

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

Mr. Dunnigan, speaking in a low-key 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."

Wednesday, the pilots declined a similar offer by a United States official in Moscow, giving the same reasons.

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

At one point, after a journalist quoted the actress Jane Fonda as saying that all of the captured pilots she had interviewed during a recent trip to North Vietnam wanted the war to end, Lieutenant Gartley sharply noted that "the number of opinions among the prisoners is as many as the prisoners themselves."

Asked specifically about his choice between the policies of President Nixon and Democratic Presidential candidate George 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 at the prisons themselves in North Vietnam or the effect of the current bombing campaign on camp life.

Asked how he felt now, Major Elias, who was shot down last April, responded: "The whole thing's like another reorganization. You go through it and reorganize yourself and now I have to go through another one."

Lieutenant Charles, who was captured last December, described his treatment as being marked by "a lot of kindness and a lot of generosity."

He told of a North Vietnamese official who offered him a cigarette shortly after his capture and then, "patted me on the knee—as if to say, 'don't worry, it'll be okay.'"

Adaptation Is Described

Lieutenant Gartley, who was captured in August, 1968, during the first air war over North Vietnam, said that he had become psychologically "adapted" to prison life. "The first six months are the hardest," he said. "But after that instead of living from hour to hour, you live from month to month—just a long stretch of nothing."

Lieutenant Gartley said that he shared living quarters with as many as 25 other prisoners.

The family members who made the trip to Hanoi were Lieutenant Gartley's mother,