

Low-Key Moves on 3 Fliers Ordered

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WASHINGTON, Sept. 29—The White House has quietly passed the word to the rest of the Nixon Administration—including Melvin R. Laird, the Secretary of Defense—to take a low-key approach to the three prisoners of war who returned to the United States last night.

Informed Administration officials disclosed in interviews today that Mr. Nixon's closest advisers had determined that it would be a mistake politically to cause a confrontation between the three men and Government authorities or to threaten them with reprisals.

Mr. Laird seemed to furnish evidence of the new posture when he said in Wichita, Tex., today that the Defense Department would not file charges against the three men because they failed to return home through military channels. Earlier this week the Secretary was quoted as saying that he could not state "that the case of the three prisoners of war would not be followed."

Mr. Laird's earlier statement

was described by one State Department official today as a "departure" from White House policy, while his latest comments seemed to bring him more closely in line with public pronouncements from the White House.

Ziegler Comments

Ronald L. Ziegler, the White House press secretary, has said that no charges would be brought against the men for anything they might have done while in captivity. He has also said—in response to questions about the prisoners' decision to return home on civilian aircraft—that the President's main interest was "their safe arrival back home."

Officials interviewed here today were obviously pained by incident that occurred on board the plane when the three officers arrived at Kennedy International Airport in New York. Dr. Roger E. ... the chief Pentagon specialist for prisoner affairs insisted that Lieut. (jg.) Mark J. Gartley, be taken

to a military hospital immediately for a medical checkup.

Mrs. Cora Weiss, one of four members of the antiwar group that helped arrange the release of the prisoners, described the incident as a "recapture scene."

"We are trying to be sensitive to the very thing Mrs. Weiss is complaining about," one White House official said today.

'Try to Be Sensitive'

Asked what would happen if any or all of the three men decided in time to speak out against the President's Vietnam policy, the same official said:

"We're going to try to be sensitive about that, too. Presumably, any one of them who wants to speak out will want to design his commission, and this can be done."

White House sources said there had been an initial period of embarrassment over the fact that the three men had been released under the auspices of a group opposed to the President's policies, as well as news business that one or more of them might criticize the Administration.