

Hospital Checkups For Freed POWs

New York

Three American pilots underwent initial hospital observation yesterday following their return from North Vietnamese prisoner of war camps, and a Pentagon official said they freely agreed to their rehabilitation program:

In their first full day back in the United States, the men evinced lingering thoughts of comrades they left behind in captivity.

"He's deeply interested in the men he left behind and in seeing their families," said the mother of one of the three, Navy Lieutenant

Mark Gartley. The others also indicated the plight of an estimated 400 Americans still in North Vietnamese hands was on their minds.

Meanwhile, controversy continued regarding the Defense Department's quick takeover of the pilots upon their arrival Thursday night at Kennedy airport under escort by four American anti-war activists.

CHARGE

"They were separated and whisked away to three different places," said the Rev. William Sloane Coffin, one of the group to whom Hanoi surrendered the POWs September 17. "The military have inserted themselves between the pilots and the American people."

Dr. Roger E. Shields, special Pentagon assistant for POW affairs and the first Government official to meet with the pilots at Kennedy, said there was some initial reluctance on the part of Gartley. But Shields said Gartley went along willingly after it was explained that the Defense Department's sole concern was the "medical well being" of the men.

How long the three will be hospitalized depends on them and their doctors, Shields said in Washington. Once released, they will be given leaves and then "returned to active duty if they desire."

HOSPITAL

Gartley, 28, was taken to St. Albans Naval hospital in New York City. There a spokesman said he had access to an outside telephone and could leave any time he wished.

"He is by no means being

A second POW, Navy Lieutenant j.g. Norris Charles, 27, was flown with his wife, daughter and parents to a Naval hospital at San Diego, and the third, Air Force Major Edward Elias, 34, went to Maxwell Air Force base in Montgomery, Alabama.

Bowman said preliminary tests had been made on Gartley, and that X-rays showed no lung disorders. He had spent four years as a North Vietnamese captive.

The others also were scheduled for initial examinations.

CONTROVERSY

The Defense Department quickly took custody of the pilots when they landed in New York.

Chaplain Coffin said "this type of interference by the American military . . . jeopardizes the possibility of further releases."

Gartley's mother, Minnie Lee, wept upon landing, when she learned that her bachelor son would not be allowed to leave with her on a prearranged vacation.

However, Mrs. Gartley differed with Chaplain Coffin, saying she didn't think the intervention of the Defense Department at the end of the trip would jeopardize further POW releases.

Mrs. Gartley said her son "will leave the hospital soon . . . He's very well. We've been with him last night and this morning."

SUITE

Mrs. Elias and her husband spent the night in a suite provided them at the air base, and said she and her husband expected to be joined for the weekend by their 3-year-old son.

In a briefing for newsmen at St. Albans, Commander Bowman said Gartley visited with his parents Thursday night, then retired at 10:30 p.m. for "a full night's sleep."

Bowman said Gartley came to St. Albans "at his own wish."

None of the three pilots