

OCT 1 1972

'Kidnap' Of POWs Is Denied

SF Examiner

United Press International

The Pentagon has refuted charges by Hanoi Radio and anti-war activists that three U.S. prisoners released by North Vietnam had been "kidnaped" by the military on their return to American soil.

The three fliers spent their first day back in the U.S. Friday at separate military hospitals where they underwent physical examinations and visited with members of their families.

A controversy arose Thursday night when Navy Lt. (J.G.) Markham L. Gartley and Norris A. Charles and Air Force Maj. Edward K. Elias arrived at New York with their anti-war escorts after their journey from Hanoi via Peking, Moscow and Copenhagen.

Two of the activists, David Dellinger and Cora Weiss, said the promptness with which the military took the men to the hospitals was "totalitarian."

Mrs. Weiss said the Pentagon had "recaptured" the

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men. Dellinger said the return was a "peace initiative" by North Vietnam that the United States ignored.

Hanoi Radio accused the U.S. government of "coarse and shameless interference" with the release of the men.

The Pentagon denied the allegations.

"They went of their own free will," said Dr. Roger Shields, special assistant to the Defense Secretary for prisoner of war affairs. "They were given no direct order."

Talks With Fliers

Shields talked with the fliers before they emerged from their commercial jetliner. Four members of the Committee of Liaison With U.S. Prisoners of War, who

negotiated the release with North Vietnam, were also aboard the plane.

Shields told newsmen that "the men said the North Vietnamese had imposed no conditions on their release."

He said the men would be asked their preferences for future assignment but would be "removed as far as possible from the hostilities in Southeast Asia."

In Good Shape

Gartley, 28, who spent more than four years in captivity, was in St. Albans Naval Hospital in New York City; Charles, 27, was in Balboa Naval Hospital in San Diego, and Elias, 34, was at Maxwell Air Force Hospital at Montgomery, Ala.

On the basis of preliminary medical tests, all three men were found in good shape and free of disease.

In Montgomery, Elias's wife Georgia disagreed with claims by anti-war activists that the POWs had been "recaptured" by the American military.

"If I have been shackled, I like it, and I think my husband does, too," the attractive, 25 year old Mrs. Elias said.

Gov. George Wallace extended an invitation to the flier to visit him at the executive mansion.

If Elias gets a clean bill of health, a military spokesman said he may be released tomorrow.

Mrs. Elias defended the military for giving her husband a physical examination.

"I am very thankful that they (the military) care enough about him that they want him well, and I want him well," she said. "Just looking at him, I thought that he looked well, but I am not a doctor and they aren't either."

In New York, Dellinger said, "This (release) was clearly explained to us as a peace initiative." The U.S. government should have responded with some peace initiative on its part.

"I'd like to see President

Nixon use the POWs as a propaganda issue," Dellinger added, suggesting that Nixon might announce a halt in the bombing of North Vietnam.

Dellinger said the North Vietnamese made it clear to him and the others who traveled to Hanoi that President Nixon would have to make a choice between the early release of the POWs and supporting South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu.

"We were told by the North Vietnamese in Paris and North Vietnamese Premier Pham Van Dong that

the release was a signal of North Vietnam's desire to release all the prisoners," Dellinger said. "The moment there is a settlement, they told us 'We want the prisoners to go home.'"

Dellinger said he thought the Vietnamese would be reluctant to release more prisoners before the end of the war because of the Pentagon's handling of the three who arrived here Thursday night.

He added that seven fliers and two of the released POWs told him they felt more endangered by American bombing raids than they did by their captors.