

# Ex-P.O.W. Calls Camps Humane

By RALPH BLUMENTHAL

The first of the three newly freed American pilots to hold an American news conference yesterday called his treatment in a North Vietnam prison camp "humane," affirmed that he had not been mistreated and pictured prison conditions as steadily improving.

The pilot, Lieut. Mark L. Gartley of the Navy, also said that he and fellow captives had been forced to take cover on the floor of their compound when American planes bombed nearby.

The men had a grim joke about it, he said; They would tell themselves that they were actually on the floor looking for a lost contact lens.

### A 'Misunderstanding'

Lieutenant Gartley—he learned he had been promoted one rank from lieutenant junior grade when he put on his uniform in the commercial jumbo jet that flew the three pilots and their party here Thursday night—also sought to portray as a "misunderstanding" the clash he and his mother had had with military officials at Kennedy International Airport over his immediate hospital confinement.

His mother, Mrs. Minnie Lee Gartley, insisting on what she said was an agreement to permit the family to have at least two days alone together, broke into tears when her son was ordered away.

But yesterday at his news conference at St. Albans Naval Hospital in Queens, where he has been undergoing tests, Lieutenant Gartley said that military officials afforded myself and my family the seclusion which I so ordered.

The "initial misunderstanding," he said, has since been "cleared up." His mother, in a blue pants suit sat silently at his right during the brief news conference.

### Similar Confrontation

Meanwhile, it was learned that another of the three freed prisoners, Lieut. (j.g.) Norris A. Charles, of the Navy and his family had a similar clash with military officials at Kennedy Airport.

According to the officer's brother, Dr. Herbert Charles, who was there, family members insisted on having at least a few hours alone with the 27-year-old flier. The officers appeared to agree, Dr. Charles recalled, but then whisked the pilot and his family to a plane waiting to fly him to San Diego.

The family "flipped out—we screamed and hollered," Dr. Charles said, until the military authorities condescended and drove them all to the airport's International Inn, where they celebrated their reunion with champagne in a private room for about an hour and a half before Lieutenant Charles continued on to San Diego.

### 'Not Mistreated'

In his news conference, the 28-year-old Lieutenant Gartley, looking pale and bemused but otherwise alert and fit in a crisp tan naval uniform, said, when asked his feelings about the North Vietnamese:

"My treatment during capture has been humane. I have not been mistreated. Prisons anywhere in the world are no bed of roses. This was no exception. But when you take into account the standard of living in the country in which we were confined and examine the conditions, you'd have to say we were treated very well."

While there were instances of good and bad treatment of American prisoners, Lieutenant Gartley said in reply to another question that "generally speaking" good treatment had been on the increase.

"We have been provided with more food, more educational material and more access to sports activities," he said.

There were Soviet novels to read, he said, and documentary and other films.

"On the average," he said, "treatment is improving. It's much better now than it was when I arrived." He was captured in 1968.

In their prison compound—he said he would not give the location or any substantial details of the captivity before he is "debriefed" by the military and has a chance to talk to the families of other prisoners—Lieutenant Gartley said that the pilots could hear American planes overhead, "bomb explosions" and antiaircraft guns. There were no special under-



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Lieut. Mark L. Gartley at his news conference yesterday in St. Albans Naval Hospital, Queens.

ground shelters for the prisoners, he said, adding that during the raids, "We were confined to our buildings, which were protection enough."

He declined, however, to be drawn into discussing his feelings on the war and the bombing because he said it takes "quite a bit of re-examination." Nor would he discuss his plans—he is eligible for discharge after his medical tests are completed.

He appeared ill at ease under some of the probing and, after about 15 minutes with many questions still to be asked—including one he cut off on whether he was satisfied with his treatment by the American Government—he stood up abruptly, announced he had to catch the military medical- evacuation plane to Jacksonville, Fla., and was escorted out of the barracks-like press

center. Outside, on the street, four antiwar demonstrators silently held up signs. He arrived in Jacksonville yesterday afternoon and entered the naval hospital there for further tests.

Lieutenant Charles, meanwhile, remained confined in the naval hospital in San Diego, but relatives said he was expected to be released today. Military officials scheduled a news conference for him today.

The third released flier, Maj. Edward K. Elias, 34, of the Air Force, is the only one of the three who has announced his intention to remain in the service as a career. The only one of the three not hospitalized for medical tests, he has been undergoing out-patient testing at Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, Ala., and spending time in strolls with his family.