

NOV 21 1972

Radio Helped Prepare POW for Return

*Making love in the afternoon
With Cecilia up in my bedroom
I got up to wash my face
When I came back to bed
Someone's taken my place.*

11/2/72 JW

"Cecilia," by Paul Simon

By Donald P. Baker

Washington Post Staff Writer

"When we first heard the song 'Cecilia,' sometime in the fall of 1970, we knew things were really loosening up back home," Markham L. Gartley said the other day.

Gartley, one of only 12 American servicemen to have been returned from prison camps in North Vietnam, said the radio broadcasts helped prepare him for changes in lifestyles — "I didn't suffer cultural shock from miniskirts and long hair."

Gartley, 28, was released Sept. 17, exactly 49 months after his Navy aircraft was shot

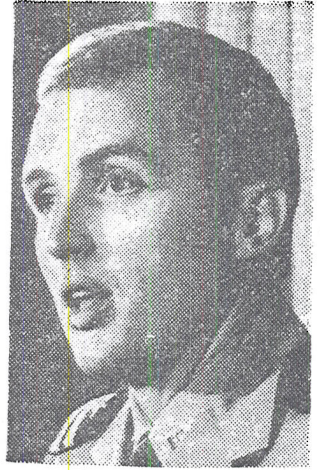
down over North Vietnam in 1968. Released with him were Navy Lt. Norris Charles and Air Force Maj. Edward Elias.

Their reactions to what the Department of Defense calls the three Rs—Repatriation, Rehabilitation and Readjustment—are being used to test the efficacy of Operation Egress Recap, which is Pentagonese for the elaborate plans the military services have drawn to handle the return of POWs from Southeast Asia. As of Nov. 11, there were 547 known POWs.

Gartley stopped at the Pentagon last week, in the midst of a drive from Maine to Florida during which he is talking to families of men he met in POW camps.

(The Navy permitted an interview with Gartley with the stipulation that it be limited to his repatriation.)

See RECAP, A8, Col. 1



LT. MARKHAM GARTLEY
... no cultural shock

RECAP, From A1

He conferred here with Cmdrs. William S. Graves and Vincent L. Knaus, the Navy officers who have put together the kit which will be given to returning POWs.

Gartley was in new civilian clothes, a snappy brown ensemble which included buckled shoes, colored shirt and other trappings of men's fashions.

"I like the new clothes—bell bottoms, double knits, wide ties, colors. But I don't like the new prices," he said. "They scare me to death."

As with other returning POWs, he has not been pressed to decide whether he wants to continue his military career. He is on "generous" convalescent leave.

The one thing Gartley hasn't been able to deal with in his travels is something the Defense Department can't control: "the (low) level of consciousness the so-called average American has concerning the Vietnam issue.

"People have become deadened, desensitized (to the war) and I understand. You can't help falling into the trap of worrying about car repairs and cleaning bills," Gartley said.

"But in prison, it's the only thing."

Aside from that, his biggest adjustment has been "trying to get back up to speed."

"In prison you operate on a very slow schedule, one thing at a time. On the outside, you do two things at once, and it takes time to learn to talk on the phone and comb your hair at the same time," he said.

Gartley is finding joy in "the rediscovery of simple things, such as 'door knobs on the inside of doors, and being able to walk 100 yards and not see barbed wire, or taking a walk alone at night—the feeling of freedom."

The information packet assembled by Cmdrs. Graves and Knaus was "one of the more valuable" aids in catching up with four years of history. "But you can't catch up in two or three days. It's likely to be by osmosis, over two or three months," Gartley told them.

The four years wasn't a total blank, however, as North Vietnamese radio broadcasts were supplemented by news brought in by newer prisoners.

Leafing through a book of headlines, Gartley recalled that word of President Nixon's election in 1968 was picked up about three days late, and more ordinary events were learned with a 7- to 10-day lapse.

The Apollo moon walks "were learned about only through oblique references. It was never officially acknowledged," Gartley said.

The Navy information packet, which is similar to those of the Army, Air Force and Marines, includes films of the space shots, the book of headlines and vari-

ous annual yearbooks provided by Time-Life Books, Encyclopedia Britannica and news agencies including UPI, ABC and NBC.

The headline chronology was prepared with the aid of newsmen who are Naval reservists, including CBS television reporter Peter Hackes.

Catching up with happenings in the world outside POW camps is just one part of the overall repatriation project.

Dr. Roger E. Shields, assistant to the assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs, explained it to the House Armed Services Committee last month in these words:

"The mission of Egress Recap is to be able to go anywhere in the world at any time to receive our men and insure that they get the very best treatment possible—sensitive, individualized processing and care.

"Our ultimate goal is to help the returnee confidently rejoin our society, his family and his chosen career as quickly as possible—to resume a normal, healthy and productive life."

Shields said the nickname Egress Recap "has no special meaning. It is merely a short term used for ease of reference to our repatriation plans."

Full-scale planning began in 1969, upon orders from Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird. Air Force Brig. Gen. Russell Ogan was named director of a task force which includes broad representation of flag and general officers and Defense Department officials.

The steps outlined in Egress Recap began with transporting the released POWs from the repatriation point, by medical evacuation aircraft, to a joint central processing center.

The Defense Department is, for unexplained reasons, keeping that location secret, but sites mentioned are in Okinawa, Guam and the Philippines.

At the processing center, examinations will be made "to assure that the individual's medical condition will not be impaired by the extended and tiring trip" to the United States.

The initial stopover also will be used for debriefing, a procedure which Shields acknowledged often brings the question, "Why the urgency to debrief these men?"

Shields told the House committee the debriefing "is for the sole purpose of securing information on men missing and men not returned."

Gartley, Elias and Charles were released on Sept. 17 into the custody of the Committee for Liaison With Families of Pilots Detained in North Vietnam, a peace group, and relatives in Hanoi. Gartley was met there by his mother. They traveled a circuitous route home, eschewing military and diplomatic escorts of-

fered by the United States. En route to New York from Copenhagen via commercial aircraft, Gartley said, the three men decided to put on their uniforms and meet military representatives at Kennedy Airport. That action brought complaints from some of their escorts that the POWs had been "recaptured" by the Americans upon their return.

Gartley called the affair a "misunderstanding." He said that "contrary to some opinions I've seen in the press, I have not been held incommunicado. I have been able to see whomever I so desired, make as many telephone calls as I want."

He also said he had not been brainwashed by the enemy. "We were exposed to limited and filtered information of an antiwar nature, but this, in my opinion, was not brainwashing."

The Egress Recap trip to the states will be aboard specially equipped C-141 airplanes, in which each returnee will have a bed and a seat. Except when special medical treatment is required, the men will be taken to service hospitals near the homes of their next of kin.

In the Washington area, that means Walter Reed for Army personnel, Bethesda for Navy and Marines, and Andrews for the Air Force.

The returnees' immediate families will already be at the stateside hospitals when the airplanes arrive.

Families who don't live close enough to commute will be housed on the base or at the hospital if they choose.

The actual reunions "should take place privately," coordinator Shields said. "Large crowds and fanfare may hinder the reunion that the men have envisioned."

In a study of problems of Vietnam POWs and their families, to be published in the January issue of Social Psychiatry, four physicians warn: "A hero's welcome upon release may aggravate these problems (of guilt), and a repatriated prisoner of war is not emotionally ready for fanfare for some time after release. The carnival-type atmosphere surrounding the release of POWs from Korea aggravated and precipitated many problems among those repatriates."

In a question and answer section, a Defense Department pamphlet handles one delicate question this way: Q—How much time will I be able to spend with him in the hospital? Will we have time alone? A—Provisions will be in effect for private visits with his next of kin.

An Air Force officer at the Pentagon said "yes," this is the government's way of saying a husband and wife will be able to have sexual relations during his confinement.

Resumption of normal relations, however, may not be so simple as putting a cou-

ple together in a room with a bed.

"Even the most stable and mature wives experience emotional problems . . . which (may) have profound effects on the readjustment of the repatriate and his family," the report of the four military physicians said.

It also notes, "There is of course no acceptable outlet for normal sexual drives. Whatever the wife does, she is burdened with a sense of guilt."

Valerie Kushner, the wife of a POW physician, has cited Dachau studies which indicated some repatriates suffer up to six months impotence. "And we must face the possibility they were forced to homosexuality," she said.

She also warns that wives may someday have to hear their husbands ask about their faithfulness, "even if it is 20 years later."

Again from the physician's study: "The absent father has a deleterious effect upon the children. There are stages of development in both boys and girls that require a father figure to proceed satisfactorily.

"The wife idealizes her husband's return. She believes once he is released, her problems will be resolved and everything will be perfect. In actuality, she is due for a tremendous letdown, since a new series of problems will arise at that time . . ."

Says Mrs. Kushner, mother of two: "Once we're back together again, I know the period of readjustment is going to be worse than the separation. We will be four individuals who have shared no experiences for five years."

For wives of men missing in action, all the problems confronting the prisoners' wives are aggravated. The ambiguity of their situation was acknowledged by an MIA wife who was asked what she thought of Lt. Gartley. The handsome bachelor had addressed a private meeting of wives upon his release. Said the wife:

"Several of us looked at him and decided that after this is all over, maybe we'd like to get to know him."

"Cecilia" lyrics © 1971
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