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CAPT. HAYDEN J. LOCKHART, MAJ. WESLEY D. SCHIERMAN, MAJ. HUGH FLESHER

Lockhart told of meeting son Hayden Jr. for first time at Travis AFB.

—AP Photo

POWs Say Camps Improved in Last Months

Special to The Examiner

TRAVIS AIR BASE—Prisoner of war conditions "loosened up in the last few months we were there," Air Force Major Hubert K. Flesher said yesterday.

Among concessions, said

the former POW, were that prisoners in the North Vietnamese "Hanoi Hilton" camp, where he had been incarcerated six years, were permitted to read articles from Time magazine, sports journals and Playboy.

The officer made reference to Playboy with a sheepish smile.

Flesher and Air Force Majors Hayden J. Lockhart Jr., 34, of Alexandria, La., and Wesley D. Schierman, 37, of Spokane, Wash., held their first meeting with reporters here since their return to the United States last month.

The 40 year old Flesher, a resident of Rancho Cordova near Sacramento, was one of 20 POWs whose release was negotiated during the visit to Hanoi by special presidential envoy Henry Kissinger.

Adhering to the Defense Department's ban against specific descriptions of prisoner treatment, Flesher did say that he and fellow POWs had taken pride in assembling a complicated communications system to "keep each other informed of everything that was going on in the prison camps."

"It was one of the accomplishments we were quite proud of," said Flesher.

"Most of us had memorized a list of all the shoot-downs and were able to pass these names and other news

from the camps despite their efforts to stop us."

Asked his impressions of his homeland, Flesher said, "Things have changed quite a bit in 6½ years. We were pleased to see the changes."

But not all was change, the major said.

"Everything was exactly the way I remembered it," he explained of his personal homecoming. "Even the old car that we had when I was shot down is still in running condition."

He said his wife, Sue, who met him with one of those memorable, much-photographed jumps into the arms, had scattered presents throughout the house for his return.

Asked why his group of 20 POWs at first refused to leave their camp near Hanoi after being told they were freed, Flesher replied:

"The principal reason was that we were told we were coming out early in honor of Dr. Kissinger's visit and we were hesitant to believe that he had negotiated a special release for us."

In 1965

Schierman, shot down in August 1965 on a combat mission, said news of anti-war activity in the United States "hurt my morale at first."

But, Schierman added later he "re-evaluated" his thinking and realized this was one of the rights we were fighting for."

Major Lockhart said his "biggest experience" was getting to know his 7 year old son, Jaime, whom he saw for the first time on arrival here.