

Freed Prisoner's Story

Loneliness in Peking

Philadelphia

An Army civilian employee who spent 19 years in a Communist Chinese prison . . . nearly half that time in solitary— said yesterday he was generally well treated by his captors but that the loneliness had left its mark.

"I was alone so long," said Richard G. Fecteau, 43, of Lynn, Mass., his voice almost inaudible at times as he met with newsmen for the first time since his release Monday in Hong Kong.

"I was in solitary the first three years and the last five or six years" in a prison in Peking, the Chinese capital.

A doctor described him as withdrawn and cautious.

HEALTH

Otherwise, Fecteau appeared in good health.

Clad in blue military pajamas, hands clasped in front of him he stood erect in front of a Christmas tree, replying to questions in short, sometimes incomplete sentences.

Mary Ann Harbert, 25, of Palo Alto, a Red Chinese prisoner for more than three years, was released at the same time as Fecteau. She has agreed to meet with reporters tomorrow.

Physical examinations of both were completed at the nearby Valley Forge Medical Center and Hospital where they were brought Tuesday after a 27-hour flight from Hong Kong.

Major Allen Yanoff, a staff physician, said both appeared somewhat fatigued but "otherwise were essentially normal, although Miss Harbert" who weighs 97 pounds, "appears somewhat thin."

TRACHOMA

He said both experienced eye trouble during their confinement that was diagnosed by Chinese doctors as trachoma, an infectious disease that could lead to chronic problems without treatment.

"I am not bitter at the Chinese," Fecteau said. Asked if he was saying that because he feared retaliation against other American pris-

oners in China, Fecteau replied "No comment."

He said his trial on spy charges "lasted about an hour."

"I was tried two years after my capture and I got a lawyer the day of the trial," he said and then grinned, explaining: "He (the lawyer) said something about that I was educated in American schools and therefore didn't know anything."

CHARGES

He declined to comment on his capture and on the spy charges.

Fecteau said that in the first six months after his capture he was interrogated constantly but had declined to give any information to his interrogators.

He said that, for the most part, he was able to keep abreast of news happenings by reading the English-language Peking Review, which was supplied him weekly.

He said he knew that Americans had walked on the moon and that President Nixon was planning to visit

China.

"I think that visit is important," he said, "it will help ease relations between our countries."

SURPRISE

Fecteau said "it was a surprise to be released. I thought I would have to do another year, but I never gave up hope of getting out."

He indicated his main concern now was to get home, although officials would not say when he and Miss Harbert might leave the hospital.

"I am in good health and I want to see my family," he said. I want to be home for Christmas. I don't want to talk to newsmen because I have been so long in solitary confinement. You can get used to that, but that's one of my problems now. I was alone so long."

CELLMATES

He said three Chinese shared his cell at various times during his imprisonment.

"One was a colonel, one had been an interpreter for the Japanese and one was charged with espionage," he



RICHARD FECTEAU WITH THE HOSPITAL CHRISTMAS TREE ^{AP Wirephoto}
 'I am in good health . . . I want to be home for Christmas'

said.

He said his cellblock was occupied by four other Americans, including John T.

Prison

Downey, 41, of New Britain, Conn., who was aboard a plane with Fecteau when it was shot down over China on a flight from Japan to Korea in 1952, during the Korean War.

Downey, sentenced to life, has had his sentence commuted to five years, effective with the date of the commutation, believed to have been recently.

AMERICANS

Fecteau identified the other Americans as:

Air Force Captain Philip E. Smith, shot down over the Gulf of Tonkin in September 1965.

Navy Lieutenant J. Flynn, presumed shot down over China in August 1970.

Hugh Redmond, serving a life sentence since his arrest in 1951 on espionage charges. Peking said he committed suicide in April 1970.

Asked if he had been able to speak to the other Americans, Fecteau said "No chance, except with Downey once in a while, and then we talked about baseball and football."

He said he saw Downey last a few months ago.

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