

MAR 28 1964

Reds Free Fliers

—Claim Spy Data

CPYRIGHT

CPYRIGHT

THE AIRMEN

By Myron Kandel
Of The Herald Tribune Staff
CPYRIGHT BONN.

Two American fliers, held captive by Soviet forces for 17 days after their RB-66B reconnaissance plane was shot down over East Germany, were released yesterday.

As the two men were handed over to United States authorities, official Soviet and East German statements said investigation of the plane's wreckage—presumably meaning its photographic equipment and film—"established beyond a doubt" that its mission was spying.

The fliers—with whom the U. S. Air Force says it lost radio contact, perhaps because of Communist jamming—were said to have admitted under interrogation that they were in steady contact with U. S. bases and "knew where they were throughout the entire flight." The U. S., the statements said, had expressed regret over the incident and promised to avoid further "transgressions."

GRIM-FACED

In Washington, Secretary of State Dean Rusk repeated the U. S. stand that the RB-66B had strayed over East Germany by mistake. Mr. Rusk said he knew of no deals or conditions surrounding the fliers' release.

The two airmen, Capt. David I. Holland, 35, of Holland, Mich., pilot of the downed plane, and Capt. Melvin J. Kessler, 30, of Philadelphia, navigator, crossed West Germany in a U. S. Army sedan at the Helmstedt frontier checkpoint. They were smartly dressed in a full of Soviet troops at the border crossing, which ordi-

ONLY ONE AMERICAN now remains in an East German prison. He is Frederic Loba, 36, of Altadena, Calif., sentenced to 2½ years last October for helping refugees flee to freedom. The three American fliers are free—and so is a Jackson Heights opera singer who was in a Red jail for 20 months. Her return was another strange chapter in the shadowy story of Iron Curtain hostages. Secretary of State Rusk said yesterday that the straying off course of the fliers' plane was "mysterious." So was the simultaneous release of the forgotten singer.

IN THE CITY AND STATE—

["Spy" mystery. Only 36 hours after release from an East Berlin prison, opera singer Gabrielle Hammerstein was sitting at home in Jackson Heights in fine fettle despite 19 months incarceration on charges of being a spy. Details were vague, but she was arrested January, 1962 (she lived in West Berlin) when she drove into the Eastern (Communist) Zone. She was released as inexplicably as she was arrested. The overall puzzle: Why is Soviet Russia releasing Americans charged as spies?

SINGER, TOO

By Maurice C. Carroll
Of The Herald Tribune Staff

Mysteriously arrested in East Berlin as a "spy" for the West. Tried in secret. A captive 27 months. Freed as mysteriously as she was arrested.

At home yesterday in Jackson Heights, Queens, less than 36 hours after her release, buxom Gabrielle Hammerstein, 39, told about her chilling experience in booming good spirits that seemed somehow as strange as her mysterious reticences.

"I was a lousy prisoner," she said with a deep chuckle. "They told me I was the worst thing they ever encountered.

"I refused to work—to aid the Communist system.

"I refused to eat potatoes—they were pretty rotten—even though our diet was mostly liquid, and there were some days when we had the same soup all three meals."

CHEERFUL

She talked for reporters and TV cameras with great good cheer. An opera soprano, she even roared out a few sample notes from "Die Valkyrie" that shoved the needle on a sound man's gauge out of sight.

But the story she told in those cheerful tones was of strange and sometimes brutal imprisonment and it was laced with areas of "no comment" to protect, she said, prisoners still in Communist hands who were "fighting for our way of life."

Someone ventured the belief that most people arrested as spies have actually been spying. Was she a spy?

One comment, said Miss Hammerstein mysteriously.

Her whole story, and it

TWO AIRMEN RELEASED

CPYRGHT

CPYRGHT

narily is manned by East Germans, and Red loud-speakers blared martial band music.

GRIM-FACED

Both men, grim-faced, stared straight ahead.

From Helmstedt, Capt. Holland and Kessler were driven to nearby Hannover, where they boarded a plane for the U. S. Air Force base at Wiesbaden. Still dressed in their flight suits, they were checked by doctors and fed a hot meal during the flight.

Still silent and sober-faced on arrival at Wiesbaden, the two airmen were whisked away immediately to Wiesbaden Air Force Hospital in military sedans, without being permitted to talk to newsmen. An Air Force spokesman said they would remain at the hospital "for some time" for observation.

The third member of the RB-66's crew, Lt. Harold W. Welch, 24, was freed by the Soviets last Saturday in a similar under-wraps transaction. Lt. Welch, who suffered a broken arm and leg, was the only one of the three crew members injured when they bailed out of the plane after it was hit by a Soviet fighter 20 miles inside East Germany on March 10.

WHERE?

Lt. Welch was picked up by a U. S. Air Force ambulance at the Soviet Army hospital at Megdeburg, East Germany, where he was being treated. It was not disclosed yesterday where his two companions were held or where they were picked up by the U. S. Army sedan that brought them out of East Germany.

U. S. military and diplomatic authorities in West Germany imposed a complete news blackout on yesterday's release, even refusing to confirm that it had taken place. "I am not authorized to tell you anything," one official spokesman said. The clamp-down, it was learned, was ordered from Washington.

The freeing of the two fliers followed stiff diplomatic pressure from Washington. A spokesman said U. S. relations with the Soviet Union would be jeopardized unless the two

were released. The U. S. and the Soviets currently are negotiating consular and cultural exchange agreements during a period of relative "thaw" in their relations.

The Russians earlier had hinted that the fliers might be tried for espionage, in an echo of the 1960 spy trial of U-2 pilot Francis Gary Powers. Thursday, however, U. S. officials confirmed that the two remaining airmen would be released under arrangements made through Anatoly Dobrynin, Soviet Ambassador to Washington.

PLEASED

In Johnson City, Tex., President Johnson expressed gratification at the fliers' release and said he was pleased "that this matter has been sensibly settled."

In announcing the airmen's release, both the Soviet news agency Tass and the East German news agency ADN re-emphasized the Communist claim that the fliers had committed espionage. The Communist statements said investigation had shown that the RB-66B entered East German air space "deliberately, for purposes of military reconnaissance."

The plane carried "equipment for aerial photography and special equipment for military reconnaissance by radiotechnical means, with the reading of the instruments recorded on film," the statements said.

Despite this "espionage," the Reds said, the fliers were being released because "the U. S. government has expressed its regret over the transgression and has given assurance that American authorities have received strong orders not to commit such transgressions in the future."

There has been some speculation in Western quarters that the RB-66B might, indeed, have inadvertently photographed Soviet Army maneuvers in East Germany after straying off-course in its flight from a French base.

Mr. Rusk, while insisting in his statement that the U. S. had offered no concessions for the fliers' return, added that "we have taken additional measures to prevent this kind of straying in the future." "Mysterious" now the RB-66B had wandered away from its flight plan.

OPERA SINGER OUT, TOO

CPYRGHT

CPYRGHT

will be a "real shocker" she said, will come out next week, she promised, after she talks with "the proper authorities." But she declined to say who those authorities might be.

She was arrested in January, 1962, while living in West Berlin and studying voice in East Berlin. "I had just driven into the Eastern sector when I was stopped..."

Her car pulled over?

"I can't say exactly. But they have a definite system. It could happen to anybody." With another booming laugh, she added, "That's easy, getting arrested in the Soviet sector."

Then in August, after a one-day secret trial, she was sentenced to six years in prison as a spy.

Except for the last two weeks before her release, her jail stay was rough. "I was treated quite brutally at times. . . there were brain washing attempts. . . I was asked to do things that, as an American, I couldn't do..."

Someone asked what languages she spoke and she said English, German, French "and now, of course, I can speak Russian. . . enough to get along in prison, anyway."

Meanwhile, her mother, Dr. Gertrude Rosenhain, who fled her native Germany during the Hitler years, was working through lawyers in East Germany and West Germany to get her daughter released.

Suddenly on Thursday, was put in a car and driven to the Heinrich Heine check-



Herald Tribune—UPI

Gabrielle Hammerstein as she was interviewed here yesterday.

point on the Berlin border. "I saw an American car, the first I had seen in more than two years. Then I walked over to it. My mother was inside, along with some one from the American consulate. We drove away together."

Together, mother and daughter flew home to New York Thursday night. Yesterday, with great good humor, she welcomed the press in the combination apartment-office that Dr. Rosenhain maintains in a six-story apartment house at 35-40 82d St., Jackson Heights.

Dr. Rosenhain told of trying to free her daughter "as soon as I learned she had been kidnaped by the Russians." Twice during the time of captivity, she was able to visit her daughter, she said.