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One step across the white line and smiling Shcharansky is free

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WEST BERLIN — A little man in a big fur hat and a wide smile stepped across a white line painted across the middle of the Glienicke Bridge, the only "spy" who wasn't in an East-West prisoner exchange yesterday.

Anatoly Shcharansky, 38, the Ukrainian-born Jewish computer scientist who has spent nine years in Soviet jails and camps because of his defiant agitation on human rights, was carefully separated from others involved in the spy swap.

U.S. officials insisted that he come first because they reject Soviet assertions that he was an American spy. Three others fresh from East European prisons followed in his footsteps, then five jailed in the West on spy charges stepped over the line from West Berlin to communist East Germany.

Six nations — the U.S., the Soviet Union, East and West Germany, Czechoslovakia and Poland were involved in the trade.

Mr. Shcharansky was one of the unintended victims of the disintegration of 1970s superpower detente.

Born to a Ukrainian Communist Party member, he became involved in Jewish affairs during his college years. In 1970, a year after graduation, he applied to emigrate but was refused on the grounds he possessed state secrets because he worked for an oil and gas company. The company immediately fired him.

In 1976 he became a founding member of the unofficial Moscow group that monitored Soviet observance of the human rights clauses of the Helsinki Agreement. But two years later he was convicted by the Russians of spying for the United States and sentenced to 13 years in prison and labor camps.

His first year in prison saw Jewish

emigration reach a peak of 51,000. But Mr. Shcharansky became a symbol to Soviet "refuseniks," those Jews denied permission to leave.

When his family last heard from him in January, the 38-year-old mathematician and computer expert was in a remote detention camp at Perm, 500 miles east of Moscow.

He reportedly suffers from recurring heart, blood circulation and vision problems resulting from his incarceration and repeated hunger strikes.

On the last steps of his journey to the West, Mr. Shcharansky was accorded personal attention by two American ambassadors, both of whom towered over him. The U.S. envoy in East Berlin, Francis Meehan, met him on the GDR side of the stripe, then escorted him to Richard Burt, the ambassador to West Germany.

American officials made a special point of separating the human-rights activist from the accused espionage agents released with him. They argue that Mr. Shcharansky is not and never was a spy for the U.S. although the Soviets insisted that he was and have treated him as such. Fifteen minutes after Mr. Burt arrived at the bridge, he and Mr. Shcharansky drove off in the ambassador's Mercedes. The three others released by the East had to wait another half hour and traveled by bus.

The five prisoners freed by the West were embraced by communist officials on the bridge and driven away toward Potsdam.

A U.S. official said the other prisoners released by the West were:

- Jerzy Kaczmarek, 33, an officer in the Polish secret service, held in West Germany since his arrest in March 1985 in connection with spying in the Bremen area.

- Yevgeni Semliakov, 39, a Soviet computer specialist who worked at his country's trade mission in Cologne, West Ger-

many, was sentenced in September 1985 to three years in prison for trying to obtain high technology that is banned for export to the East bloc.

- Detlef Scharfenort, East German state security agent, serving a four-year prison sentence in West Germany since last June for recruiting students to spy for his country.

- Karl F. Koecher, 52, a native Czech awaiting trial in the United States on charges of passing U.S. Central Intelligence Agency documents to the Czechoslovakian government while he worked for the agency in the 1970s.

- Hana Koecher, 42, wife of Karl Koecher, arrested along with her husband as a material witness. An affidavit filed in court described her as a courier for the Czechoslovakian intelligence service from 1975 to 1983, though she has never been charged with committing a crime.

In addition to Mr. Shcharansky, prisoners released by the East bloc were:

- Wolf George Frohn, 41, an East German sentenced in his country to life imprisonment in 1981 after being convicted of spying for the CIA.

- Jaroslav Jaworski, a Czech sentenced in 1981 to 12 years in prison for helping East Germans flee to the West.

- Dietrich Nistroy, 50, a West German sentenced in East Germany in 1982 to life imprisonment on a conviction of spying for West Germany's intelligence service.

Bonn government officials said the three prisoners released to the West were taken to a U.S. military plane to Munich for questioning by West German intelligence officers.

Mr. Shcharansky and Ambassador Burt flew from Berlin's Tempelhof Airport to Frankfurt, the first leg of the dissident's journey to Israel, where his wife has lived for the past dozen years.

This story is based in part on wire service reports.