

Communists Win Vast Air Fleet

Approximately 1,000 U. S.-built military aircraft abandoned in South Vietnam; only about 110 manage to leave country

By Clarence A. Robinson, Jr.

Washington—Final evacuation of over 7,000 U. S. citizens and Vietnamese refugees from Saigon last week was successfully carried out by Marine and USAF helicopters under Communist surface-to-air missile and ground fire, but about 1,000 military aircraft worth millions of dollars were abandoned intact to North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces.

U. S.-built aircraft were abandoned in South Vietnam, many at the Tan Son Nhut air base near Saigon. Aircraft lost included Northrop F-5E fighters, some of which had been shipped to South Vietnam within the past two months.

Only about 110 aircraft from what had been the world's third largest air force made it out of the country, carrying refugees and airmen. Before the final evacuation began, more than 1,100 aircraft had remained in Vietnam. Aircraft losses include:

- Northrop F-5s—87. That number includes 27 of the newer F-5Es. Twenty-two F-5Es flew to Thailand. The South Vietnamese operated three squadrons with a total strength of 49 F-5Es. One RF-5A reconnaissance version of the fighter was landed at Utapao air base in southern Thailand along with four older models of the fighter.

- Cessna A-37 attack aircraft—95. Eight A-37s flew to Thailand.

- McDonnell Douglas A-1 Skyraiders—26. Eleven were evacuated to Utapao.

- McDonnell Douglas C-47s—38. Among those abandoned were AC-47 gunships with early-model forward looking infrared radar equipment. South Vietnamese pilots landed 13 C-47s crammed with refugees in Thailand.

- Lockheed C-130s—23. Only six

C-130s were flown out, but none of the C-130s lost was a gunship, because none was provided to the South Vietnamese.

- Fairchild AC-119 gunships—37. Additionally, eight C-119 transport aircraft were lost in South Vietnam and three were flown to Thailand.

- De Havilland of Canada C-7 STOL transports—33. Five reached Thailand.

- Cessna O-1 observation aircraft—114.

- Bell UH-1 helicopters—434. Twelve were recovered on board U. S. Navy ships of the Seventh Fleet, and 18 others were purposely crashed into the sea alongside Navy ships or tossed overboard after landing.

- Boeing Vertol CH-47s—32.

According to the Pentagon, approximately 72 other aircraft were left behind in Vietnam including Cessna U-17s, Cessna O-2s, Cessna T-41s and de Havilland of Canada U-6s.

The F-5Es lost as South Vietnam surrendered to the Communists contained no equipment that was considered sensitive by the U. S. The fighters were being operated with a simple, track-only radar with a 10-15-mi. range—an Emerson Electric APQ-153. A radar bombing beacon was in the F-5Es, but that is not considered critical.

The South Vietnamese operated 10 RF-5A reconnaissance aircraft and nine fell into Communist hands. One of the two-place F-5Bs was among the F-5s flown to Thailand.

The F-5s were armed with the earlier models of the Philco-Ford and Raytheon AIM-9 infrared-guided Sidewinder air-to-air-missiles.

A large supply of the weapons was left behind, but, according to U. S. officials, no accurate count is available at this time.

The AC-47s and AC-119s captured were armed with the M-39 20-mm. gatling-type gun system.

The massive airlift from Saigon of Americans and Vietnamese refugees was carried out by 28 Marine Boeing-Vertol CH-46 helicopters and 40 Sikorsky CH-53 Sea Stallions. The Air Force operated with 12 HH-53C helicopters, with

USAF pilots flying for the first time ever from carrier decks.

Flying in darkness and under small arms fire, the helicopters carried out about 640 sorties to evacuate 7,150 persons from small landing zones. One landing zone was in the parking lot beside the U. S. embassy in downtown Saigon. Another was atop the embassy roof, and three small landing zones were located in the compound of the defense attache at Tan Son Nhut air base. The field was under rocket, missile and small arms fire during most of the evacuation.

Two U. S. marines in the compound were killed.

Helicopter Crash

Two Marine helicopter pilots were presumed dead after their CH-46 crashed in the sea while they were flying a night search and rescue mission from the aircraft carrier USS Hancock.

During evacuation from the U. S. embassy, at least three Soviet-made SA-7 Strela heat-seeking missiles were fired at one helicopter, but none struck the aircraft.

Both Communist and South Vietnamese anti-aircraft gun positions opened fire on U. S. helicopters and fixed-wing fighters, but no hits were reported. The F-4s returned the fire and silenced several gun positions.

The helicopter evacuation was ordered by President Ford after Tan Son Nhut airfield came under attack late on Apr. 28, at the time previously scheduled for C-130s to begin the evacuation.

Destroyed on Ground

A U. S. C-130 on the ground at Tan Son Nhut was hit and destroyed by fire but the crew escaped unhurt. As a force of other C-130s circled overhead at the airfield, Army Maj. Gen. Homer Smith, the defense attache, decided that because of the ground attack, the aircraft should not land.

The helicopters for the evacuation operated from the helicopter carrier USS Okinawa, the older carrier USS Hancock, and the USS Midway, which carried USAF helicopters. A Marine force of

F-14s See Action

Washington—Navy/Grumman F-14 superiority fighters operating from the nuclear carrier USS Enterprise saw their first action in support of the helicopter evacuation of Saigon.

The F-14s flew about 20 sorties during the operation. While flying combat air patrol for the evacuation aircraft, about 30 rounds of what Navy officials believe was 37-mm. anti-aircraft ground fire were observed by F-14 pilots.

All of the F-14 fighters returned to the carrier and none suffered damage.

Navy/McDonnell Douglas F-4 fighters also provided cover while operating from the decks of the USS Midway and Coral Sea. F-4 pilots returned North Vietnamese ground fire during the operation, but none of the aircraft suffered damage.

USAF F-4s also supported the evacuation, operating from the U. S. air bases in Utapao and Udorn, Thailand.

F-5E Procurements

Washington—Government of South Korea is procuring 72 Northrop F-5E Tiger 2 fighters and has already taken delivery of nine of the aircraft.

Jordan will begin receiving F-5Es this week through the Defense Dept.'s military assistance program and ultimately will get a total of 22 of the fighters.

about 850 men was landed to provide security for the evacuation at the various landing zones.

The operation was confused in the early hours as the first flight of helicopters left the USS Hancock at about 1 a. m. Apr. 29. The flight was to land at Tan Son Nhut about 2 a. m., but the flight received a false command over the radio to turn back and delay the landing until 3 a. m. Source of the command is not yet known.

The lead helicopter was carrying the ground force commander, Marine Brig. Gen. Richard E. Carey. That helicopter continued on to the airfield to land and came under ground fire. The other helicopters circled the airfield for almost an hour before the Pacific commander ordered the evacuation to begin.

Original Plan

The operation initially was scheduled to last only about 3-4 hr. to evacuate about 1,000 Americans still in Saigon. But before the final lift of the last 30 Marines from the security force at the embassy, almost 20 hr. had elapsed.

Defense Dept. officials blame the length of the operation on evacuation of Vietnamese refugees by U. S. Ambassador Graham Martin. Toward the end, Martin received orders from Washington to speed up the exit of Americans and get the Marine security force out of Saigon.

Other reasons account for the delay in the operation. Flying in darkness and at low altitudes over unfamiliar terrain into small landing zones capable of supporting only a single aircraft added to the delay.

About 5,300 Vietnamese were evacuated from the Saigon area and about 1,000 Americans—838 of whom were with the U. S. mission in Saigon, 154 military and 115 contractor employees.

Even before the President decided on the helicopter airlift, Vietnamese began a wild scramble to get to the fleet of U. S. ships lying off the coast opposite Saigon. Cramped with refugees, some of the Vietnamese helicopters flew toward the 40-ship fleet.

One of the Vietnamese leaped from a helicopter just before it crashed into the side of the command ship, the USS Blue Ridge.

The pilot was recovered from the water unhurt, and there was no damage to the vessel.

A number of Vietnamese and Air America helicopters descended on the Blue Ridge. Approximately 14 helicopters are estimated to have landed on the ship's helicopter platform. Some of the aircraft were pushed over the side of the ship in the first hour to make room on the small deck for others trying to land.

The first two helicopters piloted by Vietnamese collided on the deck of the Blue Ridge. The first aircraft to land was about to take off after unloading wives and children of Vietnamese officers and

Paris Show Visit by MRCA Canceled

London—Delays to flight test program of European multi-role combat aircraft (MRCA) resulted in cancellation last week of the swing-wing fighter's scheduled appearance at the Paris air show June 2-8 (AW&ST Apr. 28, p. 45).

The delays were attributed to the Rolls-Royce RB.199 powerplant oil system which led to an inflight shutdown (AW&ST Apr. 21, p. 20) and to other engine problems, and bad weather at flight test centers at Warton, England, and Munich, Germany.

Panavia, the consortium building the MRCA, said the decision to pull out of the show was made by Germany, Italy and Great Britain because "MRCA flying prototypes are fully committed to intensive flight test schedules which have to take precedence to the show in the interest of maintaining the time scale of the overall program."

Panavia officials said appearance of even one prototype—two are now flying and the third will fly at the end of May—would cause a three-week delay in the planned flight test program. Panavia and Turbo-Union, the engine consortium, are now planning the MRCA pre-production stage for a report to governments before a milestone meeting in November, and the flight test program cannot be interrupted for this reason, too.

The RB.199 engine is still experiencing blade problems in the high pressure compressor, which has experienced a series of random faults that were alleviated by some temporary modifications to keep the aircraft flying. Full modifications, which include damping of blade excitation, will be ready this summer.

The low oil pressure problem is due to oil hiding and the fix is to balance the oil system by improvements in scavenging and venting.

Rolls-Royce also has been troubled by industrial disputes and wildcat strikes that have severely hampered the ground test program.

First flight engine has been delivered to British Aircraft Corp. at Warton for installation in P-03, the third prototype, and the second will be delivered shortly.

American officials. The second helicopter flew into the rotor blades of the first, sending fragments of metal across the Blue Ridge's deck, but no one was hurt. The second helicopter carried a load of women and children.

The sailors on the ship opened the

doors on the helicopters to make ditching easier, and after getting the passengers off, the Vietnamese pilots of some helicopters took off and ditched in the sea. Some jumped from the aircraft before impact with the water. Some pilots leaped from their helicopters at heights of 100 ft. or more but, according to the Pentagon, there were no fatalities.

Former vice president and air vice marshal Nguyen Cao Ky, who earlier called those leaving Vietnam cowards, landed by helicopter on the USS Denver, and was later flown to the USS Blue Ridge.

Other Landing Sites

U. S. officials reported that other South Vietnamese pilots landed their aircraft in the Philippines, Taiwan and at other airfields in Thailand. No official count of the aircraft at these other locations has been made. One aircraft carrying four persons crashed while trying to land at Chantaburi, Thailand, killing the passengers. Another crashed in Saigon's Cholen district, taking the lives of about 10 persons.

An estimated 2,000 Vietnamese refugees landed in aircraft flown into Thailand. The Thais are considering turning the aircraft that landed in their country over to the new Communist regime in Saigon. The aircraft landed there have an estimated value of \$300 million.

With the fall of Vietnam and Cambodia to the Communists, the Thais now are being cautious. They have demanded that the pilots and passengers of the aircraft that landed in Thailand leave the country immediately.

Advanced RPVs Study

Three aerospace companies have been selected by the Air Force to conduct competitive one-year studies of an advanced multi-mission remotely piloted vehicle for use in the 1980s. The RPV is to be capable of performing reconnaissance, electronic warfare and strike missions.

Contracts from USAF's drone/remotely piloted vehicle system project office were awarded to Boeing, Rockwell International's Missile Systems Div., and Northrop. Northrop will be aided in its effort by General Research Corp., Santa Barbara, Calif., and Texas Instruments. Values of the contracts were \$499,614 (Northrop), \$646,750 (Boeing) and \$699,684 (Rockwell).

Northrop previously conducted an Air Force study of multi-mission RPVs in competition against Teledyne Ryan, an unsuccessful bidder for the current studies. Ryan is converting into BGM-34C interim multi-mission vehicles eight AQM-34 photo reconnaissance drones for USAF to evaluate the use of a single modular vehicle with replaceable nose sections for electronic warfare, weapon delivery and reconnaissance.