

Pentagon Cloaks Cult Cost Figure

By GRAHAM HOVEY

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Dec. 16 — The Defense Department compiled a tentative estimate of \$3.5 million for the total cost of operations associated with the People's Temple in Guyana but withdrew the document for legal reasons before it was made public, Carter Administration officials said today.

Pentagon spokesmen declined comment, but officials elsewhere said they understood that the Justice Department had asked that the estimate be withheld because of possible legal actions arising from the airlift of more than 900 bodies of People's Temple members to the United States.

The airlift, at public expense, of the bodies of the cult members who were killed or committed suicide at the Jonestown settlement Nov. 18 has provoked criticism and generated a heavy flow of protest mail to members of Congress.

Officials familiar with the estimate said it took in everything included in the operations except the salaries of servicemen and public officials, which would have been paid whether or not they had been involved.

Round Trips by Transports

Among the major cost items was one of more than \$200,000 for nine round trips by Air Force C-141 transports, which flew the bodies from Guyana's capital of Georgetown to the Dover Air Force Base in Delaware.

The estimate also included the cost of 96 hours of flying time for the large helicopters that flew the bodies from Jonestown to Georgetown; per diem expenses, including billeting, for servicemen; supplies and equipment, including jeeps, trucks, radios and other communications gear.

At the Dover base, the estimate took in expenses for refrigeration of the bodies,

including the rental of additional refrigeration facilities off the base, and mortuary service, including the cost of hiring private undertaking experts to reinforce the overtaxed staff.

About \$3.2 million of the total was incurred by the Air Force and \$300,000 by the Army, officials said. Some expenses are continuing. Officials said that Ambassador John R. Burke had asked for the continued temporary use of two UH-1 helicopters to facilitate the travel of embassy officials from Georgetown to the Port Kaituma airstrip near Jonestown.

Earlier Estimate

Three weeks ago, while the body evacuation was getting under way, a State Department official reported a preliminary Pentagon estimate of \$2 million to \$3 million for the operation in Guyana. Other estimates were much higher.

Administration officials familiar with the operation took sharp issue, however, with the assertion of a Columbia University journalism professor in a letter to The New York Times that the "direct costs" of what he called "the heart of the operation" would amount to less than \$250,000.

Christopher G. Trump, assistant dean of the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia, had figured only the costs of the body lift by the C-141 transports and the helicopter operation between Georgetown and Jonestown.

The officials pointed out that it had required 35 flights (25 by C-141 transports and 10 by C-130's) just to get the Defense Department's task force into Guyana to start the airlift. At the peak of operations, 321 Army and Air Force personnel were working in Guyana, exclusive of the flying crews.

REMEMBER THE NEEDIEST!