

## Mercy Shipments to Vietnam Curbed

By Jack Anderson

Maira was a little orphan in Vietnam who died a month before Christmas. She died of the measles, because there was no vaccine.

The vaccine that could have saved her young life never got out of the warehouse, where it is still stored in faraway America. An estimated 25,000 pounds of life-saving material is waiting in U.S. storehouses to be shipped.

Air Force planes, which have plenty of available space on their Vietnam flights, aren't permitted to haul the supplies. The national defense transportation policy restricts the government from competing with commercial airlines, except in specific emergencies.

Many orphans have died in Vietnam since the U.S. government stopped shipping vital food, clothing and medical supplies free.

The supplies have been donated by charitable Americans, but they haven't been able to raise enough additional money to pay the huge shipping charges.

Some airlines have helped. So has the Canadian Air Force, but the Pentagon has rou-

tinely denied almost every request for a Vietnam orphan airlift, citing the official policy.

This was imposed upon the Pentagon by a Congress which is more interested in boosting airline profits than in saving dying orphans. An Air Force official blamed the airline lobby.

No exceptions are made to the shipping ban. Explains a memo, meant for Pentagon eyes only, from Defense Secretary James R. Schlesinger's office: "We are then placed in an untenable position, particularly as far as some of our congressmen are concerned, of appearing to show favoritism when other requests are denied."

Air Force planes fly to Vietnam loaded with military equipment and economic aid for President Thieu. President Ford has requested a whopping amount of money to bolster the Thieu regime next year. But there isn't room in the planes for a few supplies to help the most innocent victims of the Vietnam war.

There are about 700,000 orphans in the ravaged little nation. Between 100,000 and 200,000 are half American, the illegitimate progeny of U.S. servicemen.

Yet Vietnam has only 113 orphanages, which house a total of

no more than 20,000 children. The rest fend for themselves, or stay with relatives.

In the few orphan homes, the vital supplies are needed not to provide for the children's comfort but simply to keep them alive. The ratio between staff volunteers and children is an agonizing 100 to 1. Little more than the necessities of life are provided.

With inflation soaring out of control in Vietnam, these orphanages must rely on U.S. aid for the necessities.

Sen. James Abourezk (D-S.D.) is now searching for ways to loosen the insensitive regulations so food and medicine can be shipped to the orphans. The Air Force itself would like to see something done.

Meanwhile, many Vietnam war orphans may not live to see another Christmas.

**Footnote:** Until Dec. 1, packages for orphans could be sent to Vietnam with the military mail. Now even that has been discontinued.

The Agency for International Development gave one group, Friends of Children, \$5,000 to defray shipping costs. But the money ran out before many

children could be supplied.

**Headlines and Footnotes—**Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas has complained to friends about the handling of his mail while he was working on the Nixon tapes case. At least one letter had been opened before it reached him. The delivery of other letters was unusually slow. Wrote the jurist to a friend: "How many read it (my mail), I do not know" . . . The Post Office was used in the 1972 campaign to develop political information on Sen. George McGovern by counting his mail flow, although the Post Service denies it has ever allowed itself to be used for political purposes . . . The First Lady joined the Harlem Globetrotters while they were waiting to see President Ford the other day. She began bouncing their basketball in the outer office until an agitated aide came out with a message from the President. He wanted to know what was causing that thumping noise . . . Aristotle Onassis, the shipping magnate, is mystified by reports that his wife spends \$30,000 a month on clothes. He has seldom seen her in anything except slacks and shorts, he remarked to a friend . . .

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