

Decorated Army Major Flies to Cuba With Son

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A U.S. Army major who was decorated in Vietnam has flown to Cuba with his young son and apparently asked for asylum there.

The officer was identified as Richard Harwood Pearce, 36. He was divorced and his former wife normally had custody of their child.

Pearce's action was disclosed yesterday in a communique broadcast by Radio Havana. The radio said Pearce had addressed the following appeal to the Cuban government:

"I have decided to leave my country in the company of my son, aged 4½, for reasons of conscience and to ask the Cuban authorities to give me asylum or proceed to another country of my choice."

Confirmed Here

The broadcast said asylum had been granted and that the Swiss Embassy in Havana, which represents U.S. interests in Cuba, had been informed of this.

In Washington, State Department officials confirmed this.

Pearce had been the object of a widespread air and sea search since he took off from Key West, Fla., shortly after noon last Sunday in his private plane, a Cessna 150. His flight plan said he planned to take a one-hour sightseeing spin with his son, Richard Jr.

Officially, Pearce is on leave from his post as aide-de-

camp to Lt. Gen. Thomas W. Dunn, commander of the U.S. 4th Army with headquarters at Ft. Sam Houston in San Antonio, Tex., until midnight Thursday. He picked up his son in Houston, where he lives with his mother, now Mrs. Sandra Mitchell, on May 12.

Legal Status Uncertain

Until his leave expires, Army officials said, Pearce's legal status will not be determined. Presumably, this means that he would not face any military charges if he returned to duty by midnight. However, he might face other action for having violated the State Department's ban against travel to Cuba.

In any case, officials were loath to say that Pearce had defected. "All we know is that he has gone to Havana and apparently asked to stay there," an Army spokesman said.

There was some speculation that Pearce had acted out of personal reasons arising from his divorce rather than political motives. Friends said they had never known the soldier to utter an unpatriotic word.

Pearce had top secret clearance on a "need-to-know" basis. This means he was authorized to see only those top secret documents that were necessary to his work. The Army said all classified documents to which Pearce had access had been checked and that all had been accounted for.