

Fourth Army Commander's Aide Is in Havana

U. S. Major Defects

MIAMI, May 24 (UPI) — Maj. Richard Hardwood Pearce, a decorated veteran of Vietnam with access to U.S. military secrets, has defected to Cuba with his 5-year-old son, Havana Radio reported today.

Maj. Pearce, 36, and his son, Richard, flew to Cuba from Key West.

"I have decided to give up my country for reasons of conscience," Maj. Pearce said, according to the Havana broadcast monitored here.

He was aide to Lt. Gen. Thomas W. Dunn, Commanding Officer of the U.S. Fourth Army at Ft. Sam Houston, Tex.

MAY MOVE ON

There were indications that Maj. Pearce may intend to move on to another communist country.

The officer and his sandy-



MAJ. RICHARD PEARCE

haired son, took off Sunday in their own Cessna 150, purchased six weeks ago. He had told the

flight tower he was going on an hour-long sight-seeing flight.

But he took his only luggage — a duffel bag and a pair of combat boots — and checked out of his motel.

The U.S. State Department said the Swiss Embassy, which handles U.S. affairs in Cuba, confirmed that Maj. Pearce was "seeking asylum in Cuba or a third country."

Maj. Pearce was divorced from his wife, who remarried and had custody of Richard Jr. Maj. Pearce brought the boy to Key West for a vacation and his mother, Mrs. Sandra Mitchell, said "I know nothing about their disappearance. I only know I want my child back."

EMOTIONAL PROBLEM

A friend of Maj. Pearce suggested the defection may have

been spurred by his recent divorce rather than by political motives. "A man certainly wouldn't take a boy five years old to Cuba unless he was trying to get back at someone," the friend said.

RELIGION

"Another thing that always bothered him was religion," his friend said. "His parents were divorced—one was a catholic and the other Protestant and he couldn't figure out what to be.

"I never heard him say one thing detrimental toward his Government or country and that's why I think this thing (the defection) is more domestic than political."

In Atlanta, the Major's father was stunned by the news and found it difficult to believe.