

Civilians to Fly Aid to Cambodia

Washington

The U.S. Air Force will turn over to a civilian contractor next month the airlifting of military supplies to Cambodia, the Pentagon announced yesterday.

Air Force C-130 transport planes operating out of Thailand have been averaging SJ about three flights a day into Cambodia, the Pentagon said.

The airlift has been providing mostly ammunition and rice to Cambodian forces in enclaves where it has been difficult to reach them overland because of Communist military operations.

The Pentagon said the turnover to a civilian contractor, Bird Air of Washington state, is "an effort to further reduce the presence of U.S. military personnel in Cambodia."

Civilian crews will start flying supply missions in early October. The civilian air crews will continue to use U.S. Air Force C-130s and operate from the Uta-pao Air Base in Thailand.

Pentagon spokesman William Beecher said it is expected the planes will be manned by Thai and U.S.

nationals.

The contract will pay Bird Air \$1,760,000 a year to cover the salaries and management costs for about 40 civilians, including pilots, navigators and load masters.

Bird Air has a contract with the U.S. Agency for International Development and operates six helicopters in Laos for "refugee and humanitarian purposes," Beecher said.

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