

A Tricky Way to Use U.S. Airmen in Vietnam

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Saigon

Small groups of American airmen in faded green fatigues, jungle boots and baseball caps are back in South Vietnam, leaving the country only briefly every four days to comply with the letter, if not the spirit, of the Vietnam cease-fire agreement.

The airmen are reorganizing a supply system for crit-

ical spare parts that has lapsed into chaos in the two years since American GIs left. U.S. government ground rules forbid military visitors from being in Vietnam more than four days, but there is a Catch-22 end-run around the rules.

Each fourth day a big C-141 transport jet flies the men to the Philippines, then brings them back in the morning, an overnight hop

of 2000 miles.

"I guess we're not supposed to be here," shrugged a sergeant at Saigon's Tan Son Nhut airfield as his company waited for a flight out. "Well, we are. We're here for 60 days to try to help the VNAF (Vietnamese Air Force) straighten itself out."

American sources in Saigon denied that the airmen's presence violated the Paris

agreement.

"They are logistics specialists who come and go on an administrative basis to help with the aid program set up under the provisions of the Paris agreement," a source said.

"This is no more of a cease-fire violation than the provision which requires us to fulfill our obligations. There have been several teams such as this coming in and there will be more."

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