

52 Viet Orphans Land in Oakland

A group of 52 Vietnamese orphans — instead of the 458 an airline president had hoped to fly to safety in a target jet cargo plane—landed last night at Oakland Airport for new homes in the United States.

The children will remain at the Presidio for up to 48 hours while they are checked by immigration and health authorities. Then they will go to American families who have already arranged to adopt them.

The plane left Saigon with 54 orphans aboard, but two who were said to be suffering from tuberculosis were left behind in Japan during a stopover there.

For a time, it appeared the orphans might not even get out of Vietnam.

As the stretched-out version of the DC-8 carrying them taxied to the end of the runway at the Saigon airport, an operator at the battle-threatened field's control tower radioed an order: "Don't take off. Don't take off. You have no clearance."

Ken Healy, pilot of the Oakland-based World Airways plane, continued his mercy errand anyway and headed toward Tokyo, the

first stop on the 8000-mile journey.

A U.S. Embassy spokesman in Saigon told why American authorities had opposed the plans of Ed Daly, president of World Airways, to carry 458 children in the jet — a plane that generally carries 250 persons in its passenger version.

"He was planning to use a DC-8 cargo plane without seats, little cabin heating, no toilets and no personal safety equipment," the spokesman said.

The plane had been converted hastily by putting mattresses and blankets on the cabin floor, with safety

Back Page Col. 1

From Page 1

webbing, used instead of seat belts.

Daly said he is paying the entire \$70,000 cost of the trans-Pacific flight himself.

"When we put that rigging in, it's 20 to 30 per cent safer than normal seating," said Daly, the pistol-packing airline executive.

"This is obviously because of our defiance last Saturday in flying into Da Nang to remove 350 refugees. This is sheer retaliation by the U.S. Embassy."

As the lightly loaded plane gained altitude, the pilot turned to Peter Arnett of the Associated Press, the only correspondent on the plane, and told him why he defied the tower's order to stay on the ground.

The airport had been ordered closed because of an anticipated Viet Cong attack.

"I just didn't get the message in time," Healy said with a smile. Then, more seriously, he talked about other flights under more perilous conditions. Healy said he had flown under fire to rescue refugees from China in the late 1940s.

Daly, who joined the flight after his angry press conference at the airport, had only a few moments of relaxation aboard the plane when a stewardess announced from the rear of the cabin, "It's diaper service time already for this one."

The 53-year-old airline executive went to lend a hand — the first diapering he had done, he said, in 25 years.

"It's too bad they couldn't all go," said Jan Wollett, a stewardess who was helping care for the 52 young passengers, some only three months of age.

"All those children had a ride out of here. Now I don't know what will happen to them."

Miss Wollett said that she had been on the last flight out of Da Nang and had witnessed women and children being stomped to death by soldiers.

"I only hope that doesn't

More orphans news
on Page 11

happen to the kids left behind," she said.

It was reported that in general the children are in good condition — surprisingly good condition, according to some observers who saw them off from Sangon.

The children found the flight a startling experience, with the babies in the group rolling on their backs in surprise as the plane rose.

Then Arnett reported that most of the children chattered with excitement on the blanketed cabin floor. Each lay on a pillow. Some lay back quietly, their eyes open wide with wonder.

Twenty adult passengers, including two doctors, traveled with them. They helped stewardesses distribute milk, soft drinks, baby food and other meals and change paper diapers.

Behind the plane, the dispute over why 401 children had been left in Saigon continued to rage. Embassy officials said they did not consider themselves technically responsible.

A spokesman for the embassy said a field director of Friends of All Children was told the children would be permitted to leave if he would sign a statement saying he knowingly permitted them to board an unsafe aircraft.

Ahead of the plane there was anguish among families who had hoped the children would be flying to join them.

"The big question is whether the American government is interested in those kids, protested Leo Wells, a 33-year-old Milwaukee father waiting for a chance to adopt a 3-year-old girl.



AP Wirephoto

Wrapped in blankets, the children on the plane gazed about in wonder