

OVER 100 VIETNAM ORPHANS KILLED WITH 25 ADULTS IN SAIGON CRASH; VAST COMMUNIST DRIVE REPORTED



Associated Press

Grief-stricken women taking tiny survivors of the crash of a C-5A plane to a hospital in Saigon yesterday

243 ABOARD PLANE

Huge Air Force Craft Was Flying Children to Refuge in U.S.

By FOX BUTTERFIELD

Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, South Vietnam, April 4—An American Air Force transport taking 243 Vietnamese orphans to refuge in the United States crashed and burned shortly after take-off here today. More than 100 of

the children and at least 25 of the adults accompanying them were believed to have been killed.

Rescue work was still going on in the mud of rice paddies about five miles northeast of Tan Son Nhut air base. Bodies of the children, ranging in age from 8 months to 12 years, were buried in the mud. Debris—a baby bottle, blankets, a Donald Duck comic book—was scattered over the scene.

The rescue effort for the orphans of the war was the first of an airlift series announced by the United States Government Wednesday to take about 2,000 children to safe homes away from the fighting.

More Than 100 Survive

There were 305 people aboard the Galaxy C-5A jet—the 243 orphans, 44 women volunteers acting as escorts, 16 crewmen and two flight nurses. About 100 of the children and 15 to 20 adults were known to have survived.

The four-engine Air Force plane, the world's biggest, apparently suffered a loss of pressure that blew out its rear door after take-off. The pilots crash-landed in a rice field, causing an explosion that sent a fireball 200 feet in the air.

The crash flattened the cargo hold, where about 50 children had been strapped in. "Some of us got through a

chute from the top of the plane, but the children at the bottom of the plane didn't have a chance," one survivor said.

The orphans were to be taken to Travis Air Force Base in California. They were to be adopted by American families in what President Ford described as a "humanitarian effort."

"This is the least we can do, and we will do much, much more," the President said of the airlift yesterday in San Diego.

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The \$2-million it will cost to transport the 2,000 came from a special foreign aid fund for children.

The women escorts aboard the plane were said to be volunteers, mostly secretaries working in the United States embassy or wives of members of the American defense attaché office.

Other American secretaries and wives of officials stood around the hospital tonight weeping and supporting each other as each new ambulance-load of bodies arrived.

Nurse Helped Programs

Rosemary Taylor, who was head of the Friends of All Children orphanage, which provided most of the children on the flight, stood alone and silent against a hospital wall. An Australian nurse, she was well known in Saigon's foreign community for her aggressive support of orphan causes.

Crowds of Vietnamese also stood around watching the arrival of the victims, but most of the people helping with the bodies were Americans.

Victor Urbach, a Pan American World Airways pilot who was flying above and behind the Air Force plane, said the C-5A pilots "had done one heck of a job," to avoid a worse disaster. Mr. Urbach, from San Francisco, said the trouble had occurred over the South China Sea near Vung Tau, 40 miles east of Saigon.

The pilots managed to maintain partial control of the plane, Mr. Urbach related, but according to their radio messages they realized they would not be able

to make it safely back to Tan Son Nhut before hitting the ground. Instead of crashing into a heavily populated area near the airfield, they tried to land in the rice field, and the craft exploded.

Copters Get Survivors

The survivors, many covered with mud, were picked up from the wreck by Air America helicopters and brought to the Seventh Day Adventist hospital next to Tan Son Nhut.

Until the Paris peace agreement of 1973, the Seventh Day Adventist hospital was the U.S. Army Third Field Hospital, a major center for treating wounded American soldiers.

An American doctor, who declined to be identified, said many of the children were "in amazingly good condition."

According to hospital sources, eight members of the Air Force crew perished in the crash. The others escaped practically unscathed. They sat quietly in the hospital this evening, drinking coffee offered them by nurses. When asked about the accident, a sergeant said, "we were ordered to say nothing."

Among the survivors was the pilot, Capt. Dennis Traynor.

Officials said that the orphans in the plane had been seated in three decks and that the greatest death toll was among those strapped to metal benches along the side of the lower deck.

The C-5A, made by the Lockheed Corporation, has long been a controversial and trouble-plagued plane because of enormous overruns in its cost and faults in its design.

Ford Sends Condolences

Special to The New York Times

SAN FRANCISCO, April 4—President Ford, here to make a series of speeches and appearances, issued the following statement today on the crash of a military plane carrying Vietnamese orphans to the United States:

"I am deeply saddened at the loss of so many lives in the crash of the United States C-5A mercy flight today near Saigon.

"I wish to convey my heartfelt condolences to the families and friends of the victims, many of whom were coming to new homes in the United States, and to the volunteers who were caring for them on the flight.

"Our mission of mercy will continue. The survivors will be flown here when they are physically able. Other waiting orphans will make the journey.

"This tragedy must not deter us from offering new hope for the living. The Government and

the people of the United States offer this hope in our reeducation to assisting the Vietnamese orphans as best and as quickly as we can."

6 Survivors Reach Philippines

CLARK AIR BASE, the Philippines, April 4 (UPI)—A United States Air Force C-9 flying ambulance arrived here tonight carrying six of the most seriously injured survivors of the C-5A crash.

The C-9 is the same plane used to transport American prisoners of war out of Vietnam two years ago. Tonight it brought in three nurses, two military men and a civilian.



United Press International

Rescue workers among the smoldering wreckage of the plane that crash-landed in rice fields a few miles northeast of Tan Son Nhut air base soon after taking off with 305 persons, mostly orphaned children.