

WXPost JUN 17 1975

Defect Cited In Crash of Refugee C-5

Associated Press

Sen. William Proxmire (D-Wis.) said yesterday he has documentary evidence that the defect that caused the crash last April of a C-5A transport loaded with Vietnamese orphans is common to most if not all of the Air Force's C-5A fleet.

The Air Force said in a report issued last Thursday that the investigating board had found that "no structural failure" was involved in the accident.

Proxmire told reporters he is not yet prepared to make the evidence public, but will do so soon. He appeared before the Senate Government Operations Committee as a witness on defense procurement.

"I do not mean to be melodramatic, but in candor it must be said that the deaths of the children and others who died in the Saigon crash, and the huge sums that have been wasted on this program, should lie heavy on the heads of the government officials responsible for the scandalous way in which this major weapon system was acquired," Proxmire said.

Last Thursday, the Air Force blamed the April 14 crash of the C-5A transport near Saigon which killed 155 persons, mostly children, on the failure of a cargo door ramp lock. The Air Force ruled out sabotage.

"What the Air Force has not revealed is that this defect, along with others such as the weaknesses in the wings, is structural and exists on most if not all C-5As in the inventory," Proxmire said. "Moreover, the Air Force has known about these deficiencies for several years."

In its report, the Air Force said the entire locking system in the C-5 fleet is being studied for possible changes. Meanwhile, it said, the 77 C-5 planes in its transport fleet are operating under restrictions barring them from flying in areas of turbulence.

Lockheed Aircraft Co., which makes the C-5A, said it was in general agreement with the Air Force report and stressed that the report found no structural defects in the C-5A.

The Air Force said the crash occurred after three locks on the rear ramp unlocked. Air under pressure in the cabin rushed out the opening and blew off the door, which hit the fuselage and cut important control cables.