

18 Months Early

Saigon Weapons Goals Achieved

Washington

Stepped-up U.S. shipments of aircraft and other weaponry to Saigon since October have achieved "Vietnamization" goals almost 18 months ahead of original schedules.

"Vietnamization is virtually completed," Defense Secretary Melvin Laird told Congress January 8. He did not discuss the stepped-up shipments.

By Pentagon accounts, however, roughly 600 aircraft (including 300 helicopters), 70 M-48 tanks and roughly a dozen long-range 175mm cannons have been given to Saigon since Henry Kissinger, the President's chief negotiator, announced that peace was at hand on October 26.

GOAL

One major program goal for mid-1974 was to have 2100 aircraft (1300 fixed-wing planes and 800 helicopters) in the hands of the South Vietnamese air force. These numbers have already been reached, according to Pentagon officials, although a "quality" goal remains.

That goal involves shipment of the advanced model F-5E (jet) interceptor, which is in production but will not be ready to go to Vietnam until fall, according to Air Force sources.

What the Air Force did last fall was to "borrow" nearly 120 earlier model F-5 jets from South Korea, Iran and Taiwan and ship them to South Vietnam, planning to replace them with F-5Es as these later models be-

came available. Such replacements apparently were allowed under the tentative October accords with Hanoi.

EQUIPPED

In essence, an Air Force source said, the South Vietnamese air force, aided by U.S. civilian maintenance technicians, is now equipped — if not fully trained — to handle "low intensity" combat. But its firepower does not match that of the U.S. B-52 bombers and F-4 jets deployed last spring to help stop Hanoi's 15-division Easter offensive.

To offset the enemy air threat in northern South Vietnam — pending the arrival of F-5E jets — the Pentagon shipped a small number of light antiaircraft weapons.

Washington Post Service

Hanoi Claims 3 U.S. Warships Set on Fire

Saigon

Radio Hanoi said yesterday North Vietnamese gunners have set afire three American warships off North Vietnam in the last five days.

The radio, in a broadcast monitored in Saigon, said gunners set fire to two ships off Nghe An province Saturday and a third ship was hit Monday. The location of the third ship was not given.

The U.S. Navy said earlier that one ship, the destroyer O'Callahan, was damaged by shrapnel Saturday but no injuries were reported.

United Press