

Pilot Fined In Death

DA NANG, Vietnam (AP)—A 21-year-old U.S. Army helicopter pilot was fined \$3,000 by a military court Tuesday on charges of negligence in the killing of a Vietnamese farmer by the landing skid of his aircraft.

WO Kenneth P. Cuthbertson, was convicted Monday and the court reconvened Tuesday to fix the sentence. He could have drawn a prison term of 2-10 years.

Cuthbertson was ordered to pay the fine at the rate of \$250 a month for 12 months.

He will face an evaluation board later that will determine his flying status.

According to testimony at his court martial, Cuthbertson was flying from Hue to an Army base a few miles away last April 21 when the skid of his helicopter hit Vo Quang Huyen, 53, in the head.

The court's verdict said Cuthbertson was negligent in flying the aircraft "at such a low height as to constitute a hazard to personnel on the ground and thereby causing the helicopter's skids to strike" the victim.

Thanat Nixes Coalition Plan

BANGKOK (UPI)—Foreign Minister Thanat Khomwan told the new chief U.S. delegate to the Paris peace talks that a coalition government in South Vietnam could lead to a Communist takeover, it was learned Tuesday.

David K.E. Bruce, the new American negotiator at Paris, met for 25 minutes Monday with Thanat before flying on to London after three days of briefings in South Vietnam.

Ellsworth Bunker, U.S. ambassador to South Vietnam, and Leonard Unger, U.S. ambassador to Thailand, also attended the meeting.

Foreign Ministry spokesmen said Thanat told Bruce the Communists do not know anything about free elections and a coalition government to them means one rigged in their favor.

Bruce, 72, stopped over in Bangkok to confer with Thanat at the behest of President Nixon.

The Not-So-Glamorous Life of a 'Stewardess'

By SGT. JOHN H. MUELLER

TAN SON NHUT AB, Vietnam (Special)—It's not a charming stewardess. He doesn't serve coffee, tea or milk or hand out soft, fluffy pillows for comfort.

He doesn't wear a spiffy Pucci outfit either. You're lucky if he doesn't smell of sweat and if his T-shirt is clean.

But the Air Force passenger flight loadmaster in Vietnam does his job daily with little praise or thanks.

It is more than pushing coffee, tea or milk.

"When they ask where the stewardess is, I tell them that I may not wear makeup or have the right shape, but I've got the right idea," Sgt. Alan E. Hawson said.

One of the 834th Air Div.'s many passenger flight loadmasters, Hawson finds his missions easy unless there is an emergency.

"We have had technical school train-

ing in how to evacuate passengers in case of a crash. In an actual emergency I would brief the people on what to do and jettison the cargo and any loose articles we might have. Luckily we haven't had to do anything like that yet," he said, glancing down at the St. Christopher medal hanging from his neck.

Often his 12-hour day begins before sunup. He arrives at his C130 Hercules aircraft to check it over and to make sure it is set up for the day's run.

As the passengers arrive at the plane, he makes sure they are seated properly.

"Move toward the front of the plane please," he shouts while standing on a back seat as the passengers—a mixture of U.S. troops, Republic of Vietnam soldiers and Vietnamese civilians—crawl over one another to their seats. About 12,000 passengers a day ride on the 834th's passenger flights.

Later he guides the cargo pallet into place and locks it down to make sure a

passenger is not hit by a flying duffel bag.

Passengers and cargo loaded, he puts on his headset to talk to the pilot about loading operations.

"Got any bags?" a passenger shouts from the front of the C130s. "No," he replies. "But I'll get some."

He dashes into the terminal and returns with a stack of brown Manila envelopes.

"These will have to do," he apologizes as he hands them out.

The engines begin to run up, and as the plane taxis down the runway, he flops into the back seat traditionally reserved for him and wipes the sweat from his face with an olive-drab towel.

"Before the Cambodian thing ended, we used to fly mostly ammo runs," he said. "But now we fly mostly passenger runs. I prefer the ammo runs because it can't talk back," Hawson said.

He paused to wipe more sweat off his

forehead and check to see if his passengers were okay.

"Most everyone gets on, falls asleep and wakes up when we get there. Most of the Vietnamese women get airsick, but few GIs do," he added.

The 22-year-old sergeant is a member of the 50th Tactical Airlift Sq. out of Ching Chuan Kang AB, Taiwan. While in Vietnam he is attached to Det. 1 of the 834th Air Div.

He will spend 18 days in country and then go back to Taiwan for four to six days. Then he will be rotated back here for another 18-day shift.

Occasionally he will be tagged with unusual passenger missions, like a load of Viet Cong detainees.

As for his future?

"Well I don't plan to be an airline stewardess."

Ben Tre: Restored and Revisited

By ROBERT S. ELEGANT
The Los Angeles Times

BEN TRE, Vietnam — For the first time since 1960 I took a taxi to Ben Tre the other day.

During the 50-mile drive from Saigon, two unarmed civilians, George McArthur, also of the Los Angeles Times, and myself, were troubled chiefly by waiting for the antiquated ferry across the muddy Mekong River at My Tho. Yet we traveled notorious Route 4 to the Delta between palm trees beheaded by artillery and helicopter fire, occasionally passing blasted houses not yet rebuilt.

Our destination was Kien Hoa, still the worst province in South Vietnam from the Allied view-

point. Kien Hoa was the seedbed of the Indochina Communist Party in 1930-1931, a stronghold of the Viet Minh in 1945—46, the chief recruiting area of the Viet Cong thereafter, worst hit by the Tet offensive in 1968—and still operates the strongest Communist infrastructure. Proudly independent, the people persistently rose in arms against French colonial rule and formed the fierce Binh Xuyen pirate-sect, which once "bought" the Saigon police force from Emperor Bao Dai.

All in all, one does not trifl with the people of the province I have visited regularly for a decade.

No one in Saigon was sur-

prised at our driving to Kien Hoa. We could have driven, unarmed and unescorted, all the way to Camau, the southernmost tip of the country, 160 miles from Saigon.

Only lack of time prevented our driving 15 miles from Ben Tre to Mo Cay, where the National Liberation Front, the political facade of the Viet Cong, was proclaimed in 1960. Again, outwardly an unremarkable statement. But one could previously only helicopter to Mo Cay town, preferably covered by two gunships.

Readers outside Vietnam will, probably, be no more surprised than Saigon residents by our excursion in a gaudy, vintage

Dodge. But they may remember the fatuous remark attributed to an American officer at Tet: "If became necessary to destroy Ben Tre in order to save it!"

Ben Tre has been almost wholly restored. Few scars inflicted by the Communist attack are visible. I was, incidentally, pleased to reassure a Communist negotiator at Paris that rebuilding was well under way a year ago, since Ben Tre was his home town. Kien Hoa has bred a vastly disproportionate number of Communist leaders, including three peace negotiators.

Wise men, obviously, do not underrate Ben Tre. Yet there have been no Viet Cong incidents—abductions, assassinations, or torture—in the city since December 1969.

I am not writing travel notes. I hardly expect a rush of tourists to Kien Hoa, despite luxuriant palms, green ricefields, and graceful sampans plying sinuous rivers and canals of its trifoliate islands. Kien Hoa is no Venice of the Orient. But I cannot help recalling previous visits.

On my first trip after major American intervention in 1965, the light plane spiraled tightly down from 5,000 feet to the heavily guarded airstrip. Nervous soldiers escorted our jeep the four miles to Ben Tre.

Subsequent helicopter approaches were almost as tight, sidegunners alert. From the soccer-field landing pad, howitzers thundered. Once, we literally flew below tree-top level to evade fire along Route 4. The Huey rose and dropped like an elevator directed by a computer blowing fuses with abandon.

Now the howitzers are gone. Ben Tre once again appears a languid tropical market town. Few soldiers are seen. As late as 1968 it recalled an embattled stockade of the Old West, with every male armed and red-neck-cherished soldiers swarming.

Everything is hardly rosy in Kien Hoa now. The often questioned hamlet evaluation system shows only 44.9 per cent of 556,000 persons living in secure areas and 20.3 per cent in relatively secure areas. The figures are Vietnam's lowest.

The Viet Cong infrastructure, the active civilian collaborators of the guerrillas, are estimated at 4,300. Only 40 low-level members are captured or killed monthly. Their leader is widely respected and wholly incorruptible.

But, axiomatically, as Kien Hoa goes, so goes the worst trend in the nation. The way Kien Hoa is going—however slowly—cannot encourage the Viet Cong.



Setting Up Camp Again

A U.S. Army helicopter brings in a load of supplies to the newly-reopened Kham Duc camp. American Div. troops reopened the camp to support South Vietnamese troops operating near the Laotian border in northern South Vietnam. (AP Radiophoto)