

U.S. 'COPTER UNITS ARRIVE IN SAIGON

Craft, Flown by Americans,
to Aid in Anti-Red Fight

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SAIGON, Vietnam, Dec. 11—

Two United States Army helicopter companies arrived here today. The helicopters, to be flown and serviced by United States troops, are the first direct military support by the United States for South Vietnam's war against Communist guerrilla forces.

The craft will be assigned to the South Vietnamese Army in the field, but they will remain under United States Army control and operation.

At least thirty-three H-21C twin-rotor helicopters, their pilots and ground crews, an estimated total of 400 men, arrived aboard the Military Sea Transportation Service aircraft ferry Core.

South Vietnamese and United States official circles kept the entire operation under strict security wraps despite the fact that the Core, towering high above the surrounding rice paddies and with her unmistakable deck cargo visible for miles, had to travel upstream for about forty-five miles through countryside said to be alive with Communist agents and sympathizers.

Even without an announcement of the vessel's arrival, thousands of persons lined both banks of the narrow, muddy Saigon River to watch the former World War II auxiliary aircraft carrier tie up at a pier in front of the Majestic Hotel. The gray-painted ship, dozens of khaki-colored helicopters and hundreds of grinning, waving service men appeared as dramatic evidence of the United States' intention to bolster its assistance to South Vietnam in the face of the increasing threat from the Communists.

Training Planes Included

In addition to the helicopters the Core was carrying six or eight T-28 single-engine, propeller-driven training planes to be turned over to South Vietnam under the regular United States military assistance program.

Although the United States has made about twenty helicopters available to the Laotian

Government in its fight against pro-Communist guerrillas, those machines are operated by civilian pilots of Air America, a subsidiary of Civil Air Transport of Taiwan.

The aircraft and men aboard the Core were seen here as the first fruits of Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor's recent mission for President Kennedy and also of the lengthy series of conversations just concluded by President Ngo Dinh Diem and the United States Ambassador, Frederick E. Nolting Jr.

The South Vietnamese leader had given helicopters the highest priority in his listing of essential military assistance.

The vessel and her cargo were already in the South China sea only a few hundred miles off the Vietnamese coast last week when the State Department issued a White Paper on the crisis in South Vietnam. The document charged Communist North Vietnam with a wide range of overt and covert acts in violation of the 1954 treaty that ended the French-Indochinese war.

Neither the United States nor South Vietnam was a signatory of the treaty that ended the French empire in Southeast Asia and established the independent states of Laos, Cambodia, North Vietnam and South Vietnam. But the United States made it known at the time that it would not stand idly by if aggression occurred against any of the three non-Communist nations—Laos, Cambodia and South Vietnam.

More Aid Expected

It was widely presumed here today that the arrival of the United States helicopters and crews foreshadowed much more United States aid, but there was no confirmation of this by either South Vietnamese or United States official sources.

Today's shipment alone could make a great difference in South Vietnam's ability to prosecute the war against the Vietnamese Communist forces. It nearly trebles the number of helicopters available to the South Vietnamese Army.

In the anti-guerrilla operations in the mountains, heavy jungles and rice paddies, the ability of the helicopters to cruise, hover and land almost anywhere makes them invaluable.

According to normal United States Army usage, H-21C helicopters can carry a pilot, copilot and twelve combat-ready soldiers or 2,500 pounds of cargo. It may be possible to load fifteen or even eighteen smaller, lightly armed South Vietnamese soldiers into each of the aircraft.

The units that arrived today were the Fifty-seventh Helicopter Company of Fort Lewis, Wash., commanded by Maj. Robert J. Dillard, and the Eighth Helicopter Company of

Fort Bragg, commanded by Maj. Charles N. Hardesty.

Both officers refused to say how many aircraft and men they had. The standard complement for a helicopter company is twenty machines and 200 men.