

MAC AND OPERATION BABYLIFT



**AIR TRANSPORT IN SUPPORT OF
NONCOMBATANT EVACUATION OPERATIONS**

MAC and Operation BABYLIFT:

***Air Transport in Support of
Noncombatant Evacuation Operations***

**Military Airlift Command
Office of History
Monograph**

by

Coy F. Cross II

**Military Airlift Command
Scott Air Force Base, Illinois
November 1989**

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PREFACE

This monograph describes a minor airlift in terms of aircraft involved, following the Vietnam War, but one of tremendous significance and visibility. When the Military Airlift Command (MAC) and commercial airlines evacuated Vietnamese children from the falling capital of South Vietnam, American military forces, except for a small contingent with the Defense Attache Office, had already withdrawn. Operation BABYLIFT, therefore, had no intrinsic strategic value. The operation does provide an example of the failures and successes of noncombatant evacuation. Since noncombatant evacuation operations (NEOs) continue to be an integral part of MAC's role as an instrument of national policy, a study of Operation BABYLIFT can help planners prepare for future evacuations involving children and infants. Operation BABYLIFT, also, confirmed the value of MAC's aircrew training and quality of the command's flight and aeromedical evacuation crewmembers.

Many people contributed to this monograph. I owe thanks especially to other staff members of the Office of MAC History: Dr Roger D. Launius, Dr John W. Leland, Ms Betty R. Kennedy, Dr Jeffery S. Underwood, CMSgt Robert C. Williford, Ms Kathy Wilcoxson, and Ms Mary Anna Kaufer. Mr James F. Smith, 60th Military Airlift Wing Historian, shared not only his archives and his office, but also his knowledge of his unit and its personnel. Lt Col Keith D. Malone and Maj Regina W. Aune added personal insight to the airlift and especially to the events surrounding the C-5 crash. Mr Thomas F. Cygan of the International Airlift Division at MAC Headquarters also helped. Many others provided assistance and encouragement. To each, I say thank you.

Coy F. Cross II
Office of MAC History
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CHRONOLOGY

1973

27 Jan Signing of Paris Peace Accords ending war in Vietnam.

1974

9 Aug Richard M. Nixon resigned. Gerald Ford became president of the United States.

Dec Communist attacks began in Phouc Long Province.

1975

6 Jan Communists captured entire Phouc Long Province.

4 Mar North Vietnamese Army began large offensive in Central Highlands.

8 Mar An estimated 100,000 refugees began moving from northern region of South Vietnam toward Hue.

10 Mar Massive North Vietnamese Army attack on Ban Me Thout.

14 Mar Communists conquered Ban Me Thout.

14 Mar South Vietnamese President Thieu decided to withdraw forces from Central Highlands, thereby abandoning the outlying provinces to the Communists.

16 Mar Chaotic retreat of South Vietnamese Army and civilians from Central Highlands. Military units disintegrated and abandoned their equipment.

24 Mar South Vietnamese Army withdrew from Hue. North Vietnamese Army occupied city.

28 Mar Officials closed Da Nang airport as mobs of civilians and military deserters overran the runway and airport facilities.

29 Mar Despite bans by United States and South Vietnamese government officials, World Airways flew last evacuation flight from Da Nang.

30 Mar Da Nang fell to Communists without resistance.

CHRONOLOGY (cont)

1975

- 2 Apr An unauthorized World Airways flight evacuated 58 orphans from Saigon.
- 3 Apr President Ford's announcement that Air Force C-5As and other aircraft would fly over 2,000 Vietnamese orphans to the United States initiated Operation BABYLIFT.
- 4 Apr A C-5A on the first official BABYLIFT mission crashed shortly after takeoff from Tan Son Nhut airport.
- 21 Apr President Thieu resigned.
- 27 Apr USAF stopped flying C-141s into Vietnam.
- 9 May U. S. State Department officially terminated Operation BABYLIFT.

INTRODUCTION

The evacuation of orphans and refugees was a unique episode in the annals of USAF history. As no precedent for this type of operation had been previously established, numerous and novel problem areas were encountered from the embryonic stage through conclusion. . . The knowledge acquired as "lessons learned" at Clark was passed on in the form of TDY assistance in establishing Operation Newlife at Guam.

Major General Leroy J. Manor, Commander, 13th AF.¹

Noncombatant evacuation operations (NEOs) have long been an important and highly visible part of the Military Airlift Command's (MAC) mission. When the president determines that airlifting civilians from a hostile environment is in the nation's interests, MAC uses its own airplanes or contracts with commercial airlines to provide the necessary aircraft. Historians have discussed MAC's role as an instrument of national policy so often that the term is almost a cliché, yet it is still a crucial aspect of the command's role in the nation's defense. In October 1956, following an aborted revolution in Hungary, MAC airlifted over 11,000 Hungarian refugees from Germany to the United States. During the civil war in the Congo in 1960, MAC evacuated thousands of endangered American and third-country nationals to safety. More recently, the Military Airlift Command has evacuated noncombatants from the Dominican Republic, Grenada, and Iran.

Noncombatant evacuations differ from military operations in the obvious sense that the passengers are civilians instead of military personnel. This can cause several problems. The physical condition of the civilians is often unknown and can require special care. Airlift personnel also have little authority over their passengers. These operations usually receive considerable publicity and therefore provide a ready forum for any criticism of the airlift, MAC, or the Air Force.

Probably the most frustrating aspect of NEOs, from MAC's perspective, is the lack of unity of command. Since such operations involve international relations, control of noncombatant evacuations rests with the State Department. The line of authority goes from there to the Department of Defense, to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, since 1988 to the United States Transportation Command, to MAC, and then to the subordinate commanders who are conducting the airlift. In most NEOs this cumbersome system works well. But, if the airlift commander has a special need or a particular problem, he may not have the authority to resolve it without going through the long chain of command.

¹Rprt, Maj Gen L. J. Manor, Commander 13th Air Force, "End-of-Tour Report, 1 Oct 73-8 Oct 76," p 40.

Probably no operation so typified all the positive and negative aspects of noncombatant evacuations as Operation BABYLIFT. This evacuation of orphans from Vietnam in April 1975 touched the hearts not only of the people directly involved but also those participating vicariously through the screens of their televisions. BABYLIFT provided a rare opportunity for Americans to feel good about some part of the Vietnam War. Some of the good feeling evaporated when the airlift did not flow smoothly. First, the political and diplomatic climate deprived MAC of control of the BABYLIFT. Then, despite MAC's best efforts things beyond the command's control—a plane crash, civilian adoption agencies, non-contract airlines—interrupted the air flow. Yet, even with these hurdles, the operation succeeded. Operation BABYLIFT illustrated the parts of a noncombatant evacuation operation planners can control and the parts over which they have little or no control. There have been few substantive changes in noncombatant evacuation operations since 1975, therefore the lessons of BABYLIFT are still relevant to today's planners.

Chapter I

The Setting

We are seeing a great human tragedy as untold numbers of Vietnamese flee the North Vietnamese onslaught. The United States has been doing--and will continue to do--its utmost to assist these people.

President Gerald R. Ford, 3 April 1975¹

The Paris Peace Accords supposedly ending the fighting in Southeast Asia were barely two years old and the American-backed government in the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam) was collapsing as President Ford made this announcement. When Ford's predecessor, Richard M. Nixon, ran for the presidency in 1968 he campaigned on a promise to end the war in Southeast Asia. The first half of the Nixon solution, "Vietnamization," involved training and equipping the South Vietnamese to defend themselves. In the spring of 1972, the president declared this program a success and began withdrawing most American ground forces from the Republic of Vietnam. When the North Vietnamese launched the 1972 "Easter Offensive" against the South, President Nixon dispatched the United States Air Force (USAF) to help repel the attack by bombing North Vietnamese supply lines and directly supporting South Vietnamese counter-attacks.²

General Cao Van Vien, the last chairman of the South Vietnamese Joint General Staff, also considered "Vietnamization" a success. He described his country's military as "a strong, modernly equipped force with over one million men under arms, second to none among non-Communist Asian countries."³ He also believed that South Vietnam's "best combat divisions rated as equal to their American counterparts."⁴ Unfortunately, according to Vien, by 1975 the South Vietnamese Army had become overly dependent upon American supplies and air power. "Vietnamization" would continue to succeed as long as the

¹Transcript Press Conference No. 12, 3 Apr 75, San Diego, Calif.

²Thomas G. Tobin, Arthur E. Laehr, and John F. Hilgenberg, *Last Flight From Saigon* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1978), p 1.

³General Cao Van Vien, *The Final Collapse* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1985), p 5.

⁴*Ibid.*, p 5.

military supplies continued to flow and "Big Brother" was there to intervene if North Vietnam attacked in force.⁶

The other half of Nixon's solution was a negotiated settlement to the war. While the American military trained and equipped the South Vietnamese, Henry A. Kissinger, special presidential envoy, met in Paris with representatives of North Vietnam in an attempt to achieve a permanent arrangement for peace. In October 1972, while negotiators talked in Paris, the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) instructed the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) to coordinate with the American Embassy and create a Defense Attache Office (DAO) in preparation for final American withdrawal. After the last American ground forces left Vietnam, the DAO would manage resupply, local maintenance, and contractor support for South Vietnam's Armed Forces. Approximately 850 American and 3,000 Vietnamese civilians together with 50 American military personnel were to staff the office with Major General John E. Murray, United States Army, the former Director Logistics MACV, as the Defense Attache. The Attache would have two supervisors: the American Ambassador, who directed all in-country political, economic, and psychological aspects of the mission, and the Commander-in-Chief of the United States Pacific Command (USCINCPAC) in Hawaii.⁶

The peace talks dragged on with little progress, but finally an agreement seemed near in the fall of 1972. Suddenly, however, the Communist representatives withdrew from the talks. President Nixon criticized their lack of sincerity and demonstrated America's willingness to continue the war by ordering the Air Force to resume the bombing of North Vietnam. This bombardment, named LINEBACKER II, may have helped convince the North Vietnamese to return to the peace table. In any event, the talks resumed in early January 1973, and on 28 January President Nixon announced the settlement, proclaiming that the negotiators had achieved "peace with honor" in Vietnam.⁷

In spite of American hopes and the president's claims for the treaty, the Paris Peace Accords represented at best a series of compromises. First, there would be an immediate in-place cease-fire. Second, within sixty days the United States would withdraw the remainder of its military forces (except those assigned to the DAO) and the two sides would exchange prisoners. Third, neither the United States nor North Vietnam could send more troops into South Vietnam, but each could replace equipment and supplies expended after the cease-fire. Fourth, a Joint Military Commission and an International Commission on Control and Supervision were to investigate and verify

⁶*Ibid.*, p 5.

⁶Tobin, *Last Flight From Saigon*, pp 3-4.

⁷*Ibid.*, p 3.

violations of the military stipulations in the pact. The accords also directed the Saigon government to meet with the other political parties in the country, both Communist and non-Communist, to create a National Council on National Reconciliation and Concord. The council would ensure free elections in South Vietnam. Finally, the United States pledged financial aid for postwar reconstruction throughout Indochina.⁹

The Paris Peace Accords specified that the United States would withdraw its military forces from Vietnam but did not require the North Vietnamese to recall its army from the South. The price for South Vietnam's concurrence to this inequity was a promise by President Nixon to react vigorously to any serious North Vietnamese breach of the cease-fire. On 14 November 1972 he wrote Republic of Vietnam President Nguyen Van Thieu explaining that Henry Kissinger could not obtain all the adjustments to the agreement that Thieu had wanted. Nixon concluded the letter: "You have my absolute assurance that if Hanoi fails to abide by the terms of this agreement it is my intention to take swift and severe retaliatory action."¹⁰ Years later former President Nixon admitted that the "Agreement on Ending the War and Restoring the Peace in Vietnam" was not perfect, but he considered it "adequate to ensure the survival of South Vietnam—as long as the United States stood ready to enforce its terms."¹⁰

By January 1975, however, conditions had changed in the United States. After Kissinger signed the Paris Peace Accords in January 1973 the "doves" in Congress became more determined than ever to end all American involvement in Southeast Asia. In June 1973 Congress passed and President Nixon reluctantly signed an appropriation bill that included an amendment banning "support of direct or indirect combat activities" in Indochina after 15 August 1973.¹¹ In November 1973, Congress overrode Nixon's veto and passed the War Powers Act¹² that stipulated that the president must consult with Congress

⁹Richard M. Nixon, *No More Vietnams* (New York: Arbor House, 1985), pp 166-67; and Joseph A. Amter, *Vietnam Verdict: A Citizen's History* (New York: Continuum, 1982), p 291, contain summaries of the terms of the agreement.

⁹Nixon, *No More Vietnams*, pp 155-56.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p 166.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p 180.

¹²The War Powers Act limited any military action to 60 days, without a declaration of war or other legislative authorization. The president could get a 30-day extension if he certified in writing that the safety of the military force required the extra time. If Congress did not approve the president's action, he had to withdraw the troops.

when intervening with military forces in an armed conflict.¹³ In August 1974, Richard Nixon resigned the presidency under the threat of impeachment. Furthermore, rising inflation and a growing national debt, along with a desire to distance America from the Vietnam War, motivated Congress to reduce military aid to Vietnam in the fiscal year 1975 budget. Thus, by January 1975, Congress had removed the cornerstones of direct military intervention and substantial military aid for the "Vietnamization" program and Nixon's successor, Gerald Ford, had neither congressional nor public support to "take swift and severe retaliatory action" against North Vietnamese breaches of the peace agreement.

When 1975 began South Vietnamese forces controlled their country, except for a few remote areas in the northern provinces. An air of foreboding prevailed, however, as the North Vietnamese Army steadily increased in strength and six Communist army divisions hovered north of the Demilitarized Zone.¹⁴ Meanwhile, the Communists also attacked Phouc Long, near the Cambodian border, only 75 miles northeast of Saigon. On 6 January, Phouc Long fell.¹⁵ American military officers working for the Defense Attache Office in Saigon noted that there was little doubt in the minds of the South Vietnamese that the B-52s would return to punish these North Vietnamese violations. "It wasn't a question of 'will they return?' it was when."¹⁶ Despite Vietnamese expectations, "Big Brother" would not be there to "bail them out" either with B-52s or with more money.

Throughout February 1975, observers daily reported seeing large truck convoys moving south along the Vietnamese/Cambodian border. On 10 March, North Vietnamese forces struck Ban Me Thout in the Darlac province in the Western Highlands. Ban Me Thout's defenders held out until 18 March before withdrawing. South Vietnamese leaders, believing that soldiers would fight harder to defend their own families, often stationed individuals in their home provinces. Therefore, as the defense of Ban Me Thout collapsed, the "family syndrome" set in.¹⁷ Once reinforcements arrived, "instead of forming up to fight, they broke ranks and ran to find their wives and children. When they found them, the ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] soldiers threw away their uniforms and weapons and started with their families for Nha Trang."¹⁸

¹³Nixon, *No More Vietnams*, p 181.

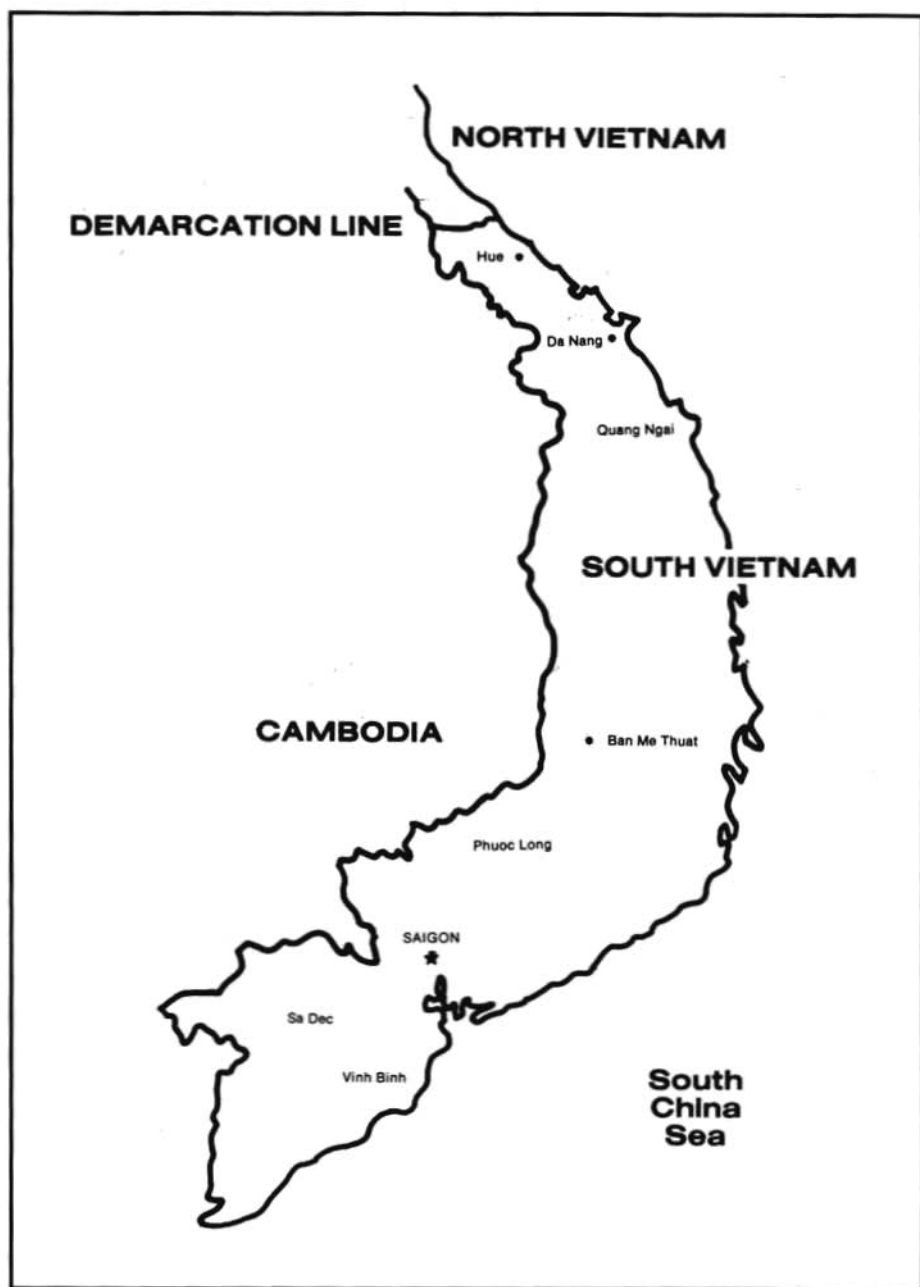
¹⁴Tobin, *Last Flight*, p 14.

¹⁵Vien, *The Final Collapse*, pp 60-66.

¹⁶Tobin, *Last Flight*, p 7.

¹⁷Nixon, *No More Vietnams*, p 197.

¹⁸Phillip B. Davidson, *Vietnam at War: The History 1946-1975* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1988), p 773.



Map of Vietnam.

The withdrawal from Ban Me Thout became a disaster. Believing that a Communist victory would lead to a "bloodbath" wreaked on the civilian populace, South Vietnamese forces refused to evacuate without their families. Civilian and military forces intermingled in a massive, disorganized flight to the sea. American newspapers and television covered the plight of women and children dying in an attempt to reach the safety of the coast.¹⁹ The escape route was a little used, one-lane mountain road. Some of the weak and the young died from lack of food and water along the way. The North Vietnamese Army harassed the retreating column all the way to the coast, and reportedly 30,000 to 40,000 people died before the 15-day ordeal ended. The fleeing army also abandoned "virtually a mountain of needed military supplies."²⁰

Following the loss of Ban Me Thout, Republic of Vietnam President Nguyen Van Thieu made what General Vien called the "Fateful Decision." Vien related that Thieu called some of his closest advisors to a "working breakfast" on 11 March and announced, "Given our present strength and capabilities, we certainly cannot hold and defend all the territory we want."²¹ Thieu decided to withdraw from the Central and Northern Highlands and defend only the most important and populous areas.

This strategy failed, because the South Vietnamese forces did not pull back intact. The withdrawal precipitated a panic and the military units disintegrated as soldiers merged with the thousands of fleeing civilians. Evacuees clogged the roads and overwhelmed the cities in which they sought haven. The hordes of fleeing citizens eliminated any degree of mobility by the military and severely hampered defense of the cities. Evacuees overran first Hue, then Da Nang. Observers estimated that 400,000 to 1.5 million refugees crowded into Da Nang, a city with a resident population of barely 400,000.²² According to a member of the Defense Attache Office in Saigon, "All the necessities of" life were missing or rapidly disappearing: food, sanitation, housing, and medical care.²³

¹⁹*Newsweek*, 31 Mar 75, cover; *Time*, 31 Mar 75, cover; *NY Times*, 18-31 Mar 75.

²⁰Tobin, *Last Flight*, p 16.

²¹Vien, *The Final Collapse*, p 77.

²²*The World Almanac and Book of Facts, 1975* (New York: Newspaper Enterprise Association, Inc, 1975), p 597 lists Da Nang's population as 437,668; William E. Le Gro, *Vietnam from Cease-Fire to Capitulation* (Washington, DC: U. S. Army Center of Military History, 1985), p 159, estimates the refugees at 400,000; Michael Maclear, *The Ten Thousand Day War, Vietnam: 1945-1975* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), p 322, suggests "The city's population had doubled with the refugee flow and now numbered three million."

²³Le Gro, *Vietnam from Cease-Fire to Capitulation*, p 159.

Military stragglers, often heavily armed, pillaged the city. Another observer noted, "They went wild and some of them indulged in inadmissible acts of banditry. Billions of dollars of equipment were destroyed or left for the enemy. Thus fell the second biggest city of Vietnam. She had gone through a stage of insanity before she died of suffocation."²⁴ The relentless North Vietnamese Army captured Da Nang with hardly a battle and thereby cut off the primary escape route for a third of the South Vietnamese Army.²⁵

By the end of March, Thieu's strategy of withdrawing from the sparsely populated north to defend the south had failed. His forces had lost half of the country's territory, including Hue and Da Nang. The move had weakened the defenses of Saigon. Military units had vanished in the rout, so there was no significant increase in troops to defend the city. Refugees fleeing before the advancing North Vietnamese Army crowded into the capital. Retreating forces had left large caches of military supplies and equipment, including aircraft, for the advancing North Vietnamese Army. Some of Thieu's ministers, therefore, urged him to resign. He later recalled, "I was very calm at that period. We had been overrun, but not all. One third of the army had been overrun, but not all. One half of the country had been overrun, but not all."²⁶ Thieu refused to quit. Although he believed "we still had the strength," most observers felt the capital and the last vestiges of the Republic of Vietnam would soon fall.²⁷ Within a month Thieu had resigned, Vietnam had fallen, and North Vietnamese forces occupied Saigon.

²⁴Stephen T. Hosmer, Konrad Kellen, and Brian M. Jenkins, *The Fall of South Vietnam: Statements by Vietnamese Military and Civilian Leaders* (New York: Crane, Russak & Company, Inc., 1980) pp 224-225.

²⁵Maclear, *The Ten Thousand Day War*, p 322.

²⁶*Ibid.*, p 324.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p 324.

Chapter II

The Military Airlift

You see, we'll just bring them from Saigon to Clark--then examine them . . . and put them on airplanes configured for med evac and bring them home in style.

Lieutenant General Daniel James, Jr., Vice Commander MAC¹

On 1 April 1975, with the fall of his country imminent, South Vietnamese Ambassador to the United Nations Nguyen Hu Chi appealed to the United States for help in the resettlement and evacuation of refugees. He stressed the immediate need to move approximately 2,000 orphans from Saigon to the safety of the United States or other friendly countries.² Various humanitarian organizations with orphanages in South Vietnam were already determined to remove their charges to a safer haven.³

President Gerald Ford responded to the appeals of the Vietnamese ambassador and the humanitarian agencies in a press conference on 3 April 1975. He announced, "I have directed that money from a \$2 million special foreign aid children's fund be made available to fly 2,000 South Vietnamese orphans to the United States as soon as possible." Ford continued, "I have also directed American officials in Saigon to act immediately to cut red tape and other bureaucratic obstacles preventing these children from coming to the United States." The president noted that he had "directed that C-5A aircraft and other aircraft especially equipped to care for these orphans during the flight be sent to Saigon. I expect these flights to begin within the next 36 to 48 hours."⁴

When President Ford announced that C-5A aircraft would carry the orphans from Vietnam, the Military Airlift Command already had a long history of non-combatant evacuation operations. The command also had most of the required airlift structure in place for such an undertaking: MAC C-5s and C-141s

¹Transcript, telephone conversation between Lt Gen D. James, Jr., and Maj Gen G. E. Hairston, Jr., 042330Z Apr 75.

²Hist, Commander in Chief, Pacific, (CINCPAC), 1975, Appendix III, p 1.

³The agencies involved: Friends for All Children, Boulder, CO; Holt Adoption Program, Eugene, OR; Travelers Aid International Social Services of America, New York; Catholic Relief Services, New York; Migration and Refugees Services, New York; World Vision International, Monrovia, CA.

⁴Transcript Press Conference No. 12, 3 Apr 75, San Diego, Calif.

were already carrying materiel into Tan Son Nhut to reinforce the beleaguered military forces of the Republic of Vietnam. The tiny passengers could fly from Vietnam to Clark Air Base (AB), Republic of the Philippines, on the return trip. Just two days before, for example, a C-5A from Travis AFB, California, had carried a load of howitzers and ammunition into Saigon, then returned empty to Clark AB.⁶ However, several problems, especially the lack of clear lines of authority, made what soon became known as Operation BABYLIFT anything but a routine assignment.

First, the American ambassador in Vietnam controlled all evacuations from that country. Following the withdrawal of the American military from Vietnam in 1973, the ambassador requested an update of the plan to evacuate the Embassy and DAO staff, other Americans in Vietnam, and Vietnamese nationals who would be endangered by a Communist takeover. The military contingency plan, TALON VISE, later changed to FREQUENT WIND,⁶ gave the ambassador four options: (1) Commercial airlines to evacuate through Tan Son Nhut, (2) Military airlift to evacuate through Tan Son Nhut, (3) Sealift to evacuate through the major ports, or (4) Helicopters to carry people to United States Navy ships stationed offshore. None of these options covered a limited evacuation such as BABYLIFT.⁷

Next, the organization of the airlift into Vietnam after the Paris Peace Accords of 1973 reflected the conflict between strategic and theater airlift in general. The commander of the Seventh Air Force's United States Support Activities Group at Nakhon Phanom (NKP), Thailand, controlled intratheater airlift and the facilities at Tan Son Nhut Airport, fifteen minutes north of Saigon. Although MAC often flew directly into Tan Son Nhut with materiel from the United States, the command, with no airlift coordinating personnel stationed in Vietnam, relied on the DAO's supervisor of airlift.

During February 1975, the Seventh Air Force designated Major Robert S. Delligatti supervisor of airlift in Vietnam. He would oversee the movement of emergency supplies, mainly rice and kerosene, into Cambodia. Four MAC contract carriers, including Ed Daly's World Airways, ferried the supplies from Tan Son Nhut into Phnom Penh until that city fell on 12 April. Delligatti's office was in the Flying Tigers Airline operations facility on the flight line at Tan Son Nhut. Colonel Earl Mickler later came from Seventh Air Force Head-

⁶"Travis Plane Airlifts Arms to Defend Saigon," Vallejo *Times Herald*, 1 Apr 75.

⁶Security officials changed the name after reporters used the name TALON VISE in stories relating to possible evacuation plans.

⁷Tobin, *Last Flight From Saigon*, pp 8-9.

quarters to join Delligatti. Besides Mickler and Delligatti, the office included 11 security guards, one customs official, and eight maintenance specialists.⁸

As President Ford tried to prevent the collapse of the Republic of Vietnam by increasing the flow of military equipment, the supervisor of airlift, by virtue of location and experience, became the on-site manager for this operation, too. Furthermore, when the American ambassador, Graham A. Martin, decided to move "nonessential" employees and endangered Vietnamese from the country, Mickler and Delligatti also became responsible for this evacuation.⁹ The beginning of Operation BABYLIFT added to their hodge-podge of responsibilities.

The DAO had earlier requested a satellite communications unit from Hickam Air Force Base (AFB), Hawaii, when the advancing Communist forces threatened the existing system. By 30 March, the unit was operating, so throughout the airlift the communications worked well. An Air Force officer with the DAO described the unit as fast, reasonably secure, and capable of sending classified messages.¹⁰

On 3 April, even before President Ford's announcement, Secretary of State Kissinger asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger to move the Vietnamese orphans from Saigon to San Francisco, after the Agency for International Development (AID)¹¹ signalled the children were ready to leave.¹² When the president stated later that day, "I have directed that money from a \$2 million special foreign aid children's fund be made available," he meant that the State Department would control funding for Operation BABYLIFT. Since the airlift would be in the Pacific Command's area of responsibility, the Joint Chiefs of Staff notified the Commander-in-Chief, United States Pacific Command (USCINCPAC), Admiral Noel Gayler, on 4 April that "highest authority" had approved the evacuation of Vietnamese orphans. Also, the JCS authorized Air Force Chief of Staff General David C. Jones to airlift the orphans and requested USCINCPAC to arrange for the necessary escorts and support to accomplish the mission.¹³

⁸*Ibid.*, p 43; Alan Dawson, *55 Days: The Fall of South Vietnam* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1977), p 167.

⁹*Ibid.*, p 42.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p 13.

¹¹The division of the United States State Department that coordinates various American foreign-aid programs.

¹²"President Weighs Options on Aid to South Vietnam," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 6 Apr 75, p 2.

¹³Msg, JCS to CINCPAC, "Airlift of Vietnamese Orphans," 041210Z Apr 75.

President Ford's message, by directing the use of the C-5A, implied that MAC would be conducting the orphan evacuation, however, there was no explicit command to do so. Acting on the president's implied order, Major General Maurice F. Casey, Deputy Director for Logistics in the Organization of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (OJCS), called General Paul K. Carlton, MAC Commander, and authorized the first two flights, using a C-5A and a C-141 that were then en route to Vietnam. Casey stated that further flights would depend upon the actions of the State Department and USCINCPAC. Major General Foster L. Smith, from General Jones' office, assured General Carlton, "Moe Casey and I will be straightening out the authority and authorizations,



General Paul K. Carlton, MAC Commander

but don't hold up anything."¹⁴ General Carlton concurred and suggested bringing the children to Clark AB where waiting doctors could examine them before their flight on to the United States. Smith replied, "That's right. He [General Jones] agrees with that basic plan. Get them to Clark, get them into proper shape to travel, get the comfort kit seats and everything and then press on in a good order."¹⁵ Clark AB had served as a staging area during much of the Vietnam War period and would do so again for BABYLIFT. Subsequently, on 5 April, General Jones sent a message authorizing MAC to airlift the orphans from Vietnam.¹⁶

General Carlton, meanwhile, activated the MAC contingency support staff which began to identify medical personnel to accompany the children, locate seats and portable toilets, and determine the number of aircraft needed for the operation.¹⁷ After evaluating their assets, MAC planners decided to base ten C-141s and one C-5A "backup" at Clark AB, Philippines, and shuttle between Clark and Tan Son Nhut AB.¹⁸ The 61st Military Airlift Wing (MAW) had previously established the 604th Military Airlift Support Squadron (MASS) at Clark to support the airlift of military supplies into Vietnam, the unit would service the BABYLIFT aircraft. The only segment missing from MAC's airlift operation was an airlift control element (ALCE) at Tan Son Nhut AB.

When the president decided to evacuate the orphans from Vietnam, Military Airlift Command leaders began to gather additional equipment and personnel at Clark AB. The command collected seats from as far away as Dover AFB, Delaware, and loaded them on C-5As bound for Clark.¹⁹ General Carlton directed the commanders of the Twenty-First and Twenty-Second Air Forces to ensure that all C-141s flying cargo missions into the Pacific theaters carried the maximum number of side seats.²⁰

¹⁴Transcript, telephone conversation between Gen P. K. Carlton and Maj Gen F. L. Smith, Asst DCS Oper/Plans & Ops, HQ USAF, 032210Z Apr 75.

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶Msg, CSAF/LGT to MAC/CC, "Airlift of Vietnamese Orphans," 041856Z Apr 1975.

¹⁷MAC Contingency Support Staff (CSS) Log (S), info used (U).

¹⁸Memo For Record, Lt Gen D. James, Jr., "Telecon with Major General Maurice F. Casey," 4 Apr 75.

¹⁹Zoe Hanisian and Kenneth L. Patchin, *OPERATION BABYLIFT* (Military AirLift Command, History Office, 1975 [unpublished]), pp 10, 12, & 17.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p 21.

In the meantime, Admiral Gayler designated the Commander in Chief, Pacific Air Forces (CINCPACAF), General Louis L. Wilson, Jr., as the "unified agent" for Operation BABYLIFT and requested him to coordinate schedules and requirements with the Defense Attache's Office and with MAC. Admiral Gayler also asked General Wilson to arrange logistical support at all en route stops. The CINCPAC then requested the Defense Attache Office to provide escorts and coordinate with Wilson for airlift requirements and scheduling. Admiral Gayler also asked MAC to coordinate with PACAF for airlift support.²¹

The Pacific Air Forces' (PACAF) Thirteenth Air Force was the host organization at Clark AB. On 5 April 1975, the commander of the Thirteenth, Major General Leroy J. Manor, set up a Coordinating Center to act as a twenty-four hour single point of contact for Operation BABYLIFT.²² However, the 604th MASS apparently was to be responsible for all airlift control at Clark AB. When the first C-5A left Clark AB for Saigon, the 604th loaded it with blankets, pillows, juice, and milk. People from the 604th would later man the MAC airlift coordination element (ALCE) personnel at Tan Son Nhut when General Carlton finally got permission to send the unit into Vietnam.²³ The 9th Aeromedical Evacuation Group provided five nurses and medical technicians for each flight and the Third Security Police Group furnished two armed security guards.²⁴ The 374th Tactical Airlift Wing, one of MAC's newest elements at Clark AB, also participated in Operation BABYLIFT.

Since Clark AB was a PACAF base, Brigadier General Keith L. Christensen, MAC's Assistant Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, called the office of the Chief of Staff, Pacific Command, to discuss preparations. Brigadier General Donald A. Gaylord, Commander, Pacific Exchange System, noted that he had "just got off the phone with the State guy" who told Gaylord that commercial airlines had already complained to the State Department that MAC was conducting an airlift that should be a commercial airline operation. General Christensen explained, "[T]he immediate requirement is to get them [the children] out of Saigon. We'll assemble them at Clark." He continued, "I think we can very usefully employ the civilian airlines from Clark to Hickam or CONUS or wherever they decide, so we'll keep the civilian airliners employed alright, those of them that are available."²⁵ Major General Casey called Head-

²¹Msg, CINCPAC to USDAO/Saigon, *et al.*, "Airlift Vietnamese Orphans," 050325Z Apr 75.

²²Hist, 374th Tactical Airlift Wing, (Apr-Jun 1975), p 37.

²³*Ibid.*, p 15.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p 17; Hist 61st Military Airlift Wing, (Jan-Jul 1975), p 29.

²⁵Transcript, telephone conversation between Brig Gen K. L. Christensen and Brig Gen D. A. Gaylord, 032240Z Apr 75.

quarters MAC to confirm that the State Department had agreed that MAC and Casey's office would run the airlift.²⁶ A few hours later a message from the Joint Chiefs of Staff verified General Casey's statement.²⁷

Medical personnel and other volunteers would meet the children at Clark AB. Doctors would check the young evacuees to determine which were capable of continuing the journey. The Military Airlift Command's Twenty-Second Air Force then could fly the orphans on to the United States aboard C-141s configured for aeromedical evacuation. Twenty-Second Air Force planners considered using the scheduled C-9 aeromedical evacuation flight to carry the first group of children on to Travis AFB, California, where civilian agencies awaited them.²⁸

Following the crash of the C-5A on MAC's initial BABYLIFT flight (discussed in Chapter III), Major General Casey called General Carlton. After expressing his "heartfelt sympathy," Casey noted, "I've just talked to the State people and they want to continue with the airlift as we have programmed it to bring them [the orphans] out of Saigon and bring them on to Travis."²⁹ General Carlton then acknowledged that he planned to use C-141s for the evacuation, unless conditions in Saigon forced him to use C-5s.³⁰ The commander stated the C-5s would continue to haul "outsized" cargo into Vietnam, but C-141s would carry everything else. The returning C-141s would use "side facing" seats for evacuees.³¹ Also, as an added safety precaution, Carlton decided that MAC would land and takeoff at Tan Son Nhut only during daylight hours.³²

General Carlton and his staff wanted a MAC airlift control element (ALCE) at Tan Son Nhut to coordinate the efforts of the various agencies trying to get the children aboard the airplanes. The Paris Peace Accords, however, restricted the number of American military personnel in Vietnam and the Defense Attache expressed concern that the additional people would violate the agreement. The DAO's Supervisor of Airlift oversaw the loading of the first

²⁶Hanisian and Patchin, *OPERATION BABYLIFT*, p 10.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p 18.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p 12.

²⁹Transcript, telephone conversation between Gen P. K. Carlton and Maj Gen M. F. Casey, 041102Z Apr 75.

³⁰Transcript, telephone conversation between Gen P. K. Carlton and Brig Gen D. L. Gray, 041400Z Apr 75.

³¹Hanisian and Patchin, *OPERATION BABYLIFT*, p 20.

³²*Ibid.*, p 20.

airplanes, but General Carlton believed that a MAC ALCE, with enough people to oversee the unloading of cargo and the loading of children, would improve the flow of the airlift.³³ The Twenty-Second Air Force Chief of Staff notified MAC Headquarters on 5 April that he had obtained permission to place an ALCE in Saigon.³⁴ However, Admiral Gayler apparently did not agree that MAC needed its own airlift team at Tan Son Nhut.

A few hours later General Carlton informed General Richard H. Ellis, Vice Chief of Staff, USAF, "We're still having trouble getting ALCEs into the country, but what we are going to do is take them in in the morning and bring them out at night to avoid the count."³⁵ By flying in and out every day, the team would not count against the limited number of personnel listed in the Paris Peace Accords. A call from Pacific Air Forces to Major General Alden G. Glauch, Deputy Chief of Staff, Operations, MAC, acknowledged "lots of anxious moments over at CINCPAC about who's going in and out of Saigon."³⁶ To alleviate the resistance to the ALCE, Headquarters Twenty-Second Air Force reduced the team to a chief, three maintenance men and two passenger specialists.³⁷

Still CINCPAC requested that MAC send a message explaining the rationale behind placing an ALCE team at Tan Son Nhut. The MAC response explained that the team would establish a central point of control and coordination. It could provide accurate data on the arrival and departure of MAC aircraft, ensuring the most efficient use of the passenger spaces.³⁸ The team could also do minor maintenance and help with the unloading of cargo and boarding of passengers, thereby reducing the time the aircraft would have to spend on the ground.³⁹ Admiral Gayler eventually agreed.

Finally, on the afternoon of 7 April, the MAC airlift control element reached Saigon. Captain Frank N. Shapiro, ALCE Chief, had in-country clearance to

³³*Ibid.*, p 26.

³⁴*Ibid.*, p 28.

³⁵Transcript, telephone conversation between Gen P. K. Carlton and Gen R. H. Ellis, 051725Z Apr 75.

³⁶Transcript, telephone conversation between Maj Gen A. G. Glauch and Maj Gen F. L. Poston, 051745Z Apr 75.

³⁷Hanisian and Patchin, *OPERATION BABYLIFT*, p 39.

³⁸The lack of an accurate passenger list on the ill-fated C-5A flight (discussed Chapter III) further illustrated the need for correct passenger and aircrew listing.

³⁹*Ibid.*, p 44.

stay at Tan Son Nhut during the airlift. The rest of the team, from the 604th MASS at Clark AB, flew into Vietnam on the first flight in the morning and left on the last flight at night.⁴⁰

Besides wanting an ALCE to coordinate the loading of the aircraft, General Carlton worked diligently to ensure the safety of MAC airlifters flying into Vietnam. Even before President Ford had announced that MAC aircraft would evacuate orphans from Vietnam, General Carlton expressed concern "about the security of our airplanes heading west of Clark."⁴¹ On 4 April, Carlton commented to Major General Lester T. Kearney, Jr., Commander of the Twenty-First Air Force, whose aircraft would also participate in BABYLIFT, that hijackers had taken control of a merchant ship and a Vietnamese C-130. Carlton reminded Kearney that crews flying into Vietnam should carry weapons to protect themselves and their aircraft.⁴² He later acknowledged his decision to the Air Force Vice Chief of Staff, General Richard H. Ellis, and added, "Maybe I ought to put a few air policemen on aircraft going into Saigon." Ellis agreed, but cautioned "Nothing visible. They ought to look like crewmembers there."⁴³ Major General Glauch, MAC DCS Operations, relayed this decision to the Twenty-Second Air Force Commander, Major General John F. Gonge: "Two security policemen heavily armed [are to be] on each aircraft going in, just between Clark and Saigon."⁴⁴

The following day, 5 April, the Defense Attache Office asked for the rationale behind MAC's decision to guard its aircraft. According to DAO, there was no reason to believe that conditions warranted any additional security above that already available at Tan Son Nhut.⁴⁵ An American Embassy message to MAC reiterated the DAO position.⁴⁶ A Pacific Command staff member then called to question the use of armed guards on MAC flights. General Glauch reassured him that the security policemen would stay inside the aircraft and

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p 49.

⁴¹Transcript, telephone conversation between Gen P. K. Carlton and Maj Gen J. F. Gonge, 011827Z Apr 75.

⁴²Transcript, telephone conversation between Gen P. K. Carlton and Maj Gen L. T. Kearney, Jr., 041735Z Apr 75.

⁴³Transcript, telephone conversation between Gen P. K. Carlton and Gen R. H. Ellis, 041825Z Apr 75.

⁴⁴Transcript, telephone conversation between Maj Gen A. G. Glauch and Maj Gen J. F. Gonge, 041845Z Apr 75.

⁴⁵Hanisian and Patchin, *OPERATION BABYLIFT*, p 34.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, p 35.



Major General John F. Gonge, Twenty-Second Air Force Commander

“their weapons will not be able to be detected by anyone, unless there is a problem.”⁴⁷ A short time later the PACAF Vice Commander in Chief, Lieutenant General Winton W. Marshall, complained to General Glauch that the security policemen boarded the airplane going into Tan Son Nhut before Marshall could talk with them “and Saigon is real upset about it.” He continued, “The problem is that things are so tense over there and there is a chance the people can’t get off the airplane” with any side arms.”⁴⁸

⁴⁷Transcript, telephone conversation between Maj Gen A. G. Glauch and Capt MacAnenny, USN, 051840Z Apr 75.

⁴⁸Transcript, telephone conversation between Lt Gen W. W. Marshall and Maj Gen A. G. Glauch, 052355Z Apr 75.

Major General Glauch restated MAC's policy to guard the aircraft when he informed Lieutenant General Robert E. Huyser, Deputy Chief of Staff for Plans and Operations at Headquarters USAF, about this controversy "[T]he people over there at the Embassy," Glauch said, "are real upset over the fact that they're sending additional people in with more protection. . . . [E]vidently they won't let anyone come in there with arms showing or doing the things we wanted to do to sort of protect that bird."⁴⁹ General Huyser agreed with MAC's position.⁵⁰ Headquarters MAC, therefore, responded to the Pacific Command reservations about placing armed guards aboard aircraft in the USPACOM theater by pointing out that the measure was purely precautionary and would minimize the possibility of sabotage or hijacking. The visibly armed crew and security personnel would always remain inside the aircraft unless trouble broke out.⁵¹ This message apparently resolved the aircraft security disagreement.

Besides the difficulties with placing the ALCE team at Tan Son Nhut AB and security guards aboard the aircraft, the lack of information about the numbers and condition of the potential passengers also plagued MAC during Operation BABYLIFT. The Republic of Vietnam's Social Welfare Ministry' requirement for a mountain of paperwork before anyone, including the orphans, could leave the country created the first bottle-neck. The American Embassy then had to clear the list of evacuees before the Defense Attache Office's Evacuation Processing Center processed the paperwork and prepared the airlift manifest. All this "coordination" slowed the process so much that, even after MAC had placed an airlift control element at Tan Son Nhut on 4 April, the command still never knew if there would be orphans to evacuate. On the first MAC flight, for instance, officials acknowledged while the aircraft was en route from Clark AB to Saigon that neither the State Department nor USCINCPAC had "any firm requirements on these kids yet."⁵²

The Defense Attache Office, however, advised that it expected to process 400 children per day.⁵³ On 4 April, Major General Glauch noted, "We've set up the schedule. We're supposed to have 400 folks--that is what we've been

⁴⁹Transcript, telephone conversation between Lt Gen R. E. Huyser and Maj Gen A. G. Glauch, 050020Z Apr 75.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*

⁵¹Hanisian and Patchin, *OPERATION BABYLIFT*, p 44.

⁵²Transcript, telephone conversation between Brig Gen K. L. Christensen and Brig Gen D. A. Gaylord, 032240Z Apr 75.

⁵³Hanisian and Patchin, *OPERATION BABYLIFT*, p 12.

planning on. We've got five aircraft standing by there at Saigon ready to launch come daylight. We're going to use 141s of course."⁶⁴

Despite the tangle of bureaucratic coordination, many of the BABYLIFT flights proceeded according to MAC's evacuation flow plan. Before a C-141 left Clark AB for Tan Son Nhut with a load of materiel, the 604th MASS loaded it with the seats, supplies, equipment, medical and security personnel needed to transport babies on the return trip. At Tan Son Nhut, while Air Force personnel unloaded the C-141, volunteers and members of the orphanages' staffs brought the children to the Defense Attache Office Evacuation Control Center or directly to the flight line. There the DAO's supervisor of airlift completed the paperwork while loadmasters, medical technicians, nuns and other volunteers carried babies on board and medical crews strapped them in their



Medical personnel and volunteers check orphans before they continue their journey.

⁶⁴Transcript, telephone conversation between Maj Gen M. F. Casey and Maj Gen A. G. Glauch, 041805Z Apr 75.



Volunteers tend babies while . . .



. . . awaiting flights on to the United States.

seats.⁶⁶ The airlift control element helped with the loading and made sure that all the passengers' names were on the manifest. Besides the MAC personnel on the BABYLIFT flights, volunteer escorts tended and reassured the tiny passengers. The escorts were usually Americans or Vietnamese who were leaving South Vietnam, or dependents or military volunteers from Clark AB.



Volunteers fed and . . .

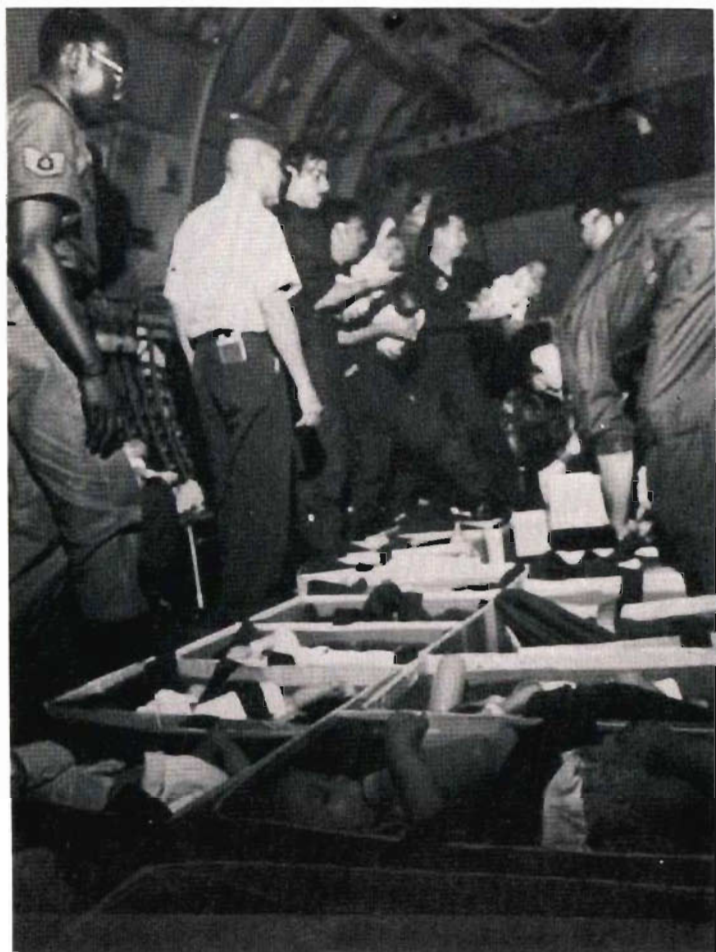
⁶⁶Tobin, *Last Flight from Saigon*, pp 50 & 67; Stuart A. Herrington, *Peace With Honor? An American Reports on Vietnam 1973-1975* (Novato: Presidio Press, 1983), pp 157 & 159; intvw, Dr C. F. Cross, MAC Hist, and Maj R. Aune, 14 Jun 89.



... nurtured the orphans

When the C-141s arrived at Clark AB with the children from Vietnam, hundreds of Red Cross, Family Services, military dependents or off-duty military personnel met the planes. Many of the orphans were sick, and all were tired and frightened. Each child had an adult escort to feed, bathe, diaper, or hold him. Although the majority of the children were under two years old, even the older ones needed care and personal attention. Doctors and nurses examined the young evacuees to determine who needed hospitalization at Clark and who could continue the journey to the United States. Some of the children had

contagious diseases and doctors placed them in quarantine.⁵⁶ The entire process took about 12 hours. General Carlton noted, "I think we have a good system. It tends to protect public health, it does filter out the real sick ones, and allows us to handle this thing properly."⁵⁷ Lieutenant General Daniel "Chappie" James, Jr., MAC's Vice Commander, told Major General Guy E. Hairston,



Crew members placed babies in bassinets made from cardboard boxes.

⁵⁶Rpt, Major George J. Klazynski, "The Airlift Role in Operations Babylift and New Life," Air Command and Staff College, Number 88-1475, p 6.

⁵⁷Transcript, telephone conversation between Gen P. K. Carlton and Lt Gen W. W. Marshall, 072210Z Apr 75.



Operation BABYLIFT had its lighter moments.

Headquarters USAF Director of the Office of Information, "You see, we just bring them from Saigon to Clark--then examine them real good and put them on airplanes configured for med evac and bring them home in style."⁶⁸

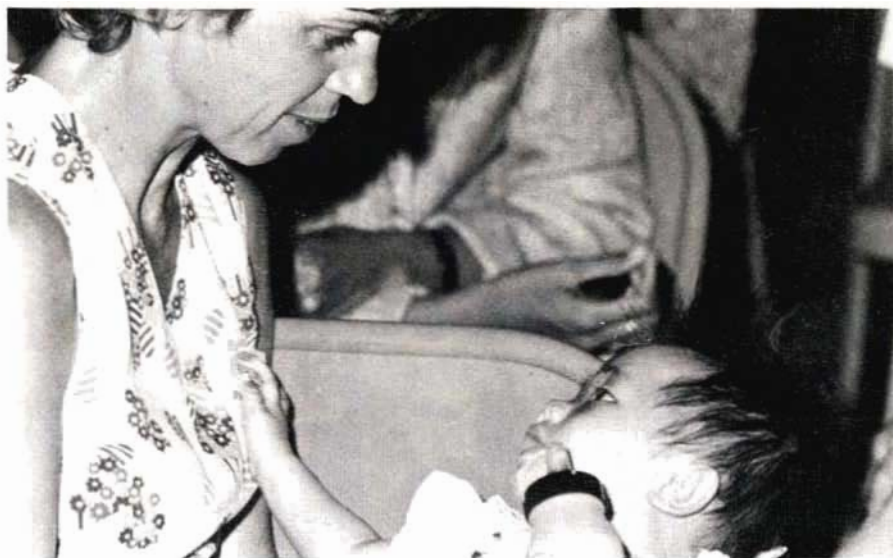
⁶⁸Transcript, telephone conversation between Lt Gen D. James, Jr. and Maj Gen G. E. Hairston, Jr., 042330Z Apr 75."



Volunteers carry orphans aboard C-141 at Hickam AFB.



Older children are strapped into their seats.



Volunteer at Hickam AFB feeds baby.



Volunteer clowns entertained the children during the stopover at Hickam AFB.



Volunteer airman coaches a budding artist awaiting her flight at Hickam AFB.



Travis AFB doctor meets incoming aircraft.



First BABYLIFT flight arriving at Travis AFB.

The C-141 flights from Clark AB to Hickam AFB, Hawaii, were aeromedical evacuation missions with 12 escorts, two loadmasters, five crewmembers, and a maximum of 80 orphans. The older children on the flights were often afraid to use the toilet facilities on the airplanes. Generals Carlton and Gonge decided to install extra lights and portable unenclosed latrines to reduce the fears. Many of the children got airsick before flight crews realized that they had been feeding Salisbury steaks to children accustomed to eating rice.⁵⁹ At Hickam AFB, volunteer caretakers and medical personnel met the aircraft. Again doctors checked and evaluated each child, then Air Force dependents, off-duty military personnel, Family Service and Red Cross workers bathed, fed, comforted and played with the babies. Immigration, customs, and public health officials also met the incoming BABYLIFT flights. The 61st Military Airlift Support Wing (MASW) from MAC and Pacific Air Forces' 15th Air Base Wing at Hickam worked together to make the orphans brief stopover in Hawaii as pleasant as

⁵⁹Transcript, telephone conversation between Gen P. K. Carlton and Lt Gen W. W. Marshall, 072210Z Apr 75.

possible. *The Hawaiian Falcon*, the Hickam AFB newspaper, described one such encounter: "Volunteers . . . carried [the] tiny visitors from the transport planes to the MAC passenger terminal. Here cookies, juices, crackers, and lots of love and affection awaited the young travelers."⁶⁰ While the caretakers bathed and prepared the children for the flight on to Travis AFB, California, members of the 61st MASW cleaned and prepared the C-141 for the final leg of the journey.⁶¹ The children were usually on their way to their new homes in the United States within two hours.⁶² (For a breakdown of MAC-sponsored evacuation flights, see Appendices 1 and 3). Even though most Operation BABYLIFT flights flowed smoothly, the airlift began tragically when the initial flight, a C-5A with 228 orphans aboard, crashed shortly after takeoff.



Volunteers await the incoming orphans.

⁶⁰*The Hawaiian Falcon*, 11 Apr 75.

⁶¹Hist, 61st Military Airlift Wing (Jan-Jul 1975), pp vi & 36.

⁶²Rpt, Major George J. Klazynski, "The Airlift Role in Operations BabyLift and New Life," Air Command and Staff College Report, Number 88-1475, p 16.



Red Cross volunteer escorts orphan at Travis AFB.

Chapter III

The Crash of C-5 Number 68-218

I have directed that C-5A aircraft and other aircraft especially equipped to care for these orphans during the flight be sent to Saigon.
President Gerald R. Ford.¹

Military Airlift Command officials had already expressed concern for the safety of the giant C-5As flying missions into Vietnam, before President Ford's announcement on 3 April 1975 initiated the command's participation in Operation BABYLIFT. General Carlton, therefore, had decided to fly the "Galaxy" only as far as Clark AB, where MAC personnel would transfer cargo from the C-5A to the smaller C-141s and C-130s for the last leg of the journey to Tan Son Nhut.² The United States Army, however, had a shipment of 17 105-millimeter howitzers for the South Vietnamese Army. Military leaders did not want "to offload and onload" these large artillery pieces at Clark AB. After reviewing the requirements and the president's statement, the Chief of Staff of the Air Force (CSAF) agreed to send a C-5 into Vietnam to execute this mission.³

An aircrew from the Twenty-Second Air Force's 60th Military Airlift Wing left Travis Air Force Base (AFB), California, aboard C-5A, Serial Number 68-218, on 1 April 1975 and flew to Warner Robins AFB, Georgia, where ground crews loaded the artillery destined for Vietnam. The aircraft returned to Travis and then continued to Hickam AFB where it picked up a new aircrew, with Captain Dennis W. "Bud" Traynor as aircraft commander. Captain Traynor's crew flew the C-5 on to Clark AB. There they paused for a 12-hour crew-rest in preparation for the flight to Tan Son Nhut AB at Saigon.⁴

After the president's press conference, General David C. Jones, CSAF, and General Paul K. Carlton, MAC Commander, decided to use the C-5A carrying the howitzers into Vietnam to airlift the first load of orphans, since the Galaxy was the next available transport aircraft. After the initial flight, they agreed that MAC would switch to C-141s, unless the smaller aircraft would slow the

¹Transcript Press Conference No. 12, 3 Apr 75, San Diego, Calif.

²Transcript, telephone conversation between Gen P. K. Carlton and Lt Gen J. F. Gonge, 011827Z Apr 75.

³Transcript, telephone conversation between Gen P. K. Carlton and Lt Gen W. G. Moore, Jr. n. t. 1 Apr 75.

⁴Rprt, Col B. A. Waxstein, Jr., "Collateral Investigation of Aircraft Accident Involving C-5A Serial Number 68-218," 15 Aug 75, pp 2-3.

movement or prevent the evacuation altogether of some of the children. Although General Carlton received no written authorization to execute BABYLIFT until 5 April, he commented, "I heard the President myself on TV and he said we're supposed to move 2,000 already adopted Vietnamese orphans to the United States, period."⁶ The MAC commander, therefore, directed the C-5 crew on 3 April to move "as many Vietnamese orphans as were available out of Tan Son Nhut Air Base on C-5A 218 to Clark AB and [authorized] the floorloading of passengers in the cargo compartment, if necessary."⁶ The Twenty-Second Air Force Operations Center at Travis AFB, California, relayed General Carlton's directive to Captain Traynor.

Nine additional Air Force personnel, mostly flight nurses and medical technicians from Clark AB, joined Traynor's crew to aid the children on the return flight.⁷ First Lieutenant Regina Aune, on temporary duty to Clark AB from Travis AFB, acted as the Medical Crew Director for the aeromedical evacuation team. Since C-5s had not flown as a medical evacuation aircraft before, none of Lieutenant Aune's team had experience on board the Galaxy.⁸

While the C-5 was heading for Vietnam, officials from the American Embassy, the Agency for International Development (AID), the Defense Attache Office, and various humanitarian organizations in Saigon gathered children and adult escorts for the first Operation BABYLIFT flight. Rosemary Taylor ran the largest orphanage in the Saigon area: Friends of All Children. Her organization had the most children ready to go, but other groups added to the list. In all, 228 Vietnamese orphans awaited the trip to new families and a new life in the United States.⁹

In addition to the children, several members of the Defense Attache Office (DAO) staff would be on board this first BABYLIFT flight. Ambassador Graham Martin had hesitated to order the evacuation of Americans from Saigon, believing that the premature departure of large numbers of Embassy or DAO staff would contribute to the growing panic in South Vietnam. Accordingly, the chief of DAO decided that BABYLIFT offered a perfect cover to begin the withdrawal of his staff. He designated 40 women as "nonessential" and selected them to act as escorts for the Vietnamese orphans.

⁶Transcript, telephone conversation between Gen P. K. Carlton and Maj Gen F. L. Smith, 032210Z Apr 75.

⁷Rprt, Col B. A. Waxstein, Jr., "Collateral Investigation of Aircraft Accident," 15 Aug 75, p 3.

⁸*Ibid.*, p 3.

⁹Intvw, Dr C. F. Cross, MAC Hist, and Maj R. Aune, 14 Jun 89.

⁹Rprt, Col B. A. Waxstein, Jr., "Collateral Investigation of Aircraft Accident," 15 Aug 75, p 10.

Although several of the women did not want to leave, eventually 36 civilian DAO employees and five of their dependents hurriedly packed their bags and prepared to depart the country.¹⁰ Army Sergeant G. E. Bell, who also worked at DAO, was able to get his wife and two children space on this C-5A mission returning to the United States. Six women staff members from the Friends of All Children organization and one of the women's three children also planned to accompany the flight. The Agency for International Development arranged for Dr Merritt W. Stark, a Public Health Physician with AID, to be the medical advisor for the orphans, and he managed to get his daughter Laurie assigned as an escort. One other young woman, a dependent of an Esso Eastern employee, would also be a passenger on the first MAC BABYLIFT flight.¹¹

When the C-5 landed at 0451Z 4 April 1975 at Tan Son Nhut AB, ground crews quickly unloaded the howitzers and readied the aircraft for the children. A second medical crew, including Captain Mary Klinker also on temporary duty from Travis AFB, arrived from Clark AB aboard a C-141 to help with the care of the children, along with two combat photographers from the 1369th Photo Squadron at Clark AB sent to record the first evacuation flight. The Galaxy had three compartments for the crew and passengers: the flight deck, consisting of the cockpit and the crew area; the upstairs troop compartment with 73 seats; and the downstairs cargo compartment. The flight crew and medical personnel formed a human chain passing the Vietnamese children hand-to-hand through the door, up the ladder, into the troop compartment. Lieutenant Aune later recalled, "The arm rests were removed so we could put two in each seat, so there were six across in each set of seats. As the medical crew director I chose to stay downstairs to control the flow of the children."¹² Pillows and blankets cushioned and padded the children under their seat belts. After the troop compartment was full, crew members placed doubled blankets on the floor of the cargo compartment, and the rest of the passengers sat or laid on the blankets. Aune noted, "We tried to put most of the younger children upstairs and the older children downstairs."¹³ Tie-down straps held the orphans and their escorts secure. The medical team stowed the children's medical records and the medical kit toward the rear of the aircraft, except for narcotics and medicines which went in the crew area upstairs.¹⁴

¹⁰Stuart A. Herrington, *Peace With Honor? An American Reports on Vietnam 1973-1975* (Novato: Presidio Press, 1983), p 166.

¹¹*Ibid.*, pp 8-10.

¹²Intvw, Dr C. F. Cross, MAC Hist, with Maj R. Aune, 14 Jun 89.

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴*Ibid.*

After the aircrew had completed their preflight check, the C-5 took off at 0803Z, made a right-hand turn, and headed for Vung Tau on the coast of South Vietnam. "When we were taking off, there was no indication there was any problem. The only thing that happened downstairs was that one of the civilian adults that was accompanying the children got quite ill," Aune remembered. "Mary [Captain Klinker] and Sergeant Paget [Staff Sergeant Michael G. Paget] and I went over to see what we could do to help her. I decided to go upstairs and get her some medication."¹⁵ The aircraft reached an altitude of 20,000 feet as it passed Vung Tau at 0812Z. Three minutes later, at 23,300 feet, the C-5 suffered a rapid decompression.¹⁶ Captain Keith D. Malone, who was in the cockpit on his initial "check ride" in the C-5, described it as a "classic rapid decompression." He recalled, "Ironically, we had just concluded a conversation about what we would do in case there was a rapid decompression. We decided that we would go into a left descending turn and get down as quickly as possible."¹⁷ One of the medical technicians on board described the experience later: "You could see it. You could see the hole in the back of the plane. You could see sunlight streaming in. Things started flying around. Eyeglasses. Pens. . . . That went on for a little while until the air stopped."¹⁸ Lieutenant Aune later stated, "It was while I was getting the medication out of the medication box we had the rapid decompression. I never got back down stairs."¹⁹ The air rushing from the aircraft "blew off" the aft pressure door, part of the aft loading ramp and the aft center cargo door. As these parts flew off, one of them severed the pitch trim, elevator, and rudder cables.²⁰

Following the decompression, the crew donned their oxygen masks, began a left-descending turn, then notified flight controllers in Saigon of their condition and their return to Tan Son Nhut AB for an emergency landing. They noticed that the pressure and the quantity in the number one and two hydraulic systems read zero. Also, the pilot noted a lack of pitch control. He asked the copilot to help with the pitch, but the copilot had no pitch control either. "We had one system powering the right aileron, that was all," Malone later recalled. He then explained: "The only reason that without elevators we didn't go into an

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶Rprt, Col B. A. Waxstein, Jr., "Collateral Investigation of Aircraft Accident," 15 Aug 75, pp 5-6, 15-16.

¹⁷Intvw, Dr C. F. Cross, MAC Hist, with Lt Col K. D. Malone, 14 Jun 89.

¹⁸Transcript of interview by an Associated Press reporter, 4 Apr 75.

¹⁹Intvw, Dr C. F. Cross, MAC Hist, with Maj R. Aune, 14 Jun 89.

²⁰Rprt, Col B. A. Waxstein, Jr., "Collateral Investigation of Aircraft Accident," 15 Aug 75, pp 5-6, 15-16.

immediate dive that we could never get out of was that when we had the RD [rapid decompression] and the cables were severed and the hydraulic power lost, the elevators were trimmed for 260 knots which was our climb speed." He continued, "Therefore, as long as we stayed at 260 knots the aircraft would fly. If we got higher than that the aircraft would climb, if we got lower it would descend."²¹

During the left descending turn the airspeed increased to 370 knots and nose of the C-5 began to rise. The aircraft then started a steep climb, and the airspeed dropped. To avoid a stall, Captain Traynor banked to the right and reduced power. When the aircraft began a steep dive, the pilot leveled the wings and increased airspeed. He soon realized that he had limited control of his pitch with a combination of power and bank.²²

Master Sergeant Raymond F. Snedegar, the senior loadmaster, went below and assessed the damage. He described the damage to the pilot and informed him which systems were operational and which were not. Sergeant Snedegar later provided invaluable information to accident investigators trying to determine the location and extent of the damage caused by the decompression.²³

The medical crew, meanwhile, moved about the aircraft reassuring the children and other passengers and treating those injured by flying debris during the decompression. Captain Klinker tended Staff Sergeant Michael G. Paget, who was seriously injured. The two combat photographers, on board to record the first military BABYLIFT flight, used their high intensity lights to illuminate the area where Captain Klinker worked.²⁴ Other nurses and technicians prepared the children for a possible crash landing.²⁵ "We checked all the children and resecured them, repadded them, and retied all their seat belts," Lieutenant Aune explained later. She continued, "In flight school you learn all your emergency procedures. We immediately went to our emergency mode about what we were going to do and how we were going to get out of the aircraft when we landed, who was going to go down the escape slides, etc. We went through our usual emergency procedures."²⁶

²¹Intvw, Dr C. F. Cross, MAC Hist, with Lt Col K. D. Malone, 14 Jun 89.

²²Rprt, Col B. A. Waxstein, Jr., "Collateral Investigation of Aircraft Accident," 15 Aug 75, pp 5-6.

²³Ltr, Lt Gen D. James Jr. to Mr C. J. V. Murphy, n. s., w/atch, 28 Apr 75.

²⁴Neither Klinker, Paget, nor the photographers survived the crash landing.

²⁵Ltr, Lt Gen D. James Jr. to Mr C. J. V. Murphy, n. s., w/atch, 28 Apr 75.

²⁶Intvw, Dr C. F. Cross, MAC Hist, with Maj R. Aune, 14 Jun 89.

While ground crews at Tan Son Nhut prepared for an emergency landing, the crew aboard the C-5A readied themselves for a possible crash landing. The flight crew lowered the landing gear and aligned the aircraft with the runway. About six miles from the airport, Captain Traynor began a shallow left turn in preparation for landing. Captain Malone remembered, "We really thought we were in good shape. We had altitude on the turn to final, we had the runway, and the gear was down."²⁷ Suddenly, the C-5 commenced a rapid descent. The extra drag of the landing gears had reduced the airspeed to 230 knots, too low to maintain level flight. Realizing they could not reach the runway, the pilots working together leveled the wings, used full power to bring the nose up, and then cut power just before impact.

The C-5 touched down at about 269 knots in a marsh two miles short of the end of the runway. The aircraft rolled and skidded along the ground for about 1,000 feet, then became airborne again. It remained airborne for about 2,700 feet, flying across the Saigon River. When it hit the ground the second time, the C-5 began to break-up as it skidded for another 1,200 feet. The airplane broke into four parts: tail section, flight deck, troop compartment, and wing section. During the impacts and skidding, the cargo compartment totally disintegrated.²⁸

Rescue efforts began immediately. Despite painful injuries, the surviving crewmembers and escorts carried the children from the wreckage. Senior Master Sergeant Howard C. Perkins, a loadmaster, splinted his own broken leg with a crutch and six aircraft seat belts, then joined the human chain passing babies along to waiting rescue helicopters. Lieutenant Aune recalled, "We started doing the same thing we had done in loading the patients and the children in the plane. We relayed them out and had to run backwards to the helicopters because of the rotor-wash."²⁹ Aune stood on a broken leg handing babies to rescuers until she neared collapse and had to be carried to a helicopter. Another flight nurse, First Lieutenant Harriet Goffinett, with one arm immobile because of a broken collarbone, carried children on her other hip. Acts of heroism and self-sacrifice characterized the entire rescue effort.³⁰

Air America and Vietnamese Air Force helicopters, alerted for the emergency landing, arrived at the scene within five minutes of the crash. An hour and a half later all the survivors were at Tan Son Nhut and Saigon area hospitals. In all, 138 people died in the crash, including 78 orphans, 35 of 36

²⁷Intvw, Dr C. F. Cross, MAC Hist, with Lt Col K. D. Malone, 14 Jun 89.

²⁸Rprt, Col B. A. Waxstein, "Collateral Investigation of Aircraft Accident," 15 Aug 74, p 7.

²⁹Intvw, Dr C. F. Cross, MAC Hist, with Maj R. Aune, 14 Jun 89.

³⁰Ltr, Lt Gen D. James Jr. to Mr C. J. V. Murphy, n. s., w/atc, 28 Apr 75.

DAO employees, 11 Air Force personnel, Sgt Bell's wife and son, and Dr Stark's daughter.³¹

Captain Traynor and his crew had displayed remarkable flying skills and presence of mind under extreme stress. Thanks to their performance, 176 of the 314 persons on board survived, including 150 of the orphans. Most of the survivors were on the flight deck or in the troop compartment. Hardly anyone who had been in the cargo compartment lived. Traynor and his copilot, Captain Tilford Harp, later received Air Force Crosses for their actions. Other flight crewmembers earned the Distinguished Flying Cross.³² Although newspapers and citations described the heroics of the crew, Captain Malone denied that they were exceptional: "I think the end result would have been the same with most crews. I think it was just a series of circumstances and we reacted to each one as it came up. I don't think we did anything unusual that any other crew wouldn't have done with probably the same result."³³

Despite the accident, Operation BABYLIFT continued. However, since some officials suspected sabotage, General Carlton increased security around the aircraft flying these missions.³⁴ He told Major General Lester T. Kearney, Jr., Commander, Twenty-First Air Force, "I want you to double up on your passenger inspection and things of that sort." The hijacking of a merchant ship and a Vietnamese C-130 at about this same time added to the MAC Commander's anxiety.³⁵

General Carlton further ordered a 48-hour "administrative restriction" for the C-5A force to allow time for consultation with Lockheed, the aircraft's manufacturer, and a one-time inspection of the parts investigators suspected of having failed. Sensitive to the criticism of the C-5's cost and air worthiness, MAC officials carefully avoided using the term "grounded."³⁶ General Jones suggested that MAC operate the C-141 to the maximum extent possible, not because the C-5 was unsafe, but because of "crowd control, inspection for

³¹Rprt, Col B. A. Waxstein, "Collateral Investigation of Aircraft Accident," 15 Aug 75, pp 8-11.

³²Rprt, Col B. A. Waxstein, "Collateral Investigation of Aircraft Accident," 15 Aug 75, pp 8-11.

³³Intvw, Dr C. F. Cross, MAC Hist, with Lt Col K. D. Malone, 14 Jun 89.

³⁴See Chapter II above for more details on the aircraft security controversy.

³⁵Transcript, telephone conversation between Gen P. K. Carlton and Maj Gen L. T. Kearney, Jr., 041735Z Apr 75.

³⁶Congressional critics, especially Representative Les Aspin and Senator William Proxmire, claimed the C-5A was too expensive, spent too much time on the ground, and was unsafe.

bombs, and so forth." Carlton agreed not to "use the C-5 west of Clark for air evac unless things get really in a bind."³⁷

Despite the care with terminology, critics of the C-5 reacted quickly. Led by Wisconsin's Representative Les Aspin and Senator William Proxmire, opponents of the aircraft demanded that the Air Force ground C-5s until a complete investigation proved its integrity. Proxmire questioned the decision to use the aircraft to evacuate the Vietnamese children "in view of the many deficiencies in the C-5A, the numerous accidents and mishaps in which it has been involved, and the fact that it was not designed as a passenger plane, and that such use entailed significant risks." He also pointed out to Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger: "I note the fact that your request for \$900 million to repair the wings on the C-5A is pending before Congress." The senator concluded his remarks to Secretary Schlesinger: "Questions have been raised by many people as to whether it was decided to use the C-5A on April 4th in part as a dramatic demonstration of its usefulness in emergency situation so as to underscore the importance of your new request for additional funds for this aircraft."³⁸ Major General Maurice F. Casey, Deputy Director of Logistics for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, responded that the C-5A carried the initial load of evacuees because it was on a priority Army cargo mission into Vietnam. He stated, "[T]he policy was that we'd use the first airplane that went in there, be it C-5, C-141, C-130, or MAC contractor, whatever, and that we would then take the orphans from Saigon to Clark for medical evaluation."³⁹

General Carlton immediately appointed an accident investigation board, with Major General Warner E. Newby, MAC's Deputy Chief of Staff for Logistics, as board president. By the time the investigation team arrived at Clark AB on 6 April, the United States Navy had already recovered the inflight recorder from the C-5.⁴⁰ Attempting to establish the sequence of events leading up to the crash and trying to learn the extent and type of damage caused by the decompression, General Newby talked with members of the flight crew, who had recently arrived from Vietnam aboard MAC C-9s.⁴¹

³⁷Transcript, telephone conversation between Gen P. K. Carlton and Brig Gen D. L. Gray, 041400Z Apr 75.

³⁸Ltr, W. Proxmire to J. R. Schlesinger, n. s., 8 Apr 75.

³⁹Transcript, telephone conversation between Lt Gen D. James and Maj Gen M. F. Casey, 112145Z Apr 75.

⁴⁰Transcript, telephone conversation between Gen P. K. Carlton and Gen R. H. Ellis, 051725Z April 75.

⁴¹Transcript, telephone conversation between Gen P. K. Carlton and Maj Gen W. E. Newby, 061543Z Apr 75.

General Newby and selected members of his investigation team then flew to Tan Son Nhut AB. General Carlton ensured that General Newby had an assigned airplane so he could readily travel between Clark AB and Tan Son Nhut.⁴² Military Airlift Command officials had to contact the Defense Attache Office directly for permission for any members of the accident board to enter South Vietnam.⁴³ The Paris Peace Accords' limitations on the number of American military personnel in Vietnam restricted the size of the accident investigation in-country team.⁴⁴ Although MAC leaders were eager to learn the cause of the crash, the military and political climate in Vietnam was deteriorating so rapidly that American officials there placed the investigation "way down on the list of priorities."⁴⁵

In Saigon, a representative from the Defense Attache Office briefed team members on the local informal accident investigation. Local authorities had succeeded in securing the accident site from the Viet Cong, but not from pilferage. Vietnamese nationals had begun to scavenge through the wreckage immediately after the accident. They had already carried off many pieces of the aircraft, including avionics and communications equipment from the cockpit. General Newby's team also learned that although a manifest existed for the adults aboard the flight, there was no accurate accounting of the children.⁴⁶

After the briefing Air America helicopters airlifted General Newby and his team to the crash site. Scavengers were still taking any piece of the C-5 that they could carry. Newby later told the MAC Commander, "The security out there is zilch. Security forces started carrying stuff off the first night and there were at least 4-500 people carrying things out of that site out there today."

⁴²Transcript, telephone conversation between Maj Gen A. G. Glauch and Maj Gen F. L. Poston, 051745Z Apr 75.

⁴³Transcript, telephone conversation between Gen P. K. Carlton, Maj Gen M. F. Casey, and Maj Gen A. G. Glauch, 050100Z Apr 75; transcript, telephone conversation between Lt Gen R. E. Huyser and Maj Gen A. G. Glauch, 050020Z Apr 75.

⁴⁴Transcript, telephone conversation between Gen R. H. Ellis, and Lt Gen D. James, Jr., 041700Z Apr 75.

⁴⁵Transcript, telephone conversation between Lt Gen W. W. Marshall, and Maj Gen A. G. Glauch, 052355Z Apr 75.

⁴⁶Transcript, telephone conversation between Gen P. K. Carlton and Maj Gen W. E. Newby, 061543Z Apr 75; transcript, telephone conversation between Gen P. K. Carlton and Maj Gen W. E. Newby, 071515Z Apr 75; transcript, telephone conversation between Lt Gen D. James, Jr., and Maj Gen W. E. Newby, 102100Z Apr 75.

When team members attempted to stop the removal of aircraft parts and pieces, the Vietnamese prepared to fight to protect their right to pick clean the remains of the C-5.⁴⁷

Even though an Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) team had previously examined the wreck, EOD personnel and an explosives detector dog accompanied the accident investigation board as they checked the wreckage. The EOD teams found no evidence of sabotage on either visit.⁴⁸ The absence of powder traces and eye witness reports that there was no flash at the time caused Newby to doubt that explosives had initiated the decompression.⁴⁹

Because of the obvious need to recover as many of the relevant aircraft parts as possible before Vietnamese nationals carried them away, General Newby decided his team members needed to devote their initial attention to the crash site. Recovered parts were airlifted back to Clark AB, photographed, cleaned, and reassembled in a hangar. After four days General Newby determined that his team had salvaged all the important parts that the scavengers had left behind. After examining the parts, the team acknowledged it lacked sufficient evidence to determine the cause of the decompression. Newby told General Carlton, "We did not get anywhere near the number of parts we would liked to have gotten—they've obviously been carried off."⁵⁰ Carlton also expressed concern for the "advanced technology items" in the C-5 cockpit and sent Newby a list of items to destroy.⁵¹ After examining the aircraft again, Newby informed Carlton, "there wasn't anything left. It was gone—everything. They're down to pulling plugs and wires, and things of that sort now."⁵²

In an effort to find more parts, General Newby initiated three programs. First, he asked the United States Navy to use its sophisticated underwater-search equipment to look for parts that might have fallen into the ocean after

⁴⁷Transcript, telephone conversation between Gen P. K. Carlton and Maj Gen W. E. Newby, 061543Z Apr 75.

⁴⁸Rprt, Col B. A. Waxstein, "Collateral Investigation of Aircraft Accident Involving C-5A Serial Number 68-218," 15 Aug 75, p 13.

⁴⁹Transcript, telephone conversation between Lt Gen D. James, Jr, Maj Gen W. A. Dietrich, and Maj Gen W. E. Newby, 102100Z Apr 75.

⁵⁰Transcript, telephone conversation between Gen P. K. Carlton and Maj Gen W. E. Newby, 071515Z Apr 75.

⁵¹Transcript, telephone conversation between Gen P. K. Carlton and Maj Gen W. E. Newby, 061543Z Apr 75.

⁵²Transcript, telephone conversation between Gen P. K. Carlton and Maj Gen W. E. Newby, 071515Z Apr 75.

the decompression. He commented to MAC officials, "There is increasing importance in trying to locate the ramp and pressure door that left the airplane out at the decompression site."⁵³ Next, Newby asked MAC Headquarters for \$1,000 (later increased to \$7,000) to purchase aircraft components pilfered from the crash site.⁵⁴ The investigation team prepared handbills depicting aircraft parts critical to the investigation and avionics equipment containing state-of-the-art technology. These handbills circulated through the local populace and Newby was able to "buy back" the tape from the Maintenance Data Recorder (MDR). Third, team members returned to the crash site and scoured the area again. They found several more parts, although nothing that materially aided the investigation.⁵⁵

On 19 April, investigators determined they could learn nothing more from the crash site, so they abandoned the wreckage. The next day technicians crated the recovered C-5 components and shipped them by air to the San Antonio Air Logistics Center (ALC) for laboratory analysis.⁵⁶ On 27 April the Navy Salvage Operation recovered a 20 foot by 12 foot section of the aft ramp and a 7 foot by 12 foot section of the pressure door. A MAC aircraft quickly airlifted these critical components to the San Antonio ALC for examination.⁵⁷

The collateral accident investigator, Colonel Bernard A. Waxstein, Jr., discovered that on 24 March 1975 maintenance technicians had replaced the tie rod assemblies connecting the numbers 2, 3, and 4 right aft cargo ramp locks. The technical order (TO) governing the replacement of tie rod assemblies, TO 1C-5A-2-12, included no "specific rigging, adjusting or operational checking instructions" following installation. The TO procedures did not ensure correct "adjustments, measurements, pull forces and over center positions." Colonel Waxstein concluded that "some of the right side locks were not carrying their share of the load." The "most probable cause" was the failure of the locking-mechanism on the right side of the aft loading ramp. This placed too much stress on the other locks, causing them to fail. The right side of the ramp then broke loose and tore completely across, striking the pressure door and causing the

⁵³Transcript, telephone conversation between Lt Gen D. James, Jr, Maj Gen W. A. Dietrich, and Maj Gen W. E. Newby, 102100Z Apr 75.

⁵⁴Ltr, MAC DCS Comptroller/ACX to MAC Chief of Staff/CST, "C-5 Accident," w/7 atchs, 17 Apr 75.

⁵⁵Rprt, Col B. A. Waxstein, "Collateral Investigation of Aircraft Accident Involving C-5a Serial Number 68-218," 15 Aug 75, pp 12-13.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*,

⁵⁷Msg, CTF Seven Three to MAC/IGF, *et al.*, "C-5A Cargo Door SALVORS," 300715Z Apr 75.

decompression. The pressure door separated from the fuselage hitting "the sloping torque deck area of the fuselage," severing the "empennage flight control cables and hydraulic lines to systems 1 and 2," and causing "the loss of all pitch trim, elevator and rudder flight controls."⁵⁸

The Office of Information at Headquarters MAC acknowledged, in a message to the military airlift wings, that although, "the board was not able to pinpoint the exact cause of failure, it was able to trace the sequence of events close enough to insure that subsequent actions will prevent recurrence." The message continued, "Equally important, the board conclusively determined that there was no structural deficiency involved and that the ramp and pressure door failed only as a result of a dynamic overload." To prevent a similar occurrence, "two Time Compliance Technical Orders (TCTO) were issued to inspect and secure the remainder of the C-5 force, they required a replacement of worn or deficient components and a complete riggering of the system in each aircraft." The message then announced, "Based upon completion of the TCTOs and the board's determination of the structural soundness of the aircraft, MAC [C-5s] returned to channel operations on May 15, 1975."⁵⁹

Except for this tragic accident, the MAC portion of Operation BABYLIFT proceeded with hardly a flaw. Commercial aircraft chartered by private agencies and a flamboyant owner disrupted the airflow, however. These actions not only wreaked havoc with airlift scheduling but also overloaded support facilities along the route between Saigon and the United States.

⁵⁸Reprt, Col B. A. Waxstein, "Collateral Investigation of Aircraft Accident Involving C-5A Serial Number 68-218," 15 Aug 75, pp 17-18.

⁵⁹Msg, MAC Office of Information/OIP to 60 MAW/OI, "PA Guidance on C-5 Saigon Crash," 122115Z Jun 75.

Chapter IV

The "Contributions" of the Civilian Airlines

I told your duty officer there everybody that's ever been in Vietnam has a big pet orphan project. A lot of these people have a lot of money, and they're running down Pan Am and World Airways, and all these others to ask them to come in there and haul their people out.

Major General Maurice F. Casey, 5 April 1975¹

Although not officially part of Operation BABYLIFT, privately-contracted civilian airlines made a significant "contribution" to the orphan airlift during April and May 1975. Of the 2,894 orphans that had reached the United States by 9 May, when the State Department officially ended the evacuation of the children, privately-contracted airlines had carried 1,090 of them.² (For a breakdown of commercial flights, see Appendices 1, 2, and 3). The "contributions" of these airlines, however, were not always positive. They also disrupted the flow of the airlift, disregarded Federal Aeronautics Administration (FAA) regulations, caused friction between the United States and foreign governments, and overwhelmed the processing center at Honolulu International Airport (IAP), Hawaii.

By the first of April 1975, with the fall of Vietnam imminent, the humanitarian organizations with orphanages in the country determined to remove their charges to a safer haven. As previously mentioned, the Military Airlift Command leaders planned to evacuate the children on C-141s returning to Clark AB after carrying equipment and supplies into Saigon. However, some of the civilian airlines disagreed that MAC should airlift the orphans.³

Even before President Ford's news conference on 3 April, a flight by World Airways carried the first evacuees to America. On 2 April a DC-8 with 54 Vietnamese children, between eight months and 11 years, 27 adult escorts (including six Vietnamese adults without passports or exit visas), and World Airways president Ed Daly began to taxi toward the runway at the Tan Son Nhut airport. Suddenly, the control tower turned off the runway lights and ordered the DC-8 crew, "Don't take off! Don't take off! You have no

¹Transcript, telephone conversation between Gen P. K. Carlton, Maj Gen A. G. Glauch, and Maj Gen M. F. Casey, 050100Z Apr 75.

²Ltr, PACAF/CSH to HQ MAC/CSH, "Babylift Statistics," 2 Dec 75; no two sources agree on the totals for BABYLIFT.

³Transcript, telephone conversation between Brig Gen K. L. Christensen and Brig Gen D. A. Gaylord, 032240Z Apr 75.

clearance!"⁴ The air controllers later stated that authorities had closed the runway in anticipation of a predicted Viet Cong attack on the airport. World Airways' chief pilot Ken Healy continued to taxi and as soon as he reached the runway gave the DC-8 full power and took off into the darkness. "I just didn't get the message in time," he later explained.⁵

This was not the first time that Healy and Daly had defied authority in Vietnam. On 27 March 1975, the day after the North Vietnamese had captured Hue, a World Airways' Boeing 727 carried 200 refugees from Da Nang to Nha Trang. World Airways completed three more flights before South Vietnamese officials closed the Da Nang airport. An estimated 100,000 refugees in the airport and shelling by the advancing North Vietnamese made conditions unsafe for further flights. On 29 March, after failing to obtain American or Vietnamese permission to continue the rescue missions, Ed Daly met with his chief pilot. Daly asked Healy if he would be willing to fly into Da Nang, and Healy agreed. Daly later told reporters, "People who should have been doing something about it sat on their asses and refused to move."⁶ Just after noon two World Airways' 727s left Tan Son Nhut, without clearance or permission.⁷

When Healy reached Da Nang, he made a pass over the runway at about two hundred feet. The runway was clear and he decided to land. The second aircraft continued in a holding pattern nearby. Healy stopped on the wide taxiway that paralleled the Da Nang runway. Suddenly thousands of people rushed the airplane. Healy warned the second airplane not to land. Soldiers, civilians, men, women, adults, and children fought to climb aboard. Men with guns forced their way onto the 727. Someone yelled, "We're full," and Healy began to taxi to prevent the mob from overwhelming his airplane. People climbed onto the wings, then fell off as the jet rolled down the runway. A distraught soldier hurled a hand grenade and badly damaged the flaps on the right side. Healy could not retract his landing gear because several people had crawled into the wheel well and a soldier's body kept the gear from retracting. Shortly after the 727 became airborne, the pilot of the second airplane reported seeing someone lose his grip on the landing gear and fall to his death.⁸ There

⁴"New Angels of Mercy," *Washington Post*, 5 Apr 75.

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶"Daly's Refugee Airlift," *Time*, 14 Apr 75, p 74.

⁷Alan Dawson, *55 Days: The Fall of South Vietnam* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1977), pp 156-184; "Daly's Refugee Airlift," *Time*, 14 Apr 75, p 74.

⁸Dawson, *55 Days*, pp 156-184; "Daly's Refugee Airlift," *Time*, p 74.

were only two women and one baby among the 268 people who jammed themselves into the airplane and in the wheel wells.⁹

So after grabbing headlines by defying authority and flying the last flight from Da Nang, Daly and Healy did not hesitate to ignore warnings and fly the first BABYLIFT to the United States. Daly had originally announced that a World Airways' Boeing 747 would carry 458 orphans out of Saigon. Since he had the permission of neither the American Embassy nor the Vietnamese government, such a move was illegal. Attempting to thwart Daly's plans, American Ambassador to Saigon Graham Martin, or one of his aides, apparently approached Rosemary Taylor of the Friends of All Children and offered USAF C-5As to evacuate the children in Taylor's orphanage. Ms Taylor accepted the offer and withdrew her support for the World Airways' flight.¹⁰

Without Taylor's support, Daly could only get 54 orphans for his flight and, therefore, switched to the smaller DC-8. When the United States Embassy refused to supply him with milk and the other basic items the children would need, the undaunted Daly loaded the aircraft with milk, baby food, and diapers at his own expense.¹¹ The maverick president of World Airways then directed his pilot to ignore the warnings of the Tan Son Nhut air traffic controllers and head for Yokota Air Base (AB), Japan.¹²

Since the Military Airlift Command had not chartered the flight, the plane could not legally land at any military base. However, with the aircraft nearing Yokota AB and with no suitable alternative landing field, officials at the base allowed Daly's DC-8 to land, but prohibited any Vietnamese from leaving the airplane. Two of the babies suffered from such dehydration and malnutrition that doctors admitted them to Tachikawa AB hospital, the nearest major hospital to Yokota AB, anyway. After refueling the World Airways jet continued to Oakland IAP, California, where a throng of reporters awaited the arrival. Five waiting buses whisked the children to a makeshift nursery in a maintenance facility at the United States Army's Presidio in San Francisco. The flamboyant Daly avoided the reporters by staying in Japan, saying that he had rested little in the past two weeks "and I'm beat."¹³

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰Dawson, *55 Days*, pp 213-214.

¹¹"Orphans of the Storm: The Lost Generation," *Newsweek*, 14 Apr 75, p 29.

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³"Orphans of the Storm," *Newsweek*, 14 Apr 75, p 29; "Daly's Refugee Airlift," *Time*, 14 Apr 75, p 74; *The Fall and Evacuation of South Vietnam* (Office of PACAF History, 1978), pp 61-63.

He also avoided an immediate confrontation with the FAA over his many violations of the agency's regulations. Pilot Ken Healy considered the risk of losing his license "a cheap price to pay to bring these kids from danger to their American families."¹⁴ Healy and Daly both probably counted on public opinion to influence the FAA. In any event FAA Chief James E. Dow announced a few days later that "in view of the humanitarian circumstances" the agency would take no punitive action against either the pilot or the airline.¹⁵ Japan also overlooked this breach of the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA). But, when Daly again landed at Yokota with another planeload of evacuees on 21 April 1975, the Japanese government charged him with a "technical violation" of the agreement and asked for an explanation from the American Ambassador.¹⁶

The Military Airlift Command also reacted to Daly's many violations. On 14 April 1975, MAC cancelled World Airways' contract to fly food into Cambodia. Daly reacted to the news in a Telex to President Ford, "World Airways has over \$22 million dollars worth of in-flight equipment currently on the ground in Saigon plus cockpit and cabin crews and other employees." Daly continued sarcastically, "We have just been notified by your high ranking and esteemed commanding general of the Military Airlift Command, General Paul Carlton . . . that our contract with the Military Airlift Command for the supply of food to Cambodia has been terminated effective this date." This action, according to Daly, left World Airways "without any insurance coverage with respect to the aircraft in question, without any compensation for its air-lift capability in this emergency and without any guarantee for the safety of the equipment or its crews by your administration." Daly noted, "There is no wonder that the peoples of the world have lost their confidence in the U. S. government and its people." He then concluded, "With all due respect to you and your worldwide problems, Mr President, I strongly urge that you get the incompetents out of there immediately and appoint someone with the intelligence, competency and the guts necessary to get the job done. You don't have days or weeks—you only have minutes." Daly also emphasized that he

¹⁴"Saigon Tots Sample U. S. Delights," *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, 3 Apr 75.

¹⁵"Ford: Still Hope for Vietnam: U. S. to Take 2,000 Orphans: Americans Embracing 'Babylift,'" *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, 5 Apr 75; *Fall and Evacuation of South Vietnam*, p 63.

¹⁶*The Fall and Evacuation of South Vietnam*, p 78.

had sent copies of this message to "all members of the cabinet, all members of the Congress, the governors of all states and to the press."¹⁷

Meanwhile, the illegal status of the children presented a dilemma for American officials, since many of the orphans on the World Airways flights had no entry visas. But the Immigration and Naturalization Service consulted with the State Department and the Agency for International Development then decided to grant the orphans 90-day parole visas, giving authorities three months to conclude a more permanent arrangement. The publicity surrounding the World Airways' flight also prompted immigration officials to grant a blanket approval for another 2,000 Vietnamese orphans to enter the United States. Even the Vietnamese officials in Saigon agreed to speed up the paperwork to make the move easier. In the words of one AID official, the only hold up was "suitable and safe aircraft transportation."¹⁸

Throughout the evacuation of Vietnam, Daly played by his own rules. At a formal press conference following the flight from Da Nang, he drew the pistol he reportedly always carried and laid it on the table beside him. A reporter quoted him as saying then, "I'll shoot the next God-damned man who talks while I'm talking."¹⁹ Later, Daly or a member of his staff told officials at Clark AB that the President's Military Advisor had given permission for World Airways to land at Clark. Officials at Headquarters MAC checked and found this to be untrue. General Carlton warned the Vice Commander of the Pacific Air Forces, "[H]e (Daly) is double trouble and when he hits your base he is going to upset your hospital, your officers' club, your base commander, your AF commander, and all hands on board."²⁰

Ed Daly's World Airways was not the only airline to disrupt MAC's flow plan. When the State Department decided to continue the airlift following the crash of the C-5, MAC had five C-141s scheduled to deliver cargo into Tan Son Nhut on the following day and available to airlift 400 previously-scheduled children from Saigon to Clark AB. President Ford planned to meet the first

¹⁷Msg, World Airways to President Ford, *et al.*, n. s., 142230Z Apr 75; msg, MAC, Mr Arthur W. Purkel to World Airways Inc., Attn: Mr. Edward J. Daly, "WOA MSG 142230Z Apr 75," informed Mr. Daly that he was "in error." Indemnification and insurance had not been withdrawn if the ferry flights had departed Saigon by 150001Z Apr 75 for CONUS.

¹⁸"Viet Aid Offers Skyrocket," *The Honolulu Advertiser*, 3 Apr 75; *The Fall and Evacuation of South Vietnam*, p 63.

¹⁹Dawson, *55 Days*, p 156.

²⁰Transcript, telephone conversation between General P. K. Carlton and Lt Gen W. W. Marshall, 072210 Apr 75.

military aircraft with the children on board at Travis AFB, California.²¹ Before MAC crewmembers could load the children, a privately-chartered Pan-American Boeing 747 arrived at Tan Son Nhut to transport the orphans back to the United States. Since the Agency for International Development could process only 400 children a day, the five MAC C-141s with a capacity of several hundred only had 38 passengers on the return trip to Clark AB.²²

General Carlton expressed dismay at his lack of authority to control the aircraft involved in the airlift: "[T]here's something brewing here that I don't like. We're getting both State and Defense hiring airplanes to go and do these things." To make the matter even more infuriating, Major General Maurice F. Casey of the Joint Chiefs of Staff asked MAC to fund the Pan-American flight. He explained to Carlton, "[E]verybody that's ever been in Vietnam has a big pet orphan project. A lot of these people have a lot of money, and they're running down to Pan Am and World Airways, and all these others to ask them to come in there and haul their people out." The contractor represented a "bonafide licensed adoption agency" so the State Department had told him to contact MAC through Casey and request MAC to pay for the flight from the fund the President had set aside for BABYLIFT.²³

General Carlton's reply reflected his frustration: "We're programming C-141s in there to do it--the same C-141s that are hauling in war guns, and now we get a call saying go ahead and call the contracting officer at Pan Am and see if State will certify the money."²⁴ To compound Carlton's frustration, Pan American wanted additional insurance coverage since investigators had not yet ruled out sabotage in the C-5 crash. The war risk coverage under MAC contracts only covered "war-like acts of an enemy," it did not ensure against hostile acts by allies.²⁵

When MAC agreed to charter the Pan American 747, the airlines requested additional coverage. Federal law limited the indemnification available, so MAC could not comply with Pan American's request. The airline, therefore, declined

²¹Transcript, telephone conversation between Gen P. K. Carlton, Maj Gen M. F. Casey, and Maj Gen A. G. Glauch, 041805Z Apr 75.

²²Transcript, telephone conversation between Gen P. K. Carlton, Maj Gen M. F. Casey, and Maj Gen A. G. Glauch, 050100Z Apr 75; transcript, telephone conversation between Gen P. K. Carlton, Lt Gen R. E. Huyser, and Maj Gen A. G. Glauch, 050130Z Apr 75.

²³Transcript, telephone conversation between Gen P. K. Carlton, Maj Gen M. F. Casey, and Maj Gen A. G. Glauch, 050100Z Apr 75.

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵Transcript, telephone conversation between Gen P. K. Carlton and Maj Gen J. F. Gonge, 050345Z Apr 75.

the charter and stated that under the existing circumstances they would accept no more MAC charters into the war zones.²⁶ Perhaps, however, the issue was profit, not insurance coverage. Pan American, World Airways, and other commercials continued to fly into Saigon and airlift orphans directly back to the United States throughout Operation BABYLIFT.

International incidents and disrupted airflow were not the only problems the commercials airline caused for the airlift. The wide-bodied airliners, such as the 747 and DC-10, overwhelmed the support services. A plane with 300 orphans and their escorts exceeded the capacity of the support and service facilities at Honolulu IAP, Hawaii, and Hickam AFB terminal. One attendant for each child and the necessary medical, customs, immigration, public health, and security personnel added up to approximately 800 people in a "confined, inadequate area."²⁷ Additionally, the limited facilities at Honolulu IAP also made it impossible to quarantine 300 or 400 hundred sick children.²⁸



302 orphans from Overseas National Airways' flight processing at Honolulu International Airport.

²⁶Transcript, telephone conversation between Gen P. K. Carlton and Gen R. H. Ellis, 051725Z Apr 75.

²⁷*The Fall and Evacuation of South Vietnam*, p 67.

²⁸*Ibid.*

When the initial Pan American Boeing 747 landed at Honolulu IAP on 5 April with 407 Vietnamese children on board, the Air Force and the state of Hawaii had already developed a contingency plan for such emergencies. Hawaii's governor then declared a state of emergency and enacted the plan. Air Force personnel, therefore, awaited when the plane landed: security policemen and people from the Safety Office cordoned off walkways from the plane to the infant care area; services people gathered supplies and food; hundreds of volunteers bathed, clothed, and cuddled the children; and doctors, nurses, and technicians examined each child. Civilian maintenance personnel, meanwhile, worked through the night cleaning the aircraft.²⁹

Lieutenant General Winton W. Marshall, Vice Commander for the Pacific Air Forces, later described some of the problems to General Carlton: "The city people here were very nervous when that 747 Pan American came through here about not wanting those children to get off that airplane. . . . [T]hey are worried about getting infected."³⁰ Marshall compared the commercial operation to MAC's: "All the MAC guys and the base here really did an outstanding job and the people from Public Health and Customs and everybody else said this was a great operation, much better than the 747 that was handled by the civilians coming through over there at the terminal."³¹ Carlton suggested receiving the commercial BABYLIFT aircraft at the MAC terminal, but the local contractor refused to service the commercial airplanes in the MAC area. General Carlton decided to "do everything we can" to shift the operation from the Honolulu International Airport to the MAC terminal at Hickam AFB, "even if we have to do it ourselves."³²

Even when the commercial airlines carried fewer children there were sometimes problems. A World Airways' Boeing 727 arrived at Hickam AFB terminal with 211 orphans on board. The flight across the Pacific had been so long that the crew needed to rest before they could continue to the West Coast. While the crew slept, Air Force personnel at Hickam AFB set up sleeping quarters for the children in the base gymnasium. The delay forced the Air Force to use three shifts of nearly 300 volunteers and support staff each to care for the children.³³

²⁹Hist, 15th Air Base Wing (ABW), 1 Apr-31 Jul 75, pp 1-2.

³⁰Transcript, telephone conversation between Gen P. K. Carlton and Lt Gen W. W. Marshall, 072210Z Apr 75.

³¹*Ibid.*

³²*Ibid.*

³³Msg, 15 ABW/DP to CSAF/OC, *et al*, "Operation BABYLIFT-After Action Report," 270630Z Apr 75.

In comparison, the C-141s with 50-60 children on board spent approximately two hours on the ground at Hickam AFB, thereby shortening the length of the trip and easing the strain on the children, attendants, and support personnel. Health officials could also quarantine the smaller number of children and keep them separate from the general public.³⁴ Although the civilian airlines carried a large percentage of the orphans during Operation BABYLIFT, their "go-it-alone" attitude interrupted the smooth flow of the military airlift, extended the travel time for some of the children, and caused additional work and frustration for ground support staff, especially in Hawaii.

³⁴*The Fall and Evacuation of South Vietnam*, p 68.

CONCLUSIONS

Command and control was fragmented, often resulting in conflicting guidance and incomplete coordination.

Brigadier General Richard T. Drury¹

Since the Military Airlift Command continues to evacuate noncombatants, the lessons of Operation BABYLIFT are still relevant. Many of MAC's problems were and still are inherent in noncombatant evacuations. President Ford's casual method of implementing the airlift left MAC several days without written authority to evacuate the orphans. This delay and the nebulous lines of authority between the State Department and the Department of Defense prevented clear understanding of where authority for the operation rested. This hampered General Carlton's direction of BABYLIFT throughout the operation. Control of noncombatant evacuations still rests with the State Department, therefore clear directions and command lines remain a potential problem in all NEOs.

Lieutenant General William H. Tunner, commander of the Berlin Airlift, once described his ideal airlift: "The actual operation of a successful airlift is about as glamorous as drops of water on stone. There's no frenzy, no flap, just the inexorable process of getting the job done."² A lack of "proper command and control" during BABYLIFT prevented MAC from creating the smooth, even, monotonous flow that Tunner envisioned. Commercial airlines picked up hundreds of orphans while empty MAC C-141s sat waiting for loads. Then some wide-bodied commercial jets by-passed the staging area at Clark AB where medical personnel could examine the children and flew directly to Hickam AFB, where the large loads overwhelmed the support services.

For future non-combatant evacuations both MAC and PACAF recommended establishing a staging area, such as Clark AB during BABYLIFT, to receive the children: "Experience has shown that a majority of the orphans are in poor health and require complete medical checks, baths and clean clothing, and adequate rest prior to making a long air trip to the United States."³ To improve the air flow, reduce the pressure on the support services, and decrease the time required en route, planners recommended using

¹Rprt, Brig Gen R. T. Drury, "After-Action Report, Theater Airlift Manager," 17 May 75.

²William H. Tunner, *Over the Hump* (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1964), p 167.

³Msg, CINCPAC Vice Commander to MAC Vice Commander, *et al.*, "Operation BABYLIFT," 152120Z Apr 75.

“dedicated C-141s with no more than 50 to 60 orphans aboard.”⁴ The condition of the aircraft and the orphans prompted PACAF to suggest doubling the ground time normally allowed for “turnaround support.” At the stops along the way the children must be removed from the aircraft, bathed, and checked by medical personnel. Also, the aircraft must be thoroughly cleaned, and “the cleaning crews required at least twice the normal time because of the unsanitary condition of the cabin.” PACAF recommended that agreements with commercial airlines using military staging bases require the above procedures.⁵

After the orphan evacuation the Joint Chiefs of Staff followed a MAC recommendation and established a single coordination point within the JCS to consolidate and approve the joint military and civilian involvement in non-combatant evacuations. The command’s leaders believed, “This would eliminate duplication of effort and poor utilization of valuable airlift, manpower, and materiel resources.”⁶ Having an airlift coordinator at the JCS-level has significantly improved communication since that time. The military, however, still has little control over commercial airlines not under MAC contract, short of activating the Civil Reserve Air Fleet (CRAF), an action that will not be taken unless a major war develops.⁷

Operation BABYLIFT again proved the need for the consolidation of command and control. The lack of a single airlift commander led to frustration, confusion, and inefficiency. Military Airlift Command leaders recognized this deficiency and appointed Brigadier General Richard T. Drury as theater airlift manager when Operation FREQUENT WIND, the massive non-combatant evacuation of South Vietnam, began a few days later on 20 April 1975. In his “After-Action Report” that covered the end of Operation BABYLIFT and the beginning of FREQUENT WIND, General Drury emphasized that before he arrived, “Command and control was fragmented, often resulting in conflicting guidance and incomplete coordination.”⁸ Drury’s presence at Clark AB and his recognized authority to manage the airlift solved many of the problems. He wrote that “The Theater Airlift Manager, directing the ALCC and acting for the Air Force component commander, provides the single airlift point of

⁴Hist, USPACOM 1975, “Appendix III-BABYLIFT,” p 28; msg, CINCPAC Vice Commander to MAC Vice Commander, *et al.*, “Operation BABYLIFT,” 152120Z Apr 75.

⁵Hist, USPACOM 1975, “Appendix III-BABYLIFT,” p 27.

⁶Hist, USPACOM 1975, “Appendix III-BABYLIFT,” p 29.

⁷Intvw, Dr C. F. Cross, MAC/HO, with Mr T. F. Cygan, MAC/TRCI, 11 Jul 89.

⁸Rprt, Brig Gen R. T. Drury, “After-Action Report, Theater Airlift Manager,” 17 May 75.

contact previously lacking, provides a vital coordination interface between strategic and theater airlift, and can resolve many corollary problems of command and control.”⁹ General Drury also stressed the value of an on-site airlift control element (ALCE): “We could have then alleviated such problems as aircraft returning empty, or else crowding the loading ramp with as many as seven C141’s waiting for loads.” He believed that the political considerations should have been secondary to “proper command and control.”¹⁰ A theater airlift manager in-place from the beginning could have made BABYLIFT a smoother operation.

The delay in placing a MAC airlift control element at Tan Son Nhut also allowed undocumented aliens to board the aircraft and created a problem with customs officials both in the Philippines and the United States. One member of the Defense Attache Office staff described tactics for sneaking deserving, but undocumented, Vietnamese civilians aboard MAC C-141s, “we managed to exfiltrate many people to Clark, with never a thought of the consequences at the end of the railroad.”¹¹ While the State Department complained to the Department of Defense of MAC’s failure to prevent unauthorized passengers from boarding evacuation flights to the Philippines, State and Defense Department staff disguised the offenders as orphan escorts and secreted them on the aircraft. This confusion also reflected the lack of command and control.

Not all of the lessons of Operation BABYLIFT were negative. The performance of both the flight and medical crews during the C-5A emergency illustrated the quality of MAC aircrews and confirmed the value of training and practice. Because of previous experience during altitude chamber training, crewmembers immediately recognized the rapid decompression and acted appropriately. Although no one had experience flying a C-5A with such limited control, Captain Traynor and his flight crew had the training and expertise to devise methods of controlling the airplane until they could make an emergency landing. Trainers later incorporated some of these techniques into approved emergency procedures practiced in the C-5A flight simulator. Lieutenant Colonel Keith D. Malone, who was in the C-5 cockpit, stated later that he believed that any MAC crew could have brought the airplane in for an emergency landing. He felt his crew did nothing special. Also, Lieutenant Aune and the medical staff, with no experience as C-5A aeromedical evacuation crewmembers, efficiently reacted to the crisis. They remained calm, comforted and treated their patients, and systematically prepared for an emergency landing. Both flight and medical crews not only showed great personal valor but also reflected the excellence and relevance of their training.

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹Stuart A. Herrington, *Peace With Honor? An American Reports on Vietnam 1973-1975* (Novato: Presidio Press, 1983), p 160.

Operation BABYLIFT also proved the need for flexibility when forces beyond MAC's control disrupted the airlift and thwarted plans. As long as MAC continues to serve as an instrument of foreign policy and as long as the State Department oversees noncombatant evacuations, there will be divided control. During such operations the command can manage those airlift elements under its jurisdiction and stand ready to help those beyond its span of control. Despite frustrations, interruptions, and a tragic accident, Operation BABYLIFT reflected the Military Airlift Command's ability to respond quickly and to evacuate noncombatant people under very difficult conditions. Members of the command performed well, even heroically. Operation BABYLIFT set the stage for the highly-successful Operation FREQUENT WIND that followed immediately and demonstrated the application of lessons learned.

Appendix 1

MAC-sponsored BABYLIFT flights to CONUS (6 Apr-6 May 1975)

<u>Depart</u>	<u>Destination</u>	<u>Mission No</u>	<u>No/Type Acft</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Orphans</u>
Clark	San Francisco	1963-06/07	2 C-141	6 Apr	128
Clark	San Francisco	1963-18	1 C-141	7 Apr	65
Clark	San Francisco	1964-01	ONA DC-10	8 Apr	302
Clark	San Francisco	PLP 552*	1 C-141	9 Apr	9
Clark	Los Angeles	1965-01	WOA B-747	12 Apr	329
Clark	San Francisco	PLP 552	1 C-141	12 Apr	12
Clark	Travis	PLP 552X	1 C-141	14 Apr	1
Clark	Los Alamitos	1963-28	1 C-141	16 Apr	38
Clark	Travis	PLP 552	1 C-141	19 Apr	9
Clark	Travis	PLP 552	1 C-141	23 Apr	5
Clark	Travis	1966-45	1 C-141	24 Apr	24
Clark	Long Beach	1967-08	1 C-141	25 Apr	65
Clark	Long Beach	1967-09	1 C-141	25 Apr	65
Saigon	Oakland	1974	WOA 727	26 Apr	211
Clark	Travis	1967-10	1 C-141	27 Apr	55
Clark	Long Beach	1967-11	1 C-141	27 Apr	51
Guam	Norton	1967-88	1 C-141	27 Apr	35
Clark	Los Alamitos	1967-70	1 C-141	28 Apr	47
Clark	Travis	1967-71	1 C-141	28 Apr	65
Clark	McChord	1967-72	1 C-141	28 Apr	65
Clark	Los Alamitos	1967-78	1 C-141	29 Apr	41
Clark	Travis	PLP 852X	1 C-141	29 Apr	4
Guam	El Toro	1965-80	PAA 707	29 Apr	3
Clark	McChord	1977-46	1 C-141	30 Apr	65
Clark	McChord	1977-47	1 C-141	30 Apr	58
Clark	McChord	1978-78	1 C-141	6 May	42
				Commercial	845
				C-141	949
Total MAC & MAC Contract as of 7 May 1975					1794

*All PLP flights were aeromedical evacuation missions.

SOURCE: MAC DCS Ops/Opnl Rpts & Briefing Div [cited in Hist (S), 22d AF, 1975, p. 74, info used (U)].

Appendix 2

Private Airlift (Non-MAC) 2-22 Apr 1975

<u>Depart</u>	<u>Destination</u>	<u>Type Acft</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Orphans</u>
Saigon	Oakland	WOA DC-8	2 Apr	58
Saigon	San Francisco	PAA 707	3 Apr	18
Saigon	Seattle	PAA 747	5 Apr	408
Saigon	San Francisco	PAA 747	5 Apr	320
Yokota	San Francisco	PAA 707	9 Apr	2
Yokota	San Francisco	PAA 707	11 Apr	2
Saigon	Oakland	WOA DC-8	22 Apr	<u>76</u>

Total as of 30 Apr (private) 884

SOURCE: MAC DCS Ops/Opnl Rpts & Briefing Div. [Cited in Hist (S), 22d AF 1975, p. 75, info used (U).]

Appendix 3

MAC-sponsored BABYLIFT flights to Saigon (5-25 Apr 1975)

<u>Depart</u>	<u>Destination</u>	<u>Mission No</u>	<u>Type Acft</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Orphans</u>
Saigon	Clark AB	1963-04	C-141	5 Apr	100
Saigon	Clark AB	1963-05	C-141	5 Apr	30
Saigon	Clark AB	1963-10	C-141	6 Apr	79
Saigon	Clark AB	1963-11	C-141	6 Apr	79
Saigon	Clark AB	1963-16	C-141	7 Apr	99
Saigon	Clark AB	1963-17	C-141	7 Apr	110
Utapao	Clark AB	1963-19	C-141	9 Apr	*52
Saigon	Clark AB	World Airways 801		10 Apr	22
Saigon	Clark AB	Y5A7MX	C-141	11 Apr	120
Saigon	Clark AB	3613-10	C-141	11 Apr	133
Saigon	Clark AB	40635	C-141	15 Apr	44
Saigon	Guam	60168	C-141	25 Apr	<u>59</u>
Total					927

*Cambodian orphan refugees.

SOURCE: Chronology, MAC/HO, "Operation BABYLIFT 3 April-13 May 1975," Appendix I, pp. 157-63.

Appendix 4

List of Crew Members Aboard C-5A SN 68-218

<u>Name</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Position</u>
Flight Crew:		
Traynor, Dennis W.	Capt	Pilot
Harp, Tilford W.	Capt	Copilot
Malone, Keith D.	Capt	Additional Crewmember
*Melton, Edgar R.	Capt	Additional Crewmember
Wallace, William G.	Maj	Auxiliary Navigator
Langford, John T.	Capt	Navigator
McAtee, Lynn F.	MSgt	Flight Engineer
Engels, Allen R.	TSgt	Flight Engineer
*Dionne, Donald T.	SSgt	Flight Engineer
Perkins, Howard C.	SMSgt	Load Master
Snedegar, Raymond F.	SMSgt	Load Master
*Payne, Wendle L.	MSgt	Load Master
*Aguillon, Felizardo C.	TSgt	Load Master
Bradley, Percy D.	TSgt	Load Master
Doughty, Peter P.	TSgt	Load Master
*Parker, William A.	TSgt	Load Master
Mission Observer:		
*Willis, William S.	LtCol	Mission Observer
Photographers:		
*Castro, Joe	MSgt	Additional Crewmember
*Nance, Kenneth E.	Sgt	Additional Crewmember
Medical Crew:		
*Klinker, Mary T.	Capt	Flight Nurse
Aune, Regina C.	1Lt	Flight Nurse
Goffinett, Harriet	1Lt	Flight Nurse
Wirtz, Marcia	1Lt	Flight Nurse
Boutwell, Olen	MSgt	Medical Technician
*Johnson, Denning C.	TSgt	Medical Technician
Hadley, James A.	SSgt	Medical Technician
*Paget, Michael G.	SSgt	Medical Technician
Gnerek, Gregory	Sgt	Medical Technician
Wise, Philip	Sgt	Medical Technician

*Fatally injured.

SOURCE: Ltr, MAC/JA to Mr F. L. Marrs, "Request for Information re C-5A Aircraft Crash," w/atch, 24 Jul 75.

Appendix 5

Key Personnel

1. Gen Paul K. Carlton, Commander, MAC.
2. Gen Richard H. Ellis, Vice Chief of Staff, USAF.
3. Gen David C. Jones, Chief of Staff, USAF.
4. Gen Louis L. Wilson, Jr., Commander in Chief, PACAF.
5. Adm Noel Gayler, Commander in Chief, PACOM.
6. Lt Gen Marion L. Boswell, Asst Vice Chief of Staff, USAF.
7. Lt Gen Robert E. Huyser, DCS/Plans & Ops, USAF.
8. Lt Gen Daniel James, Jr., Vice Commander, MAC.
9. Lt Gen Winton W. Marshall, Vice Commander in Chief, PACAF.
10. Lt Gen William G. Moore, Jr., Chief of Staff, PACOM.
11. Maj Gen Maurice F. Casey, Dep Dir, J-4 (Logistics), JCS.
12. Maj Gen William A. Dietrich, Chief of Staff, HQ MAC.
13. Maj Gen Alden G. Glauch, DCS/Ops, HQ MAC.
14. Maj Gen John F. Gonge, Commander, 22d AF.
15. Maj Gen Guy E. Hairston, Jr., Dir, Office of Info, USAF.
16. Maj Gen Lester T. Kearney, Jr., Commander, 21st AF.
17. Major General Leroy J. Manor, Commander, 13th AF.
18. Maj Gen Fred L. Poston, DCS/Ops, PACAF.
19. Maj Gen Foster Lee Smith, Asst DCS/Ops, USAF.
20. Brig Gen Keith L. Christensen, Asst DCS/Ops, HQ MAC.
21. Brig Gen Richard T. Drury, Vice Commander, 22d AF.
22. Brig Gen Donald A. Gaylord, Commander, Pac Exch Sys.
23. Brig Gen David L. Gray, Exec to Chief of Staff, USAF.
24. Brig Gen Warner E. Newby, DCS/Log, HQ MAC.
25. Brig Gen Jack Waters, DCS/Log, PACAF.
26. Mr Edward Daly, President, World Airways.
27. Mr Arthur W. Purkel, Dir of Contract Airlift Div, HQ MAC.

FOR FURTHER READING

The overwhelming majority of information for this monograph came from the official archives of the Military Airlift Command, Scott Air Force Base, Illinois. In addition, former MAC historians Zoe Hanisian and Kenneth L. Patchin's unpublished *Operation BABYLIFT (A Chronology)* and unit histories from: the Military Airlift Command; 22d Air Force; United States Pacific Command; Pacific Air Forces; 60th Military Airlift Wing; 61st Military Airlift Support Wing; 62d Military Airlift Wing; and 15th Air Base Wing provide details of Operation BABYLIFT. The USAF Historical Research Center, Maxwell AFB, Alabama, and the MAC History Office, Scott AFB, Illinois, archives contain the messages and transcripts relevant to the operation.

Several books provided background material for the period leading up to the evacuation. Richard Nixon's *No More Vietnams* (New York: Arbor House, 1985) discusses his perception of the peace treaty and the reasons for its failure. The last Chairman of the South Vietnamese Joint General Staff General Cao Van Vien's *The Final Collapse* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1985) gives an insider's perspective to the fall of Vietnam. Phillip B. Davidson's *Vietnam at War: The History 1946-1975* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1988) describes the Vietnam War from the end of World War II through the fall of Saigon. Guenter Lewy, *America in Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978) and Alan Dawson, *55 Days: The Fall of South Vietnam* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1977) recall their first-hand experiences as American civilians in Vietnam during the North Vietnamese takeover. Stuart A. Herrington, *Peace With Honor? An American Reports on Vietnam 1973-1975* (Novato: Presidio Press, 1983) and Joseph A. Amter, *Vietnam Verdict: A Citizen's History* (New York: Continuum, 1982) add additional insight to the period following American withdrawal from Vietnam. Three American officers who worked for the Defense Attache Office, Thomas G. Tobin, Arthur E. Laehr, and John F. Hilgenberg, *Last Flight from Saigon* (Washington: Government Pr. Ofc., 1978), describe the fall of Vietnam, the functioning of the Defense Attache Office, and the crash of the C-5.

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