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Airlift and the Guard

DESPITE apprehensions voiced from several quarters, including the concern of this Association, the Department of Defense has ordered the deactivation, next October, of three Heavy Transport units of the Air National Guard and, in 1967, of eight Troop Carrier Squadrons of the Air Force Reserve. Every indication points to additional reductions in the years ahead.

To Guardsmen who currently are engaged in a prolonged and massive effort to help the Military Airlift Command (formerly the Military Air Transport Service) move ever-mounting backlogs of vital military cargo to overseas points—mostly to South Viet Nam—the decision came as a shock. Air Guardsmen and MAC Regulars alike have flown saturation schedules since early last Spring, yet the demand for airlift continues to spiral and the backlog to mount. At one point in time, not many weeks ago, MAC had more than 200 of its planes in the air, someplace in the pipeline between the U.S. and South Viet Nam. On a single day last month—18 December—43 of the Air National Guard's heavy transports were on their way to or from an overseas destination, hauling cargo for MAC in an attempt to keep up with the unprecedented demand.

(The full story of the Air Guard's contribution to U.S. airlift, both before and since the step-up of our efforts in South Viet Nam, may be found elsewhere in this issue.)

And it is in a period like this, with an ever-mounting demand for airlift and little prospect for a slowdown in the foreseeable future, that a reduction of reserve airlift is announced!

The proposed cutbacks have been under study in the Pentagon for more than a year, and a hand-pick Airlift Subcommittee of this Association has delved deep into the rationale for such a reduction. It has found official explanations to be reasonable and logical—up to a point!

The larger, faster C141's now coming into the strategic airlift system can haul heavier loads, farther, faster, and at less cost per ton-mile, than the outmoded aircraft now flown by the Air Reserve Forces. The mammoth C5A, still only a gleam in the eyes of its designers, though delivery of the first models is promised for 1970-72, will exceed the C141 by as wide a margin as the C141 surpasses the Guard's C97's and C121's. If you have one aircraft which can haul ten times the load of any present plane, then you need only a tenth as many aircraft, and crews! So goes the reasoning, apparently.

There can be no doubt that the new transports can out-perform older models by a wide margin. The C5A, in particular, will constitute a major breakthrough for military airlift, since it will be capable of carrying five times the number of combat-loaded troops or ten times the amount of cargo to an overseas destination in a fraction of the time required by one of the C97's of which the Air Guard fleet is largely composed.

It is the opinion of knowledgeable senior officers of the Air National Guard who are well-acquainted with the airlift program, though, that the decision appears to give little consideration to several highly relevant factors:

(1) Only a handful of C141's currently are available and the

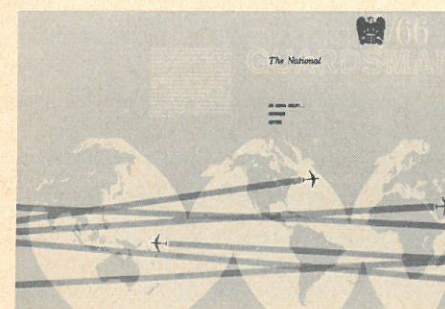
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