

world

Failures 'stun' officials Choppers got no special care

WASHINGTON — Navy maintenance men aboard the USS Nimitz were not told their helicopters would be employed on the disastrous 500-mile flight that sank American hopes for a rescue of the 53 hostages in Tehran.

And Pentagon officials said the eight RH-53 "Sea Stallion" choppers were not the same aircraft as those that performed flawlessly through storms and other difficult conditions during practice runs in the United States.

Officials said the eight choppers used in the rescue mission were transferred from the United States to the Indian Ocean island of Diego Garcia as long ago as December. From there, the 7-year-old aircraft were shipped to the carrier USS Nimitz and maintained by crews.

A senior military officer said those maintenance teams did not know the choppers were to be used for anything but routine operations and that only one or two officers on the entire ship knew just how important the machines really were.

President Carter and military officials

were in agreement the rescue plan had an excellent chance for success.

It was to have worked like this: Six C-130 Hercules transport planes flew early Thursday from a base in Egypt, made a rest stop on the Gulf of Oman, then made it to a desert rendezvous point near Tabas, 200 miles southeast of Tehran, where they were to refuel the helicopters.

The eight choppers, carrying 90 men from an elite antiterrorist group trained at Fort Bragg, N.C., were to fly from the deck of the Nimitz 500 miles, mostly across desert, to the desert refueling point.

From there, the choppers, each capable of carrying 55 passengers, were to take the men to a mountain hideout near Tehran. The rescuers were to have driven to the embassy compound in trucks and other vehicles, attacking Friday night, and using incapacitating gas if necessary.

The raiders, the hostages, and presumably their Iranian agents and helpers were then to have been picked up by helicopters, taken to a new rendezvous point with the C-130s

outside Tehran for a freedom flight away from Iran.

But Pentagon officials said they were stunned that three of the helicopters failed on the first leg of the mission.

Of the eight CH-53s that left the Nimitz, one developed trouble with its gyros during a sandstorm, causing the artificial horizon to disappear from the panel. With safe flight endangered, they chose to return to the Nimitz.

A second helicopter came down on Iranian territory short of the rendezvous point for unexplained mechanical reasons, and its crew was rescued by its "buddy" aircraft.

Once all the other crafts had landed, a third helicopter was found to have drastic hydraulic problems.

Since officials felt they needed a minimum of six helicopters to carry out their rescue plan, the commander recommended the mission be aborted.

It was at that point that one of the remaining five good helicopters crashed from an altitude of 15 feet into a parked C-130 transport.

Tito's condition improves —barely

BELGRADE, Yugoslavia — Doctors Monday reported President Josip Broz Tito, 87, emerged from a state of shock and was improved enough his condition could be described as "very grave" rather than "exceptionally grave."

"By application of corresponding measures of medical treatment, the critical stage of shock into which Comrade President fell in the afternoon of April 22 has been overcome," the official medical bulletin said.

"But, the general condition of his health is still very grave. Intensive medical treatment is being continued."

Tito, hospitalized for 107 days, presumably was still in a coma.

Doctors had described Tito's state of health as "very grave" for about six weeks until just a week ago — April 21 — when internal bleeding and liver failure forced them to downgrade their description of his condition to "exceptionally grave."

Tito lapsed into critical condition with the onset of shock April 22, and remained in that state for two days.

He suffers liver failure and acute jaundice, total kidney failure, pneumonia, high fever, internal bleeding and cardiac weakness and serious disorders of the digestive organs.

These were complications which followed his Jan. 20 leg amputation.

France starts withdrawing troops out of civil war-stricken Chad

PARIS — France Monday began withdrawing its last 1,100 troops from Chad, engaged in a civil war and where renewed fighting began a month ago between rival Moslem factions.

French Foreign Ministry sources said the withdrawal operation from an air base near the capital city of N'djamena would take several weeks.

The French forces had been under strict orders to remain neutral and

serve as a protective mission during the fighting that began March 21 in N'djamena.

More than 1,000 people were killed and 3,000 injured in the fighting in the impoverished African nation. Thousands of others have fled into neighboring Cameroon, including nearly the entire 800-member foreign community.

French sources said sporadic shelling and bombing have continued in N'djamena since the latest cease-fire collapsed April 9.

"The French military troops have accomplished their protective mission," a statement from the Elysee presidential palace said Sunday.

"The withdrawal is being carried out under the provisions of an accord with the Chadian government of national unity."

The latest round of fighting involves a power struggle between forces of President Goukouni Oueddei and Defense Minister Hissen Habre.

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