

Pilot Training for the South Vietnam Air Force

Once U.S. redeployment began in earnest, the training and buildup of the South Vietnam Air Force also took on a new importance. While the Army retained jurisdiction over helicopters within its sphere, in the South Vietnam government defense organization these critical machines were controlled by the Air Force. Thus, after 1969 the rapid buildup of the Air Force's rotary-wing arm necessitated close coordination between CONUS training schedules, U.S. Army aviation redeployments, equipment turnover procedures, and U.S. Air Force advisory teams. In many cases Vietnamese Air Force pilots and mechanics served long apprentice periods with Army aviation companies before their own squadrons were finally activated. Again the result was impressive. In 1968 the Air Force possessed about seventy-five outmoded rotary aircraft (H-34's) organized into five squadrons; by the end of 1972 it boasted some 500 new machines in eighteen squadrons, one of the largest; costliest, and most modern helicopter fleets in the world.

Both U.S. Army and U.S. Air Force CONUS installations were used extensively to train Vietnamese Air Force pilots. This practice made it necessary for all prospective pilots to receive extensive language training. English language training for all Vietnamese helicopter pilots were finally completed on schedule with the last group leaving for the United States in April 1971. CONUS helicopter pilot training was scheduled for completion in July 1972. At the time, a total of 1,642 would have been trained including 341 who would have received instrument qualification training. The total Vietnamese Air Force offshore pilot training requirement, including helicopter, fixed-wing, and high-performance aircraft, was 3,334. During 1971, 1,007 students departed for offshore training while the remainder were scheduled to depart for continental United States by May 1972 for eighteen months of training. Completion date for the major portion of the offshore pilot program was September 1973.

(Source: Vietnam Studies: The Development and Training of The South Vietnamese Army, 1950-1972)