

The BEAM Report



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The date was April 30th, 1975, in the hours just before the final tragic overrun of South Vietnam by the communist, North Vietnamese fighters. After decades of fighting, the United States Armed Forces were pulling out their last tiny foothold in Saigon, South Vietnam and the region was in turmoil. South Vietnamese soldiers and civilians alike were frantic to get out, to escape the torture, death, and destruction that were sure to follow the arrival of North Vietnamese forces.

The last commercial and military flights out of the country were jam packed with desperate refugees. Others took to the sea in anything that would float in an attempt to reach safety. Tragically, for most, there was no way out.



The USS Midway

Operation Frequent Wind was launched in an a last ditch effort to evacuate all US personnel and as many South Vietnamese as possible. An aircraft carrier, the USS Midway, was one of the many ships ordered to the waters off Vietnam to aid in the evacuation effort. Soon, South Vietnamese pilots flying Huey Helicopters filled with people began arriving in the skies above the carrier. In short order, the flight decks were a bee hive of activity as helicopters landed and the refugees were unloaded.



The Buang Ly family in the Cessna O-1

Meanwhile, back in Vietnam, Major Buang Ly, a South Vietnamese Air Force pilot loaded his family aboard a small reconnaissance airplane. He knew the USS Midway was supposed to be located somewhere off the coast. The two passenger Cessna O-1 "Bird Dog" was dangerously over loaded with himself, his wife, and five small children. To make matters worse, he couldn't know for sure if he'd be able to even locate the US aircraft carrier. However, he had no other options. Knowing the odds, yet having weighed the cost, he took off with his precious cargo and headed out to sea.

A crew member aboard the USS Midway spotted a small reconnaissance airplane flying toward to aircraft carrier. All attempts to establish radio communications with the tiny airplane failed as it flew nearer and began circling low over the ship. After successfully evading enemy ground fire and navigating without a radio, the pilot, Major Buang Ly, had miraculously found the Midway.

However, the ordeal was far from over. He quickly noticed that the carrier flight deck was jam packed with helicopters. Even if the deck had been clear there was still the problem of an extremely short landing area, far shorter than the length normally required for his airplane.

After several futile attempts at dropping a message to the ship, Mr. Ly scribbled a brief note on a chart. He stuffed it into his pistol, and on a low pass tossed his

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weapon onto the deck of the ship. It read, "Can you move these Helicopters to the other side, I can land on your runway, I can fly one hour more, we have enough time to move. Please rescue me. Major Bung, wife and 5 child."

The message was quickly carried to the ship's commanding officer, Capt. Larry Chambers, who quickly realized the gravity of the situation. Mr. Ly didn't have enough fuel to make it back to land. Captain Chambers immediately ordered all available hands on deck and gave orders to start pitching helicopters overboard. Though he believed his decision would get him court marshaled after only five weeks of command, spotters had reported that there were at least four people in the two person aircraft, including children. There was no other choice!



Major Buang's Handwritten note

Over the next few frantic minutes, over ten million dollars worth of helicopters were pitched into the South China Sea. Even as the crew worked to clear the deck, five more Hueys landed. These too where quickly unloaded and scuttled.

The weather was definitely not ideal, it was raining, the overcast ceiling was low, and the wind was blowing, but there was no time to lose. The Captain ordered the ship full speed ahead in order for the wind over the flight deck to reduce the landing distance required by the little Cessna. He also had warnings broadcast over the radio in both English and Vietnamese warning of the treacherous wake turbulence that would be present behind the moving carrier. Dangerously low on fuel, Major Buang finally received the green light to attempt the landing.

Landing a land plane on a carrier without a tail hook would be no easy task but the die was cast, and there was no turning back. Major Buang lowered full flaps and slowed down to just above stalling speed. As the crew watched with bated breath, the tiny plane cleared the threshold and touched down on the center line at the normal touchdown point. He bounced once and quickly came to a stop with room to spare, to the cheers of the carrier crew. His family was safe!



Major Buang flares for a perfect landing

This article illustrates how much one captain was willing to sacrifice to save a Vietnamese pilot and his family. Shouldn't we be willing to pay whatever it costs to save those who have never heard the good news of the gospel? That is why our motto is "reaching the lost at any cost." Aircraft are not cheap. The Navy pitched ten million dollars worth of helicopters into the ocean to save one family. We are asking the Lord to provide an airplane to be used to reach whole villages, families, or even just one individual if necessary, who has never heard the Gospel. Imagine yourself in the place of that one individual. Is it worth it?



The Buang Ly family safe aboard the USS Midway