

Flew in 3 refugees

Wounded U.S. copter pilot may face German charges

TRAUNSTEIN, Germany (UPI) — The wounded American helicopter pilot who flew three East German refugees to the West from Czechoslovakia Sunday amidst a hail of bullets from Communist border guards may face charges for violating West German laws, the police said.

Barry Meeker, 34, of Hartford, Conn., took a chartered helicopter into Czechoslovakia to bring out an East German family. He suffered two bullet wounds when guards spotted the chopper and opened fire.

Police said they believed Meeker had made two previous runs into Eastern Europe to smuggle out prospective refugees for payment.

Meeker, a decorated veteran of the Vietnam Green Berets forces, faced charges of violating air space, filing a false flight report and crossing the border illegally, the Bavarian Interior Ministry said.

The spokesman said authorities still are undecided whether to file criminal charges. In addition, the pilot could lose his license and be made to pay a fine.

Meeker said that the damage caused by rifle bullets to his rented helicopter exceeded 15,000 marks (\$5,900), more than he was paid for the flight.

Surgeons at the Traunstein hospital operated on Meeker for two hours to mend an elbow joint shattered by one of the bullets

that hit him. The hospital described his condition as good.

Meeker, who for the past 18 months has worked as a civilian pilot for an air rescue group, piloted his damaged chopper to the same hospital where he previously had brought other accident victims in the course of his work.

Meeker also brought to the hospital one of his passengers, Brigit Neukirschner, 14, who suffered a bullet wound in the thigh. She was released after treatment, the doctor said.

Besides Neukirschner, Meeker flew the girl's father, Guenther Neukirschner, 60, and a 19-year-old male family friend.

When the Czech guards opened fire on the helicopter, Meeker lifted off, leaving behind the girl's mother, who was wounded by the fire, and his copilot, who got off the chopper to help the passengers aboard.