

Refugees Drugged, Pentagon Admits

By George C. Wilson
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The Pentagon admitted yesterday that Air Force personnel in Thailand drugged 13 South Vietnamese refugees and flew them against their will to Guam.

The refugees, the Pentagon said, had been told by South Vietnamese flight crews that they were going to the southern delta region of their own country—not Thailand or Guam.

The refugees became hysterical when they discovered they had landed in Thailand, and, according to the Pentagon, "demanded to be returned to Vietnam and threatened suicide if they were not returned immediately."

Thai government officials had stipulated that South Vietnamese planes carrying refugees could land in Thailand only if the refugees did not stay there. The U.S. Air Force flew C-141 transports to Thailand to transport the refugees from Thailand to Guam.

"Hours of discussion," the Pentagon said, "failed to persuade" the 13 refugees "that

there were no means" to take them back to Vietnam on that date—May 1, 1975.

"The Thai officials were adamant" that the refugees leave Thailand immediately, the Pentagon statement continued. "A decision was made by the United States and Thai people on the scene to sedate the Vietnamese and take them to Guam with the other refugees where it was hoped that repatriation could be made expeditiously."

A Pentagon official said sodium pentathol was used to sedate the refugees and thiazine was given to them as a tranquilizer.

"Although they were helped aboard the aircraft," said the Pentagon, "all 13 were ambulatory during flight. All except one, who insisted on being carried off, left the aircraft at Guam without assistance."

An Air Force nurse flew with the 13 refugees to Guam and noted "no ill effects" from the drugs, the Pentagon said.

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Columnists Jack Anderson and Lea Whitten first wrote of the incident Monday. They wrote that Norman Sweet, the government's refugee executive on Guam in May, demanded an investigation of the treatment given to the 13 refugees.

Sweet also cabled statements from the refugees that claimed three American colonels had threatened to "shoot us" if they did not go to

Guam. "We knelt down accepting the execution," the refugees said, according to the account quoted by Anderson and Whitten.

Rep. Joshua Eilberg (D-Pa.) said yesterday that he had confirmed the Anderson-Whitten account through interviewing 12 of the 13 Vietnamese refugees on Guam.

He is chairman of the House Judiciary immigration subcommittee and threatened to hold hearings on the incident if the Air Force did not issue a satisfactory report.

Eilberg said in a press release issued through his subcommittee office yesterday that he had been told the 13 refugees were beaten when they refused to board the plane for Guam "and then each person was carried by four Americans into a room where they were given two injections in their arms and two in their legs."

He said he had not been able to identify "the Air Force officers responsible for the drug-

ging" or the Army captain who had examined the Vietnamese and believed their story.

"However," said Eilberg, "we have enough evidence to confirm what happened. This is a horrible thing for our country. What we can't understand is what was the compulsion involved—what motivated the Air Force officers."

Eilberg said the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees was to arrange the return of the 13 refugees along with

other Vietnamese who have asked to go back home.

The commissioner, the congressman said, has suggested to the South Vietnamese government that a delegation of refugees attend negotiations on their return. But there has been no response to that request, Eilberg said.