

First Orphans Arrive to Begin a New Life

By LACEY FOSBURGH

Special to The New York Times

SAN FRANCISCO, April 3— Their papers read "orphan boy" and "orphan girl," and there were 52 of them, silent children in sandals and T-shirts.

They are homeless Vietnamese children, the first of what may become hundreds shipped here for adoption by American families over the next few days or weeks.

After their arrival at Oakland International Airport last night, the children, many of them infants, were taken in buses to the Army base at the Presidio here.

In a cavernous green building that had been transformed within hours into a nursery, the children slept on mattresses on the floor and ate and stopped being silent, as they waited to take off again to their final destinations.

They are headed for a new life with families that are adopting them, in Oregon or Nebraska, Pennsylvania or perhaps New Mexico.

Flight from Saigon

When the DC-8 carrying them touched down at Oakland, their unsmiling faces pressed against the windows of the plane for their first glimpse of America, it had been 16 hours since the World Airways plane had roared without lights down the blacked-out runway of Tan Son Nhut Airport outside Saigon.

The long journey from Saigon to Oakland was arranged, with virtually no advance warning by World Airways, the International Red Cross and two adoption agencies.

A host of volunteer groups in San Francisco provided the make-shift nursery with 800 mattresses and blankets, 40 cartons of clothing, 108 teething rings, 75 nurses, 30 doctors, gallons of scrambled eggs and rice, crayons and clay and toys and several teddy bears.

There was also at least one large stuffed rabbit, last seen this morning in the arms of a skinny boy wearing an Oakland Raiders jacket who was headed toward a new home in Illinois.

American Fathers

The children's ages range from 2 months to about 10 years. At least half of them, officials said, were fathered by American soldiers.

None of them speak English and all, reportedly, have been in orphanages most of their lives.

All but five of the children were in the custody of the Friends of Children in Vietnam, a Denver-based adoption agency. The others were sponsored by the Seventh-day Adventists, but all have been cleared for official adoption.

The evacuation operation began suddenly Tuesday (when Edward J. Daly, president of



Associated Press

Kim, an orphan girl, holding a toy rabbit in the Presidio in San Francisco yesterday

World Airways, announced in Saigon that he would take 1,000 children out of South Vietnam, with or without the Government's permission.

During the last few weeks his planes have flown refugees south from Da Nang and carried tons of rice under government contract from Saigon to Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

About 500 children were to have been flown out Tuesday night, but there were last-minute problems because of charges that the aircraft was unsafe. So only 52 children, who just that day had been issued blanket clearance to leave by the Ministry of Social Welfare, made it aboard.

Emotional Arrival

The scene today at the make-shift nursery was orderly. But last night the arrival was chaotic and emotional.

At least 200 representatives of the news media crowded the runway, along with scores of World Airways officials and about 100 Vietnamese who had managed to sneak past security guards. Some of them were students, some of them workers; some were obviously wealthy others very poor.

Some were there, they said, because they hoped that an infant relative had been hidden among the orphans. Others said they had once lost a son or niece and hoped they might recognize the child here among the orphans.

Others said they had come because they were frightened for their relatives in Vietnam and this was their way of es-

tablishing some communion with their homeland.

And there was one very small man, wearing a bright purple polyester shirt, who was there alone. He was Lieut. Dinh Van Manh and is assigned to the Oakland Naval Base. He has a family and two children in Saigon and is "very frightened" for their safety.

The plane taxied in and stopped. Americans waved, but none of the children waved back. Then Lieutenant Manh walked out past the crowd toward the plane.

He started waving vigorously. He was laughing and crying and he looked a little foolish, but then, suddenly, the children all began to wave back at him.

"I just want to come over to see my country children," Lieutenant Manh said. "I want to see my family safe. I worry too much for them now," he said. "How can I stay tonight at home when my country children are coming here on airplane?"

Also in the crowd was Sgt. Fausto Agredano, who was assigned to escort the buses to the presidio nursery. The sergeant, who served 28 months in Vietnam with the 101st Airborne, recalled that more than 3.5-million soldiers shipped out of Oakland for Saigon during the nineteen-sixties.

"I was among them," he said. "We went out to kill those people and now I'm standing here watching us bring them back. It's a strange feeling, I can tell you. I just don't know

what that was all about over there, but it sure doesn't feel right now."

Stopover in Denver

Special to The New York Times

DENVER, April 3 — The executive director of the Friends of Children in Vietnam said today that between 10 and 20 of the children who landed at Oakland were tentatively expected in Denver, with most of them scheduled to stay overnight with families before being sent on to their adoptive parents elsewhere.

The executive director, Cheryl Markson, whose agency took care of the children in Vietnam orphanages, said that about 16 of the children were to be adopted by families on the east coast, about 10 in the South, and the remaining ones in the West and Middle West.

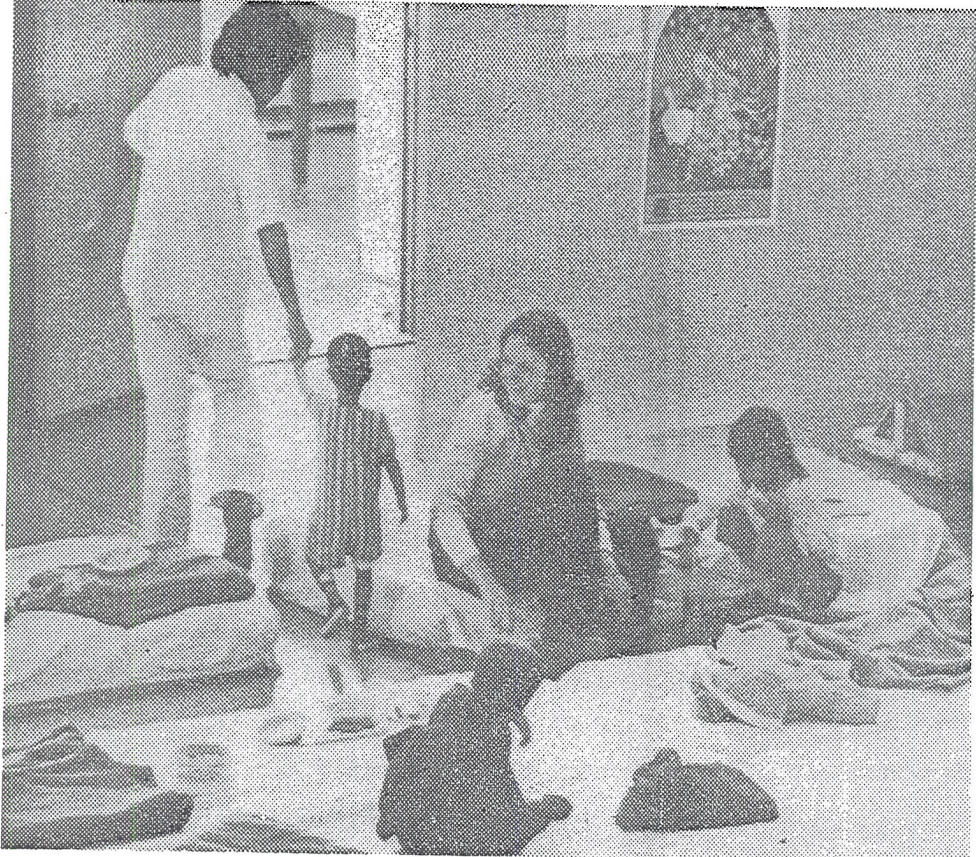
Case workers at the volunteer organization's offices in the Episcopal Church of the Ascension said they had been swamped in the last few days with calls from hundreds of prospective adoptive families. There was also a steady stream of visitors donating money. One case worker said she had collected \$200 this morning alone.

Friends of Children in Vietnam was founded by Denver area physicians who had worked in civilian hospitals in South Vietnam. A spokesman said that although its main work was sending medicine and supplies, the agency had placed about 150 Vietnamese orphans with American families in the past 11 months.

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The New York Times/Alan Copeland

U.S. Army base at the Presidio in San Francisco, where they were taken after their 16-hour land, Calif. By today all are expected to be with new families throughout the country.