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Vietnamese Arrive on Coast: Sad, Uncertain, Relieved

By WALLACE TURNER
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TRAVIS AIR FORCE BASE, Calif., April 23—Two more plane loads of employees of the United States Government and its contractors, accompanied by their Vietnamese dependents, arrived here today. But the predicted flood of Vietnamese refugees is yet to come.

The manifest for the two flights listed 354 Vietnamese. It was not clear, however, whether that number arrived here, since both flights stopped over in Honolulu where the Air Force reported, 11 passengers left a DC-8 and 46 left a 747.

The DC-8 arrived at 5:40 P.M. (P.D.T.) with 204 passengers, and the 747 at 10:25 A.M. with 294 passengers. The Air Force was not able to say who had left the flights, or why. Other flights previously scheduled to arrive here tonight and tomorrow had been canceled because of adjustments caused by shift of the refugee center from Manila to Guam.

The only group of upper class Vietnamese to come to this area arrived early yesterday aboard a World Airways flight to Oakland. There were about 150 persons, about 50 of them children, and they have been living in seclusion in quarters of the Christian Church at Los Gatos, a suburb of San Jose.

Families Separated

Reporters have been rebuffed there in attempts to talk to individuals. An English-speaking Vietnamese said today that the refugees fear being identified because of family members still in Saigon. Immigration officials began interviewing the refugees today.

The Rev. Marvin Rickard, pastor of the church, said he understood that the Vietnamese had been given 30 minutes to two hours notice to get ready to leave and that four children had lost their parents in the crush and one

woman had been separated from her husband.

Many of the men who arrived at this air base today have been unemployed in Saigon for weeks or months, as contracts were canceled.

Howard Wyckoff, a 38-year-old retired soldier, had lived in Vietnam for five years before his retirement. With his wife, Nam, tugging at his sleeve, he said he did not know what he would do now.

"Go back to Missoula [Mont.], and try to figure it out," he said.

Some of the contract employees were bitter. One cursed reporters who tried to question him, telling them, "You are the kind of people who caused it."

The Vietnamese wives seemed especially sad. All of those questioned said they had left members of their families behind and did not expect to see them again.

The scene around the terminal seemed to mesmerize some of the Vietnamese. Reporters asked them questions insistently under glaring television lights. Cab drivers hustled them for trips into San Francisco. And it was difficult for them to discover when buses would arrive and depart, and for where.

Charles Downes, a vending machine salesman, and his wife, Nam, said they had barely escaped capture in Saigon. They had gone there

from Columbus, Ohio, to pick up her two children whom they were unable to bring out when they left three years ago.

The children were with them today, but Mrs. Downes said, "They told us we couldn't bring my other family out." She said that at Clark Air Force Base, in the Philippines, however, she saw "all those high-ranking Vietnamese military and their whole families."

Philip Cook, a consular employe from Vietnam, provided a note of mystery. He was the first person off the second plane today and was driven about 40 yards in a staff limousine. He took two Vietnamese women and two children with him into customs.

After he had cleared inspection, Mr. Cook met reporters, but refused to identify the women or the children, except to say that the children belonged to an American who worked in the embassy in Saigon and that he had escorted them here "as a favor."

Phoung Petitt, tears streaming on to her cheeks, told reporters that she was the widow of a soldier killed in 1968, and that she and her three children were headed for Elma, Wash., where they will live, temporarily at least, with her brother-in-law, Eldridge Petitt.

The day's happiest scene

was the reunion of Mrs. Huang Tam Echols of San Francisco with her 60-year-old mother, Nguyen Thi Cu. For the elder woman, this was the end of an escape that began weeks ago with a ride in a fishing boat down the Vietnamese coast to Saigon.

Mrs. Echols, dressed in a purple velvet gown, waited for hours to greet her mother. The older woman finally emerged, carrying a conical hat and wearing a black dress. On sight, they cried out loudly and clutched each other. Three of Mrs. Echols' brothers are still in Vietnam.

"My mother now out," said Mrs. Echols. "My two brothers now lost in Da Nang and Qui Nhon. A brother in Saigon. Maybe they kill him."

Home Is Now Hawaii

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* HONOLULU, April 23—Some of the Vietnamese refugees who were flown from the Philippines to the United States today chose Hawaii as their adopted home rather than going on to Travis Air Force Base in California.

John O'Shea, district director of the United States Immigration Service, said that those involved carried documents permitting them to stay in Hawaii.

"They wanted to get off here and there was no problem that I know of," he said.