

South Vietnam Surrenders --
Americans Gone

Years of Fighting End-- U.S. Flag Comes Down As Yanks Fly Away

Saigon

South Vietnam surrendered yesterday to the Viet Cong.

The collapse came 2½ hours after the United States pulled down the Stars and Stripes and left the country it had spent 14 years trying to keep out of Communist hands.

President Duong Van (Big) Minh announced the surrender in a 60-second address to his people. He told his soldiers to stop fighting and said he was ready to meet Viet Cong leaders "to discuss the turnover of the administration, both civilian and military."

Columns of South Vietnamese troops pulled out of their defensive positions in the city and marched to central points to turn in their weapons.

Thirty minutes later, 20 Communist tanks loaded with soldiers and flying the red and blue, gold-starred Viet Cong flag rolled into downtown Saigon and onto the grounds of the presidential palace.

Viet Cong forces entered the palace and soon an explosion was heard. The cause was not immediately determined.

Other tanks and some trucks with North Vietnamese troops moved into the city and witnesses said some had opened fire. Government troops did not return the fire.

In Paris, the Viet Cong said it would accept the surrender only after fulfillment of one remaining condition: that U.S. ships leave Vietnamese waters. That was expected shortly.

The surrender ended 35 years of fighting in Vietnam, starting with the Japanese takeover in 1940. The United States invested 14 years, \$150 billion and more than 50,000 lives in its efforts to block the communists.

America gave up yesterday.

President Ford approval "Option 4" — a massive and swift helicopter evacuation — and scores of helicopters swept into Saigon to pick up all Americans who wanted to leave, about 900 persons, and transported them to ships and carriers waiting in the south China Sea.

U.S. Ambassador Graham Martin, weary and drawn, step stepped from a helicopter and onto the deck of the amphibious command ship Blue Ridge.

He symbolized the pullout that saw the Americans leave with Vietnamese screams of "Please take me! Please take me!" still echoing in their ears.

Gunshots resounded in the streets, and flames licked at the abandoned U.S. Embassy that Vietnamese first looted and then set a fire. As mortar rounds pounded the city's outskirts, Minh

Back Page Col. 4

From Page 1

made his brief, sad announcement:

"All soldiers, be calm and remain where you are now. I also call on soldiers not to open fire so that together we can discuss ways to hand over the reins of government without bloodshed.

"In the interest of peace, national conciliation and concord of the people, to save the lives of the people, I believe deeply in conciliation among the Vietnamese people.

"Therefore I call on all the soldiers of the republic of Vietnam to stay where you are.

"We also call on the soldiers of the Provisional Revolutionary Government (Viet Cong) not to open fire because we are waiting to meet with the government of the PRG to discuss the turnover of the administration, both civilian and military, without causing senseless bloodshed to the people."

It was 150 minutes after the last U.S. evacuation helicopter left. It was 13 days after neighboring Cambodia fell to the pro-communist Khmer Rouge.

Even as Minh spoke, communist forces fought toward the center of the city, and by mid-morning Saigon was in Chaos.

Vietnamese went on a rampage, looting homes the earlier and carting off tables, desks, chairs and anything else they could carry from the U.S. Embassy before putting it to the torch.

Police fired time and

again over the heads of people in crowds to try to control them. Instead it created

On rooftops, Vietnamese waited for rides on the helicopters that would not return. The embassy's compound held more of them,

**More Indochina pullout
News on Pages 6-10**

there with the same forlorn hope.

Hours earlier, a young woman pleaded in vain, "please take my children." A well-dressed man offered \$200,000 if someone would take him from Vietnam.

The departure of the Americans — what President Ford called "closing a chapter" on U.S. involvement in Indochina — fulfilled one Communist demand as a condition for peace: an end to the U.S. presence. The ships they flew to were expected to sail quickly, thus meeting the Communist demand that U.S. vessels quit Vietnamese waters.

The few Americans remaining were mostly newsmen and missionaries.

The beginning of the end for the Saigon government was its decision in mid-March to abandon

the central highlands. Communist forces quickly swept in and, with increased momentum, overran the northern two-thirds of the country. Government troops fled in panic, often without firing a shot.

At the time of the surrender, the Communists held three-fourths of South Vietnam and two of its 44 provinces, and had Saigon all but surrounded with an estimated 150,000 men with tanks, artillery and rockets.

The Communists' heaviest attack of the war on Saigon's Tan Son Nhut air base before dawn yesterday killed two U.S. marines and spurred the American decision to go. Two other marines died later when their helicopter crashed into the sea.

Former President Nguyen Van Thieu was in exile, in Taiwan. So was his successor Tran Vanuon, who handed the presidency Monday to Minh — the one remaining presidential contender the Communists had not rejected out of hand for talks.

The hopelessness of the government's position in the final hours was symbolized in the meeting of all his Saigon commanders called by Minh.

Only one showed up.

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