

He Brought 13 In-Laws From Saigon

By Frank Del Olmo
Los Angeles Times

Camp Pendleton

For Nate Allen, 44, a remarkable six-day odyssey ended Wednesday.

The civil engineer had left his home in San Diego for Saigon last Thursday to rescue as many relatives of his Vietnamese wife as he could before the South Vietnamese capital fell.

When he left Saigon aboard an air force plane Monday — amid a rocket barrage — he carried 23 Vietnamese in tow, including 13 relatives, an orphan boy and one "7-year-old boy" who was actually a middle-aged man.

Along the way he paid \$2000 in bribes to South Vietnamese bureaucrats and "lived in tent cities, tin cities and crowded hotel rooms."

"Luck was with us all the way," he said yesterday, following a tearful reunion between his wife, Lam, and her parents, whom she had not seen in eight years. "Luck and a lot of hard-working Americans."

While some Americans returning from Vietnam with dependents and friends aboard the refugee airlift have complained about the minimal and often chaotic

accommodations at U. S. bases in the Pacific, Allen had nothing but praise for the people working in the rescue operation.

"The embassy people in Saigon, the marines at Ton Son Nhut air base, the Seabees on Guam — they've all been great," he said. "Give them credit for what they accomplished in such a short time."

But if anyone deserves credit for accomplishing near miracles in a short time it is Allen.

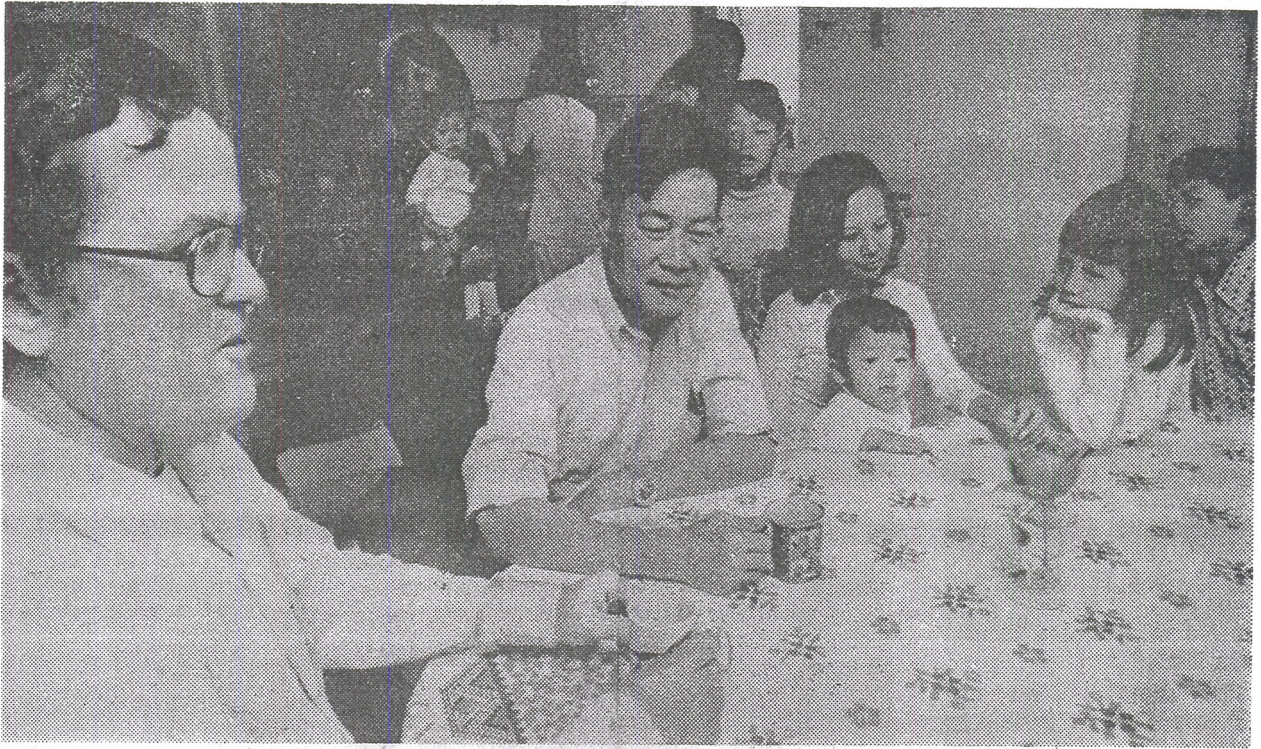
When he arrived last Friday in Hong Kong it was just in time to catch the last China Airlines commercial flight to Saigon.

He headed immediately to the suburb where his wife's parents and other relatives lived. While there he also sought out five relatives of two friends from the San Diego area.

Allen's Vietnamese relatives asked him to try to arrange hurried exit visas for four of their former neighbors who were fearful of staying in the country.

U.S. Embassy staff members arranged the necessary paperwork for Allen's charges in only two hours, he said.

It was there that the group



AP Wirephoto

Nate Allen at the breakfast table with some of his wife's relatives in San Diego

picked up an orphan boy of undetermined age, whom they later left with U.S. officials in Guam.

The group flew out of Saigon aboard a C-141 cargo plane during a lull in a rocket barrage.

From Saigon the group was flown to Guam, where they spent 24 hours in a makeshift refuge compound constructed by Navy Seabees on the island. There they went through a preliminary clearance by U.S. immigration and health officials.

Allen returned to Southern California Wednesday with 23 of his charges, touching down at the El Toro Marine Air Station at 5 a.m.

The Vietnamese paperwork normally would have

taken longer than it did, but Allen said he freely distributed an estimated \$2000 in bribes "to grease the way."

"Some of those officials would stamp the papers and reach out for some green in the same motion," he said.

One of "those officials" cleared a legal hurdle by simply declaring that a middle-aged man Allen wanted to take with him was a 7-year-old boy.

The man, a neighbor of Mrs. Allen's relatives, would have been endangered had he fallen into the hands of North Vietnamese or Viet Cong troops, Allen said.

In all, Allen said he spent only nine hours in and around the city of Saigon.

The rest of the time was spent at Ton Son Nhut, the U.S. air base outside the South Vietnamese capital, waiting to be airlifted out of

the besieged city.

By midday, his wife, whom he married while working in South Vietnam in 1965, had arrived at the refugee encampment to be reunited with her family.

Firemen Return San Diego

City firemen were back on the job yesterday after a five-day work slowdown

Associated Press