

Feuds and Bad Planning In Saigon Exit Recalled

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MANILA, May 5—Although more than 100,000 Vietnamese successfully escaped from Saigon, the evacuation was marred by what diplomats and newsmen now recall as bad planning, bitter feuding between sections of the United States Mission and often an every-man-for-himself attitude.

As a result, many key Vietnamese officials and others who had long worked for the Americans were left behind. Many fearing reprisals from the Communists.

Moreover, the selection of

those to be evacuated often seemed arbitrary. Dozens of prostitutes, for example, were taken out by American contractors and officials who listed them as wives or fiancées. But the chief spokesman for the Saigon Government and his staff, who would be major Communist targets, were apparently not helped despite repeated pleas.

In addition, some officials in the United States Embassy and Consulate—partly because of panic and partly out of concern for their own Vietnamese staffs—are known to have deceived each other or failed to notify subordinates about the final evacuation on Tuesday, endangering many lives.

In the end, no American officials are known to have been left behind, and the loss of life in the evacuation was minimal.

But the series of mix-ups and the haggling that accompanied the final American exit angered many American officials, and on the evacuation ships that carried them here they talked of their bitterness toward Ambassador Graham A. Martin.

It was Ambassador Martin, they say, who by delaying evacuation until the last possible minute—to avoid throwing Saigon into chaos—was responsible for the failure to rescue many endangered Vietnamese.

Some officials go further,

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accusing Mr. Martin of having been so isolated inside his walled embassy that he was blind to the inevitability of the Communist victory. The Ambassador, an aloof, secretive man who strongly supported former President Nguyen Van Thieu, became ill with pneumonia in the last few days before Washington finally ordered him, last Tuesday, to "pull the plug."

Leaving Saigon among the last American evacuees, the Ambassador boarded the Seventh Fleet flagship, the carrier Blue Ridge, and—except for a chance encounter with a few newsmen—remained unavailable to the press. He could not be asked about criticisms of his role.

According to knowledgeable diplomatic informants, when some American officials began to push for evacuation planning after the loss of the northern two-thirds of the country in March, Mr. Martin's opposition delayed it.

As a consequence, some parts of the United States Mission—composed of the embassy, the Agency for International Development, the United States Information Service, the Defense Attaché's Office and the Central Intelligence Agency—privately began their own withdrawal scheme.

This worked best for those institutions with their own air transportation and money to bribe Vietnamese officials and guards—namely the Defense Attaché's office and the C.I.A. But the embassy and the aid and information agencies, which did not have their own "assets," in the popular term, were much less successful in getting their staffs out.

General Is Dismissed

On April 12, with North Vietnamese troops beginning to tighten around Saigon, Brig. Gen. Richard M. Baughn, the senior Air Force officer in the Defense Attaché's Office, was abruptly dismissed and transferred out of Vietnam by Ambassador Martin. According to military sources, he had angered the Ambassador by beginning to fly Vietnamese employees in the office to the Philippines aboard Air Force planes.

It was not until April 20, after the siege of Xuan Loc had begun 40 miles northeast of Saigon that Ambassador Martin on orders from Washington assented to the first legal evacuation flights by Air Force C-141 planes.

Thereafter the evacuation was pushed hard, with the embassy pressing the Saigon Government to accelerate granting exit permits and special passes for Vietnamese dependents and employes of Americans. In some cases the embassy actually helped in secretly taking Vietnamese out of the country without officials permission.

But there appeared to be little coordination or careful planning to separate cases of Vietnamese seriously endangered from those who merely wanted to leave.

Thus, for instance, a Vietnamese who had worked 10 years for the C.I.A. in Pleiku in the Central Highlands, before it was abandoned to the Communists, discovered no one in the embassy would help him when he managed to flee to Saigon. All his friends from the agency had already been transferred out of Vietnam and there was no one who recognized him.

But by contrast, on Saturday, April 26, a blue compact car of the type used by the embassy pulled up in front of Annie's Bar on Tu Do Street and took away three bar girls carrying suitcases.

Perhaps the worst case of confusion involved the United States Consulate General in Can Tho, the center of Military Region IV in the Mekong delta.

Officials from the consulate say they were never given any notice at all to evacuate their Vietnamese personnel until 11:30 Tuesday morning, when they were suddenly ordered to withdraw only their remaining Americans. By that time, the last emergency evacuation had already begun in Saigon.

As a result, the Con Tho office acting on its own at the last minute was able to get out only 42 of 573 Vietnamese employes, and 312 of over 3,000 Vietnamese dependents.

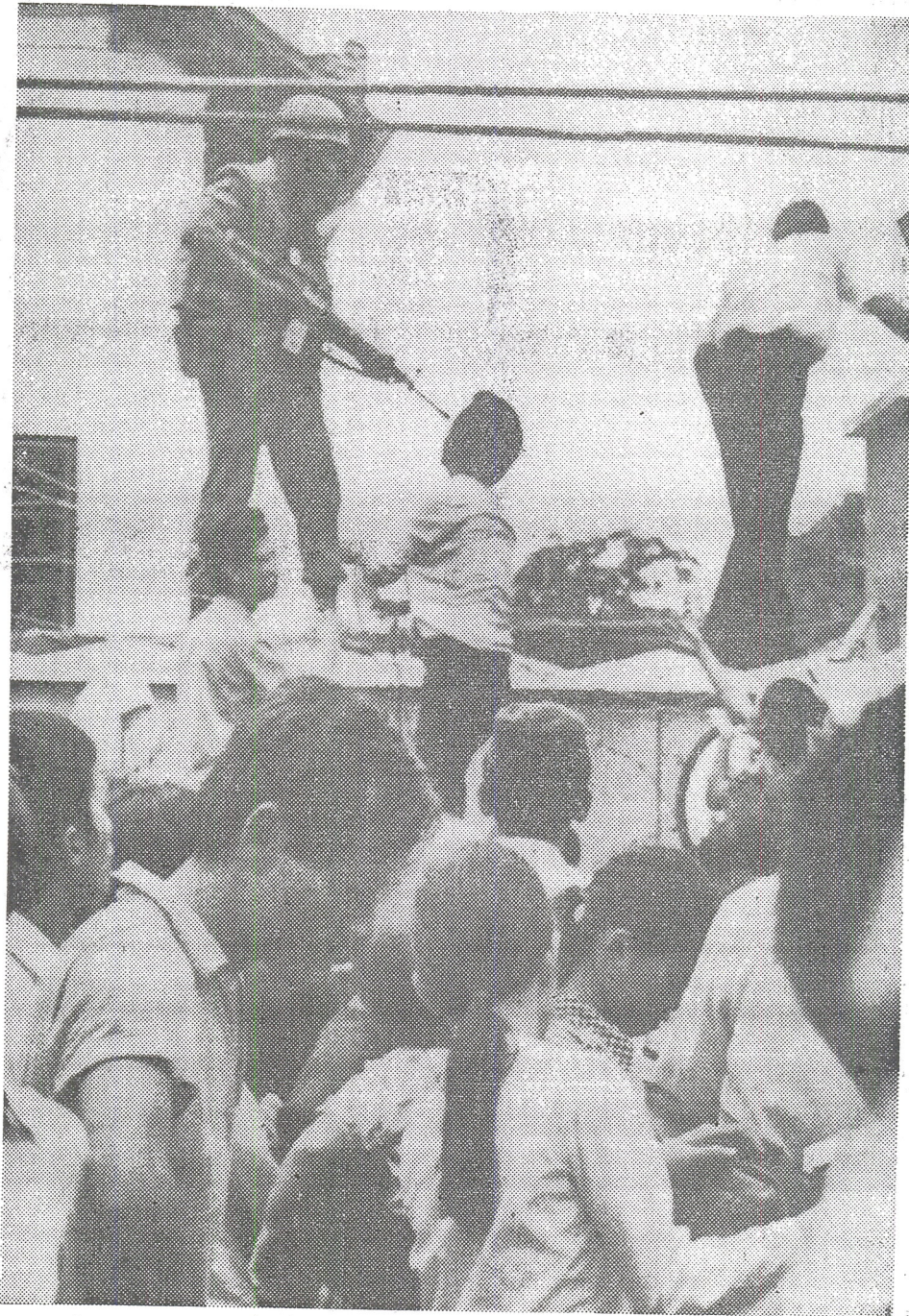
One Can Tho official who made three special trips to Saigon to discuss evacuation was reportedly turned away with the answer that Ambassador

Martin would not accept pulling out the Vietnamese employes.

Another Can Tho official who was dispatched to Saigon over the last weekend to try to press for help in evacuating Vietnamese staff, was in the office of Donald Anderson, the embassy administrative officer in charge of pulling out field staff, on Tuesday morning when the order for final evacuation was given.

"Anderson got up and left his office with some of his own Vietnamese without telling our men anything," recalled a furious Can Tho official. "He just went out to get on an airplane with his people, leaving our man sitting there."

The Can Tho consulate at its own initiative had prepared several evacuation plans, including its main one using four Air America helicopters stationed in Can Tho. However, at 8 A.M. on Tuesday the local C.I.A. officials asked to borrow the four Air America helicopters for their own personnel and flew off to Saigon without returning the aircraft.



United Press International

American marine warding off people trying to scale wall of U.S. Embassy compound in Saigon, South Vietnam, last Tuesday. There are complaints that a series of mix-ups and haggling marred evacuation and that some pro-Americans may have been left behind.