

# Speed of Communist Advance

## Refugees Cram Rescue Vessels

MAR 31 1975

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Special to The New York Times

CAM RANH, South Vietnam, March 30—Thousands of refugees from Da Nang, clinging to railings, hanging onto smokestacks and packing the decks, arrived on ships today at the relative safety of this attractive deep-water port 165 miles north-east of Saigon.

This Easter morning a motley armada of 10 freighters, LST's and an old Victory ship with a Dutch captain who himself was evacuated by ship in World War II, began arriving here with perhaps 30,000 people from Da Nang.

Clutching some clothing and dented plastic bottles used to carry precious water, the refugees streamed off the ships onto the crumbling pier of what was once the major United States logistical base in South Vietnam.

They told tales of terror in the streets of Da Nang where South Vietnamese soldiers fought each other, not the Communists, in shooting matches over food and other looted items.

They told of 30 hours at sea, with people crammed into every conceivable space,

### 30,000 Transported by Motley Armada to Cam Ranh Bay

including the first mate's bathroom on one vessel. There were no toilet facilities, no food and little water. On one United States Navy ship, the Sgt. Andrew Miller, upwards of 9,000 people made it to safety.

#### Some Drownings Reported

Some refugees reportedly drowned while trying to reach the ship under shell-fire in Da Nang. Others fell into the sea during the night. Rumors said at least one person had been smothered in

the crush, but by late today no bodies had been found in the mounds of rotting refuse and human wastes left behind in the 95-degree weather hind in the humid 95-degree weather.

At last four babies were delivered at sea during the Andrew Miller's voyage. The doctor, named Khoi, a dedicated man who was said to live in Arlington, Va., evidently worked nonstop throughout the ship's journey. The babies, if they live, may never know it, but their birth on an American ship in international waters could presumably entitle them to citizenship papers and a life away from this war zone.

The refugees included hundreds of South Vietnamese soldiers and deserters who fled their units in and near Da Nang. Some were wounded and many were barefoot.

But many more were still armed. And they fired their M-16 rifles occasionally to hurry civilians ahead of them. Tonight packs of these men were wandering the streets of nearby hamlets drinking beer and demanding food from refugees. Shots could be heard.

#### 'Indescribable' Misery

"We do our best to save many people," a South Vietnamese sailor said. "It is indescribable, the miseries and all." Significantly in these days of South Vietnamese military collapse, the sailor did not want his name used.

This sprawling, sandy encampment was chosen for an American military base because of the natural deep-water port, considered one of Asia's best. Until the American war involvement, however, there was nothing much to be hauled into or out of the bay.

With around 25,000 troops, it was so secure here that President Lyndon B. Johnson chose the site for a brief war zone visit one day in 1966.

Today, however, the base is deteriorating and rusting, and grass grows through the holes of a steel sheet airplane runway. And the bright blue waters offered little to the refugees—except that they were not the waters of Da Nang Harbor.

Communist forces controlled Da Nang, but a half-dozen ships were steaming back there in hopes of snatching more of the hundreds of thousands of refugees who flocked into South Vietnam's second largest city in recent days.

Kurt Olmeyer, the captain of the Andrew Miller, said he would take the ship to Da

Nang again if more could be saved. But the loss of that city to the Communists made further large-scale evacuations seem impossible.

Captain Olmeyer and his civilian merchant marine crew had been instructed to keep their naval cargo vessel in international waters off Da Nang. But he remembered a day in 1939 when a captain he never met ignored the three-mile-limit to pluck him and others off the Netherlands coast in the face of advancing German armies.

"Now I have my turn to help somebody," he said.

Among those he helped was Nguyen Thi Chu, a 64-year-old woman from Hue who can no longer remember how many times she has been a refugee. "But this is the farthest I have run," she said.

Nearby, Phan Khoo squatted on the ground dabbing at his eyes. Like 9,000 others on Friday night he rode a barge out to climb aboard the Miller. Just after he boarded, the door was slammed shut. Through a crack Mr. Khoo last saw his wife and seven children standing on the barge waving.

#### Many Lost Children

Lost children were commonplace on the pier here. Many little ones did not know their family names but wandered about looking for familiar faces. Some carried smaller brothers or sisters on their backs.

There was little hysteria. Most refugees sat quietly, waiting resignedly one more time for the trucks to take them somewhere. Even when some soldiers stole personal items or pushed ahead to water bins the civilians were quiet and straight-faced. "I

will go wherever they take me," said Nguyen Thi Dung.

Pham Vang's wife was not there. She is five months pregnant and feared another flight from her home near Da Nang. But she was afraid that her husband, a Regional Forces soldier, would be killed by the Communists. So he fled.

Nearby, Route 1 was clogged with bicycles, motor-bikes and large, speeding army trucks hauling refugees to temporary camps despite military indications that they might have to flee again soon.

#### **Bags Thrown Overboard**

On the roadside men were burning off dried grass to make room for tents. The ground was littered with countless lost possessions, broken umbrellas, pieces of wood, a child's shoe. Some refugees wore plastic sandwich bags for shoes.

Nguyen Xuan Ngon had no possessions to lose today. He, along with his two brothers and three sisters and their families, a total of 40 people, had seen all their bags thrown overboard to make room for more people. The families have fled four times in eight years. "We have no hope to ever go back," he said.

One little girl seemed unaffected by the crowds and trucks and chaos surrounding her. She played quietly with a stick. Where would she live now? she was asked. She did not know, she said.

Was she worried? she was asked. No, she replied, her mother would take care of her. The little girl smiled. Then she vomited in the dirt.