

U.S. MARINES SENT TO AID NAVY SHIPS

APR 2 1975

Pentagon Says 700 Men

Will Assist Evacuation

—Won't Go Ashore

NYTimes

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, April 1—The Defense Department announced today that 700 marines had been sent to assist the four Navy amphibious and cargo vessels in the possible evacuation of refugees from South Vietnam.

The Pentagon announcement emphasized that the Marine units, four rifle companies and a headquarters company, "will not depart the shipboard evacuation control."

Laws passed in 1973 forbid the use of Federal funds to finance the involvement of United States military forces in Indochina.

The Defense Department disclosed, meanwhile, that as part of an emergency resupply effort for the South Vietnamese forces, it had begun taking away weapons from Army National Guard units for shipment to Saigon.

The four rifle companies are aboard the Blue Ridge, an amphibious command ship, and the Dubuque, a transport dock, which are scheduled to arrive off the coast of South Vietnam tomorrow. They will rendezvous there with the landing ship Frederick and the cargo ship Durham, and two of the rifle companies will be transferred to the two ships already standing by for evacuation duty.

Press Briefing Canceled

The Pentagon said the Navy ships were standing by in international waters off the central coast of South Vietnam. The Defense Department, which for the second day in a row canceled its daily press briefing, refused to be more specific on the location of the ships.

While the Pentagon announcement talked in terms of using the Navy ships for evacuation of "civilian refugees," it was learned that at one point consideration was given to

having the ships evacuate elements of South Vietnamese military units from Qui Nhon and Tuy Hoa before those cities fell to North Vietnamese forces.

It was also learned that the ships have permission to proceed to within one mile of the coast—or well within the territorial waters of South Vietnam—to pick up refugees coming out by small boats.

Thus far according to Pentagon officials, no refugees have been picked up by the Navy ships. Rather, the reliance in the evacuation effort was being placed on civilian ships chartered by the Military Sealift Command at the direction of the Agency for International Development.

With the deteriorating military situation, AID officials said the evacuation program was having trouble staying ahead of the fall of South Vietnamese cities along the coast.

Ships were still positioned off the coast from Qui Nhon to Nha Trang to pick up what were described as "stragglers" who were able to make their way out on small boats.

Focus Is Shifting

The main focus on the sealift, according to officials, was being shifted to removing refugees who earlier this week had been taken from Da Nang to the former American base at Cam Ranh Bay. With the fall of Nha Trang 25 miles to the north and North Vietnamese forces moving in on cities to the south, Cam Ranh was no longer considered a secure place for the refugees.

If ships can be assembled in time, officials said plans called for moving 70,000 refugees at Cam Ranh to Vung Tau, a deep-water port at the mouth of the Saigon River, and then transferring them to camps in the Mekong Delta.

The requisitioning of National Guard weapons was first disclosed by Representative Barkley Bedell, Democrat of Iowa, who complained in a statement that it was "ridiculous to deplete the supplies of our National Guard for a futile, last-ditch effort in Vietnam."

A Pentagon spokesman confirmed that units of the Iowa National Guard had been ordered to turn over about 25 105-mm howitzers and an unspecified number of recoilless rifles for air shipment to South Vietnam. The spokesman maintained that the weapons had already been designated for shipment to South Vietnam as part of the military maintenance program and that the requisitioning only represented an acceleration of previous plans.

The Defense Department was unable to say immediately whether other National Guard units had been ordered to turn over weapons and equipment for transfer to South Vietnam.

Officials said, however, that it was highly likely that if Gen. Frederick C. Weyand, the Army Chief of Staff, returns from South Vietnam with recommendations for large shipments of weapons, the Pentagon would be forced to turn to the available supplies in National Guard and reserve units.