

SF Examiner

APR 6 1975

700 Marines poised to land, save Yanks

By Philip Caputo
Chicago Tribune

SAIGON — The United States is preparing to land 700 Marines, backed up by an entire Marine division, at Saigon's Tan Son Nhut Airport to evacuate Americans from South Vietnam should the fall of the city become imminent, it was learned yesterday.

The Marines are aboard U.S. Navy ships rescuing civilian refugees from the lower central coast, where North Vietnamese armored columns apparently are poised for a drive on the capital.

According to Pentagon announcements of last week, the Marines were prohibited from leaving the vessels and were to provide "individual ship security and shipboard evacuational control."

But well-placed sources here said that the rescue operations of Vietnamese refugees are, in effect, a cover to bring the Marines within range of Saigon.

If the city appears in immediate danger of fall-

—Turn to Page 4, Col. 5

—From Page 1

ing, and observers here say that is likely within the next month, the battalion would land at Tan Son Nhut to provide airfield security for the evacuation of the 5,800 Americans still in the country.

The sources said the Marines would be supported by a division, in case additional forces were needed. This is presumed to be the Third Marine Division on Okinawa. It was the first U.S. combat unit to land in Vietnam when the American buildup began in 1965.

Congressional legislation prohibits the use of U.S. military forces in Indochina, but sources indicated that the Ford Administration believes that operations involving the rescue of American citizens fall within the law.

Ford indicated in a press Vietnamese war orphans are being evacuated in Air Force planes to conceal the American exodus and avoid creating panic in Saigon, they said.

Secretaries for the Defense was considering using the military to pull Americans out of Saigon.

Some employees of the U.S. government and dependents already are leaving the country under orders from the State Department, the sources said.

Secretaries for the Defense Attache Office and dependents of DAO officials are accompanying the orphans, allegedly as nurses and escorts. On Friday, 23 of them died when a C-5A Galaxy transport crashed near the capital.

The sources said that the DAO employees got the order to leave, with one suitcase, at 8:30 Friday morning. There is now no secretarial staff among the 700 DAO people in Saigon.

The order was given, the sources said, because the State Department has concluded that the Communists now are so strong that Saigon is theirs for the taking.

Also, both the DAO and the U.S. embassy in Saigon are "dreadfully afraid" that panic-stricken South Vietnamese troops will begin rampaging through the city, threatening American lives.

The reason for the secrecy, the sources said, is to prevent the Vietnamese from seeing the Americans leave.