

U.S. Is Reported Building Up Naval Force Off South Vietnam

SAIGON, South Vietnam, April 6 (AP)—The United States is continuing to build up its forces off Vietnam, with at least one aircraft carrier, three destroyers, a half-dozen amphibious ships and elements of a Marine Corps division, according to independent sources here and news releases from the American Embassy.

Three other aircraft carriers are said to be in the zone, including the nuclear-powered Enterprise.

Informed sources said that the Marines were prepared to land in Saigon to evacuate Americans and some Vietnamese if major fighting or chaos broke out.

Specific locations of the various vessels were not given.

No Comment From Embassy

U.S. Embassy spokesman here would not comment on the Seventh Fleet's build-up, but news releases from the embassy on refugee evacuation disclosed that the commander of the fleet's amphibious force, Rear Adm. Donald B. Whitmire, was on station near Saigon with his flagship, the Blue Ridge.

The news release also disclosed that the destroyer Reasoner and scores of Marine helicopters were within a short distance of Saigon.

There are nearly 6,000 Americans in South Vietnam, although many Americans have begun leaving by commercial transportation.

2 More Destroyers

Other sources disclosed the presence of two more destroyers, the carrier Hancock and

supply ships off the coast of Vietnam.

They said that President Ford had ordered every available ship to Indochina waters and that more would be on the way, perhaps as a signal to Hanoi that the President is determined to protect Americans in South Vietnam.

At a news conference in San Diego, on Thursday, Mr. Ford said that contingency plans exist to protect and evacuate Americans in South Vietnam and Cambodia and that they could include the use of United States troops "to protect American lives."

Major Build-Up Denied

WASHINGTON, April 6—The Defense Department denied today that there was any large-scale movement of Navy ships toward the South Vietnam coast for possible evacuation of Americans.

The Pentagon spokesman said that there was "no substance" to a report from Saigon by The Associated Press that described a major build-up, including an aircraft carrier, off the Vietnam coast.

He said that the Navy had a total of four amphibious and cargo ships evacuating Vietnamese refugees. There are also nine civilian ships chartered by the Military Sealift Command, he said.

There is at least one destroyer far offshore to protect these vessels if necessary, he added. There are four carriers in the Western Pacific but none has been ordered to Vietnam waters, he said.