

A Refugees' Barge Yields 50 Dead at Vietnam Pier

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Special to The New York Times

VUNG TAU, South Vietnam, April 6—At this lovely beach resort forty miles southeast of Saigon the bathers were out almost as usual today, enjoying ice cream and beer, swimming in the warm South China Sea and watching the armada of landing craft, ships, barges, boats and fishing craft.

A few hundred yards from the bathing beach, at a pier, navy barge AN 2801 had pulled in. The big steel vessel, pulled by a South Korean tugboat, had been traveling for nine days, all the way from the waters off Hue, loaded with fleeing soldiers and their families.

The sun had scorched them on the open deck all that time and they had been without food and water. From the huge pile of debris on the deck—smashed bicy-

cles, suitcases with the contents strewn about, dolls, pots—at least 50 bodies were pulled out by nightfall, most of them children and women.

The AN 2801 was not unique. Hardly a vessel of the hundreds of large and small boats that have been moving down the coast has avoided deaths—some from starvation, thirst and exposure, some from shooting by renegade soldiers turned bandit, some in disputes over fragments of bread.

Some survivors told of vessels stopping at Cam Ranh Bay, farther up the coast, in hopes of finding some sanctuary.

"Some people came out in boats with water," a woman said, staring blankly out to sea. "They sold it to us for

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1,500 dong"—about \$2—"A glass. Of course, most people could not afford a whole glass, so we tried to share it.

"A few times it rained, and we all lay on the deck trying to lick up what gathered, although the deck was so thick with human waste it was awful."

Another survivor, a university student from Da Nang, said he had been on one of the Korean ships. "We had enough food, because an American helicopter came and dropped a big load of supplies on the deck," he said. "Here it is not so good, because there is no room in any camp for us."

Many Balk at Island

Bad though conditions here are, soldiers and civilians have rebelled against the Saigon Government and come here rather than be sent to the island of Phu Quoc in the Gulf of Siam near the Cambodian border.

In the past week the Government has created a combination internment and relief camp on Phu Quoc, to which all refugees from central South Viet Nam were supposed to be sent. Most were to be accommodated in a former prisoner-of-war camp that was used until two years ago to hold Vietcong prisoners.

The Phu Quoc plan was worked out by Deputy Premier Pham Quang Dan, and the United States, Australia and other nations joined in.

The day before yesterday, South Vietnamese officers and troops fleeing the central part of the country aboard the American ship Greenville Victory, chartered to the United States Military Sealift Command, rebelled when they realized that they were being taken to Phu Quoc Island instead of the mainland destination they had expected — Vung Tau.

Incensed, they ordered the captain to change course and take them to the mainland. Faced with several thousand heavily armed and angry troops, the captain and his crew obeyed.

"Those Men Were Desperate"

The Mayor of Vung Tau, Col. Vu Duy Tao, explained the incident this way:

"It was psychological. Most of these soldiers fled leaving their families behind, believing that after the emergency was past they would find ways to get home to their families.

"That is a possibility, if they land on the mainland. They can get buses or cars and just go away and find their people. But it is not possible on an isolated island like Phu Quoc. Those men were desperate, and, in my opinion, Dr. Dan and the Government did the wrong thing in insisting that they go. I told him so on the telephone this morning, and he said he had changed his mind."

"It was not a violent mutiny," the colonel went on. "There are high-ranking officers on those ships who are with the men in this. They just went to the captain and politely asked him to send a message saying he was changing course and going to the mainland, and the captain obviously felt obliged to comply."

400,000 People in a Week

Colonel Tao said the same thing happened on two ships yesterday, to one the day before and presumably had happened to two more arriving here late today. Each of the ships carried about 8,000 people, almost all of them soldiers.

The Mayor said there are already 50,000 refugees jamming Vung Tau even though most of those who arrived have moved on to Saigon or elsewhere.

"All together, roughly 400,000 people have come here in the past week or so," he said. "The overwhelming majority of those 400,000 refugees

were soldiers, most of them armed when they came, who willingly gave up their weapons once they were on shore."

He said there was enough food and water for the refugees in Vung Tau at the moment, but little or no shelter.

There was no evidence that any of the international relief services interested in Vietnam, or any American relief workers, were represented at Vung Tau. The airport here is deserted except for a guard at the gate and a weathered American helicopter wreck from which residents have chopped bits of metal to make pots. The

Americans and other relief workers had all gone to Phu Quoc island, because the Saigon Government had decided on it.

Today, this correspondent flew to Phu Quoc, where four American aid officials were at work, and where a continuous airlift of American and Australian planes was bringing in food and supplies. On the island Lieut. Col. Dinh Xuan Thao, after saying that he had received strict orders not to allow any correspondents on the island, conceded that he had problems.

Gesturing at one of the ships riding at anchor, he said, "They will have to obey Government orders eventually. They have guns, but we have the food and water, and enough security troops."

"We shall feed them for a while, but we will not tolerate laziness," he said. "They will have to work for a living."

Colonel Thao said the normal population of the prosperous fishing island is 16,000 but that now there are 11,000 evacuees in addition, most of them military. Other reliable sources said that there were already closer to 40,000 refugees on Phu Quoc.

In Vung Tau, what relief work was being carried out was that of local boy scouts and girl scouts, Buddhist and Catholic church workers, and the officials and soldiers under the command of Colonel Tao, the mayor of the city.

None Would Go Back

Despite the great potential danger here in Vung Tau in the presence of tens of thousands of armed hungry troops, the town appeared peaceful, and Colonel Tao's own troops and policemen were obviously in control. There was no evidence of any looting or of the rampages that ripped apart Da Nang and other cities before they collapsed.

Government offices were hard at work, an unheard-of situation in South Vietnam on a Sunday afternoon, and soldiers were even getting back pay. Many of the renegade soldiers now roaming Saigon and other parts of South Vietnam had not been paid in two months, it was learned today.

In conversations today with dozens of men who had been soldiers until they headed south, not one showed any inclination to rejoin his unit or go back to fighting. Government authorities here in Vung Tau, on Phu Quoc and some other places hope to regroup the troops into new units, but judging from conversations with those former soldiers, that will be impossible.