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Airlifts Include Kin of Vietnamese

By Robert Joffe

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SAN FRANCISCO, April 13—Vietnamese children who are not orphans have been included in orphan airlifts to join Vietnamese relatives living in the United States, airlift officials said today.

As many as 10 per cent or more of the 885 children who have received medical processing at the Army's Presidio base here may be in that category, according to officials of Orphans Airlift, the umbrella organization in charge of the flights.

This was one of a number of problems that have come to light as more than 2,000 children have been airlifted from Indochina in the past two weeks:

A Vietnamese child who had expected to live with his older sister in Tennessee mistakenly was sent instead to an adoptive American home in Vermont. Officials said the same thing may have happened to other children with close relatives in this country.

• Eleven children were mistakenly handed over to an agency that flew them to Seattle. When the mistake was discovered, they were flown back to San Francisco. The incident caused anxiety among American adoptive parents to whom the children had already been assigned.

• Many of the children arrived in this country on group visas; as a result, the children could not be individually identified. **

• The identities of children with individual papers were sometimes incorrectly recorded at the San Francisco processing center.

Maria Eitz, an executive director of Orphans Airlift, said most of the children brought here are infants, orphaned or abandoned in Vietnam, and destined for American adoptive families. She said responsibility for the records and placement of the children rests with the adoption agencies that have been using the flights.

Among 10 older children selected at random and interviewed through three volunteer interpreters here Wednesday night, nine said they were not orphans, but had one or both parents still living either in Vietnam or

in the United States. They said they had come to the United States to join either their parents or uncles, aunts or other relatives. Six of the children carried papers telling how those parents or relatives could be contacted.

A reporter on Saturday was able to contact the mothers of three of the children—in Atchison, Kan.; Ft. Campbell, Ky., and Spokane, Wash.—and the sister of a fourth in Maynardville, Tenn. The three mothers asked anonymity. They said their children from Vietnam had arrived at their homes.

*But Mrs. Philip Harness Jr. of Maynardville, Tenn., who is the older sister of Tran Van Dat, 13, said she was unaware that her brother had been sent to this country. She said no one had contacted her.

Officials of the Denver-based Friends of the Children of Vietnam said today that their agency had misidentified young Dat and had sent him to an adoptive home in Vermont. The officials today were making calls to Vermont and Tennessee to try to straighten out the situation.

When interviewed Wednesday, the boy had said, "I am very sad. My mother lives in Saigon and I will miss her very much." He said he looked forward to seeing his sister, however.

Friends of the Children of Vietnam officials said they had received calls from 10 other Vietnamese expatriate families who believed they, too, had youthful relatives aboard the orphan airlifts.

The children destined to join expatriate families in

this country spent short periods at orphan-holding facilities in Saigon before their flights.

For example, a 10-year-old girl, Vu Thai Loc, who was accompanied by two younger brothers and an infant cousin, said her family had "paid a lot of money" to a South Vietnamese army colonel (whose picture she carried) to get them to this country. "We stayed only a week at the Go Vap orphan-

age in Saigon, but we ate good food and were kept separate from the other children there," she said. She said they would go to live with an aunt who is married to an American.

A note attached to a 10-year-old boy said a Kentucky couple are his "natural parents," and asked

volunteers to contact them when he arrived in America. The wife, reached by phone Saturday, said the child was her son by a former marriage—and that he had arrived safely at the couple's home.

An 11-year-old boy who on Wednesday said, "I'm very happy I'm going to see my mother soon," was with his mother in Kansas Saturday. His American step-father said, "If we'd been rich, we would have bribed a South Vietnamese official to get him out earlier; but we aren't rich." He said a member of congress had intervened on their behalf with the South Vietnamese embassy.

**Many children have had no identification of their own, Miss Eitz said, but they

have entered this country legally on blank, group visas granted especially for the flight of orphans. She said it is possible the children who are not orphans were slipped aboard the flight under such visas.

Other children have had papers identifying them individually, she said, "but the information on those papers has sometimes been recorded incorrectly." She said this may have been the case with young Dat, who was sent to adoptive parents in Vermont instead of to his sister in Tennessee.

Meanwhile, volunteer Vietnamese interpreters said they had talked to poor children who were not orphans but whose families are being broken up by the airlift.

The most striking example came from Mrs. Thoa Jerulle, a Vietnamese American housewife from Vallejo, Calif., who said, "I talked to a 12-year-old boy who was here with two sisters. He said he had six other brothers and sisters in a fishing village near Quinhon. But one day, he said, a Vietnamese nun persuaded his mother that her oldest three children would be better off if they went to the Americans for adoption.

"The nun said all three would be adopted by one American family," Mrs. Jerulle continued. "But when I looked at the tags on the boy and his two sisters, I learned the boy would go to France, one sister to Germany and one sister to Belgium."