

WXPost APR 12 1975

Mother Sees Her 'Orphan' Off for U.S.

By Arnold Zeitlin

Washington Post Staff Writer

SAIGON, April 11 — Ha Thi Cam Huong stood across the street from an orphanage Friday watching her 9-year-old son leave for the United States. In her hand, she clutched a bag of bread.

"I hope my boy not hungry," she said in halting English.

The boy, Ha Mai Khoi, lightly freckled across the nose, wearing a scout hat and carrying all his belongings in a brown satchel, climbed aboard a bus to join a group of more than 250 Vietnamese children who flew to the United States aboard two U.S. Air Force C-141 Air Force cargo jets.

His mother did not approach him with the bread, although she had waited almost four hours for a glimpse of the boy as he walked out through the An-lac orphanage gate with its fringe of barbed wire.

"When we learned yesterday he go, he jump up and down he so happy, while I cried," she said. "Maybe he come back when he is 20 years old and a student."

The boy's father was an American, she said, with whom she lived 10 years ago at Laikhe, 30 miles from Saigon. He was an artilleryman who died in Vietnam. She said the father's last name was McCoy, hence her boy's curious Vietnamese name—Mai Khoi.

"I am scared," she said, explaining why she sent off her son. "The VC will come and kill those American babies."

Like many people here, she had heard of such stories but knew of no such killing. Other Vietnamese claim American-fathered children were murdered by the Vietcong during the 1967 Tet offensive in Hue.

The mother didn't know it, but inside the orphanage, Ha Mai Khoi had an anxious moment.

Two buses were loaded for the ride to the airport, and the boy was left alone outside. He sat with his satchel, his eyes reddened, then bent his head to his knees and cried.

"He doesn't have a number," someone said. American film actress Ina Balin, who helped with the evacuation, folded him in her arms until his proper number was found. He scampered aboard.

Betty Tisdale, who organized the airlift after two days of lobbying for permission from the South Vietnamese government, said the boy would have a good home in Columbus, Ga., her home town.

She said he would go to Billy Newsome and his Vietnamese wife, Hoa, of Columbus. They have one other child, a daughter, and she said a son would be welcome.