

Refugees Reunited With Mother

Ft. Benning, Ga.

Steven Welch looked around the south Georgia countryside yesterday afternoon and told his mother, "It looks like Dar Lac."

His Vietnamese mother sternly replied, "You don't get no Dar Lac any more."

Mrs. Hanh Welch and her three children, who had not seen each other in three years, were reunited here Saturday night when 171 orphans from the An Lac orphanage in Saigon, including the Welch children, arrived from Los Angeles.

The rescue mission was led by Betty Tisdale of Columbus, Ga., who has raised money for An Lac orphanage since 1961.

When Mrs. Welch's husband, Sergeant Don Welch, had to leave Vietnam on short notice in 1972, she was unable to complete government forms allowing her to take her children to the United States.

She left the three youngsters in Dar Lac, in the Central Highlands, with her parents, who are still there.

As time passed, the situation involving the relocation of her children to the United States became more complicated.

"Because you're an American, the

Vietnamese think you're rich," said Mrs. Welch.

She said the government tried to charge her \$715 for the release of each of the three children.

Later the youngsters were taken to a sister's home in Saigon and placed at An Lac when Mrs. Welch, who lives at Ft. Benning outside Columbus with her husband, became aware of Mrs. Tisdale's work with the orphanage.

Mrs. Tisdale said she knew she could bring back two of the Welch children—Teddy, 6, and Annie, 5. But 12-year-old Steven was older than the age limit set by the Saigon government, she said.

As military planes were loaded at Tan Son Nhut, Steven was assigned to one aircraft, while his brother and sister were assigned to the Tisdale flight.

Instead of waiting to board the plane he was assigned to, Steven put his sister on his back, grabbed Teddy's hand and dashed across the airfield to the plane the younger Welches were assigned to and refused to leave.

The second plane, which was loaded with orphans too old to leave the country, never left the ground.

"Now I have to pay God" instead of the Vietnamese, said Mrs. Welch.

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