

# The Vietnam Orphans Who Really Aren't

By Duffly Jennings

Some of the children airlifted out of Vietnam may not have been true orphans, an official of the group which processed them at the Presidio acknowledged yesterday.

"We have no way of checking out what happened in Vietnam," said Bernard Powell, a spokesman for Orphans Airlift, the private, non-profit organization founded by a group of San Francisco businessmen to provide food and medical care for the arriving orphans.

"We were set up to take care of the children. It is not political; we're not a police force."

Powell's remarks were directed at weekend reports that some of the youngsters definitely have parents here

or in Indochina or are the children of high Vietnamese political and military officials.

The reports came from officials of adoption agencies coordinating the placement of Vietnamese orphans in American homes.

Maria Eitz, of Friends for All Children, the Boulder, Colo., adoption agency that sponsored most of the orphan flights, said some wealthy Vietnamese parents may have paid bribes to get their children out of the war-torn country.

Jane Barton, a representative of the American Friends Service Committee, which opposed the airlifts, said she personally spoke to four nieces and a nephew of a South Vietnamese army colonel who were placed in a Saigon orphanage a few

days before they were flown to California.

Powell said such reports were passed on to adoption agency officials in Saigon for investigation.

"We can only make the assumption that their papers are legal documents until they can be checked," he said.

Powell likened reports of

non-orphans being evacuated to saying "the sun may rise," but discounted in large part statements made by any child under stress.

"What the children say in their current emotional state may be what they think you want to hear," he said.

Meanwhile, Orphans Airlift volunteers were dismantling their hastily-organized

facility at the Presidio yesterday as the airlift came to an indefinite halt.

In all, Powell said, 980 children were received at the Presidio center. The last of the children were discharged to their adoptive American families Sunday night, except for 51 who remain hospitalized here for a variety of illnesses."