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Tempers Flare at U.S. Mission

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SAIGON, April 17—A Vietnamese police major broke up the long line of Americans and Vietnamese waiting in line before the U.S. Consulate here Thursday morning. "You can't leave this country!" he shouted in Vietnamese. "I'll arrest you all!" 17 APR

Marine guards quickly escorted several hundred Americans with their Vietnamese children, wives, and fiancées inside the U.S. Embassy compound and locked the gate, leaving the major and five other policemen outside.

The police then went away and the incident ended. Observers said it seems unlikely the police were acting in an official capacity, but the incident is indicative of the explosive atmosphere in Saigon those days and the resentment with which Vietnamese tend to review the American re-

An Air America helicopter to review the American reaction to events.

An Air America helicopter was seen to circle low over downtown Saigon streets in recent days as an American leaned out shooting motion picture film footage. At least some Vietnamese office workers who saw this became nearly hysterical and said they are sure it is part of the planning for an American evacuation. The U.S. embassy refused to comment officially on such activities.

The Vietnamese wives, children and in some cases fiancées of American citizens can leave the country legally, and those lined up in front of the embassy this morning—as people have been doing for weeks now—were waiting for necessary paperwork to get out.

The embassy incident began about 6:40 a.m., when two police jeeps carrying six policemen drove up. The major, whose nametag said, "Tam," got out and quietly began asking questions of the first Vietnamese people in line.

"How does this work?" he asked. "Can anybody get in? What kind of paperwork do you need?"

One of the first women in line explained things to the major, and as the discussion continued he grew more and more agitated.

Finally he began accusing the Vietnamese people in the line of "avoiding the war." Some onlookers said they had the impression that the major believed a Vietnamese could leave the country immediately, perhaps by helicopter, simply by getting through the embassy gates.

The major then began telling people that he wouldn't allow them inside the embassy unless they could prove to him that they were married to Americans.

He spoke only in Vietnamese and at no time addressed himself to any of the Americans in line.

A Marine guard at the gate said later that he let the Americans and Vietnamese inside "to save as much harassment as we can." He said that by closing the gate he hoped to make latecomers disperse rather than form a line outside.

Today was the first such incident, and the first time the line was not allowed to form outside the high, modernistic U.S. embassy building here.