

# Saigon Agrees to Speed Up the Departure

## A SPECIAL OFFICE WILL GIVE PERMITS

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## of Vietnamese Families of Americans

Wives and Children to Get  
Safe-Conduct Passes and  
Red Tape Will Be Cut

By FOX BUTTERFIELD

Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, South Vietnam, April 17—The Saigon Government agreed today to speed the departure of the Vietnamese wives and children of Americans here, a move that is considered a breakthrough in the Vietnam evacuation effort.

The Government's decision was made under strong pressure from the United States Embassy. More than 1,000 Americans have left the country in the last three days.

Embassy officials estimate that there are now fewer than 4,000 Americans left in Vietnam, compared with more than 5,000 at the beginning of the week. There were about 7,500 Americans here at the end of March, including nearly 2,000 who had never registered with the embassy until Saigon faced the threat of its army's collapse.

### Faced a Long Process

Most of the unregistered were retired servicemen, deserters or contractors, their jobs expired, who had elected to stay in Vietnam. Many have Vietnamese wives or girlfriends, and children born here.

Until today's decision by the Government, these men with Vietnamese wives faced the cumbersome and time-consuming process of going through both the United States Consulate General and Saigon's Ministry of the Interior before they could get permission to take their families back to the United States. In some cases, the procedure would have taken months, thus thwarting a speedy evacuation.

## Americans

Under the new plan, the Ministry of the Interior will establish a special branch office, in the United States Defense Attaché's Office at Tan Son Nhut air base, which will grant exit permits in a day or two. Instead of passports, the Vietnamese wives and children will be issued safe-conduct passes, United States Consular officials said today.

### Americans Are Pessimistic

Despite the breakthrough, well-informed United States officials remained pessimistic about the prospect of evacuating many Vietnamese associated with Americans here, or

even all of the remaining 4,000 Americans themselves. A senior official stressed that all the plans under consideration were based on the assumption that the North Vietnamese would not yet be inside Saigon and that South Vietnamese troops would not try to interfere. "It is a very misguided assumption," the official said.

It has been predicted widely that Communist commando attacks within Saigon will begin in the next day or two. Intelligence reports indicate that there may now be as many as 10 to 12 North Vietnamese divisions in the area around Saigon, preparing for a major attack on the city. The capital is defended by only four regular South Vietnamese divisions, plus units of militia.

### One Plan Slips Out

Apart from the threat of a Communist assault or possible violence against Americans by South Vietnamese troops, there were indications today that the embassy's own evacuation plans were still disorganized and far from complete.

A secret embassy plan to signal the start of an evacuation, for example, was disclosed accidentally when a marine guard at the big white embassy building handed out copies of it to anyone who came through the door, officials said. This involved the reading of a coded





The New York Times/Nguyen Ngoc Luong

**A marine waved a photographer away as Vietnamese at U.S. Consulate General in Saigon yesterday sought visas**

message over the American-radio station here, to be followed by the playing of a certain popular song.

Copies of the plan were distributed to certain American officials, businessmen and newsmen, but not to the Saigon office of The New York Times and others. When asked why, an embassy spokesman, John F. Hogan, replied, "We told only those people who called up to ask for it."

**More Than 230 Spirited Out**

Given the Embassy's apparently inadequate planning and the imminence of the Communist threat, some Americans have begun taking things into their own hands.

Late last week 230 to 250 Vietnamese were flown out of Tan Son Nhut to Clark Air Base in the Philippines aboard United States Air Force C-141 transports. According to American officials here, the Vietnamese arrived at Clark without official exit permits or passports.\*

Following the incident, Brig. Gen. Richard M. Baughn, of the Air Force, the Deputy Defense Attaché here, was suddenly relieved of command and hustled out of Vietnam. An embassy spokesman, while admitting that General Baughn had been transferred, insisted today that the general had had no connection with the illegal departures.

However, other knowledgeable

sources said that either General Baughn or someone on his staff had arranged to fly the Vietnamese from Saigon out of concern that the embassy was moving too slowly to evacuate Vietnamese employes of the United States mission.

According to these sources, the Vietnamese were employes of the Defense Attaché's office and their families.

**18,000-20,000 Involved**

It is estimated that 18,000 to 20,000 Vietnamese are employed by the United States mission, which includes the embassy, the Defense Attaché's office, the United States Information Service and the Agency for International Development. That does not count these people's families, believed to number over 120,000, or the hundreds of thousands of other Vietnamese who worked for the United States Government or the Army in earlier years.

President Ford said in a speech to Congress last Thursday that the United States has a "profound moral obligation" to help the Vietnamese who have associated themselves with the American presence here. Similarly, Ambassador Graham A. Martin has said that he, personally, would not leave Vietnam until these Vietnamese were safely out of the country.

But Mr. Martin appears to have a problem: If he begins to

evacuate American officials and Vietnamese employes too quickly, he will unavoidably give the impression that the United States has given up in Vietnam; that, in turn, could spell chaos.

It was apparently for just such a reason that Mr. Martin, according to subordinates, ordered the immediate transfer of General Baughn after the flight to the Philippines.

**Embassy Study Begun**

The embassy itself began a study yesterday to determine how much its remaining American personnel could be cut, and how many sent out of the country as soon as possible. An embassy spokesman said there are still 1,100 official American personnel here.

The Defense Attaché Office has acted more quickly than any part of the mission, having begun a prompt evacuation more than two weeks ago. Most of the Americans went on the three or four daily commercial flights to Bangkok, Hong Kong or Manila, but some of the office's employes left on Air Force planes.

Cathay Pacific and China Airlines, two of the four commercial airlines that serve Saigon, announced today that they would not accept any more freight. Airline officials said that passengers were taking too much excess baggage.