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4 U.S. Ships Ready for Evacuation Role

By PAUL L. MONTGOMERY

At least four American cargo ships under charter to the Defense Department are off South Vietnam or on the way there with orders to stand by for possible evacuation of refugees, shipping executives said yesterday.

Edward J. Heine Jr., president of United States Lines, said two of his line's ships—refurbished after a harrowing voyage with refugees from Dr Nang two weeks ago—were standing by south of Saigon, while a third was scheduled to leave Thailand for the area imminently. Central Gulf Lines of New Orleans also said one of its ships was on the way from Thailand.

Under Navy Charter

Mr. Heine held a new conference yesterday at the offices of his public relations concern, Howard J. Rubenstein Associates, to tell of the role of his three ships in the hectic evacuation from Da Nang and Cam Ranh early this month. He said he had been released by the Defense Department from a operation. Later, executives of Central Gulf and Seatrain Lines, which had one ship each under military charter in the area, gave details of their experiences.

The five cargo ships under charter to the Navy's Military Sealift Command and operate

on orders from Washington, not from the owners. They are the Pioneer Contender, the Pioneer Challenger and the Pioneer Commander of the United States Lines, the Transcolorado of Sea train, and the Greenport of Central Gulf.

Mr. Heine said his three ships had carried 34,450 refugees from Da Nang and Cam Ranh in the beleaguered north to Phu Quoc Island in the Gulf of Siam. None were designed to carry passengers and he said the masters of the vessels described "incredible" crowding and disorder on the voyages.

The Pioneer Contender packed on 16,600 people for the trip from Cam Ranh to Phu Quoc, which Mr. Heine said was a record for refugee evacuation on a single ship. He said the vessel's decks were awash with human waste and that a number of refugees had died.

Vessels Refurbished

The Commander and the Contender, Mr. Heine said, have been cleaned and refurbished for possible further evacuation work and are standing by at Newport, the American-built facility 15 miles south of Saigon. The Challenger was scheduled to leave Sattahip, Thailand, for Newport soon and a fourth military charter, the American Racer, was on the way to Subic Bay in the

Philippines and could go on to Vietnam, Mr. Heine said.

Hugo F. Hansen, vice president of Central Gulf Lines, said in New Orleans that the Greenport had carried 7,000 refugees from Cam Ranh to Phu Quoc on a one-day trip that began April 3. He said the crew had tried to feed the children on board and had had problems with adults who also wanted food. He said many of the civilians on board were armed, but that there were no major disorders.

The Greenport is at Sattahip and was to leave yesterday for Newport, prepared for further evacuation, r.M Hansen said.

A Seatrain spokesman said the Transcolorado has taken 8,000 refugees from Da Nang and Cam Ranh to Vung Tau in the south in a chaotic voyage with several stops between March 31 and April 9. He said that 50 South Vietnamese marines had to be taken on board to restore order, and that five people had died during the voyage. He said five suspected Vietcong were discovered among the passengers and were taken off under guard.

The spokesman said the ship had also picked up 3,586 refugees from the United States Navy cargo vessel Durham and unloaded them at Vung Tau. The Transcolorado is preparing to leave Saigon for Subic Bay.