

Evacuation fleet reported on way

Examiner News Service

All the U.S. aircraft carriers and amphibious vessels earmarked to assist in the possible evacuation of Americans from South Vietnam have put to sea, headed for undisclosed destinations in the Western Pacific, the Pentagon disclosed today.

Officials were tight-lipped, but it appeared that preparations were being made to rescue Americans by helicopter if Saigon's Tan Son Nhut airport should be closed by Communist artillery fire.

Defense department sources said jet fighters had been replaced by large passenger-carrying helicopters on at least one of the carriers.

Reconfiguration of the carriers and the mass sailing, which sent seven of the nine vessels to sea either late Friday or early yesterday, triggered speculation a major evacuation from Vietnam might begin soon.

Admiral Noel Gayler, commander-in-chief of the Pacific Fleet, has left Saigon for Hawaii after a final check of plans for the emergency evacuation.

It was Gayler who directed the Marine-protected naval helicopter evacuation from Phnom Penh before the Cambodian capital fell.

Gayler's one-day visit took on added significance in view of the increasingly critical military situation.

The number of Americans in Saigon has been cut by nearly half — from nearly 6,000 to a little more than 3,000 — during the last week under an accelerated thinning out process.

The families of key South Vietnamese officials who because of their close association with the United States could be marked for execution by the Communists also were reported on their way out on American aircraft.

Both U.S. Air Force planes and chartered trans-

— Turn to Pg. 18, Col. 1

—From Page 1

ports were being used to move out the evacuees.

Vietnamese were begging American friends to get them or their families out of the country.

A number of unauthorized flights have left Saigon airport during the last week with the connivance of Vietnamese airport officials who granted clearance with the understanding that their families could go along.

Few if any of the Vietnamese have passports but presumably will be granted entry to the United States as refugees. The going price for a Vietnamese passport is \$7,000 for a woman and \$14,000 for an able-bodied male.

Intelligence sources said Viet Cong agents in Saigon and other cities have supplied North Vietnamese troop commanders with "blood lists" of people marked for execution. Policemen and Vietnamese security officials were said to be at the top of the list with key bureaucrats a close second.

It was reported Friday that the North Vietnamese had moved their biggest 130-mm. artillery pieces almost within range of Tan Son Nhut.

Pentagon officials believe that an American population reduced to between 1,000 and 2,000 could be evacuated quickly by U.S. helicopters accompanied by some of the 4,000 Marines on the carriers and amphibious ships, just as choppers from the Okinawa and Hancock evacuated U.S. and Cambodian personnel from Phnom Penh.

There was also the possibility of evacuation several thousand Vietnamese aboard jumbo jets if Tan Son Nhut remained open.

Newhouse News Service reported yesterday that the Ford administration has notified Congress to expect 80,000 refugees from Southeast Asia for resettlement in the United States — with possibly more to follow.

Most of the 80,000 are related to American citizens or permanent resident aliens of the United States. Almost all are now in South Vietnam.

Not included among the 80,000 are South Vietnamese unrelated to Americans who might be targeted for Communist reprisal because they were closely associated with the U.S. effort in Vietnam. The Ford administration has estimated the number of such high-risk South Vietnamese at 175,000.

The 80,000 would be admitted to the United States under special "parole" procedures provided by the Immigration and Naturalization laws in emergency situations.

Of the 80,000, about 65,000-70,000 are close relatives — wives, children or parents — of American citizens in the United States. Some 3,000 are the immediate relatives of American citizens or permanent, resident aliens of the United States now in South Vietnam.