

REFUGEE AIRLIFT BUILDS UP QUICKLY

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U.S. Base in the Philippines
Gets Heavy Flow After
Trickle for 2 Weeks

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CLARK AIR BASE, the Philippines, April 20 — The flow of people leaving South Vietnam, which started with a trickle nearly two weeks ago, developed tonight into what military and diplomatic officials here considered the start of the major airlift sought by President Ford.

Eight C-141 jet transports of the Military Airlift Command carried nearly 500 people — Americans and Vietnamese — from Tan Son Nhut airfield in Saigon here to Clark Air Base, more than 1,000 miles to the east. Late tonight, 217 more people, who had arrived over the last two weeks, left on a World Airways flight for Travis Air Force Base in California.

Many Were Smuggled

Officials here who have talked with these passengers say that many of the Vietnamese do not know where they will be going if they are allowed to enter the United States or what they might be doing.

A key problem that has still apparently not been resolved is what to do with the Vietnamese who are without any official status. The United States has been trying to find other countries willing to accept some, but the Philippine Government has categorically refused and the legislature on Guam is still considering the matter.

Many were understood to have been smuggled on board by American friends or relatives. Some were the Vietna-

Continued From Page 1, Col. 4

mese girlfriends of Americans in Vietnam, others were household servants or had other close ties with Americans.

In the suddenness of the Communist advance in the last month, most were caught unaware and were delayed in leaving by the South Vietnamese Government's refusal until now to issue them passports or other travel documents.

Arrivals indicated tonight however, that the South Vietnamese Government had become more flexible in the last 24 hours, reportedly under American pressure in Saigon and had begun to issue an informal "laissez passer" — literally "let pass" — document, which American officials have agreed to accept in lieu of a passport or visa.

All of these Vietnamese are still to be detained, although it is hoped that new procedures may minimize this detention.

A number of Vietnamese passengers, both today and the last two weeks, have not had any valid travel documents. While the stay at Clark Air Base for the American evacuees is generally only overnight or for two or three days, there are now more than 500 Vietnamese with no travel documents being held until American officials here can figure out what to do with them.

Several evacuees today had harsh words for the red tape imposed by both South Vietnamese and American officials in Saigon.

The evacuees were divided almost evenly between Americans — largely employes of Government contractors working in South Vietnam — and those called dependents, largely Vietnamese.

There were small children, babies in arms and slung into backpacks. There were children with olive skins and blond hair and almond-shaped eyes.

A few cried, most looked on in silence as their fathers handed passport and travel documents to the lines of military and civilian processors who waited at long row of tables to stamp passports and check visas and health certificates.

Problem Expected

It is the Vietnamese refugees without travel documents — a group expected to swell into the thousands over the next week or two — that are expected to pose the greatest problem for the evacuation effort.

The airlift began with a single flight on April 4, and anywhere from two to five planes have been leaving Clark, flying to's

Saigon and returning each day since then — a total of more than 70 flights. But, until today, many planes had been returning empty or with only a handful of passengers.

Air Force officials here shake their heads and say: "What are they doing over there? They just seem to be running in circles."

As a result, more than two weeks of flights until tonight had produced fewer than 1,200 evacuees although the 70 flights have had a combined capacity of nearly 5,000. And Clark Air Base officials have said that the base could handle up to 5,000 at any one time.

"This is clearly the key to the entire airlift — how they resolve this question," said one Air Force officer. "The few thousand Americans we can handle with no problem. But it's these others, especially if there is a flood of them and we have to hold them for days or weeks. I just don't know what we will do." iW2

Continued on Page 16, Column 7