

'Terrible Looting' in Da Nang Laid to Panicky Saigon Units

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DA NANG, South Vietnam, April 22 (Agence France-Presse) — A parish priest who witnessed the capture of Da Nang by Communist forces said today that there was "terrible looting" by South Vietnamese soldiers before the city fell.

The French priest, Father Charmop, has been here for 20 years.

"The liberation forces here were 100 times better behaved than those who liberated my birth place of Savoie in 1944," the priest said.

"There had been panic and terrible looting," he went on. "The intervention of the liberation forces — which was firm but not brutal — helped restore calm in less than an hour."

André Obrach, director of the French cultural center here, commented that if the Communist troops had not rapidly taken over the town, all its installations would have been looted.

He added: "Soldiers of the Saigon Army, some of whom were drunk, indulged in some incredible pillaging. They were

awaiting evacuation boats of which there were not enough."

He said that the Saigon troops wandered all over the town in all sorts of vehicles. He said that some used armored vehicles to break down doors or gates and steal what was on hand, from hi-fi sets to vases. A good number of the city's inhabitants did the same, he added.

Two missionary nuns who work in an orphanage near the beach said that Saigon troops also visited them. The nuns said the troops were in a panic—and that they came simply to try to exchange their military uniforms for civilian clothes.

On the Evacuation Effort

Several eyewitnesses referred to the evacuation effort as "the hours of madness." They said that the evacuation effort would not have been marred by slayings and mass drownings if it had not been for the panic of the Saigon Army.

The eyewitnesses said that the troops sought to get aboard everything that could fly or float, since the roads out of Da Nang were closed to them.

According to the French Vice Consul, Xavier Dilleman, and other eyewitnesses, the Saigon troops pushed civilians around, beat them up and even fired on them.

Mr. Obrach said that the evacuation plan drawn up by the Americans could possibly have been put into effect if the Saigon Army had remained calm.

While saying that the Saigon Army was largely responsible for what happened in Da Nang, Mr. Obrach added that the Americans who had stayed behind did not help by leaving in a none too discreet manner. Their departure had reportedly spurred the panic.