

Refugees Uncertain About Future in U.S.

By Don Oberdorfer

Washington Post Foreign Service

CLARK AIR BASE, Philippines, April 23—The way Capt. Trinh looks at it, he was never much of a soldier.

He went into the army because he had no choice. His loyalty was to the men he served as paymaster, not the government whose uniform he wore. He was born in China of Vietnamese parents, lived in Saigon and in Hanoi, and was introduced to Western ways of thought by a classical French education.

Now the war is far from over, although the death rattle can be heard, and Capt. Trinh of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam sits in a refugee center at Clark Air Base tending the bath of his small children and thinking vaguely about the better life he hopes for far away, in the United States.

"I am not afraid of the Communists, because they are people like everyone else. Of course, there will be blood in the revolution, but that is the way revolutions are. I was worried about my children, though I might be called out to fight during the battle for the city when shells come down. And I worried about the life they would lead afterwards. I didn't want them to be Red Guards. Maybe most people would be as well off under communism, but I wanted something different for my children.

"To tell the truth, in some ways I am living better than I ever did at home," said tall, darkly handsome Pham. "Here in this trailer we have air conditioning, a refrigerator, and a telephone. Of course, I might be living in one of the bunks in 'tent city' (just across the parade field) and things would be different, but right here I could have no complaint."

"Do you think America would give reclaimed land to Vietnamese so we could have a place to start?" he asks. He knows there are few rice fields in America and that land is scarce, but still he hopes.

He worked with the Communists in the Vietminh against the French, and then he deserted them. Rightly or wrongly, he had no doubt of his fate—quick and final—when the takeover comes to Saigon. Like many others, he had considered dangerous and hare-brained schemes to flee, involving small boats, money under the table and code tapping in the night.

Thus, he was delighted almost beyond belief when an American friend arranged a safe and almost effortless Air Force flight to Clark. Still, he is leaving Vietnam behind and going off into a land of the unknown. That is fearsome to him, and with good reason.

Like very many of the 6,000 or so refugees who are crowded into tents, trailers, schools, a gymnasium and other quarters on America's largest overseas military base, Trinh and Pham have been propelled from their native land by circumstances and the power and sense of honor of the United States. They know and everyone knows that no other nation could or would mount such an operation, with giant jet planes landing around the clock bringing grateful people in flight from their fears.

The problem—and the opportunity—is that many years of life are still ahead of them, and they are only beginning to search for dreams to dream. They have heard of the melting pot, but they are wary. The melting pot may be for Europeans, but what of the yellow-skinned sophisticates of the Orient, the Vietnamese?

Professor Anh, a noted mathematician of Dalat University who has studied at Berkeley, sat on an army cot in "tent city" and expressed confidence in a future in digital analysis beyond the ken of ordinary mortals. He has friends in America, and he has a skill. He is certain everything will go right.

Refugee status at Clark Air Base is a godsend in other ways as well. "My oldest son would have been drafted in June if we remained in Vietnam. Now he will not have to go." Anh had thought of taking his family to America before, but it seemed impractical. They are nine, including his married daughter and her husband, and air tickets alone would have been thousands of dollars beyond his reach. Now they all are being fed, housed and transported by their adopted country, and prepared for eventual citizenship.

A woman in black pantaloons living in "tent city" was mystified by the very question about her decision. "I know nothing. My husband said we go. So we go."

A student of Saigon University, who sat out the war with a draft exemption no doubt purchased at a handsome price, believes he will exist quite well with the help of his sister in America and the support of the United States.

"This is the price America must pay for waging war in our land and then abandoning Vietnam. It is small price, considering everything."

He has found a rationale for his journey. Evidently he has not yet found a dream to dream.

559 Evacuees

Land in California

By Leroy F. Aarons

Washington Post Staff Writer

TRAVIS AIR FORCE

BASE, Calif., April 23—Hundreds of evacuees from Saigon — three-fifths of them South Vietnamese refugees landed here today.

Most were Vietnamese women and children who came with civilian Ameri-

can husbands and sponsors. They brought stories of homes, businesses and families abruptly abandoned, of growing anti-American tension and of black market prices for dollars and passports.

"Our house, our furniture, we had to leave it all behind. I imagine the VC have got it all now," said Walter M. Bain, a civilian contractor in Vietnam.

With him on the American Airline 747 Flight from Clark Air Base in the Philippines were his Vietnamese wife, Lahn, and their three children. "I spent eight years in that damn country, and all I've got to show for it is the \$300 in my pocket—and my family."

The flight was the second to arrive here today, and the tenth to land in California since the refugee airlift began last week.

The 559 Americans and Vietnamese who arrived today were processed promptly through immigration and customs at Travis and allowed to make their own travel arrangements to other parts of the country.

Under a liberalized entry procedure set down by the Immigration and Naturalization Service, so-called dependents were not questioned too closely about their status. Most were given a simple form to fill out and were told to report to immigration authorities at their destinations.

Immigration agents said several Vietnamese were getting into the county merely by "latching on" to American friends willing to claim them as spouses and offspring.

"They're not all dependents," said Immigration inspector Homer McCain. "In many cases, they're not even related."

The service today detained 135 Vietnamese refugees who had no papers. They were held in a church near San Francisco while authorities decided what to do with them. Another 19 were turned over to a Catholic relief agency.

For the most part, however, newcomers today were clearly wives or fiancées of the American civilians who accompanied them.

Because of the frantic push to evacuate, the refugees said, American dollars were at a premium in Saigon—up from 725 piasters exchange rate to as high as 3,000 piasters per dollar on the black market.