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Panic at Airport

From News Dispatches

A swelling tide of Vietnamese fought in desperation Friday to get aboard the decreasing number of planes airlifting refugees from threatened Saigon.

Fear of being left behind triggered near-panic among refugees at Saigon's Tan-Sonnhut airport as three commercial jetliners took on passengers.

"The people seemed almost half-crazed with the idea they weren't going to make the flight," UPI correspondent Alan Dawson reported.

"They jostled and knocked over kids trying to get their tickets stamped. Then they pushed and shoved at the immigration lines even though they were now assured a seat." Dawson said his wife, an American citizen, was pushed out of line by a Vietnamese soldier trying to get his wife on an aircraft.

As many as 5,000 Vietnamese, five times more than the normal backlog, were waiting in and around the air base for flights out of Saigon.

Officials beefed up U.S. Marine guard units attempting to keep order with the help of Vietnamese military police. The Pentagon said another 40 Marines were flown into Saigon by helicopter to build up the force of 80 already there to help control crowds of Vietnamese seeking visas to leave the country.

According to reliable sources, six South Vietnamese air force pilots, who have been flying sorties against insurgent positions around Saigon, left on one American flight.

Pentagon officials indicated that a contingency plan for Marines to rescue between 75,000 and 200,000 Vietnamese jammed into the coastal city of Vungtau would probably be abandoned because Communist forces were getting close to the city.

The refugees who managed to get aboard U.S. Air Force planes for the flight to Guam found intense overcrowding at the American military base there, and officials said they feared outbreaks of epidemics among the refugees, almost none of whom were immunized.

Nguyen Cao Ky, former premier and vice president, said in a speech at a

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Saigon rally, "Let the cowards who are leaving with the Americans go, and let those who love South Vietnam stay and fight.

"Whatever you do, do not leave your homeland of Vietnam. No matter what happens, you should stay here. Even if the Communists win, you should stay because at least they will be yellow-skinned Communists."

"If we must die, it is better to die a heroic death in Vietnam," said Mr. Marshal Ky. He told 500 listeners at a mass meeting at a Roman Catholic church, "Why should we evacuate to foreign countries? To do what? To be servants? To be prostitutes? To be kitchen hands?"

"It is better to be the servants of the Communists because at least the Communists are of the same blood as us. It is better than to be a servant for foreigners."

Ky said plans were being made to arm 500,000 civilians in Saigon to fight the Communists after evacuating women and children to Phuquoc Island off the Vietnamese coast.

"If Hanoi refuses to negotiate a peace and demands a surrender, we will fight to the death," he said.

"People remember Stalingrad, but if we surrender meekly like Hanoi wants, no

one will remember the South Vietnamese," he said.

As the number of refugees crowding the Saigon airport area grew the number of U.S. Air Force planes running the shuttle between Saigon and Guam dropped from 28 Thursday to 22 Friday.

American commercial airlines were ordered by the U.S. government to cease operations in Vietnam for safety reasons. The Hong Kong-based Cathay Pacific Airways, Thai International and the French airline UTA also have stopped flying into Saigon. Only Singapore airlines, Air Vietnam and Air France still are operating flights.

In an attempt to overcome the shortage of planes—caused mainly because it is at least twice the flying time to Guam than to the original destination of refugee airlifts of Clark Air Base in the Philippines—more than 200 persons are being carried aboard each C-141 Starlifter jet and C-130 Hercules turbo-prop being used in the evacuation. The refugees are being strapped to the floors of the planes.

The United States asked the Philippines to lift its restrictions on refugees passing through American bases so the flying time of refugee planes could be cut in half. The government of President Ferdinand E. Marcos is allowing only 200 Vietnamese evacuates to be on U.S. bases at any one time.

U.S. Ambassador William H. Sullivan also told the Philippine government that the United States expected "a massive evacuation from Vietnam in the next few days."

Meanwhile, at Clark Field, the airlift of Vietnamese orphans abruptly resumed after a 9-day suspension. Two jets sponsored by U.S. organizations flew 389 Vietnamese children there from Saigon.

A World Airways 727 jet with 200 babies and the airline's president, Ed Daly, arrived from Saigon a short time later. Clark had said three other agencies—the Holt Children Service, the Pearl Buck Foundation and Friends of All Children—had clearance for the 200 children to leave Vietnam.

'Tacit Deal' With Hanoi To Allow Airlift Reported

Rep. William S. Broomfield (R-Mich.) said yesterday there is a "tacit deal" in Vietnam to permit evacuation of Americans to continue "at least until Monday," but Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger said the report was "not accurate."

There has been a lull in the fighting in South Vietnam since last Monday, when President Thieu resigned. This has facilitated the evacuation of Americans and South Vietnamese.

To that extent it is a tacit arrangement;

what Kissinger was disclaiming was that the United States is a party to a deal or that it knows how long the "lull" will last.

The Washington Special Action Group, known as Wasag, the top-level committee for crisis situations, will meet Saturday morning at the White House on evacuation strategy in Vietnam.

A critical decision is approaching on the time for removing the last Americans from Saigon. The timing depends in part on how long Communist forces will wait for South Vietnam to produce the kind of government North Vietnam would bargain with, on what amounts to face-saving surrender terms.

Broomfield, senior Republican on the House International Relations Committee, told reporters that contacts through a third country have produced "a tacit deal" to "get Americans evacuated without trouble at least until Monday."

"During this period," said Broomfield, "we ought to make maximum efforts to get Americans and their dependents out of there."

The State Department quickly moved to counter Broomfield's remarks. Broomfield had talked to reporters going into a Senate-House conference of evacuation legislation; when he emerged, Broomfield said his earlier statements were based on press reports. Reporters said they overheard a State Department official ask Broomfield not to use the phrase "tacit deal."