

# The Upper-Echelon Viet Refugees

By David Lamb  
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## Agana, Guam

No one has ever questioned Colonel Duong Thien Hung's bravery and when he called his family together in the living room of his Saigon villa the other night he made one point clear.

"If you would respect me any less for leaving," he told his four children, "if you would grow up feeling that your father had been anything but a brave man, then I will stay and if necessary I will die here fighting."

The family's response was unanimous and the next day

he put his wife and children on a U.S. C-130 transport plane at Tan Son Nhut airport. Two days later he, too, boarded a refugee plane, thus ending a 22-year military career that began shortly after he fled North Vietnam in 1954.

Hung, 45, an F-5 pilot three months short of retirement, had flown more missions than he could count. Once he was shot down over North Vietnam and rescued by the Americans. Another time he was the only survivor of a mission flown by the Da Nang-based air wing he commanded. His mementoes include medals for valor and citations for leadership.

"There were people, foreigners and American friends — not many but a few — who said, 'You must stay because you are military,'" Hung recalled in English. "They said, 'If you go, people in America will look at you because you fled and eye you and make you feel uncomfortable on the streets.

"I did everything I possibly could to save my country and now there is no issue to fight for any more. It is gone. If I stay in Vietnam my life is finished. But if I go to the United States and America will give me a chance, then I can work for my children, to give them an education, to be a father they are proud of."

So yesterday, sitting in a tent with 16 members of his family, he had taken the first step. Next to him on the mattress sat his brother — the manager of Tan Son Nhut from 1956 to 1967 and the holder of two degrees from Toulouse University in Paris. His 72-year-old father, a wealthy man until a few days ago, slept on a cot a few feet away. Like other refugees they had left all their material possessions behind.

The Hung family, to be

sure, does not fit the stereotype conjured up when the word "refugee" is mentioned. Their children went to private schools, there were three cars in the garage at the air-conditioned villa, there were TV sets and servants. "Life in Saigon," admitted the father, "was quite easy."

But many, if perhaps not even a majority, of the 21,000 refugees here are, like the Hungs, from the upper echelon of Vietnamese society. They are educated with professional skills. As a result, the United States is the beneficiary of a brain drain probably unequalled in a history that has given entrance to 46 million immi-

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grants and refugees since 1903.

In one enlisted man's barracks overflowing with 350 refugees, there are 12 university professors with PhDs. Colonel Hung's wife was a dentist and a University of Saigon lecturer. The camps abound with doctors, attorneys, field-grade military officers, more than 200 correspondents who worked for American news agencies, interpreters, businessmen.

"They have been very, very good to us," said Dung Thien Dung, 46, who holds French degrees in electrical and aviation engineering. "Yesterday we had nothing, today we have electricity and water pipes. It is amazing. Yes, we had many more comforts in Saigon but we did not come here expecting to sit in an air-conditioned room.

"People are not complaining. What is better? To live here in tents with freedom or to live in an air conditioned house in fear and panic? That is one thing I hope you will tell America. Tell America we are happy for the chance to start again."