

# Cambodian Refugees at U.S. Air

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UTAPAO AIR BASE, Thailand, April 28—About a thousand Cambodian refugees housed in tents on this large U.S. air base will have to leave Thailand within about two weeks, and most are expected to be flown to the United States.

The Thai government, eager to get along with the new government in Phnom Penh, said two weeks ago that the refugees would

## Base Must Leave Thailand

There are also in Thailand a number of Cambodian government officials and diplomats who fear that their lives would be in danger if they returned to Cambodia.

A U.S. embassy spokesman in Bangkok said the United States "feels responsible" for the 850 refugees who were brought here on the American evacuation ships and planes. Other sources suggested that as many as 1,400 Cambodians were to be assisted by the embassy.

have to leave within 30 days. It is assumed that the United States will airlift them either to a Pacific island or one of the military bases in the United States being used to receive Vietnamese refugees.

The Cambodians at Utapao include 850 evacuated along with American diplomats just before the Khmer Rouge insurgents entered Phnom Penh, as well as pilots and other members of the armed forces who flew to Utapao on their own.

During the weekend, U.S. embassy officials began processing the refugees, taking blood tests, fingerprints and what personal data they could elicit.

Official and unofficial sources in Bangkok suggested that the embassy is concerned at the lack of any positive response from Washington about these people's future. There are indications that the processing is to keep refugee morale up as well as to present the documentation to Washington as a fait accompli and to speed up their eventual resettlement. According to eyewitnesses, the refugees are settled in large, plywood-floored army tents with about 25 cots in each. The tents have electricity and drinking water is available in large canvas containers on wooden tripods.

People with access to the camp, about three miles

from the base's main gate, say the mood is one of weariness and monotony. The camp is administered by about 20 former Green Berets.

According to reliable sources, one seven-month-old baby boy died in the camp last week of dehydration, but it is believed that the baby's condition was critical before he was evacuated.

The families who worked for the U.S. embassy in Phnom Penh are said to tend to have a naive view of their future.

"When they are asked what plans they have for the future, some of them say, 'We will go to the United States with you and when you reopen your embassy in Phnom Penh we will be your driver or assistant again,'" one person said.

About two-thirds of the refugees speak no English and some are said to have

expressed the desire to travel to the United States by ship, believing that they will have learned the language by the time they arrive.

The refugees' status once they are in the United States is another problem. It is assumed that they will

all be stateless persons as they possess either passports

of the defunct Khmer Republic or none at all.

There are about 6,000 more refugees who crossed the western border of Cambodia into Eastern Thailand and the Thai government is waiting for some word from the new Cambodian authorities before deciding on their fate. Foreign Ministry officials believe it may be as long as six months before they are resettled, either back in Cambodia or, in the case of many officers and merchants, outside Thailand.