

SFChronicle

A Swarm of APR 30 1975 Copters to The Rescue

Aboard the Blue Ridge
off South Vietnam

Two helicopters collided and another crashed into the main deck of the Blue Ridge as South Vietnamese refugees including babies, sobbing women and three-star generals flew to this American ship yesterday in the evacuation from Saigon.

In the rush of helicopter flights, several of the craft had to be pushed into the sea after landing in order to make room for other helicopters reaching the ship loaded with frightened evacuees.

Others were deliberately ditched by their South Vietnamese pilots after they unloaded their passengers to leave space for other craft arriving.

The Blue Ridge is the command and communications vessel of the 40-ship

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A SWARM OF COPTERS

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Seventh Fleet armada waiting off the coast of South Vietnam to evacuate Americans and other foreigners, including selected Vietnamese, from beleaguered Saigon.

The first seven helicopters to reach this amphibious command ship appeared in the western sky late yesterday morning and swooped down on the single helicopter landing pad at the stern of the vessel simultaneously in a desperate effort to land.

A few minutes later, with one helicopter unloaded and about to take off from the landing pad, a Vietnamese pilot brought his aircraft down into the whirling blades of the first.

His load of women and children almost toppled into the sea, and crewmen dived to the deck as pieces of metal, broken off in the collision, flew in all directions. No one was injured.

The first helicopters unloaded babies, wives of Vietnamese air force and army officers and American officials. Later helicopters brought one-, two- and three-star army and air force generals. The vessel is stationed 20 miles off Vung Tau, the port town east of Saigon.

Some women rushed from helicopters clutching their children and crying.

Mothers carried powdered milk in tins and mosquito netting. One evacuee brought with him two bottles of cognac and gin, which U.S. marines tossed overboard.

Fourteen helicopters landed on the Blue Ridge yesterday morning. The Navy did not announce the number of Vietnamese arrivals, but said 26 Americans, two Filipinos, two Koreans and two other unidentified non-Vietnamese were among them.

In the first hour of the

landings, eight helicopters were jettisoned after unloading to clear deck space for more.

One nervous pilot leaped from his helicopter, which then smashed against the Blue Ridge's starboard side, spraying the main deck with more metal fragments. The pilot was rescued alive.

Afraid to land his craft in the sea, one Vietnamese pilot jumped from it 100 feet above the water. His helicopter plunged into the sea almost on top of him, but he, too, was rescued unharmed.

Several other pilots dived from their cockpits before their helicopters crashed into the water and were rescued by the crews of two small boats patrolling the area.

Although helicopters plunged into the sea one after another yesterday, there were no fatalities.

Agence France-Presse