

Pendleton's First Refugees

Camp Pendleton

The first groups of Vietnamese war refugees arrived at this huge Marine Corps base yesterday to take up temporary residence in a Quonset hut-tent city not far from where a mock war was in progress.

Many of the arrivals among the hundreds brought here during the day from El Toro Marine Air Station were American citizens, contract employees of the U.S. government in Saigon or employees of the U.S. embassy there.

Some protested the processing which required them to come here by bus after the long flight across the Pacific from Guam.

Officials hurried the processing and before day's end, 56 of the refugees — American citizens — left in two buses to make commercial airline connections in Los Angeles or San Diego and go to family homes.

Most of the first refugees to arrive appeared affluent and were well dressed.

James Megellas, deputy coordinator of the refugee project, said most of them had families in the United States or had sponsors. He said "genuine refugees" would arrive on later flights.

Medical officers said there were no cases of communicable diseases among the first batches but that some children suffered from ringworm.

About 700 men, women and children were brought in through the day on flights from Guam to begin a new life in a strange land. Some California officials voiced hopes that the state would not be saddled with care of the refugees.

The biggest contingent, numbering 356, arrived on a chartered blue and silver DC-10 emblazoned with the words "Holidayliner Freedom." For the most part, they were unsmiling as they came down the ramp and walked across the apron at the El Toro Marine Station.

A few children broke into smiles.

After being cleared by customs and immigration, they were taken by bus to the huge Pendleton base. There, a "city" had popped up overnight on the northern part of the reservation about five miles from former President Nixon's home.

Field maneuvers had been scheduled for this period long ago by the marines, but a spokesman said the refugees probably will see little of them although jet airplanes will be frequently overhead.

The group yesterday was taken to Camp Talega, which had readied 50 Quonset huts holding 20 persons apiece and 90 tents holding 16 persons each. Two mess halls were ready to serve meals. There were 30 medical corpsmen on hand and

also a number of doctors including pediatricians.

California Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr. expressed concern about their arrival. He said the state "cannot afford to have any more unemployed people living here."

The situation was no different in Arkansas and Florida, the two other states where refugee reception centers are located.

Thousands of Americans in the three states have complained to their representatives or senators that the refugees constitute a

threat to the economy and health of their communities.

"Disease, disease, disease, that's all I've heard," said Representative Thomas M. Rees (Dem-Beverly Hills), "I've had some of the dumbest phone calls I've ever received. They think of the Vietnamese as nothing but diseased job-seekers.

"If Americans had thought that way in 1912 I wouldn't be here today. That's the year my father came over from Wales."

Most of the protests come from the areas of three military bases selected as reception centers — Pendle-

ton, Ft. Chaffee, Ark., and Eglin Air Force Base, Fla.

Seeking to allay the fears, State Department officials have assured congressmen from all three states that only 50,000 "high-priority Vietnamese refugees" are involved and that they eventually will be resettled in communities across the country.

The officials said that the federal government will pay the total cost of the resettlement program and that the refugees will pose no financial burden or health hazard to local communities.

A.P. & U.P.



AP Wirephoto

The Vietnamese started arranging themselves in a bunk-lined Quonset hut at Camp Pendleton