

The Weather

Today—Rain, high near 70, low in the 50s. The chance of rain is 60 per cent today and tonight. Thursday—Mostly cloudy, high in the upper 60s. Yesterday's temperature range was 58-50. Details are on Page C2.

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Evacuation Ends

By Haynes Johnson

Washington Post Staff Writer

The American evacuation from Vietnam, which took place amid scenes of chaos, panic and suffering, is over. The final act of an American involvement that lasted for a generation, took the lives of 56,737 military personnel, cost more than \$160 billion in treasure and affected virtually every aspect of national life occurred in the early morning hours of Wednesday in Saigon.

Shortly after the last helicopters had taken to the air carrying U.S. Ambassador Graham Martin and other survivors of the once overpowering American presence, President Ford issued a statement. He said the evacuation "closes a chapter in the American experience" and

called upon the nation "to close ranks, to avoid recrimination about the past."

Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger, appearing on national television, said: "Our ambassador has left and evacuation can be said to be completed."

In the final, desperate 24 hours about 6,500 persons were evacuated by American helicopters protected by Navy F-4 Phantom jets to carriers waiting in the South China Sea. Of those, about 1,000 were Americans, the rest South Vietnamese, Kissinger said.

The end to America's bitter Vietnam experience came suddenly. Shortly after 6 o'clock Monday night, Washington time, a general brought a whispered message to Mr. Ford, who was presiding over a meeting of his energy advisers. Panic was growing, evacuation was becoming

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Vietnam Role

more difficult hourly, and two U.S. Marines had been killed in a rocket attack at Saigon's Tansonnhut airport.

Within hours the President had ordered the evacuation of the remaining Americans.

The final departure triggered panic among Vietnamese soldiers and civilians. At the U.S. embassy Marines and American civilians used pistol and rifle butts to smash the fingers of Vietnamese trying to claw their way over a 10-foot wall.

Others fended for themselves as best they could. What appears to be about one-third of the South Vietnamese air force, one of the largest in the world, left for the security of an American base in Thailand.

As the evacuation proceeded, in darkness and in poor weather, an ironic note was recorded. For the first time

since 1965 when the first American combat troops waded ashore at Danang, no daily war communique was issued from Saigon.

Another figure starkly evoked memories of the divisive war, the longest in U.S. history. In the last few days about 55,000 South Vietnamese have been evacuated from their homeland—almost exactly the number of Americans who died there on their behalf.

These refugees are now strung out across the Pacific, from the Philippines to Guam to Wake Island where American soldiers fought and died in World War II, and on into California. They are huddled together in hastily constructed tent cities awaiting a new life in the United States.

"This action closes a chapter in the American experience. I ask all Americans to close ranks, to avoid recrimination about the past, to look ahead to the many goals we share and to work together on the great tasks that remain to be accomplished."

—President Ford.