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Vietnam's Rats Flee

The Composition of Evacuees Changes

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CLARK AIR BASE, Philippines, April 29—There is a Vietnamese saying that "Only when the house burns, do you see the faces of the rats." This phrase, often cited in Saigon in the last few weeks, is again being repeated by Vietnamese observing the most recent loads of refugees arriving here from Tansonnhut airport.

The social composition of the evacuees has changed markedly in the last two days. Until the suspension of flights out of Saigon this morning, whole plane loads of evacuees with few or no Americans aboard were arriving here.

Many of these refugees are employees and families of employees of official American agencies, such as the Defense Attache's Office and the Agency for International Development; these people have legitimate grounds for being evacuated even without accompanying American sponsors.

Many other Vietnamese, not employed by the U.S. government and often from among the wealthier and more politically powerful families in Saigon, have also come out on these flights. Early yesterday morning a number of high-ranking former Saigon government officials passed through on their way to Guam.

Among a large group of such refugees, according to an eyewitness were: Dr. Phan Quang Dan, former deputy prime minister in the Khiem Cabinet and concurrently minister responsible for social welfare and refugee resettlement; Hoang Duc Nha, former information minister; and Nguyen Ba Can, prime minister of the short-lived "combat Cabinet" that fell last week with the resignation of President Thieu.

Dan, who has been a vocal anti-Communist, has been seen by many foreigners as a leading representative of the true nationalist spirit in South Vietnam. Fewer Vietnamese seem to share this view, however. Hoang Duc Nha, a nephew of the former president, was responsible for information policy and press relations until he

was dismissed from the Cabinet in an unsuccessful last-ditch attempt by Thieu to placate the opposition press. Nguyen Ba Can—speaker of the lower house of the National Assembly until his elevation to prime minister—was noted primarily for his subservience to Thieu.

Some days earlier, after having been put on an evacuation flight by a senior official in the U.S. aid public health division, Dr. Tran Minh Tung arrived. Tung, who has been living in a tent here, is a former minister of health who resigned his Cabinet Post in order to serve as the secretary general of the Democracy Party, the monolithic pro-government political apparatus Thieu established after the 1973 cease-fire accords. All civil servants and schoolteachers were required to join the party, the only legal party in South Vietnam for the last two years. With a typically Vietnamese sense of irony, many referred to the party (known as Dan Chu in Vietnamese) the "Chu Dan Party," which roughly translates as the "Master of the People" Party.

The arrival of these former high officials here is galling to many of the Vietnamese refugees who did not enjoy benefits of power. It is particularly hard to accept that these men—who for years called on the people of South Vietnam to sacrifice everything for the "salvation of the fatherland"—and their families are filling seats on U.S. evacuation flights, while the common soldiers they have abandoned continue to die to preserve their escape route.

Before his former ministers left, Thieu had already followed his wife and family into exile in Taiwan.

Many lesser official and quasi-governmental figures have also been seen in the refugee camp here. A number of wealthy businessmen, dressed in expensive foreign-made clothing, carry small but obviously heavy bags with them at all times. Knowledgeable Vietnamese say these are filled with gold. Young men of military age, but who have never done active service, are also among the new arrivals. Some held more-or-less-legitimate stu-

dent deferments; other are from wealthy families who paid large bribes to keep their sons out of the army.

Although the young men would be listed as soldiers on some unit's roster, they would never report for duty, and their commanding officers would pocket their salaries. Such "ghost soldiers"—who represented a significant reduction in the fighting capability of many of Saigon's units, continued to lead the good life in the capital while others fought and died in Quangtri and Kontum and Camau.

Watching the "beautiful people" arrive, many Vietnamese and Americans with long personal involvement in the war openly express bitterness and anger.

Two weeks ago on Phuquoc Island, a soldier disfigured by battle scars approached an American. The soldier had been wounded while serving together with the U.S. Marines in a combined-action platoon in Quangnam Province. He showed a carefully preserved certificate attesting that he had completed a special training course run by the Marine and asked if the Americans would remember him and help him escape from the Communists.

The answer is to be seen here at Clark, and so far, at least, it appears to be, an overwhelming No. There are ghost soldiers in abundance, but combatants like the militiaman from Phuquoc are conspicuous only by their absence.