

WXPPost APR 30 1975  
**Deciding on the Final Withdrawal**

By Lou Cannon and Michael Getler

Washington Post Staff Writers

The end began with a brief, whispered conversation.

Shortly after 6 p.m. Monday, Lt. Gen. Brent A. Scowcroft slipped into the Cabinet room of the White House where President Ford was presiding over a meeting of his energy advisers. Scowcroft, the President's deputy national security adviser, handed Mr. Ford a note and then conferred with him in whispers about the death of two U.S. Marines in a Communist rocket barrage at Saigon's Tansonnhut airport. Panic was growing, Mr. Ford was told. Evacuation was becoming more difficult hourly.

Without interrupting the meeting the President whispered instructions to Scowcroft, who left the room. He returned a few moments later for another whispered conversation. The President's action at that moment set in motion an emergency National Security Council meeting and triggered a chain of events that was to lead to the final American withdrawal from Vietnam.

Mr. Ford had been aware for the past several days that there was impatience, both at the Pentagon and in Congress, with what seemed to be the slowness of the U.S. evacuation. Now, as an aide recounted it later, he realized that time was running out.

This was the sequence of events in the next 12 hours as 14 years of American involvement in the Vietnam war reached its conclusion:

**7:12 p.m.**—President Ford ended the energy meeting without making any decision on whether the administration would seek to reimpose oil import tariffs. He left the Cabinet room and walked across the hall into the Roosevelt Room where his National Security Council already was gathering.

National security adviser Henry A. Kissinger



President Ford and Secretary Kissinger discussing evacuation at meeting Monday night.

White House Photo via United Press International

was there along with Scowcroft. So were Defense Secretary James R. Schlesinger, Central Intelligence Director William E. Colby and Gen. George S. Brown, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

**7:23 p.m.**—The NSC meeting began. The only topic of discussion was whether it was now time for the final evacuation to begin. At this point, said one White House official, it was unclear how much longer C-130 planes could land

at Tansonnhut because of milling refugees and the restricted landing space for fixed wing aircraft.

**8:08 p.m.**—The NSC meeting concluded without a firm decision. Participants were told that it would not be known for another hour if the C-130s could land. An order was given to evacuate the 450 Americans in the Defense Attache's Office at Tansonnhut, but there was

See DECISION, A29, Col. 1



## DECISION, From A1

no order for the final evacuation. The President wanted to fly the C-130s for another day if they can get into the airport and out again safely.

**8:18 p.m.**—President Ford, walking with his hands in his pockets, returned to his residence. An aide described his expression as grim. The President stopped briefly to chat with White House physician William Lukash, then took the elevator to his second-floor living quarters. He greeted Betty Ford with a kiss, sat on the couch and put his feet on the coffee table. He drank a before-dinner martini.

**8:30 p.m.** — Kissinger arrived for a meeting with the President. They conferred for a few minutes. At 8:34 p.m. the two men were joined by Scowcroft, who told them that the situation at Tansonnhut was becoming more desperate.

**8:43 p.m.**—Kissinger and Scowcroft left the residence without a final decision being made on the evacuation.

**9:15 p.m.**—President and Mrs. Ford ate supper in the family dining room. The menu included oyster cocktail, corned beef and cabbage, carrots, a beet salad and black cherry Jello.

**10 p.m. (approximate)**—About the time the President was finishing up his dinner two C-130s that had been sent from the Philippines to Saigon to take out

the defense attache's staff circled Tansonnhut, trying to determine if it was safe to land. No planes had landed on the airfield since earlier that afternoon when the rocket barrage was under way and another C-130 had been set on fire.

High-level military men were angered at the danger posed to the C-130s because the White House, fearing congressional reaction, had refused to allow Air Force fighter escorts for the planes. Gen. Homer Smith, the top military man in the Defense Attache's Office, had sent some U.S. soldiers in his office on reconnaissance patrols around the field to see if the perimeter was safe.

**10:15 p.m.**—Gen. Smith radioed the C-130 pilots that the situation was a little rough but that it seemed okay to land. The planes dropped to 16,000 feet, and Smith told them to start their 14-minute landing approach. Ten minutes into that situation Smith got back on the radio and ordered the planes not to land. Scouting reports had brought back the news that two platoons of North Vietnamese infantry were in a cemetery just one-half mile from the airfield. A South Vietnamese pilot had landed his F-5 fighter on the field and abandoned it with its engine running. Other Vietnamese had run a jeep in

front of a Vietnamese C-130, blocking its path to the runway. Crowds of some 3,000 Vietnamese at the field were becoming unruly.

Smith called Adm. Noel Gaylor, commander of U.S. forces in the Pacific based in Honolulu. He told Gaylor that the situation seemed to be getting out of control.

**10:25 p.m.**—Kissinger called the President and told him of the situation at the Tansonnhut airport. At approximately the same time Smith was calling Graham Martin, the U.S. ambassador in Saigon, and telling him he didn't see any way to evacuate the remaining Americans except by helicopter. This was the so-called "option four" of the evacuation plans. The first three options involved fixed-wing planes and ships.

Martin reportedly gave no indication of whether he accepted Smith's assessment. But he told Smith and Gaylor that he would call Kissinger.

**10:35 p.m.**—Kissinger called Gen. Brown, who reportedly favored immediate evacuation.

**10:38 p.m.** — Schlesinger joined the conversation. Reflecting the concerns of the military, he also favored evacuating the remaining Americans.

**10:43 p.m.**—Though events had nearly reached a climax, the President still wanted to hear Martin's recommendation before he or-

dered the final evacuation. Kissinger called Martin at this time. "Let's go with option four," Martin told Kissinger.

**10:45 p.m.**—Kissinger called the President again to pass on the recommendation from Martin. The President concurred immediately and ordered the evacuation to begin.

**10:51 p.m.**—Kissinger called Schlesinger to pass on the directive.

**11 p.m.**—Kissinger called Martin back to order the evacuation. By now, dozens of aides were on call at the White House, the State Department and the Pentagon. Lawrence S. Eagleburger, executive assistant to Kissinger, was in bed leafing through New York magazine when he got a phone call, at 11 p.m., to come back. He showered, shaved and went to the State Department operations room, where he ate a left-over egg roll.

**11:12 p.m.**—Kissinger called Vice President Rockefeller and informed him of the decision to evacuate.

**11:26 p.m.**—The President left his living quarters, headed for the Oval Office. He met Kissinger there and the two men walked into the top-secret Situation Room. Kissinger spread out a map of Saigon and outlined the evacuation route for the President.

**12:05 a.m. Tuesday.**—The President returned from the Situation Room to his living



quarters. On the way he is hailed by CBS reporter Phil Jones. "Working late?" Jones asked him. "With good reason," replied Mr. Ford.

12:23 a.m.—Kissinger telephoned the President, brought him up to date on the evacuation and discussed the wording of the evacuation announcement.

12:25 a.m.—The President retired.

12:43 a.m.—Kissinger phoned the President with the wording of the evacuation order. Downstairs, some of Mr. Ford's top aides were meeting in chief of staff Donald Rumsfeld's office. The group included Rumsfeld, his top aide, Richard Cheney, press secretary Ron Nessen, Assistant Press Secretary William Greener, congressional liaison John O. Marsh and his top assistant, Max Friedersdorf. Marsh and Friedersdorf have been calling congressional leaders to tell them of the news.

The group sat around Rumsfeld's writing table, devouring three pizzas, which had been brought in by an assistant press secretary.

12:45 a.m.—Two hours after the order for the evacuation, the first wave of 36 Marine Corps and Air Force helicopters took off from the USS Hancock and headed for Tansonghut. The helicopters were scheduled to land just after 2 a.m.

EDT. Inexplicably, the helicopters received a call over a secure radio channel delaying their landing for an hour.

Immediately the channels were jammed with calls from Adm. Gaylor and other high-level military officials demanding to know who gave the order for the delay. Late yesterday the Defense Department still didn't know who was responsible. Defense officials suspected that someone simply got confused in translating time zones.

But the wrong order delayed all but the lead helicopter from landing before 3 a.m. The lead helicopter, commanded by Marine Brig. Gen. Richard Curry, got in at 2:05.

1:08 a.m.—Kissinger again telephoned the President and told him that the evacuation was proceeding and that there was nothing more that could be done for the present.

1:30 a.m.—Mr. Ford finally went to sleep. In the next hour his senior aides would follow his example. Many of them would lie down for a few hours of sleep in the couches in their offices.

3:12 a.m.—It was late afternoon in Saigon when the first helicopter, with 50 people aboard, left the airport. By 4:30 a.m. Washington time, with 81 helicopters now in use, 2,000 people had come out. By 9 a.m. the

number had swelled to 4,500. All but about 450 of these were South Vietnamese. The large numbers of South Vietnamese that were evacuated plus thunderstorm activity in the area caused what had been estimated as a 3½-hour evacuation to take 16 hours.

5 a.m.—The first Marine helicopter began lifting Americans and still more South Vietnamese from the embassy area. But the evacuation was delayed because the helicopters went back to Tansonghut to bring some of the Marines back to the embassy to beef up the guard there.

5:27 a.m.—The President woke up after four hours' sleep and telephoned the White House operator for messages.

6:30 a.m.—Kissinger called the President to tell him that the evacuation was proceeding smoothly, though more slowly than expected.

7:30 a.m.—With darkness closing in on Saigon, Gen. Smith, aware that some Americans were having trouble getting either to the embassy or the airport, ordered helicopter pilots to pick up people from the rooftops of their homes if they spotted a stranded American.

7:40 a.m.—The President arrived at his office. Nessen talked with him and found that Mr. Ford was con-

cerned but pleased with the progress of the evacuation. "If we get all these people out safely . . ." he said and then trailed off.

Later in the morning Mr. Ford would express the same idea, more completely, to his Cabinet.

"The fact is we did not panic and we handled it carefully," the President said. "We came out of a very difficult situation better than we had any right to expect."

Kissinger spoke to the same meeting of the Cabinet, saying that "we maintained our honor by taking out these Vietnamese." He would say this again an hour later in a meeting with congressional leaders.

Then at 5:30 p.m. he would face the American people over television and deliver the eulogy for the long, long war that had finally come to an end.

*Washington Post staff writers Marilyn Berger and Carroll Kilpatrick also contributed to this article.*

## **Refugee Welcome Rejected in Seattle**

SEATTLE, April 29 (UPI)—A resolution welcoming Vietnamese refugees to this city failed Monday in a 7-to-1 vote by the City Council.