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Americans Are Told to Close Ranks and Look to Future

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WASHINGTON, April 29—
The United States ended two decades of military involvement in Vietnam today with the evacuation of about 1,000 Americans from Saigon as well as more than 5,500 South Vietnamese.

The emergency helicopter evacuation was ordered last night by President Ford after the Saigon airport was closed

*Ford statement and excerpts
from Kissinger's, Page 16.*

because of Communist rocket and artillery fire. The 1,000 Americans were the last contingent of a force that once numbered more than 500,000.

The helicopters removed the 5,500 South Vietnamese citizens because their lives were presumed to be in danger with a Communist take-over of South Vietnam. Over the last two weeks, a total of about 55,000 South Vietnamese have been removed. Most of them will come to the United States.

Last Marines Evacuated

The final withdrawal of Americans was completed at 7:52 P.M., about two hours after the White House had announced the evacuation was completed, when 11 marines were taken by helicopter from the roof of the American Embassy in Saigon. Officials said that the marines, the last of a security guard sent in to protect the evacuation, were safely removed although small-arms fire had broken out around the deserted embassy.

President Ford, in a statement issued by the White House, said the evacuation "closes a chapter in the American experience." In a plea for national unity in the post-Vietnam period, the President said:

"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 remains to be accomplished."

Appeal by Kissinger

At a news conference, Secretary of State Kissinger appealed to North Vietnam not to storm Saigon by force because the United States believed the new South Vietnamese Government was prepared to capitulate.

Mr. Kissinger said a bloody take-over by the Communists was now "unnecessary" since the Saigon Government of Gen.

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Duong Van Minh was "ready to draw the conclusions from the existing situation and in fact was formed to correspond to the demands of the Communist side." [Details on Page 17.]

The last Americans were removed by a fleet of 81 helicopters flying from Navy ships lying off South Vietnam. Nearly 1,000 combat marines went ashore to protect the evacuation and air cover was provided by Navy and Air Force F-4 fighter-bombers. This same aircraft for more than eight years was the main bomber of the United States in the Vietnam war.

The helicopter evacuation—the largest ever conducted by the armed forces—took more than 16 hours, far longer than had been expected by the Pentagon, which had been planning on an operation of less than four hours to remove the Americans still in South Vietnam.

Two marines were lost and presumed dead when their helicopter, which was flying rescue guard duty off the carriers, crashed into the South China Sea. Two other marines, standing guard at the American Defense Attaché's office at Tan Son Nhut airport were killed yesterday by Communist rocket fire in an attack that directly led to Mr. Ford's decision to order the evacuation of all Amer-

icans today.

The first marine helicopter to land at Tan Son Nhut Airport today reportedly came under gunfire as did a later helicopter carrying evacuees back to the carriers. There were no casualties.

F-4 Fires Back

A Navy F-4 flying air cover came under anti-aircraft fire and, according to the Pentagon, took "countermeasures," either bombing or strafing the anti-aircraft position. A Navy A-7 attack bomber was ditched in the ocean after it ran into mechanical problems, but the pilot was rescued.

The evacuation effort, which began at 12:45 A.M., Eastern daylight time, continued until 5:22 P.M. The White House reportedly postponed an announcement throughout this afternoon that the final American had been removed.

The operation was delayed by the weather, by the limited landing areas around the American Embassy in downtown Saigon, by an unexplained radio message that delayed the first landing of marine helicopters by about an hour and finally by pilot fatigue in the final stages of the evacuation. Another factor, as the press secretary, Ron Nessen, acknowledged to reporters, was that "A larger number of South Vietnamese were evacuated than had been anticipated."

The original Defense Department and State Department announcement early today stated that "the President has ordered the evacuation of the remaining Americans from South Vietnam."

Authority Explained

The assumption in the original Pentagon planning was that a limited number of South Vietnamese might be evacuated but that the emphasis would be removing some 1,000 remaining Americans. This assumption was in line with the Administration's position that the President, as Commander in Chief, had the authority to use armed forces to remove Americans but needed authority, not yet given by Congress, to permit the armed forces to evacuate South Vietnamese.

In the end, however, even in the absence of specific Congressional authority, the Administration decided to evacuate several thousand South Vietnamese who had gathered at the Defense Attaché's Office and at the embassy.

At a televised briefing the followed conclusion of the operation, Secretary of State Kissinger said he did not believe that there had been "an undue delay" in the evacuation because of the decision Amba-

sador Graham A. Martin that large numbers of South Vietnamese should be removed before all Americans were finally evacuated.

Mr. Kissinger said that Mr. Martin, who more than any other official dictated the pace and timing of the evacuation, felt "a strong moral obligation" to South Vietnamese who had worked with the United States, which Mr. Secretary said, "is not the worst fault in a man."

Furthermore, he said, Ambassador Martin was "in a very difficult position" of having to make judgments over the last week on how quickly the American contingent could be reduced without "triggering a panic" that would have complicated the removal of Americans.

Mr. Kissinger maintained that the Administration's objectives in the phased withdrawal were achieved. "We got out with all the personnel there without panic and without the substantial casualties that could have occurred if civil order had broken down."

At the same time, he said, "We all went through a somewhat anxious 24 hours because until the last helicopter had left we couldn't really know whether an attack on any of these compounds might start or whether missiles would be used."

Mr. Martin and his closet aides were on the last helicopter to leave the embassy grounds.

Relations 'In Abeyance'

With Mr. Martin's departure, Mr. Kissinger said, American relations with the South Vietnamese Government, which has been supported by the United States ever since the French withdrew in 1954, were "in a state of abeyance."

Mr. Kissinger hinted that as a result of discussions through intermediaries, North Vietnam, which had been selling the airport, permitted the evacuation of Americans and South

Vietnamese from the Defense Attaché's Office.

The initial evacuation effort concentrated on Tan Son Nhut, where more than 4,000 people were removed by helicopter in the first few hours.

Flight Delayed

The first flight of helicopters, which had left the carrier Hancock at 12:45 A.M., had been scheduled to land at Tan Son Nhut at 2 A.M. But just as the helicopters were about to land, a command came across the radio telling them to delay their landing until 3 A.M.

The lead helicopter, carrying Brig. Gen. Richard Carey of the Marine Corps, proceeded to land, coming under some gunfire. But the other helicopters circled for nearly an hour as Adm. Noel A. W. Gayler, Commander in Chief Pacific, and other high-ranking officers broke in, demanding to know who had issued the order. As of tonight, the Pentagon still had not determined who gave the spurious order.

With all the people evacuated from Tan Son Nhut under the protection of some 800 marines who had been flown in, the evacuation effort shifted to the embassy. There the operation

was limited to two landing places, the embassy roof and a parking lot. Only two helicopters could come in at a time.

Toward the end of the operation, an 80-minute break was called, apparently, as explained by Pentagon officials, because of "pilot fatigue." In addition, night had fallen, complicating the helicopter operations.

As dawn approached, the final flight of 19 helicopters went in to rescue 125 Americans and 475 South Vietnamese still at the embassy.

Defense Secretary James R. Schlesinger sent a message to the armed forces telling them that "in this hour of reflection you may feel that your efforts and sacrifices have gone for naught."

"That is not the case," he said. When the passions have been muted and the history is written, Americans will recall that their armed forces served them well. Under circumstances more difficult than ever before faced by our military services, you accomplished the mission assigned to you by higher authority. In combat you were victorious and you left the field with honor."