



United Press International

Ambassador Martin, right, arrives aboard USS Blue Ridge off Vietnam.

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Hasten Exit, Martin Told

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A strongly worded cable from Washington Tuesday afternoon to U.S. Ambassador Graham Martin in Saigon warned the ambassador that President Ford was becoming irritated with the slow pace at which Americans, in comparison to South Vietnamese, were being evacuated by helicopter from the besieged capital.

The message, sent after U.S. Marine and Air Force helicopter pilots had already been through some 12 hours of arduous flying, "left very little to the imagination," according to one senior administration official.

In Washington there were growing fears of a last-minute disaster as helicopter crews grew weary after flying many more hours than planned, the level of ground fire at the rescue chop-

pers increased, and crowds around the embassy tried to claw their way in.

The cable, in effect, forced Martin to stop loading so many Vietnamese and to get the remaining Americans out fast. It limited the number of helicopter flights that would be sent into the embassy area from carriers offshore and politely suggested to the ambassador that he be on one of those.

Sources in two government agencies said the message stated that the last 19 helicopters were on their way and that the President and Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger wanted the operation terminated by 3:45 p.m. EDT Tuesday. Sources said Martin requested a 45-minute extension.

The message, according to a senior official, made it clear that if the evacuation continued to be left in Martin's

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hands, "he would take out all of South Vietnam."

As matters turned out, the dramatic 20-hour-long helicopter airlift picked up some 7,000 people from Saigon's Tan Son Nhut airport, the U.S. embassy compound and rooftops around town. Some 6,000 of these were Vietnamese, far more than U.S. military planners had understood were to be picked up.

Sources say that the cable to Martin was not sent by President Ford personally, but that it was made clear in the message that it was being sent in the President's name.

At 5:20 Tuesday afternoon, Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger told a televised news conference that the evacuation "can be said to be completed" and that Ambassador Martin had left.

Martin, 61, stepped from his evacuation helicopter on the USS Blue Ridge and told reporters: "I am hungry."

The ambassador, suffering from a slight case of pneumonia, later held a press conference in which he said: "If we had kept our commitments we

wouldn't have had to evacuate," news agencies reported.

But the evacuation even then had not been completed. More than 100 Marines and a handful of civilians were still left at the embassy compound and getting them out aboard several additional flights over the next 2½ hours proved to be the most dangerous part of the evacuation.

All told, Pentagon sources said yesterday Marine and Air Force helicopter pilots flew a total of 630 individual sorties during the evacuation. A sortie is a single flight from takeoff to landing.

Off the shores of South Vietnam still another bizarre part of the end to the war continues to unfold.

In the past few days, about 18,000 South Vietnamese who have made their way out to sea in sampans, rafts and anything else that will float have been picked up by U.S. Navy ships off the coast.

These refugees are being loaded aboard the same armada of roughly 40 U.S. warships and transport vessels that have been off the coast for several weeks and that now have the 7,000 helicopter evacuees aboard.

Many of the ships, now packed with

the approximately 25,000 refugees, are sailing toward the big U.S. naval base in the Philippines.

But some ships, according to Pentagon spokesman Joseph Laitin, are continuing to stay offshore, at a distance of more than three miles, to pick up any more stragglers who may make it out to sea.

Laitin did not say how these ships would remain in the area, but Navy sources suggested it probably would be another day or two.

Laitin said that many of those 18,000 picked up at sea apparently lack proper documents and pose a potential problem because they do not fit in the two categories authorized for evacuation—those who are relatives of Americans or those thought to face harsh treatment at the hands of the Communists.

But Laitin and State Department spokesman Robert Anderson both indicated these refugees would not be sent back to Vietnam.

"They were there. They were on the high seas, and they were rescued," Laitin told reporters, acknowledging that the Navy was not operating under any specific legal authority.