

Viet Refugee Estimate Increases to 70,000

By Lawrence Meyer

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The United States now estimates that more than 70,000 refugees fled Vietnam and that it will cost more than \$500 million to take care of them in the next year, administration officials said yesterday.

The substantial increase in the expected number of refugees, estimated at 50,000 Tuesday, resulted from the addition of the "self-evacuated" Vietnamese who fled South Vietnam in small boats this week and are being picked up in the South China Sea.

Although the State Department has said it will press other countries to take these self-evacuees, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Philip C. Habib told a Senate Judiciary subcommittee yesterday, "We're not going to abandon anybody. That would be unconscionable on our part."

Refugees already have begun arriving at Camp Pendleton, Calif., one of three temporary staging areas designated by the Defense Department to receive the new immigrants before they are permanently resettled. The other two are Ft. Chaffee, Ark., and Eglin Air Force Base, Fla.

Pendleton, a sprawling 94-square-mile Marine base which was the principal staging ground for the Marine Corps during the height of the American involvement in Vietnam, received more than 3,000 refugees yesterday from Guam.

A military spokesman at Ft. Chaffee said that 1,000 Vietnamese are expected to arrive there Friday, and 2,000 a day are expected after that until 20,000 have arrived. Eglin has been designated as a reserve base to handle the overflow from Chaffee. The spokesman said the military had ordered 40,000 pounds of rice,

40,000 pounds of powdered milk and 50,000 pounds of frozen fish and poultry to feed the refugees Vietnamese-type food.

Events changed so rapidly yesterday that budget figures given to the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Refugees and Escapees in the morning increased significantly by late afternoon.

At first, State Department officials estimated that it would cost \$300 million to \$350 million to evacuate, care for and resettle the refugees in the first six months. By yesterday afternoon, with the number of refugees estimated at more than 70,000, the State De-

partment cost figure for six months had increased to \$410 million.

During their testimony yesterday, State Department officials agreed with subcommittee Chairman Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) that it would cost the United States at least \$500 million for the refugees in the next year. A subcommittee staff member later said that figure was conservative.

Although the federal government will be relying almost entirely on voluntary agencies to help Vietnamese without family or friends in this country to resettle, virtually no funds have been made available to the agencies.

An administration bill authorizing money for humanitarian relief has been held in Congress at the administration's request while it decides what it wants to do. The White House said yesterday that it wanted the legislation to go forward.

"Money is the key now," said Wells Klein, who represents three private voluntary agencies. "We're all right so far, but we're not going to be all right for long."

Without funds from the government, Klein said, local voluntary agencies will be unable to begin the job of helping refugees settle into new homes and jobs.

Julia Taft, deputy assistant secretary of health, education and welfare for human development, told the subcommittee that state governments were being notified that the federal government will reimburse them for all the additional costs they incur because of Vietnamese who resettle in their states during the next six months.

Mrs. Taft conceded under questioning by Kennedy that the administration did not yet have the authority to back up the guarantees given to state governments.

Frank G. Wisner, director of the State Department's Office of Plans and Management, told the subcommittee that Canada, Australia, Western Europe and some Latin American countries have indicated an interest in taking some Vietnamese refugees. Without a clear idea of who the refugees are and what skills they have, Wisner said, no firm commitments have been obtained.

In addition, countries in French-speaking Africa have given an "encouraging response," Wisner said. But Habib said the vast majority of the refugees are expected

to come to the United States.

"The important point," Habib told the subcommittee, "is that whatever residual amount we take, that they be widely dispersed."

At one point Kennedy faulted the American embassy in Saigon for failing to keep officials here fully informed on the situation. After Kennedy referred to "catastrophic bungling," Habib replied, "I don't know where the bungling was, senator."

"I think you could start with the ambassador [Graham Martin], quite frankly," Kennedy said.

"I don't think that is a fair characterization of his effort," Habib said. "Ambassador Martin fit a very deep responsibility to these people. . . I think all in

all, I feel Ambassador Martin cannot be faulted in regard to his obligation, his sense of obligation to those people."

Kennedy said that inadequate information and delays in moving Americans out of Vietnam had "necessitated Americans' **risking their lives.**"

After Sen. Hiram Fong (R-Hawaii) joined Habib in support of Martin, the subcommittee dropped the subject.

The Public Health Service, apparently reacting to scattered expressions of concern that the refugees may be carrying diseases, issued a statement yesterday saying that the "refugees pose no more of a problem to the health of Americans than the thousands of other travelers who enter this country from the Far East every year."

According to the statement, of the 33,858 refugees received on Guam as of 9 a.m. yesterday, 80 or 90 were hospitalized, with no reports of serious disease.

The Public Health Service has established a surveillance system on Guam and Wake Island to identify and treat illnesses, and children from the ages 1 to 5 are being immunized against measles, rubella, polio, diphtheria, pertussis and tetanus, the statement said.