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For 26,000 Refugees,
U.S. Is a Little Closer

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CLARK AIR BASE, Philippines, April 30—A slight figure in dark pajamas moved solicitously among the 66 Vietnamese children in the improvised nursery on this United States Air Force base in the Central Philippines.

But when she sat down to talk about why she fled Saigon on one of the last evacuation planes, 41-year-old Mrs. Vu Thi Lan could not hold back her tears.

One of her two soldier sons was killed in action in South Vietnam earlier this month and the other is missing. Because Mrs. Lan, a widow, had worked as a domestic for American servicemen and feared Communist reprisals, she and her three remaining children fled to what she hopes will be a new life in the United States.

Mrs. Lan and 750 other forlorn-looking Vietnamese left their makeshift quarters here today and flew in C-141's to Guam or Wake Island. The 26,000 South Vietnamese evacuated to this base, only 550 remain.

At the base gymnasium, where the children without parents had been housed, all was quiet; the last group of children was also flown out this morning. "Our work is finished at last," a young volunteer worker said. And Col Lee Torraca, chief information officer for the Pacific area, announced that the evacuation from Saigon had been completed.

The command ship of the 40-vessel American Armada off Vietnam, the Blue Ridge, had reported that 6,000 Americans, Vietnamese and people of other nationalities had been flown out of Saigon in 19 hours, he said. Two marines were confirmed dead in the shelling Monday of the Defense Attaché's Office at Tan Son Nhut airport and two whose helicopter had crashed yesterday near the carrier Hancock were missing.

The destination of the American ships could not be confirmed but there were indications tonight that Subic naval base in the western Philippines coast would receive the last evacuees, including members of the foreign press corps in Saigon.

The refugees at bases here were being moved in stages—from here to Guam and Wake Island—to three military camps in the continental

United States. Those related to American citizens were getting priority in immigration processing along with orphans and "high-risk categories," meaning those who had helped the United States effort in South Vietnam.

Among the 26,000 who came through this Air Force base was Dr. Edward J. Kriksciun, a dentist from Windsor, Conn., who herded to a waiting military bus his Vietnamese wife's parents, brothers and sisters, the husband and children of another sister, and a woman and child he did not know but could not bear to leave behind in Saigon because the woman threatened to kill herself if he did.

Dr. Kriksciun came for his in-laws out of fear for what the Communists might do to them after the take-over. "It seems absurd that they would be harmed just because they have an American in-law," he said, "but with all these reports of killings in Can Tho and other places where they took over, who knows where the Communists will stop?"

Several students who had been together in the university were among those who left today. "I will work in the restaurant of my uncle in Maryland or, failing that, I will go to another relative who is a building contractor," said a teen-ager, neatly combed despite the inadequate toilet facilities in the tent areas set up to accommodate the excess flow of evacuees in the last two weeks.

Each of the refugees carried one or two pieces of luggage. Some were good quality leatherette satchels and suitcases, others were well-worn plastic bags and some were polyethylene laundry bags apparently provided by volunteer workers.

The refugees clearly came from different levels of Vietnamese society but all hoped to enjoy the good life in America that they had heard and read about.

"Hope is the common bond among all of us who have fled Saigon," said a man who asked not to be identified because he had been an officer in the South Vietnamese Army. "We also share suffering, having all lost a brother, cousin or friend in the war. All of us dread Communism."