

SFChronicle
30 Ships

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Viet Navy Flees -- 35,000 Aboard

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Washington

More than 35,000 South Vietnamese navy personnel and their dependents escaped the collapse of their country and are steaming out into the Pacific aboard a fleet of more than 30 vessels. The Chronicle learned last night.

Both the White House and the State Department said last night that they had no information about the mass escape, but The Chronicle learned about it from a reliable congressional source.

Earlier in the day, before the fleet had been sighted off South Vietnam, administration spokesmen had set the refugee total at 80,000 — a number that already was posing critical problems for the strained facilities established by the United States to accommodate them.

It was learned that the refugee fleet was about a hundred miles off South Vietnam and steaming "very slowly" east.

An American destroyer was watchdogging the motley collection of 30 vessels. Several other refugee ships were believed to be "straggling along" behind the main

fleet, a source said.

Pentagon officials were meeting last night to decide where the rag-tag refugee fleet should be sent. It was not known how much food and fuel are on board the ships, believed moving slowly because of the great numbers of people on board.

It seems likely that it won't be sent to the Philippines because the Foreign Ministry there informed the U.S. in a diplomatic note of its "understanding" that Vietnamese military personnel or refugees will not be brought ashore.

The Philippines is reported fearful of offending the Hanoi government and anxious to establish a neutralist position among Southeast Asian nations.

Salinity Study

Salt Lake City

Representatives of the seven states of the Colorado river basin met with members of the National Commission on Water Quality Wednesday to discuss a basin assessment study on salinity.

United Press