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Refugee Fleet Sailing for Philippines

By Lawrence Meyer
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A flotilla of more than 30 South Vietnamese naval vessels loaded with thousands of refugees is moving slowly toward the Philippines, administration officials said yesterday.

The ships could contain as many as 35,000 refugees, according to one State Department source. These refugees would be in addition to the almost 80,000 the administration estimated earlier yesterday had fled or been evacuated.

The refugees on the naval vessels could pose critical problems for the already strained facilities established by the United States to accommodate refugees it evacuated from South Vietnam.

The United States, despite the opposition of the Philippine government, earlier had been flying refugees into Clark Air Base and into the American logistical base at Subic Bay.

But Washington Post correspondent Don Oberdorfer reported from Manila yesterday that U.S. warships, with some 30,000 Vietnamese refugees aboard, will sail 2,000 miles across the Pacific to Guam to avoid the Philippine bases and a possible confrontation with the government of President Ferdinand E. Marcos.

At the same time, the defeat in the House yesterday of a bill providing aid for Vietnamese refugees threatened to bring efforts to resettle them to a halt. The result of the House action could be an indefinite backing up

of refugees at the three military bases—Camp Pendleton, Calif., Ft. Chaffee, Ark., and Eglin Air Force Base, Fla.—designated to temporarily house refugees before they are resettled. Without funds, according to an official representing three private volunteer agencies, the agencies cannot begin to finding homes and jobs for the refugees.

U.S. Navy ships assembled off South Vietnam to receive evacuees began heading away from Indochina, Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger announced yesterday. Schlesinger told reporters that only one or two American ships remained to pick up refugees from small craft.

State Department spokesman Robert

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Anderson said the evacuation effort will continue despite North Vietnamese demands that U.S. ships leave the area. "Our ships are on the high seas and as long as there are Vietnamese who come out in distress we will pick them up," Anderson said.

Administration and congressional sources said yesterday a new refugee problem may develop quickly. According to a decision made by Attorney General Edward H. Levi on April 21, approximately 126,000 Vietnamese falling into carefully defined categories would be admitted into the United States.

Although the number of refugees who do not qualify for entry into the United States is only about 1,000 so far, according to an Immigration and Naturalization Service official, more are expected when the "self-evacuated" are processed.

American officials are in a quandary about what to do with Vietnamese who do not qualify under the categories defined by Levi—"high risk" Vietnamese who were endangered because of their association with American policy in Vietnam and Vietnamese related to American citizens or permanent resident aliens in this country.

Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Philip C. Habib said Tuesday, "We're not going to abandon anybody. That would be unconscionable on our part."

Yesterday, however, immi-

gration commissioner Leonard F. Chapman Jr. said the impression that all who left Vietnam would be admitted to the United States is erroneous. "That is not so," Chapman said. "Only those who fit the criteria established by the Attorney General in consultation with Congress."

One administration official said that "every effort will be made to place these people in other countries." If that fails, this official said, "humanitarian considerations will eventually enter into it," indicating that the refugees would have to be admitted to the United States. "This is an issue that obviously has to be addressed very quickly," this official said.

So far, no other country has made a commitment to take large numbers of refugees.

The flotilla of South Vietnamese naval vessels, more than 100 miles at sea, was described by State and Defense Department officials as moving "very slowly" in an easterly direction. An American naval destroyer was near the ships, estimated to number about 30 with others "straggling along," according to a State Department spokesman.

Because the vessels were sighted before dawn Vietnam time, no firm estimate of the number of refugees was immediately available. Both State and Defense Department spokesmen said, however, that indications are that the ships are carrying "large numbers" of refugees, which may be contrib-



United Press International

A young Vietnamese refugee samples a snowcone as she and 69 others visit the Oakland, Calif., Baby Zoo.

uting to their slow speed.

At Camp Pendleton, nearly 8,000 refugees were expected to have arrived by the end of the third day of the airlift from Guam. Washington Post correspondent Leroy F. Aarons reported that the composition of the refugees began changing yesterday, from American dependents with places to go to unattached, unsponsored refugees for whom homes and jobs must be found before they can leave Pendleton.

In the Philippines, the foreign ministry Monday informed the United States in a diplomatic note of its "understanding" that Vietnamese military personnel or political refugees will not be brought ashore at Subic Bay or Clark Air Base. The Philippines is reported fearful of offending the Hanoi government, and anxious to establish a neutralist position among Southeast Asian states, correspondent Oberdorfer reported from Manila.