

7 Transports Fly 490 Vietnamese to Arkansas Post

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FORT CHAFFEE, Ark., May 2—The first Vietnamese refugees to be flown to a processing point in the United States beyond the West Coast arrived here today, many of them English-speaking, middle-class professionals who probably will have relatively little trouble making new homes in America. Bent with exhaustion after a 17-hour flight from Wake Island, the lead group of lightly clad exiles emerged from the cargo hold of an Air Force C-141 by gusts of chilly rain and military and civilian officials bearing signs of welcome and a bouquet of red and white carnations.

Many Here Before

Six other transports followed throughout the day, bringing a total of 490 refugees to this Army post in northwestern Arkansas. Twenty-thousand exiles eventually will be processed here.

The first plane carried about 70 Vietnamese. In the group were five lawyers, four plastic surgeons, three general practitioners, six nurses, two government officials, a pilot and Nguyen Tan Viet, the former head of Air Vietnam, the national airline of South Vietnam. "Many" of us on the plane knew each other in Saigon and

many of us have been to America before," Mr. Viet said. There were a few cries of "go back" from the crowd of 300 spectators who gathered at the nearby Fort Smith airport for the arrival of the first transport. But the refugees seemed too tired and numbed by the recent rush of events in Indochina to notice.

Besides, most of the spectators were cheering the exiles as they huddled in the cold downpour and listened to the speeches of welcome by generals, mayors and other local luminaries.

The speeches over the refugees were bused a few miles to this 72,000-acre post and housed in two-story wooden barracks, used only infrequently over the last 15 years or so. Immigration officials immediately began looking over their papers.

Seek New Lives

Exiles with sponsors — persons or organizations willing to assume financial responsibility for refugees — will probably be permitted to leave the base within a few days. Those without sponsors must wait until the Federal Government or private social agencies can locate willing individuals and organizations.

The refugees with professional backgrounds seemed particularly ready to pick up new lives.

"I want to get on with being a plastic surgeon," Dr. Tran Manh Tong said as he emerged from his first visit to his new barracks home.

Dr. Tran, 38 years old, was born in North Vietnam but fled south to Saigon in 1954 when the French were driven out by the Vietnamese.

"I do not think I would have been permitted to live if I had stayed in Saigon," he said. "I would have lost what I wanted for my way of life."

Worked With Americans

Dr. Tran escaped South Vietnam on an evacuation flight arranged by the American Embassy. He said he had approached the embassy because he had often worked with American doctors in Vietnam and because he had once visited the United States on a study fellowship.

"But before I went to the embassy," he added, "I had plans to escape by sea. Several of us had gotten together and purchased a ship."

Dr. Tran's family also es-

caped, but on another plane. "They are at Guam or somewhere now," he said. "We will have to link up."

Mr. Viet, the former head of Air Vietnam, also escaped because of his work with Americans.

"I was working with U.S. air transport people all the time and often visited America," he said. "I think I could not have stayed."

The first person off the first transport was Dr. Lam Van Thach, another physician with American connections. At the airport ceremony, he spoke for his fellow refugees, saying: "We thank all you for this. We had to leave our country, all that we have, all that we fought for the past 20 years. We hope that the U.S. Government will give us a chance to start again our lives, our new lives."

Gov. David Pryor, one of the welcoming officials, urged the refugees not to be overly concerned about the criticism leveled by some Americans at

the refugee resettlement effort. "If you encounter some who are unfriendly," the Governor said, "remember that they are people like yourselves who have met unknown circumstances and are less than certain how to deal with them."

A few minutes before the first C-141 landed, a commercial airliner arrived carrying nine Vietnamese refugees who had been processed earlier at Camp Pendleton, Calif.

They were the relatives of Mrs. Elmer Cameron, a Saigonese who married an American soldier in Vietnam seven years ago. Now, with Mr. Cameron as their sponsor, they will make a new home in nearby Charleston, Ark.

New Citizen Born

CAMP PENDLETON, Calif., May 2 (UPI)—A girl, born to a Vietnamese refugee, arrived here today, becoming the first American born in this tent resettlement area. The baby automatically became a citizen because she was born in this country.