

against will

Associated Press

AGANA, Guam — Forty-five Vietnamese airmen here, who say they were caught up in the panicky exodus from South Vietnam against their will, pleaded yesterday to return to their homeland.

"If we go back, the Communists may kill us," said Sgt. Tran Thanh Tong. "We are ready for that. But first, we must see our families."

He said they are ready to work with the Communists.

Sgt. Nguyen Van Hien's eyes welled with tears as he fumbled in his wallet to find a faded picture of his wife and infant daughter. "Most of us are crying at night," he said as he waited to talk to the camp commander.

The men said they thought they were boarding aircraft to safe bases in South Vietnam but found themselves at the Utapao Air Force Base in Thailand and heading for the United States.

After landing in Thailand, Tong said, the group asked to be taken to the Cambodian border where they planned to start walking home. When that request was denied, they lined up and demanded to be shot, he said.

Instead, they were given sedatives and put aboard aircraft, said Tong.

Tong and Hien, with the help of an interpreter, poured out their tale to Army Col. John O'Donohue, commander of the "Tent City" at Orote Point.

They gave O'Donohue a

Let us return, airmen beg U.S.

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letter addressed to President Ford, which read in part: "Most of us still have our families in Vietnam and we would not, for any price, be able to live by ourselves in a foreign country.

"We therefore do hope that, with your humanitarian plan in mind, you would find a way to send us back to South Vietnam as soon as possible, no matter what the Communist government is reserving for us."

Attached to the letter were the names of the 45 reluctant refugees, who were all non commissioned Air Force officers at the Tan Son Nhut air base near Saigon.

The men were ordered aboard cargo planes last Tuesday amid heavy shelling of Tan Son Nhut, Tong said.

"We think we are going to another base in Vietnam," he said. "We did not know we go to here."

He had no time to say goodbye to his wife, his 4-year-old daughter and 2-year-old son, Tong said.

Because they were low-ranking members of the vanquished South Vietnamese Air Force, Tong believes their lives might be spared.

"We are willing to work for the Communists," he said.

There were few smiles and little laughter around

the three tents assigned to the 45 NCOs. Ashamed that their families must feel deserted and bewildered by their journey of nearly 3,000 miles, they have thought only of leaving since arriving Friday night.

them through a third country or under auspices of the International Red Cross, he said, adding that the matter would be channeled to the State Department.

Although there had been rumors that some of the more than 17,000 refugees at Orote Point wanted to go home, O'Donohue said, Tong and Hien were the first to appeal to him.

O'Donohue explained to the airmen that the United States could no longer take anyone to South Vietnam. It may be possible to return