

WXPost MAY 4 1975
Viet Airmen

Want To Return

^{29 APR}
 AGANA, Guam, May 3—
 Fortyfive South Vietnamese
 air force mechanics, unwillingly
 exile from their country when
 their pilots flew to Thailand
 Tuesday at the height of the
 shelling of Saigon airport,
 Saturday petitioned President
 Ford to let them return home.
 3 MAY

The eyes of many of them
 brimming with tears, they
 presented a petition at a
 refugee camp here asking
 President Ford to "send us
 back to South Vietnam as
 soon as possible no matter
 what the Communist govern-
 ment has reserved for us."

Members of the group
 said they were ordered
 aboard the planes Tuesday
 by their officers as mortar
 shells rained down on
 Tan-Son-Nhut airfield near
 Saigon and panic-stricken
 air force families scrambled
 aboard. They were not aware
 the planes were leaving
 the country but thought
 they were going to airbases
 further south out of the
 range of the fighting.

When they arrived at
 Thailand's Utapao airbase
 they begged that Thai and
 U.S. authorities either
 put them off in small boats
 near the South Vietnam
 coast to sail back home or
 to let them walk across
 Cambodia.

"But they would not
 listen to our pleas," Sgt.
 Nguyen Van Hien, 34, said
 today at a refugee camp
 here where all 45 were
 flown Friday. 2 MAY

"We lined up and told
 the Thais to do us a favor
 and just shoot us because
 without our families we
 don't want to live."

M/Sgt. Tien Thanh
 Thong, 29, said that after
 this demonstration they
 were given a number of
 shots in the arms and
 thighs on the understand-
 ing they were getting
 inoculations.

The shots drugged them
 and they were carried
 aboard the plane which
 brought them to Guam.

Thong said he felt the
 International Red Cross
 could arrange their return
 to Vietnam.

Their petition handed
 to the camp commander
 said: "Most of us still
 have our families in
 Vietnam and we would
 not, for any price, wish
 to live by ourselves in
 a foreign country."

All the airmen were
 wearing their khaki
 flight uniforms, all the
 clothing and possessions
 they brought with them
 from Vietnam.

Some cried openly as
 they pulled their wallets
 from their jacket pockets
 and showed reporters
 pictures of their wives
 and children.

Asked what reception
 he thought he might get
 from the new Communist
 government, Thong said:

"We are not afraid of
 the communists doing
 bad things to us. Even
 if we go back and the
 Communists sentence us
 to death the one thing
 we will ask is that they
 let us see our families
 before we die."

Sgt. Hien said that
 when he set out from his
 home to travel 40 minutes
 to work on his motorcycle
 on Monday evening his
 wife had said she was
 afraid he would leave
 the country and she
 would be left behind.
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Hien has two children,
 a daughter aged two
 and a newborn son. "I
 promised my wife I
 would never leave her
 behind," he said.