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Refugee Ships Land

Some Died on Voyage to Philippines

From News Dispatches

SUBIC BAY, The Philippines, May 3—An armada of warships and freighters began arriving here Saturday, bringing the first 10,000 seaborne refugees of a total that is expected to reach 100,000.

The refugees filed down the gang planks, their weary faces reflecting the anguish of their ordeal. A few old women burst out crying in a release of pent-up emotions. Children laughed and called "hello, hello" to Marine sentries. Air force pilots looked about apprehensively, confirmed that they had indeed escaped and broke into wide smiles.

A spokesman aboard the command ship USS Blue Ridge, however said some of the refugees had died in the crush aboard some of the vessels. But he did not disclose the figure.

"Any time you have a great number of people you have to have illness and deaths," he said.

He said none of the ships was intolerably overloaded, although 45,000 Vietnamese were aboard nine American chartered freighters. The USS Andrew Miller, with 6,146 people on board, was the most heavily loaded.

Many of the Vietnamese reached the fleet during the evacuation by fishing boat or on barges towed by tugs.

Many fishing boats and barges were abandoned and left to drift in the wake of the fleet's departure from Vietnamese waters, while others tagged along.

Hong Kong authorities said one evacuation ship, the 1,723-ton South Vietnamese freighter Truong Xuan, was skirting and had been abandoned in the South China Sea.

About 3,000 refugees aboard were rescued Friday night by the 14,000-ton

freighter Clara Maersk 50 miles south of the Mekong Delta. In Copenhagen a had no food for the refugees who were crowding the deck, the bridge, cabins and even the holds. The ship was expected to reach Hong Kong on Sunday.

(Hong Kong officials said two patrol vessels were on their way to the Danish ship with water and a doctor.

Forty-six American vessels took part in the rescue operation, which President Ford ordered after the Viet-

cong launched its heaviest attack of the war on Saigon's Tansonnhut air base, killing two American marine guards and putting the base itself out of operation.

The Blue Ridge has indicated there are about 80,000 seaborne evacuees, but Singapore monitors of U.S. Naval communications have put the figure near 100,000.

At least one American who left Saigon criticized the way the U.S. embassy handled the evacuation.

"We left a lot of people who should have been brought out," said Frank Plummer, 46, of Adrian, Mich., employee of a U.S. military contractor in Saigon. "It was poor planning on the embassy's part.

"The attack started on the evening of the 28th (Monday night). Saigon went on a 24-hour curfew. There was no attempt on the part of the embassy to have the curfew lifted," he said.

"People could not get out in the streets to go to evacuation points."

Dozens of Americans who had expected to leave Manila on commercial flights after leaving the fleet were temporarily stranded while awaiting exit permits, David

Lamb of the Los Angeles Times reported. Because they entered the Philippines through a U.S. base where there are no immigration formalities, they need special approval to leave through commercial airports.

Grumbling aside, most of the Americans were simply relieved to have completed the first tedious leg of their trip home. They stood in a gymnasium on this base 55 miles west of Manila, waiting for exit visas or for Guam-bound military flights which shuttled eastward every hour. They had left everything behind except what they carried—usually no more than an attache case or a suitcase.

"I never got any evacuation word or anything," said Albert Steinberg, 66, a civilian contractor from Philadelphia. "But Monday night they started a lot of shooting and it was pretty obvious it was time to go.

"My son was in the hospital with a temperature of 103 and I never would have forgiven myself if I'd tried to get him out and he'd

died, so my wife stayed behind with him, I went to the embassy Tuesday and I couldn't get in there. There were maybe five or six thousand Vietnamese outside. This man right here behind me just sort of threw me over the fence."

The man behind him in the Gymnasium line, Ralph Singleton of Nashville, Tenn., said the Marines guarding the compound showed exceptional discipline in the face of the pan-

icked Vietnamese crowds pressing against the fence.

"They were a lot cooler than I ever would have been," he said. "I only saw them really hit one guy and he deserved it. But who got on those choppers and who didn't was mostly luck. You couldn't open the gates or they'd all have come pouring just pulled them over the fence."

Outside we recognized, we going in, so if we saw someone. The problem of visas for Americans was not the only diplomatic hurdle for the refugees.

No sooner had the lead vessel, the carrier USS Hancock, docked to the cheers of sailors on board, than the Vietnamese merchant marine ship Thong attempted to enter Subic Bay with 700 refugees. U.S. military authorities, however, under pressure from the Philippines government, turned the vessel aside and placed it in a holding position outside the harbor.

The vessel did not contain sufficient fuel or supplies to continue to Guam and the U.S. command was unsure exactly what to do with it—or with the other 20 or so Vietnamese ships headed toward the Philippines. Two other U.S. merchant ships, carrying 10,500 evacuees, were diverted toward Guam Saturday.

The Manila government has threatened to arrest high-ranking Saigon officials or officers who stop here. It also has the authority under martial law declared in 1972 to impound the Vietnamese vessels.

(Taiwan has set up a refugee center at the southern port of Kaohsiung to provide temporary shelter for Vietnamese refugees of Chinese origin, the Free China Relief Association said today.