

## Reporter's Notebook: Tenderness, Hatred

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Special to The New York Times

**ABOARD** the U.S.S. **MOBILE**, in the South China Sea, May 3—Like a failed marriage, the Vietnamese-American relationship of the past generation has ended in a mixture of hatred and suspicion, coupled with a strong remnant of tenderness and compassion on both sides.

It ended with an embittered Saigon policeman pistol-whipping an American reporter and with Government troops and policemen taking potshots at American cars and buses, or sometimes just at any "big nose"—non-Asian.

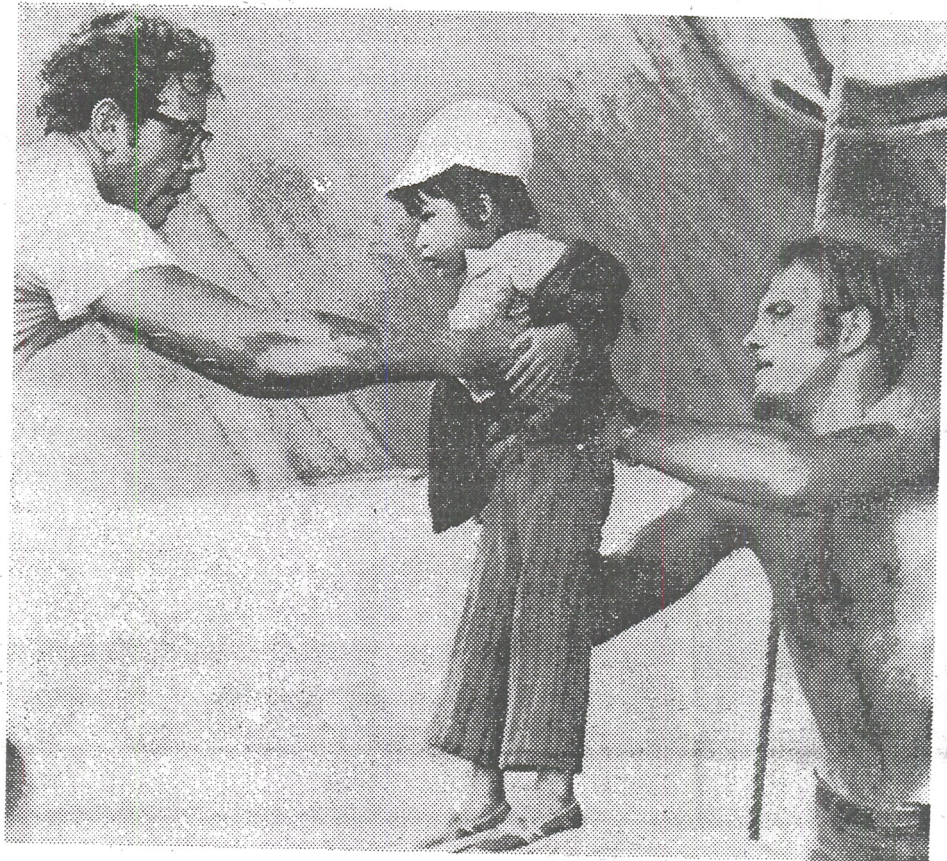
The parting was often a time of anxiety and grief, however, and both American and Vietnamese faces were lined with tears.

There were the Americans—private citizens now—who lived and worked in Vietnam years ago and who came back before the end to do what they could. They went into debt to buy air tickets, arriving within a few days of the surrender, in a desperate effort to find Vietnamese friends or the relatives of their Vietnamese wives. Most of them failed, but at least in trying they avoided the extra load of guilt they would have felt at doing nothing.

At least, during those final hours at the gate outside the airport, trying to get my own people in, an American said, "I maybe helped one woman. She was Vietnamese, with an American passport, but of course without a big nose no one was getting through on their own, had to leave my own behind, but at least I got her through."

The tens of thousands aboard the huge evacuation armada sailing away from Vietnam have told endless stories of heroism, loyalty and love in the last hours.

But for millions of Vietnamese and not a few Americans the dominant memory



Associated Press

**U.S. sailors handing a Vietnamese boy from the Blue Ridge, command vessel of the Seventh Fleet, to a merchant vessel off Vietnam May 1. The last hours of the evacuation have produced countless stories of heroism and compassion on ships in the operation.**

will be sorrow and betrayal and guilt.

There was scarcely an American in the final weeks who was not forced to share personally in that intense feeling of guilt. For each of them had what Vietnamese call a big nose—the only Caucasian features could do almost anything: cash checks, cut through the maddening bureaucratic impediments that had been erected both by Saigon and Washington and, most of all, get a few Vietnamese to safety.

Nonetheless, countless Vietnamese, knowing they would remain despite all, worked for their American friends to the last.

On the other hand, many an American organization, private and official, locked its doors and left without any effort to help Vietnamese employes and associates.

Some, like Northrop, the airplane builder, offered help to Vietnamese employes but not to their families; in most

cases this amounted to leaving the employes behind.

The Saigon branches of American banks closed, sent their records and American employes home and left tens of thousands of Vietnamese depositors unpaid.

Many organizations had some access to the "black life"—a semiclandestine air-



## and Grief Mark Last Days in Saigon

lift of selected Vietnamese and their families that operated for about a week like an underground railroad before the frantic final exodus under fire.

Details of how it worked will have to remain secret for a time to protect the Vietnamese and Americans involved, but a considerable number of Vietnamese found out about it.

Any American, including newsmen, suspected of having anything to do with it became the object of an endless procession of supplicants, some pleading, some offering bribes, some asking for marriage. Only a handful of places were available, so the Americans involved dissembled, comforted and lied.

There were Vietnamese who could have gone and chose not to — thoughtful, courageous men and women who made their decisions after agonizing reflection. Among them was one of the principal reporter-photographers on the staff of The New York Times, Nguyen Ngoc Luong.

One of them explained: "In the end the color of the skin counts for more than politics. Anyone who has lived in either the United States or Vietnam knows this, and I have done both. The Vietcong, like me, are yellow."

For an overwhelming majority desperation and panic prevailed. Some who knew from the first that they could not leave, however much they wanted to, tried to send out last precious parts of themselves — photographs, the ashes of ancestors, keepsakes and children.

On the last day, as frantic

people took to the streets despite the thunder of rockets and the popping of rifles, someone spread a blanket on the sidewalk next to the Continental Hotel, in the heart of the downtown foreign quarter. On the blanket lay a sleeping baby, beside it a small plastic bag containing ragged clothing and toys. Clearly the hope was that someone would carry it away to America, but by then it was too late.

There was the maid who, believing she could not go herself and having no living relatives, wanted to send her cat, all she had. Both were evacuated.

The prospect of leaving,

### President Says Martin Did Well in Evacuation

WASHINGTON, May 5 (Reuters)—President Ford today stood behind Ambassador Graham A. Martin, who supervised the evacuation of Americans and thousands of South Vietnamese hours before Saigon fell to the Communists.

The Presidential press secretary, Ron Nessen, was asked about reports that the Administration believed Mr. Martin had delayed the evacuation. He said the President believed the envoy accomplished a difficult task under trying circumstances and accomplished it well.

Mr. Nessen said Mr. Martin had the difficult mission of saving lives yet not acting so hastily that he would cause panic in Saigon.

"The President thinks the results speak for themselves," he said.

real or imagined, often led to bitterness. There were those Vietnamese who had been promised that they would be evacuated but who gave way to morose suspicion—to the widespread Vietnamese belief, carefully nurtured by the Communists, that even those Americans considered the closest of friends could not be trusted.

In the long decades of American involvement in Vietnam there were an appreciable number of Americans who learned to understand and love the country. Unfortunately, it seemed to some of them, the more Americans who came the greater was the number who preferred to avoid any real relationship with the Vietnamese.

Increasingly the Americans walled themselves into compounds, command posts and official buildings, which they furnished with air-conditioning, supermarkets, swimming pools and clubs—everything possible to keep the Vietnamese reality from penetrating the American one. For most the outside represented the threat of death, robbery, disease and the hatred presumed to be lurking behind the mask of an Asian face.

Of course there were just enough such evidence as Vietnamese units abandoning or betraying American advisers under fire to lend substance to many Americans' attitudes. Americans were ambushed in supposedly safe places and killed; they were robbed and cheated.

On the other hand, there were countless cases in which Americans short-changed or cheated Vietna-

mese—sometimes because of misunderstandings arising from the language barrier — and instances of brutal and overbearing behavior. Not least was the killing and wounding of people seemingly without reason.

The Communists were provided with ample evidence to support their denunciations of "American imperialism."

Despite the recriminations tenuous contact was maintained between Americans and Communists through an indirect telephone link. On the final day this correspondent telephoned the Vietcong delegation after a particularly heavy shelling of the Saigon airport by their side to ask about their safety, among other things.

"I cannot tell you how grateful we are for asking, especially considering the circumstances," was the reply. "We hope you all get through this somehow."

A few minutes before one of the last groups of distraught Americans rushed from their ravaged offices and hotel rooms to look for a bus to the airport, a Vietnamese friend arrived to say farewell. Some of the Americans were in tears, and the Vietnamese, seeking to comfort them, patted their shoulders and said:

"You may hear after you leave that some here have died, perhaps even at their own hand. You must not spend the rest of your lives with that guilt. It is just a part of Vietnam's black fate, in which you, all of you, became ensnared for a time. Fate is changeless and guiltless."