

Viet Officials
Get Special Camp
Exit

Camp Exit

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CAMP PENDLETON, Calif., May 14—The former police chief of metropolitan Saigon and at least a dozen other former high-level South Vietnamese officials and their families were allowed to depart Camp Pendleton last week without the knowledge of the camp's commanding general or State Department officials, it was learned today.

Immigration and Naturalization Service authorities here confirmed that these officials were processed out of the camp without the security clearance and sponsorship required of all refugees. This special arrangement was ordered by INS headquarters in Washington.

The departure of the special group was accomplished without informing other departments integrally involved with the refugee operation. It came, also, at the time officials here and in Washington were insisting that no refugee, regardless

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of rank or position would receive special treatment.

William Wild, the chief representative at Pendleton of the Inter-Agency Task Force on Vietnam, which has authority over the entire refugee program, expressed shock when told that a number of high-ranking Vietnamese soldiers and civilians had been allowed to leave the camp.

Some 18,000 other refugees, with no access to special treatment, have been living in tents here for as long as 10 days awaiting clearance.

"I'm embarrassed because I know nothing about it," Wild said "I didn't believe anyone could get out of this camp without my knowl-

edge."

Brig. Gen. Paul Graham, the Pendleton commander, also said he was "surprised" by the special processing of selected officials.

The former police chief, who left after one or two day's residence in Refugee Camp 8, is Trang Si Tan, a brigadier general in the Vietnamese army who was known for his stern suppression of dissidents. Tan departed with 11 dependents to an unknown location in Los Angeles on May 6, immigration officials confirmed.

Also reportedly released under special conditions were three other former police brigadier generals: Nguyen Van Giau, 43, deputy commander of security for the Saigon National Police; Trouong Bay, 44, chief of staff of the National Police; and Huynh Thoi Tay, 42, head of the National Police "special branch."

These three, plus Trang, were among five National Police colonels elevated to the rank of general within months of the fall of Saigon. They were being rewarded, according to Vietnamese sources here, for handling a group of dissidents who had been criticizing the Thieu administration.

Eighteen dissidents were arrested in February or early March, most of them journalists, and two of them confessed on television that they were Vietcong. It was after that that the five officers were promoted.

INS officials here and in Washington admitted the existence of a special category for certain former high-ranking officials, but they were unable to supply the exact number. The category was established on April 29 in a

telegram from INS headquarters to all refugee camps, stating that certain "identified, well-known, high-risk people," who have special letters of passage from the American embassy in Saigon were to be released without prior security clearance or the requirement that they certify direct relatives or sponsors in the United States.

The INS discontinued the practice somewhere between May 8 and May 10.

Donald Day, INS official in charge at Pendleton, was unable to explain the reason for the operation or why it was done in such secrecy. "The rationale is not here. It's in Washington," he said.

An INS spokesman in Washington said, "A small category of prominent officials was allowed to leave." Asked why, he said, "I guess the simplest way to explain it was just because they were prominent officials."

The spokesman insisted, "There was no attempt to hide anything. Everything was being done under the eyes of the media."

Sources among Vietnamese at the refugee camps said all four police generals were Thieu intimates (Trang, a 38-year-old bachelor, reportedly was once betrothed to Thieu's daughter) who were zealous in the pursuit of alleged subversives.

One officer here said that some senior officers fled Saigon at least two days before the surrender, without informing the lower echelons that the end was near.

"If I were to see them I might spit in their faces," said the officer, not a general. "They left two days before we knew what was happening, to save their own skin. I nearly lost my life as a result; and 1,500 of my boys [troops] got trapped."



TRANG SI TAN
... former police chief