

# 18 American Prisoners in Laos Are Freed

## Vientiane

Eighteen Americans, as well as a number of Britons and other Europeans held by student demonstrators in a southern Laotian town for nine days were flown to Thailand yesterday.

Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger said there will be a "substantial reduction" of the U.S. community in Laos because of the harassment of Americans by leftist students.

The developments came as three Americans, including two U.S. Marine guards, remained prisoners in a U.S. compound in Vientiane and the Communist-dominated government decided to end a 24-year-old American aid program.

The United States evacuated Americans from Cambodia before it fell April 17 and from South Vietnam before it surrendered to the Communists on April 30. But Kissinger told newsmen in Ankara, Turkey, that the departures from Vientiane, starting today, are not considered a complete evacuation "at this point."

A U.S. Embassy spokesman in Vientiane, who called the departures an "accelerated withdrawal," said the Americans would leave by chartered Royal Air Lao jet and that "hundreds of Americans would be flown out in the near future."

The Americans and for-

eigners in the southern town of Savannakhet were flown to Thailand aboard a U.S. plane. Most of the Americans were officials of the U.S. Agency for International Development, a group opposed by student demonstrators.

Previously, the embassy said 12 Americans were being held in the town. It gave no reason for the change in figures, but communications with Savannakhet in the past week have been restricted to brief radio contacts.

In Vientiane, American doctors gave vaccination shots to American women

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and children at the gates of the main housing compound before their departure. Americans with dogs, children with bicycles and women in curlers stood at the chain-link fence looking out.

About 400 Americans were confined to the main housing compound four miles south of Vientiane. Pathet Lao guards, armed with rocket launchers, searched every car that came out of the Florida-style suburb known as "Levittown on the Mekong." They seized cameras and other valuable items.

With a major U.S. AID installation in Vientiane occupied by a sit-in student demonstration and other U.S. AID offices throughout the country wrecked and abandoned, U.S. officials were busy arranging flights for the women and children.

The embassy spokesman said most of the first evac-

although the U.S. Embassy claims the 1951 treaty that established the U.S. AID operation in Laos contains a 90-day termination clause.

At a press briefing covering a Wednesday night cabinet meeting, a Laotian government spokesman said the government has decided to ask for an end to all U.S. activities in Laos and the hand-over of all AID material in the country after an inventory was taken.

The spokesman, Ouday Souvannavong, deputy minister of information, said, however, that the government still wants economic assistance from the United States but that it must be direct aid to the Laotian government, such as other countries are giving.

He said the U.S. Embassy had agreed to close all U.S. AID branches in the provinces, and a joint U.S.-Laotian committee would be formed to negotiate an end

ues would be AID employees and their dependants.

Most of those scheduled to leave had their passports in safekeeping in one of the buildings of the AID compound, which has been occupied by student demonstrators since Wednesday.

One of the demands of students occupying the sprawling U.S. AID compound in Vientiane, where the two Marines and an American civilian were held, is that Americans pay tax on all luxury items they have imported duty-free, including kitchen utensils.

However, a government spokesman said American U.S. AID employees have diplomatic privileges and their property will be respected.

The students had demanded that American AID personnel leave within three days. They now agree to a 30-day withdrawal period,

to the U.S. AID operation in Vientiane.

Meanwhile, the Pathet Lao control of Laos appeared to be almost complete.

The Pathet Lao now has troops in every major city, and the once powerful right-wing faction of the coalition government of leftists, rightists and neutralists appears to have been routed.

There were more strikes by government officials showing their support for the government and opposition to right-wing and "reactionary" forces, most of whom fled the country two weeks ago.

Workers at government-owned Royal Air Lao staged the latest strike pasting posters at the airport and the airline's downtown office pledging support for the Pathet Lao-dominated government.

*Associated Press*





AP Wirephoto

A woman was allowed to leave the U.S. housing compound near Vientiane, where 40 Americans are confined