

# Pendleton Refugee Camp Closes

## Camp Pendleton

The young marines balanced on the back of the pickup truck watch the small clouds of dust spread toward the feet of refugees sitting near the outside of the tent.

The blue-and-white pickup stops near one tent where a Vietnamese woman stares into the sunshine. Two marines jump down from the back and begin to pick up a lone cot sitting in the sun outside the woman's tent.

"No, no," she shouts, and reaches to pull the cot inside the ropes that secure the tent.

The marines hop back on the truck, and it resumes its slow cruise, the men peering into tents on either side for any items refugees may have left behind.

Such scenes of military efficiency are replayed continuously these days at Camp Pendleton, the temporary home for more than 50,000 Indochinese refugees since the first of them arrived in late April.

The Marines are dismantling the camps with the same thoroughness they employed in setting them up, and it seems there will be little left for any of the refugees to come back for. If they ever want to come back.

Camps 5 and 6 are now bulldozed fields, glaring in the sun like buff-colored scars next to the brush-covered hills and green tents remaining in Camp 4.

Gone, too, is Camp 8 — the largest of the refugee camps and one that swarmed with reporters in the first few weeks after the arrival of former South Vietnamese Premier Nguyen Cao Ky at Tent 3C.

And in Camp San Onofre, which housed the Cambodian refugees, all but a few of the Quonset huts are empty. Bulging cardboard boxes tied with string are piled each day in front of the camp commander's office, ready for shipment to the homes of sponsors.

The relative quiet emphasizes the imminent closing of the camps.

Showers and mess halls that daily created a din have been torn down. Classrooms, television sets and Ping-Pong tables are gone.

And the loudspeakers that incessantly blared information and questions and suggestions and announced visitors — all but a couple have been taken away.

Fewer than 2000 refugees still inhabit the camps. And Nick Thorne, senior coordinator of the Inter-Agency Task Force on the base, repeatedly has confirmed the projected camp closing date of Oct. 31.

Task force officials even have announced that sponsors are no longer needed for the refugees at Pendleton, and only those special cases that cannot be placed with sponsors will be flown to Ft. Chaffee, Ark.

So, for those few who remain, each sweep of the marines through the camps reminds them of the impermanence of their lives here.

Tensions that occasionally kept many refugees in their tents all day or flared into fistfights seem to have abated.

There are the same worries — job, home, language skills — but they are not new. In some cases they are more noticeable now as time is running out, and in others they are well camouflaged.

Although most of the refugees remaining here will be placed with sponsors, some will have been sent to Ft. Chaffee by the time the refugee camps at Pendleton close at the end of next week.