

Camp Pendleton Center Closes After Helping 50,426 Refugees

By DOUGLAS E. KNEELAND

Special to The New York Times

CAMP PENDLETAN, Calif., Oct. 31—The Indo-Chinese refugee center at this sprawling Southern California Marine base officially closed today when Liang Sui Lang, his wife and nine children climbed aboard a van with their sponsors at 8:30 A.M. and headed for Los Angeles.

They were the last of the 50,426 persons processed through here in the six months and two days since April 29, when the refugees from South Vietnam began to arrive as their Government collapsed.

Despite early fears of epidemics, fires that could sweep through the tent city set up among the brown hills or civil disturbances among the newcomers, everyone who observed the program seemed to agree that it had been handled with a minimum of trouble.

But even while Marine enlisted men struck the last score of tents in the final departure center under today's late October sun, a substantial number of refugees released in the weeks before the closing here were encountering serious difficulties in their new lives on the outside.

Trouble With Jobs

In Pomona, east of Los Angeles, for instance, 266 who had been recruited for a gardening company are waiting apprehensively to see if their sponsor is going to try to hold the struggling venture together. In Sacramento, 139 Vietnamese of Chinese origin are living from hand to mouth on part-time seasonal work in the fields and on what some of their women can earn in a small garment shop.

In Oakland, more than 20 remain in an old apartment house, the last of a group of nearly 100 who were enrolled

in a security guard training program that collapsed. And in Fresno, five families totaling 24 refugees, who were originally taken on to cook for the trainees, insist that they have been abandoned by their sponsor and are trying to make it on their own with the help of the local welfare authorities.

These were among the few mass resettlement efforts undertaken, so the breakdowns have been highly visible. No one seems to know how many of the individual sponsorships for the approximately 118,000 other refugees distributed around the country have broken down.

Avoided Publicity

A spokesman for the President's Interagency Task Force for Indochina Refugees said today that the voluntary agencies responsible for finding sponsors had tended to deal with breakdowns quietly, without involving the Government.

"They've realized the destructiveness of bad publicity, so they play it pretty close to the vest," he said. "There've got to be breakdowns, but if there were very many, believe me, we'd hear about it."

Leon O. Marion, executive director of the American Council of Voluntary Agencies for Foreign Service, the umbrella organization for the groups handling the resettlement, acknowledged in a telephone interview from New York that there had been other breakdowns but added that he didn't "think anyone's been keeping percentages."

Mr. Marion said he thought the problem of the breakdowns and the mass resettlements in California as Camp Pendleton was being phased out came because of the pressure from the Government to meet deadlines.

"The voluntary agencies finally explained to the Govern-

ment," he said, "that they weren't doing resettlement any more, they were just moving people. That's probably been their biggest problem. They [the Government] set administrative targets and they've been trying to meet them willy-nilly. There have been harsh words across the table about that."

Nicholas G. W. Thorne, senior civil coordinator of the task force's program here, denied there had been any undue haste in releasing refugees in order to close Camp Pendleton on schedule today. He said the average stay of each refugee was 60 days and that about 200 were discharged on the average day.

"I want to lay aside this idea that we rushed people out of here," he said. "When I came here I was told to get people out of camp in 72 hours. The people in Sacramento were not rushed out of here. I'm going to apologize for that out of 50,000 people. We're sorry it happened."

But another Government official, who asked not to be identified, said the mass breakdowns in California had come because "they're in a numbers game and a time game."

Second to Close

Camp Pendleton was the second of the four bases where refugees have been housed in the United States to close. Eglin Air Force Base in Florida processed 10,085 refugees before it shut down in mid-September.

Fort Chaffee, Ark., still has 11,384 refugees, including 244 who were shipped there in recent days from Camp Pendleton because they did not have sponsors. Indiantown Gap, Pa., has 4,065. A spokesman for the task force said that plans to close Indiantown Gap on Nov. 30 had been changed and it will be kept open as long as it is needed before the Dec. 31



Marines at Camp Pendleton taking down tents that were used by refugees from Southeast Asia during stay at the Marine Corps base in California

The New York Times/Gary Sattler

deadline that has been set for getting all refugees out of the camp.

Of the 124,236 refugees who have been released from the camps already, 6,426 have gone to third countries.

More than 20 per cent of the refugees who have been processed, 26,115 the largest part of them from Camp Pendleton, have settled in California. The state with the next highest number, according to the task force, is Texas, with 7,857, fol-

lowed by Pennsylvania, 5,787, Washington, D. C., 5,128, and Washington state, 3,955.

Most people involved in the program agree it is difficult to measure how well the refugees are doing after they leave the bases, but in California at least, some records have been kept as to how many are on welfare.

A of Oct. 17, when the last figures were compiled, a total of 9,049 were receiving some sort of welfare. The largest

number, 6,060, were getting aid for dependent children. Others were receiving foster care and medical aid, food stamps and social services. Under the refugee act, the Federal Government reimburses the states for welfare assistance given to the newcomers.

In Los Angeles County, which at last count had 6,706 refugees, the largest number of any county in the state, 1,817 persons were receiving aid for dependent children, 29 were

getting foster care and 93, medical aid. No figures were available for the number receiving food stamps.

Although Camp Pendleton's refugee center closed today, nine persons remained in the base hospital and a husband and child stayed behind to wait for a wife and mother who had just given birth to the 165th baby born at the camp. Eight refugees died here—seven of natural causes and one by sui-

cide.

Mr. Thorne, the civil coordinator, said that the operation which had been budgeted for \$30-million, cost just \$17-million. He said the average cost per day for each refugee was \$5.04.

Then, looking across the empty fields where an Indochinese city of as many as 18,500 persons at a time once stood, he said wearily: "Everybody's exhausted. Everybody's really glad it's over."