

Viet 'Nightmare' Recurs

Guardians Lose 'Orphans' to Natural Mother

LINCOLN, Neb., Jan. 7 (AP)—“It seemed like a nightmare, then it was the most wonderful thing that happened to us. Now it's another nightmare.”

State Sen. John DeCamp described his brief guardianship of two Vietnamese orphans, saying both had been taken from him after their mother was located in South Carolina.

“I would be a liar if I denied that I considered a court fight, but after the children saw their real mother there just didn't seem to be any point in it,” DeCamp said.

“We took the children to Charleston, S.C., to see Mrs. Thomas Mallard. They just started crying when they saw her. They were so happy.

“You could see it was settled.”

Hung, 6, and Tam, 7, were reunited with the Mallards on New Year's Day. Mallard, a service manager for a Charleston oil firm, is their stepfather.

DeCamp, who served in Vietnam as an Army captain and speaks Vietnamese, went there twice to help in Operation Babylift, which brought thousands of Vietnamese “orphans” to this country.

“Obviously all the children weren't orphans, but at the time there was so much confusion no one could be sure of anything,” DeCamp said. “My first understanding was that their parents had died in the fighting. It was a nightmare over there, but I thought I had been so careful in picking these children that I

was just sure everything would work out.”

DeCamp said his wife is heartbroken “because she was with them every minute. We have no children of our own.”

Once they learned that the children's mother was alive, DeCamp said he and his wife promised the children and themselves they would do whatever they could to find

out if she had escaped from Vietnam.

“A short time ago we learned that a Vietnamese woman fit the description the children gave of their mother . . . she was in a refugee camp and making efforts to find them and it has all led to this,” DeCamp said.

The children lived with the DeCamps in Neligh, Neb., a small farming community 160 miles northwest of here.