

PRESIDENT GREETES COMBAT MARINES

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Promises Them He Will End
War in Vietnam "in a Way
Worthy of Your Services"

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CAMP PENDLETON, Calif., April 30—President Nixon welcomed home from Vietnam today the vanguard of the First Marine Division with a pledge to end the war "in a way worthy of your service."

The President stood before 1,500 officers and men of the division, who were in olive combat uniforms, and told them and 10,000 spectators that he knew the question in their minds was, "What will the verdict of history be about your service in Vietnam?"

In terms of personal heroism, Mr. Nixon answered, it is unquestioned. He presented the division its second Presidential Unit Citation for service in Vietnam and paid homage to the 20 First Division marines who won the Medal of Honor there, all but two posthumously.

A Remaining Question

"The question which really remains," Mr. Nixon said, "is whether this war is ended in a way that will achieve our goal, and that goal is a Vietnam with a chance to defend itself from a Communist take-over.

"If we fail to achieve that goal, if we take the counsel of those who would have us leave Vietnam, even if it means turning over the country to the Communists, then your service and the service of thousands of other Americans—two and a half million, in fact, in Vietnam—will have been a failure.

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President Greetes Marine Group Upon Its Return From Combat

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"But we are not going to fail. We shall succeed."

Mr. Nixon flew here this morning from Washington, where antiwar demonstrations, nearing the end of their second week, continued to underscore the opposition to his Vietnam policy. But the President sought to punctuate, through the pomp and color of a lengthy military ceremony under the sun on a wide green parade field, that neither demonstrators nor political critics would hasten his program of disengagement.

"As I welcome you home, I can say to you that the nation is proud of you," the President told the veterans. "I can say to you, you come home, mission accomplished.

"When you went to Vietnam five years ago, you found a country there with millions of South Vietnamese under Communist rule and the whole country threatened by a Communist take-over.

"On your return, you left a South Vietnam with the South Vietnamese now assuming the major burden of their own defense and soon developing the capability for their complete defense without the assistance of American fighting men."

The Marines celebrated the return of the division colors—the division's much-decorated battle flag—with a martial pageant incorporating the duty in Vietnam into a history of combat heroism dating to Belleau Wood in France in World War I. They trooped the line for the President, flew over his head in their most modern aircraft and gave him a 21-gun salute that enveloped him in white smoke.

Because of the sacrifice of the Marines and other Americans in Vietnam, the President

said, "Americans can continue to be withdrawn at approximately, or almost, a division a month." The current pace of withdrawals, which averages 14,300 men a month, is scheduled to reduce United States strength in Vietnam to 184,000 by Dec. 1.

Tomorrow is the deadline Mr. Nixon set a year ago for a reduction of the troop level to 284,000. Ronald L. Ziegler, the White House press secretary, said that as of April 22 there were 281,000 American soldiers in Vietnam.

The Marine Corps had a peak of 81,800 men in the war zone two years ago. About 14,000 men of the Third Marine Amphibious Brigade, whose main element is one of the four regiments of the First Marine Division, remain there. They are due home this summer.

The Marines have lost 12,919 men in combat. The First Division toll has been 8,127 dead and more than 51,000 wounded.

The President stressed again that by withdrawing in measured stages from Vietnam and permitting the South Vietnamese to gain in strength enough to defend themselves, the United States was seeking to establish "what Americans have never had in this century—a full generation of peace."

He told the marines that "by your service you have done your part in trying to achieve that kind of peace, and I pledge to you that in the conduct of our foreign affairs we shall bring this war to an end in a way worthy of your service and the service of other Americans."

At Mr. Nixon's request, the Marine Corps delayed by a week the celebration of the return of the division headquarters so that the President could participate.