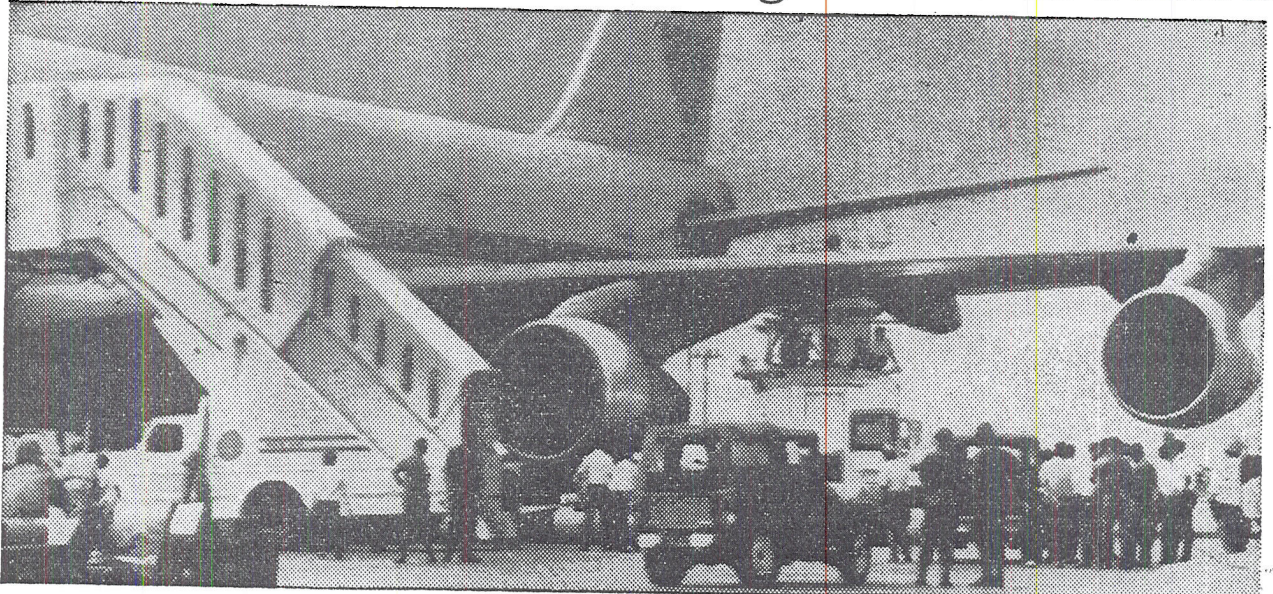


# Fear of Opposition Seen in Saigon's Ban on General



Associated Press

South Vietnamese policemen guarding the exit ramp of the Pan American jet to prevent General Thi from disembarking

By FOX BUTTERFIELD

Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Feb. 23—A former senior South Vietnamese Army commander with ties to the anti-Government Buddhists was barred from returning from exile in the United States today because President Nguyen Van Thieu apparently feared he might become a focus for increased opposition.

Lieut. Gen. Nguyen Chanh Thi, whose ouster as commander of Military Region I in the northern part of South Vietnam touched off the Buddhists riots of 1966, was forbidden by the Saigon police chief to leave the Pan American World Airways 747 jet that had brought him from San Francisco.

American officials were dismayed by the Government's refusal to admit him. "It serves no purpose for them to keep him out," one high-ranking American said.

After barring the general from debarking, the police chief, Trang Si Tan, ordered the plane to take off ahead of schedule with only General Thi as a passenger, leaving behind 189 American soldiers who were to be flown home on leave.

A group of 50 friends and supporters of the general who waited in vain to greet him at Saigon's Tansonhut Airport condemned the Government's action and predicted that it would

arouse popular opposition to President Thieu.

"The move is illegal and unwise," said Tran Quang Thuan, who is chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. "After all, General Thi is a Vietnamese and he has a right to return to his own country. This could mean trouble."

Most observers here, however, tended to discount the possibility of any widespread protest demonstrations. The Buddhists, and other opposition politicians, have not been publicly active since President Thieu's re-election in October.

The order barring General Thi was issued personally by President Thieu, South Vietnamese official sources said.

The general had been living in exile in Washington for six years. He had been forced out of the country by the then Premier, Nguyen Cao Ky, when pro-Buddhist students and troops used his removal as corps commander as a pretext to begin anti-Government demonstrations in the spring of 1966.

## General Going to Honolulu

WASHINGTON, Feb. 23 (AP)—American officials said General Thi was being flown to Guam and then to Honolulu.

His diplomatic passport expired Dec. 31. He could be permitted to enter the United States as a political refugee, but American officials would say only that "we are checking on his status."