

U.S. Pullout Completed

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Saigon

The last United States combat troops pulled out of Vietnam yesterday, leaving a still-embattled nation that President Nguyen Van Thieu vowed would continue to "fight under all conditions" to defend itself against communism.

The U.S. troops departed after more than a decade of fighting that cost nearly 46,000 American lives and billions of dollars and divided the people of the U.S. as no foreign war had done before.

At a 20-minute ceremony at Saigon's Tan Son Nhut air base, the departing commander, General Frederick C. Weyand, said U.S. forces had accomplished their mission to prevent a Communist takeover by "raw military force."

But as he spoke, North Vietnamese and Viet Cong shells were blasting a beleaguered South Vietnamese ranger camp at Ton Le Chan, 50 miles to the north, and the Saigon command reported 146 violations of the cease-fire in the last 36 hours.

The last GIs filed aboard a C-141 transport aircraft at Tan Son Nhut, watched by North Vietnamese and

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Viet Cong officers whose manner suggested they regarded the American departure as little short of a Communist victory.

About 2500 U.S. troops were flown out of Saigon and the northern base of Da Nang during a the day to complete the withdrawal provided for in the Paris

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peace agreement signed January 27. Since the signing, 23,500 U.S. troops have left Vietnam.

As the last combat troops flew home, U.S. officials made clear that the U.S. was not washing its hands of Vietnam.

They noted that about 48,000 American troops remain in nearby Thailand, 30,000 aboard Seventh Fleet ships in Southeast Asian waters, and 20,000 on the Pacific island of Guam.

The Seventh Fleet is reported to have about 50 ships, including four carriers with a total of 200 attack planes within range of Vietnam. The Pentagon said there were 152 B-52 bombers on Guam and more than 450 Air Force and Marine

planes, including 50 B-52s, at bases in Thailand.

The U.S. continues to bomb enemy forces in Cambodia, adjacent to Vietnam. The Department of Defense has accused the Communists of falling down on provisions of the Paris agreement that called for withdrawal of all foreign troops from Cambodia.

COMMAND

As the Saigon command closed shop, a new U.S. command was being set up in Thailand. It will be known as USSAG — U.S. Support Activities Group—with headquarters at Nakorn Phanom, 550 miles northeast of Bangkok, on the Mekong River and within artillery range of North Vietnamese forces in Laos.

USSAG will be the operational headquarters for U.S. forces in Indochina. Its commander is General John Vogt, previously deputy commander in Vietnam and commander of the U.S. Seventh Air Force.

More than 1000 U.S. servicemen remain in Vietnam — 825 members of the four-party Joint Military Commission, 50 military attaches, and 159 U.S. Embassy Marine guards. The JMC contingent will leave today and tomorrow. The others will stay.