

## "HEARTS OF GOLD"

(A Report on Operation Passage to Freedom)

By

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Henrietta Pass is a sheltered stretch of water connecting the China Sea to the Baie d'Along in the Tonkin Delta of Northern Indo-China. The French will tell you that it is one of the great wonders of the world. They may be correct; for one must see this body of deep blue water to appreciate its exquisite beauty. Thousands of basalt islands with sheer towering peaks rise from its depths to stand like silent sentinels overlooking the China Sea. Small coves, smooth lagoons and hidden pools lie snugly between its many islands. Years of salt water erosion have cut eerie passages through the base of many of the islands. Huge Stalactites as big as tree trunks and as sharp as spears hang from their roofs. Venomous sea serpents, ugly squid and stinging jelly fish haunt its waters. Except for poisonous snakes and flying insects which infest the thick brush off the narrow beaches and hundreds of baboons who make their homes in the crevices of the craggy peaks, the islands are uninhabited.

Twenty miles to the south at the mouth of the Haiphong River is Do Son peninsula. A few miles up the river sprawls the port of Haiphong, gateway to the sea of Northern Indo-China. Sixty miles to the west is the lovely city of Hanoi, once the center of French culture in Indo-China and now the capital of Viet Minh and the headquarters of its Communist leader, Ho-Chi-Minh. With its placid lake, its colored buildings of pink, blue and lavender and its houses of stone and grill-work, Hanoi is, indeed, a picturesque city.

Between the two cities lie the lowlands dotted with small villages with their native huts and rice paddies. Surrounding them are the rugged mountains and jungles teeming with wild life, including the fierce man-eating tiger. In the summer the southwest monsoons bring hot, humid, sticky weather causing the heated air to rise from the jungle in a steamy mist. In late Autumn the winds shift to the northeast causing chill air, strong gusts, heavy ocean swells, often bitter cold and sometimes powerful typhoons.

Into this area on August 15, 1954 steamed USS MENARD, an Attack Transport of the Amphibious Group, Western Pacific. Three days later,

Menard sailed for Saigon with 3,000 refugees from the Communist Viet Minh, the first group of hundreds of thousands who were to follow them to freedom in United States ships.

Among those ships was an LST; LST 901, headed south in the China Sea from Haiphong to Saigon. On its tank deck was a load of military equipment. Below decks several hundred ill clad, hungry and pathetic refugees were huddled avidly consuming the first hot meal they had eaten in weeks. Squatting on the outskirts of the circle was a thin, worried man named Tran-Duc-Zuong. Tran was eating, too; for it is the nature of hunger to be demanding. Tran was worried about his wife. She was not with him. Somewhere in this United States ship, Tran's wife was giving birth to a baby.

As Tran finished his meal, a man in a white Navy uniform wearing the insignia of a Pharmacist's Mate approached him.

"Will you come with me, please?" said the man. Through an interpreter, he gently explained to Tran that his wife had given birth to a baby girl. His wife was doing well; but the baby was in trouble and the doctor was trying desperately to save its life.

In a small, make-shift operating room, the doctor was bending over the form of a tiny new born infant. Sweat streamed down his face from the intense heat and his nervous strain. Above the sanitary mask, his eyes reflected his worry. A Vietnamese nurse watched him from the opposite side of the table. Perhaps he prayed that he might be able to save the life of this tiny, brown bundle. He was a young doctor. This was not the sort of thing he had expected to find when he entered the Navy. But he was a doctor and a human life was at stake. The baby's heartbeat was faint but it was still there. As long as it was there, hope for its life was there, too.

Outside the room Tran paced up and down. The nervous worry of the father of a newborn is the same all over the world. Hours passed; then more hours. Finally the doctor emerged. Tran was informed that his infant daughter had passed the crisis and would live. Gratefully, Tran whispered in his native Vietnamese: "Thanks be to God."

As the Captain of LST 901 nosed his ship past Cap St. Jacques at the entrance to Saigon channel a note was handed to him. This is what it said:

"I come in name of wife, of newborn and family to present sincere thanks. All of you giving much help to birth my little daughter. We doing you much trouble but you bringing us good help and much niceness. You give your medicines, necessary instruments and very good place for accomplishments. You and your doctor losing sleep to render service to us.

From Captain to last sailor you have Hearts of Gold.

My family and myself thanking you very much and wishing you many victories against Communism. Long live American Peoples.

(Signed)

Tran-Duc-Zuong"

This is but one of the many tributes to the officers and men of the U.S. Navy and the Military Sea Transportation Service whose "Hearts of Gold" were felt by hundreds of thousands of unfortunate people in an operation perhaps unparalleled in the history of this nation. Others will appear later. All of them expressed the same sentiment and gratitude to those whose "hearts of gold" overflowed with gentle understanding and tender assistance to a courageous but pathetic people.

Statistics reveal that over 700,000 freedom seeking persons were brought out of Communist controlled Indo-China. United States ships alone transported 310,848 passengers; and personnel of these ships ministered to 184 births and 66 deaths. In addition 68,757 tons of military equipment and 8,135 military vehicles which had been furnished to France under the Mutual Defense Assistance Program (MDAP) were evacuated in United States shipping, thus insuring that no weapons of U.S. origin would fall into the hands of the Communists.

These statistics constitute the whole purpose and effect of the exercise. They are sufficient in themselves to stamp the effort a success. Yet, imposing as they are, they still are but cold figures of numerical results. Within them was a dramatic performance; a show, if you will, sometimes tense, often frustrating, occasionally amusing, frequently exciting but always heartwarming. It was a performance that included the tragedy of human misery but which had the satisfying reward of human appreciation. The script was shipped up in three days without a guiding precedent. It was produced in a hurry and the curtain was raised without a rehearsal.

The cast included hundreds of thousands of people from a few high level government officials and ranking military personnel to the

many, many lowly peasants. There were people who experienced the miracle of birth and people who established the inevitability of death. There were people with fright in their eyes but hope in their hearts; finally there were people wearing the uniforms of the United States Navy and the Military Sea Transportation Service whose compassion and generosity were a daily demonstration of the American way of life at its finest. They were men, unschooled in the art of diplomacy but steeped in the traditions of a free society. Ambassadors of good will they truly were although they wore no tall hats or striped trousers. Their wardrobe consisted of bell bottom pants, shirt sleeves and dungarees; - and there wasn't an "ugly American" among them.

"Passage to Freedom" was an apt name for the Operation since it involved the mass movement of three quarters of a million people who chose to give up their land, leave the only homes they had ever known and be transported nearly a thousand miles rather than live under the hard heel of Communism. In the Geneva Conference Agreement signed on July 21, 1954 between France and the Viet Minh of Northern Indo-China, there was a stipulation that persons living either in the areas north or south of the 17th parallel who desired to move to the other area would be permitted to do so freely and without hindrance in accordance with a specified time schedule. This was a laudable provision and it would have been a lofty one had the Communists permitted it to be carried out without restraint. Upwards of two million people would have moved out of Northern Indo-China. But this was not to be and even many of those who were able to get out had literally to fight their way to their Passage to Freedom. In contrast to this, in the free South where there were no restrictions, only a few hundred chose to leave and most of these were known Communist agents and spies.

Under the command structure set up by the Commander-in-Chief, Pacific and Pacific Fleet, Admiral F. B. Stump, all U.S. military matters ashore were under the direction of General John W. O'Daniel, U.S. Army who reported directly to Admiral Stump. I had command of the United States Sea Forces and also reported directly to Admiral Stump. Thus there were two vertical echelons of command tied together by close coordination with each having liaison with the United States Ambassador to Vietnam, Mr. Donald Heath (later General Collins) for matters of politico-military significance.

To examine the problem a series of conferences were held in Indo-China. The first conference was held at the French Army Headquarters in Haiphong on August 10, 1954. Present in addition to General O'Daniel and myself were Major General Franchy, commanding the Haiphong perimeter of French forces, Vice Admiral Auboyneau, Commander-in-Chief French Naval Forces Extreme Orient, Rear Admiral Querville, Commander French Naval Station, Haiphong, Colonel Blanchet

representing General Ely, the French Commissionaire-Generale of Indo-China, staff officers and the Vietnamese Mayor of Haiphong. It seemed significant to me that the mayor was the only Vietnamese representative present.

After the conference we toured a refugee camp. It was located by a rice paddy and was one of the most awful sights I have ever seen. The last monsoon had left a sea of mud around the area. The only shelter was a few tents of tattered cloth held up by bamboo sticks. Conditions were unbelievably squalid and horribly unsanitary. Human excreta was all about attracting flies and insects which were continuously biting the half clothed adults and naked little children. Dr. James Amberson who was initially in charge of the first medical unit ashore described it this way in a paper later presented before a meeting of the American Medical Association: "There were no sanitary conveniences. The human excreta combined with the presence of an enormous number of flies had the makings of the spread of epidemic diseases. Water was taken direct from the rice paddies and consumed raw. Wormy feces were common; heat was intense and strong odors permeated the air. Pyrogenic infections of the scalp of young people were common as well as numerous other skin diseases. Dysentery and intestinal parasites were very common and one had only to walk through a camp site any morning to see writhing worms in the fresh stools scattered about."

Yet, despite the sickening aspect of the scene, it was emotionally inspiring. Old and young alike gathered about us holding up the V for victory sign, bowing low and even falling prostrate before us as they shouted in French: "Pour la Liberte'. Vives les Americaines!"

When Menard embarked the first passengers, there was little organized procedures. There were no welcoming committees ashore, no organized assembly points and loading schedules, no control parties, very little screening and health inspections, etc., all of which were points brought up at the first conference and which were later placed in effect. No one aboard Menard knew quite what to expect. The Captain, therefore, gave his officers and men a very simple but effective briefing. The refugees would be dirty, perhaps bewildered and certainly hungry. Be kind to them, feed them, help them but above all be patient with them. Although orderly procedures were later established, that simple formula was to be followed throughout the entire operation.

The matter of births and deaths aboard ship was one that required clarification. It was decided that an infant born aboard a public vessel of the United States would be given an opportunity to choose whether he desired to be a citizen of the United States when he reached the age of twenty one. This choice will become available in 1975 and 1976.

Christians readily consented to burials at sea when assured that appropriate religious ceremonies would be held when the remains were consigned. Some of the Buddhists and a few of the Confucianists agreed to burials at sea but for the most part they did not. Ships were provided with impregnated coverings for the remains which were placed in sealed containers and, after notification to Vietnamese authorities, were delivered to the relatives on arrival at Saigon.

In a letter report to Admiral Stump dated August 24, 1954, I stated that I was frankly appalled by the utter lack of advance planning to handle either the refugees or the military equipment. This was the reason I had offered to place a Shore Party in Haiphong and a Sea Bee Detachment at Cap St. Jacques in Saigon to organize both the Embarkation and Debarkation points. The French would not permit this since they considered it would be a violation of the Armistice provision against landing foreign troops. I reported also that I had found on my arrival in Saigon "that the French down there had entirely different ideas as to how things should be done than the French in Haiphong. Admiral Querville told me that because the French Army control the perimeter, his hands are tied except for what he can give me in the way of Naval assistance. On the other hand, General Franchy had told me that the French Army had no responsibility for civilian refugees despite the fact that he was up to his neck in the problem. That is not in consonance with what General Ely's Chief of Staff told me in Saigon. He said the French Army is running the whole show. --- There have been some interesting sidelights. Recently 400 tents arrived here without any tent poles. We had the canvas but nothing to hold it up except the refugees. ---Security screening is not yet entirely satisfactory but is improving. Most of the refugee violations are not serious. They just bring what they think they need. We have uncovered kerosene lamps and cooking utensils filled with kerosene and with extra bottles on the side. We tell them they can keep the utensils but not the kerosene. One fellow was spotted by a native nurse with a pistol. He said it was a souvenir. She reported it to a Legionnaire who took the pistol for his own 'souvenir'. ---The Chief Vietnamese delegate in Hanoi told me that the Viet Minh had ringed Hanoi on all sides just 15 kilometers outside the city and were making it very difficult for the refugees to get past. He also reported that their propaganda was beginning to be effective whereas ours was not getting through and he doubted whether many people over 15 kilometers from Hanoi even knew there were any U.S. ships here."

We used a number of "gimwicks" to help in handling the refugees while they were aboard ship. We generally were able to find someone who had a knowledge of French among our crews; so in our reception committee we could pass from English to French to Vietnamese and back.

Many of the refugees had never seen a modern toilet. So we posted large cartoons showing the right and wrong way to use this necessary facility. We used refugees to assist our cooks in preparing rice so that it would be palatable to them. Gift packages inscribed in French and Vietnamese, "From the officers and men of the U.S. Navy" were distributed. Some of the ships even held a contest enroute to select a "Miss Passage to Freedom" and the winner and runner-up had tea and ice cream in the Captain's cabin.

Our medical unit inspected all refugees prior to boarding for communicable diseases and screened out those who were ill or showed symptoms. One evening I received a report from Dr. Thomas Dooley that he had screened out a very sick man. He later discovered the cause of the man's emaciation was a tapeworm which Dr. Dooley removed - all nineteen feet of it! The tapeworm lost its meal ticket but the man regained his health. When he was sent along later he had gained thirty pounds and was a very grateful and happy fellow.

Another matter of constant concern was security. We were totally dependent on the French and Vietnamese to uncover possible Communist agents planted among the refugees. In this they did fine work as did the Vietnamese underground working in the interior through outlets to the French. Nevertheless we were handicapped by the paucity of our own agents and the difficulty of assessing the dependability of the source of the information we did receive. Internal security of ships was likewise a matter of concern. Sabotage of our ships and smuggling were an ever present possibility. Some attempts to smuggle small items, including narcotics, were uncovered while others undoubtedly went undetected. Frequent inspections of all parts of a ship were standard procedure but only a few evidences of attempted sabotage were found.

The lifeline of any military force is its logistics support. In a Naval Force operating as we were literally at the end of the line, it was imperative that we have facilities for continuous maintenance. Therefore we had included in our operation order the assignment of a Mobile Logistics Force. On 11 August we requested CINCPACFLT to provide this force. I had expected that a Captain would be ordered to command it and I was therefore delightfully surprised when my old friend Rear Admiral Roy Gano, at his own request, was given the assignment. As a base of operations, we selected Tourane Bay, a large but unprotected harbor a little less than half way between Saigon and Haiphong. Gano arrived with his Logistics Force in Tourane Bay on 23 August and immediately sent out the following message: "Gano's General Store now open for business."

When the refugee evacuation count reached 75,000, we decided to make a special occasion of the transportation in a U.S. ship of the 100,000th refugee. Since Estes, my flagship, had not had any refugees because of the necessity for me to move from one point along the coast to another on short notice, we decided that it would be appropriate to transport the 100,000th refugee in the flagship. Arrangements were made for appropriate ceremonies for his reception at Saigon and, in fact, this turned out to be quite an occasion with the President of Vietnam receiving him.

The 100,000th refugee was a tobacco farmer named Pham-Hung-Son. He was 29 years old with a wife and four children. His wife, Nguyen-Thi-Chi was 27 years old and hardly bigger than a minute. Four feet, eight inches tall and weighing about 70 pounds, her teeth were lacquered black in accordance with the custom among Vietnamese peasant women who believe it enhances their beauty. Nguyen had become a bride at the tender age of fourteen. The children were two girls, Pham-Thi-Chi age 12 and a baby, Pham-Thi-Diep age one year, and two boys, Pham-Hung-Nga and Pham-Hung-Ngoc ages 6 and 4 respectively. We transported the family to the ship in a helicopter. They were a bit shy at first after arriving on board but it was not long before our wonderful men had gained their full trust and confidence. I am sure that trip will live long in their memory.

As the flow of refugees reached its peak we began to concentrate on expediting the removal of military equipment. We were resolved that if it was humanly possible not one piece of MDAP military material would be left in Northern Indo-China to fall into the hands of the Communists. Since this material had been given to the French under the MDAP program, they had title to it and, in fact, owned it. It was essential, therefore, that they give whole hearted support to collecting it, inventoring it, getting it to the assembly points, seeing that it was loaded and making arrangements to receive it at its destination. The cooperative effort in this project on the part of all concerned was the finest I experienced during the entire operation. The Communists found no military equipment of U.S. origin when they took over Northern Indo-China.

A very sticky problem arose over whether commercial and private property should be transported in U.S. ships. I made a decision subject to review by higher authority that it could not because (1) U.S. shipping had not been provided to afford free transportation for commercial and private property, (2) that public vessels of the U.S. should not be placed in competition with French commercial interests and (3) that the transportation of such material might interfere with

the removal of military equipment. The two most important industries in the area were a cement factory in Haiphong and some coal mines at Hongay. Although these plants were purely civilian commercial activities, they did have an economic value in national defense. It was because of these plants that I referred my decision to higher authority.

French business interests protested the decision on the grounds that insufficient French shipping was available, that anything that fell into the hands of the Communists would be detrimental to Free World interests and finally that they were caught on the horns of a dilemma. If they remained they were sure that Ho-Chi-Minh would not permit them to operate their businesses as private enterprises and if they left without their hardware they would be bankrupt. On 9 November I referred the problem to Admiral Stump for a policy decision and on 11 November I had the answer. U.S. shipping could be made available for such use under three conditions only; first, that insufficient French bottoms were available; second, that it would be a last resort to keep the material from falling into the hands of the Communists and third, that standard MSTS shipping charges would be paid. The cement factory was left intact but the coal mining machinery was evacuated about two months prior to the terminal date of the operation.

As the evacuation progressed the political situation in South Vietnam began to deteriorate. President Diem was beset by difficulties in his efforts to create a free and independent nation. His government was composed of men, who for the most part, were ill-equipped by training or experience to handle the positions they held. Compounding this situation were the Sects; large regional groups of politico-military-religious organizations each with its own Army and with complete authority within its own province. Diem realized that national solidarity would be impossible until the Sects surrendered their regional control to the Central Government and placed their armed forces under the jurisdiction of the National Army.

The three most important Sects were the Hoa Haus, the Cau Dais and the Binh Xuanists. The first two were willing to negotiate. But the Binh Xuanists, the majority of whom were cutthroats and pirates whose authority extended over the entire area of Saigon and Cholon, were not. Created as the Police Force of that area by the ex-Emperor, Bau Dai, their, loyalty, if any, was to him. More important, they controlled Le Grand Monde, a large section of Saigon where gambling, narcotics and prostitution were openly practiced. Diem vowed to close Le Grand Monde and to wipe out the Binh Xuanists. He knew he would have to fight to do it.

By early November the situation in Saigon was so tense that we had to cancel all shore leave and liberty. Saigon is a big city with a mixture of French and Oriental atmosphere. Its broad boulevards and sidewalk cafes are reminiscent of Paris. But its many narrow, winding streets, its alleys and off-beat dives are strictly Oriental. Political intrigue permeated the city and a network of Communist spies and agents worked relentlessly to undermine the government. Open sabotage with bombings of business buildings and restaurants were frequent occurrences. The President took personal control and ordered the National Army to wipe out the Binh Xuanists.

This would have been a difficult task under any circumstances. It was made all the more difficult because of the disloyalty of the Chief of Staff of the National Army, General Hinh. Hinh was a remarkable man in many ways. Young, handsome, intelligent and well educated, he was highly personable and very popular. He was married to a beautiful French woman and his sympathies were definitely pro-French. In fact he held a commission as a Major in the French Army at the same time as he commanded the Vietnamese Army! His animosity and arrogance towards Diem were openly expressed. At a reception one evening, Hinh told me quite frankly that his loyalty belonged to Emperor Bau Dai who, he said, was still the Chief of State and he gave me a copy of a letter he had received from Bau Dai in which the latter had praised Hinh's loyal services and stated that he was requesting the President to appoint Hinh to an important post in the government. Hinh confided to me that it would not be long before everybody would know who was running the country. He was correct-but not the way he intended it. Faced with Hinh's open defiance and possible disruption of the only military force available to him, Diem ordered Hinh out of the country. At first Hinh refused to leave but eventually departed vowing to return.

The attitude of the French warrants some understanding. During their long war in Indo-China, the French made some serious political blunders and committed grave military errors. Nevertheless, their reluctance to give up that rich region of the Orient is understandable. They had a sizeable capital investment in Indo-China from which they received a substantial revenue. All of the modern improvements such as roads and highways, sanitary and medical facilities, educational institutions, industries and development of the country's resources had been accomplished by the French. The division of the country left the manufacturing and industrial activities in the north and the agriculture in the south. Both were mutually dependent. To have the one fall to the Communists and the other pass into the hands of a new and uncertain government must indeed have been a bitter pill to swallow.

As the movement of refugees and military equipment increased in tempo so did Communist atrocities against the people trying to reach the coast. Dr. Dooley reported performing a series of single and double amputations on the feet and legs of a group of young men who had been clubbed with rifle butts by the Communists when they insisted on leaving their village. On 24 November a Catholic priest arrived in Haiphong having been subjected to revolting and degrading treatment. Accused of telling lies to his people about their opportunity for freedom, the Communists had beaten him with bamboo poles and jabbed chopsticks into his ears. Refugees from Phat Diem province reported that they had been forced to attend lectures by the Communists in which they were told that the people in the camps at Haiphong were being subjected to terrible cruelties and that the young men were being impressed into the Vietnamese Army or sent by the French to Morocco for duty. Our interrogation units through conversations with the refugees revealed that religious freedom was only a part of their desire to move. Hard labor with little pay, higher taxes, constant marauding and lawlessness and the continuous indoctrination in Communist philosophy were equally important factors in their decision to leave. A group of refugees from Than-Hoa, lead by their old patriarch, arrived in Haiphong on November 28, after travelling for two and a half months. Half of them had died from starvation and disease but the remainder fought their way through. They reported that the Communists were demanding 7,000 piastres per person to get out of the interior. This was about \$250 and a fortune to most of the refugees far beyond their reach.

A captain in the Vietnamese Intelligence Service who had infiltrated the Viet Minh sent me a written report of which the following is an excerpt:

"Sir, there are now much more refugees inside wanting to leave than ever before. Viet Minh prevent them. In Ju-Thai-Binh over 20,000 people are waiting to cross river. Geographical points are Ben-Do-Minh bridge of Tra-Ly. Viet Minh hold them up saying there are no more transports for leaving Haiphong. Also Viet Minh send ahead five young mens in teams. Each team has to hold off one young man trying to cross river. At outpost of Dong-Van at railroad station at Van-Dien are thousands more. These people are waiting for relatives but now know why relatives are not coming on. Viet Minh threaten relatives which are left behind. ---I hope this investigation would be of help to you for further settlement at Trung-Gia conference with Truce Commission since Viet Minh have violated Agreement that anybody would be free to go to area they chose."

I presented these charges to the Commission at Trung-Gia. The Polish representative was scornfully silent. The Indian and Canadian representatives said they could find no evidence of forcible restraint. Later, the Canadian representative told me privately that it was almost impossible to collect such evidence because when such reports were received and a team sent out to investigate, it took so long to reach the area that by the time they arrived, the Communists had removed the evidence, having been warned in advance of their arrival. Moreover, Viet Minh officers were always present when the people were interrogated and it was obvious that they had been threatened with reprisals if they spoke out. He said the people were so frightened they refused to answer any questions.

Operation "Passage to Freedom" was hardly consonant with what one generally thinks of as a strictly Naval exercise. To be sure, there was salt water and there were ships. But the objective had very little in common with a Navy's mission in war or peace. The deployment of a Naval force usually carries the presumption that its combat power is there available for use if required. In this instance, no guns were loaded and no ships ever went to "Action Stations". This was strictly a humanitarian effort. Yet, it was that very aspect which made the Operation such a stimulating experience. Indeed, it was a high privilege to be associated with so many fine young Americans who so constantly were emphasizing some of the noble principles which for so long have been a symbol of this nation. In a letter to me, the United States Ambassador to Vietnam, Mr. Donald Heath, put it this way:

"The conduct of officers and men both ashore and afloat deserves the very highest commendation. Their kindness and thoughtfulness towards the refugees have, I am sure, left an impression of individual Americans which will not soon be forgotten."

In a sense, as the Ambassador indicated, it was an individual effort because so many of the difficulties had to be overcome by the man on the spot right then and there. But in its larger sense this was not an individual show. It was a team effort. There were times when the pace slowed agonizingly; but it never stopped. It never stopped because every single man bent on his oar with equal energy all the way from the lowest rating to the Commander-in-Chief, Pacific. Just before I was detached, I sent Admiral Stump a message thanking him for his wonderful support. His reply stated simply: "It is easy to help those who help themselves".

Perhaps it can be said that our difficulties were minimized because we were helping those, who by their own courage and sacrifices, were also helping themselves. Certainly, we were richly rewarded by the gratitude of those whom we helped. We saw it in their faces; we watched it in their simple little gestures of appreciation and we received it in the form of so many heartwarming notes of thanks which are now our treasured mementos. One of those notes was quoted in the beginning of this report and it inspired the title of this essay. As we wind up the report, it would seem appropriate to quote a few more since, in their simple sincerity, they are vivid tributes to the men with "hearts of gold".

"To all peoples of great U.S. Navy:

We suffer much badness to come your ships for liberty. Communists tell us you are beasts. We do not know to believe. So we come anyway. We know now Communists the beasts. You care our sick and most kind to child and old peoples. Our freedom mean much which you have help so good. In name my family and all Vietnamese people God Bless You."

(signed)  
"Han-Bu-Song"

"To Captain Commander and all members this ship:

In name Vietnamese people we thankful you American gentlemen and friends have helped our government carry us south to another land."

(signed)  
"Nguyen-Thaul-Brit      Bui-Van-Tong      Nguyen-Viet-Hai"

"To Mister Master of Ship:

There are three days in your ship you are nursery my people and Mister Doctor is forever my benefactor. I never to forget together in this ship because you are very goodness. In my finest word of honor I beg to send Mister Master of ship and all mens my gratefulness."

(signed)  
"Vong-Phu-Dan"

"To Naval Captain, Officers and Crew Members:

My people and I are most grateful for courtesy you have shown us this Passage to Freedom. We thank you one and all from the bottom of our hearts."

(The signature was illegible. It was probably a note from a member of one of the Control Parties or one of the better educated refugees)

The final curtain dropped on May 18, 1955. But there was drama almost to the last moment. On May 13, MSTIS General Brewster, the last United States ship in Northern Indo-China sailed from Henrietta Pass. It lay off Do Son peninsula to embark the final increment of French Security Forces. With hardly more than minutes to spare, ten ragged, barefoot refugees reached the peninsula just as the French were embarking. Among them was a young father with an infant daughter in his arms. He had remained as long as he dared trying to persuade his wife to leave with him. She refused. He took their infant child and fled. The Communists called it wife desertion and kidnapping. Perhaps, in a sense, it was. But to the father who had to make the grim decision, it was a sacrifice for liberty. He made his unhappy choice to insure that his baby girl could start her life in a community of freedom.

Tran-Duc-Zuong wrote that our men had hearts of gold. Hearts of gold have always characterized our people wherever there is human suffering. That is a part of the history of our nation. But an equally important part of the history of our nation are the times when those same hearts of gold have turned to hearts of steel. Enemies who would destroy our own precious freedom should beware of this phenomenon of chemistry within the hearts of the American people. -And let the Communists make no mistake about that!