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VIET NAM REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT PROGRAM

BACKGROUND

The Geneva Accords of July 22, 1955, gave the Communist Government of North Viet Nam control over all Vietnamese territory north of the 17° and authorized inhabitants north and south of the parallel to emigrate without molestation. All movement of persons between zones was to be completed by May 18, 1956. The President of the United States announced that the U.S. would assist non-Communists from the North to evacuate and settle in the South.

Almost immediately after this announcement, U.S. Navy transports and about \$10 million (for tents and supplies) were made available to the non-Communist Government of Viet Nam, and refugees began to arrive in large numbers in Saigon and other receiving centers in U.S. transports by August 15. From the beginning the French Air Force and Navy also engaged in assisting the exodus.

Early in August the U.S. Government sent several seasoned refugee experts from Germany, Hong Kong, and other places to assist the Vietnamese in solving administrative problems, such as, the organization of a Government refugee bureau, the planning of refugee reception and temporary settlement centers, the provision of direct relief supplies and cash grants, and the establishment of classification records to facilitate the handling and later resettlement of the refugees. The new Prime Minister Diem appointed a Commissioner General for Refugees, and a committee composed of Vietnamese, French, and Americans was established early in August to coordinate activities.

Initially it was thought in Saigon that the refugees would total about 250,000 civilians and 200,000 Vietnamese troops. By September, 60,000 a month were being transported by the U.S. Navy and a larger number by airlift. As of the final date for refugee exodus, the number of refugees was:

Vietnamese Civilians	620,090
Other Civilians	38,024
Vietnamese Military	<u>154,410</u>

TOTAL 821,524

The U.S. Navy lifted 322,586 persons; the French lifted 448,610, and 41,328 were self-evacuated.

When the magnitude and nature of the refugee problem became clearer in November 1955, an over-all refugee program was developed and a U.S. aid project totaling \$35 million for FY 55 was approved. Later, supplemental aid raised the total for the fiscal year to \$55.8 million, for transportation, reception, food and medical supplies, tents and housing materials, and cash grants.

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The evacuation, or first, phase of the program was a notable success. Probably no other voluntary migration of this magnitude has been accomplished in modern times. On the whole, the refugees have been well-cared for and there have been no epidemics of diseases.

Considerable confusion, however, characterized the second phase -- including reception, relief, and initial housing of the refugees. During the period September 1954 to March 1955 there was some suffering and much overcrowding, and failure to classify the refugees at the outset has prevented proper utilization of their skills and is complicating their resettlement.

The chief causes of the confusion in this stage were these: (a) a new Government took office only three months prior to the Geneva Accords; (b) Prime Minister Diem appointed and dismissed several refugee Commissioners during the first two months of the exodus; (c) Government employees responsible for the second phase activities had little administrative competence and technical skill. It should be realized, however, that any government would have been strained to handle such a mass movement of people efficiently.

Progress in the final, or resettlement, phase of the refugee program has been very slow. A recent report from Embassy/Saigon indicates that only about 10 percent of an approximate total of 580,000 refugees needing aid has been resettled in areas suitable for raising crops and that few of these 60,000 have been given sufficient land for self-support. The seriousness of this situation is but little mitigated by earlier field reports that some 450,000 refugees had been transferred from temporary receiving centers to "resettlement areas." (Many of these areas are roadside camps). Although the Government with the able assistance of several U.S. voluntary agencies (CARE, International Rescue Committee, American Red Cross, International Red Cross, Mennonite Central Committee, Federated Women's Clubs, National Catholic Welfare Conference, International Junior Chamber of Commerce), as well as with USOM aid, has met the most pressing needs for shelter, food, clothing and medical treatment and though generally the refugees themselves have energetically endeavored to improve their living conditions, the great bulk of them are still supported through direct grants of cash and in kind. Thus they are in danger of becoming at best pauperized and at the worst sources of political unrest. Moreover, it is obvious that resettlement of these people is a precondition for any substantial reduction in Viet Nam Government outlays for their support and consequently also a precondition for a reduction in the Government's requests for United States financial assistance.

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