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Final Report from Haiphong

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FIELD REPORT NO. FS - 227

On 17 May at 0600, all USOM activity in Haiphong came to an end. This date also marked the close of a period of some two weeks of hectic activity, disorganization, mild confusion, riots, demonstrations, parades, decorations, crying generals, etc.

With the arrival of the Vietnamese advanced government officials, the Evacuation Committee was forced to abandon their office. Further complicated by Mr. Nam's leaving for Saigon, about the 5th of May, the new committee became incapable of handling the refugees or keeping a daily tally of figures. It was only a few days thereafter that the Evacuation Committee office was closed down and the refugees left to forage for themselves in the streets of Haiphong. Fortunately, by that time the daily arrival of refugees had dwindled down to a mere trickle. Most of the people leaving were the city people, who after endless delays were now scampering to leave Haiphong -- all preferably by air.

With the Evacuation Committee gone, the refugee camps soon went by the wayside. By that time however, Camp Lack Iray had been totally abandoned and on one morning, with the departure of one of the American ships, Camp Marine went down to only a few squatters. Placed at the disposition of the Refugee Committee was the Seminary at 9 rue Bonal. Although very spacious, it never accommodated too many refugees but was seen used by only a few refugees. By 8 May, it seemed that all hope for the refugees was completely gone as no one was doing anything about them. The arrival of several escapees as well as some 120 genuine evacuees on 9 May as well as 290 on 10 May presented a problem. At an early morning conference, Admiral Querville put his Deuxieme Bureau in charge of rounding up the last minute refugees, kept them overnight at the Marine Base and shipped them out as soon as possible to the waiting American ships in the Bay. Quickly the influx was placed in the No. 9 rue Bonal camp and on the following day sent out to the waiting ships. This, in effect, accounts for about all of the passengers carried by the USNS General Brewster on its last trip down.

Escapees with no place to go upon arriving in Haiphong and the citizens not knowing where to sign up, resulted in our office being swamped with curious people wanting to go South who missed what they considered the last plane or the last boat. The Navy's top secret attitude about the number of ships left, the dates of departure and the loading points made it impossible for the refugees to converge on a last rally point and still be taken out of Haiphong.

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A further complication..

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A further complication was that the regular loading zone at the Briquetterie was now taken over and all loadings were done at the docks. To get to the docks, however, one had to gain entrance past the guards. On the 12th of May, it was announced that the ships would be loading that afternoon of 1000. Some 150 people showed up. Since there was no committee to sign up refugees, we merely told them to show up at the docks and they would be picked up. It was also announced that there would be ships at the docks to load all the refugees on the 13th of May. This however presented a problem, since the French at the Higham command had supposed a surplus from 2000 on 12 May through the day on which the "liberators" came in. Thus, with the few last minute refugees loaded on the 13th, were those who braved the tight curfew and made their way to the docks. On the way out the French picked up what few persons remained at 9 rue Souai, and with the exception of the 20 refugees loaded at La Sen, the final curtain came down on Operation Exodus.

It was not a very colorful finish, but as expected by most groups, because of the continued Vietminh security measures, there was no last minute rush or stranded refugees on the docks. From conversations with the local people during the last two weeks, it was easily seen that the people who had intentions to leave left prior to 5 May when the Vietminh experts came in town. From our records prior to that date, we had the highest number of daily departures on the American ships. Those who left subsequently were the last minute attentists, opportunists and traffickers. These crafty characters, in white sharkskin suits, came to the office and practically demanded American air transport since they had missed their last ship. Not too much sympathy was felt for them as they knew that air evacuation had stopped several days ago and there was yet another ship on 13 May.

In the midst of our final evacuation, the arrival of the S.S. Djiring with some 450 refugees from the South caused a lot of disturbance around the waterfront. It is hard to determine whether these were genuine refugees. The well dressed returnees with brand new bicycles and luggage looked more like the returning Vietminh envoy who had made a haul down South and was now returning to enjoy it under the Vietminh. A few of the older persons might well have been genuine. Some of the French military who were on hand to supervise the unloading, as well as they supervised the loading, remarked that some of them had gone to Saigon only a few weeks prior for the ride, the money, and now for propaganda.

#### MATERIAL:

On May 10 the Sverd Knot made its last trip with a pay load. On board was the last remaining American equipment to be shipped South. After much discussion and pressure from Saigon, we were successful in loading three refugee sampans on the deck, not to be outdone by the French who were using all available space to dispose of the few remaining sampans that came into Haiphong with refugees. Although some 6 or 7 sampans had to be left, these few refugees were evacuated. This was part of the last minute French undertaking with the refugees left in Haiphong.

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To throw no end to.....

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To throw us and to confusion, on 10 and 11 May some 10 vehicles all belonging to the Vietnamese government of the North were suddenly released by Hiner's office. The Vietnamese government officials claim that this was done after much falsifying and changing registration numbers, etc. The problem, however, was how to take them down. We managed to squeeze 6 of these on the Sword Knot, 24 on a French LST and 3 jeeps and one jeepster which we brought down on the last American LSTs.

A final look at Haiphong made it obvious that a minimum of any equipment of real AKA origin was left behind. This, of course, includes the obvious material of public welfare, like the ambulances, hospital equipment, a fire truck, and some public works machinery. Attempts were made to move all of this equipment but to no avail. As for the long list of American manufacture but dubious American Aid origin that had been discussed with the Public Works Division and Mr. Charles Mann, et al, it was too late to effect any evacuation. Too much time was needed to pour into the records and verify its true status. The fact that some of the material on the list clearly indicated that part of it was not AKA equipment made the French suspect this as a dishonest coup on our part and consequently little effort was made to help us out. Since this list was prepared sometime in January, it should have been looked into at that time and some of this material might have found its way out.

#### CEMENTERIE:

In the last few days of Haiphong, much speculation was aroused as to the final disposition of the cement plant. As reported earlier, it was considered a total loss. But it was not so easy to slide over a plant that, according to Mr. Chastel, director of the plant, was worth 10 million dollars and produced 250 to 300 thousand tons of cement per year.

Rumors had it that Chastel had sold some equipment to the British firm of John Manners in Hong Kong. Chastel confirmed this by stating that he had sold three planing machines, which he thought were some of the newest and best equipment there, to the Manners company but that the British had managed to evacuate only two of them and only part of the third.

Other rumors had it that Chastel was also negotiating for further disposition with the Vietminh. Chastel did state that some negotiations were now in open discussion but that he was not part of it. He claims that on May 12, he formally closed the plant's doors and the Vietminh moved in to take over. Any future settlement, though doubtful, may still be effected but then it could only be in the interest of ulterior motives and certain aspects of the Sainteny co-existence policy.

#### CHARBONNAGE:

Subsequent to the outright purchase agreement, Haiphong was buzzing with rumors that the agreement had fallen through. A check

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on this revealed that the charbonnage deal with the Vietnamese still held but that complications had developed in the application of the terms of the agreement. Apparently the Vietnamese were still agreeable to pay the SFCF in coal but how this transaction was to be effected remained unresolved and in bitter discussion as we left Haiphong.

**MISCELLANEOUS:**

Amidst all the property and equipment that was evacuated from North Viet Nam, a considerable amount of French property still remained there. Upon checking with the President of the Haiphong Chamber of Commerce it was estimated that the total value of French property in Haiphong was about 70 to 100 million dollars, while the total value of French property in the Tonkin (which includes the Nam Binh cotton mill and the Songay coal mines, etc.) is about 200 million dollars. The point to remember is that this property was virtually left intact -- a considerable gain on the part of the Vietnamese.

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