

WAR	HIST.
FILE	SUBJ.
DATE	SUB-CAT.
1975	40

A033

R I

VIET 4-17

(PICTURE)

DAY LD

BY BERT OKULEY

SAIGON (UPI) -- AMERICAN OFFICIALS ON ORDERS FROM PRESIDENT FORD TODAY ORGANIZED A MASSIVE EVACUATION OF U.S. CITIZENS FROM SAIGON WITH A WARNING THAT TIME TO MAKE THE BREAK WAS RUNNING OUT.

COMMUNIST FORCES, MEANWHILE, MOVED THEIR HEAVIEST ARTILLERY INTO THE MEKONG DELTA FOR THE FIRST TIME AND USED IT TO DESTROY A GOVERNMENT NAVAL TRANSPORT.

MAJ. GEN. HOMER SMITH, THE U.S. MILITARY ATTACHE AND THE HIGHEST-RANKING AMERICAN OFFICER IN VIETNAM, WARNED AN ASSEMBLY OF AMERICANS WEDNESDAY IN SAIGON. "I CAN TELL YOU THAT THE LONGER YOU STAY HERE THE MORE DIFFICULT IT'S GOING TO BE IN TERMS OF YOU AND YOUR FAMILIES TO GET OUT OF HERE."

THE U.S. EMBASSY BEGINNING FRIDAY WILL MOUNT AN AIRLIFT FOR RETIRED AMERICAN MILITARY PERSONNEL AND THEIR FAMILIES TO THE UNITED STATES AT NO COST.

PRESIDENT FORD ORDERED THAT "NONESSENTIAL" AMERICAN PERSONNEL STILL IN SAIGON BE WITHDRAWN. WHILE THE EXACT NUMBER TO BE EVACUATED IS NOT KNOWN, IT IS BELIEVED THAT A SIZEABLE NUMBER OF THE COLONY OF 5,500 AMERICANS WILL BE REMOVED.

EVACUATION PLANS CALL FIRST FOR THE PULLOUT OF RETIRED AMERICAN MILITARY PERSONNEL WORKING ON DEFENSE DEPARTMENT CONTRACTS AS PRIVATE CITIZENS. CONGRESSIONAL LEGISLATION PROHIBITS THE USE OF AMERICAN SOLDIERS ON ACTIVE DUTY.

EMBASSY OFFICIALS PRIVATELY VOICED OBJECTIONS TO THE EVACUATION ORDER IN THE BELIEF IT WOULD SHATTER THE MORALE OF A VIETNAMESE POPULATION THAT HAS HELPLESSLY WITNESSED A COMMUNIST TAKEOVER OF 18 OF THE COUNTRY'S 44 PROVINCES, OR ROUGHLY 60 PER CENT OF THIS COUNTRY.

GEN. SMITH, HOWEVER, TOLD THE AMERICANS, "I'M NOT SUGGESTING THAT IT (THE FALL OF VIETNAM) MAY HAPPEN, BUT, HELL, ANYBODY WHO'S GOT ANY SMARTS AT ALL CAN LOOK AT THE SITUATION AND FIGURE OUT WHAT KIND OF RISK THERE IS INVOLVED."

MORE

UPI 04-17 04:00 AED