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The attached paper, which I have entitled The Final Forty-Five Days in Vietnam, represents a mixture of facts and my own thoughts concerning what happened between 14 March and 29 April 1975 in the Republic of Vietnam. The bulk of the paper is written from memory. Therefore, my treatment of a particular facet may differ from the treatment of some other person who saw it differently.



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## THE FINAL FORTY-FIVE DAYS IN VIETNAM

This paper was written within a few days after my evacuation from Saigon on 29 April 1975. It represents my thoughts and recollections leading up to the final forty-five days of my tour as the Defense Attache, Republic of Vietnam, my recollections of the period from 14 March through 28 April 1975 and the events that occurred on 29 April 1975 up until I departed the Defense Attache Office compound at 2000H that night.

To begin with there are certain retrospective thoughts and ideas which most probably contributed to the situation which led up to the final evacuation of the Defense Attache Office (DAO) and the remainder of the American Mission from Saigon.

There is no question but what the action of the United States Congress to appropriate only \$700 million of the \$1 billion authorized for the Defense Assistance Vietnam (DAV) program had an erosive effect on the morale of the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF) and probably upon certain other elements of the national administration such as the Ministry of National Defense (MOND). The erosion, although gradual, was enough to set the stage for much further erosion in connection with the later proposed supplemental. In nearly every case when a high ranking American visited Saigon, the message was the same; to wit, every attempt would be made to secure a supplemental appropriation but no definite promises could be made. Hearing this, the Joint General Staff (JGS) and other higher officers of the RVNAF believed that the chances were very good that a supplemental would be forthcoming.

The efforts of the U. S. administration to push through the supplemental at first buoyed the hopes of the RVNAF and, indeed, the government of the Republic of Vietnam (RVN). However, the visits of the various congressional delegations (CODELS) and the subsequent actions by the Congress pointed to the fact that no supplemental was forthcoming. This, following the loss of Phuoc Long Province (and the failure of the United States to provide the military clout promised in the event of overt and obvious North Vietnamese (NVA) incursions), caused RVN and RVNAF to face up to the obvious -- the fact that, despite promises in the past and hopes expressed in the more recent past, they were going to have to face an

ever increasingly strong enemy force with little or no help from anyone. I believe that this was brought rather strongly to the attention of President Thieu by his own CODEL which had visited the United States and our Congress in an effort to aid in the timely passage of a supplemental DAV appropriation.

There followed the meeting of President Thieu, Prime Minister Khiem, LTG Quang (military advisor to the President) and General Cao Van Vien, Chief of the Joint General Staff, plus MG Pham Van Phu, Commander of Military Region II (MR II). This meeting was held at the White House at Cam Ranh Bay on or about 14 March 1975. During the week prior, the attack on Ban Me Thuot (BMT), had surprised RVNAF to the extent that the 23rd Infantry Division, or elements thereof, plus various Regional Force (RF) elements had been badly mauled. My information is that President Thieu had decided that BMT was much more essential to the continued existence of the Republic than was, for instance, the provinces of Kontum and Pleiku. I had known for sometime that RVNAF anticipated having to give up certain territories if and when the time came. This had been based on inadequate forces coupled with inadequate materiel support. My information is that the President directed MG Phu to withdraw from Kontum and Pleiku in order to provide additional forces for the retaking of BMT. That Phu had anticipated fighting for these two provinces was evident by his request, a few weeks earlier, to increase the on-the-ground materiel levels for POL and ammunition to 90 days of supply. This request had been turned down by the JGS for two reasons -- (1) having less supplies on the ground would ostensibly give Phu additional incentive to keep highway QL 19, between Pleiku and Qui Nhon open; and (2) in case of massive attack on Pleiku, there would be less potential on-the-ground losses of materiel. At the time the decision was made to withdraw from the two provinces, QL 19 was interdicted at two points, had been for several days, and despite some effort on the part of MR II forces, the enemy forces had not been cleared. MG Phu returned to his headquarters at Pleiku and made the decision to pull out almost at once. It was his decision because the President had given him alone the authority to make it. I take note here of the fact that LTG Dong Van Khuyen, Chief of Staff of the JGS and the senior RVNAF logistician, had been out of the country since 11 March in connection with the illness of his father (cancer of the larynx which necessitated treatment in Japan). Had he been on duty at the time, I am convinced that he would have directed MG Phu to provide a detailed plan for any withdrawal. Plans for the withdrawal from these two areas were in existence but

I believe that they entailed a logistical withdrawal rather than total withdrawal. In any event, MG Phu loaded up his own headquarters and then turned the evacuation of the other RVNAF elements and local populace over to BG Tat, the Ranger commander, who had been promoted just that day.

The evacuation began on Saturday, 15 March 1975, a fateful day in the history of the Republic of Vietnam. I became aware of it on the following day as reports thereof began to filter through to my staff. I might add here that I had seen General Vien on Friday afternoon, the 14th. We discussed the BMT situation and the general logistics situation but not once did he mention what was going to happen at Pleiku and Kontum. In retrospect I believe that either he had no idea that the withdrawal would occur as rapidly as it did or else he did not understand the difficulties associated with a withdrawal of that magnitude. I followed the action on Sunday, 16 March and saw the beginnings of a real donnybrook. I visited General Vien the following day, since Monday was my regular day for such visits. I asked him pointblank what was going on in the Highlands and he gave me the bulk of the information cited above. I asked him why he had not mentioned this to me the previous Friday and he told me that the President had made it very plain to those in attendance that this was a matter of such secrecy that they were not to mention it to anyone at all. I told him that in my judgment the entire withdrawal would develop into total chaos and that it could very well set the stage for some severe repercussions in the future. He acknowledged that this was possibly true and that in retrospect he should have notified me of the decision to make the withdrawal during our meeting the previous Friday. He emphasized though that the decision was not delegated to him to make. It was given directly to MG Phu by President Thieu.

As the withdrawal developed further, and as it became more and more clear that it would indeed be a debacle, President Thieu made still another decision which, as later proved, would further debilitate the situation. At another meeting with his senior military leaders and advisors he decided to move the Airborne Division, in the line south and west of DaNang, down to the Saigon area as a strategic reserve. At that point in time, there existed only the newly formed 4th Airborne Brigade of two battalions, a new Marine Brigade of two battalions and a newly formed Ranger Group as the strategic reserve in the Saigon area. These new elements had been hurriedly activated during the period late December- early

February to be used if necessary during TET. LTG Truong, MRI commander, was so upset about the decision to move the Airborne Division, that he journeyed down to Saigon for consultation with President Thieu. This effort was to no avail. The order stood. Reportedly, Truong advised Thieu that the withdrawal of the Airborne Division would require him to move the Marine Division south from the lines in and around Quang Tri to defend the DaNang area. He also reportedly told the President that if this came to pass that he would more than likely have to give up Quang Tri province and perhaps even Thua Thien province. He did feel that he was capable of defending the city of Hue for an unspecified length of time. By this time LTG Khuyen was back in country, having returned on or about 19 March 1975.

Upon the withdrawal of one airborne brigade, Truong ordered one Marine brigade out of the lines at Quang Tri and replaced them with RF units. Reportedly, the Province Chief advised his own people to evacuate their families south and within hours there was a general evacuation of the civilian populace from Quang Tri. The NVA attacked out of Quang Tri, the RF withdrew and in fact the city itself fell. The movement of people and vehicles down route QL 1 south to DaNang continued and as they came by Hue, the general populace of that city joined to the extent that the highway was choked with people and vehicles from the Hai Van pass north to Phu Loc. During this time Khuyen had the logistics people evacuating materiel -- principally ammunition and POL from the Phu Bai area adjacent to Hue. Once the road became impassable because of choking by personnel and vehicles, the only source of egress was through the small port of Tan My, just east of Hue. Unfortunately, the 325th NVA Division cut QL 1 in the vicinity of Phu Loc on or about 22 March thereby precluding the movement of people down the highway. Instead they were told by RVNAF to move to the ocean shore for pickup by Army and Navy vessels. Almost immediately Tan My and the only road thereto became choked with people. It took Khuyen and his personnel over two days to clear the port of people so that they could once again evacuate materiel -- ammunition and POL. By this time, nearly 7000 short tons of ammunition had been moved from Phu Bai to Hue and/or Tan My. Truong intended to defend the Hue enclave at least long enough to get the bulk of his materiel out and moved south. It was then that the 'family syndrome' manifested itself.

Although the Marine and Airborne elements had their families in the Saigon area, ARVN all had their families

in close proximity to where their areas of operation were. Consequently, as the chances for egress lessened, ARVN soldiers and officers became increasingly apprehensive about the welfare of their families. The famous ARVN 1st Division first fell prey to this condition. As it became evident that the NVA buildup was cutting them off from access to DaNang except by sea, ARVN pulled out of the line to get their families to safety. Suddenly, LTG Truong lost a significant part of his fighting strength. Where he had planned to defend Hue, he found that he could no longer do it. Accordingly, another quick switch in plans was made with the result that another two division sets of equipment and significant tonnages of ammunition and POL were lost to the enemy.

I think that the details of the withdrawal from Hue are well known so I will not elaborate further except to say that this entire operation badly soured the feelings of the Vietnamese Marines. This was expressed to me by their commander, MG Lan, at Vung Tau, many days later. They had spent nearly two years in the lines at Quang Tri without a significant battle with the enemy and now, without fighting to any great extent, they were ordered to abandon their equipment and withdraw to DaNang. To my knowledge they were the only RVNAF force that withdrew as a body instead of so many thousand individuals.

While the foregoing was occurring, a similar stage was being set south of DaNang within the area of operations of the 2nd ARVN Division. Whether by design or by order, this division began to withdraw to set up an enclave around the ChuLai area with its small port. Tam Ky, the capital of Quang Tin province, fell with little or no fighting. Once again the family syndrome took effect and what had been a viable fighting unit became a bunch of disorganized individuals oriented to survival of the family unit. Previously I had directed the movement of several tugs and barges from the Mekong convoy operation north to DaNang to begin the retrograde of end items, ammunition and POL in anticipation of eventually having to abandon DaNang. Before the 2nd Division dissolved, one tug and barge segment had pulled into the port of Chu Lai. Instead of taking on materiel they were forced to take on personnel. Additional personnel moved by other small craft to the island of Cu Lao Re about 30 km east of Chu Lai. All in all about five to six thousand of this division were able to get out in this manner. Others attempted to make their way north to DaNang -- again, with their families.

Holding the line to the south and west of DaNang was the ARVN 3rd Division. As the refugees from south came north, the same syndrome took hold of the soldiers and officers of the 3rd Division to the extent that it was no longer a viable fighting unit and for all practical purposes the defense of DaNang in that area no longer existed. By this time, DaNang had almost one million refugees, to include thousands of armed soldiers. The evacuation of the American Consul General element, together with their local national workforce, had begun using available Air America aircraft. This gradually became impossible as time went on because it became increasingly evident to those in DaNang that means for evacuation were very limited.

Again, previously I had directed that all available Military Sealift Command (MSC) shipping in the area be moved to DaNang to backhaul materiel. This resulted in two ships plus three tugs and four barges being on site at this time. Later other MSC ships joined the evacuation convoy. However, instead of materiel, they, of necessity, moved people. Tug and barge combinations moved people out to the MSC ships and then, finally, when it was no longer possible to move people because of insufficient shipping or intolerable shore conditions, the tug/barge combinations pulled loads of people south. Only a fraction of the refugees of DaNang were moved. Hundreds of soldiers were left, as were their families. Additional significant quantities of end items, ammunition and POL were lost as were many line items of repair parts. None of the facilities storing these items were destroyed. I later learned that the depot commanders were awaiting orders from the Corps headquarters to initiate destruction.

In retrospect, had the one million refugees been successfully evacuated south, the RVN would have had an insurmountable problem with their relocation. As it was, they experienced great difficulties in assimilating the less than 100,000 that did escape.

The pandemonium which overtook reason in DaNang literally wrested control of the city from all official presence. The last Americans out of the city escaped over the beach onto Vietnamese Naval craft along with the military hierarchy. Later in the evacuation of Saigon, the reverse would be true. The experience was shattering to all who participated. I talked with the United States Consul General, the MRI commander, the 3rd ARVN Division commander and others. All were in a daze for days thereafter and some had not fully recovered as late as 29 April when Saigon was evacuated. All told,

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approximately four division sets of equipment, one of two major ARVN depots and significant tonnages of ammunition and POL were lost to the enemy. In addition, three ARVN divisions no longer existed as such. The only troops pulled out which maintained any unit integrity were the Marines.

While the foregoing was occurring, the remnants of the elements from Pleiku and Kontum were emerging at Tuy Hoa, south of Qui Nhon. Concurrently, the ARVN 22nd Division was withdrawing east along QL 19 in an effort to establish a defensive perimeter around the area encompassing the airbase at Phu Cat and the city of Qui Nhon. Once again President Thieu ordered a defense to the last man. The ARVN logistical elements were making every effort to retrograde POL and ammunition from the Qui Nhon area as well as bombs from Phu Cat. They were somewhat successful in this attempt for a while but as it turned out it was to no avail anyway because the materiel was being retrograded to Cam Ranh Bay which would soon be lost. Very soon the press of people caused the retrograde efforts to become ineffective, and in fact ARVN personnel walked out of the POL tank farm and ammunition depot. Eventually, the remnants of the 22nd Division were taken out of Qui Nhon during the night and moved south to Phuoc Tuy.

Tuy Hoa rapidly came under attack as the pursuing NVA 320th Division on route 7B decimated the ARVN Rangers and Territorial forces blocking its advance. Meanwhile, the NVA 10th Division outflanked the airborne brigade defending in Khanh Duong district, Khanh Hoa province and reached the coast at Ninh Hoa. As the bits and pieces of ARVN elements streamed southward to Nha Trang, the MR II commander, MG Phu and LTG Thuan, former commander of MR III and then commanding the NCO Academy at Nha Trang, took off for parts unknown. Almost immediately the MR II headquarters was deserted by the staff. This precipitated the evacuation of the American Consulate in Nha Trang. This was handled exclusively by Air America assets operating between Nha Trang and TSN. Unfortunately, it came about not as a result of enemy action, but panic on the part of ARVN, probably generated by the sudden departure of MG Phu. As late as several days later, enemy troops had not entered the city.

Next on the list was Phan Rang. The airbase at Phan Rang had been taken over by the same 6th Air Division which had been ordered out of Pleiku in such an untimely manner. Once again the 6th AD had to evacuate -- this time to TSN and Bien Hoa. However, the base was continued in use as a forward area.

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Elements of 2nd ARVN Division were moved back to Phan Rang together with one airborne brigade. AN MR III headquarters under the command of LTG Nghi, former commander of MR IV, was established. For some days ARVN held on to this area. There were even indications that they would re-enter Nha Trang. Rather quickly this became impossible. Cam Ranh Bay came under attack and fell. All materiel moved from the north was lost to the enemy. Phan Rang finally fell and the remnants of the 2nd Division were lost.

At this point I shall digress and address the situation with respect to the VNAF. As the 6th Air Division withdrew from Pleiku under orders, they flew all of their flyable A/C out to Phan Rang. They did, however, leave approximately 80 A/C on the ground. These included several different types. A large number were the A-1 A/C which were in a semi-preserved state. They attempted to destroy these during subsequent days through air strikes but were not overly successful. At DaNang there was a much better opportunity to fly out all flyable A/C and to bring up to a flyable condition additional planes. A good number were evacuated but a significant number were not. In fact, serviceable aircraft were left at DaNang because pilots/crews left to evacuate their families. Phu Cat was a repeat to a large extent. Despite having the requisite time, VNAF was not able to get their A/C and other materiel evacuated. This story was repeated at Nha Trang and Phan Rang.

While their inability to move more of their assets was a result of limited transport aircraft, their concern for their families and personnel also influenced the situation. There was a two phased plan with Phase I being relegated to personnel movement. In general, they never did get around to Phase II, that of moving materiel. I also feel that this failure was in part due to the inflexibility of the command structure. The various air divisions belonged to the MR commanders and took their orders accordingly. Where the MR commander failed to order an evacuation in a timely manner (and I know of no case where one was ordered in a timely manner), the job was done piecemeal. Thus, VNAF was gradually whittled down in size and became more and more bitter in their attitude toward ARVN.

The VNN was much more flexible despite having the same command relationship with the MR commanders. VNN systematically dismantled radar sites and other bases and brought much of their materiel south in their own vessels.

From the time that Nha Trang fell, the JGS had begun making plans for the defense of the Saigon area. LTG Toan, the MR III commander, had the overall responsibility and was to be aided in this effort by LTG Minh, newly appointed commander of the Capitol Military District. A strike force headquarters was constituted using the staff of the former MRI Command under the continued direction of LTG Truong. Their plan called for a strike force, consisting of the Marine and Airborne Divisions, to be used as the situation dictated. At this time the Marine Division was in Vung Tau being reconstituted. Enough materiel had been flown in from the United States or was being processed from the overhaul lines to equip two Marine brigades. Two Airborne brigades were available for a short while only. As it turned out, all of these assets were committed to LTG Toan in an effort to hold the enemy east of Bien Hoa. Efforts were being made to reconstitute the 22nd ARVN Division and the one brigade which was finally put together was almost immediately committed just south of Saigon on highway QL 4. The only other assets not committed were a combination of the 1st and 3rd ARVN Divisions under the command of MG Hinh. This element never did get reconstituted in time to do anything. ARVN had simply run out of materiel and that which was coming from the United States did not materialize soon enough.

With the foregoing as a rather long introduction and basis from which to continue, let me now address the draw-down of the DAO and American Mission. Although the planning for Talon Vise (later Frequent Wind) was an ongoing process during my entire time as Defense Attache, the situation which developed at DaNang and other points down the coast caused some second thoughts concerning some of the provisions of the plan. As an example, one of the prime assumptions, i.e., that RVNAF would provide adequate control and security in the event of an evacuation, came under fire. It was obvious that RVNAF could not be counted on to provide any kind of control and/or security and in fact could become an adversary under panic conditions. Accordingly, it became necessary for further planning to be undertaken. At the DAO we began looking over our internal plans around 1 April 1975. I detached one Army LTC from my Security Assistance Directorate and assigned to him a USMC Major and one NCO from the FPJMT element and two Captains (one USA and one USMC) and one NCO from the JCRC element to finalize the DAO plans for assembling our own people, bringing them to the DAO compound and providing for their physical care for five to seven days if necessary. Their planning

included a new look at proposed landing zones, a new look at how and where to assemble DAO employees and a new look at how to transport DAO employees from assembly points to the DAO compound. They were also instructed to determine how to house and take care of DAO employees once they arrived at the compound. I directed them to look at all of our resources in order to determine the best method of feeding and housing our people. I directed that food from the commissary be stored within the compound for subsequent use if necessary.

This small group did a magnificent job within a matter of days. Almost overnight food was moved in and stored, C rations were requisitioned and received, lister bags and other equipment were requisitioned and received, tank trucks with JP-4, diesel and MOGAS were positioned within the compound, a bulldozer and other heavy equipment were parked within the compound on a nightly basis for use if required, auxiliary generators were placed for use in case the main power source was rendered inactive, equipment for outside latrines was built and positioned, additional bunkering materials were put in place, chemicals to convert the water in the swimming pool to a potable condition was secured and put in place, the gymnasium was surveyed and materials were stored to configure it into a processing center with necessary medical facilities, additional telephone lines were installed in critical spots and many other things were done to provide for a quick transition into a viable posture for assisting in the mass evacuation of DAO and other Mission personnel. The planning also included a survey as to the number of U.S. personnel necessary to secure adequately the DAO complex if required. At this point in time I had grave doubts that my local hire local national guards would be able to provide the requisite security if pressed by RVNAF elements. A message asking for two USMC reinforced companies on a standby basis was dispatched on 2 April 1975. An advance party or survey team was requested at the same time and arrived on or about 7 April 1975. This party validated the requirement my own planning group had established. On 1 April I asked for authority to drawdown the Defense Attache Office. In order that the action could be explained to the JGS, I asked to be directed to reduce the size of the DAO in order to free up additional DAV funds for further immediate help to RVNAF. With this rationale I was able to secure approval for the reduction from Ambassador Martin. Within days authority and guidance were received.

On 1 April our Evacuation Control Center (ECC) was opened

on a 12 hour per day basis. By 3 April we had gone to a 24 hour operation principally in connection with the refugee operations being controlled by RADM Benton, CINCPAC representative for that purpose. On 4 April the first large shipment of materiel called forward arrived in a C5A aircraft. The same aircraft departed TSN in the late afternoon loaded with orphans being evacuated to the United States. In attendance were the first DAO employees to be moved out -- some 37 individuals -- mostly women. The C5A experienced a malfunction while over Vung Tau, returned to TSN and crashed on the approach. All but one of our employees were killed in the crash.

I assigned the JCRC element to recover the remains. This operation took several days. DAO personnel also provided significant assistance to the USAF crash damage assessment team which arrived within hours. Our personnel had been processed in the DAO theater and it was this building which we used through 21 April for processing of departees.

The processing operation was evolutionary in nature. It became evident that despite our best intentions we were not going to be able to move significant Americans from Saigon. C-141 aircraft bringing in materiel were departing with very few passengers. My investigation revealed that many personnel would not leave because of affiliations with local nationals. There were instances where personnel were legally married to local nationals but had not bothered to process the necessary paperwork for exit permission from the RVN. Others had families but had never bothered to marry and of course had no papers at all. Still others were married elsewhere but had additional families in Saigon whom they would not leave. There was no way to secure papers for these people under any circumstances. I advised the Embassy of these situations. Over a period of a week or ten days Consulate personnel were able to work out with the Ministry of Interior (MOI) a procedure which materially shortened the processing time for exit permission. Where six months plus had been required, the MOI now promised that it would not take longer than three days. The instrument being used was a Laissez Passe. By this time the American Consulate was using a parole document to provide entry permission for various classes of Vietnamese. With these two documents personnel could be processed and moved by air to Clark AFB in the Phillipines. It turned out, however, that only one person at the MOI could sign the Laissez Passe so the bottleneck remained to a lesser degree than before.

By this time the theater had been configured completely

for personnel processing. All of the seats had been removed and sufficient desks and other office furniture had been set up to provide for all processing (American Consulate and MOI) to be done on the premises. Once processed, a family was moved by bus to the DAO annex where plane-sized loads were organized prior to embarking. We still were not moving enough people, however.

On 14 April I met with all DAO contractors in an effort to convince them that a concerted effort must be made on their part to have their personnel leave the country. At this meeting the aforementioned processing changes were outlined. Subsequent to the meeting, however, I was called by one contractor advising me that his people would not leave until we somehow could move even those not legally married. On 16 April I met with all retired military personnel of which there were about 250 heads of families. A week before I had stopped their PX and Commissary privileges in an attempt to get them on their way out of country. This had had little effect. At the meeting I told them that the only smart thing to do was to leave the country. I advised them that they could return if things got better. Many questions were raised about processing. We advised them of our plans and operations with the MOI.

During this time our best efforts moved fewer than 500 personnel per day. I asked the Deputy Chief of Mission at the Embassy for some simple way to increase our throughput -- even if we had to resort to smuggling people out without MOI exit permits. During the days previously we had had some covert smuggling carried out by certain DAO employees or by air crews themselves. Emotions were running strong and there was great determination on the part of my American DAO employees that DAO local nationals were not going to be left behind. I had several papers on this problem from various employees -- U. S. employees making pleas for the movement of the local nationals with whom they worked.

We were making no progress. Finally, on 19 April, during his visit with Ambassador Martin, Admiral Gayler broached the subject and suggested that a simple piece of paper be used whereby a sponsor could sign an affidavit that personnel he listed were in fact his dependents and that he would be responsible for them after departure from the RVN. Ambassador Martin agreed to the suggestion and before we left the Embassy we drafted up a proposed affidavit form and left it with the Deputy Chief of Mission. That afternoon the form was reproduced and we began to use it.

This solved all paperwork problems and left Americans with no further excuse for remaining in country. From 20 April on our numbers of departees grew daily reaching over 6,000 for 27 April. Despite this effort we were not able to get all Americans out of Saigon. I had difficulty getting my own employees to depart. It was only when I threatened to separate anyone who had been directed to depart and had not, that my own ranks began to thin noticeably. There were several reasons for this. My own employees had a great deal of empathy with their local national co-workers and were determined to get as many of them as wanted to go out of the country. Further, those of my employees who had married or had acquired ties with Vietnamese women found it most difficult to get their wives or girl friends to leave without taking the entire family. In some instances they ended up doing just that. Contractor employees were also almost impossible to move unless they desired to go. Once an employee had been separated by the contractor, there was no way that he could be made to depart. The Embassy had no way to force the departure of any non-employed or employed American. I suggested to the Deputy Chief of Mission and later the Ambassador on more than one occasion that the government be asked to declare all Americans not contributing to the country's war or economic efforts persona non grata. They apparently were loathe to do that as long as President Thieu was in office. The Ambassador told me that he would consider it when President Huong had taken over. I do not believe that the subject was ever raised at all. It may have been politically undesirable to do so. My wife overheard an American telling another at the bank that he was not going to put up with the standing in lines and paperwork. He was going to wait until the big evacuation then he would bring out whomever he wanted. I am afraid that this feeling was shared by more than one American.

As the outmovement of personnel progressed we began to be visited by more and more RVNAF personnel. They were frantic to move their families out of Vietnam. They brought with them all records of their past contacts with Americans to prove that they were high risk personnel. Although few overtures were made by these officers to accompany their families, early in the operation I advised all my personnel that we would not be a party to helping any RVNAF personnel leave the country as long as fighting was going on and the government was still in power. During the week of 20 April, it became apparent that we were not able to control the entrance of RVNAF personnel into our compound and therefore our main office building. This lack of security had several adverse implications so I took two steps. We closed the processing point at the DAO theater and moved all processing to

the DAO Annex where we used the gymnasium as the overall processing point. This allowed us to control the entrance of RVNAF personnel much better. We borrowed 16 USMC personnel from the Embassy to help us control personnel being processed. Of necessity I had to close out the beer and liquor outlet in the Annex area in order to preclude any abuse from that direction. As the week progressed, we began losing control again so I asked for a platoon of USMC personnel from the Ground Support Force (GSF). These personnel arrived during the daylight hours of 25 April. They were ferried from the fleet off Vung Tau by Air America helicopters. This made all the difference in the world. There is something about a United States Marine that demands respect from the Vietnamese people. From the time of their arrival on we had and maintained complete control.

On or about 1730H on 28 April 1975, the flight line at TSN was bombed by A-37 aircraft. It is supposed that these aircraft most probably came from Phan Rang since VNAF quickly checked and ascertained that all A-37's under their current control were accounted for. Subsequent to the bombing the government imposed a 24 hour curfew. Later that evening I learned of the decision to discontinue the flow of C-141 aircraft into TSN. I was told that 60 sorties of C-130 aircraft could be expected for 29 April. Effective with the bombing of the flight line, the flow of C-130 aircraft was interrupted. In fact, from that time until approximately 0130H, 29 April, only three aircraft were inbound. These three carried hot cargo in the form of 15,000 pound bombs. After unloading they were available for passenger loading. Unfortunately, the timing of the rocket attack (0400H, 29 April) precluded such loading and in fact one C-130 was lost to rocket impact. This aircraft burned at TSN that morning.

As noted above, at about 0400H, 29 April 1975, TSN came under a rather heavy rocket attack. Two United States Marines of the Embassy Armed Guard Detachment who were manning a roadblock in the vicinity of Gate 4 of the DAO compound were killed by one of the first rockets. Another impacted within six feet of Quarters 1 and 2 and blew all occupants of the quarters (14 personnel) out of bed with no injuries. Two other rockets impacted in the DAO annex. Two Vietnamese suffered light injuries. From that point on the state for the evacuation was set.

In anticipation of moving some 10,000 personnel via the

sixty sorties scheduled for 29 April, both the DAO and Embassy compounds had a large number of staged personnel aboard. Had additional C-130 aircraft materialized during the night, there would have been many less personnel in the DAO area. In the DAO processing area there were approximately 2800 personnel, principally Vietnamese, ready for loading. During the day we would see an input of an additional 2870, again mostly Vietnamese. Some 395 U. S. citizens would be evacuated out of the total of 4870 evacuees from the DAO complex. At the Embassy, there were approximately 1000 personnel at the beginning of the 29th. During the day an additional 1000 plus would come aboard. These personnel were about 50 percent U. S. citizens. Specifically, of the 2098 evacuated from the Embassy compound, 978 were U. S. citizens.

As of early that morning, the plan was to continue with the fixed wing lift from TSN. It was hoped that we would be able to bring in the C-130 aircraft without undue danger as a result of rocketing. Unfortunately, the rocketing did not materially lessen as the morning progressed. Additionally, VNAF began to get quite restless as the rocketing progressed and in fact, sometime not long after daylight, VNAF began scrambling their aircraft. We learned later that many flew into Thailand while others proceeded to Con Son island, or to the U. S. Fleet off Vung Tau. We began to receive reports concerning foreign objects littering the runways at TSN and after having our personnel on the field check and re-check, it became clear that we were not going to be able to use the field for further fixed wing operations. I relayed this information to Ambassador Martin who chose to come out to the DAO compound for a personal look into the matter.

After Ambassador Martin arrived, we quickly briefed him on the situation. He, nevertheless, was quite strong in his convictions that we had to move a significant number of Vietnamese that day in order to carry out our commitment to our own employees, the high risk Vietnamese of the government and to RVNAF families. He discussed this with me in great detail and before departing called LTG Scowcroft in the White House from the DAO office. Subsequent to his departure, he called me from the Embassy and read to me a message from the White House stating that the C-130 lift would continue as long as feasible. At this point in time I was under orders to evacuate the DAO personnel by fixed wing aircraft.

Within an hour I had discussed the problems of the runways at TSN with CINCPAC and had agreed that there was no way that we



could continue the fixed wing lift. CINCPAC advised me that he was going to recommend to the JCS the execution of Phase IV of Frequent Wind. I called Ambassador Martin and so advised him. After ascertaining I was absolutely sure that there was no way to continue the fixed wing lift, Ambassador Martin agreed that he would call for the rotary wing evacuation. Within the hour the execute message had come through and Frequent Wind was in process.

The first evacuees departed the DAO compound by Air American helicopter about 1000H. We were unable to move personnel earlier because of lack of air crews. At the time of the rocketing, Air America had only one pilot available at their compound. As others became available during the morning, additional helicopters were activated and in fact Air America finally moved their operational element to the DAO building since their compound had become untenable as a result of the continued rocketing and VNAF interference. Early in the morning a refueling problem developed for Air America. The only refueling vehicle in their compound required manual pumping and the internal situation there precluded being on the ground long enough to refuel in this manner. Although we had positioned JP4 in our own compound and on various roof tops which were designated landing zones for the purpose of picking up U. S. personnel stranded in the city, these methods of refueling did not prove satisfactory either. Accordingly, most refueling operations were carried out aboard ship as further personnel were moved from the Saigon area to the fleet. A certain number of Air America helicopters were set down on in-city landing zones to await the movement of personnel to the compound.

During the period 0815H - 1745H, nine convoys of various mixes of buses were used to bring personnel into the DAO compound. The numbers of buses involved varied because from time to time we were directed by Embassy personnel to provide buses for movement of specified personnel. Unfortunately we thereby lost control of buses which could have been used to pick up additional personnel in the city. Two to five buses remained in the Embassy compound for the better part of the day. I do not believe that we failed to pick up any personnel as a result of this but we did have convoys moving throughout the city for a longer period than might have been necessary otherwise.

We were advised that the fixed wing overhead cover had crossed into Vietnam territory about 1230 H. The advance elements of the GSF arrived at the DAO compound by 1350H. Our first heavy lift helicopter arrived with GSF personnel by

1506H. A decision was made prior to this to backload the initial helicopters. This was a change to the published plan but was a good decision, particularly in consideration of the lateness of the day. Lifts were made from three landing zones in the DAO complex -- one at the annex, one at the ball field just outside the DAO compound and one adjacent to the DAO theater in the tennis court area. The evacuation ran quite smoothly, all things considered. As we began the lift from the annex area, ARVN airborne troops in an adjacent compound began to cut holes in the separating fence. This required extra effort on the part of the GSF to preclude a large influx of additional personnel. Late in the evening, the remaining personnel in the annex area were moved by road through the DAO Command Mess area to the landing zone at the ball park. This enabled us to dry up the annex area rather quickly and thereby close out the operation there.

Communications throughout the exercise were outstanding up until on or about 1915H. We were in constant secure voice communications with the NMCC, CINCPAC AND USSAG. We also had a constantly open line with USSAG. At about 1915H, the lights in the ECC failed. Emergency power was activated and this quickly reestablished our lighting. However, the loss of power knocked out our out-of-country communications. It turned out that one or more individuals outside the compound had shorted out our power lines using a long pole with a metal conductor on the end. I was advised that it would require at least forty minutes to reestablish communications. By that time the number of DAO personnel was quite small and I could see that within the hour we would be lifted out of the compound. Accordingly, I elected not to make the effort to reestablish communications out-of-country.

By 2000H I ordered all remaining DAO personnel to prepare to move and led them aboard two helicopters. We were airborne by 2015H and arrived at the Midway by 2055H. Although we were the last DAO personnel in the compound (with the exception of one Federal Electric Corporation employee left behind to assist in the destruction of communications equipment), I learned from the GSF commander that the compound continued to be used up until about 2400H, 29 April. Prior to leaving, communications were patched through for continued intramission use prior to destruction.

One final element which deserves special mention concerns the reactivation of the Bird contract. The idea to remove from Vietnam such assets as were acceptable to VNAF and the JGS was a good one. The Ambassador objected to moving anything out of country which was serviceable. I con-

sider his approach reasonable since the country was still engaged in a war of survival and needed all serviceable assets on hand with the possible exception of some of the turbine engines and other high dollar items. Nevertheless, you could not make a good case for moving any serviceable assets out of country. We encountered no problem with the removal of un-serviceable assets. As a matter of fact, earlier we had loaded out 30 to 40 mixed armored personnel carriers and tanks as well as a large quantity of unserviceable fire control instruments. The bulk of the readily available unserviceable assets belonging to VNAF were at Bien Hoa. At this point in time, on or about 25 April, Bien Hoa was coming under increasing enemy fire -- both rockets and artillery. Nevertheless, the Von Marbod team felt that they would be able to operate out of Bien Hoa despite the enemy fire so the Bird contract was re-initiated. The first C-130 arrived at Bien Hoa on 27 April.

During the past several days, the DAO transportation element had built up a backlog of from 85 to 100 pallets of package mail and household goods at TSN for outshipment. We had been able to get one pallet per departing aircraft shipped during this period. The bulk of the pallets had been left behind when the last ship sailed from Newport. On 27 April, one Bird aircraft loaded our pallets. Mr. Von Marbod had agreed to provide us with additional aircraft over the next several days. As it turned out, the shelling of Bien Hoa reached such an intensity on 28 April that Bird was not able to operate there past mid-morning. The aircraft already inbound were made available to DAO to move our palletized mail and household goods to Thailand. In addition, a palletized computer was moved by air that date. Had the Bird contract not been reactivated, all this material would have remained at TSN.