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Office of the White House Press Secretary
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STATUS REPORT: REFUGEES FROM INDOCHINA

The President is transmitting to the appropriate congressional committees the third report required by Section 4.(c) of the Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1975 (PL 94-23). The report describes aspects of the final phases of the refugee resettlement operation of the President's Special Inter-Agency Task Force which is charged with coordinating refugee resettlement activities. In addition to a description of reception center guidelines, the resettlement process, the report also contains annexes with historical material, a refugee profile, details on voluntary, state and local resettlement agencies; repatriation data, federal support, budgetary data and a listing of retrieval of funds.

BACKGROUND

The Interagency Task Force was established by the President on April 18, 1975 to coordinate all U.S. Government activities concerning evacuation, reception, and resettlement of refugees from Indochina. Personnel and resources were drawn from eighteen Federal Departments and Agencies: the Office of Management and Budget; the Departments of State, Treasury, Defense, Justice, Interior, Labor, Health, Education, and Welfare, Housing and Urban Development, and Transportation; the General Services Administration; the Small Business Administration; the U.S. Information Agency; the Agency for International Development; the Immigration and Naturalization Service; the Central Intelligence Agency; the Joint Chiefs of Staff; and the U.S. Marshals Service.

In less than two weeks, the first refugees started to arrive within the continental United States. With a pipeline extending back to Guam, Wake Island and Subic Bay, refugees continued to arrive around the clock. It was necessary to ready the installations in California, Arkansas, Florida and Pennsylvania to receive the newcomers within a very short time frame.

Responding to the President's request for legislative action, the Congress passed the Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1975 which the President signed into law on May 24, 1975.

In carrying out the mandate established for the Task Force and the provisions of the Refugee Act, the Task Force has continued to provide policy guidance and to operate the refugee reception centers, to negotiate agreements with the appropriate agencies that will result in sponsorships, to offer testimony before the appropriate Congressional Committees, to obtain program assistance from Federal agencies, to provide a toll-free number with staff to accept calls from potential sponsors and from refugees needing assistance, to provide computerized locator service, liaison with other countries interested in accepting refugees, to develop programs and literature to assist the refugees in understanding the resettlement process and the customs of the United States as well as to provide information to the public to encourage sponsorship.

The Task Force will cease operations and disband upon completion of its assigned task -- the resettlement of all the refugees. Preparations are underway for the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare to take over at that time. HEW will be concerned with follow-up on the success of the program, provision of services to the refugees, and the maintenance of a center for response to and referral of inquiries and problems related to the Indochina refugees.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE REPORT

- The last of some 130,000 refugees to be resettled in the United States is scheduled to leave from the remaining resettlement center at Fort Chaffee, Arkansas, December 20. The center at Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania closed December 15. Two other centers in continental United States were closed earlier: Eglin, Florida, September 15; Pendleton, California, October 31.
- Another 6,629 refugees were resettled in other countries, with Canada and France taking the largest share, and 1,546 have been repatriated, as of December 15.
- Another 115 Cambodians requesting repatriation departed Fort Chaffee on December 11 for Philadelphia where they will be housed for the next three months in a halfway house funded by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in a contract with the American Council for Nationalities Service. All 115 have refused sponsorship pending the outcome of forthcoming negotiations between the High Commissioner and authorities in Cambodia.
- Refugees have been resettled in every state, ranging from 81 in Alaska to 27,199 in California, as of December 10. After California, States with the largest numbers of refugees are, in order, Texas, Pennsylvania, Florida, Washington, New York, Minnesota, Virginia, and Oklahoma. Guam has 778 refugees, Samoa and Puerto Rico one each.
- Data from a preliminary survey released October 8 indicates that 65 percent of the heads of households are employed, while an additional 18 percent are actively seeking employment. Only 18 percent of the refugees surveyed were receiving financial assistance.
- A second survey and report is underway and is due in mid-January. A contractor for the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) will interview by phone refugees released from reception centers since the first report and also interview for a second time a percentage of those interviewed earlier. This survey plus a number of site visits will be continued by HEW.
- The activities of the Task Force in the last eight months can be visualized in three overlapping phases: evacuation, reception and resettlement. The first, evacuation was implemented by the military services and foreign affairs agencies. The second phase, reception, also placed the heaviest burden upon the military services which had to, on extremely short notice, select and establish a number of Pacific staging areas and reception centers in the United States for the refugees. Staging areas were established at Utapao, Thailand; Subic Bay, Philippines; Guam and Wake. U.S. reception centers were provided by the Marine Corps at Camp Pendleton, California; the Air Force at Eglin Air Force Base, Florida; and the Army at Fort Chaffee, Arkansas, and Indiantown Gap Military Reservation, Pennsylvania.

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- The third phase of domestic Task Force activities, resettlement, is one that will be carried over to HEW in January.
- The Task Force, created by the President on April 18, has tested the ability of working levels of several government agencies to cooperate effectively. During the course of its eight-month life, the Task Force has undergone a transition from a foreign affairs agency to one whose orientation is now almost completely domestic.
- The principal operational responsibility for the Task Force was transferred on July 21 from the Department of State to the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW). Julia Vadala Taft, Deputy Assistant Secretary of HEW for Human Development since October, 1973, was named Director of the Task Force.
- The voluntary resettlement agencies were the prime movers and the first recourse of resettlement. The nine voluntary agencies initially called upon by the Task Force to take first line responsibility for resettlement of the Indochina refugees all had proved their effectiveness in earlier refugee programs, those having their roots in World War II and the more recent Hungarian and Cuban refugee movements.
- The work of these agencies was later supplemented by a number of State and local governments whose elected leaders took upon themselves the responsibility of resettling within their communities large numbers of refugees.
- The resettlement agencies, whether religiously oriented, secular, or as in some cases governmental, were responsible for the actual details of resettlement. They interviewed and counseled the refugees; they sought out, encouraged and verified sponsors, whether individuals, families, churches, civic organizations or other groups, they spent long painstaking hours arranging amenable matches between sponsors and refugees, and following up on many important details required to develop a viable long-term resettlement arrangement.
- Total funding availability to the Indochina evacuation and resettlement program is \$505,277,454. As of November 30, total obligations were \$358,915,625.

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