



"All the News
That's Fit to Print"

The New York Times

LATE CITY EDITION

Weather: Continued mostly cloudy,
cool today, tonight and tomorrow.
Temperature range: today 45-58;
Tuesday 45-53. Details on Page 81.

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20 CENTS

DUONG MINH SURRENDERS, VIETCONG IN SAIGON; 1,000 AMERICANS AND 5,500 VIETNAMESE EVACUATED BY COPTER TO U.S. CARRIERS

GREECE AGREE
END HOME PORT
FOR THE 6TH FLEET

base of Americans at
is Also Closed, but
Facilities Remain

United Press International
NS, April 29—United
and Greek officials an-
today the termination
home-port arrangement
th Fleet ships at the
Eleusis near Athens and
ing of the American air
Athens airport.

announcement came in a
tement at the end of
round of talks on the
United States military
in Greece.
Greek Government



FORD UNITY PLEA

END OF DEFENSE

President Says That
Departure 'Closes a
Chapter' for U.S.

Troops Leave Posts
in Capital and Turn
in Their Weapons

By JOHN W. FINNEY

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, April 29—
The United States ended two
decades of military involvement
in Vietnam today with the
evacuation of about 1,000
Americans from Saigon as well
as more than 5,500 South Viet-
namese.

The emergency helicopter
evacuation was ordered last
night by President Ford after
the Saigon airport was closed.

Ford statement and excerpts
from Kissinger's, Page 17.

because of Communist rocket

By The Associated Press

SAIGON, South Vietnam
Wednesday, April 30—Presi-
Duong Van Minh announced
day the unconditional sur-
render of the Saigon Govern-
and its military forces to
Vietcong.

Columns of South Vietnam
troops pulled out of their
defensive positions in the cap-
ital and marched to central po-
st to turn in their weapons.

[In Washington, the Whi-
te House said that Presi-
dent Ford had "no comment"
on the surrender of Saigon,
a White House spokes-
man said the surrender was

On April 30, 1975, the People's Army of Vietnam captured the city of Saigon. That day marked the end of the Vietnam war, and the day my family escaped the chaos. I was 12 years old.

The war had been raging since the day I was born, growing right alongside me. Fortunately for our family, living in Saigon, we were not as affected by the fighting as many others. But April 30 changed that in an instant, and altered the rest of my life.



Including aunts, uncles and cousins, there were 19 of us. Everything happened so fast, I still don't know to this day how we ended up as some of the few lucky ones that managed to make our way on to a boat, and flee the death and destruction piling up behind us. We had no food. Whoever wasn't carrying a child was carrying a few small things we would share. We were all afraid of getting caught, which meant execution, and we were all terrified of the unknown waters we motored into.



The days at sea were terrifying. There was mass exodus and chaos to the highest level on the day we left the shore of Vung Tau. The boat was packed with people with no room left to stand. We were packed in there like squished sardines. The women and children were put below inside the boat and the men stayed outside and on top. We were all so frightened. Children were crying, some people were vomitting and many prayed for protection and safety. I remembered we were so packed and crammed into such a little space that it was so claustrophobic. They were trying to get as many people on the boat they can hold without it sinking. We didn't know what to expect and what was ahead of us. As we left shore, the communists were shooting at us and all the boats in the harbor. We were shot at but luckily we were able to escape to sea. It was terrifying to us all. From adults to the babies.



With no certain line to navigate, and with no more land in sight, after 5 days at sea with no food and little water, we were again scooped up with the lucky ones, and a merchant marine ship rescued us. They were not prepared for all the refugees they were rescuing.





Many fell to their deaths trying to climb on board
when their boat was latched to the ship.



My parents and older brothers were terrified of how they will climb the rope ladder with each a younger sibling in one arm and using one arm to climb with the the other . Too many tried to do it and they fell to their deaths. They finally had an idea to lower a palette inside a rope cover thing so we wouldn't fall out. We wouldn't have made it if my siblings had to climb the rope ladder. Once on board, they didn't have enough food for the refugees so we were only given a tablespoon of cooked white rice for each meal.





Along with others they had rescued, they brought us to a refugee camp in Guam. The ground was mostly rocky, and we had no shoes. But the people were kind, and we knew we were fortunate.



From there we were flown to a camp in Pennsylvania, and eventually we were sponsored by a Catholic parish in Nebraska. With the vivid and horrible memories of the last few months still swirling in my head, and knowing no English, my journey as an American had begun.



Now, years later, with grown children of my own, looking back I realize just how lucky I was. Not only did our family escape, but through the sheer kindness of so many others, every step of the way, we managed to re-settle in the one country that people from around the world dream of moving to. I have been blessed with a beautiful family at home, and at work. And I feel inside, now more than ever, a desire to give something back, to try and make a difference in someone else's life, the way so many others have done for my family.



My Big Idea is to return to the country, the town, the neighborhood, where I was born and spent my early years. I have not had the opportunity to go back to Vietnam since the day we fled. I yearn to see the people of my native land, especially the children. I want to peer into the eyes of 12 year olds, and look for my reflection. I want to re-connect with the people and land that I was torn away from and forced to abandon. And I want to look for ways to help them.

It is no secret that poverty persists in Vietnam, and as with any place living in those conditions, it affects the children the most. I want to explore the most effective ways to help these children, and bring that knowledge back home here to raise awareness, and to encourage others to participate in helping those children. By visiting them there, I hope to bring home here more than just an address to send money to.



My first goal would be to raise money from my family and friends. I would use this to purchase necessities and gifts, which I would bring with me to give to the kids, especially those in rural areas, where they often live in very poor conditions. I will get advice on the most important things to bring from friends I have in Vietnam, who are a part of my second goal:

Starting a few years back through friends and family that traveled to Vietnam, and continuing today via Facebook, I have found friends in Vietnam who regularly organize charity events for children.

They personally give of their time and money to help. One among them, who I most frequently contact, has been very effective. She has organized a diverse group, including government employees, businessmen and women, housewives, retired seniors, students and kids. They donate their time and money to a variety of things, including:

- Making and distributing gifts for homeless people on New Year's Eve.
- Granting scholarships for orphans in the SOS Ben Tre province.
- Providing children of nursery school age in Ha Giang province with blankets and food.
- Providing older kids with books, school supplies, and new uniforms.



Most unique about her approach is that with every activity they organize, they involve their own children in the process. Whether it's wrapping books as gifts, distributing food and medicine, baking mid-autumn cakes to send to kids in far-away mountains, or delivering their new-year blessings to old men on the streets, their children are always involved. And through this involvement, their kids, who are growing up in more privileged conditions, have a chance to experience the hard lives of others who are not as lucky as they. It helps to give them an appreciation for their own circumstances, and to encourage in them a sense of kindness and empathy. I admire this approach, which not only helps people today, but also hopefully prepares the next generation to think of others, and to look for new ways to help. The Xplore program would allow me to meet these people face to face, to work beside them, and to become more personally involved in their charitable activities, now, and in the future.



Ha Giang


So after initially spending time in my home town, it is with the help of friends like this that I intend to broaden the scope of my trip, and to experience the lives of other children in other areas. My friends know of this opportunity I have, and that I may soon be able to visit them, and they look forward to showing me different provinces, such as:

- Ha Giang, a beautiful area but very hard living.
- Ba Me Thuot, a poor province known for its diversity of races.
- Ben Tre, a green paradise in the middle of the Mekong Delta, where people are thought of as especially hospitable and friendly.



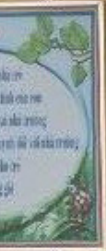
Ba Me Thuot





Ha Giang





There are many other places in Vietnam that need help. My dream is to start small, and with the support of the Xplore program, to lend a hand, to learn for myself, and to grow my involvement. I think of Ruhnau Ruhnau Clarke as a big family, and I'd like to take you along with me on this journey. My hope is that my experiences will help me to motivate others here in the U.S. to get involved, especially those in the Vietnamese communities. My knowledge from traveling there will help me to encourage them to take action and to make a real difference in the lives of 12 year olds, and of all the children, of Vietnam. Thank you for this opportunity.



XPLORE: #201603