



NEWS RELEASE

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THOUSANDS OF EVACUEES ARRIVE AT CLARK

CLARK AB, R.P. (April 22) -- Nineteen days into the operation of airlifting evacuees from South Vietnam, military personnel and volunteers at this base have witnessed thousands of children and adults arriving from the Saigon area.

During the initial phases, the airlift was known as Operation Babylift as the Air Force rushed in an average of six C-141 Starlifters a day to ferry the Saigon orphans to safety.

Beginning on April 5 Starlifters shuttled between Saigon and Clark and by the end of Tuesday, April 15, 892 orphans had arrived. A trickle of the orphan count also came from Thailand where air crews brought out a small number of homeless Cambodian youngsters.

Clark, the largest American military installation outside of the Continental United States, had opened its heart to the orphans as the youngsters, many of them toddlers and infants, were brought in, medically checked, cleaned, fed and individually cared for. Some had to be hospitalized for illnesses such as minor skin infections, malnutrition, dehydration, and diarrhea.

By the second week all the orphans but five had departed Clark for the United States and a new start in life.

Volunteer workers put in more than 37,000 hours during the crisis to handle the orphans, according to Chaplain (Colonel) Paul Wragg, installation chaplain who acted as the volunteer

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coordinator.

As Chaplain Wragg put it, since most of his work involves volunteers in one capacity or another, he was the most logical person to head up this aspect of the airlift operation.

Following closely on the heels of Operation Babylift, air crews were alerted to begin evacuating non-essential personnel and their dependents from the Saigon area.

For the second time within a month Clark, a base that recently was named "the Heart of the Pacific", was put to the task of supporting a massive airlift that was history in the making.

The call went out again for volunteers, both military and dependents, to come to the aid of those in need, and again the people of Clark rolled up their sleeves to aid and assist the evacuees who were transiting this huge American air base.

The midnight oil burned late throughout the base as plans to house, care and feed Americans and their dependents leaving South Vietnam began. All available buildings that weren't being used or could be spared were pressed into use to provide housing for the new arrivals.

Mess halls juggled regular schedules to attempt to feed the masses. Civil engineering crews started each morning at dawn for several days to erect a "tent city" in an effort to accommodate

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the overflow of evacuees.

To handle the many needs of coordination in the operation administrative personnel, communicators, security police forces, transportation, supply men and women and hospital workers braced for the expected increase of flights bringing in the evacuees.

And fly they did. For the first phases of the operation usually four to six C-141 Starlifters poured in from Saigon. Then the air crew load doubled over the weekend (April 19-20) and doubled again Monday and into the wee hours of Tuesday.

By mid-Tuesday Clark, a base that normally has a military complement of slightly under 10,000, was swelling with evacuees. U.S. Embassy officials scurried to complete the necessary paperwork to speed the refugees on their way to the United States and home.

At press time the flights were continuing to arrive at Clark almost every hour from Saigon. For a fortunate few the first leg of the journey to safety was this Pacific military base that has known tragedy and happiness on many occasions in this century -- Project Homecoming in 1973 when the American Prisoners of War were released from North and South Vietnam and World War II that saw an enemy force over-running the installation and occupying it for years, just to name a few.

But another chapter in the Clark Air Base history is being written today by the world press corps. And the thousands of military men and women and their dependents are living it.