

Vietnamese. . .

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Nip estimated that as many as 500 elderly persons died before they reached Nha Trang. Those who died near the edge of the barge were thrown overboard. The corpses in the center of the barge were propped up by the crowd on board until they reached Nha-Trang.

He said he vividly remembers a family of five standing near him. Two of the children died and were thrown into the sea. Nip said the father, feeling responsible for their deaths, jumped overboard.

That trip, although Nip called it the worst of the month's long journey, was only the beginning. He said he feared the North Vietnamese were chasing him down the coast. In each of 6 coastal cities, from Nha Trang to Cam Ranh Base to Phan Rang to Phan Thiet to Vung Tau, Nip stayed only a few miles ahead of the North Vietnamese advance.

Six days later, after hitching rides on



Photo by Bob Pearson

Nghiep (Nip) Huynh

buses, trucks and fishing boats, he arrived in Saigon. His stay in Saigon lasted three weeks.

After the resignation of two presidents that month, the third, President Duong-Van Minh, announced the surrender on April 30.

As Nip relates it, his final escape was a thin one in the street outside of his brother's home, where he was staying. Separated from his unit and wearing an officer's uniform he said his alternatives were to run, or face death or imprisonment by the Communists.

He ran. At the harbor he jumped aboard the first ship he found. The ship, packed with 2,000 fellow refugees, took him to Singapore. This voyage was only slightly more comfortable than the flight from Da Nang. There was water, but no food.

The next three days he spent in a jail-like compound in Singapore. Though conditions were frightful, he said he was glad to be there. There was food.

In the days following, things improved. He spent 20 days at Subic Bay, an American navy base in the Philippines. In the next three months he stayed at Wake Island and Fort Chaffee, Ark.

It was a hellish few months, Nip said, but adds that he does not regret it.

"At least here I have freedom," Nip said. "But I would like to return. It is my home."

He spoke almost no English when he arrived. "I could only say 'hello' when I was there."

He has had only one contact with Vietnam since he arrived. One letter to a friend in Saigon, now Ho Chi Minh City, got through.

He does not fear for his family's safety, he said. His father was a revolutionary against the French in the 1950s, and has influential friends in the Communist Party.

Despite the cultural and linguistic barriers he faces here, Nip said he has few complaints, he has been treated well.

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