

Escape

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and Voice of America.

"The greatest evacuation has been complete," the broadcasts said. "There is no more American presence in Vietnam."

He took his cousin's scooter and told him that if they saw him at home tonight, he was still there. He then drove to the U.S. Embassy.

"I left without saying goodbye to too many people," Vu said, trying to hold back the sadness he still feels.

At the embassy, a helicopter landed on top of the building, but when they went up to the top to try and get on, the door was locked. He ran back down and tried to get people to clear the lawn so the helicopter could land on the ground. But even after the Marines threw down smoke grenades, the people would pile back into the empty space. So the helicopter took off.

Plan F: Vietnamese Navy

After the helicopter left, Vu ran to the canal where a South Vietnamese navy base was located. He had gone to school and was friends with some people who were stationed there.

First, though, he stopped by a coffee shop to grab something to eat. Some sailors were at the shop.

"I told them my situation that I was looking for a way out and asked, 'Can you help me?'" Vu said. He showed them his address book, which listed addresses of friends Vu had overseas. One of the sailors told Vu that he was a gate guard and would be at the gate at a certain time at which Vu could come and be let on the base.

"I went, but the guy wasn't there," Vu said.

Plan G: Patrol boat

Next to the canal was a check point and Vu saw a patrol boat come in.

"As soon as it docked, I threw my stuff in and jumped in," he said. "The captain said, 'I'm not going anywhere. I haven't seen my wife for six months.'"

However, Vu convinced him to take him to the other side of the canal, but when they got there, they found the communists already attacking the area. So, they picked up as many wounded soldiers as they could and went back to their starting point.

"As soon as I stepped foot on the ground, the troops shot toward me and I took cover. I took out a white hanky and waved it, yelling, 'Civilian! Civilian!'"

They arrested him.

"By this time, all the people outside were looking for a way out," Vu said. "They saw the tanks and ran for their lives. They ran to the navy base and found the ship. People kept piling up and piling up and piling up. I realized we had to do something to keep order and get the people to work together."

Vu found five colonels in the group still wearing their uniforms and asked them to try to get the group under control. However, when one of the colonels started talking, the people yelled back at him.

"Now it's my turn," Vu said he thought. "I prayed quickly about that and started speaking, 'Mighty people, now is the time for us to help one another. Now is the time for you to pray. If you trust me this is what you can show to support me.'"

Vu asked them to surrender their weapons. He said that then they would search the people and if they still had weapons, they would be asked to leave. And if they resisted, they would be thrown into the water.

Then, he separated the group into mechanics, medics and soldiers and they started rebuilding the engine and preparing the ship to leave.

Then, Vu said he stopped and thought about his family.

"Should I go home and bring the rest of my family or stay?" Vu asked. After considering all the possibilities, he bargained with God that if he could get out somebody would come help the rest of his family.

At 2 p.m., after four hours of working on the ship, the engine started.

"I looked over and a tank was 200 yards away from me with its guns pointed at the ship," Vu said. "I told the people to take cover and hide."

They rose a white bedsheet and pointed the ship's gun upward in surrender mode while chopping the cable so the ship could float away. They almost hit the other side of the canal before realizing that the ship needed to be steered.

On their way out into the sea, they picked up people who were escaping in small boats. In all, the ship built for 150 passengers had 5,000 people on board.

Vu realized he wouldn't be able to feed all the people, and then someone informed him that there were two foreigners on board.

"I didn't care who they were, I was going to say they were Americans," Vu said. Then, he radioed an SOS to the South Vietnam Seventh Fleet.

"We're the last ship to leave

"I have no relief. If I use the priests in the...
"Either civilian or military. It greatly affects the...
"There's not enough priests," Vu said.
service each week before Easter.
also take turns hosting a communal penance...
The priests, including one from Starkville,
evening mass.
and the priest from West Point can cover the...
a.m. mass between his church's two services...
needs a vacation, Dore can conduct the 9:15...
called away on a deployment, for training or...
and 5:30 p.m. at CAFB. This way, if Vu is...
and 10:30 a.m. at Annunciation and 9:15 a.m...
set in Columbus. Services are Sundays at 8 a.m...
One example of this is how the mass times are...
along with other priests in the Golden Triangle...
parishes in Columbus, they do work together...
While Vu and Dore serve two different...
Stretching to serve

hope, help and comfort.
and stayed on scene for three days providing...
the conference, went directly to the Pentagon...
Cathedral when the attacks took place. He left...
conference at the Washington National

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Priests

14C THE COMMERCIAL DISPATCH



Kelly Tippett/Dispatch Staff

neys to escape

wever, in the afternoon, the truck...
er showed up. It had been stopped...
ing and earlier run, searched and...
ver and people in the truck were...
sted and the truck was seized.

in C: The sea

Vu went to go buy or rent a ship to...
his family out via the sea, but that...
on was deterred very quickly as the...
n bridge that connected Saigon was...
vn up.
I went home very disappointed,"...
said. "I looked at other areas until I...
exhausted."

n D: Make peace and stay

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Plan H: Rebuild a ship

While sitting in jail, Vu told his guards about his situation and they told him that he wasn't going anywhere.

"You don't understand what's going on," he told them. "I understand."

He even told them that he used to date one of the girls on the base whose father was a captain. Nothing worked.

Nothing until the South Vietnam surrender announcement was made public. Then they took off their uniforms and let him go.

Since he was already inside the Navy compound, he ran to the dock.

"I found a seaworthy vessel," Vu said. He searched the ship and found enough water fuel and food. It just needed its engine rebuilt.

He asked the crew to stay, but most just wanted to go home. Only the chief engineer stayed.

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"I didn't care who they were, I was going to say they were Americans," Vu said. Then, he radioed an SOS to the South Vietnam Seventh Fleet.

"We're the last ship to leave Vietnam with two Americans on board. Come and pick us up," he said.

They came and told Vu that he was too brave to have come that far, but they transferred the people over to their ships and then sunk the original ship.

Freedom

Eight days later, Vu found himself in Subic Bay in the Philippines.

"I immediately saw my chance to get to the U.S. was real," he said. "The refugee center was already up and processing people to go. I immediately processed."

Three days later, on May 11, 1975, Vu was at Fort Chaffee, Ark.

"I saw God's hand in it," Vu said. "That I could escape without a scratch and past the 11th hour when the communists had come to take over. I was on the last ship out of Vietnam."

neys

to escape

never, in the afternoon, the truck er showed up. It had been stopped ng and earlier run, searched and er and people in the truck were sed and the truck was seized.

n C: The sea

to want to go buy or rent a ship to his family out via the sea, but that n was deterred very quickly as the bridge that connected Saigon was n up. "I went home very disappointed," said. "I looked at other areas until I exhausted."

D: Make peace and stay

was ready to give up," Vu said. "anticipating what may happen when the communists took over, I d to make peace with the com- t propaganda." "I decided to throw a party at his and invited people he had ed in discussions on communism

you saw me looking for a way out, t not now," he told them. "I'm ow, if you need me, you can use vices."

E: Obey

is is the hand of God in it," Vu n the middle of the night, I e voice, 'Minh, I want you to woke up, but didn't see anyone, ent up to his roof. There were g happening all over Saigon. He until morning to come down cked the news on BBC London

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