

ON 28 APRIL 1975 I DEPARTED SAIGON FOR AN RON TOUR AT [V-17] [CAN THO] AS SCHEDULED. I WAS PICKED UP IN [SAIGON] BY [HITCHMAN] IN [HELICOPTER #20105] AND FLEW AS HIS CO-PILOT THE REMAINDER OF THE DAY. OUR CUSTOMER [MAX] RODE WITH US. OUR MISSION WAS LIFTING [VIETNAMESE] FROM VARIOUS LOCATIONS IN THE VIETNAM DELTA TO A [U. S. NAVY SHIP] LOCATED JUST OFFSHORE OF THE [MOUTH OF THE BRANCH OF THE MEKONG RIVER] ON WHICH CAN THO IS LOCATED. THE SHIP WAS THE [VANCOUVER] ESCORTED BY THE [PIONEER CONTENDER]. OUR METHOD AS ARRANGED BY THE CUSTOMER WAS TO EXTRACT PEOPLE FROM VARIOUS RANDOM PICKUP POINTS. THE PEOPLE WERE LOADED INTO VEHICLES AND DRIVEN OUT OF THE CITY WHILE WE CIRCLED OVERHEAD OBSERVING. WHEN THE VEHICLES WERE CLEAR OF THE CITY, AND OTHER HIGHWAY TRAFFIC THEY WOULD JUST STOP ALONG THE ROAD NEAR A FIELD AND START UNLOADING WHILE WE MADE AN APPROACH INTO THE FIELD FOR THE PICKUP. THIS METHOD WORKED VERY WELL AND ATTRACTED LITTLE, IF ANY, ATTENTION. WE THEN FLEW THE PEOPLE TO THE [VANCOUVER] HAVING COMPLETED SEVERAL LOADS IN THIS MANNER WE INQUIRED OF THE CUSTOMER WHEN THE AMERICANS WERE GOING TO BEGIN EVACUATING AS THERE WERE APPROXIMATELY 50 AMERICANS STILL IN THE AREA AND WE HAD ONLY 3 HELICOPTERS WORKING THE AREA. WE WOULD LIKE TO HAVE MOVED MOST OF THE AMERICANS WHO WERE NOT ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY TO THE EVACUATION OUT TO THE SHIPS, THEREBY ATTAINING A CAPABILITY OF PICKING UP THE REMAINING AMERICANS IN ONE LIFT. FROM PAST EXPERIENCE BETWEEN [HUE AND NHA TRANG] THE PANIC SPREAD SO RAPIDLY WE FELT THIS WAS THE BEST PLAN. IN REPLY, [CHRISTIAN] ADVISED US THAT THEY HAD EVERYTHING ARRANGED, AND THAT WE SHOULD CONTINUE TO WORK AS DIRECTED BUT HE DID NOT OUTLINE HIS PLAN TO US.

APPROVED FOR  
RELEASE  
DATE:  
13-Mar-2009

(WE WERE TO LEARN LATER THAT THE CONSULATE'S EVACUATION PLAN EXCLUDED THE USE OF AIR AMERICA, AND THAT HE PUT MORE FAITH IN THE RVN RIVER POLICE AND VNAF). SO WE CONTINUED TO EVACUATE VIETNAMESE ALL DAY THE 28TH OF APRIL.

THAT EVENING WE SPENT THE NIGHT IN [CAN THO] AT THE [PALM SPRINGS COMPOUND] [THE HELICOPTER WITH US ON THE TENNIS COURT] JUST PRIOR TO LANDING, WE INTERCEPTED RADIO TRAFFIC DISCUSSING THE BOMBING OF [TAN SON NHUT AIRPORT] [IN SAIGON] AND ALL RELATED ACTIONS. REALIZING THAT THIS WAS WITHOUT A DOUBT THE TIME TO START THE EVACUATION IN "HIGH GEAR" WE HAD LENGTHY DISCUSSIONS WITH ALL THE CUSTOMERS THAT EVENING, AND URGED THEM TO ASSEMBLE ALL AMERICANS FOR EVACUATION. WE HAD PLANNED TO COMPLETE THAT AS EXPLAINED ABOVE. BUT NEXT MORNING WE FLEW THE GREATER PORTION OF THE MORNING ON WHAT WE CONSIDERED "TIME WASTERS" BEFORE WE WERE INSTRUCTED TO EVACUATE VIETNAMESE AS THE DAY BEFORE. ONE OF THE PILOTS, [CAPT. TAYLOR] WHO WAS THE "THIRD CHOPPER" (HE WAS MORE OR LESS BACKUP AND SAR, STANDBY) BECAME SO IMPATIENT WITH THE OBVIOUS BLUNDERING IN THE U.S. CONSULATE HE THREATENED TO RETURN TO SAIGON WHERE HE MIGHT BE PUT TO MORE PRODUCTIVE FLYING. THE WHOLE SITUATION WAS UTTER CONFUSION, RAPID LAST MINUTE PLANNING THAT SHOULD HAVE BEEN PLANNED WEEKS BEFORE. WE WERE RETURNING FROM THE [BARBOUR COUNTY (SHIP)] WHEN [MAX] INFORMED US THAT THE CONSUL WAS NOW READY TO EVACUATE. WE WERE OVER [CAN THO] WITHIN 20 MINUTES OF THIS DECISION, THEN SPENT 45 MINUTES TRYING TO ARRANGE A PICKUP AREA FOR [MCNAMARA] AND PARTY. HE, MEANWHILE, WAS DRIVING ALL OVER TOWN TRYING TO DECIDE WHERE WE WOULD PICK HIM UP. BY THIS TIME WE WERE RUNNING LOW

ON FUEL, AND RISKED A LANDING AT THE [CAN THO] AIRFIELD FOR FUEL. WE WERE WAVED OFF BY SOLDIERS WITH RIFLES. WE LANDED IN THE [SHELL] OIL COMPOUND, WHERE WE FILLED THE TANK, WHILE MAX CONTINUED TO TALK TO THE [CONSUL] ON HIS PORTABLE SET. WE SAT AT IDLE IN [SHELL] COMPOUND FOR ANOTHER 40 MINUTES WHILE THE CUSTOMERS WERE TRYING TO DECIDE WHERE THEY WANTED US TO PICK THEM UP. AT THIS TIME, [MAX] CAME BACK AND ADVISED US THAT [MCNAMARA] DECIDED TO GO BY BOAT DOWN THE RIVER, AND HAD IN FACT STARTED LOADING. WE WERE PRETTY MUCH AGHAST, BUT WE TOOK OFF AND CIRCLED [CAN THO,] OBSERVING ONE OF THE LANDING CRAFT STARTING DOWN RIVER, AND THE OTHER JUST LEAVING FARTHER UPRIVER, AND GOING THROUGH THE CHANNEL TOWARD THE OPEN RIVER TO THE EAST. THEY WERE ABOUT 1/2 MILE APART. WE THOUGHT THEY WERE TRYING TO GET TO A SAFER PICK UP AREA. WE WERE ADVISED THAT THEY HAD 23 PERSONS; WE ADVISED WE COULD GET THEM ALL IN THE 2 HELICOPTERS [CAPT. OLSON] WAS WITH US IN [4F??]. CIRCLING OVERHEAD WE TRIED TO STEER THEM TO SUITABLE LANDING AREAS ON THE RIVER WHERE THEY COULD BEACH FOR PICK UP, BUT THEY PASSED THEM ALL. ABOUT THIS TIME WE WERE ADVISED THAT [MCNAMARA] DIDN'T WANT TO BE PICKED UP BECAUSE HE HAD MADE ARRANGEMENTS WITH ALL THE VIETNAMESE POLICE AND MILITARY AND WAS GOING TO NAVIGATE THE RIVER TO THE SEA FOR PICK UP. WE ADVISED HIM THAT WE FELT THAT ANYONE THAT MISGUIDED SHOULD DO SO, BUT LET US LAND ON THE BOAT, IF NECESSARY AND PICK UP THOSE WHO WOULD RATHER BE FLOWN OUT. WE WERE ADVISED SOMETHING TO THE EFFECT OF "BUZZ OFF". IMMEDIATELY AFTER THIS MAX WAS BACK ON HIS SET WITH SOMEONE ELSE AND 15 MINUTES LATER WE LANDED ON THE ROOF OF ONE OF THE BUILDINGS IN [PALM SPRINGS] AND PICKED UP A [LOAD OF AMERICANS] [CAPT. TAYLOR]

LANDED ON A TINY PIER AND PICKED UP THE LAST (3 AMERICANS) TO OUR KNOWLEDGE IN (CAN THO.) (CAPT. OLSON) BROKE OFF AND HEADED FOR (CON SON ISLAND) WHERE ONE OF OUR PLANES WAS DOWN WITH ENGINE TROUBLE. WE WERE ABOUT HALF WAY TO THE (BARBOUR COUNTY) WHEN (MAX) RECEIVED A CALL FROM THE (MCNAMARA PARTY) ADVISING THAT THEY HAD BEEN STOPPED BY THE RIVER POLICE, VNAF PLANES WERE BUZZING THEM MENACINGLY, AND THEY ASKED (AIR AMERICA) TO PLEASE RADIO THE (U.S. MARINES) FOR A (LARGE HELICOPTER) TO COME TO (CAN THO WITH FIGHTER COVER) IF NECESSARY TO PICK THEM UP. WE CONTACTED THE CAPTAIN OF THE (BARBOUR COUNTY) AND GAVE HIM GRID COORDINATES AND LATITUDE/LONGITUDE LOCATIONS OF THE (CAN THO CONGEN PARTY) WE WERE ADVISED THAT WE COULD NOT GET THEM OUT ANYMORE, BECAUSE THEY WERE "UP TO THEIR NECKS" IN VIETNAMESE POLICE AND MILITARY DEMANDING TO BE EVACUATED. SO AFTER WE MADE OUR DROP ON THE (BARBOUR COUNTY) WE WENT TO ASSIST AT (CON SON ISLAND) WHEN WE ARRIVED THAT SITUATION WAS ALMOST UNDER CONTROL, WE WAITED LONG ENOUGH TO COVER (JOHN FORD AND PARTY,) THEN FLEW TO SAIGON WITH ONLY ONE LAST FUEL STOP ENROUTE ON ONE OF THE SHIPS. ARRIVING IN THE (SAIGON AREA) WE OBSERVED AIR AMERICA HELICOPTERS EVERYWHERE PICKING UP PEOPLE FROM ROOFTOPS AND SHUTTLING TO THE (DAO PAD) AND THE (EMBASSY ROOF TOP). WE WERE INSTRUCTED BY THE (COM) TO TRY TO PICK UP SOME PEOPLE ON THE ("F" PAD) TALKING TO THE MAN AT ("F" PAD) WE LEARNED HE WASN'T AT THE PAD AT ALL, BUT TWO FLOORS BELOW THE ROOF OF THE NEXT BUILDING. WE TOLD HIM TO GET UP TO THE ROOF, BUT HE SAID HE COULDN'T. WE MADE TWO APPROACHES TO THE BUILDING, BUT PEOPLE WERE RUNNING INTO THE YARD BELOW, AND ON THE SECOND APPROACH

WE SAW SEVERAL SOLDIERS WITH RIFLES KNEEL AND AIM AT US. I DON'T KNOW IF THEY FIRED, BECAUSE WE WERE DEPARTING. I DON'T KNOW WHAT THE MAN AT ["F" PAD] EXPECTED US TO DO IF WE COULDN'T GET PAST THE SECOND FLOOR. WE ADVISED HIM AND HE REPLIED THAT HE WAS NOW LEAVING THAT BUILDING AND WOULD CALL LATER FOR PICK UP. WE THEN PROCEEDED TO [259 TROUNG QUOC DUNG] AND LIFTED ABOUT 7 OR 8 LOADS OF PEOPLE TO THE [DAO PAD.] WE MADE SEVERAL PICK UPS AT THE [OLD USAID BUILDING] JUST NORTH OF THE [259 BUILDING] AND WERE THEN INSTRUCTED TO GO TO THE [EMBASSY ROOFTOP] THERE, ["OB"] GOT ABOARD AND DIRECTED US TO THE TINY ROOFTOP DOWNTOWN, WHERE WE PICKED UP ABOUT [35 PEOPLE] (THE PICTURE OF THE HELICOPTER ON THE ROOFTOP, WITH THE MAN HELPING PEOPLE AT THE TOP OF THE LADDER, WHICH APPEARED IN THE 12 MAY ISSUES OF TIME AND NEWSWEEK MAY BE US UNLESS SOMEONE ELSE LANDED ON THAT PAD WITH SOMEONE WHO LOOKED LIKE [OB WEARING A WHITE SHIRT]). WE TOOK THESE PEOPLE TO THE EMBASSY ROOFTOP. AFTER THE SECOND LIFT, WE WERE RUNNING LOW ON FUEL, SO WE TOOK A LOAD OF PEOPLE FROM THE [EMBASSY ROOF] AND HEADED FOR THE SEA. WE WERE VECTORED TO THE [MIDWAY BY THE BLUE RIDGE] WHO WAS BEING SWARMED BY VIETNAMESE MILITARY HELICOPTERS. UPON LANDING ON THE [MIDWAY] AT DARK, WE WERE INFORMED THAT WE WERE TO STAY ABOARD OR NOT COME BACK IF WE DEPARTED. I IMAGINE THAT THIS WAS BECAUSE OF THE NUMEROUS VIETNAMESE MILITARY AIRCRAFT IN THE AREA WHO THE MIDWAY WAS TRYING TO KEEP CLEAR. ON SHUTTING DOWN, WE WERE REQUIRED TO TURN IN ALL WEAPONS AND KNIVES. MY FLIGHT HELMET AND FLIGHT EQUIPMENT WERE ALSO TAKEN AND PLACED IN A METAL CAN FOR SECURING IN THE ARMORY. LATER, THE MASTER OF ARMS OF THE SHIP WAS ABLE

TO PRODUCE ONLY A FRACTION OF THE EQUIPMENT TURNED IN AND WHAT HE PRODUCED WAS THE JUNK. WE SUSPECT SOMEONE "SOUVENIRED" US. ASIDE FROM THAT, OUR STAY ON THE [MIDWAY] WAS VERY ENJOYABLE. WE DEBARKED BY HELICOPTER FROM THE [MIDWAY] [TO SUBIC] THEN TO [MANILA AND HONG KONG.]

[CAPTAIN GEHRING]  
AIR AMERICA, INC.