Saigon surrenders to Hanoi; the longest U.S. war is over

By GEORGE ESHER

SAIGON (AP) — South Vietnam unconditional surrendered to the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese today, ending 30 years of warfare.

President Nguyen Van "Big" Minh spoke to the nation only hours after an armistice of U.S. Marines helicopters had completed an emergency evacuation of nearly 900 Americans and thousands of Vietnamese from the besieged capital.

Minh, a retired general and neutralist, was named president Monday in a desperate and unsuccessful attempt to negotiate a peace with the Communist leaders.

In a five-minute radio address, Minh said, "The Republic of Vietnam policy in the policy of peace and reconciliation, mixed with the blood of our people. I ask all servicemen to stop firing and stay where you are; I also announce that the provisional government of the Provisional Revolutionary Government [Viet Cong] step down and step in place of the Provisional Revolutionary Government, to hand over authority in order to stop useless bloodshed."

Gen. Nguyen Huu Hah, deputy chief of staff, then went on the air to order all South Vietnamese troops to carry out Minh's order. "All commanders must be ready to communicate with commanders of the Provisional Revolutionary Government to carry out the cease-fires without conditions," he said.

ASTHEY spoke, Saigon fell silent, and shells subdued along the northern rim, where Viet Cong gunners had been shelling the airport.

Saigon police and militiamen remaned at their posts, indicating that the Communist-led troops had not yet entered the city.

Some South Vietnamese officers complained that the evacuation of Americans had caused panic in the military, with many top army officers and most of the air force fleeing.

But it had been obvious that the capital would fall. More than 6,000 North Vietnamese Viet Cong divisions were circling Saigon, which was defended by less than one division of demoralized green troops.

(Vietnamese watch as helicopter leaves the U.S. Embassy.)

A decision without dramatics

BY JAMES M. NAUGHTON

WASHINGTON — President Ford ordered the evacuation of the last remnants of the American presence in Vietnam after Ambassador Graham A. Martin reluctantly recommended it to him at 10:44 a.m. Monday, that "we should go with Option A."" Option A was the plan for the immediate evacuation by helicopter of all remaining American citizens and as many South Vietnamese as possible.

Informed of Martin's recommendation by Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger, Ford gave the order: "Go ahead."

With the news, Ford set up an evacuation operation in the White House, the first official announcement of a change in direction of America's longest war, a tragic conflict that cost the nation more than 50,000 of its young men and $100,000,000,000 of its dollars, a war that diverted many for a generation and changed perhaps forever this country's foreign policy.

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