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NEWS CONFERENCE

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AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 6:37 P.M. EDT

MARCH 29, 1975

SATURDAY

MR. NESSEN: I am going to read you a statement by the President. I have not had time to have it typed yet. I will as soon as I finish here.

"A severe emergency exists in the coastal communities of South Vietnam, which are swollen with helpless civilian refugees who have fled the North Vietnamese offensive. They are desperately in need of any assistance we and other nations can provide.

"To help the refugees reach safe haven further south, I have ordered American Naval transports and contract vessels to assist in the evacuation of refugees from the coastal seaports.

"I also call upon all nations and corporations that have ships in the vicinity of the South Vietnamese coast to help evacuate refugees to safety in the south.

"I have directed that U.S. government resources be made available to meet immediate humanitarian needs, and I have appointed Mr. Daniel Parker, Administrator of the Agency of International Development, as my special coordinator for disaster relief."

That is the end of the President's statement. Let me say this, in addition, that the Navy transport ships which have been sent will lie off the coast and the refugees will be ferried out to them. It is anticipated that they will not be in any danger of being involved in the hostilities because they will be off the coast.

The AID agency and the Pentagon are prepared to answer any further questions you have.

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Q Is there any copy out about having armed soldiers on these ships?

MR. NESSEN: As I say, the Pentagon and the AID need to answer all your questions.

Q Where else besides Danang are they being evacuated from?

MR. NESSEN: Helen, I just don't have the answers.

Q Coastal seaports?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Is there more than one?

MR. NESSEN: The Pentagon will have to help you with this and the AID agency.

Q Can you say when the President made his decision?

MR. NESSEN: This afternoon.

Q Can you say with whom he conferred?

MR. NESSEN: I can't, Helen -- with his advisers.

Q Ron, I think the question was asked, the one I want to ask, but I want to make sure.

We, as you know, just now saw some very dramatic films of so-called refugees who are, in fact, Army deserters.

MR. NESSEN: I know.

Q Are we going to take out Army deserters?

MR. NESSEN: Bob, I just got this together and I don't have any details but I know that Joe Laitin is prepared to answer any questions and so is Mr. Parker's organization.

Q Where is Parker right now?

MR. NESSEN: At the AID.

Q Can you tell us who is going to ferry them from the shore? Do the LST's carry barges to get them in and out?

MR. NESSEN: You just need to ask the details at the Pentagon.

Q Ron, we can assume, by the fact that the President did make this decision, that he is certain that there is no violation of the combat ban?

MR. NESSEN: The Members of Congress have been notified and, since this does not involve American involvement in hostilities, it is considered to be in keeping with the spirit of the laws that apply.

Q How many ships are involved?

MR. NESSEN: You need to get all the details from the Pentagon.

Q Joe Laitin will answer all this, right?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, he is there and ready.

Q When you say off-shore, Ron, do you know how far off-shore?

MR. NESSEN: You need to ask Laitin.

Q I notice you said within the spirit. Is there still some question about the letter of the law?

MR. NESSEN: No, I don't think so.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END (AT 6:45 P.M. EDT) #177