

# The Wanderer

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# The Orphans Of Jerry Ford

By WILLIAM H. MARSHNER

Mr. Ford's highly touted rescue of the *Mayaguez* and its crew from Koh Tang Island contains an element of bitter irony. The operation brought scores of U.S. naval vessels and hundreds of U.S. aircraft within 40 miles of another island, where there is something much more important to rescue.

The other island is Phu Quoc. On it are 42,000 refugees from Communist aggression, two-thirds of them Roman Catholics. Many are orphan children. At least three hundred of them are nuns. Some of the priests there are the very ones who 20 years ago led their congregations in toto, on foot, from Hanoi to the South, seeking safety. This Spring, when Hue and Da Nang fell, the same congregations moved again to Phu Quoc, sometimes with the help of U.S. naval vessels. Now the same vessels steam by and ignore them.

The people of Phu Quoc are determined to fight. They have arms but only a limited supply of food and ammunition. It is only a matter of time before the Communists strike in force. In propaganda bulletins released in Saigon, the PRG is already claiming to have occupied the island. But U.S. intelligence sources know that the claim is false. How? Because the rescue craft involved in the *Mayaguez* affair picked up radio signals from the refugees. They listened to the cries of anguish and steamed on.

On or about May 9th, the possibility of rescuing these people was discussed in the National Security Council. According to Capitol Hill sources, rescue was vetoed at that time by Secretary of State Henry Kissinger — himself a former refugee. Kissinger is said to have argued that since Phu Quoc is legally part of the territory of

Vietnam, any rescue attempt would be an "invasion" and hence would jeopardize future relations with the Communist government. Can you believe that?

Meanwhile very few people are doing anything to put pressure on the White House, even though such countries as South Korea, Taiwan, Chile, and Canada have agreed to accept these abandoned people as immigrants. John McCarthy, director of Migration and Refugee Services for the United States Catholic Conference, has made some representations to State Department officials. Cong. Larry McDonald (D., Ga.) is circulating a letter on the House floor, and about 30 signatures have been obtained. (Both of the so-called Catholic priests in Congress, Cornell and Drinan, were asked to sign but refused to do so.) A recent effort to put the House Republican Steering Committee into action got nowhere. Clearly it is time for Jerry Ford to hear from the Catholic grass roots.

Ford is feeling pretty good about himself these days. The *Mayaguez* rescue so raised his stock among GOP conservatives, that White House aides have told political columnists Evans and Novak that the President now thinks he has Reagan on the run. It is urgent, therefore, that all Catholics, especially Catholic conservatives, tell Jerry Ford he had better think again. If our brothers in Christ on Phu Quoc are not rescued, Mr. Ford can take his trophy for freeing the *Mayaguez* and toss it in the ashcan.

That very message, a little more delicately phrased, of course, should be telephoned or telegrammed immediately to the White House: (tel. 202-456-1414). Swamp a switchboard for your Vietnamese brothers.