



## President's Message

*Richard B. Rothwell*



Joe Kirkpatrick, our financial officer, has left the board. Joe was one of the original members of the board of directors and played a major role in the success of CPHS. I greatly appreciate his dedication and professionalism. In recognition of his support the board of directors has designated Joe as a life member of CPHS. He is the first person to be so recognized. Bob Hawkins has assumed Joe's duties as financial officer. I have worked with Bob in other volunteer activities and am confident that he will serve us well.

Col. Patrick Uetz, USMC (Ret.), retired military staff judge advocate, has agreed to serve as our pro bono legal counsel. I welcome Pat to our team and look forward to working with him.

In my last report, I mentioned that CPHS is partnering with author Robin Hutton and artist Jocelyn Russell to place a monument to the Korean era warhorse Reckless at Camp Pendleton. Vice President Jim Williams and I handed Robin's donation offer to Brigadier General John W. Bullard Jr., commanding general MCB Camp Pendleton/Marine Corps Installations West in January. I am happy to report that General Bullard has accepted her offer – a critical first step. Because the value of the donation exceeds \$100,000, Department of Defense regulations also require approval by the commandant of the Marine Corps and the assistant secretary of the Navy. That process is underway. We are sufficiently confident of the ultimate outcome that we are beginning our formal fundraising efforts.

*Continued page 3, Message*

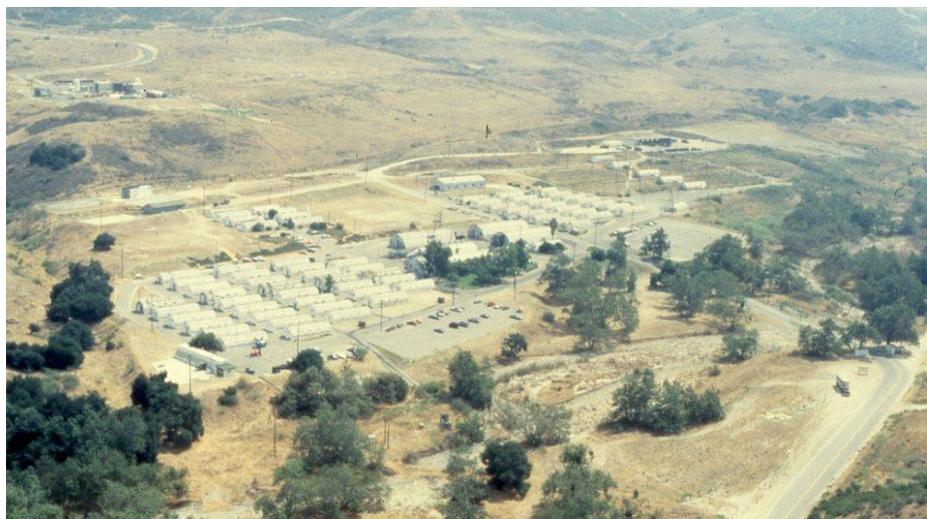
## Camp Talega – 1975

By Bill Parsons, CPHS

It's late April, 1975. The last of the American military and civilian personnel have left Saigon, Vietnam. The Vietnam War and America's involvement are over. The protective shield of the South Vietnamese Regular Army (ARVN) has begun to crumble and will fall shortly. The ARVN can no longer stop the communist onslaught into South Vietnam. Citizens are fleeing the country by the tens of thousands. They go by vehicle, by aircraft, or by boat. For most the goal is to reach American naval ships or nearby bases in the Philippines, Taiwan and Thailand. In a very short time the primary jumping off point to America will become Guam. Much of the transportation away from Vietnam is supplied by US military support through efforts such as "Operation Baby Lift" and "Operation Frequent Wind."

We can call them either refugees or boat people. They flee the country because they fear for their safety. They refuse to live under the mantle of communism and the retaliatory administration of the North Vietnamese government. Many want only to come to the United States to begin life over in a nation that represents freedom – and a guarantee of civil rights they will never be able to enjoy in Southeast Asia.

As the refugees began to make their way to America it became apparent their relocation did not enjoy unanimous support. President Gerald Ford twice approached Congress asking for millions of dollars in funding to support the movement. Both times the amount asked for was reduced or outright denied. Many Americans were against refugees being brought to this country. Why? Because it was too soon; we had just fought a nearly 10 year war in Vietnam; a war that had become extremely unpopular and, since the Civil War, incomparably divisive to the nation. America had shed much blood and spent huge amounts of treasure on Vietnamese soil. As a nation, we needed time to heal.



This aerial view shows the Camp Talega location in the northern sector of Camp Pendleton.

*Continued page 2, Camp Talega*

## continued front page, Camp Talega

Or maybe the reason had a racial overtone. The Vietnamese people, especially the children, would be better off living with their own kind. Or maybe the reason was economic. How would the cost of relocation add to our economic woes? Would taxes go up? How much more money would be taken from the pockets of working men and women to support and fund the refugees? The reasons were wide ranging and without focus.

Still the president continued to politick for support in aiding the Vietnamese. To shore up his position, President Ford pointed to the years since the end of World War II. In the years between then and 1975 the United States had welcomed, from several countries, 2 million refugees who were escaping the threat of communism. The president and his administration believed we owed the same opportunities to the Vietnamese.



Vietnamese refugees are processed by U.S. Immigration officials at Camp Pendleton, CA., as part of their introduction to the United States. Photo taken on May 2, 1975.

On April 28, 1975, Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton command is notified the Base has been chosen as one of four reception centers nationwide to receive Vietnamese refugees. And, not to put too much stress on an already stressful situation, refugees would begin arriving within 24 hours. Refugees began to land by transport at Marine Corps Air Station, El Toro, in Orange County, and by helicopter at Munn Field at Camp Pendleton. The refugees were then taken, via bus, to their new home on the Base. They would be given documents, medical examinations and become, in essence, Americanized.

As with all other problems, the Marines dealt with this situation head-on. The Base command almost immediately selected Camp Talega as the location where the incoming refugees would be housed. The camp was chosen because it is located at the northern most region of Camp Pendleton where it was relatively separated from the training and other day-to-day operations of the Base.

All other units assigned to Camp Pendleton gave, loaned or offered assistance to prepare for and accommodate the refugees. This assistance included everything from material for housing to buildings to conduct operations and the people to put these units together. Medical facilities, personnel, equipment and supplies were given. Other support ranged from clerical personnel necessary to handle routine paper work to installation of pipes to transport water or sewage.

Even Base law enforcement was employed to monitor potential criminal activity and to keep non-essential military personnel and refugees separate.

Help came from other Marine facilities in the form of clothing, bedding, food, even utility poles for electricity and telephones. Civilian agencies, especially from the city of San Clemente, assisted in getting electricity and water to the Base and Camp Talega.

*Continued page 3, Camp Talega*



First Lady Betty Ford visits Camp Talega on May 21, 1975, to welcome Vietnamese refugees to their new country.

## continued page 2, Camp Talega

As the refugees began to arrive, each was given documents and assigned to a housing unit. A notification board was centrally located in the camp with the name of each refugee. This allowed members of families or villages who were separated within Camp Talega to connect and helped with the transition into their new home. They were given complete physical examinations and assigned jobs to assist in the efficient operation of the camp. Classes in English, as well as the social and cultural aspects of America, were taught.

The refugees themselves were big contributors to their own well-being and smooth transition into American life. They came together to form committees that helped to improve everyday camp life. Camp Talega started to look very much like a typical American small town. The refugees formed what could be described as a court system to deal with minor disputes between residents. A mayor was even elected to oversee the operation of the camp from a refugee point of view and to act as liaison between the residents and military authorities.

To say this was a unified effort is to understate the facts.



A Marine Corps Mobile Field Exchange operated in one of the refugee camps aboard Camp Pendleton as a means of providing the refugees with items of clothing to match the climate of the area. Mobile banking facilities from the Bank of America also operated in the refugee camps to assist with currency exchange.

Camp Talega, as a refugee Americanization camp, operated for a very short time. During its existence, thousands of refugees passed through on their way to freedom. As each individual, couple or family acclimated and a sponsor was located, they were allowed to leave Talega and assume their new roles in their new home. Most, as well as their children and their children's children, became and have become accomplished, well respected, contributing members of their communities.

*Editor's Note: Bill Parsons is currently the secretary of the Camp Pendleton Historical Society. He is an avid writer who enjoys doing original research and producing articles such as this one. Thanks, Bill, for your contribution to a growing catalog of Groundbreaker originals.*

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## Event Alert

### Fundraiser at the Las Flores Adobe

September 13, 2014

Proceeds to support the  
SSgt. Reckless Memorial  
at Camp Pendleton.

Details to follow.



## continued front page, Message

Since my last report, I gave presentations about the history of Camp Pendleton and SSgt. Reckless to a local DAR chapter and the Solana Beach Civic and Historical Society. Both were well received and led to donations to the Reckless fund. I also met with a television crew at the Las Flores adobe in May. They were preparing a program on San Diego County ranchos to be broadcast locally in June.

Planning for our annual fundraiser is going well under the hand of Jerry Polyascko. It will be at the Las Flores adobe on Saturday, September 13. Mark the date!

Thank you for your continued support. Without it we could not help the Marine Corps preserve the rich history of Camp Pendleton. I look forward to reporting to you again in the next issue of the *Groundbreaker*.

*Richard B. Rathwell*



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