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## US Navy rescues 262 boat people

SUNBATHERS and windsurfers of Pattaya's Jomtien beach got a surprise yesterday afternoon when 262 Vietnamese refugees came ashore after being picked up by a US Navy ship, the USS Sterett, on Wednesday.

The Vietnamese men, women and children, some wearing sailor hats and sporting wide smiles, drew a sizeable crowd of onlookers as they were taken on board buses to Phanat Nikhom refugee camp, Chon Buri.

According to Huyan Huu Cau, 42, a former Vietnamese navy commander, the refugees left Vietnam in two boatloads.

The first boat, which he piloted, left the Saigon River at midnight on July 14 with 173 on board.

The second boat set sail from Rach Gia Province on the west coast of southern Vietnam on July 18 with 89 refugees aboard.

A US naval source said it was believed that a third boatload of 80 Vietnamese refugees was still out in the Gulf of Thailand.

The source said that if they could be found they would be picked up by outgoing US naval vessels and taken to the Philippines.

Cau, who speaks good English, said that before his boat was picked up by the USS Sterett his engine broke down on July 16 and later the hull cracked and the boat began taking on water.

He added that when the bilge pump malfunctioned the refugees had to bail out water with buckets.

Most of the people on his boat were residents of Ho Chi Minh City, Cau said, adding that those on the second boat were Chinese-Vietnamese.

Cau claimed that he received training in San Diego, California in the early 1970's along with two Thai navy officers whom he said he would like to contact.

The officer said the refugees were given three meals a day while on board the Sterett.



*Left: Crewmen of the USS Sterett lower a gangway to meet the Vietnamese refugees whom they found adrift in the Gulf of Thailand on Wednesday.*

*Above: Smoke billows from one of the boats as it drifts near the Sterett. It was scuttled to prevent it posing a hazard to shipping.*

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