

Bob Sigall



Operation Babylift rescued 3,000 mostly biracial children in Vietnam as Saigon fell in 1975.

Operation Babylift

Of all the 500 articles I've written for the Honolulu Star-Advertiser, the one that was shared the most (over 2,000 times on Facebook and in other places) was about the rescue of over 3,000 mostly biracial children from Vietnam in April 1975.

Fred Hemmings told me he was a Red Cross volunteer who met one of the jets at Hickam.

"The plane had been on an 18-plus-hour journey, and the caretakers on board were wiped out with exhaustion. We boarded the plane with a sea of crying youngsters and babies

that ranged in age from several months to 7-8 years old. Most were in bassinets tied to the seats. They wore wristbands with their information. It was a mess.

“After about a half-hour of changing diapers and cleaning babies, I came upon a bassinet of what appeared to be an 8-month-old child,” Hemmings said.

“She was howling, and her arms reached up while her eyes pleaded for me to embrace her. Her eyes pierced my soul. When I held her she clutched me so very tightly. After caring for her I went to secure her back in her bassinet, and she would not let me go and howled with anguish. I could not put her down.”

Hemmings spent the remaining time helping other children while somehow holding her. “I should say she held me.” Hemmings flew to Seattle, and the little girl stayed in his arms for the entire flight.

“We landed, and it came time for me to let go of my little girl. It was difficult. All these years later I would most love to meet the grown lady I held as a wee baby all those years ago.”