



GERALD R. FORD

June 15, 2000

Dear Master Sergeant Broussard:

In response to your recent letter regarding the Fall of Saigon, following are my observations. A picture of the staircase will be sent under separate cover.

April 1975 was indeed the cruelest month. The passage of time has not dulled the ache of those days, the saddest of my public life. I pray that no future American President is ever faced with the grim options that confronted me as the military situation on the ground deteriorated...mediating between those who wanted an early exit and others who would go down with all flags flying...running a desperate race against the clock to rescue as many people as we could before enemy shelling destroyed airport runways...followed by the heartbreaking realization that, as refugees streamed out onto those runways, we were left with only one alternative - a final evacuation by helicopter from the roof of the U.S. Embassy.

We did the best we could. History will judge whether we could have done better. One thing, however, is beyond question - the heroism of the Marines who guarded the Embassy during its darkest hours, and of those brave helicopter pilots who flew non-stop missions for 18 hours, dodging relentless sniper fire to land on an Embassy roof illuminated by nothing more than a 35 mm slide projector.

A quarter century later, I still grieve over those we were unable to rescue. I still mourn for 2500 American soldiers who to this day remain unaccounted for. Yet the passage of time brings with it a fresh perspective. No doubt each visitor to the Ford Museum interprets the Saigon Staircase and its historical significance for himself. To some it will always be seen as an emblem of military defeat. For me, however, it is a monument of hope and not despair. For it symbolizes man's undying desire to be free.

Ernest Hemingway once declared that human beings are not made for defeat. Man can be destroyed, he wrote, but he can never be defeated. What applies to individuals holds equally true for nations. There is more to a nation than its soil, its cities, its wealth, or even its government. There is a soul in a great people. It is steeled in their sufferings. They may be occupied by foreign armies. They may be temporarily enslaved. They may be economically impoverished. But the soul of a great people cannot be crushed.

The Ford Museum has assumed stewardship of the Saigon Staircase in the name of such a people. It is my hope that one day it may be returned to a Vietnam that is free. Until then, let us honor the millions of brave men and women who honored us through their valor and sacrifice. May God bless you and them, now and always.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Gerald R. Ford". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Colin Broussard
MSgt USMC Retired
1835 E. Main
El Cajon, CA 92021