

BEIRUT, Lebanon (AP) — The U.S. Navy evacuated some 300 Americans and other foreigners from Beirut without a hitch today while President Ford and top

Pentagon officials stayed up most of the night in Washington to monitor the operation.

The 16,900-ton amphibious transport ship Coronado anchored off Beirut's seafront before dawn, and by 10 a.m. (3 a.m. EDT) all of the evacuees were aboard. The Coronado was to land them in Athens on Thursday.

Among those leaving was U.S. Ambassador Talcott W. Seelye, whose departure was a closely guarded secret until the last moment. The embassy said he was going to Washington for consultations and would return to Beirut.

An embassy official said 160 Americans and about 390 others signed up for the evacuation, but closer to 400 — "less than half" of them Americans — showed up this morning. However, to persons watching the departure it looked more like 250 to 300 persons, and the White House said there were about 300.

About 1,000 other American citizens remained in Lebanon despite warnings from the White House and the embassy that it was the last evacuation the U.S. government would organize. Most of those remaining are

of Lebanese birth and have dual Lebanese and American citizenship.

President Ford kept abreast of the evacuation in a White House Situation room, flanked by senior advisers. He was in telephone contact with Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and his chief military and civilian advisers at the Pentagon.

Rumsfeld sent Ford's "thanks for a good job" to the Coronado. ;

Heavily armed soldiers of Yasir Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organization and leftist Moslem Lebanese police stood guard as the evacuees boarded an unarmed U.S. landing craft at the former military officers' swimming club.

The PLO also guarded the previous U.S. evacuation of 110 Americans and 157 others on June 20. This time, as then, one Palestinian standing on the seawall above the loading dock caused a brief stir by firing several shots into the air. There was no explanation.

A C130 circled overhead to seaward, providing a radio link between the embassy and Sixth Fleet ships offshore. The giant aircraft carrier America was reported about 60 miles away in case its fighter planes might be needed.