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# Flight worth it, boat people say

United Press International  
HONG KONG — If anyone is vulnerable it is Huynh Van Hau, who never expected to travel farther from his farm home than the three-mile distance to the Buddhist center of study in the old Vietnamese imperial capital of Hue.

## Ship assists Viet refugees on high seas

United Press International  
SINGAPORE — A 380-ton ship registered in Thailand cruises the South China Sea looking for Vietnamese refugees to assist them in reaching friendly shores.

The ship, Cal Loader, is operated by World Vision International, (WVI) an organization with a \$48 million annual budget which assists victims of war, floods, earthquakes and other disasters.

Last May, it launched Operation Seasweep off the coast of southern Vietnam in international waters. Eight WVI officials were aboard the ship, including a doctor and two nurses.

"Our main functions are to provide medical attention, food, water, fuel and repairs to the engine of the boat if necessary and to help them live another day so they can get to safety," said WVI official Milton Kohut of Los Angeles, Calif.

During Kohut's tenure aboard the Cal Loader, he had five encounters with Vietnamese refugee boats.

The first one, he said, had 55 refugees aboard. The Cal Loader repaired the boat's engine and the refugees continued on their journey.

Two days later, the WVI ship came across 21 refugees on a sinking boat.

They were taken to Bangkok, Thailand, and 12 were later processed for entry to the United States, while the other nine were granted admission to France, Kohut said.

On another occasion, the Cal Loader found 64 people jammed aboard a 40-foot boat.

"They did not have a compass or a map and were lost when we found them. We treated 20 of the refugees who were ill, mostly from dehydration. We provided them with a compass, map, food and water and sent them on their way when the engine was fixed."

WVI's Singapore office purchased a vessel for \$3,000 and it rendezvoused with the Cal Loader 20 miles off the coast of Malaysia. He said the Vietnamese transferred to the ship and "left on their own" in early October.

The Seasweep operation has since been suspended because of the monsoon season but will resume in March, Kohut said.

According to WVI officials in Singapore, about half of the refugees fleeing Vietnam have drowned or died in the escape journey.

Kohut said WVI based the calculation on what volunteers had seen and heard from the refugees. He also said that virtually all were fleeing in fishing boats which were not fit for high seas navigation.

Kohut said he rated the chances of survival for those not picked up by passing boats as about 50-50.

ing barely half his 24 years and cringing in his faded plum-colored monk robes following a 1,000-mile adventure on heaving seas that included two stops in China.

"They treated us well enough — in fact they were kind and generous," Hau said in recalling Chinese treatment when his refugee boat had to put in twice for repairs on the island of Hainan, halfway across the South China Sea from Hue.

"But they told me — told us — to take guns and go back and overthrow the Vietnamese government in Hanoi."

**THE CHINESE REPAIRED** the reluctant motor propelling Hau and his 73 shipmates, then set them off to sea with food, water and enough fuel to get them safely to Hong Kong waters — minus the guns.

Hau's tale is not the normal story of the estimated 40,000 Vietnamese "boat people" who have been tossed up on the shores of the western Pacific all the way from Thailand to Australia.

But it's a recounting far from unique. And if he had it to do all over again, would Buddhist monk Hau abandon his mother, bribe authorities, steal a boat, sneak past sentries who would happily fill his body full of lead if caught and then set out on an un-

known sea famous for its treachery? **HAU'S ANSWER IS** the same as that of Wong Thai, a Vietnamese-Chinese businessman from Qui Nhon, a coastal city 240 miles south of Hue.

"It was worth risking death to escape," said the middle-aged former businessman. "If I were given the choice of execution or returning to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, I would ask to be executed."

Wong fled Vietnam aboard a boat with 171 other ethnic Chinese.

"My Vietnamese friends who were in business took the same road as I did. They had to close their shops." He shrugged. "It's the communist way."

**WHETHER THEY HAVE** learned the lesson from risking prison by surreptitiously listening to the Voice of America (VOA) or British Broadcasting Corp. (BBC) broadcasts, the "boat people" all tell dubious authorities when they step on the non-communist shores of Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Macao or Australia: "We are fleeing communism. We cannot live under communism. Our lives would be in danger."

Those are the magic words, whether they know it or not, that are the open sesame to temporary asylum until they are granted per-

manent refuge in the United States, Canada, Australia, or France.

One of the refugees on the nearby Portuguese enclave of Macao claims that at least to his sensitive office in Ho Chi Minh City, it was a matter of economics what happened to people in the former South Vietnamese capital known previously as Saigon.

**LE TRONG WORKED** in the dreaded Central Office of Registry for New Economic Zones, known affectionately among the refugees as the "concentration camp farms." Trong decided who went and who stayed in the city.

"If they had enough money to bribe me or other officials who had influence with me, I put them on the list of 'needed personnel' (exempt from breaking new earth in virgin land) — they could stay in the city."

If he had earned all that money (he never said how much) in bribes, why did Trong leave? "The new cadres were not only Northerners," he said. "They were communists and neither one will leave us southerners alone."

Trong's reaction is typical of a Vietnamese clannishness that is exacerbated when Vietnamese from different regions or different religions are cast together in the seaside camps in Thailand, or the cramped hotel rooms where many of them are housed in Hong Kong.

## Refugee flow increases

# Resettlement quotas raised

United Press International  
BANGKOK, Thailand — Refugee resettlement programs in Thailand are finally working more smoothly, quotas have been raised and local resettlement is being planned.

Meanwhile, over 20,000 refugees have landed in Australia in the past three years, and officials there say most have been given resident status.

The problem in Thailand, however, remains that more Indochinese refugees are coming into Bangkok than going out.

A representative of the United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees said the number of refugees registered in Thai camps reached 116,534 by the end of September, up more than 1,000 over the previous month.

**THE UNHCR OFFICIAL** called it "one of our better months." He said about 2,000 refugees left for resettlement in third countries, but more than 3,100 new refugees were registered.

A brutal regime in communist Cambodia and uncompromising socialist transformation in Vietnam have added to the flow. But most of Thailand's refugees come from tiny neighboring Laos.

More than 98,000 Laotian refugees are living in Thai refugee camps and thousands more are believed to be living illegally outside the camps in the Thai countryside.

**WITH A DROUGHT** last year and widespread floods this year add-

ing to serious food shortages, the flow of refugees has steadily increased.

Refugee resettlement programs at the French, Australian and United States embassies have ironed out some of the bureaucratic bugs that have plagued them over the past three years. Movement abroad, especially for Vietnamese boat people, is fairly quick.

Many of the 15,011 Cambodians registered in the camps have stuck there for over three years, hoping for speedier action once a proposed U.S. quota of 7,000 Cambodians per year is approved by President Carter.

Canada recently announced a new program aimed at the neglected Cambodians, but it is limited to 20 families per month.

**SOME WESTERN COUNTRIES** and the UNHCR have been urging Thailand to permanently resettle some of the refugees in Thailand. But the Thai government, with a large, land-poor population of native Thais in the countryside, is wary of the political consequences of aiding and resettling Laotians, Cambo-

dians and Vietnamese while its own people go unhelped.

At first the refugee problem was somewhat embarrassing to the Australian government because some of the vessels got within a few miles of Darwin harbor before being detected.

Since then, however, their route has become almost standardized.

The refugees are almost invariably accepted and given temporary entry status pending checks on their backgrounds.

**ALTHOUGH ABOUT 8,000** are still in government-operated hostels in various cities, others have made their own homes in both urban and country areas and have been assimilated into the community. Most have been given resident status in Australia.

Immigration Minister Michael Mackellar said many Australians feel the boat people should be turned away. "But what would happen to Australia's good name if we did turn back one of these boats and it sank? And what would we be condemning refugees to when we send them back to the places from which they fled?"

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