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75-79

**Vietnamese Orphans Safe
After Harrowing Odyssey**

By Toby Druin

Ft. Chaffee, Ark. (BP)--A doughty band of 84 Vietnamese orphans are recuperating here from a stranger-than fiction odyssey that at various times saw them----

--In the midst of a firefight between opposing South Vietnamese forces;

--Crowded with 25 other orphanage staff members and families in to a 13 by 40 foot boat for three days;

--Adrift on the open sea.

Through it all, says Nguyen Xuan Ha, diminutive director of the Baptist supported orphanage at Cam Ranh Bay, he had faith that the Lord would see them through the journey to freedom.

Ha recounted his and the orphans' adventure after they arrived here following a flight from Singapore to Zurich to Washington D.C.

They are considering several offers of sponsorship, including one from Houston's West Memorial Baptist Church and one of its members to come to a Texas Ranch.

Other offers have come from Washington, D.C., to adopt the children ages 2-12, and children's homes in Texas and North Carolina.

But Ha said they need time to recoup their energies and would likely remain at Ft. Chaffee for at least a week before going anywhere.

Ha, soft-spoken and bespectacled, had directed the Cam Ranh City Christian Orphanage since its inception by U.S. service persons in 1967.

The orphanage, which lost that support with the withdrawal of U.S. forces, got the backing of American missionaries in Vietnam and from churches and remained open.

Ha said he decided to move the children on April 2 when a nearby city fell during the last days of the war. They crowded onto three micro-buses and began driving to Phan Tiet, 200 kilometers away, where they hoped to get on board a boat for Saigon.

Conditions along the way, Ha said, were "troublesome" and soldiers, also fleeing southward, boarded the bus. At one point other South Vietnamese troops blocked them from crossing a bridge and a firefight with the soldiers on the bus followed. The children hid under the buses.

When they finally reached Phan Tiet, the city was jammed with refugees and boat owners were demanding \$350,000 piasters (more than \$400) to rent them a boat.

"One blessing was a wrong radio report that another road had opened to Saigon," Ha said. "Many refugees tried to take that road rather than go by boat."

The boat owners agreed then to take them to Saigon for considerably less money.

Ha and the children and others rode the boats to Vung Tau and then went by bus to Saigon, under fire all the way from communist troops and even in danger from friendly forces, he said.

"There was no order at all," he said, "and many refugees from Ban Me Thuot, Pleiku, Nha Trang, Da Nang--thousands, thousands of them."

The journey from Cam Ranh to Saigon, normally a day's drive, took three days.

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Aft r several days in the Baptist refugee center in Saigon, Ha said, he felt the city was threatened and decided to move the orphans to the country's southern province of Rach Gia.

Only 15 kilometers (nine miles) out of Saigon they learned the city had been clamped under a 24-hour curfew because of the bombing of the presidential palace by a South Vietnamese pilot.

In Rach Gia, ha said, "We made preparations for the exodus."

He bought a leaky, 11-year-old diesel-powered boat and somehow got permission to purchase 4,500 liters of fuel although it had a military priority. The fuel was enough to get them to Australia.

Ha also purchased 1,000 pounds of rice, three cans of fish sauce for seasoning--100 kilos of instant rice and 12 boxes of instant noodles.

"We expect some times when we could not cook," Ha said, explaining the instant rice and noodles. Those times came when the orphans and crew got seasick and just lie down lik dead."

Ha, whose papers could have allowed him to leave the country alone, said he had given up hope of flying the children out of the country when he purchased the boat.

"I see that many people want to go and no chance to get all the kids on the airplane--too crowded," he said, "so I am determined that we go by sea."

Ha said he consulted with fishermen in the area and learned that if worse came to wors and they had to settle on one of the islands they could use the boat for commercial fishing to make a living or provide commercial transportation from island to island.

The evening they left Rach Gia, they had a prayer meeting at dockside with other Christians from the city and cast off.

None was an experience helmsman, however, and they rammed two boats getting away from the dock.

"Later we thought if that had happened the next day we would had had to stop and negotiate for damages and many people would have rushed on board," Ha said.

Rach Gia fell the next day to the communists.

Ha and the orphans and others literally were jammed into the boat, he said, 109 of them in the tiny craft. He said he bought rope to tie them in place but there was only room to sit.

They spent all night on the boat, the next day and next night before reaching the open sea.

Early on the second day they hailed a Taiwanese merchant ship and asked to be taken aboard.

At first they were refused and the ship sailed away.

Their situation bordered on desperation when the engine of the boat would not start, but the Taiwanese ship returned and took them in tow.

He described the trip behind the larger vessel as terrifying, too slow by day and too fast by night.

"We were frightened to death," he said, "could not sleep. Just squat and watch, We have our axe in hand so if anything happen (if the boat began to be dragged under) we cut the rope."

Ha said everyone aboard prayed all the time, The big boys also bailed, using buckets to empty water from the boat.

"The young kids were all very seasick," he said. "They just lie like death."

Finally on the morning of the second day and in water near Singapore, the ship asked them to drop the tow and abandoned them in the water. Ha explained that other ships were in sight, however, and a rescue plane directed three fishing boats to pick them up.

A friendly Singapore policeman took a message from Ha on the boats to Southern Baptist missionary Bob Wakefield and, though the orphans were in quarantine, Wakefield, Mrs. Gene Tunnell and Mrs. Harold Bengs, both of the latter missionaries from Vietnam, brought them candy and "good news of what they were trying to do for us," Ha said.

That good news was the trip to the United States.

"I have faith in the Lord," Ha said, recounting the trip. "My faith at times is v ry weak. I want a sign--like Gideon-- want to see the sun stop and see the Lord was with us.

"In this journey I think the Lord timed everthing--leaving Rach Gia, the ship coming back and towing us...The Lord move that captain's heart."

Vietnamese Baptist Girl - -
Gift to Missionary Family

By Jim Newton

GUAN (BP)--When the young Vietnamese girl stepped off the refugee bus at Anderson Air Base here, the first person she saw was missionary Jim Lassiter.

It was a tearful reunion, made even more emotional by the implications of a small stuffed animal she was carrying.

Just a few days earlier, Lassiter and his wife, Barbara, were fearful they would never again see Bich Lien, the young Vietnamese girl who had worked for the Lassiter family at their missionary residence in Vietnam.

About a week before Vietnam fell, independent Baptist missionary Walter Routh was in the Philippines and told the Lassiters he was going back to Vietnam. "Is there anything I can drop by your house and bring back," Routh had asked Barbara Lassiter.

"Not unless you can put my little helper, Bich Lien, in your hip pocket and bring her out," Mrs. Lassiter had replied.

When Routh, a former SBC appointed missionary to Vietnam who resigned in 1972 to establish his own independent mission association, arrived in Saigon, he was able to bring out a total of 53 Vietnamese, including 44 Baptists.

Bich Lien was among the group.

"When the door opened for me to bring these people out, I thought of her," Routh related in a telephone interview after his return to the USA.

She had just become a Christian and had been baptized last December.

Routh went to her house in Saigon and woke her up at 7 a.m. on Saturday, April 24. "Do you want to go to America?" he asked. "Then meet us at Grace Baptist Church at 9 a.m."

Bich Lien couldn't believe it. Shortly before 8 a.m. she telephoned the Baptist mission office and asked if it were true.

"What do I do about the Lassiter's house?" she asked, indicating the missionaries had left her the keys and the responsibility for the property.

"Leave it and come," Routh told her.

"Should I take anything?" she asked.

Routh suggested she take those things that were personally valuable to her, and anything that the Lassiters might want.

Five days later, on Guam, she handed to Jim Lassiter the stuffed animal she had brought out for Anthony, because she knew he loved it.

But the greatest gift for Anthony, and for Jim and Barbara Lassiter, was Bich Lien, herself.

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May 20, 1975

75-79

**Senate Passes Overseas
Voting Rights Measure**

WASHINGTON (BP)--The U. S. Senate passed and sent to the House of Representatives a bill which would grant American private citizens living abroad, including missionaries, the right to vote in federal elections by absentee ballot.

The measure passed the Senate by a voice vote and without amendment. A similar bill in the House has yet to be cleared for floor action by that body's subcommittee on elections.

The Senate bill's primary purpose is to assure the right of otherwise qualified citizens residing outside the U. S. to vote in presidential and congressional elections. Private citizens living abroad have been denied that privilege, despite the fact that special provisions have long been made for government and military personnel stationed overseas.

During March of this year, six Baptist bodies, with missionaries overseas, including the Southern Baptist Convention, submitted testimony urging passage of the measure and consideration in the House. The mission boards involved, which maintain about 3,000 overseas missionaries, presented their views through the staff of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs here.

James E. Wood Jr., executive director of the agency, told the House Subcommittee on Elections that Baptists support the measure because the right to vote is basic to the concept of citizenship. He also argued that the principles of equity and justice demand that private citizens, as well as government and military personnel, be allowed to vote. Furthermore, he said, American citizens should have the right to free movement and travel, including the maintenance of a permanent residence overseas for legitimate purposes.

Sen. Charles Mc. C. Mathias (R.-Md.), who sponsored the legislation, said that more than 750,000 American citizens will be affected by the measure if the House also passes it. He noted that nearly half the states do not allow such citizens to vote in presidential elections.

Mathias went on to decry the fact that, although such citizens are subject to federal tax laws and other obligations they are denied federal voting rights because of "a checkered pattern of archaic state laws packed with confused language and red tape."

The Senate-passed measure specifically exempts overseas citizens, who who exercise their right to vote, from federal, state, and local tax liability if they are otherwise not liable to taxation. At present, many such citizens are hesitant to vote because of the possibility in some states that their action would place them on the tax rolls.

The bill is also designed to establish uniform standards for absentee registration and balloting, thereby eliminating confusion caused by the variety of such procedures in the states.

In addition, the measure includes under the term "federal election" all general, special, and primary elections held to select, nominate or elect candidates for president, vice-president, U. S. senator and U. S. congressman.

Before the Senate bill can become law, the house must approve it or a similar measure of its own. After that, the president would have to sign the measure into law.

Weber Urges Day of
Prayer By SBC Churches

MIAMI BEACH (BP)--The president of the Southern Baptist Convention has asked the denomination's 34,734 churches in all 50 states "to set aside a few minutes of their worship services on June 8 to pray" for the SBC's annual meeting here, June 10-12.

Jaroy Weber, pastor of First Baptist Church, Lubbock, Tex., said that pastors and other elected messengers who may not be in their churches, Sunday, June 8, "are not on vacation but have gone to conduct the business of the Southern Baptist Convention.

"Let us pray that this will be a significantly spiritual convention which will express our compassion for the troubled world," Weber said.

"Let us pray that the convention will not occupy its time with divisive, incidental matters which negate our positive witness to a world desperately in need of redemption and cleansing. Let us pray for personal cleansing so God can work through us to bring renewal to our nation and world."

The 118th annual session (130th year) of the SBC will be preceded by auxiliary meetings, June 8-9.

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Mrs. O'Hair Says She
Will Sue W. A. Criswell

Baptist Press
5/20/75

DALLAS (BP)--Atheist Madalyn O'Hair said she is going to sue W. A. Criswell, pastor of First Baptist Church here.

Mrs. Janelle Scott, religion editor of the Dallas Times Herald, reported that Mrs. O'Hair says she plans to sue Criswell for libel because she says during their much-publicized Jan. 31 radio confrontation, the Southern Baptist pastor called her a Communist.

Criswell said, in fact, that the famed atheist reminded him of Communists he had met in Russia.

Criswell's office said the news story did not bother him and he would make no comment.

Mrs. O'Hair said, "I would not have gone into a discussion with him if I had known the low level of his intellect. It was a bizarre thing from beginning to end."

She said if Criswell represented the Baptist mind, she has "nothing to fear from Baptists."

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Dallas Baptist College
Picks Thorn as President

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DALLAS (BP)--W. E. Thorn, pastor of Metropolitan Baptist Church, Wichita, Kan., has been named president of financially-plagued Dallas Baptist College here.

He succeeds Charles W. Pitts, who resigned last June.

The college, with 1,213 students, has faced severe budget troubles, which peaked last summer when the Baptist General Convention of Texas supplied an emergency \$586,000 to open the college in September.

Continuing to have financial difficulties, the college has asked the Texas convention to help it complete the 1974-75 school year.

Thorn, 52, a native of McAlester, Okla., has served as pastor of the 2,300-member Metropolitan Baptist Church for 11 years, succeeding his father. He was formerly pastor of Calvary Baptist Church, Lubbock, Tex.

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He was president of the Kansas Convention of Southern Baptists (now Kansas-Nebraska Convention of Southern Baptists) when the then financially shaky convention launched a fund drive, which raised \$1.6 million, in coordination with the Southern Baptist Stewardship Commission and Home Mission Board and with assistance from other state conventions.

Thorn holds a bachelor of arts degree from Hardin-Simmons University, Abilene, Tex., and a master of divinity degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth.

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Pa. Parochial Aid Plan
Held Unconstitutional

Baptist Press
5/20/75

By Stan Hastey

WASHINGTON (BP)--In a landmark decision, the U. S. Supreme Court declared that two Pennsylvania laws providing aid to nonpublic schools violate the Constitution's prohibition of "an establishment of religion."

The laws called for the expenditure of tax funds for a wide variety of so-called "auxiliary services" and the provision on a loan basis of instructional materials and textbooks to students in nonpublic schools.

The justices, by a 6-3 margin, struck down all the provisions except for the loan of textbooks.

Many Washington observers say that the high court's new decision is the most extensive yet in a long series of rulings seeking to set limits on the kinds of aid that can be provided to nonpublic school pupils without violating the First Amendment's ban on the establishment of religion.

Among those seeking the overthrow of the Pennsylvania laws was the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs here, which joined with a number of other organizations in filing a "friend of the court" brief supporting opponents of the state aid program.

James E. Wood Jr., executive director of the Washington-based group, hailed the court's decision as a "reaffirmation of the rationale for its earlier positions outlawing public funds being used for nonpublic schools."

Wood noted that the decision "reinforces the position long maintained by the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs" and in fact affirms the arguments contained in the agency's brief in the present case. Those arguments, Wood continued, "are consistent with our commitment to the First Amendment and our conviction that the use of public funds be restricted to public schools which serve a uniquely public function."

Justice Potter Stewart, joined by Justices Harry A. Blackmun and Lewis F. Powell, wrote the majority opinion in the case, known as Meek v. Pittenger. Their opinion on the textbook loan provision was also joined by three others, Chief Justice Warren E. Burger and Associate Justices William H. Rehnquist and Byron R. White, who held in two separate opinions that the court should have upheld Pennsylvania's entire plan.

The majority opinion was supported, except in the textbook provision, by the other three justices, William O. Douglas, William J. Brennan and Thurgood Marshall, all of whom said in still another opinion that Pennsylvania's entire package should be thrown out.

The two laws at stake, Acts 194 and 195, were enacted by the Pennsylvania General Assembly in 1972 in an effort to find some constitutionally valid means of assisting the state's private elementary and secondary schools. Two other programs from Pennsylvania had already been declared unconstitutional in previous Supreme Court actions.

Act 194 called for the provision of "auxiliary services," including counseling, testing, psychological services, speech and hearing therapy, teaching and other services for exceptional, remedial and educationally disadvantaged pupils, "and such other secular, neutral, non-ideological services as are of benefit to nonpublic school children."

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Act 195 authorized Pennsylvania's secretary of education to lend textbooks without charge to children in nonpublic schools and to lend directly to such schools other "instructional materials and equipment." That category included periodicals, photographs, maps, charts, sound recordings, films, "or any other printed and published materials of a similar nature," as well as projection, recording and laboratory equipment.

The case was brought to the Supreme Court by a number of private individuals and groups, which objected to Pennsylvania's program after a U. S. district court ruled against them.

The high court majority rejected the "auxiliary services" provided for in Act 194 on grounds that they would inevitably produce "excessive entanglement" between church and state. In addition, the majority held that provision of such services "creates a serious potential for divisive conflict over the issue of aid to religion."

As for Act 195, the court divided sharply on the majority's distinction between loans of textbooks and other instructional materials and equipment. The majority, citing a 1968 Supreme Court decision in a textbook case from New York, held that lending textbooks either directly to nonpublic school children or indirectly to the schools to be passed on to children does not "offend the constitutional prohibition against laws 'respecting an establishment of religion.'"

Justice Brennan, writing also on behalf of Justices Douglas and Marshall, stated that "in light of the massive appropriations involved (nearly \$5 million in the 1973-74 school year), the court would be hard put to explain" the difference between lending textbooks and other materials and equipment. Brennan also insisted that "it is pure fantasy" to assume that free textbooks are an aid to students and not to schools themselves.

Chief Justice Burger, in a bitterly worded dissent, castigated the majority for what he called a "crabbed attitude." He went on to declare that the religion clauses of the First Amendment were not designed "to discriminate against or affirmatively stifle religions or religious activity."

He said also that the denial of auxiliary services and other benefits to children solely because they attend a church-related school "does not simply tilt the Constitution against religion; it literally turns the Religion Clause on its head."

But the solid 6-3 majority felt otherwise, stating at one point that state aid to nonpublic schools, "though earmarked for secular purposes . . . has the impermissible primary effect of advancing religion."