



August 24, 1979

79-144

Skull, Crossbones Mark
Beginning of Miracle

By John Rutledge

DALLAS (BP)--The skull and crossbones flag of the Thai pirates has been a harbinger of death to thousands of Vietnamese boat people fleeing their country.

But for Dao Que Huong, a 21-year-old refugee now living in Dallas and attending East Grand Baptist Church, it marked the beginning of a renewal of her faith, and ultimately a "miracle" of deliverance.

In a scene experienced by hundreds of thousands of refugees, her family departed Vietnam among 437 persons jammed into a boat designed for only 200.

On the third day, pirates, who make a lucrative business of plundering the steady stream of refugees from Vietnam, boarded the ship. They stabbed the captain, ransacked the boat looking for hidden gold or valuables, and then left. The refugee boat was boarded three more times that day by different pirate ships, four times the next day and four times the day after, Dao said.

"We were exhausted. There was no food, and no oil or water on the boat. They had poured it all out looking for gold," she said. "Our bodies were dry."

Each successive wave of pirates was angrier than the one before, because there was less to be found that was valuable. Boards and planks were ripped up searching for money, and the boat began to leak.

"On May 5 two cruel pirate boats came alongside," Dao said. "They took everyone onto their boats and searched, but found nothing to take."

"So they decided to take 16 of the young girls." Dao buried her face in her hands as she recalled that day. "We heard the screaming of the girls they had taken to the other boat. When they returned, they did not look like human beings."

All seemed lost for the refugees, "but a miracle happened," Dao said.

For a reason she cannot explain, Dao was "moved by the Holy Spirit" to pray publicly for the whole boat. Normally a shy girl and not given to witnessing since her conversion at age 12, Dao knelt down in the refugee boat.

"I wanted them to become Christians before they died," she explained.

Her mother warned her that she would draw attention to herself by the action. Earlier she had attempted to make her attractive face ugly, and had escaped the attention of the pirates.

"But I felt I should pray and tell them about Christ. I told them that God can give you the things that are more precious than what you are looking for. We may not attain what we seek for, but we can receive him," she said.

She then began singing a Vietnamese gospel song, "The Lord is my shepherd, I have peace in him."

One pirate pulled a pistol and aimed it at her head, but she continued to sing. Although the Thais did not understand the Vietnamese words, they liked her voice. When she stopped singing, they aimed a pistol at her head again, but this time to make her continue.

"As they listened to the music, their temperament became calm," she said.

They took her into the cabin belonging to the captain of the pirate vessel. He offered her some "medicine" to "make her feel better," apparently drugs, but she indicated to him that she didn't want any and that she had to return to the boat to take care of her son (although she does not have a son).

"All the time, I was praying that God would deliver me from being ashamed."

Instead of using force to overcome her, they allowed her to return to the refugee boat. But they warned her the boat was sinking and that she would die. "I told them I wanted to die with all those people," she said.

The next day, the pirates organized a funeral service for the refugees.

"They took all our names and played funeral music. They tied white bandages around our heads and then began towing the boat as fast as they could out into the ocean," Dao explained.

After being towed all night, the boat began to break up. The pirates boarded again and started chopping it apart with axes.

But a lookout spotted a large ship approaching; and, in a moment, the pirates had gone. Dao said when the refugees saw the ship's name, the U.S. frigate Robert Perry, "We felt as if we were removed from hell to heaven."

The refugees were given medical attention, food and water, but nothing could be done to fix the engine. So the ship began to tow the refugees. Five Thai fishing boats appeared, waiting to rob the refugees if the U.S. ship left.

When they began following too close, the U.S. ship fired on them, scaring them off.

Dao was transferred to an aircraft carrier, and then to a refugee camp in Thailand. Because of the U.S. involvement in their rescue, the refugees were allowed into the United States in two months. She arrived in Dallas to meet her relatives July 9.

Only about two percent of Southern Baptist churches nationally are involved in refugee sponsorship through the SBC Home Mission Board. Gene Tunnell, refugee settlement coordinator at the board, said Washington, Oklahoma and Texas are the states where Baptists are doing the most.

First Baptist Church in Lacey, Wash., a congregation of about 150, is working with 200 refugees, most of which it sponsored. Enon Association in Ardmore, Okla., has sponsored over 100. First Baptist Church, San Antonio, Texas, has a goal to sponsor 50 more families in the next few months.

Southern Baptist response is increasing. Tunnell said that in 1977 his office guaranteed settlement for 75 refugees. In 1978 that number increased to 168 but the 1979 total by Aug. 21 was 1,122.

He said as many or more individuals sponsor refugees as do churches. One-fourth to one-third of the sponsors are refugees who are in turn sponsoring others. In April, five Florida churches, composed mainly of Cuban refugees, sponsored Vietnamese refugees.

-30-

Elderly Couple Sets Up
World Hunger Trust Fund

Baptist Press
8/24/79

RALEIGH, N.C. (BP)--An elderly North Carolina couple who asked to remain anonymous has set up a \$40,000 trust with proceeds to be used for world hunger alleviation through the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board.

The couple has set up two previous trust funds for Southern Baptist causes since 1974.

Working through the Baptist Foundation of North Carolina, they established a \$40,000 fund for use in the Cooperative Program in 1974 and a \$20,000 fund for foreign missions in 1976.

Papers for the world hunger trust fund were signed on World Hunger Day, Aug. 1, 1979, but the date was a coincidence, according to the Baptist Foundation of North Carolina.

-30-

Christians Should Proclaim
Not Debate Bible: Cothen

Baptist Press
8/24/79

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--Grady Cothen said here that he has avoided the recent Southern Baptist debate involving the inerrancy of the scriptures because of his belief that the role of the Christian should be proclaiming the Bible.

"I am loathe to participate in any level of the biblical debate which has been recently introduced among Southern Baptists, because I have felt the Christian's responsibility is not to debate about the Bible but to proclaim it," said Cothen, president of the denomination's Sunday School Board.

Speaking to more than 3,100 college students on the "Authority of the Bible," Cothen said the real argument has to do with the inspiration of the scripture which is not a new issue and until a few months ago not a live issue in the Southern Baptist Convention.

"It is difficult for scholars using scientific methodology to talk about original autographs since no one living has ever even known anyone who might have seen them. On the other hand, the argument is moot to many since at no significant doctrinal point do the major manuscripts differ," Cothen said.

-more-

"The Bible is authority for us by faith," he said. "Its trustworthiness and authority are grounded in its God-breathedness. Though much of it has been verified by other sources, it is not completely processable through the scientists."

Quoting from 2 Peter 1:21 and 2 Timothy 3:16, Cothen said that Christ accepted the scripture of the Old Testament as "God-breathed" and that it was authentic and authoritative.

"The apostles added to the scripture the words and meanings of Jesus Christ," he said. "The church fathers, those who had direct contact with the apostles, added letters and writings of the apostles to complete the New Testament.

"Gradually the church came to agree that these are the books of holy writ and the authentic, authoritative word of the eternal God. The scripture has survived persecution, burning and its greatest enemy, ignorance, throughout the centuries," he said.

Recalling the controversy arising over biblical inerrancy at the recent Southern Baptist Convention in Houston, Cothen said he wants to go on record as believing that "the Bible is God's authentic, inspired, totally trustworthy work. It is good enough, wise enough, smart enough, deep enough, broad enough, high enough and loving enough for anybody and it has everything in it you will ever need to show you the way home.

"The message of God's love comes through the scripture to all of us who will open our hearts and minds and allow God to speak to us," he said. "The Bible is like a love letter from home. God has sent us his completely reliable and authoritative letter from his heart."

-30-

Elmer Gray Recovering
From Moped Accident

Baptist Press
8/24/79

FRESNO, Calif. (BP)--Elmer Gray, editor of the California Southern Baptist, is glad he was wearing a helmet when the moped he was riding crashed in Fresno County, Calif.

Gray, 61, suffered a broken arm and other minor injuries and is recovering rapidly. His helmet sustained a three-inch-long gash on the right side.

He was returning on the motorized bicycle from a Sunday preaching engagement at Cornelia Avenue Baptist Church, Aug. 19, when he noticed a fast-moving pickup truck overtaking him.

"I did the very thing a moped driver shouldn't do," Gray said, "and that is take my eyes off the road."

The next thing he knew he had fallen onto the road's right of way while his moped remained in the traffic lane. He said the truck did not hit him.

A passerby stopped and took Gray back to the Cornelia church. Later he went to a local hospital for x-rays and treatment. He sustained a break in the upper arm and skin abrasions.

He expects to be back at his typewriter soon--and riding his moped again.

-30-

Baptist Church in Knoxville Hosts Athletes from Russia

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--While others protested the presence of Soviet athletes in Knoxville, members of the Island Home Baptist Church took them on a tour of their church and informally told them about Jesus Christ.

The Russians were in Knoxville for a Soviet Sports Exhibit to promote the 1980 Olympics and the opportunity for Americans to tour Russia as they attend the Olympic games in Moscow.

Protests came when the exhibit was scheduled for the newly-opened City-County Building in Knoxville. Local officials and the news media received many phone calls objecting to the Soviet flag being flown over the building, along with the American and Tennessee flags, according to David G. Peach, pastor of the Island Home Baptist Church.

He said a local Jewish group called for the release of Jewish prisoners and for permission for the migration of Jews from the U.S.S.R. Also, he said, a Christian group called for the release of all religious prisoners and for religious freedom in Russia.

In the midst of negative reaction, Peach seized an opportunity for a positive impact in international understanding by inviting the Russians to the church for an informal exchange of ideas about beliefs and philosophies.

"I discovered the Russians to be very friendly and open," said Peach after visiting the exhibit. "They have a great curiosity about our people and our way of life."

Peach arranged for nine Russians to visit the church to talk and exchange ideas. They met with several church members and the pastor. Peach talked with them about the church, the denomination and Baptist beliefs.

"But most exciting of all, I was able to share the message of salvation," Peach said. "As I explained about Christ and God's plan for man, they displayed a genuine interest. They offered many sincere questions and a discussion ensued.

"They told of their beliefs and made an honest effort to understand ours. It was a time of openness and sharing. No converts were made, but it is our prayer that the seed has been planted. They had never before heard the plan of salvation...Their response was one of interest and curiosity."

Peach said they were able to discuss religious freedom in the U.S.S.R., and that the Russians knew about Georgi Vins and other Russian Baptists who have been persecuted.

"It proved to be a great experience," Peach said, "perhaps one of the greatest of my life. It was our concern that we leave them with a positive impression of people who call themselves Christians, and that we present the message of Christ to those who might not again hear it."

"We have come to understand the Russian people a little better and perhaps to overcome some of our fears in regard to our differences. We have helped them to understand us better and to accept the fact that we practice our belief in God," Peach concluded.

"Now we have experienced Bold Missions first-hand at home," he said in reference to the Southern Baptist Convention's Bold Mission Thrust plan to proclaim the message of Christ to the whole world in this century.

**Guerrillas Close Schools
At Sanyati Baptist Compound**

SANYATI, Zimbabwe Rhodesia (BP)--Guerrillas closed the Baptist Elementary and High Schools in Sanyati, Zimbabwe Rhodesia, Aug. 20, following the last day of classes for the first term.

A group of 12 to 15 guerrillas visited the school that evening, talked to students and staff and told them the school would not be allowed to operate the next term, said Marion G. (Bud) Fray Jr., the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's field representative for Southern Africa.

The guerrillas were not violent, he said, and expressed a desire that the Sanyati Baptist Hospital continue operating.

The school board scheduled a meeting Aug. 25 to consider alternate locations for offering the last term of this year to grades 10 and 12, Fray said. Students in those grades must take qualifying exams for entrance into the next level at the end of their final term.

In 1977, seniors at the Sanyati school, the nation's only Baptist high school, scored highest in the nation on graduation exams used throughout Africa and Europe to determine qualification for graduation and to measure scholastic achievement.

In another incident in mid-July, guerrillas took about \$1,600 and medical supplies worth another \$350 to \$400 from the compound.

The school and hospital have been operating under local Baptist leadership. Transfer to local leadership was accelerated in June 1978, when the guerrilla murder of Southern Baptist missionary Archie G. Dunaway Jr. caused missionaries to evacuate the compound.

-30-

**Baptists Rush Supplies
To Area Hit by Snowstorm**

Baptist Press
8/24/79

EDENVALE, South Africa (BP)--The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board has provided \$10,000 to send food to a mountainous region of Lesotho where supply lines were cut by the area's worst snowstorm in years.

Beginning Aug. 27, Mission Aviation Fellowship will begin making six flights a day carrying the food. Each flight will transport seven bags of corn meal, from Ladysmith, South Africa, to the airstrip near Mokhotlong, Lesotho. Plans call for Southern Baptists to provide 400 bags of corn meal, the diet staple in the area, to this small, independent nation within South Africa's borders.

Southern Baptists are providing the food through hunger relief funds at the request of the Baptist Union of South Africa, sponsors of mission work in the area. The Baptist Union will provide \$2,400 for food and literature in the local language for distribution with the food.

Two meters (about six feet) of snow cover the only two roads into the area. Three bridges on the main road are out and a 15-ton boulder blocks a pass on the smaller trail.

In Lesotho, Baptist pastors in churches associated with the South African Baptist Missionary Society will help coordinate ground distribution. A Baptist layman there has donated the use of his land-rover for distribution.

-30-

Southern Baptist 'Christian Citizenship Corps' Launched

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--The Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention has announced formation of a "Christian Citizenship Corps" to generate increased political involvement among the SBC's 13.2 million members.

Touted as "a grassroots network of Southern Baptists," the citizenship corps will consist of Southern Baptist citizens "interested in what government is doing locally, statewide and nationally, and willing to make their voices heard in those arenas at appropriate times and in appropriate ways," said William H. Elder of the commission staff.

The stated purpose of the citizenship corps, he said, is to stimulate political action "to promote public righteousness," but Elder believes it offers an alternative to organizations which have "wedded conservative politics and conservative Christianity."

(Elder said he preferred not to discuss such groups specifically, but organizations such as The Christian Voice and the Moral Majority have attracted widespread media attention recently after opening offices in Washington.)

"I don't think the Christian faith should be used to baptize any political persuasion," Elder said. "The Christian faith should be the norm, the standard, and if it is, I think it defies any doctrinaire labeling. Jesus, for example, always frustrated people who tried to classify him in liberal or conservative categories."

Elder added that he is "leery of Christian politicians who can determine their positions on the issues too quickly, perhaps allowing a political-philosophical allegiance to tell them where to stand and using their faith to authenticate the position.

"In fact, I find it hard to believe that any Christian group which tries to be true to the standard of the gospel will always come up on one political or philosophical side," he declared.

The Christian Life Commission, the SBC's national social concerns agency, will "coordinate and facilitate communication" between citizenship corps members and government by collecting and channeling information on "legislative issues and their ethical implications," said Elder, director of citizenship development for the commission.

The basic communications vehicle will be a "Moral Alert" newsletter, to be sent to corps members "when issues of special importance to Southern Baptists arise and when fast action is called for," he said.

The operational style for the Christian Citizenship Corps, Elder said, will be to "look first to the specifics of an issue, then to the biblical ethics before we speak."

Even then, he stressed, the policy of the Christian Life Commission will be to present both sides of a legislative issue, based on a belief that "there is a difference between fairness and neutrality."

"We think this approach fits best with the Christian gospel, which is a gospel of enabling, and with the Baptist commitment to the priesthood of the believer," Elder explained. "It enshrines respect for individuality and diversity. We want to be catalysts, not power brokers. We do not intend to tell people what they should think and how they should vote, but we will try to help them in the ethical analysis of the issues and may choose to take a position based on that analysis."

The formation of the citizenship corps marks the first time the nation's largest Protestant denomination has attempted to mobilize political action through an organized structure.

The new emphasis on political involvement, Elder emphasized, does not violate Southern Baptists' zealous commitment to the principle of separation of church and state.

"The Christian Citizenship Corps," Elder said, "recognizes and defends the doctrine of separation of church and state as the basic foundation of religious liberty in America. But it rejects the misinterpretations of that doctrine which suggest that Christians and Christian principles should not be actively present in the political process."