

Montagnards Who Fled Cambodia Get Little Aid

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, April 9—About 8,000 Cambodian mountain tribesmen who sought refuge in South Vietnam after the Vietnamese Communists captured their native regions last year are suffering from hunger and neglect although ample American funds have been allocated for them.

Maj. Kpa-Doh of the Cambodian army said in an interview that the South Vietnamese Government had supplied almost no food, clothing or shelter to the refugees, the bulk of whom arrived last May and June.

Dr. Pham Quang Dan, Minister of State responsible for refugee matters, agreed that

the aid given to the Montagnards was far from sufficient.

Official South Vietnamese, Cambodian and American sources said that the neglect of the tribesmen, the majority of whom are women and children, was the result of the widespread indifference of the governments involved, particularly in Saigon, to the fate of the Montagnards, whom many consider racially inferior.

Dr. Dan said that the neglect, which has resulted in some deaths and much illness, was the result largely of indifference by provincial officials in Quangduc, where the refugees are concentrated.

The Minister said the province chief, Lieut. Col. Houang

Cong Duan seemed unhappy with his assignment to Quangduc, the least populous and most desolate province of South Vietnam. For that reason, the Minister said, Colonel Duan took no interest in his work.

U. S. Pressure Urged

Dr. Dan said it would be helpful if the American provincial advisory team exerted more pressure on local officials.

The result of the attitude of these officials has been that of 33.2-million piasters (\$120,727) allocated to aid the refugees last July only 4,534,470 piasters (\$16,488) has been spent for rice, dried fish and salt.

Small quantities of rice from the Cambodian Red Cross and the Phnompenh Government have reached the refugees, Major Kpa-Doh said, adding that most have lived on roots and leaves and occasional meat from game the tribesmen have killed with their crossbows. However the major said that insecurity had prevented them from going far from their camps in search of food.

Major Kpa-Doh, himself a montagnard, has been named by Phnompenh to look after the interests of the refugees. But he finds the response of his own Government to his requests for material and diplomatic assistance no more encouraging than that of South Vietnamese officials.

The major, who spent the years from 1962 to 1966 fighting with montagnard units organized and trained by the American Special Forces in South Vietnam and along the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos, has grown so impatient with the inaction that he has summarily brought several groups of refugees out of Quangduc with the help of American friends.

American planes flying supplies into the former Special Forces camp at Buprang that has been taken over by South Vietnamese rangers, have sometimes carried out groups of refugees.

One group of about 100 camped for many days on the grounds of the Cambodian Embassy here before being flown to Phnompenh.

About 300 tribesmen, mainly women and children, have been camping near the airstrip at Banmethuot, a provincial capital north of Quangduc, for about a month hoping for transportation to Phnompenh. An American transport plane took them there from Buprang.

Major Kpa-Doh said two children had died so far at Banmethuot from lack of shelter

and food. What food the Montagnards receive comes from American officials in Banmethuot.

About half the refugees are around Duclap, another former Special Forces camp. Nearly 2,000 are at Buprang, 500 are at Kienduc and the rest are in smaller groups near the border of the Cambodian province of Monduliri, from which they came.

The refugees now live in territory familiar to them. The mountains are rugged and have the same dense jungles on the Vietnamese side as on the Cambodian. But they lack almost everything that made Cambodia home for them.

They arrived on foot, carrying only their babies and whatever else a man or woman could carry while climbing through the mountains and forests.

They brought the clothes they were wearing and a little extra, their crossbows, a pot or two, some rice and some salt. Now their clothes are worn out, and a loincloth is all that many have left. Hunger and exposure have caused illness and there are neither medicines nor doctors.

Fear of Attacks on Camps

Major Kpa-Doh and many observers here are concerned over the threat of Communist attacks on the almost undefended refugee settlements. The number of unarmed former soldiers and men of fighting age among them make the camps subject to Vietcong recruiting or attacks, and the current battle at Dakto, further north in the Central Highlands has heightened fear.

The major has proposed that the men be sent to Cambodia to be armed and trained and then return to protect their communities. He has been waiting for a response for months. He has received 2,000 uniforms so far from Phnompenh, which he has distributed to those most in need of clothing.

Dr. Dan said he would prefer that the soldiers be trained in South Vietnam. He said he planned to go to Phnompenh later this month to discuss that possibility and the formation of a joint committee to attend to the refugees' needs.

Dr. Dan said the funds allocated for the montagnards were part of 550 million piasters (\$2-million) contributed last year by the United States for relief for refugees coming to South Vietnam from Cambodia.

The montagnards were a small minority of 200,000 refugees, who were mainly Vietnamese residents of Cambodia.

Saigon has added 70 million piasters (\$254,545) to the American contribution.