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A Beer Hall in Oregon Shelters Refugees



Associated Press

One of the young Vietnamese who settled down yesterday in Mount Angel, as he arrived in Oregon Wednesday.

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MOUNT ANGEL, Ore., April 24—Numb from fatigue and a cold spring rain, lame children from Saigon and scores of other Vietnamese refugees settled today into their temporary Oregon shelter — a community beer hall — after traveling 10,000 miles in three days.

This small farming community of 2,200, the destination of European immigrants in another century, is the new home for 177 Vietnamese brought here by a Roman Catholic priest who for more than two decades operated a Saigon orphanage that cared for young polio victims.

The Rev. Robert Crawford, a Vincentian, cut through red tape to fly his charges to the United States. They included refugee children placed in his care by other priests in regions of South Vietnam that have been overrun by the Communists.

The priest brought his band to Mount Angel because it offered a rural haven where the children could be attended by the Benedictine Sisters of a priory that has existed here for 93 years.

Forty crippled children were expected by the townspeople and the nuns when

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word of the rescue mission reached here last week. But when the group rolled into town yesterday in five yellow school buses after a flight to Portland, there were 133 additional refugees, all healthy, and ranging in age from infancy to adulthood.

The priory and a neighboring Benedictine abbey were unable to provide beds for so many people, so the entire group was moved into a warehouse-like structure that serves this German-Swiss community as a beer garden during its traditional Oktoberfest celebration.

A huge checkerboard of sleeping cots now fills half the hall. The rest of the space serves as dining and play areas.

Rain drummed intermittently on the corrugated steel roof as the children slowly adjusted body and mind to their new land.

They thumbed through American comic books and hugged rag dolls provided by the community. A few new possessions — toothbrush, soap and towel—were stored in cardboard boxes at the



foot of each cot. Smiles and laughter soon replaced timidity, and even the crippled children, wearing braces or using crutches, investigated their new shelter.

New 'Bowling' Game

Boys of school age converted unfamiliar plastic bowling toys into a new game, gripping the pins like bats to hammer the light-weight bowling ball into the air or send it skidding along the concrete floor.

Others—the average age of the children appears to be 6 or 7—eagerly devoured words of English from any passing stranger who would sit with them. They showed greater confidence in leaping the language barrier than did their American guardians, who stumbled over short phrases of Vietnamese.

"The doctors who checked them on their first stop in California said they were the healthiest bunch of kids, outside of the polio problem, who've arrived from Vietnam so far," said Harry Lambert, retired Army colonel who has a farm outside Mount Angel and was instrumental in bringing the children here.

Details Not Released

He said that events had moved so quickly in Saigon that no one had had time to chart a future for the refugees. "I expect they'll be kept here for a few weeks before any plans for relocation can be made," he said.

In addition to clothing, books and other supplies, he added, the greatest need is for experienced physical therapists and equipment for the polio victims.

It had been hoped that the refugees could be housed in the dormitories of Colegio Cesar Chavez in Mount Angel, a former co-ed college once run by the Benedictines. But Chicano students are

staging a sit-in on the campus, protesting a foreclosure action brought against the school by the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Details of the rescue mission were not provided today by Father Crawford, who apparently has been ferrying children out of Communist areas since he was a young priest in China, and later in Hanoi. He said that he feared reprisals against South Vietnamese who had aided the escape.

Just how many of the children here are orphans and therefore adoptable is not clear. The parents of some of the polio victims, it was learned, turned them over to Father Crawford because they were too poor to pay for medical treatment.



United Press International

South Vietnamese children being carried from a plane Wednesday in Portland on the way to Mount Angel, Ore.

There were many adults—most of them women with children in the refugee party. They had been affiliated with the orphanage and fled with the priest. One woman left Saigon with a son and two nephews, leaving behind her husband and three other children.

"I don't know where they are," she said in halting English. "There was not time to find them."

One little orphan among the children would not be consoled by the sisters or the volunteer women who watched over the refugees through the night. He is 3 or 4 years old, with coal-black hair clipped above his ears. He has no name; only an identification tag on one wrist with the number CCC-8.

A Child Reaches Out

When the adults tried to place him in a cot, he reached out for them with a whimper of agony, and it was not in the hearts of the women to leave him alone.

So they placed him on a counter top, above the taps meant for the beer kegs, and he sat there barefooted and motionless for hours, staring blankly at the red exit sign above a door.

"I wonder how many street corners in Saigon he's sat on like that, looking for something or someone," said one of the women.

At last his eyes became heavy-lidded with sleep, and the women moved him to a cot, this time without protest. He slept with one hand on a coloring book titled "Babes in Toyland." The other hand dreamingly fingered a toy doll that had once comforted a sleeping child in one of the comfortable farmhouses of the rolling Oregon countryside.