

Offers of Sponsorship For Refugees Decline

By Mike Shanahan
Associated Press

Offers from prospective sponsors of Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees have dropped sharply, and some officials believe it may be a year or more before resettlement of the refugees is complete.

Resettlement officials said a reported delay caused by security checks of the refugees is slowing the pace of relocation while the decline in the number of sponsors poses more delays for the future.

These officials said the delay is likely to keep thousands of refugees on Guam through the summer typhoon season and could force the opening of more refugee camps on the U.S. mainland.

"The way things are going now, we're still going to have people in the camps more than a year from now," Leon O. Marion, director of an umbrella organization of private refugee agencies, said.

Marion and State Department officials agreed that the most recent logjam has been a congressional requirement for extensive security checks of refugees before they move on to new lives in U.S. communities.

So far, 22,382 refugees have been resettled. Most of them had relatives in this country or had established contacts with willing American sponsors before leaving home. Of the remaining 107,941 refugees, there are 24,205 at Ft. Chaffee, Ark., 16,879 at Camp Pendleton, Calif., 4,668 at Elgin Air Force Base in Florida, 520 at Ft. Indiantown Gap, Pa., and 61,669 on bases in the Pacific Ocean, mostly living under tents on Guam.

Refugees are not permitted to leave the four mainland camps until an American citizen, acting as a sponsor, provides assurances that the refugee will have a place to live and some assurance of a job.

Norman Sweet, the senior U.S. civilian in charge of the refugee program on Guam, said the length of time the island was to remain as a refugee center has now stretched to August, compared with the original estimate of mid-June.

"The weather and impermanence of sanitary facilities are proving to be worries we had

not expected," Sweet said. "These people should be processed out of here as soon as possible and are not being for what I think are essentially political reasons in the United States."

U.S. officials privately acknowledged that congressional insistence on a painstakingly screening for unknown criminals or persons with Vietcong or Communist affiliations has slowed the relocation process.

Among thousands of names checked so far, only about 30 have shown up with negative notations among records of the FBI, the Central Intelligence Agency, the Pentagon, and other agencies.

Elinor Green, a spokesman for the intergovernmental task force on refugees in Washington, insisted that the security checks have ceased to be a problem. She said more than 800 Vietnamese flew to their new homes from U.S. camps on both Tuesday and Wednesday.

Marion, director of the

American Council of Voluntary Agencies for Foreign Service, disputed her overall assessment and said there are still thousands of refugees waiting in the camps for security checks before they can join their American sponsors.

Meanwhile, from a peak daily average of 11,000 offers of help counted by the State Department in the early days of May, the number has now dwindled to an average of about 450.

Even those offers must be screened for legitimacy, and only a tiny number include promises of all three kinds of help required by the refugees: employment, housing and financial assistance.

Marion and officials of other volunteer agencies interviewed Thursday confirmed the declining interest in refugees among Americans.

He said his office is receiving around 100 calls a day from persons offering help, compared to 600 calls daily earlier in the program.