

'We Are Still Happier Here,' Says a Saigon Refugee

By DAVID A. ANDELMAN

Special to The New York Times

SONGKHLA, Thailand, June 18—Five weeks ago Hoang Lien sailed a tiny fishing boat into this scenic port of the Malay Peninsula after a 10-day journey from Saigon.

He was one of about a thousand Vietnamese refugees who escaped that way from Vietnam on the day the Communists rolled into Saigon, and for several days thereafter. But now he is one of more than 300 who are still left here—apparently forgotten by nearly everyone, though his wife, Nguyen Thi Lien, and their four children are now refugees at Camp Chaffee, Ark.

It is partially a case of people who have fallen between the cracks, American and Thai officials here admit. Some of these refugees, in the early days of the effort, were moved off—to the United States, and to Cambodia and Australia as well. But now the momentum is lost.

The Thais do not want them. The Thais do not, to keep the freindship of their new Communist neighbors, want to acknowledge they exist. American officials who screen refugees in Thailand require more and more forms to be filled out. And up the coast and in other parts of Thailand, there are others just like those here—Cambodians and Vietnamese alike—who wait in similar refugee

camps for cases to be decided.

Meanwhile, Hoang Lien and his fellow refugees live here in squalid open huts, the bamboo roofs rotting, their sanitary facilities a collection of rickety shacks suspended on bamboo stakes over the harbor's edge.

'Still Happier Here'

When it rains, as it does increasingly these days in southern Thailand, and the winds blow, the roofs leak and at times blow away the roofs.

"We are still happier here than we were in Saigon," explained a fellow refugee, Le Han Vy, 43 years old, who is the mayor or leader of this tiny refugee colony. Mr. Vy was a lawyer in Saigon and he speaks excellent English. He would like, if he ever take up law there and help gets to the United States, to

Vietnamese who have settled there. He believes they will need lawyers who can understand them.

Mr. Vy said the members of his group come to Songkhla by small fishing boats they had found in the Saigon River, sailing down the river and pointing their boats in a westerly direction. They had no maps or charts. He added: "We just sailed until we hit land. Some of us hit Singapore, others of us drifted to Malaysia. We hit the coast near Pattani."

Thai authorities then ordered his group to Songkhla, where a refugee area had been set up.

This area was a small section of land on the herbor's edge fenced off with metal crowd-control picket fences and surrounded now by soldiers of the royal Thai Army who discourage contact with the refugees.

The refugees here receive two small meals of rice and fish or meat each day and many say they are frequently hungry.

There has been major disease, here, but minor illnesses, while treated by Red Cross nurses, frequently go uncured since there are no drugs and the refugees have no money to buy them. Usually, they are not allowed to go to the market or to the missionary hospital in town.

For Songkhla, the refugees are the biggest thing that has happened since the hotel announced its decision to build a new wing. For days on end, the thousands of townspeople from the entire province turned out to stare and point at the Vietnamese.

An employe of one American official here announced one morning last week that she could not come to work

Waiting in Thai Camp

that afternoon because she had to go watch the Vietnamese. Now the interest has slackened somewhat, but still the small open-air taxis that double as buses here stop regularly at the refugee camp near the town docks.

Refugees Still Coming

The refugees are still coming to Songkhla. Two days ago two more families, 10 persons in all, arrived in two more small boats. They had left June 11, following the same route as their predecessors. They said they had not been able to find enough to eat in Saigon. But they were vague as to the reasons.

"They only give rice to poor people," Mr. Vy said, translating one of the refugee's reasons for leaving. "Not everyone can get rice there."

Many of those in the refugee camp here have relatives

already in the United States who were evacuated before the fall of Saigon through Guam or the Philippines in the regular American evacuation airlift.

That is how Nguyen Thi Lien managed to get out. Her husband, Hoang Lien, was, however, a major in the army in a unit assigned north of Saigon and could not get away from his unit to reach his wife in time for the American airlift. In an effort to join her, he resorted to the fishing boat.

"I have no money, no way to go to the United States," Mr. Lien said.

Mr. Vy broke in: "We would do anything—once we were there, anything to help or to work. I would even dig in." He motioned with his hands as though digging a trench. "I am strong, I would work hard, yes even doing this."