

Message Text

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SUBJ: REPATRIATION ACCOUNTS OF KHMER REFUGEES

1. FOLLOWING ARE THREE ACCOUNTS BY KHMER REFUGEES OF
THEIR EXPERIENCES DURING THE FORCIBLE REPATRIATION OF
KHMER IN MAY AND JUNE 1979.

2. EAP SEAV KENG, FEMALE, AGE THIRTY, CROSSED INTO THAI-
LAND NEAR ARANYAPRATHET ON 17 MAY 1979 WITH HER HUSBAND,
FOUR-YEAR-OLD SON AND HER BROTHER-IB-LAW'S FAMILY OF TEN.
ON 20 MAY, THE THAI MILITARY REPATRIATED THEM ALONG WITH
A LARGER GROUP OF PREVIOUS ARRIVALS AT WANG SOMBOUN,
PRACHINBURI PROVINCE, IN AND UNINHABITED AREA OF DENSE
UNDERGROWTH. THE THAI SOLDIERS TOLD THEM TO MAKE THEIR
WAY ACROSS THE BORDER, THREE KILOMETERS DISTANT, AS
RAPIDLY AS POSSIBLE OR ELSE THE KHMER ROUGE WOULD COME OUT
AFTER DARK AND FORCE THEM INTO CAMBODIA. AFTER CROSSING
THE BORDER THE SAME EVENING, KHMER ROUGE SOLDIERS APPROACH-

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ED THE GROUP AND TOLD THEM THAT THERE WAS NO FOOD AND THAT
THEY SHOULD RETURN TO THAILAND. THE GROUP OF THIRTEEN
RE-CROSSED THE BORDER INTO THAILAND THE FOLLOWING DAY AND
WERE GIVEN FOOD IN EXCHANGE FOR WORK IN A SYMPATHETIC
FARMER'S CORNFIELD. THEY STAYED THERE FOR ABOUT TWO
WEEKS UNTIL THE THAI MILITARY AGAIN FOUND THEM AND TOOK
THEM TO A TEMPLE NEAR THE REPATRIATION POINT WHERE APPROX.

5000 OTHER REFUGEES WERE GATHERED. AFTER A FEW DAYS, ON OR ABOUT 11 JUNE, THE THAI MILITARY TRANSPORTED THE GROUP IN 60 BUSES TO SISAKET PROVINCE WHERE THEY WERE REPATRIATED NEAR PREAH VIHEAR. THEY FOLLOWED A LONG LINE OF REFUGEES DOWN THE SIDE OF THE HILL TOWARD CAMBODIA. EAP SEAV KENG HEARD EXPLOSIONS; SOME PEOPLE STEPPED ON LANDMINES AND THERE WAS THE SOUND OF MORTARS OR ARTILLERY SHELLS.

THE RUMOR SPREAD AMONG THE REFUGEES THAT THE VIETNAMESE WERE DENYING THE REFUGEES ACCESS IN CAMBODIA. SHELLING FROM THE CAMBODIAN SIDE CONTINUED AT REGULAR INTERVALS; THE REFUGEES THOUGHT IT WAS INTENDED TO DISPERSE THEM AND KEEP THEM FROM MASSING AT THE BORDER. AFTER SEVERAL DAYS, THE FOOD WHICH THEY CARRIED WITH THEM WAS NEARLY DEPLETED. EAP'S GROUP BEGAN TO WALK PARALLEL TO THE RIDGE WHERE THEY WERE REPATRIATED TO LOOK FOR FOOD. SHE RELATED THAT THEIR TREK THROUGH THE HILLS BROUGHT THEM TO A VALLEY WHERE DECAYING HUMAN REMAINS FILLED THE AIR WITH A NAUSEATING STENCH. SHE SAID SHE SAW CORPSES EVERYWHERE - WOMEN, CHILDREN AND MEN. SEVERAL DAYS LATER, AFTER SKIRTING THE VALLEY, THE GROUP REACHED A ROAD IN THAILAND. THEY HAD BEEN WITHOUT FOOD OR WATER FOR FOUR DAYS. THAI SOLDIERS INTERCEPTED THEM AND THEY WERE AGAIN REPATRIATED AT PREAH VIHEAR. THIS TIME, INSTEAD OF MOVING TOWARD CAMBODIA, THEY FOLLOWED THE HILLTOPS AND REACHED A DENSELY WOODED AREA ON THE THAI SIDE OF THE BORDER FOUR OR FIVE MOUNTAINS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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AWAY FROM THEIR STARTING POINT, HERE THEY FOUND ROOTS AND CASSAVA, AND SEPARATED INTO SMALL GROUPS TO AVOID DETECTION BY THE THAI MILITARY AND TO EASE THE COMPETITION FOR FOOD.

THE GROUP STAYED ON THE SLOPES OF THE HILL FOR ABOUT 20 DAYS. EAP'S HUSBAND LEFT ON THE MORNING OF 6 JULY TO LOOK FOR FOOD, BUT NEVER RETURNED. EAP SEAV KENG LATER CONCLUDED THAT HE MUST HAVE BOARDED A BUS WHICH SHE HEARD HAD BEEN SENT TO BAN SARON VILLAGE ON 9 JULY TO TAKE THE REFUGEES AWAY FOR RESETTLEMENT IN OTHER COUNTRIES. SEVERAL REFUGEES PASSING NEAR HER URGED HER TO TRY TO GET TO THE BUSES, BUT, BY THAT TIME SHE WAS TOO WEAK TO STAND UP OR WALK. ON THE MORNING OF THE 9 JULY, EAP, HER SON, AND THREE REMAINING RELATIVES, NONE OF WHOM WERE ABLE TO WALK, DECIDED TO TRY TO CRAWL DOWN A PATH DOWN THE MOUNTAINSIDE. AFTER A SHORT TIME, THE THREE RELATIVES GAVE UP, BUT SHE CONTINUED CRAWLING ALONG THE PATH, DRAGGING HER FOUR-YEAR-OLD SON ALONG ON HIS BACK UNTIL THAT EVENING. SHE FINALLY REACHED A RICE FIELD WHERE SYMPATHETIC FARMERS HELPED HER TO BAN SARON VILLAGE AND GAVE HER FOOD, WATER AND MEDICINE. TWO DAYS LATER, WHEN SHE COULD WALK, SHE

WAS BROUGHT TO A TEMPLE WHERE SHE STAYED TWO MORE DAYS UNTIL SHE AND HER SON WERE BROUGHT TO A TEMPORARY CAMP WHERE THEY ARE AWAITING TRANSPORTATION TO THE UNHCR-SUPPORTED CAMP IN PRASAT, SURIN PROVINCE.

3. LIM SUN THENG, MALE, AGE 28, AND HIS WIFE, UNG LY HEANG, AGE 24, ENTERED THAILAND AT WAT KOH, ARANYAPRATHET ON 15 MAY 1979. THEY WERE TAKEN BY BUS TO PREAH VIHEAR ON 12 JUNE. IT TOOK THEM TWO DAYS TO REACH THE BOTTOM OF THE STEEP HILL. LIM CLAIMED THAT 1,000 OF THE FIRST GROUP OF REPATRIATES (8 JUNE) WERE KILLED BY LANDMINES. FIVE DAYS AFTER HIS ARRIVAL, VIETNAMESE SOLDIERS CAME AND TOLD THE

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TENS OF THOUSANDS OF PERSONS MASSED AT THE FOOT OF THE SLOPE NOT TO MOVE UNTIL A PATH COULD BE CLEARED THROUGH THE MINEFIELD.

AFTER TWO DAYS OF CLEARING MINES, THE VIETNAMESE BEGAN TO LEAD PEOPLE INTO CAMBODIA. THE REFUGEES MOVED SINGLE FILE, STEPPING ON OR OVER THE BODIES OF THOSE KILLED PREVIOUSLY BY MINES. FROM A TRANSISTOR RADIO WHICH ONE REFUGEE HAD BROUGHT WITH HIM, HE HEARD PHNOM PENH RADIO BROADCAST THAT 25,000 REFUGEES HAD BEEN TAKEN INTO CAMBODIA. AFTER A FEW DAYS, THE VIETNAMESE SOLDIERS RETURNED AND URGED THE REMAINING REPATRIATES TO FOLLOW THEM SINCE THAILAND WOULDN'T TAKE THEM AND THEY HAD AT LEAST A CHANCE FOR A

HANDFUL OF RICE IN CAMBODIA. LIM SAID HE BELIEVED THAT IF THERE HAD BEEN ANY HOPE OF RETURNING TO THAILAND. NO ONE WOULD HAVE FOLLOWED THE VIETNAMESE INTO CAMBODIA.

HE SAID ONE GROUP OF REPATRIATES CLIMBED THE HILL AND PRAYED ON THEIR KNEES TO THE THAI SOLDIERS GUARDING THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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RIDGE. HE SAID THEY WERE BEATEN, KICKED, OR SHOT BEFORE BEING FORCED BACK DOWN THE SLOPE. LIM SAID HE WAS AWARE OF 13 REFUGEES WHO WERE SHOT AND KILLED BY THAI SOLDIERS. IN ONE INSTANCE, A 33-YEAR-OLD MAN, WHO PICKED UP A PIECE OF PAPER TO RETURN TO THE SOLDIER WHO DROPPED IT WAS SHOT AND KILLED OUTRIGHT; LIM SAID THE PAPER LISTED NAMES OF SOME OF THE REFUGEES WHO HAD MANAGED TO BARTER FOR RICE DIRECTLY WITH THAI VILLAGERS. IN ANOTHER CASE, A TEN-YEAR-OLD BOY WAS SHOT AND KILLED WHEN HE CRIED AFTER RECEIVING ONLY TWO CUPS OF RICE FROM A SOLDIER IN EXCHANGE FOR 500 BAHT (25 U.S. DOLLARS). EVENTUALLY, A SYMPATHETIC THAI-KHMER SOLDIER ADVISED THE GROUP HOW TO CIRCLE BACK INTO THAI TERRITORY. ABOUT 1,000 OF HIS GROUP RETURNED DURING THE WEEK OF 21 JUNE, AND HID IN THE HILLS ON THE THAI SIDE OF BORDER. LIM, HIS WIFE AND HIS BROTHER WERE TAKEN TO A VILLAGE BY A VILLAGER WHO SOLD RICE TO THE REFUGEES AT NIGHT. HE AND HIS WIFE WERE LATER ESCORTED TO BANGKOK BY A VILLAGER WHO, AN ARRIVAL DEMANDED 100,000 BAHT (5,000 U.S. DOLLARS) EACH FOR HIS SERVICES.

4. CHENG MENG KHUN, AGE 39, ENTERED THAILAND AT NONG CHAN, NORTH OF ARANYAPRATHET, ON 18 MAY 1979. HE SAID HE LEFT CAMBODIA BECAUSE HE WAS AFRAID THAT THE VIETNAMESE WOULD BE AS BAD AS THE KHMER ROUGE. HE WAS TRANSPORTED BY TRUCK TO WANG SOMBOUN AND REPATRIATED THERE ON 19 MAY WITH AN ESTIMATED 5,000 ETHNIC KHMER, SINO-KHMER AND LAO-KHMER AND LAO-KHMER. THE GROUP RETURNED TO THAILAND THE SAME NIGHT TO ESCAPE FROM KHMER ROUGE WHO WERE IN THE AREA. ALTHOUGH THEIR CHILD DIED FROM SICKNESS, THEY ENCOUNTERED NO HOSTILE FIRE OR MINES. AFTER HIDING IN A FIELD FOR NINE DAYS, HE WAS PERSUADED TO GO TO THE WANG SOMBOUN TEMPLE. ON 11 JUNE AT 1900 HRS THE THAI MILITARY TRANSPORTED THE GROUP BY BUS TO PRAH VIHEAR WHERE THEY WERE FORCED DOWN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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A STEEP HILL, ABOUT 500 METERS HIGH, ON 12 JUNE AT 0700 HRS. CHENG MENG KHUN SAID HE SAW A MAN, WHO HE BELIEVES WAS A HENG SAMRIN SOLDIER BECAUSE OF HIS DARK UNIFORM AND

BLACK RUBBER SANDALS, WITH THE THAI MILITARY AT THE REPATRIATION POINT URGING THE REFUGEES IN KHMER TO HURRY INTO CAMBODIA. REFUGEES HAD TO DISCARD THEIR BELONGINGS IN ORDER TO MANAGE THE STEEP DESCENT. THERE WAS A MINE-FIELD AT THE BOTTOM OF THE SLOPE; HE SAW TEN BODIES OF MINE VICTIMS. HE DID NOT SEE THAI SOLDIERS SHOOT AT REFUGEES BUT SAID HE HEARD M-16 FIRE AT THE TOP OF THE REPATRIATION SLOPE EVERY DAY. HE SET OUT TO RETURN TO THAILAND BY FOLLOWING THE MOUNTAINS EAST FOR SEVERAL KILOMETERS AND CIRCLING BACK THROUGH THAI TERRITORY TO BAN SARON VILLAGE. THERE HE WAS PICKED UP BY THAI SOLDIERS AND REPATRIATED TO CAMBODIA FOR THE THIRD TIME ON THE 17TH OR 18TH OF JUNE AT PREAH VIHEAR. HE HEARD A RUMOR THAT THE VIETNAMESE HAD GIVEN A HANDFUL OF RICE EACH TO REFUGEES WHO HAD FOLLOWED THEM TO THEIR CAMP SOUTHWEST OF THE REPATRIATION POINT ON 19 JUNE, BUT HE DECIDED THAT RETURN TO CAMBODIA WAS CERTAIN DEATH, WHEREAS HE HAD A CHANCE IF HE COULD RETURN TO THAILAND. CHENG SAID THE VIETNAMESE FIRED ARTILLERY SHELLS NEAR A GROUP OF 1,000 REFUGEES WHO HAD GROUPED ON A HILLSIDE ACROSS THE REPATRIATION VALLEY WHICH HE THOUGHT WAS INTENDED TO FORCE THE GROUP BACK TO CAMBODIA. HE RETRACED HIS STEPS EASTERLY AND MANAGED TO REACH KANTHARALAK ON 3 JULY WHERE HE HID FOR 10 DAYS NEAR A MANIOC FIELD, SUBSISTING ON A LITTLE RICE HE MANAGED TO BUY, AND MANIOC. A SYMPATHETIC FARMER HELPED HIM CATCH A BUS FOR BANGKOK WHERE HE ARRIVED ON 13 JULY.

5. COMMENT: WE BELIEVE THAT MOST OF THE REFUGEE REPATRIATES WHO LATER RE-ENTERED THAILAND FROM PREAH VIHEAR WERE AMONG THE 1,036 PICKED UP NEAR BAN SARON VILLAGE ON 9 AND 10 JULY AND TAKEN TO THE UNHCR-SUPPORTED CAMP AT

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SURIN TO AWAIT THIRD-COUNTRY RESETTLEMENT. THE PRECEDING
ACCOUNTS ARE FROM THOSE REPATRIATES WHO MADE THEIR WAY TO
SAFE HAVENS INDEPENDENTLY. WILKINSON

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