

## Good News from Thailand

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People — hundreds of thousands of them. Homeless, frightened, needing help.

This is the picture of the flood tide of refugees entering Thailand from Cambodia and Laos since the Communist takeovers in those countries.

Thailand, with limited space and resources, has provided temporary shelter and assistance for the refugees, but critically needs to resettle them as quickly as possible.

The refugees' most critical need is to receive basic cultural and language training so they can be resettled. Most are simple peasants, used to the uncomplicated life of the rice paddies or quiet towns in their native lands. They are pitifully unprepared to forge out new lives in other countries, particularly in the West.

### ACEPT begins

It is time we shared with you some of the experiences of the Ambassador College students and graduates who have been in Thailand participating in ACEPT (Ambassador College Educational Program in Thailand). ACEPT began last year.

Our friendship with the Thai community in Los Angeles, Calif., dated from the time Herbert W. Armstrong visited Thailand in 1971 and met King Bhumipol.

His Grace the 18th Supreme Patriarch of Terevada Buddhism in the Kingdom of Thailand, Ariawongsagatayana, asked host Herman L. Hoeh that the college help share his nation's load of finding homes for the refugees.

The ACEPT program, with Deputy Chancellor Raymond F. McNair's encouragement, was designed to help these people accept and be accepted in their new homelands. A proposal was submitted to Mr. Armstrong, who gave his approval for a pilot program to begin in August, 1980. ACEPT and Wat Thai of Los Angeles, under the leadership of Abbot Phrathepsopon, jointly sponsor the program.

A full third of the Ambassador student body volunteered to go. Eleven were selected for the first group: Harry Curley, Bill Hall, Doug and Rosa Peitz, Randy Redel, Cyrille Richarde, Kevin Richardson, Diane Kinder, Mary Light, April Waybright and Gladys Whyte.

Mrs. Whyte is a deaconess from Canada, a grandmother, who had come to Ambassador to participate in the Diploma Program. When she applied for the ACEPT program we thought she was joking.

"You're too old," I told her.

"Mr. Armstrong wouldn't like to hear you say that," she replied, gently but firmly. Touché.

"OK, but you're not fit enough."

"Mr. Sneider says I am." Harry Sneider is the college's weight training and athletic coach and is well known for his rigorous standards.

Mrs. Whyte is tougher than she looks. She had been a combat nurse in World War II, and was used to dealing with human crises. She is well loved by the college students for her sense of humor and common sense. Mrs. Whyte felt she would be an asset to the program. And she was right.

Steve Pelfrey was chosen as group leader. Mr. Pelfrey graduated from college several years ago.

He had spent his junior year in Chiang Mai University in Thailand, and spoke the Thai language fluently. Mr. Pelfrey left for Thailand in June, 1980, to make advance arrangements.

The United Nations and the Thai authorities assigned us to Ban Thong refugee camp in the extreme north of the country, close to the Laotian border. Ban Thong held about 6,000 refugees, mainly lowland Lao and people from the many hill tribes such as Hmong and Yao. These hill tribesmen were staunch allies of the United States during the Indochinese war, and have been specially persecuted by the Communists.

Mr. Pelfrey found favor with the right people. The authorities gave us a cautious go-ahead.

"Remember you are taking your Ambassador College values with you," Mr. McNair told the 12 the night before they left. "Don't let your standards drop."

## **Ambassador's outpost in Thailand**

Ambassador, with its fine buildings and beautiful grounds, is the finest educational environment in the world. How do you transplant that into the rough life of the Thai-Laotian border area and the often sordid confines of a refugee camp?

We were able to rent two houses on the outskirts of Chiang Khong about 10 miles from the camp. They were solid, clean and weatherproof.

There was some basic furniture, but no beds — Thais sleep on the floor. The landlord agreed, however, to provide Western-style mattresses and mosquito nets. Other basic necessities were bought from the stores in Chiang Khong.

We saw on a quick walk around the neighborhood that the local people had mastered the art of making some needed items from bamboo. The students' first efforts to imitate these crafts showed clearly why bamboo construction is an art. Later efforts proved more substantial, and it was not long before shelves, a bench and an extra table were built. Cyrille Richarde even made a sign to go over the entrance to our buildings. Others built an outdoor oven and dug proper drains. The undergrowth was trimmed and the yard tidied. Mr. Armstrong's portrait was hung on the wall — and Ambassador had its outpost in Thailand!

## **Demanding but rewarding**

All involved with ACEPT agree that it is the most demanding but rewarding challenge of their lives.

How do you teach someone your language if you can't speak his? Before leaving the United States, all ACEPT teachers learn the Laubach method, which has been designed for just this situation. The method requires skilled communication and observation. At first, progress is painfully slow, but eventually a working vocabulary is built up between student and teacher.

Other volunteer agencies, who at first regarded us as enthusiastic amateurs, have come to respect ACEPT. Recently we were asked to extend the program to nearby Chiang Kham refugee camp.

Why is ACEPT so rewarding? Diane Kinder explained it this way: "It's what we are trained to do — to serve. And here we have the opportunities to help some of the most tragic people on earth."

Or, as Randy Redel put it: "We can't solve the whole problem yet. That must wait for God's Kingdom. But in a very small way, we have the opportunity to teach them our ways and show them our paths" ([Isa. 2:3](#)).

ACEPT is a small but bright light in a very dark area. It will at best make only a dent in the vast misery that is the lot of the world's millions of refugees. So why do it?

"Because we were asked!" explains Mr. Hoeh. "Thailand's religious leaders saw the college and knew we were the kind of people who believed in giving. We gave them what we had — ourselves. Not to proselyte, but to teach and to serve. It has been an opportunity to show Thailand what Christianity should be like."

Sandra Atkinson, part of the second group of students sent to Thailand, wrote, "We were very proud to be able to represent God, His Work, His college and His apostle so far away from home."