

AFTER THE FALL OF SAIGON

**THE RESCUE EFFORT
IN INDOCHINA**

“

**GOING IN THE WATER,
YOU'LL FACE HUNGRY CROCODILES;
BY LAND, YOU'LL MEET TIGERS.**

The khmer refugees [from nong chan refugee camp] were
forcefully herded onto hundreds of buses
And transported to a mountain range bordering
preah vihear province.

At dawn, the soldiers pushed us over the cliff, firing shots
through the crowd, killing many; young and old,
Male and female, including infants were mowed down violently;

The khmer refugees scrambled over each other, frantically
stampeding down the mountain in fear for their lives.
As they tread slowly through the thick, tall, grass deep in the jungle,

Many landmines exploded, maiming children and elders;
people were dying everywhere;
Some were severely wounded, with arms and legs blown to pieces;
Some were lying unconscious,

ABOUT TO TAKE THEIR LAST BREATH

”

FROM THE KHMER POEM
O! MAHA MOUNT DANGREK
BY AGGADIPO LY VAN

SYNOPSIS

THE REFUGE CRISIS

The previous poem speaks of a Cambodian refugee crisis largely lost to history. It occurred in 1979, four years after the Fall of Saigon, which marked the end of the Vietnam War. But not the end of conflict and extraordinary brutality throughout the region.

For more than a decade during 1970s, the small country of Cambodia, bordering Vietnam, had suffered massive bombing attacks by the United States targeting North Vietnamese troops. This bombing eventually destabilized the beloved Cambodian monarchy and led to the rise of the barbaric Khmer Rouge and the Killing Fields.

Caught up in the terror were more than a quarter-million Cambodians, who sought to escape their chaotic homeland. Among them was 21 year-old Bunseng and 26 members of his family.

A SURVIVOR'S TALE

For months they walked hundreds of miles north, finally finding temporary shelter within the slack barbed-wire fences of Wat Koh refugee camp, just over the border into Thailand. But the family's dream of permanent refuge in that country was not to be, as the wounds of the killing fields re-emerged and the trauma continued. Fearing further build-up of the refugee population, the Thai military took aggressive steps. They herded 40,000 of these people across the mountainous border of Preah Vihear, studded with treacherous land mines.

Bunseng later recounted that he had remembered an ancient Cambodian saying: "In the water, crocodiles; on land, tigers." These refugees faced two options. If they went down to the river, they would face landmines. And if they went to the top of the hills, they would face the Thai soldiers, already firing upon them. With no way out and nowhere to hide, they were caught between the crocodile and the tiger.

DEATH AND SALVATION

More than 10,000 people died at Preah Vihear Mountain. Early on, 1,200 were saved, but hundreds of thousands remained stranded, injured and lost. It would come to be regarded as one of the worst humanitarian episodes of the Indochina refugee story.

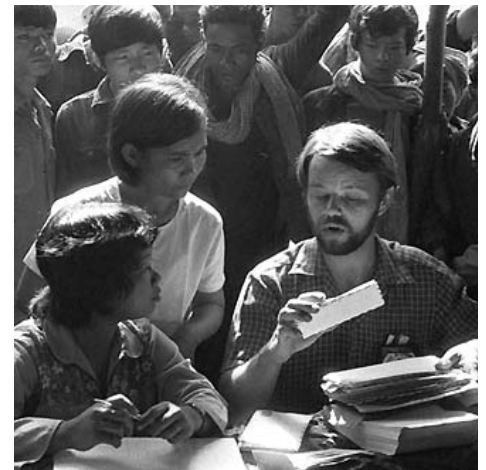
Fortunately, there were NGOs and foreign government officials who proved to be rescuers, though history has largely forgotten them. Our film would attempt to correct this by focusing on the life-saving efforts individuals such as: US State Department officers Lionel Rosenblatt, Morton Abramowitz, Jim Towey, and Robert DeVecchi of the International Rescue Committee (IRC). These rescuers not only negotiated with Thailand to evacuate the refugees, they also worked to address and prevent starvation in the broader population.



Tnbg photo archives 1980 Nong Chan



GÉRARD LEBLANC / International Committee of Red Cross 12/1979



Berta Romero / Refugee Workers in the Indochina Exodus



Ambassador of Thailand, Morton Abramowitz in Khao-I-Dang Refugee Camp in Thailand, 1979. His focus on the refugee crisis was monumental in assisting and rescuing millions of refugees in Southeast Asia. Photo courtesy of Ambassador Morton Abramowitz.

THE GLOBAL RESPONSE

In the end and under intense political pressure, the United States agreed to finance what turned out to be the most complex and expensive resettlement operation ever undertaken, costing more than \$500 million a year from 1975-1982.

The Cambodia story set the standards and groundwork for future international emergencies, a legacy that continues to this day. There were many key players in the rescue operation, and remarkably even in old age, are still involved in refugee causes. Their largely untold stories 40 years later would underscore the suffering of so many Cambodians in the 1970s, and would be of historic importance.

NEW BEGINNINGS

We will also show how Bunseng, as a welcomed refugee, was able to thrive in America. A Connecticut town, his own painting and contracting business, a marriage and two healthy, college-educated children. Bunseng achieved dreams he never believed possible. But his story doesn't end there. It has a surprise ending.

One day, in the early Spring of 2010, Bunseng agreed to take a painting assignment in Southport, CT. He had no idea that the home coincidentally belonged to a man he had long dreamed of finding and thanking in person: one of his rescuers, Robert DeVecchi of the IRC. 37 years later, sheerly by chance, he was able to do so.

The union was powerful and a friendship developed. The two shared together many holidays in Connecticut. Although, the 85 year-old DeVecchi recently passed away, we were able to film him and Bunseng last year in conversation, bringing this story full circle.

TEASER

TRAILER

For a preview of [After the Fall of Saigon, The Rescue Effort in Indochina](#) visit:

<https://www.pvfund.org/>

ABOUT THE FOUNDATION

We are excited to tell you that this film is a project of the Preah Vihear Foundation, which was established in 2016 to produce this very film, in order to preserve long-term the history of Cambodia during the 1970's. The Preah Vihear Foundation's purpose is through this educational film to raise awareness for important historical landmarks and archives regarding refugees in Cambodia and the greater French Indochina region.

MARKETABILITY

After the Fall of Saigon, The Rescue Effort in Indochina can serve as a channel via Internet distribution to inform younger audiences. This documentary will shed light on how past conflicts during the French Indochina Crisis connect to present-day global efforts in countries like Syria. It will also draw appreciation to the world-class staff and first responders of humanitarian relief, healthcare and education that presently comprise international rescue care.

This HD documentary will be shown nationwide in theatres and broadcast nationally on PBS, an interactive Web site, outreach materials targeted at high schools and colleges, and a national and international publicity campaign.

FILM STYLE

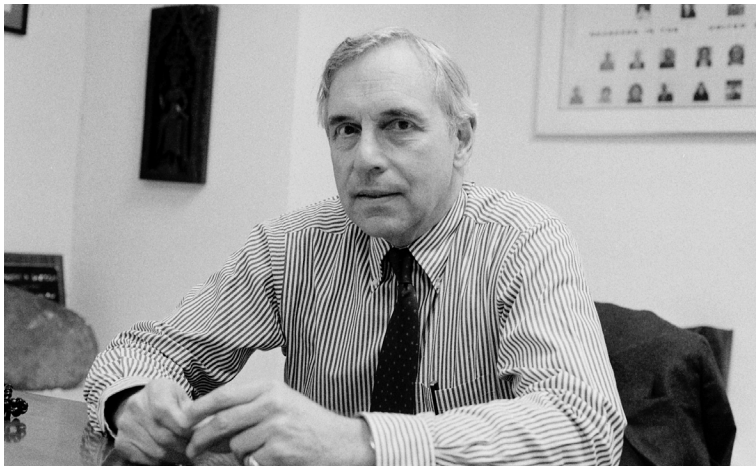
The film style is essentially cinema verité, i.e., filming to convey candid and touching realism. An experienced crew will interview the subjects in an organic style that allows each character to define their story deeply and in their own unique way. The "picture" of the events unfold from their personal observation and experience. Our film is not a history lesson but rather a narrative developed both through the interviews and voice-over. Obviously many of the subjects will require interpreters and captions on the film... all in the service of helping the viewer "touch" the events that the subjects are explicating as they bring to life this massive movement of disenfranchised people with no-where to land. When possible, to add texture to the film, the interviews will take place in the locations where the events of the narrative took place.



War And Escape

Vietnamese refugees fleeing for safety amidst war and chaos.

Horst Faas / Associated Press's Vietnam: The Real War



Robert P. DeVecchi - NYC Office

Robert DeVecchi who led the International Rescue Committee in the NY Times in 1992.

Michelle V. Agins/The New York Times



First Photo As A Refugee

Bunseng Taing (right) and Heng Ear (left), Bunseng's nephew, take their first photos in the Buriram Refugee Camp in 1980. This was the first picture they had taken in five years, since the Khmer Rouge brought war and genocide into Cambodia.

CREATIVE TEAM

PRIMARY CREATIVE PARTICIPANTS



Virginia Lynch Dean

An independent film producer and director with extensive experience encompassing a wide range of productions, features and documentaries. Her work includes NBC newsroom experience.



James Taing

Son of Bunseng with an intimate sense of the events. James has been interviewing and documenting the principal characters for the film over the last six years. Before spending full-time on this project, he had worked at GE Capital in Stamford, CT.



Dianne Wildman

Has worked as an on-air television editorial writer and presenter for Cablevision of Connecticut, appearing on Ch 12 for 13 years. Previously, she served as an NBC Network News correspondent in the US and London, and deputy assistant U.S. Trade Representative for public affairs at the Clinton White House.



Aaron Clar

The cameraman and editor for the film. Currently is a Line Producer for the Charlie Rose show and is founder of Above York, a NYC media production company that has produced many features for Fortune 500 companies. Previously he worked for Bloomberg News, Businessweek, and ABC.