**DR. HAING NGOR DIES**

WON OSCAR FOR KILLING FIELDS'

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By From News Services

LOS ANGELES -- Haing Ngor, 45, the Cambodian physician and refugee whose Academy Award-winning performance in "The Killing Fields" mirrored his own ordeal of torture and survival at the hands of the Khmer Rouge, was found shot to death Feb. 25 outside his car in the Chinatown section of Los Angeles.

Police said that he apparently was gunned down as he arrived home that evening and that he died of a single gunshot wound in the chest.

It wasn't immediately known whether Dr. Ngor was the intended victim, and police refused to release further details.

Dr. Ngor won an Oscar in 1984, four years after he arrived in the United States as a refugee, for his portrayal of Dith Pran, an assistant to New York Times correspondent Sidney Schanberg. Dr. Ngor was the first nonprofessional to win an Oscar for acting since Harold Russell in 1946 for "The Best Years of Our Lives."

Dr. Ngor's role in "The Killing Fields," a graphically realistic chronicle of Pran's frightening odyssey, had haunting parallels to Dr. Ngor's own survival story. Pran saved Schanberg, portrayed in the film by Sam Waterston, and other Western journalists from execution by the brutal Khmer Rouge regime.

Pran later was captured and imprisoned, but after four years, he escaped from Cambodia. He was reunited with Schanberg in a Thai refugee camp, came to the United States and later became a photographer for the Times.

In his 1987 autobiography, Dr. Ngor recounted his own life-and-death struggle in what has been called the Cambodian holocaust. Trained as a physician, he was captured and tortured after the bloody 1975 takeover of Cambodia by the Khmer Rouge rebels, who overthrew the country's U.S.-backed government.

Millions are believed to have died violently or by starvation in the Khmer Rouge's systematic attempt to rid the country of modern Western influences. Those targeted for execution included doctors, teachers and other professionals, even people who wore eyeglasses.

Like Pran, Dr. Ngor was forced to work in the rice fields, living with daily terror, and eventually escaped to Thailand through minefields. "Of the more than half a million Cambodians on the border, Dith Pran and I were two of the very luckiest," he wrote.

When the Khmer Rouge first took over Phnom Penh and began hunting down doctors, Dr. Ngor fled his hospital leaving a patient with his body cavity still open in the middle of surgery.

Hiding his glasses early on, he was arrested and tortured three times in efforts to make him confess to being a physician. He denied it each time. His captors cut off half of one of his fingers and chopped into his ankle with an ax. He was hung over a slow fire for four days. While working in the labor camps, his weight dropped from 140 pounds to 70.

Dr. Ngor told of other harrowing experiences -- of seeing his father led away to his death for stealing food and of watching in silence as Khmer Rouge medics injected an infant with what he knew was a fatal dose of the wrong medicine. He had to stand by helplessly while his wife, Huoy, died in 1978 while trying to give birth to their baby.

He was "always a suspect, wherever he was, trying to stay alive under the Khmer Rouge," "Killing Fields" author Sydney Schanberg said after Dr. Ngor's murder. "He would do things that would put himself at risk. . . . Every once in a while, someone would be sick, and he'd be trying to minister to them, and that made him immediately suspect as an educated person, subject to punishment and death."

Dr. Ngor escaped his native land after a Vietnamese invasion ousted the Khmer Rouge. He immigrated to the United States in 1980, initially working as a security guard outside Los Angeles's Chinatown. He studied English and soon became a job placement caseworker for fellow refugees.

He wrote that living in the United States meant that "when I woke up in the morning, I felt no terror. I knew for sure that I would live through the day and through the week and for many years ahead."

Fellow Cambodians told him about acting jobs available in the movie industry, but acting was a low-status profession in Cambodia, and at first, he wasn't interested. A casting director for "The Killing Fields" met him at a party and later helped him win the role of Pran.

Dr. Ngor wrote that he took the work because he wanted to help tell the story of his country, a story he said few in the West knew. He said he also wanted to return to the refugee camps and confront his own nightmares.

The film focused international attention on Cambodia and Dr. Ngor and Pran became symbols of the country's suffering.

Dr. Ngor sought roles in other movies that conveyed political messages, yet continued working at the Chinatown Service Center as a counselor.

He won a featured part in Oliver Stone's 1993 movie about Vietnam, "Heaven and Earth."

It focused on a Vietnamese woman victimized during the Vietnam War by U.S. and South Vietnamese anti-communist forces and by the communist Viet Cong, with whom she sympathized.

Dr. Ngor played the father of Le Ly Hayslip, on whose life the movie was based. He said he considered it his duty to take the roles to help his homeland, one of the poorest countries in the world.

"I don't want history to blame me, saying Dr. Ngor has many opportunities, why does he not help?" he said in a 1994 interview. "Now I know the value of the arts. The arts can explain everything possible to tell the world."

He also had roles in "Eastern Corridors" (1987), "The Iron Triangle" (1989), "Vietnam, Texas" (1990), "Ambition" (1991), "The Dragon Gate" (1994) and "Fortunes of War" (1994). He made guest appearances in several television series, including "China Beach," "In Love and War," "Miami Vice" and "Highway to Heaven."

He continued to live modestly in a two-bedroom apartment. He spent much of his time and money in his final years helping thousands of refugees who survived the Khmer Rouge regime. He had organized two groups to help others: Aid to Displaced Persons and Enfants d'Angkor. He frequently returned to the Thai-Cambodian border, where he helped start a medical training center.

"When I am in the refugee camps hospitals," he wrote, "I can see that almost nothing has changed."