



# Tsunami Survivor to Score Goals for a Cause

Hamilton's Jim Henry lived through one of the worst global disasters ever. Grateful simply to be alive, he returns to the Continentals, hoping to help those he left behind.

BY PAUL KROME

**T**he earthquake-induced tsunami that hit several countries in Southeast Asia last December was one of the worst global disasters ever. Depending on which media outlet is reporting on any given day, anywhere from 150,000 to upwards of 200,000 people lost their lives – and countless others are missing and presumed dead.

Jim Henry, a senior captain and attackman at Hamilton College, was in Thailand, one of the hardest hit countries, and survived.

"It's been overwhelming," said Henry, a native of Sewickley, Pa. "I'm just appreciative of my family and friends. I'm grateful just to still be here."

He was uninjured except for cuts and bruises on his legs and back.

Henry and his parents were traveling in Vietnam to visit his sister, Allison, who teaches English as a second language there. Henry's girlfriend, Georgia Tapert, also lives in Vietnam and was traveling through Southeast Asia. Henry and Tapert met at a beach island resort in Phuket, Thailand, on Christmas Day. They were to spend the last night of her trip together before parting on Dec. 26.

At about 8:30 a.m. that day while brushing his teeth in the bathroom of their first-floor resort room, Henry noticed water in the bathtub swishing back and forth. Unbeknownst to him, about a half-hour earlier and several hundred miles south, an undersea earthquake with a magnitude of 9.0 (tied for fourth-largest since 1900) had just occurred.

Henry and Tapert were swimming in the resort's pool at about 10 a.m. when the first wave of the tsunami hit.

"The ocean water just came up and filled the pool with this muddy-brown, chocolate-milk water. There was debris everywhere," said Henry. "We didn't really think anything of it. We thought it was a freak high tide. There was a full moon the night before."

They exited the pool and made for the resort lobby, located on somewhat higher ground. Told to expect a second wave, they and many of the residents raced up stairs to the top of the third floor. During the dash, they saw the second, much larger wave approaching.

"It wiped out the first floor," said Henry. "Had we been in our room, there was no way we would've survived."

The second wave sent cars through buildings and overturned busses. After it hit, residents hurried down to leave the resort, which was nestled in a valley between two peaks. To exit and ascend one of the peaks, a Thai native held open a barbed-wire fence to allow residents to pass through – in three feet of standing water with a third wave was on the way.

"The Thai people were incredible," said Henry. "The water was rising. He was a true hero."

"A human chain of people" walked up the mountain to a clearing, where they watched the third wave "devastate, completely destroy the resort," said Henry.

The mass remained there for eight hours, helping the injured, battling misinformation and panic, and, simply, surviving.

"In between the second and third waves, I was really scared of dying. Everything magnified. Everyone was panicking – there was just this look of survival on everyone's face," said Henry.

Directed down the hill by locals, Henry and Tapert found a bus to take them to the resort's sister hotel on the mainland. Henry likened it to a refugee camp.

Meanwhile, in Vietnam, parents Reg and Priscilla Henry had been watching news of the tsunami on television. They could not contact their son, and when Jim failed to arrive in Hanoi on his designated flight at 8 p.m., they feared the worst.

"They were in hysterics," said Jim Henry. "I wasn't able to call them until 11:30 that night. When I did, they were ridiculously relieved,

needless to say."

The next day, Henry and another American returned to the resort in search of passports or other belongings. They found nothing.

Officials subsequently told Henry that he and Tapert could board a military plane bound for Bangkok, China. Upon arrival, they went to the U.S. embassy, where they went through an expedited passport procedure and were able to have money wired to them. Henry arrived in Pittsburgh Dec. 29, while Tapert flew to her parents' home in Florida. Reg and Priscilla could not arrive home until Jan. 1.

Henry frequently paused and his voice sometimes quivered while telling his story – particularly when recounting tales of helping the injured or hypothesizing about being separated from Tapert. He is looking forward to the lacrosse season, but his mind has never left the people of Thailand.

"I was lucky enough to leave, but I would've stayed to help those people," he said. "I got home in my bathing suit. The Thai people had given us shirts. Now they are left to deal with that. We're doing this goal pledge drive because those people need help more than anything."

The drive he refers to is the Hamilton Lacrosse Goal-a-thon, a campaign by the Continentals' men's and women's lacrosse teams to provide tangible help to the victims of the tsunami. Players and coaches are soliciting students, family members and fans to pledge a dollar amount for each goal scored by Hamilton. The funds raised will be sent to the Utica Chapter of the American Red Cross for the specific use of aiding the victims of the tsunami. The teams scored 282 goals in 2004.

Henry was a second-team All-Liberty League selection last year. He's racked up 71 goals in three years, and he's got plenty of incentive to shoot for more. **LM**

—For more information on the Hamilton Lacrosse Goal-a-thon, visit the Web site [www.hamilton.edu/athletics](http://www.hamilton.edu/athletics).