

SFChronicle JUL 4 1975

Cambodia

--After The Fall

(The writer was one of a handful of American journalists who stayed in Cambodia after the fall of the Lon Nol government and the evacuation of foreigners to Phnom Penh and the takeover by the Khmer Rouge.)

By Richard Boyle

Special to The Chronicle

A White House intelligence memo discussed publicly by Henry Kissinger and quoted extensively in a recent Jack

Anderson column claims one million Cambodians are expected to die from lack of care

in the exodus from Phnom Penh.

This story is not only unsupported by facts, but contradicted by eyewitness observation.

As the last American to leave Cambodia on May 8, I witnessed hundreds of refugees passing along the road from Phnom Penh, emptied of nearly all people by the Khmer Rouge after its fall on April 17.

As our convoy headed for Thailand, I saw:

- A still functioning hospital in Phnom Penh, the Calmette, once run by the French, now administered by the Khmer Rouge;

- Relay stations and rest stops along the road out of Phnom Penh, where Khmer Rouge troops — mostly women — and Buddhist monks supplied refugees with food and water;

- An orderly exodus, in which refugees moved at a leisurely pace on bicycles, ox-carts and on foot. A few drove cars, although most automobiles were abandoned in Phnom Penh because little gas was available.

The intelligence memo prepared for the White House claimed people were dying from hunger "since the Communists provided no food, water or medicine throughout the long march."

None of the refugees our convoy passed appeared to be dying of starvation as the White House claimed. One column, including a waiter I knew who once worked at the Hotel Le Phnom smiled and waved to us. None were being forced to march at bayonet point — as early press reports asserted.

In his column, Anderson called the evacuation a "death march" and said the White House memo described it as "the greatest atrocity since the Nazis herded Jews into the gas chambers." According to the memo, bodies were floating in the river and abandoned on the roadside.

Yet not one of the 1100 foreign nationals, including about 20 journalists, who left on the two convoys provided by the Khmer Rouge ever witnessed any bodies abandoned on the roadside. We did see burned-out villages but didn't know if they had been destroyed by the Khmer Rouge, the Lon Nol air force, or the heavy fighting during the final days of the war.

Anderson claimed the communists sealed off Cambodia to prevent the outside world from learning what they were doing. But Khmer Rouge commanders — and troops — openly discussed their strategy of evacuating the cities with me as well as with Khmer-speaking foreign journalists.

General Su — the man in

charge of negotiating the transfer of foreign nationals at the Thai-Cambodian border — told me the Khmer Rouge had to evacuate Phnom Penh or face devastating epidemics and starvation.

Phnom Penh, which had a population of about 500,000 when I first visited it in 1965, had swollen to over two million by April, 1975. Most of the newcomers were refugees who fled during the early '70's when U.S.-B-52

See Page 11

From Page 10

bombers created "free fire zones" in liberated villages, either killing off the inhabitants or forcing them to flee to Phnom Penh or other larger cities.

Many of these people in the days before the fall were jammed into squalid refugee camps, run by various private relief agencies.

I saw hundreds of ill patients, many of them untreated, at "Slaughterhouse 400" — a converted basketball court, and at several military hospitals, all run by the former Lon Nol government.

Many of the patients were dying of gangrene because their bandages had not been changed. Amputations were routinely performed without anesthetics. Those wealthy enough to pay were treated at the better equipped Calmette hospital, the only really adequate medical facility in Phnom Penh.

When the Khmer Rouge commandos took Phnom Penh on April 17, these problems were exacerbated by the last acts of Lon Nol agents. Secret police agents sabotaged water filtration plants and blew up power lines in the last hours of the war. By the evening of April 17, there was no power in many parts of the city, and the water supply was running out. Many Lon Nol gov-

ernment medics fled Slaughterhouse 400, leaving their patients unattended, and some food stores were looted by citizens of Phnom Penh.

French doctors staffing Calmette told me at the French embassy compound they were worried about reports of an increase in the number of dead rats on the streets, and feared an epidemic of bubonic plague, or even worse, cholera or typhoid. They had already received reports of several cases of cholera among foreign nationals trying to enter the sanctuary of the embassy.

Khmer Rouge leaders said they had worked out an elaborate plan to remove the residents of Phnom Penh into the countryside where they could be fed and housed in jungle base areas and lat-

See WXP 23 Jun 75, Anderson; NYT 24 Jun 75, "Cambodians' Plight ..."



Cambodian woman on march from Phnom Penh

er put to work harvesting rice.

The Khmer Rouge set up six or seven regroupment centers a few miles out of the city in each direction—like spokes of a wheel. There the refugees were temporarily camped and told what village they would be assigned to work in. The Khmer Rouge told foreign journalists these people would be allowed to return after they spent some time in the country growing rice.

While the Khmer Rouge closed down Slaughterhouse 400 and the other squalid and crowded Lon Nol government hospitals, they did allow the efficient and relatively clean Calmette hospital to continue operating during the evacuation. When our convoy finally left on May 5, we passed Calmette and the Khmer staff of about 30 came outside to wave goodbye to us.

See NYT 13 Jun 75, David A. Andelman.

Cambodian woman on