

A CAMBODIAN VIEW OF MAYAGUEZ CASE

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Phnom Penh Wasn't Aware Ship Had Been Seized, Deputy Premier Says NYTimes

By PAUL HOFMANN

Cambodian gunboats seized the American containership Mayaguez last May 12 without the knowledge of the Communist Government in Phnom Penh, according to Ieng Sary, the Cambodian Deputy Premier.

He said the authorities in Phnom Penh learned of the seizure "through American broadcasts, because the American technology is able to convey information much faster than our armed forces can."

He maintained that "a bloodbath" had been unnecessary, saying that the Phnom Penh Government had ordered the release of the ship and its crew but that American forces attacked while the release was being arranged.

Mr. Ieng Sary, who left the United States yesterday after a week's visit to the United Nations, gave this account here Saturday at a reception arranged at the Union Theological Seminary by a small group of Cambodians living in the United States.

According to a transcript of his remarks made available by Gareth Porter, director of the Indochina Resource Center in Washington, D. C., and George Hildebrand, an associate, Mr. Ieng Sary also explained that the forced evacuation of large numbers of people from Phnom Penh after the Communist takeover of April 17 was dictated by a lack of food.

The Deputy Premier noted that the population of Phnom Penh had swollen in the last stage of the former Government to three million from two million. The new authorities, he said, carried out an evacuation "without bloodshed in a week" because the countryside offered some possibilities to feed the evacuees.

This version contrasted with reports, soon after the Communist take-over, that the new rulers had begun a peasant revolution, forcing as many as three million or four million people out of Cambodia's cities to the countryside, to till the soil.

'I Handled That Affair'

The Deputy Premier, who spoke in Cambodian, with an English translation provided by a leader of the Cambodian community here, Sok Hom Hing, an economist, gave his versions of the Mayaguez case and of the evacuation of Phnom Penh in reply to questions from the audience at the seminary,

Broadway a 120th Street. The reception was attended by more than 100 members of groups that opposed the war in Indochina.

According to the transcript, Mr. Ieng Sary said of the Mayaguez crisis: "I handled that affair with my own hands."

He said the ship was sailing westward within six kilometers of the small Wai Islands when

Cambodian forces, "in a spirit of revolutionary vigilance," captured her. American accounts at the time had said the ship was eight miles — which would be about 13 kilometers off the island when seized.

"The leaders in Phnom Penh didn't know" of the seizure, Mr. Ieng Sary went on, praising the "vigilance" of the Cambodian soldiers, whom he described as "workers." He asserted that the armed forces knew that the Mayaguez was being "operated for information-gathering." The Deputy Premier said that, on learning of the incident, the authorities contacted the forces on the islands and their commander in Sihanoukville on the mainland, ordering him to report to Phnom Penh.

The commander, according to Mr. Ieng Sary, arrived in the capital at 2 P.M. on an unspecified day "and at 5 P.M. we ordered him back under instructions to release the Mayaguez immediately."

The day after her capture off the Wai Islands, the Mayaguez was moved to Tang Island, and the crew was put on fishing boats and eventually taken to Sihanoukville before being released.

While the release of the vessel was being arranged, the Deputy Premier said, the Americans bombed Tang Island — "bombed so hard that they thought everyone who had stayed on the island had been killed." However, according to Mr. Ieng Sary, Cambodian units held out and attacked the United States forces when they landed.

He asserted that orders had been given to release all captured Americans but that the United States forces bombed the island, Sihanoukville the nearby mainland harbor of Ream, causing many casualties.

The Deputy Premier charged that "the C.I.A. will continue to interfere in our problems" and that such activities by the Central Intelligence Agency were the reason why "we must continue to raise our vigilance."

Speaking of conditions in Phnom Penh, Mr. Ieng Sary said that before the capital's capture by the revolutionary forces the "imperialists," meaning the United States, had supplied 30,000 to 40,000 tons of food to the city every month. He asserted that, in the revolution's spirit of self-reliance, the authorities did not want to depend on any help from abroad, and so decided to "disperse" the capital's population.