

# From Teachers to Soldiers in Two Weeks, With Eight Bullets

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**PNOMPENH, Cambodia, May 6**—The First Battalion of Commandos of the Teaching Profession came unevenly to attention and presented arms, using World War I rifles.

They did it haltingly, and it is all they know how to do with the British-made Lee Enfields. They have never fired them and have no ammunition.

The teacher-soldiers said they hoped to find out later this week whether the old rifles work and to learn how to shoot. They are promised eight rounds of ammunition each for practice firing.

Afterward, according to Ear Veng Ly, director of the elementary school that serves as their barracks and training ground here, they will immediately be assigned to combat units. Their total training period will have been two weeks.

The battalion consists of 474 teachers who have lost their jobs, they hope temporarily, because their schools have fallen into the hands of the North Vietnamese and Vietcong.

Most are refugees from Takeo and Kamput Provinces south of here, where the invaders have made deep inroads. They fled to Phnompenh, they said, because they

had been warned that the Vietcong have killed many teachers in Vietnam.

They said they had volunteered for military service at the Ministry of National Education to help defend their schools and liberate their regions. They wear military uniforms, which they have bought out of an allowance of 500 riels (about \$9.50), the only pay they have received. Their uniforms are motley; most of the components are American goods stolen in Saigon, smuggled into Cambodia and sold on the black market.

Some wore American cartridge belts and others wore belts with bright buckles

marked '007.' One proudly showed a rusty bush knife hanging from his belt and said he would throw it at the Vietcong.

Everyone laughed at that, as they all laughed at everything having to do with the war. They are aware of their unpreparedness and they think it funny. They fear the Vietcong invaders, whom they have seen and from whom they have escaped, but they show no signs of worry.

They appeared to share the widespread Cambodian feeling that to wear khaki or fatigues contributes to the defense of the country. That sentiment has put everyone

in Phnompenh into uniform—civil servants because their superiors have "suggested" it and other because they feel patriotic doing so.

The First Battalion of Commandos of the Teaching Profession, officers and men, had no idea that American and South Vietnamese troops had intervened in Cambodia against the Vietnamese Communists. The leading officials of the training center were incredulous and said they were not pleased.

"We can drive out the Vietcong ourselves," an official said, "if you only give us the arms."