

Cambodian Reds Terrorize Villages

By Jack Anderson
and Les Whitten

As the fighting in Cambodia approaches the showdown stage, according to classified cables from the U.S. embassy, Communist forces have turned upon the civilian population with a sudden savagery.

The cables describe a bloodbath in the countryside. Villages have been destroyed, and the inhabitants "have been ruthlessly executed by knifing or burning." Even small children have been brutalized.

"The enemy appears to have shifted some of the focus of his attacks from the battlefield to the village," Ambassador John Gunther Dean has reported in a grim message to the State Department. "... Ignoring static [government] defensive military positions, the enemy has concentrated their attacks on villages, directing their fire at villagers."

Villagers who resist Communist overtures, said Dean, are declared the "main enemy," with Buddhist monks next and government troops third.

"This is not an isolated phenomena," claimed Dean, "but

rather seems to be indicative of a new enemy strategy to inflict even more suffering on the civilian population of Cambodia."

The classified cables referred to the opposing forces by their French initials. Government troops are called FANK, and Communist guerrillas are identified as KC.

"FANK has not shown the ability to protect villages from Communist attack," Dean reported tersely. "... KC, by keeping refugees off farmland and nonproductive, continues to demoralize their spirit."

Our intelligence sources point out that terror has been used by both sides in Cambodia. Government troops have been accused in the past of ugly atrocities. But the reports from the Cambodian hinterland have seldom been more horrifying.

One cable, telling of an assault upon the refugee camp of Tuol Trach, declared: "Ten villagers were killed, 10 wounded and a few are still missing. Six of the 10 villagers killed were young children, under 10 years of age, and were brutally executed by knife and bayonet after being captured by the enemy."

Dean offered this assessment of the new Communist

ruthlessness: "Inquiries as to motives of the enemy have produced a similarity of response, with the answers varying only in degree of sophistication.

"The refugees express the view that the KC forces control most of the land area but need more people. The attacks are seen by the refugees as enemy punishment inflicted on them for rejecting KC offers to come over to the KC side, or to cease cooperating with the Phnom Penh side.

"Rather than trying to capture villagers and forcibly move them to KC-controlled territory, the refugees feel that the KC wants to demonstrate that FANK is unable to give protection...

"Military authorities ... indicate that the enemy has concentrated on areas where there has been an active effort to put the villagers back into agricultural production, or where there is a strong government-supported village militia."

The cables reported that "in some areas, villagemilitia forces have been fairly effective against enemy attacks because the village men sometimes stay and fight until their families

have had a chance to flee to safety."

The cables also contended that "in spite of lack of protection which exposes villagers to daily attacks, and in spite of the many hardships of being a refugee on the [government] side, most refugees intimate that they would rather be poor and suffering but have their freedom than live under the stifling regime of the KC.

"This is borne out by thousands of refugees that have fled from KC-controlled areas compared to the almost negligible number of refugees who, in spite of the imperfections and faults of the [government] have moved from government-held territory to the KC side."

Footnote: in past columns, we have quoted earlier, secret embassy cables criticizing the Cambodian government's "haphazard, out-of-channel and ill-coordinated conduct of military operations." One secret dispatch described the Cambodian strongman, Lon Nol, as "a sick man, both physically and mentally." It told of widespread incompetence and corruption throughout his government.