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Cambodian Diplomat Is Bitter About 'Way the U.S. Used Us'

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WASHINGTON, April 16 — Abdulgaffar Peang-Meth sat solemnly in the cool, sparsely furnished drawing room of the Cambodian Embassy today, far from the gummy heat and crashing shells of Phnom Penh.

He discussed what seemed to be the final hours of his Government with composure and unflagging politeness, but the anger and hurt showed.

"I feel frustrated, bitter," the 31-year-old diplomat said. "The desire to do something is very strong. I would go back to Cambodia tomorrow, tonight, if I could do something, but I guess that nobody can help much now."

Mr. Peang-Meth, the embassy's press attaché, was the only person on duty today. The Sec-holiday, the ambassador was out of town making a speech, the minister-counselor was "off at meetings."

"What hurts," the diplomat said in his colloquial English, the products of an American education, "is the way the United States used us. You marched into our country, you promised us aid, you encouraged us to keep fighting, you told us you were our friends, and now you drop us."

"A prostitute at least gets paid. For us, our lives, our blood, our country is ended because we helped the United States when it wanted to get its troops out. So your sons are home, and our people are left to die."

Recites Patrick Henry

The attaché grew emotional as he talked about his own attachment to the United States. As a young boy, he said, he learned Patrick Henry's speech made 200 years ago. And he began to quote from it:

"Is life so dear or peace so sweet as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God. I know not what course others may take—"

Mr. Peang-Meth did not bother to repeat the final famous phrases, "But as for me, give me liberty or give me death!"

"That kind of idealism," he said softly, "is gone from this country now. Millions of people in Cambodia are reaching out and saying, help, send us food at least, and the Congressmen sit up there and debate and

then go home for Easter Holidays."

At lunchtime today, a visitor found the embassy, situated in a relatively low-rent district, locked up tight. A sign on the door said, "Today holiday."

Soldiers Visit Pentagon

Mr. Peang-Meth later said he had taken some Cambodian soldiers who are studying here to visit the Pentagon. Receiving his visitor, he emptied dirty ashtrays and jumped up to answer the phone from time to time.

The embassy has not heard from its Government since midnight, when a cablegram said that Phnom Penh had not yet fallen.

"We always operate on the assumption that as long as Phnom Penh holds, we go on as usual," Mr. Peang-Meth said. "But now it looks as if we have reached a dead end."

Still later, driving downtown in his own small car, the young diplomats talked about his parents and his sisters and brother, who fled from their small town northwest of Phnom Penh several weeks ago.

"They're all refugees now," he said. "Every time I read about the rockets falling, I wonder. I have no word at all from them. Who knows whether I shall ever see them or my country again? I just can't say what I will do."

He did not think he could live in Cambodia under the Communists, he said, and despite his American wife, despite 13 years in the United States, at Hiram College in Ohio, Georgetown University and the University of Michigan, he felt uneasy about remaining in this country.