

# Silence and War's Litter In 'Liberated' Cambodia

By Claude Juvenal  
and  
Jean Jacques Cazeaux  
Agence France-Presse

Phnom Penh is a dead city, silent and empty. The doors of town houses have been forced and gape open, revealing ravaged interiors. The shop windows have been smashed.

There is no traffic on the main streets, except for the occasional bicycle pedalled by a soldier wearing the Khmer Rouge checked headscarf and carrying a Chinese rifle.

About two million people vanished from the city in five days, ordered out to the rice-paddies of the "liberated zones." Private cars were abandoned anywhere, on the pavements and in the middle of the streets, all four doors hanging open. The streets were littered with broken crockery, tires, mopeds and furniture. Lorries were immobilized, with their wheels unbolted and used as jacks under the axles.

In front of the railroad station — now destroyed — in the city center, I saw 500 Khmer Rouge soldiers drawn up in eight ranks for ten minutes' silent meditation before the "stuppa," said to contain a relic of Buddha. Loudspeakers played traditional music. At the head of each rank stood an officer, stiff-backed and solemn-

faced, recognizable only by the ballpoint pens in the top pocket of his uniform. It was 6 o'clock in the morning.

Young soldiers started to come out of their commandeered apartments. Some were sweeping up, with rifles on their shoulders. They did not talk. They did not smile. Others were lighting a fire on the pavement.

The suburbs presented the same spectacle of desolation. The straw huts of refugees had been pulled down. The University was empty. Soldiers had made their beds in the road. A whole neighborhood had been burned down.

At Pcochentong village, near the airport, the market had been burned. The walls of the houses were riddled with machinegun bullets. The streets were filthy, cluttered with clothing and burst cushions. Like Phnom Penh, this little village had also been totally evacuated.

When the order to evacuate the city was given, many left by car, but six miles outside Phnom Penh, in the middle of the countryside, drivers were told to abandon their cars and take only a strict minimum of good with them. At first the vehicles lined the roadside then as the road reached agricultural areas they were pushed into the rice paddies. Such luxury articles do not seem to arouse the covetousness of the Khmer Rouge.

Off the highways, in the dusty sidetracks, there were a few abandoned army trucks and 105-mm howitzers that were starting to rust. In the ditches and fields lay hundreds of helmets, uniforms and boots, the debris left by what remained of the Republican army as it tried to flee the

enemy.

Throughout recently liberated Cambodia, there were the same empty roads, burned villages and deserted countryside, where a few ownerless buffaloes grazed.

Passing through the cities there was the same silence. Water and electricity had been cut off. The streets were empty — except sometimes for drifts of banknotes. It was the same in Kompong Chhnang, Pursat and Battambang. On one wall the fleeing owner had chalked his destination and the date he left.

In Battambang Province patrols with pieces of red cloth tied to the muzzles of their American guns searched the houses and brought out bags of rice, leaving them on the pavement to be picked up later by lorries.

Nearer the Thai frontier the young Khmer Rouge did not seem to scorn certain consumer goods. Many of them were guady shirts, rode on Hondas and smoked English cigarettes.

In the frontier town of Poipet, a long line of tractors with trailers was drawn up in front of the Chinese stores. Cloth, washing powder, towels and crockery were thrown in. Apart from that, and a few patrols, emptiness and silence still reigned.

Asked where the millions of inhabitants had gone, the Khmer Rouge replied that this enforced, purifying migration was planned long ago and that the people had gone to liberated areas organized to receive them: "Later they will come back home, clean."