

\$1 Million Bribe to Lon Nol Reported

Camp Pendleton

Deposed Cambodian President Lon Nol was paid a bribe of "\$1 million in American notes" by his government to step down and leave the country, the man who succeeded Nol as president said here yesterday.

The Cambodian government wanted to oust Nol so that stiff resistance could be organized against Communist forces moving on Phnom Penh, said Saukham Khoy, who arrived as a refugee at Pendleton Tuesday night. *6 MAY*

Nol was "strong" and had a firm grasp on both military and civilian officials, but he was ill and "not able to rule" Khoy said. *5 MAY*

Former Cambodian Minister of Culture Long Botta, who arrived Monday night, added: "We thought we had enough time to strengthen the (anti-Communist) opposition to fight after his departure. We didn't know that we had no time and that the government would fall."

Botta said he did not want to give Nol so much money.

"I would have just given him a quarter of a million," he said.

Khoy was asked if he regarded the payment to Nol as a bribe.

"Yes," he replied through his son, Vanruoen, an agricultural engineer. He did not specify the source of the money.

Khoy, 60, said he, Botta and other officials had decided that Nol had to leave the country if anything was

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anything with him there," said Khoy, who was president of the Cambodian senate when he succeeded Nol on April 1.

Khoy, Botta and other officials were forced to flee to Thailand themselves when Phnom Penh fell to the Khmer Rouge on April 17.

Nol left Cambodia about a week before the fall of Phnom Penh and flew to Hawaii where he purchased a \$100,000 home.

Khoy said he himself and most other officials took no money or gold with them when they fled.

"If we were rich we would not come to live in this camp," he said. "We would go to live in motel or hotel or we would buy some houses."

Nol demanded the payoff on the ground that "it was necessary for him to have enough money to go and make a new life in another country," Khoy said.

Botta said that Nol had "many corrupt people about him, many corrupt generals," and that his brain was "not so well."

But despite the fall of Cambodia to the Communists, Khoy said, the bribe

was "a wise decision."

"If we didn't give him enough money he would not leave the country."

"Well, we paid to have Lon Nol leave, and the country fell anyway."

Khoy was asked if the United States could have done more to keep Cambodia out of the hands of the Communists.

"No," he said, "the force of the responsibility was with the Cambodians. But the people were not very responsible — only the government."

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