

View From Convoy: A Quiet Cambodia

By Bernard Kaplan

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PARIS, May 7— In the first account of the situation in the Cambodian countryside since the Khmer Rouge victory, Le Monde correspondent Patrice De Beer today portrayed a nation apparently completely under the control of its new masters who are determined to stamp out foreign influence.

Although concentrating mostly on a 3½-day truck journey by 450 foreign evacuees who crossed into Thailand last weekend, the French reporter's account lent no substance to reports that a massive and bloody purge of anti-Communists is under way in Cambodia.

The account pointedly emphasized that the reporter saw no bodies during the three-day evacuation trip last week. From the fall of the city until they were evacuated, De Beer and the other foreigners were confined to the embassy.

This past weekend Time and Newsweek reported that government officials and military men were being executed in Cambodia. On Monday the White House said that intercepted Cambodian radio transmissions indicated that 80 or 90 Cambodian military officers and their wives had been killed.

But De Beer indicated that Phnom Penh had been turned into an eerily deserted city, its population moved enmasse into the countryside by orders of the



Cambodian Premier Long Boret was pathetic figure in final days. Story, A12.

Khmer Rouge military command.

When the evacuees left the French embassy where they had been confined for two weeks after the city's capture April 17, De Beer found the streets empty except for soldiers cleaning streets. Some shops were open but had little to sell.

According to De Beer, the Khmer Rouge refused to allow the refugees to be flown from Cambodia to Thailand to show that they could organize the evacuation themselves and to demonstrate that they want no help from foreigners or contact with

See EVACUATION, A10, Col. 1

EVACUATION, From A1

them. They also wanted to show their unhappiness that the foreigners had remained in Cambodia despite an appeal by the Khmer Rouge three months earlier that they leave, De Beer said.

The Le Monde reporter indicated that the new rulers have embarked on a policy aimed at excluding foreigners and virtually cutting off Cambodia from the outside world.

Le Monde broke a voluntary news embargo, agreed to by reporters and other evacuees to insure the safety of at least 250 more foreigners still inside Cambodia. A spokesman for the newspaper said it had decided to publish De Beer's first story because the embargo had already been violated. The spokesman cited a dispatch date-lined Phnom Penh, highly favorable to the Khmer Rouge, that appeared in yesterday's edition of the French Commu-

nist Party newspaper Humanite.

De Beer's story of what he saw during the long and extremely uncomfortable journey to the Thai frontier was generally favorable to the Khmer Rouge. His bitterest criticisms were directed at some of his fellow evacuees.

These included Frenchmen who, he said, tried to steal from hospitable peasants who gave them lodging during overnight breaks in the 250-mile trip. Another evacuee, described as an ex-mercenary in the defeated Lon Nol army, threatened to kill him, De Beer said, when he found out he was a reporter.

The wife of a professor refused to join the evacuation because she was allowed only one suitcase, De Beer said. Some of the French refugees refused to obey orders during the trip, looted coconuts in the villages and scuffled over the food they were given.

Originally, the Khmer

Rouge refused to allow any but Westerners to join the evacuation convoy.

Then, without giving a reason, they changed their minds, saying that Asians with papers proving their foreign nationality could leave also. In the end, De Beer wrote, controls were more theoretical than real and several persons went off in the 25-truck convoy without having to show papers of any kind.

In some cases, however, foreigners were separated from their Cambodian spouses who were compelled to remain behind.

Except for the convoy commander, a deputy chief of the Communist military command in Phnom Penh, and the truck drivers, only a half dozen soldiers escorted the convoy. De Beer interpreted this as evidence of the Khmer Rouge's full confidence in its control of the countryside only a brief time after the war's end.

De Beer saw many refugee camps, as well as sev-

eral military camps of the defeated side. The latter appeared to be wholly intact, an indication that during the final period of the war the Communists overran them with little or no fighting.