

Those Cambodian horror

By Richard Boyle
Pacific News Service

BANGKOK — As the last American newsman to leave Cambodia on May 8, I witnessed the battle of Phnom Penh, interviewed hundreds of persons at the French embassy and traveled by road through Khmer Rouge territory on the last convoy out.

Stories of a bloodbath, as reported by other news agencies, cannot be verified, and there is every indication that many of the accounts are outright lies.

For example, Associated Press reported that French women were raped and had broken bottles put in their vaginas. I spent almost two weeks in the intensive care section of the makeshift French hospital in the embassy dining room and spoke with French doctors and nurses.

None of us ever saw any of the "rape" victims.

This reporter and several French and other Westerners informed AP in Bangkok that their reports were false. AP and UPI reporters then checked with Dr. Bernard Piquart, whom AP in Paris quoted as the source for the bloodbath story. He told reporters the story was "absolutely false."

An AP reporter here, somewhat embarrassed about the story, said "you are right." He could not understand why AP put out the story without checking the source first.

From what I saw, the Khmer Rouge were extremely lenient. For example, many "Sunday hunters," French mercenaries who enjoyed sniping at Khmer Rouge troops for pleasure, and some Americans with CIA connections took refuge in the French embassy.

The Khmer Rouge, who had agents inside the compounds, knew their names and reported on their radio that known "war criminals" were hiding inside the embassy. Yet they allowed them all to leave the country, wanting to avoid an international incident.

One American, former Green Beret Douglas Sapper, publicly boasted he was planning to take a submachinegun, given him by Associated Press correspondent Matt Franjola the day the Americans left Phnom Penh, and raise the American flag at the U.S. Embassy, killing as many "Commies as I can."

Yet Sapper was one of the

first Americans to seek refuge in the French Embassy. He managed to get out on the first convoy in a truck with Sydney Schanberg of the New York Times and seven Soviet citizens. The Khmer Rouge, who knew of Sapper's threats, let him out, as well as some journalists who were rumored to be working for American intelligence agencies. Sapper now is working for Associated Press.

There have been other distortions in the coverage from Cambodia. Associated Press asked me to take over their bureau, pay Cambodi-

an staff members and file for them as well as PNS after the hasty American departure.

I reported what the Cambodian staff reported to me: that Khmer Rouge troops told Phnom Penh government soldiers that they were "brothers" and that they did not want to kill them. There were eyewitness accounts by Cambodian AP staffers of Khmer Rouge and Phnom Penh troops embracing on the battlefield, yet when I filed this it was censored by AP.

After that story was

tales—were they true?

☆☆☆ Section A Page 21
May 25, 1975
S.F. Sunday Examiner
& Chronicle

killed, AP reported the Khmer Rouge burnt down refugee huts two days before the fall of Phnom Penh. Cambodian staffers who visited the front all day could not confirm the report.

I saw the first Khmer

Rouge troops to enter Phnom Penh from the north, and witnessed a fierce fire-fight outside the sandbagged French embassy. The Khmer Rouge front-line troops, only about 250 crack commandos, were welcomed

as liberators by students and civilians in Phnom Penh. I photographed Phnom Penh citizens cheering them.

Without the massive support of the citizens of Phnom

Penh, who threw up hundreds of white flags and took over armored cars from the army, the 250 commandos could never have taken Phnom Penh with so few casualties.