

War Exacts a Huge Toll in Cambodia

By SYDNEY H. SCHANBERG
Special to The New York Times
PHNOM PENH, Cambodia—

Cambodia has about the same number of people as New York City, and if the war in Cambodia were happening in New York, by now the equivalent of the entire population of Staten Island (295,443) would have been killed or wounded—twice over. Or, superimposing the Cambodian situation on a more populous borough, nearly half the people in Manhattan would have fallen as casualties. By the lowest estimates, more than 300 people are killed and wounded, on the average, every day of the war.

Statistics cannot explain a war because people are not digits, but they can convey to some extent the enormity of the destruction that has been caused in the four-and-a-half years of fighting. Given the confusion and the nature of Asian statistics in general, the figures on casualties cannot be exact. But they are reasonable estimates, gathered by going from ministry to ministry and by seeking confirmation from knowledgeable embassies. All the figures used in this article are on the low side; other estimates of the toll are much higher.

Foe Is Now Cambodian

Since the start of the war, on March 18, 1970, with the coup that ousted Prince Norodom Sihanouk, at least 33,000 Government soldiers have been killed and at least 42,000 on the other side, which at the beginning included some North Vietnamese and Vietcong, but now consists almost exclusively of a Communist-led Cambodian insurgent army. The ratio of wounded to dead

in this war is estimated by military analysts at 3 or 4 to 1. Using the lower ratio, the total of wounded on both sides would be at least 225,000. Civilian casualties are harder to assess, but the best estimates are that at least 300,000 have been killed or wounded.

This adds up to a minimum of 600,000, nearly one-tenth of the Cambodian population of seven million.

Dismayed Cambodians often ask why the world seems to have forgotten their suffering, why international attention is riveted instead on oil shortages or the Middle East or the Mediterranean.

U.S. Gives Support

Because the United States provides virtually all the financial and arms support for the Government in Phnom Penh, Cambodians on this side frequently express the wishful thought that Washington do something dramatic to end the war. But this is a conflict whose

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Aug. 22, 1974
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
Committee on Colonialism
—10:30 A.M.
ECONOMIC AND
SOCIAL COUNCIL
Commission Human Rights,
subcommission on preven-
tion of discrimination—4:30
P.M.

Tickets may be obtained at the public desk, main lobby, United Nations Headquarters, Tours, 9 A.M. to 4:45 P.M.

fate has been in the hands of more than one country, and as yet no hint of an accommodation has surfaced between the United States and the sponsors of the Cambodian insurgents—North Vietnam and China, and to a lesser extent, the Soviet Union.

Nearly half the people in Cambodia are now refugees. The insurgents control 75 per cent of the territory and perhaps three million people.

The Government for the most part, holds only the major cities and towns in isolated enclaves, cut off by road and reachable only by air.

Even in the relatively calm capital city of Phnom Penh, only slightly damaged by periodic rocket and artillery shelling, the human destruction is acutely visible.

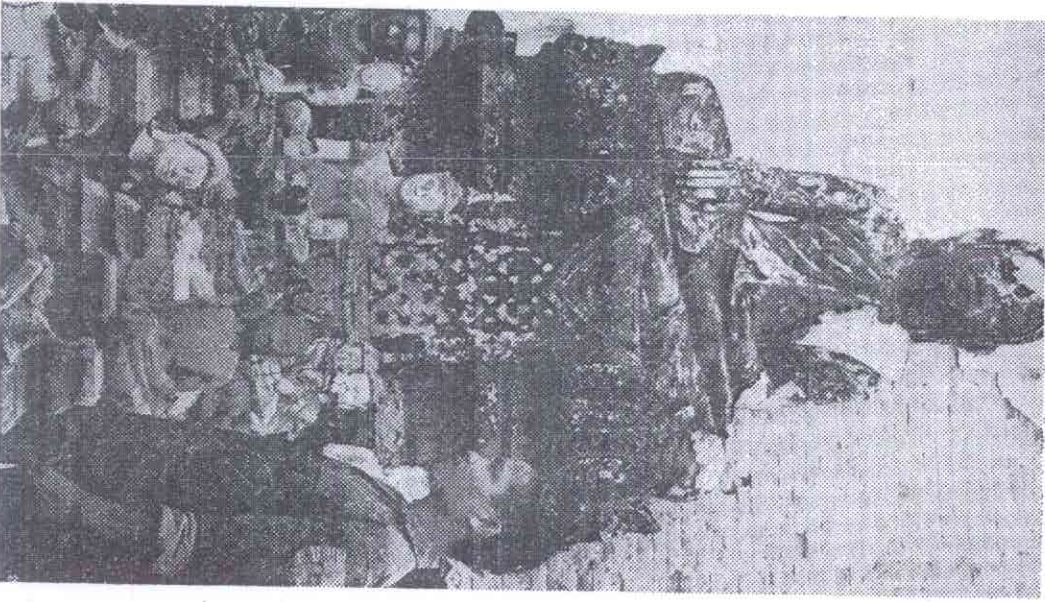
Crippled veterans and civilians beg in the markets, refugees live in the sidewalks and swarm everywhere. Fifty thousand war widows have registered with the Government. Two hundred thousand children or more have been made orphans or half-orphans.

Hospitals Like Abattoirs

Hospitals more often resemble abattoirs than medical centers, overflowing with amputees and other victims. Often the staffs are so overwhelmed with new arrivals that the trails of wet blood simply dry on the staircases and in corridors and never get washed off.

Cambodians are not the only ones to note with sadness, and sometimes bitterness, that no one in the outside world seems to care.

"If five people died in an elevator fire in a New York department store," said a Western diplomat, "it would be front-page news. The daily



Along Highway 5 northwest of Phnom Penh, a pagoda ruined by war now serves as a Government army post. It is estimated that 33,000 soldiers and 42,000 insurgents have died since the war began in 1970.

The New York Times/Sydney H. Schanberg
slaughter here gets a paragraph comparison. Elevator fires in New York are fairly uncommon. In Cambodia, the war is as certain as the sunrise.