

North Vietnamese W But Khmer Rouge There Seek to Arrange Parley

NYTimes

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Special to The New York Times

FEB 1 1973

SIEMREAB, Cambodia, Jan. 31—A tough North Vietnamese regiment in control of the vast stone temples, palaces and pavilions of the ancient city of Angkor shows no signs of making peace, yet it is clearly having trouble keeping its Cambodian collaborators in the same frame of mind.

This situation was illustrated by incidents on the Angkor defense perimeter a few miles north of Siemreab, the present-day gateway to the thousand-year-old seat of the vanished Khmer empire.

According to Gen. Em San, the commander of this region, a small Cambodian contingent of the North Vietnamese garrison—about 13 men—shouted across the 20 yards that sepa-



The New York Times/Feb. 1, 1973

rates them from Government outposts at one point, yesterday. They proposed talking things over and asked about conditions on the Government side.

Holding fire in accordance with Phnom Penh's policy, the Government troops invited the dissidents to defect, but before the exchange could go further North Vietnamese troops arrived and dispersed the Cambodians on their side with rifle fire and a hand grenade.

General Em San said that during the night a still larger group of Khmer Rouge, as the Cambodian Communists are called, sought to defect elsewhere on the Angkor perimeter, but Government troops, afraid of a ruse, put them off until daylight.

in Ta Prohm, a temple about six miles from Angkor Wat.

Around the colonnaded corridors of the 12th-century Angkor Wat the Vietnamese have eight blockhouses, all of stone and sandbags, and around Ta Prohm they have 11. There are also networks of entrenchments all around Angkor.

Long List of Weapons

It would take artillery and planes to blast the fortifications before infantry assaults could be effective.

The North Vietnamese, who have transport routes to their headquarters for northern Cambodia in dense forest 60 miles northeast of Siemreab, are said by General Em San to have heavy and light mortars, rockets, automatic weapons and "plenty of munitions."

"It would be very difficult to dislodge them," he added.

Fearful of damaging the Angkor structures, Cambodian troops have not attacked the invaders since last year, when tentative assaults and an effort to surround and starve out the garrison proved ineffective. Angkor has been in Communist hands since 1970.

General Em San does not think the Angkor structures have suffered much damage but says the Vietnamese and their Khmer collaborators have been knocking the heads off statues and shipping them to Thailand for sale.

Bernard Philippe Groslier, the French archeologist who has been long in charge of preservation in the ancient city, was forced to leave and has been unable to return. He lives in Phnom Penh, and hopes to be able to resume his life work some day.

Town Is Crowded Now

The dark stone towers of Angkor, visible just five miles from the upper stories of Siemreab buildings, loom above the surrounding jungle. They are frustratingly inaccessible to this little city whose main task for a century has been to serve as a base for visitors. Once a neat, sun-drenched, sleepy town of 15,000, Siemreab is crowded and shabby now, having doubled in size because of the influx of refugees from the Communists.

General in Peasant Garb

Discarding his uniform for peasant garb, General Em San, and the provincial governor, similarly dressed, headed toward the front lines to check the situation. "Maybe it is just a trick," the general said. "We shall see."

According to General Em San, there are little more than a thousand North Vietnamese troops of the 203d Regiment with some 600 Khmer Rouge, in the Angkor complex of 60 square miles. General Em San got a clear picture of the Angkor defenses two weeks ago from a North Vietnamese staff captain who fled from the garrison and gave himself up.

The captain had become enamored of a Vietnamese girl who occasionally slipped into the Angkor complex to sell fruit, candy and pastries. She arranged his rendezvous with Government soldiers.

According to the information he gave General Em San, the Vietnamese are using the main tower of Angkor Wat, the principal temple, for a radio communications center. Part of the defense headquarters is in the vast temple and another part

Tourists are no more, and two luxury hotels at Angkor that catered to them have been shelled and burned. A hotel in Siemreab is Government military headquarters, and General Em San has his office in the air-conditioned barber shop, where American credit-card notices still decorate the walls.

The war situation has been static in the Siemreab area for months. The North Vietnamese and Cambodian partisans are in place to the north and east and straddle the 80-mile highway to Kompong Thom, which is besieged by Communist forces.

Over the last year the North Vietnamese have sharply reduced their forces while trying to build up the Khmer Rouge bands.

Government units are reinforced by farmers, fishermen and townsfolk who serve in volunteer groups armed with World War II weapons.

Even schoolboys aged 14 and 15 do night duty helping guard government buildings in Siemreab and they go to the front as auxiliaries.

The Government seems to be holding the Communists, but its poorly armed regulars lack the punch to overrun them.