

Kampuchea Wakens From a Nightmare

By PETER T. WHITE NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SENIOR WRITER

Photographs by DAVID ALAN HARVEY NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC PHOTOGRAPHER

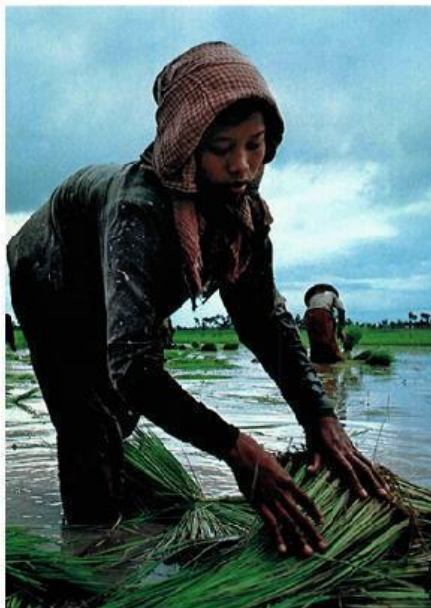
THAT CHECKERED cotton cloth we put on our heads is called *krama*," the young man said—the Khmer people are familiar with it from birth and make it serve in many ways.

"To keep off the sun when working in the rice fields. To carry home food—corn, vegetables. To cover the body when washing in a stream, for the sake of modesty." A man will wrap it around his middle, for comfort in the evening breeze. A girl may put a pretty edge on one and give it to a young man, as a token of love. He'll kiss it and think of her.

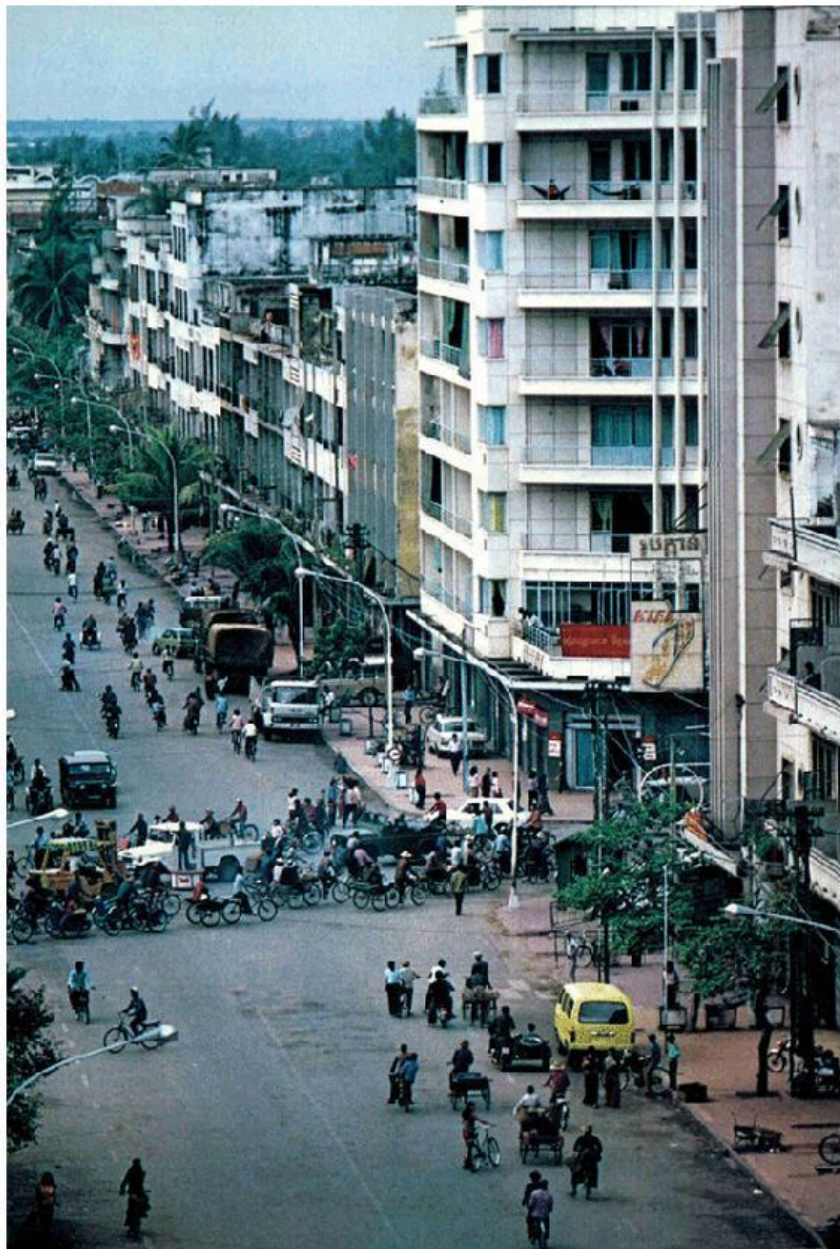
"And then came the time when people used the *krama* to hang themselves." To escape the hell on earth created by the previous regime. They knew it only as *angkar*, the organization. Survivors have come to know it by the name of its leader, Pol Pot.

Wherever I went in the land of the Khmer—formerly Cambodia, now Kampuchea—and whatever the subject of conversation, I was to find all too poignant reminders of that recent time of horrors. How could it be otherwise, when from 1975 to 1979 multitudes were systematically done to death? Through overwork and starvation, torture, execution. "Only my mother and I are left now," another young man told me. "My father, three brothers, and two sisters were murdered."

World opinion was shocked by estimates of a million victims. The new government speaks of three million, out of a total of approximately seven and a half million Khmer



Life resurges in the land long known as Cambodia, where peasants gather rice seedlings. They can hope for a better harvest than the yields of death reaped under a Khmer Rouge regime that cost the lives of perhaps three million of their countrymen from 1975 until Vietnam invaded in December 1978. Continuing conflict clouds the future.



in the mid-1970s. Were similar proportions projected for the population of the United States, the dead would be 30 to 90 million.

What explanations will I find for self-inflicted genocide on such a scale—for this well-nigh incredible phenomenon that may stand unique in history?

STAYING ON week after week, I am struck by another aspect of today's Kampuchea: the many signs of revival. Among the liveliest is the morning scene at the railroad station in Phnom Penh.

Thousands scramble aboard the train to Battambang—traders, off to buy goods smuggled in from Thailand, to bring back for sale in Phnom Penh. Soap, cigarettes, medicines, watches. A man says he'll be back in four days with pieces of cloth for sarongs: "Good color!" He means bright enough to knock your eyes out. In the Pol Pot years everyone wore only black.

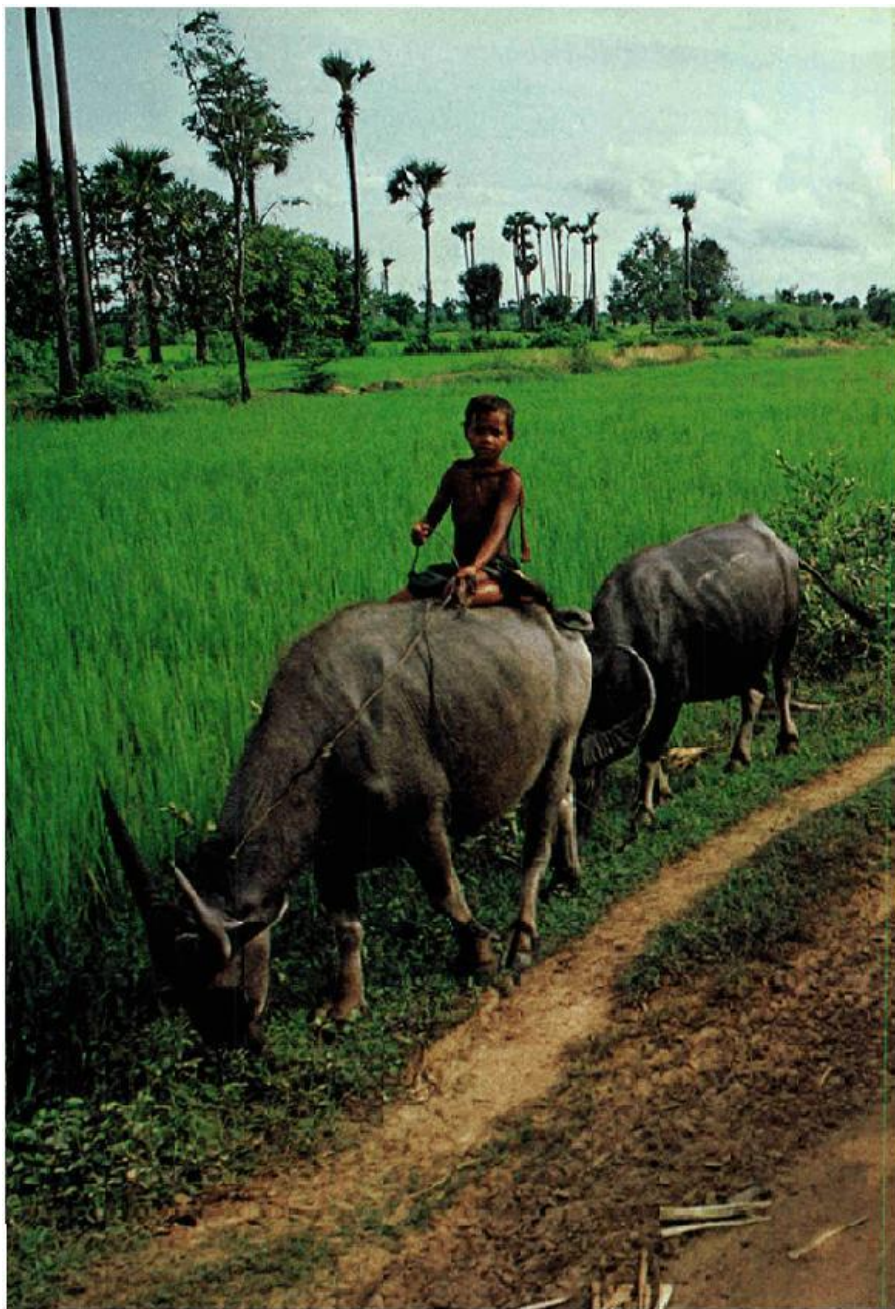
Two railway cars in front of the engine are weighted with steel rails and spare wheels, to set off mines along the track. Interspersed among the other cars are three with armor plate and heavy machine guns, served by soldiers of the Vietnamese Army—to counter ambushers.

These are reminders of still another set of compelling factors in the daily life of Kampuchea. The Vietnamese, having driven Pol Pot from power, are here in force. But his guerrillas remain a menace. Clouds of uncertainty hang over the land.

I too am off toward the Thai border—northwest on Route 5, through the provincial capitals of Kompong Chhnang and Pursat—through shimmeringly hot and humid countryside stretching flat and emerald green with rice (map, page 598). Typically Khmer, those squeaky oxcarts with four-and-a-half-foot wheels. So are the ubiquitous, bristly sugar palms: Boil the sap from the flower stalks and you get sugar.

Like swarming bees, traders in Phnom Penh appropriate every square inch on, in, and alongside a train bound for Battambang through guerrilla-menaced territory. Many will return to the capital with contraband from Thailand, main source of consumer items in a shattered economy.





I see boys herd cattle and water buffalo, catch crabs in watery fields, splash in turbid canals. Women and men rhythmically pull up bunches of rice seedlings, slap them against upraised ankles to knock away the mud, and bundle them for transplanting. At midday there's shade under the carts for a meal and a snooze.

If only the potholes weren't so typical. They're wide, deep, and unavoidable, so constant shifting of gears is necessary as one wheel plops in and then another. Most of the time you're lucky to make 15 or 20 miles an hour, but you get used to that, and to all those automatic rifles. Mostly Chinese-made AK-47s. Beyond the provincial capital of Battambang you see some every few hundred yards—carried by Vietnamese troops at bridges that look as if they've been blown up and repaired several times; lying near Khmer militiamen at checkpoints; dangling from bicycling civilians. Guns everywhere, handled as casually as hoes.

In the market town of Sisophon, a hotbed of resurgent commerce, a village entrepreneur can sell a fat pig for enough money to stock up on sandals, flashlight batteries, cooking pots, and aspirin—enough to keep a little crossroads stall back home going for months. Big stalls cluster by the score, supplied from Thailand 30 miles to the west by people who know their way through the forests and back roads.

For big items, stereos or motorcycles, payment commonly is in gold. How much for this Honda Super 700? Ten *chi*—that's 37.5 grams, worth 520 dollars at the world price today. Sisophon keeps on its toes.

Some 20 kilograms of gold may be flowing through to Thailand daily, a provincial official surmises—about seven metric tons a year, more than a hundred million dollars' worth. What flows in keeps the economy going, keeps people happy.

But where does this gold come from? The answer is rooted in the sequence of events that led to the nightmare of Pol Pot.

In 1970, while the United States was fighting Communist-led insurgents in neighboring Vietnam, a coup d'état replaced the chief of state, Prince Sihanouk, with Gen. Lon Nol. The general allied himself with the United States. The Vietnamese

Communists, in turn, supported anti-Lon Nol insurgents: the Communists that Prince Sihanouk had dubbed the Khmer Rouge, or Red Khmer.

U. S. aid to Lon Nol brought in floods of goods and money, fostering unprecedented corruption. This produced vast new wealth; added to old wealth, it accumulated in the government-held towns, chiefly in Phnom Penh; much of it was hidden away in gold.

Meanwhile the countryside, increasingly subject to the Khmer Rouge, languished. And the U. S. Air Force dropped three times



Hands speak a language of 2,000 gestures in classic Khmer ballet, rehearsed by the first class (right) to enroll at Phnom Penh's reopened School of Fine Arts. Students train to join the national troupe. Banned under the Khmer Rouge, art, education, and religion conjoin in a brass statue of a deity (above), cast at the school from spent artillery shells.

as many tons of conventional explosives as fell on Japan during World War II.

One day in April 1975 the victorious Khmer Rouge entered Phnom Penh. Right away all inhabitants—by then about two million, most of them seeking refuge from the bombing—were marched into the countryside. The same happened in Kompong Thom and Kompong Cham, in Takeo, in all the other towns. The gold was left behind. Thus began *peal chur chat*—the sour and bitter time.

NOBODY LIKES to hear an enumeration of gruesome experiences, but in Kampuchea this can hardly be avoided—nor should it be; without it, how could one appreciate how greatly things have changed for the better? Driving east along Route 6 toward the provincial capital of Siem Reap and the temples of Angkor—those magnificent remains of a Khmer empire that bestrode Southeast Asia eight centuries ago—I seek to summarize what I've heard from numerous survivors about life under that ultranationalist Communist who envisioned a period "even more prodigious than the age of Angkor Wat."

This vision of Pol Pot, like the greatness of Angkor, was to be based on the growing of great quantities of rice. And so, in his view, that was all the masses would need to know. Cities were useless—empty them! Trade was evil, abolish all markets. Abolish money. Destroy contaminating foreign vestiges—television sets, air conditioners. Destroy contaminated people: former enemy soldiers, teachers, physicians. . . .

In the countryside there was a basic division. The Old People, who had been there all along, and we New People, expelled from the towns. We could own nothing, not even a cooking pot. Families were separated—men and women had to live apart, collectively. Imagine sleeping in a 45-foot collective bed. We were expendable, treated worse than prisoners. We were used as machinery.

For 18 hours a day of plowing, hoeing, or building irrigation works, on pitiful rations of rice gruel, driven by a pitiless "cadre"—a supervisor with power of life and death.

If one felt too weak in the morning to work and asked to be excused, the cadres would say, "Ah, while we suffered in the forests to

liberate the country, you were lazy and comfortable in Phnom Penh. Now you must work." They were full of revenge.

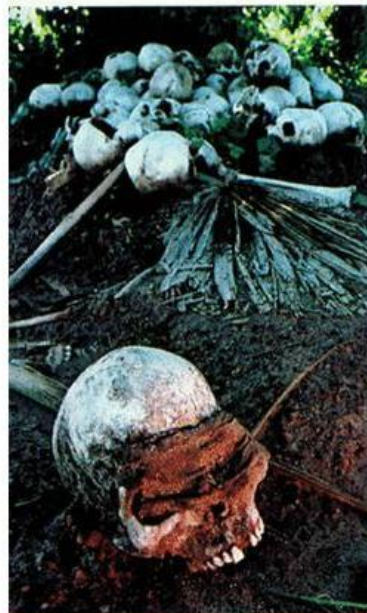
Every night the New People had to meet and criticize each other in front of the cadres. What had they done wrong that day? Picking up anything to eat—a piece of fruit, a root, a worm—was wrong. If you were criticized two or three times, you'd be killed.

Taken away at night, arms tied behind the back. . . . I'd been shown the steel bars for breaking necks, the pits the corpses fell into one by one, the skulls by the thousands. There's many a killing ground amid the sugar palms. . . . (Continued on page 604)



Doing peaceful duty in a Phnom Penh foundry, a U. S. Army helmet serves as a dipper for aluminum—from melted U. S. Air Force wing tanks—poured into molds to make cooking pots, which are in short supply. Under Pol Pot, the populace had to turn in their pots and pans and eat in communal kitchens.

Testimony of the dead surrounds exhumed mass graves (right) near Phnom Penh. Some skulls still wear blindfolds tied on before execution (below) at the "killing fields," located in virtually every district in Kampuchea. Visitors are told that the 129 pits found here held New People, the name given to city dwellers and others not under Khmer Rouge control in early 1975. Damned by Pol Pot's hatred, New People received especially harsh treatment. The Vietnam-sponsored government disdains Khmer Rouge counterclaims that such skeletal remains represent Kampuchean victims of Vietnamese violence, and is collecting skulls for a museum designed to show foreigners evidence of Pol Pot's massacres. Kampuchean need no reminders; as a Soviet diplomat remarked to the author, "You can still see the fear in their eyes."



WILBUR E. GARRETT (ABOVE)



THE SECURITY REGULATIONS

1. YOU MUST ANSWER ACCORDINGLY TO MY QUESTIONS. DON'T TURN THEM AWAY.
2. DON'T TRY TO HIDE THE FACTS BY MAKING PRETEXTS THIS AND THAT. YOU ARE STRICTLY PROHIBITED TO CONTEST ME.
3. DON'T BE A FOOL FOR YOU ARE A GUAP WHO DARE TO THWART THE REVOLUTION.
4. YOU MUST IMMEDIATELY ANSWER MY QUESTIONS WITHOUT WASTING TIME TO REFLECT.
5. DON'T TELL ME EITHER ABOUT YOUR IMMOVALITIES OR THE ESSENCE OF THE REVOLUTION.
6. WHILE GETTING LASHES OR ELECTRIFICATION YOU MUST NOT CRY AT ALL.
7. DO NOTHING SIT STILL AND WAIT FOR MY ORDERS. IF THERE IS NO ORDER, KEEP QUIET.
8. WHEN I ASK YOU TO DO SOMETHING, YOU MUST DO IT RIGHT AWAY WITHOUT PROTESTING.
9. DON'T MAKE PRETEXTS ABOUT KAMPUCHEA KROON IN ORDER TO HIDE YOUR TALK OF TRAITOR.
10. IF YOU DON'T FOLLOW ALL THE ABOVE RULES, YOU WILL GET MANY MANY LASHES OF ELECTRIC WIRE.
11. IF YOU DISOBEY ANY POINT OF MY REGULATIONS YOU WILL GET EITHER TEN LASHES OR FIVE SHOCKS OF ELECTRIC DISCHARGE.



Rules to die by, translated on a sign (top) for the benefit of foreign visitors, governed the last sufferings of more than 16,000 political prisoners executed at Tuol Sleng prison, now a museum exhibiting Pol Pot atrocities. One of seven surviving inmates, museum director Ing Pech (above right) was spared because he possessed mechanical skills useful to his captors. Behind him are a few of thousands of photographs of prisoners taken by prison authorities as part of a meticulous record-keeping system. The arms of most are bound behind them. Many underwent

prolonged torture before they died.

Four out of five prisoners brought to Tuol Sleng were Khmer Rouge supporters purged by their leader, Pol Pot.

Documents also show that four American yachtsmen captured off the coast were among the Tuol Sleng dead. Not all Khmer Rouge victims were so duly recorded—at a shrine in Phnom Penh bereaved women still pray for the return of missing husbands (above left).

Another exhibit displays a defaced—and rare—portrait of Pol Pot and photographs of Tuol Sleng's executioners.



(left). Some guards probably escaped west and now fight as Khmer Rouge guerrillas. Others may have died in the prison where they worked: Escalating terror swallowed the Khmer Rouge along with their erstwhile victims as the regime turned on its own ranks with increasing ferocity.

Nearly all prisoners signed confessions that they worked as agents for the United States, the Soviet Union, or Vietnam. Without a signed confession, wrote an interrogation officer, "We won't let you die easily."

In the early years the Old People had enough to eat, they were the cooks. They could work as they wanted, play cards, enjoy cockfights. They were the most ignorant peasants, but now they could lord it over us. If they didn't like you, they could have you killed.

How did New People survive? Several whose previous status had left them especially vulnerable—a professor, a business manager, a lady of the traditional theater, a journalist, a student—told me essentially the same. The thing to do was to conceal your background if you could, work hard, try to be deaf and mute, trust nobody. . . .

We made our way back to my father's village, thinking my uncles would receive us well. They didn't; they denounced my father. Once there was no place as nice as our village, but I'll never go back. I remember the cries at night. Of more than a hundred New families there, only twenty widows and orphans survived. They've all fled back to Phnom Penh.

So, many of the villages I've been passing are full of Old People. Do some in secret still sympathize with Pol Pot?

Yes. But our government doesn't want to tell about that.

Not far from the provincial capital of Siem Reap, my government-assigned driver abruptly speeds up. He won't say why, but I can guess. "We take care of our mouth," I've been told. "When we're afraid of poisonous snakes, we don't talk about snakes." You don't talk about Pol Pot guerrillas when you're afraid they may be near.

AFTER A REWARDING STAY in Siem Reap, visiting the Angkor monuments day after day (pages 552-589), I return to Phnom Penh. The representative of UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund—then the senior UN official in Kampuchea—recounts how international efforts have been bringing succor since 1979, when the country faced famine. Agriculture had been totally mismanaged. The economic infrastructure lay in complete ruins.

"First we had to get the ports working, fix jetties, bring cranes and forklifts." Then UNICEF brought in a thousand Japanese, East German, and British trucks and dozens of river barges, so food could be distributed to the people: tens of thousands of tons of rice provided by the UN's World Food Program, paid for by the United States; rice and wheat flour from the Soviet Union.

"Schools had been abolished. UNICEF brought in blackboards, notebooks, ball-point pens, tools to repair furniture." Now one and a half million children are said to get elementary instruction.

In the port of Phnom Penh, 200 miles up an arm of the Mekong River from the South China Sea, officials of assorted international relief organizations watch the unloading of more ball-point pens from UNICEF, bags of rice seed from Oxfam, a tractor, a machine for forming chalk.

Chalk? A lady from CIDSE, a Catholic group based in France, explains that Khmer schoolchildren carry little blackboards, they need lots of chalk. "There's gypsum to be mined in Battambang Province—this machine will make thousands of pieces of chalk every day."

The ship captain says he'll sail back to Singapore empty. Except for a little rubber going to the Soviet Union, and some of the world's finest rubies—also mined in Battambang Province, around Pailin, and smuggled to Thailand—Kampuchea produces nothing for export.

Famine has been averted, but Kampuchea remains plagued by malaria. The Vietnamese doctor in the provincial hospital

at Kompong Speu says half his patients suffer from malaria—80 percent of the falciparum variety; if not treated, many would quickly die.

And, alas, food problems seem far from over. A mission from FAO, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, is preparing a bleak report: Fifteen years ago twice as much land was planted in rice. Uncultivated fields can now be seen in every district because not enough men are left to do the plowing; two-thirds of the adult population are women. Nor are there enough oxen and buffalo. And while the 1980-81 growing season was relatively good, yielding twice as much as the year before, 1981-82 will be bad, because of flood and drought.

I've had a glimpse of that too. Flying over Prey Veng Province, southeast of Phnom Penh, I saw square mile after dismal square mile of watery expanse—some milky white, some brownish and scummy. The Mekong hadn't surged so high in August in a hundred recorded years.

Only 20 miles away, due south of Phnom Penh in Kandal Province, a subdistrict chief told me the seasonal rainfalls were too little and too late. At seeding time the ground was too dry, too hard to plow. "We finished



A healing time begins in a land bereft of healers. Of 600 Kampuchean doctors practicing before Pol Pot's era, fewer than 60 were known to be alive and in the country in 1979. One of 25 physicians trained since then, Dr. Channeary Ry tends a young patient at a World Vision pediatric hospital (left). Malaria and other ills—mental disorders not least among them—have run rampant. Vietnamese administrators and professionals supervise the rebuilding society, but keep a low profile wherever possible: Unarmed, a Vietnamese soldier mingles with Phnom Penh market crowds (right).



planting a month and a half late, so there would not be time for the rice to mature before too much sun would kill it. We will have to harvest prematurely."

FAO predicts a deficit of 278,000 tons. The minister of agriculture says it will be 450,000 tons, that even now a third of the people are hungry—only 2 percent in Battambang but 62 percent in Kompong Cham, 72 percent in Pursat. . . . "We will intensify the planting of dry-season rice, but we don't have enough irrigation."

ONE LATE OCTOBER DAY the wind changes. It has been coming from the south. Today it's strongly and refreshingly from the north, making ripples on the clear Tonle Sap river before it merges with the brown Mekong. Now it's the Khmer winter, when rice yields its seed. Until a dozen years ago there used to be celebrations on this night—a hundred lighted boats racing, crowds on the shore.

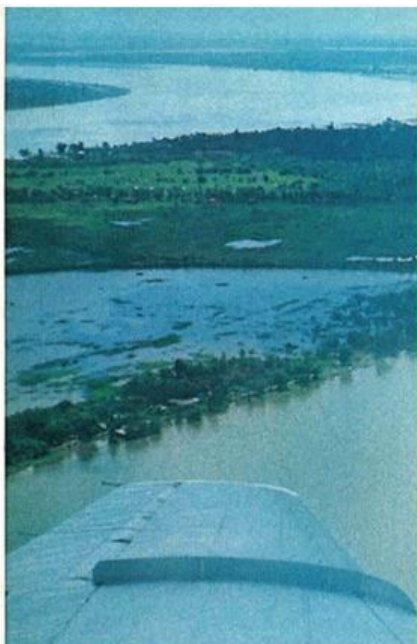
I'm on a motor launch going up the wide Mekong, past rusting remnants of Lon Nol's navy, a brickkiln, people sawing logs. A UNICEF barge carries rice upstream to Kompong Cham. A small boat brings down big round bales of tobacco. A crowded ferry crosses, with a multicolored flag and music: This is the season of *kathen*—for collecting money for gifts to the Buddhist monks, to be presented at a *bon*, or festival. Under Pol Pot all religious observances were suppressed.

This village bon is fun.

Everyone feasts. Players of the traditional band—drum, flute, cymbals—prance, hop, and jump. A cheerful procession passes three times around the *wat*, or monastery, carrying flowers in silver bowls, multicolored parasols, and the gifts for the two monks—new robes, a kerosene lamp, an umbrella, a new bed.

Inside, after much ceremony, men hold up a big cloth behind which the monks change into their new robes. Two old ladies urge me to sneak behind the cloth and take photographs: "Then you can send us pictures, and we can see what these two really look like."

Outside, young people dance to highly amplified electric guitars. I ask a singer what he sang about. "About a grasshopper. He's clever, he has political consciousness."



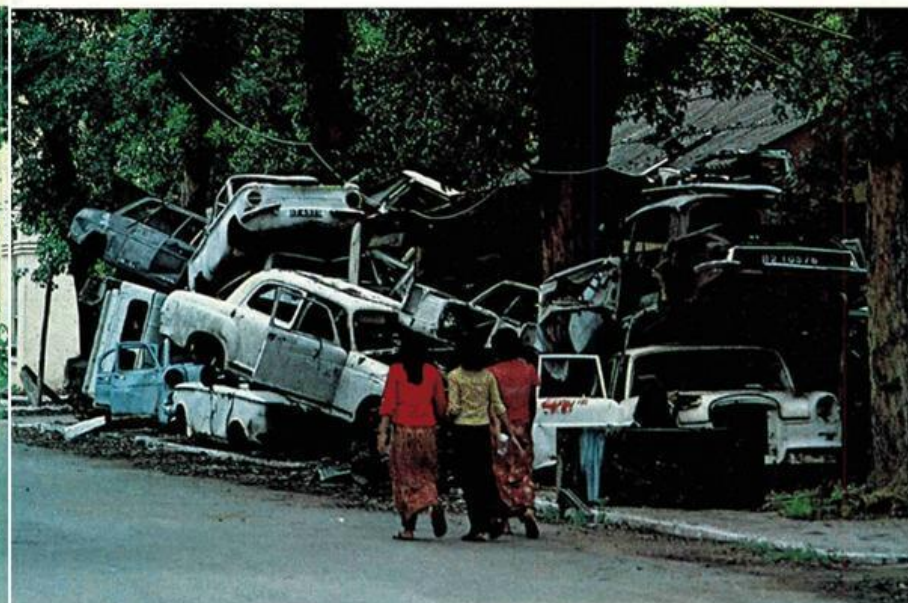
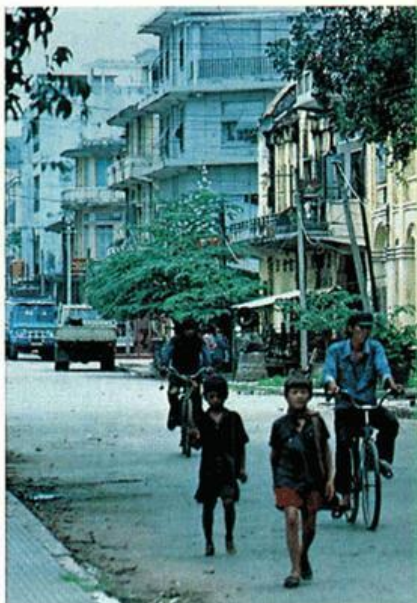
Turned inside out by evacuation, Phnom Penh reenters life wearing scars from the past. A Tonle Sap river bridge demolished in 1972 remains unrepaired



BOTH BY WILBUR E. GARRETT

(above). Abandoned cars, now stacked for removal (below), littered streets when only Khmer Rouge functionaries and a handful of essential workers

lived in the nearly deserted city. Floodwaters, above left, have further hurt a rice crop already damaged by drought, threatening more shortages.



Really? "Well, it's a funny song—he *thinks* he has political consciousness."

Fun aside, political messages are everywhere. In posters, broadcasts, traveling-theater performances; in the village meetings and political schools that reach nearly everyone. "To make our people understand the dirty tactics of the enemy," says a provincial information chief. "The enemy makes propaganda that our government is serving only Vietnam, not Kampuchea," he continued. "They want to break up the relationship

between Kampuchean and Vietnamese."

What is this Vietnamese connection?

It's complicated. Pol Pot's Communists feared traditionally expansionist Vietnam, now allied with the Soviet Union. They launched a vicious campaign against Vietnamese nationals in Kampuchea, killing thousands, and beginning in 1976, increasingly ferocious attacks across their eastern border into Vietnam itself. At the same time, Pol Pot ordered tortured to death thousands of his own people—those that he labeled

"Khmer bodies with Vietnamese minds."

The outraged Vietnamese Communists—concerned about Pol Pot's alliance with their main enemy, the People's Republic of China—struck back with a lightning invasion in December 1978. They captured Phnom Penh in January 1979, pushed Pol Pot's forces to the Thai border, and installed the present regime.

"It is true, we have Vietnamese advisers at every administrative level," a Khmer official told me in Phnom Penh. "But as we

become better organized, they will leave."

For the moment, some 180,000 Vietnamese are said to be in Kampuchea, most of them soldiers. They will not leave unless they can be sure of a secure and friendly government on their southwestern flank; not with China threatening from the north.

Pol Pot's remaining fighters—about 35,000—are supplied with arms by the Chinese, via Thailand. The Vietnamese forces are sustained by the Soviet Union. Soviet advisers are in Kampuchea too.

And so it is that this tortured, impoverished country no bigger than Oklahoma finds itself a cockpit of confrontation between world powers.

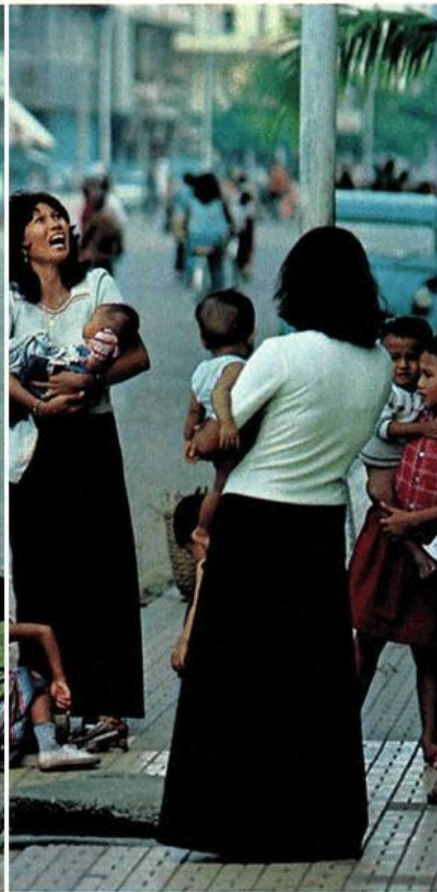
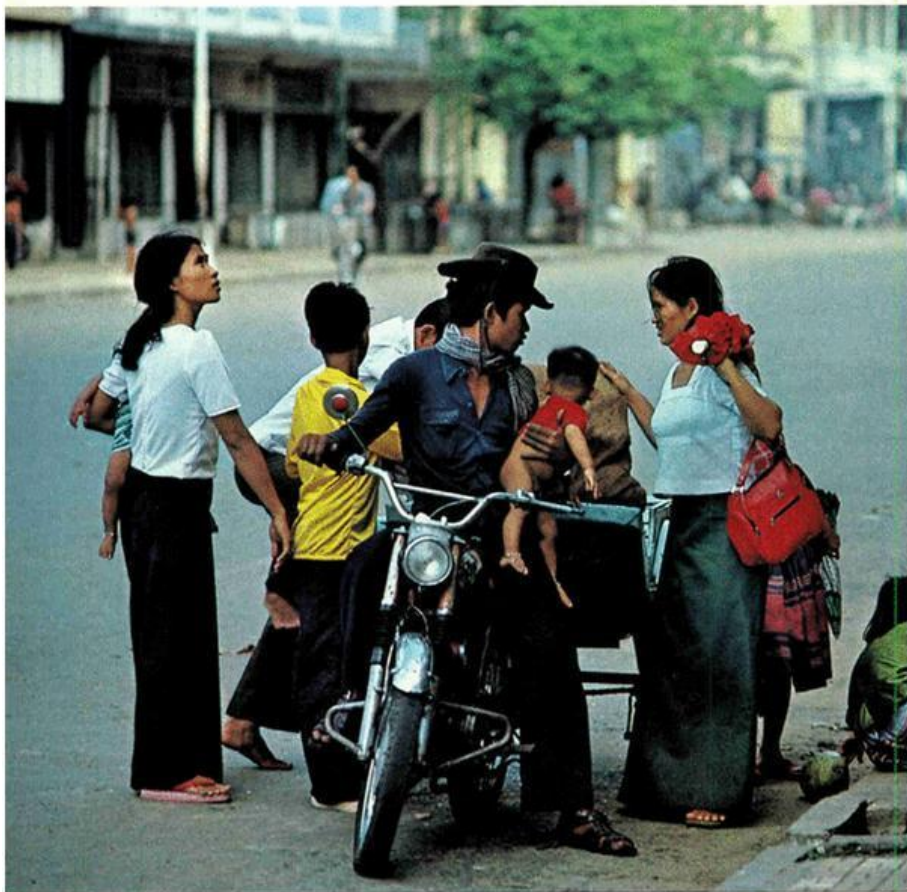
UNARMED VIETNAMESE soldiers blend into the population in Phnom Penh. In the countryside I've seen them hauling cannon and guarding off-the-road headquarters with armored cars, but usually I see them unarmed: fishing, bicycling, gardening, buying vegetables, giving each other haircuts, playing the guitar, carrying a dog. Roast dog is a favorite Vietnamese dish.

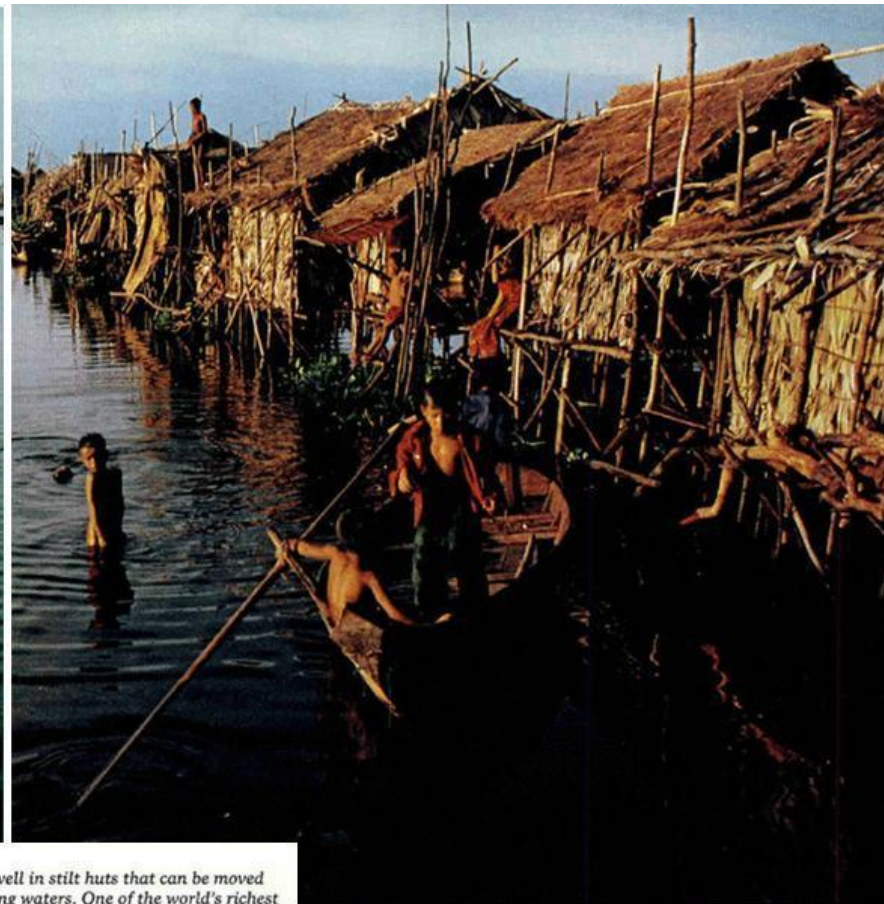
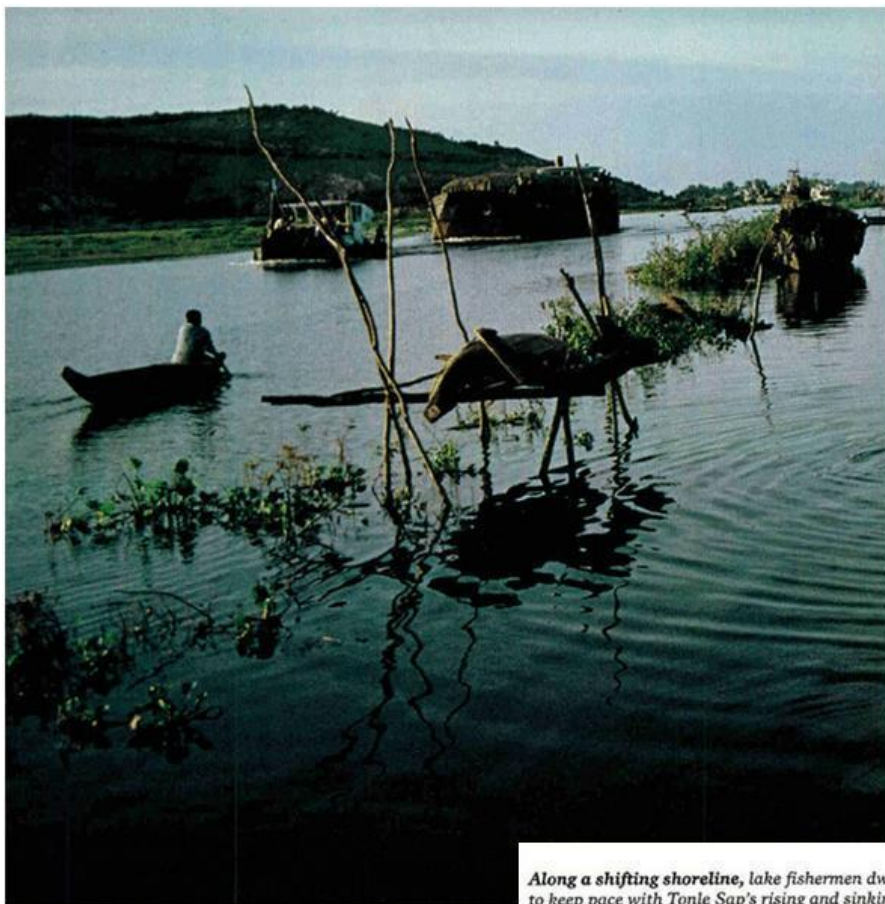
Khmer don't eat dog and tend to dislike the Vietnamese as traditional enemies, especially those from the south, from the Mekong Delta, which 300 years ago was Khmer territory. . . . By 1840 the expansionist Vietnamese controlled a Khmer puppet monarch through a Vietnamese resident, and had advisers supervising every provincial governor. But then France colonized Vietnam and made Cambodia a protectorate. That lasted into the mid-1950s. . . .

No wonder, then, that many Khmer have mixed feelings about their Vietnamese liberators. In an unguarded moment a Khmer

Baby boom sounds in Phnom Penh's streets, where market-bound mothers gather to board a motorcycle cart.

Under Pol Pot, families were torn apart: Children were raised by the state, men and women slept in separate barracks, and conjugal visits required permission. Authorities separated couples and dictated marriages. Unsanctioned liaisons were punished by death. Now birthrates have soared as couples embrace more normal lives.





Along a shifting shoreline, lake fishermen dwell in stilt huts that can be moved to keep pace with Tonle Sap's rising and sinking waters. One of the world's richest aquatic nurseries, the strategic lake also provides access for commercial and military cargoes bound from Phnom Penh to Siem Reap in the north.

official tells me, "They are imbeciles."

Those I met were not. I watched them fix a road damaged by guerrillas, using logs held in ponds along the right-of-way, cutting them to fit into the newly blown potholes swiftly and efficiently. A Vietnamese soldier told me he dislikes Kampuchea, the Khmer, the Russians, and the war. "But my country was attacked, so I suppose I've got to be here." He sounded like many a young American I met in Vietnam in the 1960s.

In Phnom Penh I fiddle with my radio.

"Resistance to Vietnamese forces... is increasing," says the Voice of America. "[They] are plagued by malaria... and desertions." The U. S., labeling Vietnam's occupation of Kampuchea blatant aggression and the government in Phnom Penh a Vietnamese puppet, just voted to let Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge continue to represent the country in the UN... The Khmer Rouge call their regime Democratic Kampuchea.

A Pol Pot broadcast, from China, claims 25 Soviet advisers killed in ambush on

Route 4 between Phnom Penh and Kompong Som, the port on the Gulf of Thailand where Soviet military equipment is unloaded. "Probably means they got three," says a resident foreigner. And perhaps explains why I was refused permission to visit Kompong Som just now...

Officially, the government in Phnom Penh exudes confidence.

The President of the People's Republic of Kampuchea—Comrade Heng Samrin, a former Pol Pot division commander who

rebelled in 1978 and defected to Vietnam—declares that despite the sabotaging maneuverings of the American imperialists and the Chinese expansionists, the people struggle successfully for stability and prosperity. "Under the enlightened direction of the People's Revolutionary Party of Kampuchea," he says. That's the Communist Party; Heng Samrin is the first secretary.

The party still has only a few hundred members, so its political line trickles down through the United Front for National



Reconstruction and its youth movement, women's association, labor organization: Increase production! Unmask "double-faced elements" hiding themselves among the people. . . .

THE MOST DRAMATIC symbol of reconstruction and revival is Phnom Penh itself. A journalist from East Berlin remembers March 1979, two months after the departure of Pol Pot: the wind whistling through a ghost town like a decaying Hollywood set, corpses lying around, helicopters spraying disinfectants.

A Soviet diplomat says a year later he still couldn't walk in many side streets, the smell was so awful. There were nearly 100,000 inhabitants by then; most still wore black. "But now, look around, people look normal, the place is changed completely."

By official estimate, the residents number 400,000. Early morning traffic moves steadily with the stately rhythm of bicycles. Many—called *kong dup*, "double bicycles," or *velo-taxis*—have the luggage carrier padded for a paying passenger. Motorcycles have trailers for several passengers. Occasionally there's some powerful comrade's white Mercedes.

Not that the city looks prosperous. There's still an inescapable air of decrepitude and neglect: broken streets, unrepaired buildings, the odd fetid smell. I saw many a truck-squashed rat. But what impressed me was the purposeful stirrings of life.

Waiters from the Monorom Hotel clean away weeds at the nearby railway station, officials sweep around the Foreign Ministry. From one day to the next, familiar heaps of garbage are gone.

Sooner or later everybody seems to get in on this act. One Sunday I see trucks and horsecarts full of people with hoes, shovels, brooms. The Phnom, the city's grassy central hill, is atwitter with thousands of schoolchildren cutting grass. "Last week we did the school grounds," says the principal of Sala Padevat, the Revolutionary School;

she has 3,412 pupils from 6 to 14. "All this is production, socialist labor. . . ."

And evidently enjoyable. There's horseplay, flirting. A boy has caught a foot-long frog, and proudly gives it to the principal. She beams. She'll take it home and cook it.

In theory, only state employees may reside in Phnom Penh. They live rent free. Electricity also is free, when available; usually water has to be carried into the house. But a lot of people without state jobs have been sneaking in—they stay with relatives or pay for quarters. Phnom Penh is a good place "to make little commerce." Like selling egg rolls and other curbed-fried goodies.

Little markets do sizable business. Ox-carts squeak in from Kompong Cham—75 miles and three days away—piled high with ceramic pots. Near a waterside stand a boatman lands his lemons, just brought upriver from An Giang Province in Vietnam. Good lemons? Not so good, he says, but they sell anyway because none are grown here now. Good money? "Not so good, but enough to get rice." To make a living.

The ramshackle Tuol Tumpoung market bustles all day; the hall of the old central market has been refurbished so wives of state employees can earn extra money.

Is this compatible with Marxist-Leninist principles? For the time being, yes. "The state has no interest to show itself too austere in regard to the free markets," declares a government guidance document: They do a better job of encouraging consumption and giving the necessary initiatives for the stimulation of production. . . .

Which brings up this tale of two Phnom Penh restaurants. The state-run Peace did poorly, the privately owned Pailin thrived. The state closed Pailin. Peace still did poorly. So the state closed Peace and reopened it under the management of the successful Pailin restaurateur. He is supposed to divide the proceeds with the state. "Business is great," he says. "Each day it gets better." Outside waits a white Mercedes.

Now what's this coming down the street?

Top-heavy with humanity, a truck lists along a road northwest of Tonle Sap. Transport is scarce, so cargo drivers cram passengers aboard to boost their incomes. The numerals 7 and 1 appear first on all Kampuchean license plates, signifying the January 7 liberation of Phnom Penh by Vietnamese forces in 1979. WILBUR E. GARRATT

Thirty drummers, rows of white-shirted boys and girls with red scarves—Revolutionary Youth from Orphanage No. 1. What does it say on the big sign they carry—this spidery Khmer writing? Oh, I see. “Condemn neutron-bomb production by Reagan Administration.”

Well, that’s another thing you get used to in Phnom Penh. Ever fresh posters show

Uncle Sam in unflattering positions as the pal of China and Pol Pot. Several times a day I am asked why my country upholds the Pol Pot presence in the United Nations.

Nothing personal, though. Buying a basketball and a soccer ball for the orphanage, I tell the man at the Tuol Tumpoung sporting-goods stand that I suppose foreigners have to pay more. “Yes,” he replies,

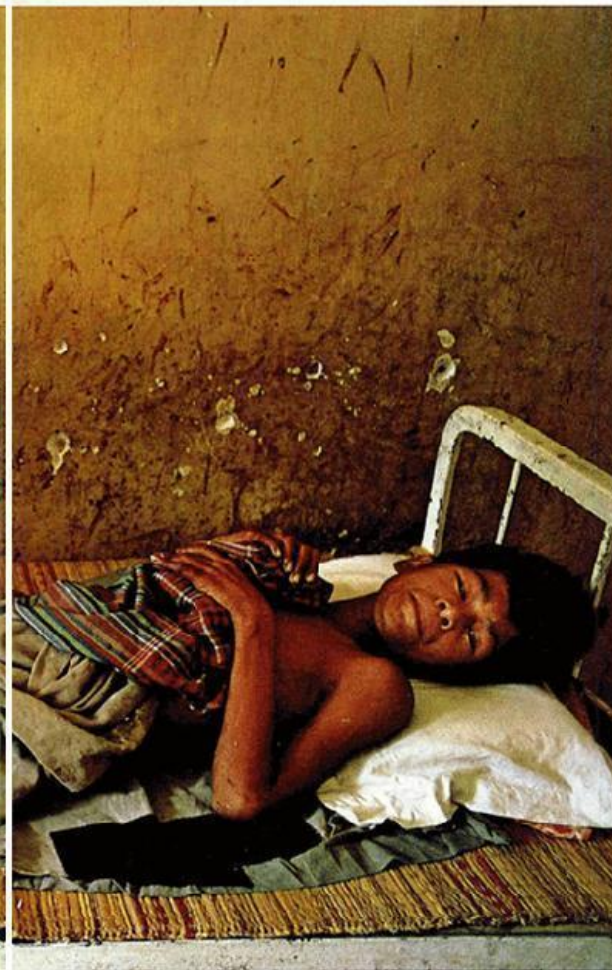
“especially imperialists.” But he’s grinning.

At first I am usually taken for a Russian. That’s why on the road, sometimes, Vietnamese soldiers salute me. I always salute back. But to the buxom Tuol Tumpoung fish lady I am just a cheapskate: “Why you just look, you don’t buy!”

OK, OK, I buy some of her giant shrimp to have them cooked back at the hotel. I also

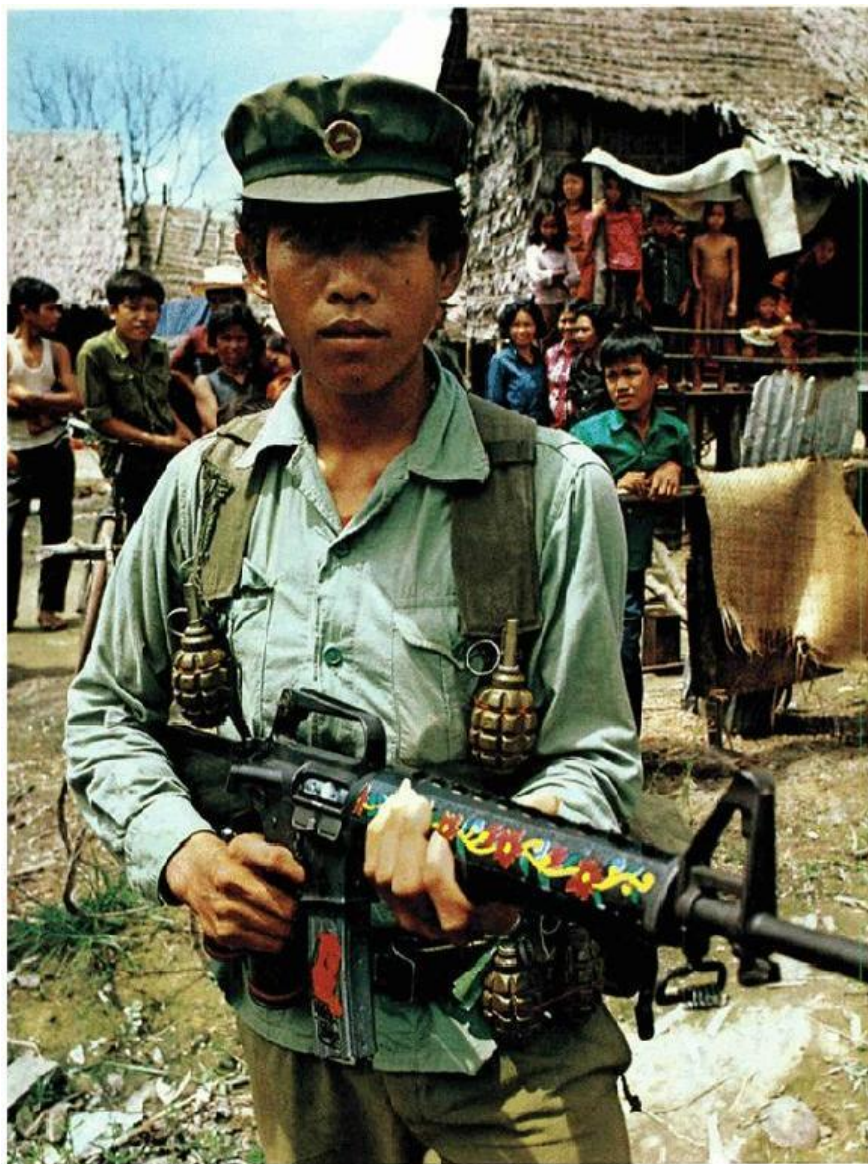
buy a bunch of freshly boiled *pong tea kon*, literally “egg duck baby”: Let ducks sit on their eggs for 18 days—then the best eggs will have big babies in them. Eat with pepper, salt, lemon, and a sprig of mint—it’s a Khmer treat. “They’ll give you strength, fortify the blood.”

How did they taste? Sorry, at the last minute I chickened out; I gave them all to a grateful hotel waiter.



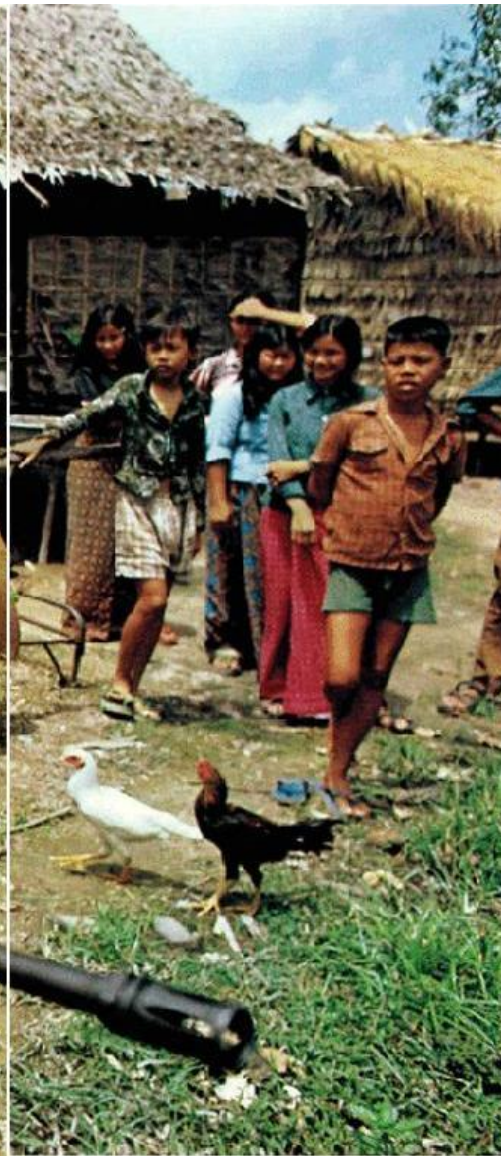
A son's agony, a father's pain: While herding water buffalo, 15-year-old Mith Yon lost a leg to a live rocket he found in the fields. One companion died. Two others recovered from injuries. The Vietnamese doctor who amputated the boy's leg told the GEOGRAPHIC team that he did not expect him to live. Following Kampuchean custom, the father, Chan Mith, or another family member will be with the boy at all times until he dies or recovers.

Mines and booby traps pose added dangers in areas contested by guerrillas. Where Vietnamese troops rule by day and Khmer Rouge roam by night, villagers face the dilemma of living between implacable enemies. “While they’re planting rice in the fields,” says photographer Dave Harvey, “the war comes to them.”



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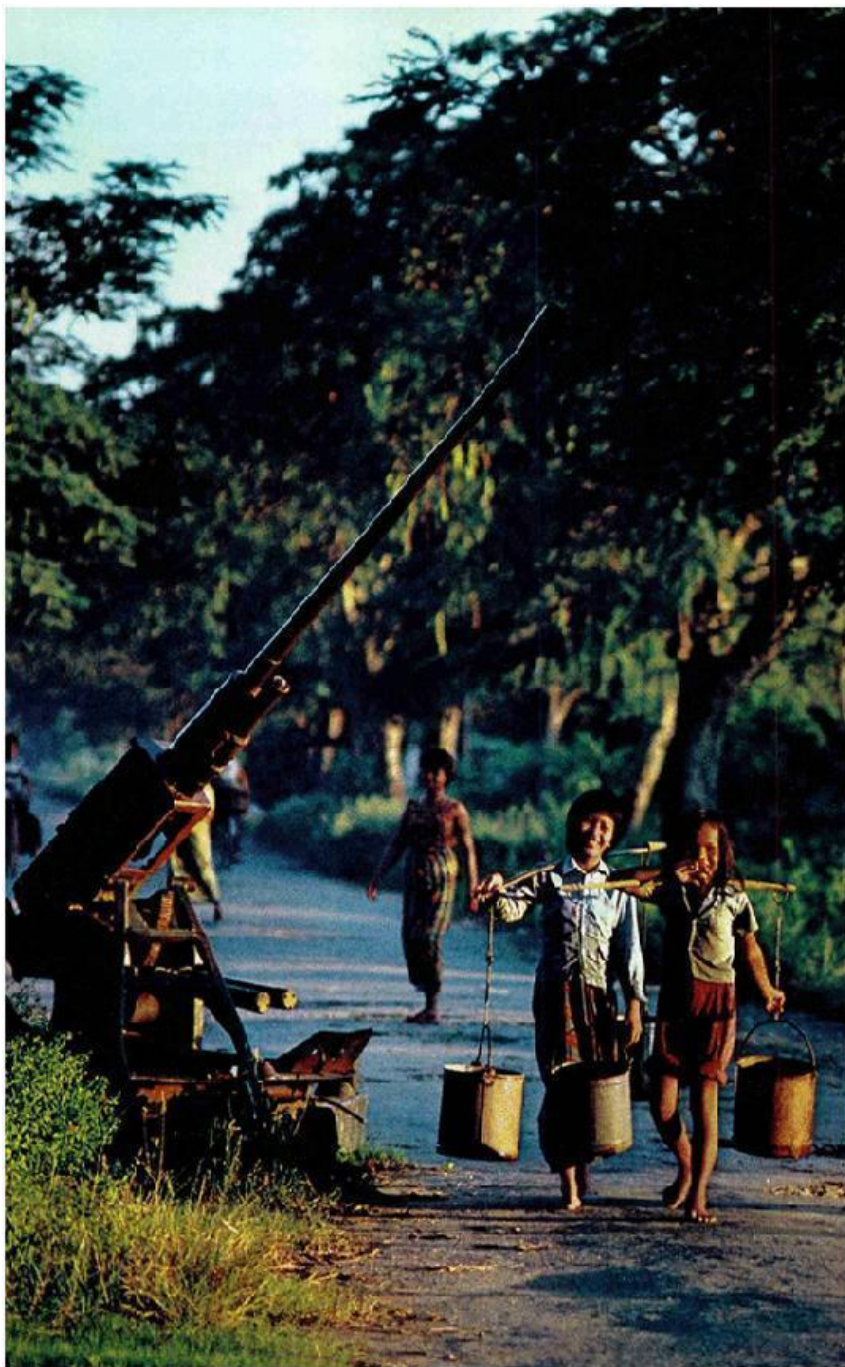
Kampuchea Wakens From a Nightmare

Fresh from combat, a soldier in the fledgling army of the Vietnamese-backed People's Republic of Kampuchea (RPK) returns home on leave to Siem Reap (left). Decorations on his U.S.-made M-16 rifle belie the deadliness of nearby fighting. His cap, he said, came from a Khmer Rouge he had killed the day before. The badge bears the RPK symbol. "Guns are as commonplace as hoes,"



says Editor Wilbur E. Garrett. For a Phnom Penh boy, a car jack becomes a toy burp gun (above). The 180,000-man Vietnamese occupation force provides the main strength pitted against about 35,000 Khmer Rouge guerrillas. Smaller independent guerrilla forces also harry RPK and Vietnamese troops.

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RUMOR startles Phnom Penh. Food is being poisoned! It's the oranges from Battambang. Yes, and bananas and cucumbers—they use syringes to inject the poison. No, fingernails. Even money may be contaminated. Four have died. No, fifty. "They do this to make people afraid, to shake confidence in the government," says a man from the Justice Ministry.

Militiamen circulate to calm people, saying that some of the enemy made a demonstration of eating, collapsing, and looking ill. "Some went to a hospital pretending to be sick, but before the doctor could look at them, they ran away."

Operatives of Pol Pot? Or of KPNLF, the non-Communist Khmer People's National Liberation Front, led by Son Sann? Or of Prince Sihanouk's new FUNCINPEC (National Union Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful, and Cooperative Cambodia)? These also lurk along the Thai border. . . . In 1979 about 700,000 hungry Khmer huddled there, in refugee camps—many had been forced to accompany Pol Pot's retreat. By now, says the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, half are back in the interior; the rest are still fed by international organizations. Half of those Khmer are controlled by Pol Pot. . . .

I remember a soccer match, Phnom Penh vs. Vietnamese. The guests were outclassed, but when they scored a goal, at last, the crowd applauded politely. I thought, if terrorists should strike, which way shall I head to avoid being trampled? Or have I become overly cautious?

Now there's a trial.

A former Pol Pot brigade commander—sent to Phnom Penh to organize a resistance network—was caught at the stadium, with grenades. He had been working as a velotaxi man. One of his accomplices, another Pol Pot officer, had been a driver for the Telecommunications Ministry. They are sent to prison. A woman who hid their

grenades and mines is sent home. After all, she has small children.

I am surprised at such leniency. "We don't execute people," I am told. "Have not enough Khmer died already?"

And who is this Pol Pot—leader of the *khmau*, those black-clad men who did black deeds and still cast such a shadow?

He has hardly ever been seen in public, but most accounts tend to agree. . . . *Born Saloth Sar, 1928, in Kompong Thom; Chinese mother, Khmer father—not unusual in Kampuchea. Educated in Buddhist monastery and French-Catholic school in Phnom Penh. In Paris, studied radio mechanics, planned radically new society with fellow Khmer students Khieu Samphan, Ieng Sary. Taught secondary school in Phnom Penh, took new name—not unusual for a revolutionary; became head of Khmer Communist Party, visited China, met Mao. . . . The rest is bloody history.*

At this writing, Khieu Samphan is the nominal head of the Khmer Rouge, of Democratic Kampuchea; but Pol Pot, supposedly at the Thai border or in China, is reported to be still in command. Ieng Sary often speaks for him at the UN in New York.

Meanwhile, inside Kampuchea, Pol Pot's guerrillas continue their black doings. A report from Stung Treng Province in the northeast: A subdistrict head of the Women's Association was tied to a pole to be eaten by mosquitoes and sexually mistreated for weeks. Now free, she is confused, cannot pronounce words, only wants to sleep. . . .

AT THE AIRPORT a group of young Khmer waits nervously. They're off to East Germany, to study industrial chemistry. The boys smoke, the girls cry. If all goes as planned, they will be home again in five years.

As our plane lifts off, I remember an old man telling me: "May you meet only good and overcome all your enemies." It's a way the Khmer say good-bye.

May their enemies not overcome them. □

Familiar with war's ghosts, girls fetch water home past a rusting anti-aircraft gun left from days when all the land was a battlefield. Weary with suffering, Kampucheans hope against hope that the nightmare is over. But demons from the past, still very much alive, haunt the nights of a people who have walked through the "valley of the shadow."