Changed Their Minds

With the occasional thud of artillery in the background, a 41-year-old rice mill worker, Tran Van Phat, sat on the porch of his rocking wooden house in the hamlet of Nghia Hoa and spoke of the cease-fire agreement signed in January in Paris: "We thought there would be peace. About 10 days ago we began to think otherwise."

Mr. Phat said that as a laborer he earned the equivalent of about $1.25 on a good day. To earn this, he said, he and two other workers had to carry about 200 bags of rice, each weighing about 220 pounds, a distance of 10 yards.

Generally, Mr. Phat said, he earned enough to feed himself, his wife and their five children. He also said with some pride that district officials had appointed him "chief of the interfamily group" in his hamlet. As chief his duty is to report to the authorities any strangers he sees visiting houses at night.

If real peace ever comes to the delta, bringing with it the opening of land now considered too dangerous to work, Mr. Phat would like to become a farmer. "My hope is that I do not have to work for anybody else," he said. "They shout at you and use bad language."

Remarking that he did not much care which side won the war he sees around him, he said, "I just wish the fighting would stop."

[From the New York Times, Nov. 2, 1974]

Montagnard Uprising Poses a Threat to Saigon Drive

(By James M. Markham)

Ban Me Thuot, South Vietnam, October 25.—An armed rebellion of dissident montagnard tribesmen has broken out in the province of Darlac and may be spreading into neighboring corners of the strategic Central Highlands.

If it continues to grow, the uprising, which is thought to have some 500 men under arms, could imperil the Saigon Government's struggle against the Communists in the highlands.

Some people here believe that the Communists have infiltrated the tribe movement. Others argue that a Government crackdown on the rebels is rapidly alienating tribesmen who are not disposed to join the insurrection and who hate the Communists.

Warning by Official

"It's going to be very bad here," warned Y Jut Buon To, the dynamic, 31-year-old head of ethnic minority services in the highlands. "I don’t think they can ever solve it with the military. It should be solved by the political."

"I don’t want to get my people killed," he added. "They are ethnic minorities—they are going to become more minority."

Compounding the problems, a wave of brutal killings and robberies—attributed by some to the rebels, by others to bandits who justify pillage in the name of rebellion—have heightened tension between Vietnamese and the montagnards. That word is the generic name for the Central Highlands tribesmen who are not of the same racial origin as the Vietnamese.

Montagnards are ethnically distinct from the lowland Vietnamese, whose civilization is largely derived from China. Montagnard languages are of Malayo-Polynesian or Mon-Khmer stock.

In August, when the violence reached a peak, about 50 people, mostly Vietnamese civilians, were reportedly killed in highway ambushes and holdups in remote villages in Darlac Province.

While the violence has abated, Vietnamese traders, taximen and truck drivers are still terrified of the lonely roads. Senior Vietnamese officials carry handguns for fear of assassination.

"There had been a certain union, an understanding, between the two communities," said a French priest who has lived in the highlands for many years. "But now a gulf has opened between them."

For their part, many montagnards find themselves caught between mixed feelings of sympathy and fear of the rebels and nervousness about the Government police reaction. A document issued in the name of the rebels charges that from July through September 160 tribesmen have been "lost, killed and massacred, others captured and subjected to savage torture."

Another, dispassionate source put the number of montagnards arrested by the Government at about 100. Some were reportedly taken as suspects in acts of
banditry and murder, others for their presumed sympathies with the rebels.

At present, two battalions of Government rangers—about 800 men—are set up in blocking positions outside montagnard villages in Darlac Province while policemen and militiamen check the papers of young highlanders.

The rangers have so far not clashed with the lightly armed rebels, who have avoided direct fighting with regular military units and have devoted most of their energies to winning over villagers and trying to stay alive.

The montagnard revolt, which is thought to be led by a disaffected former civil servant named Y Kpa Koi, is not without precedent. In 1964 and again in late 1965, montagnard troops, rallying to the standard of the United Front for the Struggle of the Oppressed Races, staged bloody rebellions that had to be put down with force.

**GRIEVANCES ARE MANY**

But, until recently, the Government of President Nguyen Van Thieu had succeeded in mollifying most of the leaders of Fulro, as the organization is known after its initials in French, and had brought many of them into the civilian administration. By comparison with previous Vietnamese regimes, the Thieu Government treated the montagnards fairly well.

But the montagnard grievances are legion. Vietnamese entrepreneurs and officials have encroached on and stolen their land.

Public services, particularly health and education, have been skimpily provided. Many montagnards live in squalor, with illiteracy and disease; their population growth rate appears to be close to nothing.

Moreover, the montagnard peoples—numbering perhaps 800,000—have suffered cruelly in the war. In 1972 and 1973 alone, 150,000 montagnards were reportedly made refugees by the fighting, some 70 percent of all montagnards now live outside their original home areas, according to one study.

At a time of political unrest and economic stagnation throughout South Vietnam, many people here are not surprised to find the montagnards—or, so far, the advanced Rha tribe—stirring, too.

But some informed montagnards find Mr. Y Kpa Koi, who is a strong-willed, little-educated veteran of the French colonial army, a somewhat unlikely figure to emerge as the Che Guevara of the highlands.

A Jarai tribesman in his early 40's, Mr. Y Kpa Koi, whose wife is Rha, was, until late in November, 1973, a senior administrator in the Ban Me Thuot Labor Department. Then he vanished into the forests and proclaimed the rebellion in the name of Fulro.

No one has a convincing explanation for his action. Though he had headed the Darlac chapter of a short-lived montagnard political organization that succeeded Fulro after the reconciliation with Saigon in the late sixties, Mr. Y Kpa Koi was not a well-known figure in Fulro itself.

Some people say that he ran into trouble with the law over some shady lumber deals involving Chinese middlemen and that his idealism was colored by opportunism. A few suspect that the Communists may have a hand in his defection.

Whatever his motivations, Mr. Y Kpa Koi gradually attracted a number of armed men, many of them demobilized irregulars who had kept the automatic rifles and grenade launchers that had been supplied by the departed America.

**TOOK GENERAL'S TITLE**

Mr. Y Kpa Koi took the title of general and soon his troops were displaying a letter in the Darlac villages that purportedly gave their rebellion the endorsement of Y Bham EnuoI, the principal Fulro leader.

The whereabouts of Mr. Y Bham EnuoI is a mystery. His customary residence in Phnom Penh but some montagnards say he is in Indonesia, while yet another report says he is ill in France.

"Oh, Fulro, Fulro," said one French coffee planter, sipping a beer in Ban Me Thuot's dingy French restaurant. "Before, they put it all on the backs of the Viets [Communists]. Now they blame the Fulros. The Fulros don't need to steal refrigerators; they don't kill old ladies in the middle of the streets."

Though the rebellion began in Darlac Province—whose population of 270,000 is estimated to be 45 percent Vietnamese and 55 percent montagnard—there are signs that it has begun to spread. Occasional acts of violence on the Darlac pattern have been noted in adjoining highlands provinces.

The movement's future may well depend on the Government's response. Nay Luett, the montagnard Minister of Ethnic Development, has so far taken a hard
Mr. Nay Luett, who spent four years in jail a decade ago for agitating on behalf of his people, denied on a recent visit here that Fulro even existed.

The rebellion has produced considerable anguish among montagnard leaders who are not unsympathetic to the grievances that may have produced it.

"Right now there are a lot of montagnards in the middle—they cannot adjust to what they should do," said Mr. Y Jut Buon Jo, the head of the ethnic minority sources, adding that he has been threatened several times by Kpa Koi partisans who want him to join them.

"They need leaders," he said.

Judge Y Blieing Hmok, the president of the montagnard court here, expressed a pervasive sadness over the racial schism brought on by the revolt and the Government's response to it.

"Without the Vietnamese the montagnards cannot live," he said. "But without the montagnards, the Vietnamese cannot work in the Central Highlands.

"But now the Vietnamese do not understand the montagnards and the montagnards do not understand the Vietnamese.

[From the New York Times, Feb. 2, 1975]

HESITANCY AND CONFUSION BLAMED IN SAIGON DEFEAT

(By James M. Markham)

SAIGON, SOUTH VIETNAM, January 31.—Diplomats and military analysts here have managed to piece together an account of the full three weeks ago of Phuoc Binh, the first provincial capital to be captured by the Communists since their 1972 spring offensive, despite Government efforts to seal off from the public and press the soldiers who got out alive.

It appears according to these experts, that while some defenders fought bravely, many ran away; that the South Vietnamese Air Force, reluctantly called in to what it considered a hopeless fight, killed many Government troops with imprecise high-altitude bombing, and that the North Vietnamese further refined tactics intended to lose as few of their own men as possible.

"It is a shame to us all—not only to us, but to any other military man of any rank who had something to do with this battle," said an officer who was sent to defend Phuoc Binh.

Several South Vietnamese military sources paint a similar picture—one of indecisiveness and confusion at the highest command levels, uncertainty about whether the North Vietnamese intended to take Phuoc Binh or slowly strangle it, bad information on the size and quality of the opposing forces in the rolling plantation country around the encircled town. These sources argue that decisions were made with less consideration than is now believed.

Beginning in mid-December, the North Vietnamese easily took four Government-held district capitals and one base camp in Phuoc Long Province, which had never been far from their complete control. Only the isolated province capital, with a garrison of regional and provincial forces totaling 3,000 men remained.

The first Government reinforcements—a battalion of regular troops and three reconnaissance companies, or about 800 men—were reportedly sent into Phuoc Binh on Dec. 28, when the North Vietnamese were already within mortar range of the town, which lies 75 miles north of Saigon near the Cambodian border.

On the first day of the new year, the North Vietnamese chased a small garrison of Stieng tribesmen off the top of Ba Ra Mountain on the southeastern edge of the town.

From this point on, in the opinion of several military analysts, the battle was lost. The North Vietnamese could shell the town at will, which they began to do with great accuracy. Reliance on heavy artillery bombardment rather than ground troops characterized the North Vietnamese tactics, as it has in other battles recently.

Civilians—the province capital had a largely montagnard population of 26,000—began to slip out of the town, crossing the Daklung Bridge over the Song Be. So did many montagnard militiamen and some regular soldiers.

The first ground attacks came on Jan. 3, but the North Vietnamese put few troops behind their T-54 tanks. Demolition troops cleared obstacles for the tanks. Many defenders reported later that their American-made, shoulder-fired rocket launchers were useless against the tanks, which had penetrated the southern edge of the town.
"We took aim on one of them, waited, waited until it was well in good range and then fired," said one officer. "Oh, it did not explode. It did not stop.

"To our amazement, the turret was moving, the big gun was pointing toward our trenches. Oh God, we sank down to the bottom of our trenches, crawled away like rats, with our mouths open in amazement."

In their analysis of the battle, Americans believe that the defenders fired the rocket at a range that was too close; to destroy a tank, they must be fired from 30 feet away, they say.

By Jan. 3, the Foreign Ministry in Saigon was preparing a press conference to announce the loss of Phuoc Binh. But the next day the Government sent into Phuoc Binh by helicopter two companies of the elite 81st Airborne Rangers—which fought well around Saigon during the 1968 Tet offensive and at An Loc during the 1972 offensive.

To their dismay, the 200 rangers found that the situation on the ground nowhere resembled the somewhat confident picture sketched by Col. Nguyen Thong Thanh, the commander of the town, in his bunker.

According to one ranger, the colonel described various positions around the town that were being held by battalions and companies that had in fact been reduced to handfuls of men who were looking for a way to escape.

Meanwhile, forced to altitudes of 10,000 feet or higher by intense 57-mm. heavy machine-gun fire, Government fighter-bombers were unable to provide significant support. Still they bombed.

"Never before had I seen such heavy casualties inflicted on our own lines by our own air force," said one member of the 81st Rangers. "The hospital was bombed, three or four military doctors were killed and hundreds of patients were killed, or wounded for a second time.

Stieng and Vietnamese refugees who managed to walk to Government positions, 30 miles away in neighboring Quang Duc Province, confirmed the bombing of the improvised hospital. According to another report, about 50 montagnards were killed when an antipersonnel bomb landed in their hamlet outside Phuoc Binh.
APPENDIX VI.—SELECTED PRESS REPORTS AND COMMENTARIES ON CONDITIONS IN CAMBODIA

[From the New York Times, Sept. 8, 1974]

CAMBODIA’s ‘LITTLE’ WAR: 600,000 CASUALTIES

(By Sydney H. Schanberg)

Early this year, President Nixon sent a letter to Marshal Lon Nol, President of the Cambodian government in Phnom Penh, assuring him in fervent rhetoric that “the United States remains fully determined to provide maximum possible assistance to your heroic self-defense and will continue to stand side by side with the republic in the future as in the past.”

An obvious question now is whether President Ford will be as stalwart in propping up the corrupt and unpopular Lon Nol Government against its enemies, the Communist-led Cambodian insurgents who are tutored by Hanoi and provided with arms from Peking and Moscow.

Some days ago, Prince Norodom Sihanouk, the exiled nominal leader of the insurgent forces said that since President Ford, unlike Mr. Nixon, had not “started the Cambodian war,” he was not bound by “those old obligations.” The Prince called on the new President to end all American aid to the Lon Nol Government, which he said would quickly bring about the collapse of the Phnom Penh forces and thus end the war.

No special signs have yet emanated from the Ford White House on how it intends to deal with Cambodia. But the new President has pledged to follow Mr. Nixon’s foreign policy, and there is no reason to expect, either from his or Secretary of State Kissinger’s past performances, that the Administration will waver in its support of the Phnom Penh side.

Congress, meanwhile, is in the process of cutting aid to Indochina. However, as the Vietnam war has demonstrated, there are ways for the executive branch to circumvent congressional curbs and budget cuts.

Officially declared American aid to Cambodia, which is augmented by unknown millions of dollars spent on such “hidden” costs as intelligence-gathering reconnaissance flights over insurgent territory, totals about $650 million a year, or nearly 2 million a day. Most of this is direct military aid. Economic assistance takes second priority.

American officials in Phnom Penh share Prince Sihanouk’s view that if United States aid were cut substantially, say by half, the Lon Nol army would fall. The only difference is that the Americans do not accept this as a viable notion of peace.

In Cambodia itself, the carnage does not change from season to season. Yet it is illuminating to set down some of the basic facts and statistics of this war.

It has lasted nearly four-and-a-half years, longer than America’s struggle in World War II. What started as a conflict between Cambodians and Vietnamese Communists has changed into one largely between Cambodians and Cambodians, although the ability of both sides to continue fighting is controlled by outside powers.

By the lowest possible estimates more than 300 Cambodians are killed or wounded every day. So far, at least 600,000 Cambodians have become casualty statistics, nearly one-tenth of the country’s population of 7 million.

Although the massive American bombing in support of the Lon Nol army was halted by Congress over a year ago, this did not diminish the killing, for Washington made up for the loss of the United States air armada by pumping in large quantities of new armament and ammunition for the Phnom Penh forces. This included single-engine fighter-bombers, helicopter gunships, armored vehicles and artillery pieces. Since, some of this weaponry has ended up, through capture and corrupt sales, in insurgent hands. Both sides are now equipped
with a greater abundance of lethal instruments than before, and the fighting is intense. If anything, casualties have increased since the bombing stopped.

The refugee rolls have soared by 200,000 in that time to an estimated total of 3 million people, two-thirds of them in government territory and the rest on the insurgent side. Nearly half the people of Cambodia are now refugees.

Other statistics: 50,000 war widows registered with the government and 200,000 or more children orphaned.

And yet there is no discernible motion toward peace talks.

The Lon Nol Government, in what has become somewhat of an annual ritual arranged by the Americans, made another peace offer, in July, offering negotiations with no prior conditions. It was a more liberal offer than last year's, which demanded the withdrawal of North Vietnamese troops as a prerequisite for talks. But the 1974 version was rejected just as summarily as 1973's by Prince Sihanouk and his insurgents. They stuck to their public position that no discussion can take place until American aid to Phnom Penh is stopped and "the traitorous Lon Nol clique" removed.

The Americans would presumably give Marshal Lon Nol a friendly but vigorous push into exile if they thought his departure would win an assurance of serious negotiations from the other side, but they imply that no such assurances have ever been hinted.

On the other hand, it would appear that not every avenue has been explored. A recommendation by John Gunther Dean, United States Ambassador in Phnom Penh, to contact be attempted with the insurgent leader, Khieu Samphan, while he was touring Eastern Europe and Africa a few months ago was rejected by Mr. Kissinger. The Secretary of State, reliable sources say, considered the move ill-timed, because the battlefield situation was going poorly for the Phnom Penh government at the time.

THE FIGHT IN THE U.N.

This dismal negotiating picture is compounded by the renewed attempt that will be made at the General Assembly session which opens later this month to oust the Lon Nol Government and seat the insurgents instead. The move failed last year, only narrowly, 53 to 50. Yet, demoralizing as the loss of the United Nations seat would be for Phnom Penh, it would not necessary mean an end to the war as long as Washington kept its sizeable military aid flowing to the Lon Nol army.

There has been a theory almost from the start of the Cambodian war—a theory that is gathering more adherents—that the North Vietnamese do not want this conflict to end until they have achieved their main objective, control of South Vietnam, and that until it suits them, they will not give the insurgents enough arms and ammunition to topple Phnom Penh. Hanoi, this theory goes, prefers the present inconclusive fighting in Cambodia to a new and strong Cambodia-insurgent government which, though leftist, might interfere, for reasons of national sovereignty or pride, with the North Vietnamese use of the Cambodian sanctuary areas and supply routes bordering South Vietnam.

Whether Hanoi-contrived or not, the relative strategic positions of the two sides in Cambodia have not significantly changed for some time. The insurgents control about 75 per cent of the country’s territory and perhaps 40 per cent of the population. The government holds only the refugee-swollen major cities and towns, most of which exist as isolated enclaves, cut off by road and reachable only by air.

The insurgents have been unable to capture the big prize, Phnom Penh, but the Lon Nol forces, in turn, have been unable to recapture any lost territory.

The Americans, in their effort to persuade the other side that it is futile to continue fighting, choose to call this a stalemate, but such a word connotes the idea of deadlock, which is misleading.

In fact, the country is being destroyed. Vast and awesome battles take place which decide nothing but which leave whole strings of villages, towns, mosques, pagodas, schools flattened.

The other day, on a road northwest of Phnom Penh that is lined with the skeletons of former towns and hamlets, a young soldier looked around him at the clumps of rubble and shrugged: "By the time we find out who is right and who is wrong, everything in Cambodian will be broken into little pieces."
PHNOM PENH, CAMBODIA.—Events in Cambodia have become misshapen in the image of the madness of this war—like the time when, at an evening reception, the armed forces commander, Lieut. Gen. Sosthene Fernandez, was asked by an acquaintance what he planned to do if the United States Congress went ahead with its plans to cut aid to Cambodia sharply. The general smiled impishly, strode to the other end of the room, threw his arms into the air in the posture of surrender and declared in French: "I'll do this."

Was he at all serious? No one at the reception really thought so. But then, a large cut in aid could really bring about the collapse of this corrupt and ineffec­tive Government. Beyond that the war against the Communist-led Cambodian insurgents, now nearly five years old, has warped human behavior here out of any normal, predictable patterns. Up is sometimes one's old schoolmate or, often enough, an uncle or cousin. Perhaps General Fernandez was merely disguising the truth with buffoonery.

BLACK HUMOR IS AN OUTLET

Indeed, black humor is one way of living with the grotesqueness of conditions here—with the Government printing money as fast as it can to keep up with a 300 per cent a year inflation rate reminiscent of Kuomintang China, and with Cambodia's population of seven million being mangled at a daily rate of at least 300 killed and wounded.

The insurgents hold the countryside and have cut most of the roads. The Government holds the fairly isolated cities and towns, including this capital city, now bursting with refugees. Both armies are Cambodian, but their ability to go on destroying their country and each other is controlled by the outside powers that provide their weapons while failing to provide peace talks. To participate in such a situation is to be slightly insane.

What follows is a compilation of some of the slightly insane things—odd and abhorrent and sad—that happened during a three-week visit.

An American economic consultant on contract to the United States Embassy was having a pre-dinner drink with his wife and some acquaintances beside the pool at the charmingly seedy Hotel Le Phnom. One of the acquaintances, a reporter, who had taken a trip up a battle-scarred road that day, commented that the Cambodians were tired and worn out with the war. The consultant vigorously disagreed.

"They're not tired," he said. "They're not tired at all. That's nonsense. All they need is some good leadership. A hundred Israeli commando officers could turn this thing around, or any hundred good officers."

The reporter asked where such leaders could be found in the present Cambodian Government.

"It's not hopeless," the consultant insisted. "This war can be won."

"Oh, come on, John," interjected his wife, who had been silent until then. "You know you're just as discouraged as everyone else. You're just saying that because he's a newsman."

He said nothing, rose, and they went to dinner.

"It's hopeless, just hopeless," said a candid American diplomat at lunch one day. "The only thing they could possibly do to save things here is to take out the whole palace entourage and shoot them. Get rid of this corrupt leadership and try someone new—anyone. It's probably too late for it to work, but it's the only thing that has any chance at all."

There are beggars everywhere in Phnom Penh. A blind one sits on the sidewalk every day outside La Taverne, a restaurant opposite the post office, playing a Cambodian-style zither. As the dominant clientele has changed with the progress of the war from the old colonial French to the new Americans, so have the blind beggar's songs. These days he makes a fairly good living playing "In the Mood" and "Alexander's Ragtime Band."

Downtown Phnom Penh is a montage of unhappiness. So Leung, a 33-year-old teacher, cannot feed his family on his salary, equivalent to $9 a month, so he pedals a bicycle rickshaw in his free hours, earning 30 cents on a good day. He
says that he is hungry all the time, that he is eating the kind of lotus-pond greens that Cambodians used to feed to their ducks. "I'm miserable," he keeps repeating.

Twenty yards away, at a sidewalk foodstall, ragged, begrimed refugee children hunker near the tables, snatching at the chicken bones cast off by the customers, and sucking and chewing on them until nothing is left.

On the other side of the street, three soldiers—two of them missing a leg and the other apparently uninjured—stand in shop doorways, silent, waiting, their faces contorted in the professional beggar's half-smiling grimace. Sometimes the shopkeepers give them 10 riels—about six-tenths of a cent.

Down the block, at the Mekong River port, workmen are unloading bags of rice and corn from barges. They are paid next to nothing, so they try to hide some of the grain droppings in special pockets and sacks they have sewn on the inside of their scarecrow clothes. As they leave work through a narrow opening in the steel gate, the military policemen whap at the workers' pregnant bulges with their hands and nightsticks, until the corn and rice spills on the ground.

An American Embassy official, during an interview, brought up the old controversy over whether the approximately 100 American military men at the embassy ever break the Congressional ban against acting as military advisers to the Cambodians or whether they stick to their stated jobs of gathering battle information and supervising the delivery and use of American arms. The official said the embassy was being extremely careful not to give military advice.

Then his telephone rang. He spoke in urgent tones for a few minutes and came back to explain that the insurgents had just badly shot up a river supply convoy and that two barges carrying 1,000 tons of rice were floating free and about to fall into insurgent hands. The Cambodian high command wanted to know what to do, he said.

"They asked our advice," he went on without thinking. Then he thought—and broke into an embarrassed grin.

As it turned out, the Cambodians, who asked permission to sink the barges by bombing them, to keep the insurgents from getting the rice, were "advised" not to do that because the barges themselves were costly and worth saving. In the end, however, the Cambodian Navy was unable to save the barges, the rice went to the insurgents and the operation was a total loss.

Some people here have made a lot of money on the war, for nothing is corruption-proof any more in Cambodia. For example, there is something called the Exchange Support Fund, a $35-million-a-year fund consisting largely of American dollars for the use of the Cambodian Government to help pay for crucial foreign goods needed for the war effort. Luxury items are expressly forbidden.

About three months ago, the Government gave a local merchant $50,000 from the fund to import foreign beer, and more recently it released $175,000 for the import of cigarette lighters.

With morale low, draft evasion has become more the rule than the exception. Young men pay bribes for all kinds of exemption papers. One of the more bizarre exemptions is known as the "lop-lop" certificate. "Lop-lop," in translation, is equivalent to "crazy." One healthy Cambodian was asked what his lop-lop certificate said. "It says I'm out of my mind and I don't have to serve," he replied. He got the certificate fairly cheaply—only 50,000 riels, or about $31.

Bribes for other things are much higher. Teachers—badly underpaid and in a mutinous mood for a long time—have been demanding and getting 500,000 riels from students for the school diploma necessary to enter the university.

The Pentagon is still specializing in double talk about Cambodia. When a Wisconsin member of Congress charged last month that American pilots flying supplies to Cambodia were receiving combat pay, even though the Administration contends that no American troops are engaged in combat here, the Pentagon replied that the term "combat pay" was incorrect—it was "hostile-fire pay."

At about the same time, a newspaper report said that American military analysts in Thailand were making bombing recommendations to the Cambodians on the basis of American reconnaissance flights over insurgent territory.

The Pentagon acted to clear up the confusion immediately. Targets are not being recommended, it said, for this would be a violation of the Congressional ban on advisory and combat activities. What is actually happening, the Pentagon explained, is that "items of intelligence interest" are "identified" and "passed on" to the Cambodians, but "the judgment of what should be done" is left entirely to them.

Tor Keu is one of the thousands of child soldiers in the Cambodian Army.
They join for many reasons, but mostly because it is a way to make a little money to live and eat on.

Tor Keu says he is 18 because that is the legal age for enlistment, but his is a frightened 12 at most. He has been in the army for a month.

It is dusk and he is walking along Route five northwest of Phnom Penh, on his way to meet his soldier father—his mother is dead—at an outpost a few miles ahead.

Tor Keu is carrying a carbine of World War II vintage and his uniform is double his size: his shirt-front is held together by a safety pin and his trousers are so pitifully baggy and clownlike that they drag on the ground until he trips. Asked what he has had to eat during the day, he stares wanly at the ground and mumbles: "nothing. Only a little fish paste."

In Nov. 28, the United States' Thanksgiving Day, a large group of top Cambodian officials—mostly generals—gathered nervously at Marshal Lon Nol's Presidential palace to await the outcome of the United Nations vote on the Cambodian issue. The outcome could have brought a collapse of this Government had the United Nations seat for Cambodia been awarded to the insurgents, whose nominal leader is Prince Norodom Sihanouk.

When news of the narrow two-vote victory came, jubilation erupted. The generals, led by General Fernandez, their commander, began jigging around the room, singing an old French children's ditty, "Tout Va Très Bien"—"Everything's All Right."

The generals, however, were singing only the title line and had apparently forgotten, or had never known, the rest of the song, in which things are anything but all right.

As the song goes on, stanza after stanza, the butler explains to the Marquise, who is telephoning from her Paris town house to find how things are going on her country estate, "Everything is all right, Madame Marquise," except that the kitchen is on fire, the barn has burned down, her husband, the Marquis, has died, and, finally, "Your favorite horse has died as well."

Cambodians are proud and independent people, and though the war has forced many of them to accept charity and even to beg, the shame lies deep.

In a village on the western edge of Phnom Penh, a family of five was slowly starving. Neither the husband nor the wife nor any of the children, could find a job. Next door lived a widower who raised pigs and was reasonably well off. He began to notice that the food he was leaving out for the pigs was disappearing, and suddenly realized that his desperate neighbors were sneaking over at night and taking the pig food to sustain themselves.

The widower felt bad about their condition, but he did not want to embarrass them. After carefully rehearsing what he was going to say, he went over to their house one day when the husband was out and said to the wife that everyone was suffering in Cambodia these days, but that he was fortunate enough to have a little extra, so would she please accept 10,000 riels to buy some food. The wife wept in shame as she took the money. Then she went out and bought some rice and fish—but her sense of disgrace overcame her. So she bought some poison, too. That night she put the poison in the food and killed herself and all her family.

[From the New York Times, Feb. 9, 1974]

IN PHNOM PENH, TAKE ANY ROAD TO THE WAR

(By Sydney H. Schanberg)

PHNOM PENH, CAMBODIA, February 8.—Take a road, any road, out of Phnom Penh and in 5 to 10 miles, or even less, you will find the commonplace of war.

Not the awesome roaring of hundreds of giant cannon as in the Sinai campaigns, or the blazing tank duels when the Indians periodically fight the Pakistanis on the Punjab plain—just a slow but malignant paddy-field war that gnaws at the country's vitals and seems to last forever.

Tens of thousands have been killed or maimed, hundreds of thousands rendered homeless, but it has happened gradually over four years, and it has happened in the shadow of the greater conflict of Vietnam, so that world headlines hardly notice it anymore.

What follows is a report of what took place on three commonplace battlefronts on three recent days.

Prev Sar was a small village about seven miles southwest of Phnom Penh. Hardly anybody lives here now except the soldiers who fight here and their
families, who travel raggedly with them. The peasant farmers who lived here fled last month before an enemy advance, leaving their rice uncut and spoiled in the fields.

The front line is a row of scraggly trees through whose branches enemy bullets whine from time to time. The Communist-led Cambodian insurgents are only about 100 yards away in some heavy bamboo growth across an eerie open field where no one dares to walk or even crawl.

SOME SOLDIERS GO HOME

The Government battalion at this spot is badly under strength. Four months ago, when Capt. Chun Ram took command, the unit had 446 men. Now there are 290. Many of the missing are not battle casualties but “disparus”—“those who have disappeared”—a polite term from the language of Cambodia’s former French colonial rulers, to describe the ADOL’s who have tired of the endless fighting and have gone home. They may or may not return after a time.

Others of the missing have been disabled by malaria, which is rampant because the unit has very few mosquito nets. With the battalion weakened, it cannot mount a counterattack to dislodge the enemy forces and push them back across the Prek Thnot river. So the sides sit 100 yards apart across the empty field, firing mortars, machine guns and rifle-launched grenades at each other. It seems madness—hurling lethal toys back and forth and then watching through binoculars to see if the toys have killed anyone.

“Right spot! Right spot!” yells a Government lookout in a treetop as a 60-mm. Government mortar shell lands with a burst of smoke and dirt smack in the middle of a bamboo clump where some enemy troops were clustered. “They’re running! They’re running!” The Government troops break into triumphant grins, but then quickly turn poker-faced and hit the ground as several mortar shells come crumping in about 50 feet in front of them.

Not everybody ducks however. A few soldiers are wading through small rain ponds catching fish with bamboo traps for the unit’s supper. They are closest to the mortar explosions, but because the ponds are depressed, the men are below the line of fire and shrapnel, and they do not even look up.

Capt. Chun Ram suggests it would be safer if his visitors moved back a short distance to his poncho lean-to, where he has tried to preserve some of the amenities of life—a bottle of toilet water, a transistor radio, some pictures of the Buddhist monks who had blessed the gold good-luck charms he wears around his neck, and a Khmer paperback romance that he was reading before the mortal duel began.

Capt. Chun Ram is 29 years old, a graduate of the Cambodian military academy, an intelligent realist who does not question why he is here trying to kill other Cambodians, just as they are trying to kill him.

CAPTAIN LIGHTLY WOUNDED

“My mission is to fight,” he says, “So I fight. Politics is for somebody else to look after.”

He has talked to enemy soldiers on his field radio many times and urged them to negotiate, “but they want total victory and they have refused.”

On a recent day when he was lightly wounded in the right arm by a mortar fragment, an insurgent officer yelled across the field at him, saying, “if you continue to resist, you’ll be killed and you’ll leave your wife and children behind.” The enemy officer, the captain recalls, “shouted that he had been my colleague at the military academy—and it did sound like someone I knew at the academy.

Captain Chun Ram paused and said, “sometimes our officers get captured and reeducated.” Then he put his head in his hands and said, almost in a moan, “Oh, oh, oh. Look at what things have come to.”

Not all frontline posts are as Spartan as Capt. Chun Ram’s. It depends on what’s available. Two miles to the east, also along the Prek Thnot, a large villa is available.

It’s not as elegant as it used to be. The swimming pool is filled with mucvy brown water, bougainvillea vines are growing wild up the sides of the two-story house, windows are broken, paint is peeling and dust is building on the imported wood paneling and goldleaf bas reliefs of ancient Khmer battles that adorn the walls of the living room.

The owner is out of the country, which is why two battalions of the First
Division have been able to take over the villa and make it their headquarters. The owner is Brig. Gen. Lon Non, younger brother of the Cambodian president, Marshal Lon Nol. General Lon Non, because of his unsavory reputation and the extralegal powers he was amassing at the presidential palace, was forced into unofficial exile last April by American pressure and is now residing, at least temporarily, in the United States.

The battalion commanders whose hammocks and cooking pots now decorate General Lon Non's front porch said they had received no special instructions about the care of the villa. "We're operating the same as we do in all areas," said one officer. "If there's an empty house suitable for a headquarters, we use it."

This seedily sumptuous command post belied the nearness of danger. The insurgent troops here are only about 200 or so yards away, and occasional deadly objects, such as machine-gun bullets and rifle grenades, come through the mango trees to land in the patio.

The officers said the windows in the villas and the adjacent guesthouse had been broken by "flying mines"—a new homemade weapon that has recently become popular with the insurgents. It is not clear exactly how the ungainly projectile is launched, but it is said to be able to fly about 100 yards.

The Government soldiers produced an unexploded one for their interested guests. It was a crudely fashioned flattish canister, very much like a 25-pound antitank mine. They said that it was filled with nails and glass and chemical explosive.

"This is not a safe place," said one officer. "They harass us all the time—especially at mealtimes."

Northwest of Phnom Penh, five miles up Route 5, the residents of the market and fishing town of Prek Phnau recently had a day of battle circuses with their dry bread.

Across the Tonle Sap, on the eastern bank, enemy troops had dug in, and now Government troops moving up the same bank from the south and four Government gunboats firing from the middle of the river—in a kind of pincer movement—were trying to dislodge them.

Many people from the town gathered on the safe western bank to watch and point and shout in awe as the gunboats poured mortar and machinegun and recoilless cannon fire into the enemy positions, and the Government troops, small but visible figures on the opposite bank, engaged their foe in close combat, sometimes standing up to hurl grenades at a distance of only 20 yards from the insurgent bunkers.

OUTLOOKERS IN Foe'S RANGE

It was a panorama of smoke and flames and booming noise that provided the villagers with a spectacular, if frightening, break from their burdensome lives. "Look, he's throwing a grenade!" "They carrying back two wounded!" "Look, everything's burning!" "They got the high ground and now they're across it!" came the cries as the Government infantry, despite mortar barrages by the enemy, pushed steadily forward.

Though the enemy troops could have fired mortars or machine-gun bullets into the crowds on the opposite bank, the bombardment by the gunboats and the flanking attack by the infantry kept them much too occupied.

If the people in the town knew they were exposed, they certainly did not show it. Those who were not massed on the bank watching the battle were placidly cleaning fish, or mashing fish into fish paste with their feet, or bathing in the river, or playing local chess on the sidewalks—all as if the sound of war was nothing but Muzak background music for their daily activities, which indeed it has almost become.

As dusk began to fall, voices in the crowd suddenly shouted, "look, they're carrying the heads!" Three Government soldiers on the opposite bank were walking back to their lines, each carrying by the hair the head of an enemy soldier. The severing of heads has become common on both sides in this increasingly sadistic war.

A few moments later, a motorized fishing boat on the opposite bank started across the river toward the town with a few of the victorious soldiers.

A youngster yelled to a bunch of his friends: "Let's go see the boat come in. Maybe they've got the heads on board." And off they ran.
IN A BESIEGED CAMBODIAN CITY, HUNGER, DEATH AND THE WHIMPERING OF CHILDREN

(By Sydney H. Schanberg)

NEAK LUONG, CAMBODIA, January 14—Every 15 minutes or so a shell screams down explodes in this besieged town and another half-dozen people are killed or wounded. It goes on day and night.

The tile floors of the military infirmary and civilian hospital are slippery with blood. Bodies are everywhere—some people half conscious crying out in pain, some with gaping wounds who will not live. Some are already dead and, in the chaos, just lie there with no one to cover them or take them away.

Inside, a 7-year-old girl, a filthy bandage over the wound in her stomach, lies on a wooden table. The only doctor in the town feels her pulse. It is failing.

Suddenly her father appears, a soldier. He has come from the spot where another of his children, a 5-year-old girl, has just been killed by a mortar shell. His wife was killed three years ago by shelling in another town.

He picks up his daughter in his shaking arms; his face, bathed in a cold sweat, contorts as he tries to hold back the tears that come anyway.

"I love all my children," is all he says as he walks away with the dying child—heading for the helicopters that are too few to carry all the wounded to Phnom Penh.

There is deep hunger in Neak Luong, too. The soldiers here are getting by, for American and Cambodian transport planes are dropping some food by parachute for them—but there is none for the civilians.

By today, the 30,000 or more refugees who have fled to Neak Luong from outlying areas as the Communist-led insurgents have advanced toward the town have been reduced to subsistence on the thinnest of rice gruel. Every day it becomes thinner. Many are living in the open and it rains almost every night.

Yesterday the Catholic Relief Services, whose dogged Cambodian staff has stayed in Neak Luong to run gruel kitchens, tried to send a barge with 25 tons of rice down the Mekong River the 38 miles from Phnom Penh to the isolated town. But at the last minute, the barge was ordered to stay in Phnom Penh. The Cambodian military said the situation was too dangerous and the barge would probably be sunk if it tried to run the insurgents' gauntlet.

"They're going to have to airdrop more food," said one disheartened relief worker. "That's all there is to it. Otherwise people will starve."

Already, as one walks around the shell-marked town one hears everywhere the sound of children whimpering.

The military situation here, though grave, does not seem to be deteriorating. Government reinforcements continue to pour in by helicopter and, while the Cambodian insurgents are right across the Mekong from Neak Luong, on the western bank of the river and also very close on most sides of the town itself, it does not appear likely at this point that they can overrun the town.

MISERY CONTINUES

Yet until the Government troops do more than just hold on—that is, until they push the insurgent back far enough to take the town out of shelling range—the human misery here, with shells raining in indiscriminately, will continue.

The Government's determination to save Neak Luong stems from the town's importance as virtually the last Government position on the lower Mekong. If it fell, the Government would lose all hope of getting supplies into Phnom Penh by way of the Mekong.

With all other surface routes cut long ago in this five-year war, the American-backed Government is now dependent on the Mekong for 80 percent or more of its supplies from the outside world.

Even now, the Mekong is temporarily blockaded. The rebels, in the annual dry season offensive that began New Year's Day, have seized control of so much of the river and its parallel road, Route 1, that the Americans have been forced to postpone indefinitely all the supply convoys—which come up from Thailand and South Vietnam.

LIFE GOES ON

As people went about their tasks today, many hardly seemed to hear mortars exploding, sometimes only 50 yards away, or the machinegun fire sputtering
around the edges of town, or the rockets whooshing into enemy positions from
helicopter gunships overhead.

Amid all this, there was at times a preposterous normality.

In the market, where a few Chinese-run shops were open for those who still
had money, a colonel who had just flown in with his fresh troops was examining
a bottle of French cologne with a discriminating air. His boots were highly pol-
ished, his uniform briskly starched, his neck scarf just so. He squeezed the
atomizer, sniffed the spray, then put it back and walked away disdainfully as if
it did not meet his standards.

Last night the insurgents began increasing their shelling—with mortars, re-
collarless cannon and rockets. Through the night, the casualties rose.

At dawn, with the explosions heaviest in the southern sector of town, where
most of the refugees had been huddled in the streets, a pagoda and a primary
school, the refugees began fleeing with their sackfuls of belongings to the northern
fringe of Neak Luong, which was not safe but at least safer.

Those who did not run began digging deeper bunkers and trenches under their
houses or shacks and scavenging for cloth to make sandbags.

There was squalor, fear and bedlam. But there was also the traditional Buddhist
fatalism of the Cambodian people. Some of this trapped population, which totals
at least 250,000 counting the refugees, seemed almost to accept that being caught
here is simply their lot.

The colonel was an incongruity in Neak Luong today. The norm was blood-
splashed stretchers, the smashed bodies of infants attached to phuana bottles,
wounded soldiers being dragged or dragging themselves from every lane, and a
meadow on the northern edge of town where the wounded who still had a chance
were carried to await the evacuation helicopters.

[From the New York Times, Nov. 28, 1974]

LIFE DETERIORATES AS CAMBODIAN CAPITAL STRUGGLES ON AND ON
TO COPE WITH WARFARE

(By Sydney H. Schanberg)

PHNOM PENH, CAMBODIA, November 27—The fabric of life in Cambodia con-
tinues to unravel. With each passing month of this brutal war, living condi-
tions deteriorate and the gentle code of Khmer society shows a few more cracks.

In the last few months, the deterioration has become its most conspicuous in
the nearly five years of conflict. Morale is low and may sink further if the gov-
ernment of Marshal Lon Nol loses its seat in the United Nations—a matter now
under debate in the General Assembly—or is deprived of much of its American
aid, as some members of Congress have urged.

ROBBERIES ARE FREQUENT

Economic decay seems the critical factor. Prices of basic foods have soared. The
rate of inflation is at least 250 per cent a year.

People are eating less, selling their belongings, taking extra jobs and cutting
moral corners. Married women of poor families are practicing occasional discreet
prostitution to feed their children.

Daylight robberies of homes—by men in uniform armed with rifles, pistols and
grenades—have become frequent. To avoid being robbed, most people do not wear
watches and necklaces on the street.

Reports are increasing of refugees eating rats and dogs—the price of dogs is
rising—and a few refugee women are known to have offered their babies to
foreigners to get money for food. These are extreme cases, but if conditions do
not improve they are expected to become more frequent.

SOLDIERS SEEK HANDOUTS

A simple bowl of noodle soup, a common meal for Cambodians, was 4 riels in
March, 1970, when the war began. Now it is 300 riels. A bread roll, which was 2
riels in 1970 and which every parent used to give to each child to take to school
every morning, now costs 100 riels. So now, many children get only half a roll
each, or none.

The pay of the average Cambodian civil servant or teacher has increased about
fourfold since the war began, but prices have increased fifteenfold or more. A
teacher's pay, for example, is about 20,000 riel a month now, or only about $12 since the recent devaluation of the riel. This is not nearly enough to support a family.

The negative aspects of life seem to be increasing apace here—refugees, hunger, begging, casualties. More and more soldiers enter shops to ask for handouts; some demand them. The pay of the average soldier is about 16,000 riel a month, or about $10.

Refugee children are becoming bolder because they are hungrier. Three months ago, they would wait outside restaurants to beg from emerging patrons; now they go inside, where they huddle in dim corners, unbothered by sympathetic waiters, to wait for diners to finish eating. Then they dart forward to grab an uneaten crust or seize a soup bowl and quickly swallow what remains inside.

Some military units have occasionally refused to fight and have sometimes deliberately retreated because their troops have not been paid on time or because the pay is simply not enough.

Although Phnom Penh is not for the moment under direct military threat from the Communist-led insurgents, as it was a year ago, when rockets and artillery shells began to rain down at random, the capital seems more pessimistic.

"Hope" is not a word used here anymore, but "hopeless" is.

"I tell you the truth," said a middle-class Cambodian who recently sold a camera and a car among other belongings. "I don't care what happens any more. The two sides that are fighting are both Khmer [ethnic Cambodians]. So who is the enemy?

"Neither side does anything for me. I have to work to feed my family, whichever one wins."

Another educated Cambodian commented: "People have reached the stage where they don't care who wins. It is true they are afraid when the other side's rockets land in the city, but they have no political or military thoughts. They just want to survive."

The battlefield used to be the focus of attention here, the key to the outcome of this war—but not so much any more. Although the fighting and the heavy casualties have not ended, neither side has been able to win.

The Americans, who are the only remaining support of the Phnom Penh Government, also seem eager for a way out. Privately they admit this. They admit also that some face-saving kind of talks on a coalition would be enough—but the search for that has been futile, too.

ECONOMY IS CRUCIAL

The downward slide of the economy has become the crucial issue. Foreign observers think that unless inflation is checked fairly soon, it could lead to an eventual collapse of the Lon Nol Government.

The Cambodian people have remained generally stoic and passive about their suffering—in the tradition of their Buddhist culture—but they are changing visibly. To live, almost everyone whom one hears about seems to have turned to some form of corruption.

Professors demand huge bribes for diplomas and certificates for entry into the university. Civil servants steal paper from their offices to sell. High Government officials and local merchants buy all the United States Dollars they can so that they can send the dollars and their families out of the country.

An exit permit to leave the country costs a million riel, or $600, in bribes to officials. Government medical teams pocket medicine intended for refugees and the wounded and then sell it on the black market.

'ANARCHY HERE NOW'

"This is the first time we have seen society break down like this," said a Government servant who was recently robbed of a gold necklace and his wedding ring while standing on his front porch. "I don't like to talk against my country, but there is anarchy here now—no law and order."

Even the Government, to preserve some credibility with its people, has begun openly acknowledging the corruption. But it pleads that the problem is too widespread to solve in wartime, when other matters must take priority. "If everybody loses his national conscience," said Premier Long Boret at a news conference a few days ago, "you can increase the number of anticorruption officials tenfold or a hundredfold and you will achieve nothing."

American officials have tried to help stabilize the economy and reduce cor-
ruption, hoping that a stronger posture in Phnom Penh might help induce the other side to negotiate but the results have been negligible.

In September the Government, after persistent American prodding, instituted a series of American-crafted “austerity” measures to try to slow the inflation rate and keep rice from being smuggled to Thailand and South Vietnam. The effect has been minimal.

Reports have emerged occasionally from the military that when infantry units under enemy attack request artillery support, some artillery commanders demand bribes before they will start firing. During the monsoon season now ending, the insurgents failed to capture any new major objectives, but the Cambodian army was unable to regain any territory it had lost previously. In some areas, more land slipped into enemy hands.

Insurgents control at least three-quarters of the country, with the Government confined to the major cities and towns, which are mostly cut off from each other and reachable only by air.

“The situation is hopeless, but not yet desperate,” said a Western diplomat, who reminded himself that the fall of Phnom Penh had been predicted prematurely several times in the past.

[From the New York Times, July 29, 1974]

PHNOM PENH STREETS HOME FOR THOUSANDS

(By Sydney H. Schanberg)

PHNOM PENH, CAMBODIA, July 28.—At night, after the 9 o'clock curfew, when the restaurants where the foreigners and the Cambodian elite dine have emptied and there is no one on the streets to beg from, squads of ragged semiwild children count up their meager take and straggle off to the foul pieces of sidewalk where they live and sleep.

They are part of a new class in Phnom Penh—a class somewhat below the poor. Four and a half years ago, before the Communist-led insurrection, a beggar was an alien sight in this capital of wide boulevards, flowering trees and a French colonial ambience. And sidewalk dwellers simply did not exist.

A lot of things did not exist four and a half years ago, like leveled villages and hospitals overflowing with the wounded and dying.

Phnom Penh’s population, swollen with refugees, has soared from 600,000 to over two million—which is almost a third of Cambodia’s population.

BEYOND FAMILIES’ HELP

At first most got shelter and help from relatives—a strong Cambodian tradition. In the last year or so the influx has gone beyond the capacity of family succor, and people have spilled onto the streets. Their shacks and lean-tos march like spreading ivy down the sidewalks; every day a few more hovels of cardboard and wood scraps appear.

There is no accurate count of the street people, but they number in the thousands and are increasing.

By day they beg, though a few find menial jobs such as shining shoes or patching bicycle tires. At night they retire to their sidewalk squalor. Some congregate around market areas, some along residential walls, some along the outside walls of public toilets.

Some have wood or plastic as lean-to covers to keep off the weather, and some have straw mats to lie on. Others simply live in the open, sleeping in their dirty, tattered clothes on pieces of cardboard. Garbage is often piled nearby, and rats occasionally slither over sleepers.

ILLNESS ON THE INCREASE

Illness is increasing—tuberculosis, dysentery—with most of it caused by lack of food. A vitamin deficiency common here—it is called speuk—causes a progressive loss of sensation in the feet and legs until the victim can no longer walk.

The largest and saddest group of street people are the children. Not all are orphans, but even those who have one parent are virtual orphans because they are left on their own and run wild.

They compete with crippled soldiers in begging around food stalls and mar-
kets, they snatch bread from the tables of small street restaurants, they pick pockets. Older girls—11, 12, 13—become prostitutes. Bigger children prey on little ones, stealing their belongings or food.

It is not yet as cruel as Saigon, where the war has been going on for a quarter of a century. The children here beg politely and do not pull a passerby's arm, but the situation is desperate.

There is a welfare program for the refugees, administered primarily by international relief agencies using United States funds, but it is small compared with the size of the problem and the size of the American military aid that fuels the war. And it rarely reaches the street people, for they are outside the organized relief structure.

**SHELTER BEING ESTABLISHED**

One relief group, the Missionary Brothers of Charity, is laying plans to open a shelter for street children—a place where they will be free to come and go as they wish, have a meal, take a bath, sleep on a clean pallet, get schooling if they want it.

The shelter is the idea of Brother Andrew, a lean, bearded, hawk-nosed man who heads the order, founded only a decade ago as the male counterpart of Mother Theresa's Missionary Sisters of Charity in Calcutta. Brother Andrew, now based in Saigon, has recently opened a program in Cambodia under the auspices of Catholic Relief Services.

"The important thing is to give them friendship and love and some laughter and joy, and to try to relieve their immediate needs," he said of the shelter. "But the door has to be open at all times so that they are not confined, because the freedom of the street has become very much a part of them."

"They come with one tremendous asset, the ability to survive," Brother Andrew continued. "If we soften them up and take away that ability, I don't think we've done them a service. Their lives are going to continue to be rough regardless of what we do."

The children describe the harshness of their lives with a simple yet tortured eloquence. One night a dozen told their stories as they sat around a visiting newsman on a sidewalk under a street lamp. Some seem perky, indomitable; others are beaten, forlorn, their heads lowered, their voices muted to a whisper.

**FATHER DIED IN BATTLE**

Chum Phal, who is 12, is from Dei Eth, a town 16 miles southeast of Phnom Penh. His father, a soldier, was killed in battle more than a year ago, his mother, in shock, lost her senses and is in the only Cambodian mental institution.

Asked how he managed, he replied: "I request money from people along the street. Sometimes I go into shops. Some people give me 5 or 10 riels. Some give me nothing, but they do not say bad things to me. They just say they have no small change."

Chhuon Yan, 13, is from a village 60 miles from Phnom Penh. Her father, badly burned in a shelling attack, cannot work. Her mother is a garbage picker, salvaging discarded plastic bags, washing them and reselling them to shopkeepers. The mother makes about 200 riels—half a dollar—a day, and her daughter gets 100 riels more begging.

Yan is ashamed of begging but, staring at the ground, she explained: "I must try to make some extra money for my parents because I know they do not have enough. Without my money mother would not be able to take care of my father."

Chum Sophat's father died over three years ago of some illness she cannot describe. When their town, Prey Veng, came under attack last year, she and her mother fled to Phnom Penh. Here her mother found a new husband and decided her daughter was in the way. "She beat me so I ran away," said the girl, who is 12.

**SHE NEEDS A STRAW MAT**

She too begs. She said she made 50 riels a day, nowhere near enough to keep off hunger, and she looks weak. She has no straw sleeping mat. "I use a piece of cardboard," she said.

Though Yan Sophal is one of the older ones, he is small and looks younger than his 15 years. He came from a fishing family on a lake northeast of Phnom Penh where his father and mother were killed in a battle five months ago.
"There are no jobs here for me, so I must beg to get food," he said. Wringing his hands and twisting his fingers as he talked, he seemed haunted, frightened, wanting affection but afraid to trust anyone. Because of his deficient diet his feet are becoming numb, and he has an ugly rash across his shoulders.

The next day Sophal was taken to a doctor, Tek To, who is known for his humanitarianism. The doctor told the boy that there were other refugees living at his house and asked him to live there too. Sophal, reacting like an untamed animal, turned his head away and shook it negatively. He seemed afraid of a real home. "I do not want to go," he mumbled.

The doctor, sensing Sophal's anxieties, said there was no rush. He told him to take his time thinking the idea over and gave him a supply of medicine and vitamins.

That was over a week ago, and Sophal is still begging and still sleeping on the sidewalk. In only five months the street has become his home. Like thousands of other children here, he seems to remember no other.

[From the New York Times, Aug. 27, 1974]

A DISTANT PEACE FOR CAMBODIANS

RUMORS ARE THICK, BUT REBELS SPURN GOVERNMENT BID

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