



THE COLLAPSE OF THE POL POT REGIME, JANUARY-APRIL 1979

Introductory Note by Ben Kiernan

This rare inside account of the fall of Democratic Kampuchea (DK) appeared in Chinese in 1992, under the title, “From Phnom Penh to the Cardamom Mountains,” in Yun Shui’s *Chinese Diplomats in International Crises*. Beijing, which has published little on its support for DK, classified the book *neibu*; the government publishing house intended it “for domestic use only.” This article describes the Pol Pot regime’s second evacuation of Phnom Penh, following its depopulation after victory over Lon Nol in 1975. About 20,000 Khmer Rouge troops and workers were living in Phnom Penh in January 1979, as advance Vietnamese units approached the capital. Chinese Embassy staff abandoned the city along with the retreating DK forces. For several months, the Chinese tried to maintain a diplomatic post in the shrinking Khmer Rouge zone. They held out in the jungles of northwest Cambodia near Thailand, in Battambang Province and then in the Cardamoms near the border town of Pailin.

Finally the Chinese diplomats gave up hope of maintaining an embassy in Cambodia, and crossed into Thailand. Yun Shui was apparently not an eyewitness; his account seems based on interviews with participants and on the embassy journal. The gripping story of the Khmer Rouge’s flight, despite the propagandistic tone, demonstrates China’s role and commitment to the DK regime. It also carries unintended ironies. The rugged setting of this account of the Khmer Rouge collapse was the location of the movement’s birth in the 1967-68 rebellions against Sihanouk’s regime. The Chinese diplomats’ hardships recall the privations under which a million Cambodian victims of the first evacuation had perished in 1975-78 at the hands of China’s DK ally — a toll silently ignored in what follows.



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An Account of Chinese Diplomats Accompanying the Government of Democratic Kampuchea's Move to the Cardamom Mountains*

Yun Shui
Paul Marks, *translator*

In spite of the condemnation of world opinion, daring the might of all under heaven, the Vietnamese invaders brazenly dispatched ten regular divisions to conquer Democratic Kampuchea (DK) by military force. On 7 January 1979 they occupied Phnom Penh, the capital of the Government of Democratic Kampuchea. This was naked shameless aggression. It shocked the entire world.

The First Evacuation from Phnom Penh

By 2 January 1979 the Vietnamese invaders had fought to near Phnom Penh, but Phnom Penh's residents were still at peace.

At 8 P.M. on the evening of January 2 Counselor Wang Yupei was relaying documents to all the embassy comrades in the embassy's 3rd floor meeting room when suddenly duty officer Comrade Wang Shuxiang walked in. She said to Counselor Wang in a quiet voice: "[Pol Pot's nephew] Little Hong¹ has come. I showed him to the receiving room."

Comrade Wang Yupei handed the documents he was holding to another leader to read and motioned for the interpreter, Comrade Fu Xuezhong, to go downstairs with him to meet the guest.

"I am entrusted by the Cambodian Communist Party center and the Cambodian government to report an important situation to the embassy..." Counselor Wang gathered from the sweat on Little Hong's forehead and his disturbed look that the matter was extraordinary. Without waiting for Little Hong to finish he motioned for Fu Xuezhong to go upstairs to get Ambassador Sun Hao.

"The front line is critical. The Vietnamese Army has fought to Tonle Bet and O Reang Ov. It's estimated the enemy will continue to push forward and will bombard Phnom Penh." Little Hong looked at Ambassador Sun Hao and Counselor Wang Yupei. "The Cambodian government has announced that Phnom Penh is in a state of war. Central organs, the diplomatic corps, and Chinese technical personnel in Phnom Penh will withdraw to Battambang this evening."

"Today this evening?" asked Ambassador Sun.

"Yes. An immediate operation. [Son Sen's nephew] Ni Kon, the chief of the Protocol Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is responsible for arranging the evacuation of the diplomatic corps," Little Hong said with emphasis.

Assistant military attaché Wang Maoxing returned in a rush just after Ambassador Sun and Counselor Wang had sent off Little Hong. Wang reported on an emergency meeting with the Cambodian General Staff's Meng Qing. In addition

* From Yun Shui, *Chinese Diplomats in International Crisis Situations* (Guoji Fengyunzhongde Zhongguo Waijiaoguan), (Beijing: World Knowledge [Shijie Zhishi Chubanshe], 1992), pp. 85-112, "From Phnom Penh to the Cardamom Mountains."

to confirming the decision to withdraw, Meng also said that “many division commanders have been killed. The front lines are unstable.”

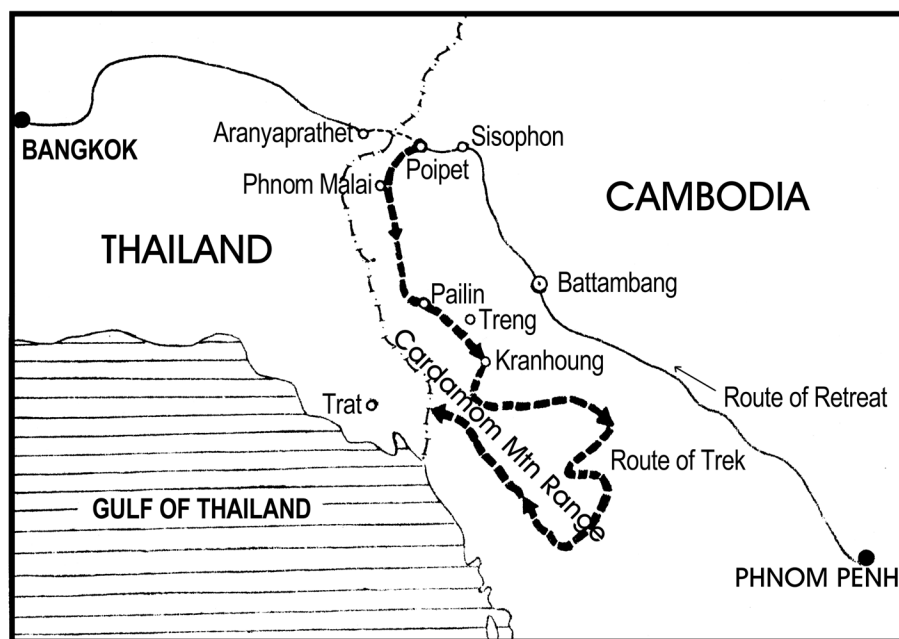
Ambassador Sun looked at his watch. It was 8:20 P.M. He immediately called a meeting. All Chinese personnel in Phnom Penh would be evacuating tonight. Send a telegram to the rear before we go and then pack the radio in a vehicle. Make contact with China again after we arrive in Battambang. Destroy all documents and notebooks. Each person brings only the clothes he’s wearing, crackers, and canned food as best he can. He reiterated: take down the embassy sign. Clean all offices and quarters and make your beds well to demonstrate that the Chinese Embassy had an orderly retreat.

Time was of the essence. Every minute and every second was precious. Sixty-one officials nervously yet methodically set to work. Wang Shuxiang went to tell the overseas students; the military and economic attaché officers each went to inform their groups of experts.

Inside the embassy each unit destroyed documents. Drivers readied vehicles. Cooks boiled eggs and made porridge.

At 9 P.M. Cambodian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Ambassador Niao Sukun arrived to tell Ambassador Sun that the operation had been moved up. Departure was now at midnight.

Counselor Wang pressed on, ordering the destruction of telegrams and documents.



中国驻柬埔寨使馆豆蔻山转移示意图

Map showing route of retreat from Phnom Penh and trek into the Cardamom Mountains. Adapted from Yun Shui, *Chinese Diplomats in International Crisis Situations* (Guoji Fengyunzhongde Zhongguo Waijiaoguan), (Beijing: World Knowledge [Shijie Zhishi Chubanshe], 1992), p. 8.

At 10 P.M. Little Hong returned on his motorcycle to tell Ambassador Sun that the evacuation time would be even earlier. All effort was underway to leave before 12 [midnight].

At 10:50 P.M. thirty students ran to the embassy carrying their bags.

At 11 P.M. the ambassador held an emergency meeting with Diplomatic Protocol Office head Ni Kon to discuss the Chinese experts outside of Phnom Penh. Ni Kon said that the Vietnamese army's main objective was Phnom Penh. Arrangements for the Chinese experts outside of Phnom Penh had not yet been considered. Ni Kon emphasized that diplomatic corps personnel would depart at midnight.

At 10:20 P.M. our eastern team assisting at Chup rubber plantation came under attack. The embassy immediately ordered the 559 experts in the eastern zone to leave immediately on the cargo ships *Xianghong* and *Liangbu*, then unloading at Sihanoukville.

Fifteen vehicles departed the Chinese Embassy at midnight. The Cambodians sent two large American 8-wheel trucks to follow. The convoy drove through Phnom Penh's silent streets.

Pre-dawn Phnom Penh on the 3rd was cloudy and misty. The water of the Mekong flowed darkly downstream. A big and tall "family of travelers" began to grow at one spot.

Chinese, Egyptian, Romanian, Yugoslavian, and Burmese diplomats joined by our experts who had pulled out of the east and Phnom Penh said goodbye to Phnom Penh. Vehicles big and small, stretching for kilometers, headed to the northwest.

Towns, villages, hills, and plains along the way all seemed normal, without a hint of war. Farmers laboring in the fields and children on the side of the road were startled at the site of the long dragon-like convoy.

One after another, the Phnom Penh-based diplomatic corps arrived at the northwestern town of Battambang at noon on the 3rd.

At 5:30 P.M. Comrade Dun from the Cambodian Ministry of Foreign Affairs met with Ambassador Sun. "Evacuating the diplomatic corps from Phnom Penh last night was a precautionary measure. We were worried that after occupying O Reang Au the Vietnamese would continue to advance and would bombard Phnom Penh. Our Army has now regained the initiative on the O Reang Au to Chup line. The higher-ups have decided that the diplomatic corps and technical groups can return to Phnom Penh tomorrow."

Dun's words caused a sinking sensation. Last night they had repeatedly urged a rapid evacuation of Phnom Penh. Today, not five hours after arriving in Battambang, they tell us to return to Phnom Penh!

The Chinese Embassy had a general estimate of the military situation around Phnom Penh drawn from experts who had been withdrawing from the east. At the front there was basically no more army. Phnom Penh would be threatened shortly. However, an embassy is an official organ sent to one state as the representative of another state to carry out diplomatic relations and to manage various interactions. The Chinese government and people resolutely supported the righteous struggle of the Cambodian government and people to preserve

their national independence and state sovereignty. The Chinese Embassy decided to reside where the country's government was.

At 8 A.M. on the 4th, all the comrades of the Chinese Embassy departed Battambang according to the arrangements made by the Cambodian Foreign Ministry. At 6 P.M. that night they returned to the imminently endangered Phnom Penh.

The Chinese Embassy discovered that they were the only embassy that returned to Phnom Penh. They would be there just forty-eight hours.

The Second Evacuation from Phnom Penh

January 6 marked a turning point in the military situation.

Cambodian Foreign Ministry Secretary-General Suo Hong came to the embassy early to notify Ambassador Sun that "the situation is extremely serious. The Vietnamese are attacking Phnom Penh from two sides, the north and the south. In the north they have crossed the Mekong at Tonle Bet and entered Kampong Cham City. In the south four planes bombed Takeo City. A large number of Vietnamese tanks are advancing on Highway One towards Phnom Penh."

January 6 was the most tense of days for the Chinese Embassy. No one slept for an entire day and night.

Counselor Wang Yupei was to lead thirty-five officials on a Chinese civil aviation flight to Beijing. They woke at dawn and hurriedly turned over their work and packed their bags.

At 11 A.M. the embassy passengers, the experts, and the students arrived one after another at Pochentong Airport, 155 in total. On a normal day the departure lounge held a smattering of travelers. It had now come alive.

Ten Westerners holding their bags had been in the waiting room two hours. Each was very anxious.

When these Westerners figured out that Yang Chong was the Chinese Embassy's administration officer they cornered him and demanded that he agree to let them on the Chinese flight to Beijing.

Yang Chong knew that the majority of people trying to leave Phnom Penh were elderly male and female comrades. Limited seating meant that 625 people could not leave. If his own compatriots could not board, how could he accommodate these people?

The heavy thud of distant artillery suddenly sent the waiting room into a frenzy.

In the afternoon the artillery came increasingly closer. The front continuously reported peril. Vietnamese artillery units had reached the north side of the Mekong. Vietnamese reconnaissance aircraft began surveillance flights over Phnom Penh. The waiting room fell silent. The weather was hot and heavy. The hearts of the travelers were even heavier. No one could breathe.

At 3 P.M. Suo Hong informed Ambassador Sun anxiously: "The situation continues to worsen. The Center has decided that the Chinese Embassy and technical personnel should again evacuate to Battambang." The Cambodian side asked, however, that the male comrades from the medical unit remain

temporarily. The Cambodian side would be responsible for their evacuation when the situation became critical.

At 4:20 P.M. Prince Sihanouk, Princess Monique, and twenty family members suddenly arrived at the airport, escorted by Ieng Sary and Ambassador Sun Hao. This increased the tension even more.

Sihanouk and Monique had fled their country twice in ten years. Their hearts were heavy and the look on their faces said that they were worried about leaving and destroying their family.

The prince and princess brought twenty passengers. Regulations limit a Boeing 707 to 150 passengers. The number of people in the waiting room now exceeded 185.

Who should be allowed to board? After discussion the embassy decided that all thirty foreign friends would go. A portion of the Chinese students would stay.

The thirty students then decided that they would all stay. What a moving choice! What splendid Chinese youth! When the ten foreigners heard the news that they would be leaving they broke into tears.

Twelve years later Comrade Wang Yupei and his wife Wang Shuxiang had vivid memories of their responsibilities that day. They praised the students who rose to the occasion with the utmost of character in the most difficult of circumstances.

At 4:30 P.M. the Chinese civil aviation aircraft landed at Pochentong. The waiting room erupted.

Normally planes waited an hour. On this day the limit was half an hour.

When the plane stopped and the door opened several Westerners emerged. One by one they turned back toward the plane as they realized the luggage chaos and the number of people waiting to register to fly. When artillery landed close enough to rattle the airport's windows the Westerners ran back to the plane. One dropped a bag but didn't stop.

At 5 P.M. the Boeing 707 took off to the applause of its passengers. Prince Sihanouk said to Counselor Wang: "Thank you for the Chinese Embassy's concern. It was important to Princess Monique and I that we got aboard with all our family." He said, with emphasis, "We were lucky."

By 6 or 7 P.M. Vietnamese aircraft were flying constant surveillance over Phnom Penh. The situation was even more pressing.

At 8 P.M. the Chinese Embassy staff withdrew from Phnom Penh for the second time. Twenty-six comrades arrived safely in Battambang at 5 A.M. on the 7th. Five hundred of the experts also made it.

The "Recurring" Storm

January 7 is a painful and unforgettable day for the Cambodian people.

At 12:30 midday on 7 January the capital, Phnom Penh, fell.

The news of the invading Vietnamese army's occupation of Phnom Penh shocked the entire world. One by one governments condemned Vietnam's invasion and stood firmly by the legal government of Democratic Kampuchea.

The Vietnamese forces had marched in without opposition and run amok. The powerful offensive by the Vietnamese forces scattered one hundred

thousand Cambodian troops. A large number of refugees surged toward the Cambodian-Thai border in boats. The Romanian, North Korean, Yugoslavian, and Egyptian embassies withdrew to Bangkok.

The situation in Cambodia changed drastically. The hearts of the people of the motherland went out to the 625 assistance personnel and the 10 million compatriots. In Beijing leading comrades from the Center, the Central Liaison Ministry, the Economics and Trade Ministry, the General Staff, and other units worked anxiously an entire day and a sleepless night on Sunday, January 7.

At 11 P.M. on January 9 eleven comrades from our embassy in Cambodia arrived safely at the Chinese Embassy in Thailand. The other fifteen staff — experts and students — billeted temporarily at Utaphao air and naval base. They later returned separately on our special flights and the cargo ship *Minghua*.

All of the people evacuated to Thailand were sleepy and exhausted. A United Press International report of 8 January from Aranyaphet read: “More than 600 Chinese, their faces travel-worn, dejectedly sat down on the ground without muttering a sound.” The first request of the eleven comrades was sleep. They were too tired. They had evacuated the embassy twice within a single week and had trudged a long road. Within earshot of artillery they had anxiously disposed of documents and arranged for the departure of 1,052 assistance personnel. So much work!

The second request of the Cambodia eleven was noodles and porridge. A week of canned food had taken their appetites.

Playing with Fire

All of Cambodia was turned upside down in days. A puppet government was established in Phnom Penh and the legal government moved to the forest.

With the nation occupied by an enemy and the army scattered, who will rescue the people when they are trampled and faced with calamity? Who will aid them? After an earnest discussion the Government of Democratic Kampuchea affirmed that only China could.

The Cambodian government officially proposed that the Chinese Embassy leave a portion of its personnel behind, take along a radio, and move together with the Government of Democratic Kampuchea to facilitate continuous normal interaction between the two countries while on the move.

The Chinese government responded positively to the Cambodian request and made clear that “right” was on the Cambodians’ side. The United Nations Security Council passed a resolution, by a vote of thirteen to two, “condemning the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia and supporting the legal government of Democratic Kampuchea.” Prince Sihanouk held a press conference in Beijing to express to the world the resolve of the Cambodian people to resist aggression and to protect their motherland.

In order to connect the Government of Democratic Kampuchea with the outside world as soon as possible, headquarters repeatedly instructed the Chinese Embassy to Cambodia now in Bangkok to think of all methods, overcome all difficulties, and return to Cambodia as soon as possible.

“Adversity tests the character of a man.” In the face of danger and disaster, officials Fu Xuezhong, Wang Yongyuan, recorder Zuo Yi, and other comrades

expressed the determination to execute the order, to return to Cambodia, and to travel with the DK government.

“There” was a battlefield with artillery day after day. “There” was an uninhabited virgin forest. These comrades would give no thought to their own survival. Mentally they prepared to never return.

They wrote their last letters to be left for their fathers, mothers, wives, and children. One comrade wrote: “I will soon return to Cambodia. My post is there. Being a diplomat means following orders and serving one’s country. The situation is unpredictable. Death is everywhere. In case I don’t return, teach the children to obey the Party, to learn from Premier Zhou, and to work hard for the motherland’s four modernizations.”

Comrades Wang Yongyuan’s intestines were not good. He was weak. The embassy’s Party Committee decided to send him home. Three times, however, he requested to follow the embassy in its work, to face the test of war. He told Ambassador Sun that despite the hardship and danger, it would be glorious to die carrying out this diplomatic mission.

In China Asia Bureau chief De Wei, communicator Zheng Jianfeng, Ma Hengyue, Qi Ling’en, and physician Pan Jiaqin all took the initiative to sign up to go to Cambodia. After just twenty-four hours of preparation they said goodbye to their families and coworkers and flew to Bangkok to await orders. Qi Ling’en was twenty-five and a newlywed. His new wife began crying as they drove out the gate and sobbed all the way to the airport. Qi Ling’en understood his wife’s emotions but he kept control of his own and patiently comforted her. The love between them was really moving.

These comrades recalled the earnest instructions of Chairman Mao and Premier Zhou to the diplomatic personnel who went to the Congo nineteen years earlier: “Loyal Bones are buried everywhere on Green Mountain. Why not die on the battlefield instead?” The satisfactory response in concrete action came from the Party’s call.

Yet there were those who shirked their duties. When faced with a rigorous test they did what they should not have done. There were two comrades who did not obey their transfer orders. They were disciplined and a criticism notice circulated.

On 15 January Vice Premier Geng Biao made a working visit to Thailand. He addressed all the personnel in the Chinese embassies to Cambodia and Thailand. He heavily emphasized the quality and foreign affairs discipline of foreign affairs cadre. Foreign affairs cadre, he pointed out, were the People’s Liberation Army without uniforms. Every move must be under orders. No one should act on his or her own authority.

Vice Premier Geng was a Long March veteran and a member of the country’s first batch of ambassadors. On this day his spirits were extremely high. He pointed out that in a guerrilla war in the forest it was imperative to stay close to the Cambodians to ensure smooth communications and liaison. Lastly, speaking deeply and with meaning, “prepare to die,” he said.

The eight comrades selected to return to Cambodia felt the enormity and arduous nature of their task. They maintained that they would not betray the

center's trust; not fear difficulty and hardship; not fear blood or dying; and ensure the completion of the mission.

In 1960 when Ambassador Sun Hao was a second secretary in the Congo crisis, he followed Chargé d'Affaires Zhang Tong without hesitation into the smoking Stanleyville. Nineteen years later Ambassador Sun was now leading seven diplomatic personnel, without hesitation, into a Cambodia at war.

The Chinese ambassador to Thailand, Zhang Weilie, gave a banquet for a healthy journey on the night before the eve of their departure. After dinner they watched the movie "Real War." The theme of the movie was the hardening of a people and the people winning the war. Appropriately, the movie reflected the connection between two old revolutionaries serving as diplomats overseas.

Crossing a Small River to Cross the Border

February 9 is an unforgettable date.

In the deep of the night Ambassador Sun Hao and party set off toward Aranyaphat. The order of march was Fu Xuezhong, Ambassador Sun Hao, Zheng Jianfeng, Wang Yongyuan, Ma Hengyue, Qi Ling'en, Dr. Pan Jiaqin, and recorder Zuo Yi.

Eight Chinese comrades in the pitch dark, wearing black Thai official's clothes and carrying backpacks, entered Cambodian territory by crossing the small river that is the Thai-Cambodian border.

Cambodian Foreign Ministry officials Suo Hong, Ni Kon, Dun, Sai, and nineteen soldiers came to the border to meet them. After shaking hands and embracing, no one spoke.

This was the first diplomatic delegation received by the Cambodians since Vietnam's occupation of Phnom Penh. The meeting of friends from two countries at this time, in this place, could not but fill their minds with a myriad of thoughts. They had not seen each other for a while, and tears rolled down their cheeks.

The Chinese comrades took food from their packs to greet their Cambodian friends. The young soldiers accepted the food. Protocol chief Ni Kon told Ambassador Sun Hao in a low voice that they had not eaten in two days.

At 2:30 A.M. on the 10th they all rode a vehicle to Nimit Village near Poipet.

The Vietnamese occupied Nimit, so they got down from the vehicles one or two kilometers away and under the cover of darkness quietly marched past the Vietnamese positions. They headed northwest on a small path. At 8 A.M. they reached the jungle of Malai Mountain [Phnom Malai] in Sisophon District. This was to be camp number one. It was about twenty kilometers south of Poipet and just five hundred meters from the Thai border. The Chinese Embassy to Cambodia was established at this temporary location.

Ieng Sary told Ambassador Sun Hao that he, Ieng, would return to General Headquarters to make preparations for the Chinese Embassy. Ambassador Sun said that the embassy would respect the Cambodians' arrangements, but that he hoped to meet with the General Headquarters soon in order to start work as soon as possible. However, for the next sixty-one days the Chinese Embassy was located by itself in three different "embassy zones." The Cambodians never did

arrange for China's ambassador to call on the Cambodian leaders at the General Headquarters. All relations between the embassy and the General Headquarters went through Comrade Dun, a Cambodian Foreign Ministry liaison officer.

After walking eighty kilometers in eight hours [*sic*] everyone had blood blisters on their feet. Among the eight comrades only Ambassador Sun Hao and confidential official Zheng Jianfeng had experienced war. Upon arrival at camp number one the ambassador consoled everyone while ordering them to boil water for their feet. This can be said to have been the first step on a "Long March."

The Chinese Embassy on Malai Mountain

Three straw huts with pillars but no walls could only block the rain and shade the sun. The beds and tables were made entirely of bamboo. Stools were blocks of wood.

This was the Chinese Embassy to Cambodia.

A Cambodian security squad stood watch. Endless forest was on all sides. No one lived there and all was silent.

The Chinese Embassy began its work here. Malai Mountain is at 13 degrees and 50 minutes north latitude and exhibits typical tropical rain forest climate. One peculiarity is the difference in temperature between day and night. During the day the temperature is 40 degrees Celsius and above — so hot that you cannot breathe. Once it is the middle of the night the temperature drops to around 15 degrees Celsius. The cold air can wake a man and then he cannot but build a fire.

The embassy's meals were very simple: with no fresh vegetables they could only open canned food and mix it with wild herbs and tree leaves to make soup. Food for eight was really only enough for one, but everyone was mutually modest, mutually caring, and mutually concerned. Time passed both happily and nervously.

A week later, on the evening of 15 February, the sound of artillery was suddenly heard in the distance. The Cambodians said that these shells were coming from Nimit Village. Nimit was less than twenty kilometers away. The sound of the explosions could be heard very clearly. The big artillery fired for an entire night. No one slept. The second day it continued from dawn to 1 P.M.

On 17 February the sound of artillery came closer and closer. The Cambodian Protocol Office director Ni Kon informed the embassy that tomorrow they would move.

Eight days of action on Malai Mountain was over.

On 18 February at 7:30 A.M. the comrades of the Chinese Embassy rode three cars from Malai Mountain to the south.

At noon they ate lunch on the bank of the Mongkolborei River. In the dry season the river was dry, and flies with their buzzing sound assembled quickly. When the flies smelled food they descended like a flight of crazed bombers at war with man for his food. Everyone sat on rocks eating with one hand and swatting flies with the other. A tense struggle between man and fly developed.

At 3:30 P.M. they reached Pailin.

Pailin was well known for its gems. White buildings were as numerous as scales on a fish. The gold of a Buddhist temple shone bright. Coconut trees were of such a height that you could reach up and pick from the palms. Coffee gardens, one after another, were full of plants with fresh red coffee beans wrapped around the branches. All of this was indicative of the fact that Pailin was once a flourishing and beautiful city. Unfortunately it was now an empty city, quiet and still. Mangos and papayas lay on the ground with no one to pick them up. Grass grew as tall as the fences and plants and flowers hid doors and windows. Upon seeing all this it gave one the sorrowful feeling reflected in the idiom, "when a country is destroyed the rivers and mountains stay good, but spring in the towns brings grass and wood."

The Chinese Embassy's second camp was set up in the woods to the east of Pailin.

A Week in Pailin

The embassy once again was a series of unwallled grass huts surrounded completely by uninhabited forest. Once again it was to remain in place just one week. But within that week Ambassador Sun Hao conducted two important foreign affairs activities.

On the evening of 19 February Ambassador Sun Hao gave a dinner for the Cambodian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ieng Sary. All seven embassy officials participated. A small oil lamp was lit and canned food was boiled with tree leaves to make a soup served on a table held up by tree branches. This was one unorthodox dinner.

On the morning of 22 February Premier Pol Pot came to the Chinese Embassy. He spread a map out on a bamboo table and explained to Ambassador Sun Hao in detail the Vietnamese invasion and the current disposition of our common enemy.

Prior to this none of the comrades in the embassy except Ambassador Sun and Fu Xuezhong had seen Pol Pot. On this occasion everyone gave him their undivided attention. They watched every move of this world "media personality."

The Move to the Cardamom Mountains

At 5 P.M. on 23 February the embassy departed its second camp and moved toward the Cardamom Mountains. The Cambodians gave each of our personnel a set of clothes and a *krama*. The combination of Cambodian clothes and a *krama* around their necks made the embassy's comrades into Cambodians.

Cambodian clothing cannot be mentioned without describing the *krama*. One point five meters long and point five meters wide, *kramas* come in red, green, and blue. Tied around the waist the *krama* can be a belt; wrapped around the neck it can protect from insect bites and keep out the cold; you can carry things on your back with it and even net fish. During bathing it is a washcloth and while sleeping a sheet. An even better use is on the head either to prevent cold or to shade the sun. The Chinese Embassy comrades, accompanied by Ieng Sary and other DK foreign ministry officials, rode four jeeps east on Route 10. Along the way they saw tanks and motorcycles scattered on the sides of the road.

The Cambodians said that this military hardware had been abandoned by the Vietnamese following an ambush. Not long before a Vietnamese motorized unit had reached Pailin. They had conducted a large sweep on this road.

When the convoy reached Treng it turned south into a big forest. In the forest they zigzagged back and forth as they wound their way up and down mountains until they reached their third camp one hundred kilometers later at 10 P.M. on a bank of the Stung Kranhoung in Prei Phneou District² in the Cardamom Mountains. The Cardamoms take their name from the cardamom flower.

The cardamom flowers grow wild everywhere. They have long plantain leaves, cream-colored tassels, and branches filled with disc-shaped fruit. When you come to the world of the cardamom the medicinal fragrance gives a person a kind of airy immortal feeling. It is no wonder that a girl's beautiful youth is called "the cardamom years."

The great Tang Dynasty poet Du Mu was extremely fond of the beautiful appearance of the cardamom. He wrote the famous line: "The graceful upward curves of a 13-year-old are like the tips of the branches of a cardamom in the beginning of February." In peacetime it would be difficult for diplomatic staff to tour or to eat wild meals here. But what diplomats in the midst of war have the inclination to appreciate flowers or to tour?

Staying here for the next forty-seven days and nights, not to mention what it took to get here, would be a most unusual event in the history of modern diplomacy and in the lives of these men.

The Chinese Embassy in the Cardamom Mountains

Four small grass huts made up the embassy.

The huts had no walls. Ambassador Sun led the embassy comrades in wrapping nylon around the huts to stop wind and rain. Beds, tables, and stools were made of local materials. Stools were nogs of wood. Beds and tables were bamboo surfaces standing on wood pillars.

The embassy was in a depression with mountains on three sides and a stream on the fourth. Its geographic location was 12 degrees 31 minutes north and 102 degrees 58 minutes east.

There were many types of tropical trees and animals in this area, but there were no villages and no people. The Chinese Embassy had no visitors while here except for Ieng Sary and Cambodian Foreign Ministry liaisons Ni Kon and Dun. The embassy depended on radio broadcasts for news of the outside world.

Every night at nine the comrades would gather around the radio in the "dining hut" to listen to Radio Beijing's 8 P.M. news broadcast. There was no light and no noise, only the vigorous voice of the radio announcer and the sounds of coworkers breathing.

The nights were pitch dark. Often one's hair would stand on end at the sight of black figures with blue or green eyes lurking around the embassy. When you stared you realized that it was a group of three to five monkeys, pandas, or occasionally wild boar, golden panthers, deer, or other animals. Lions and tigers on the mountain exerted their authority by growling nonstop at the embassy as if in protest against the new residents who had occupied their kingdom.

On 25 February Ieng Sary came to the embassy to commiserate. He and Ambassador Sun Hao discussed the embassy's security. Ieng Sary said that a 30-man remnant of "Ying Dan" had been discovered thirty kilometers east. There was a settlement of ethnic Vietnamese more than ten kilometers to the west. Hence the situation surrounding the embassy was complicated. Ieng Sary also emphasized that although it would be difficult for large Vietnamese units to enter the forest, the embassy had to be vigilant about small detachments infiltrating to seize pockets. Ieng Sary brought with him a security platoon to serve as security for the embassy. They dug pits around the embassy and lined them with sharpened bamboo. Ieng provided the comrades two pistols and six T-56 assault rifles to use for self-defense against bandits and wild animals. Ieng also gave each comrade a nylon hammock to use when necessary.

At dusk that day Comrade Fu Xuezhong caught a pangolin. Pangolins are rare. Their claws are strong and sharp for digging the caves for which they are well known. Pangolins are slow and docile. When they are surprised they contract in order to use their hard shell as armor against attack. None of the embassy comrades had ever seen one.

The comrades were like little children standing in a circle around the pangolin playing with it like a frog. They used sticks to poke its small mouth and long tail, and they used their hands to nudge its tile-like scales. The sound of laughter echoed through the valley.

Even more amazing was the fact that this pangolin's head was especially big. Its body was nearly a meter long, and it probably weighed around twenty catties. Fu Xuezhong used wire and rope to tie the pangolin to a post in the dining hut, but by the second morning the pangolin had disappeared. The rope remained.

At 8 A.M. on 26 February Pol Pot, Nuon Chea, Khieu Samphan, Ieng Sary, and other leaders came to the embassy for an official meeting with Ambassador Sun Hao in the "thatch meeting hall." At the all-day meeting the two sides exchanged frank opinions of Cambodia's internal situation and the international situation. At noon Ambassador Sun Hao hosted a lunch in the "thatch dining hall." The menu consisted of white rice, wild lettuce soup, and bean sprouts picked by the embassy comrades. Despite the simplicity, the dishes were romantically colorful. Pol Pot and Khieu Samphan said that they felt very happy to have been able to eat authentic Chinese food at the Chinese Embassy. Ieng Sary told Ambassador Sun that the Cambodian center's organs were three kilometers due north. The walk, however, took three hours and was unbelievably difficult.

On 2 March the embassy's food was extremely simple. The meal was wild herbs, picked bean sprouts, wild plantains or tree leaves, and wild vegetables. The embassy could only depend on the Cambodian warriors to hunt and bring a catch that improved their lives. However, there were all sorts of restrictions on hunting within range of the Vietnamese army.

One morning during a meeting in the "thatch meeting hall" Ambassador Sun Hao demanded that everyone prepare fortifications for a long stay in the mountains. Land had to be cleared for planting vegetables and a cave dug for defense against air attacks.

After the meeting the eight divided into two groups. One group used spades to dig holes. Digging into a mountain was very difficult for the small and physically weakened embassy. It took three straight weeks to basically finish the air raid shelter. Three days after completion the Cambodians again gave the notification to move.

On 5 March the firing from the northwest was heavy and continued for an extended time. Everyone dropped the tools in their hands and listened with alarm to the distant explosions.

That evening a foreign radio broadcast said that an intense battle had broken out between the Vietnamese army and a Khmer Rouge unit at Poipet. The two sides fought to inside the Thai border in a three-hour battle. The broadcast also said that after the Vietnamese occupied Poipet forty puppet troops raised a five-gold-tower red flag [the flag of the new People's Republic of Kampuchea] at the train station and used announcing equipment to broadcast toward the Thai border.

Qi Ling'en turned off the radio. Everyone sat where they were. No one dared speak. Despite the lack of light, everyone sensed one another's feelings. Last month when the embassy comrades transited Poipet at night they stopped at that train station to drink some water. Several hundred meters walk to the west is Thailand's Aranyaphet. This is the passage for Cambodian-Thai intercourse.

This broadcast meant that their lifeline was cut. The Cambodian personnel stayed tight-lipped about this.

The morning of 8 March Premier Pol Pot came to the embassy for talks with Ambassador Sun Hao. The two sides exchanged views on each other's situation.

In recent days the embassy comrades had eaten toads, lizards, and deer. Most people know these animals but never actually see or smell them. Each time the embassy officials had these mountain delicacies they would sit under a tree and chat while eating. This really was a case of "you had to be there to benefit."

At 11:10 A.M. on 9 March a Vietnamese reconnaissance aircraft flew over the embassy from east to west.

The sound of an aircraft hastened the digging of the air raid shelter. In 40-degree weather the comrades' sweat flowed like rain, and they could only work when the sun had set. They made more than a day's progress in half a day.

At noon on 12 March the forest scene was fascinating. The scorching sun penetrating through overlapping leaves lightly blowing in the breeze made for a midday star show. In the mountains and in the jungle there was total calm. Suddenly the bone-jarring sound of an explosion awakened the embassy from their midday rest. Everyone grabbed a weapon and looked around. Just as suddenly calm returned. Afterward, Ieng Sary told us that a snake-cow had stepped on a mine. Snake-cows have a body, tail, and legs like a cow, but their mouth is pointy and long. They eat snakes; hence the name.

According to a Cambodian liaison officer report on 15 March, a two-battalion sized force of Vietnamese had departed Battambang City and was advancing on Pailin. DK forces had just removed a regiment from near Phnom Penh to commit to stopping the attack.

After dinner the entire embassy met in the "dining hall" to assess the enemy situation. Everyone estimated that the enemy had two objectives: (1) to attack

Pailin and cut the supply line across the Thai-Cambodian border; and (2) to sweep through the Cardamoms to find the Cambodian center. Ambassador Sun Hao required the embassy to pay attention to lanterns, to speak softly, to pack their things, and to bury those items that were inconvenient to carry.

On the morning of 16 March Ieng Sary came and reported that a regiment-sized Vietnamese force from Battambang was occupying Treng and intended to sweep the Cardamoms. Could the Chinese Embassy please implement level-two war preparations.

During the afternoon rest period Comrades Zheng Jianfeng, Fu Xuezhong, and Pan Jiaqin cut walking sticks.

On the morning of 17 March the sound of artillery came from the northeast. Everyone stood ready to move with the light equipment. When Zheng Jianfeng and Wang Yongyuan were on the hillside burning sensitive documents a Vietnamese reconnaissance aircraft arrived suddenly and circled the embassy. Zheng and Wang hurriedly put out the fire and took cover.

On 18 March enemy aircraft flew circles over the embassy three times. The artillery from the northeast became more concentrated. The Cambodian security soldiers joined in digging and the progress on the air raid bunker accelerated.

The food on these days was boar and wild cow.

On 23 March the security squad killed an elephant. The skin and the fatty meat were edible. After a dawn cookout it was like New Year's. The elephant's legs were tough like leather. Elephants live in packs. An angry pack could flatten the embassy. The squad leader, Si Tai, had observed the elephant for several days. When he had determined that it was a loner, he opened fire with eleven rounds of automatic rifle fire.

Chinese and Cambodian cadre and soldiers sat together in front of a thatched hut, one man one bowl, carefully tasting the result of their stewing, boiling, frying, and barbecuing. The Cambodian friends warmly yielded the best tasting part, the elephant's trunk, to the Chinese comrades. Sitting in the lush green forest with the sun sparkling, the cicada chirping, and the birds calling; encouraging each other to eat; extending best wishes in that border redoubt — it all had a kind of special sentiment to it.

At 7 A.M. on 25 March a fire broke out near the embassy. The Cambodians warned that militia had encountered a small Vietnamese special action unit that had infiltrated the jungle.

When the sound of rifle fire vibrated the ears of the comrades who had grown up in peaceful surroundings their hair stood on end. Not knowing what to do, some pointed their rifles and prepared to wage war. Ambassador Sun Hao demanded that everyone take cover and follow orders. After everyone had calmed down, they one at a time set about making preparations.

That evening the embassy comrades laid bullets on their chests and slept holding automatic weapons.

The morning of 26 March found the security troops whispering nervously among themselves.

After breakfast liaison officer Comrade Dun notified the embassy that a two-regiment sized force of Vietnamese was advancing on Highway 10 towards

the Cardamoms. Two battalions' worth were already at Pailin. The embassy was requested to prepare to move its things to the back side of the big mountain. Dun said that the Cambodians had already buried two truckloads of food there.

Dun returned again after dinner. He informed the embassy that tomorrow at dawn the Vietnamese would launch an attack on the embassy's position.

Trudging Half a Month in the Cardamoms

March 27 was yet another unforgettable day.

On that date China's eight diplomatic personnel began a half-month march through the tropical virgin forest of the Cardamom region.

Comrade Zheng Jianfeng remembers the situation when they set out: "That evening I clutched my backpack and glanced at my moon-lit watch over and over. The time passed very slowly. It was difficult to wait until 5 A.M. with still no departure notice from the Cambodians. At last I asked our interpreter Fu Xuezhong to ask the Cambodians for an update. Comrade Dun explained that in a jungle march you could not see the trail. It was dangerous on the mountain."

At half past five, with the day just breaking, the entire group came together. Nineteen people including the embassy, the Cambodian security detail, and logistics personnel headed south with marching gear and assault rifles on their backs.

High on the mountain the forest was dense. The grass was deep and the way slippery. It was very tough going. Forty degree temperatures and 40-plus-kilogram packs made the level of difficulty unimaginable. Sweat flowed and clothes soaked through. It took an entire day to climb one mountain.

Comrade Ma Hengyue's temperature was 39.6 degrees Celsius, yet he continued to climb. At a rest stop Dr. Pan injected him with a bowl of sugar water because they had no fever medicine. Covered with a wool blanket and sleeping, Ma Hengyue's high fever amazingly broke.

Wang Yongyuan's intestinal problems returned. He persevered to the summit despite bloody diarrhea and sweat flowing in columns.

At the destination some gathered grass while others cut trees to make shelters. Everyone ignored the fatigue of a 14-hour march and did their best to finish their assigned tasks.

Every morning the embassy's critical task was to contact Beijing. The center wanted to grasp the situation promptly and to convey important news to the Cambodian leadership. This made the situation tenser as communications became more visibly important.

Heavy artillery ushered in the morning of 28 March. Suddenly there were puffs of dense smoke as the rounds impacted between the embassy and the next mountain.

At 8:30 A.M. Ieng Sary hurried over. Unable to catch his breath, he said to Ambassador Sun Hao: "The enemy situation is extremely critical. Take light gear and move!"

Comrade Dun had not yet returned from taking some men to recover the buried rice.

“You can’t wait! The Vietnamese have crossed Stung Kranhoung. Your embassy is within rocket range. A squad of enemy scouts is already on the mountain. We have no units to oppose them.” A second Cambodian Foreign Ministry cadre added: “Go now or you won’t make it.”

The embassy had a rule that no matter what the circumstances, everyone moved together. The comrades donned their gear and set off together. The Cambodian security squad had only three fighters. Everyone pressed on step after step, helping each other and heading south.

It was learned later that on the 27th the Vietnamese had stealthily occupied the backside of the mountain from which our officials withdrew from their third site at Kranhoung. They planned to interdict the back route with artillery, seize the high ground, and capture us. On the 28th the Chinese Embassy comrades again just escaped capture at the hands of a Vietnamese special action unit. The thatched huts that were the embassy were leveled by artillery. The enemy captured a 2,000-ton ammunition cache on the mountain. An additional 1,000-ton cache was blown up; foodstuffs were taken; and some economic equipment was destroyed.

Phnom Penh and Hanoi radio stations broadcast claims of “victory.”

The Chinese Embassy’s eight diplomatic warriors and the Cambodian soldiers were still hiding on the rugged mountain paths of the Cardamom Mountains and continuing to advance.

That night the comrades camped in a depression on a hill. Just as they were putting up tents a monsoon hit. Everyone was accustomed to wind and rain, but now that Vietnamese artillery was the norm, the embassy became frustrated with this new “enemy.”

There is also in the forest a kind of horseleech that hides on fallen leaves when it is dry. As soon as rain falls they come to life. They found the rare human scent irresistible and climbed en masse toward the defenseless comrades. These “enemies” bit until fresh blood was everywhere. The only recourse was to first take control of the environment by clearing away all the fallen leaves.

On 29 March the Cambodian and Chinese sides held diplomatic talks on the march.

They set off at 6 A.M. They moved south through the thick forest on the mountaintop accompanied by their Cambodian liaison.

At 10 A.M. they converged with Ieng Sary while marching. The accompanying security detail increased to twenty. Ieng Sary told Ambassador Sun Hao that General Headquarters had decided that Cambodian leaders should begin decentralized activities. From now on Ieng Sary would operate with the Chinese Embassy comrades.

Foreign Minister Ieng Sary and Ambassador Sun Hao talked while they walked. Ieng Sary informed him that Vietnam had increased its forces in Cambodia by three divisions and was determined to resolve the problem before the rainy season. He emphasized that the current situation was extremely grim. Logistics were extremely difficult. “The Vietnamese army is advancing on the Cardamoms on three roads with General Headquarters as their objective. We are

caught between the middle and western Vietnamese approaches. We need to find a way to break through as soon as possible.”

That evening during camp a battle broke out between the Cambodians and the Vietnamese halfway up the mountain. Artillery, machine guns, and grenades were used.

The rifle fire grew closer and more intense. Everyone prepared to join the fight.

Ambassador Sun Hao quickly called a meeting, relayed instructions on security to China, and emphasized the importance of operating together. Ambassador Sun said that if a comrade was captured by the Vietnamese or the Cambodian puppet army he should present his passport and sternly demand to be returned to his country in accordance with international treaties and international practice.

On 30 March we headed toward the Cambodian-Thai border.³

The forest was endless and the sun hidden. In this forest people had never lived.

In the forest vines touched the trees; trees touched the vines; trees grew out of trees; trees grew out of other trees' roots. Twisted roots and gnarled branches connected the trees. The vines had long thorns and were twisted into a bramble. It might as well have been “hell's gate.” The Cambodian fighters organized a machete squad to cut a path. Ieng Sary, Ambassador Sun, and Fu Xuezhong took the lead. Zuo Yi followed and everyone advanced one close to the next.

A pack of monkeys suddenly descended from above, hooting and howling and touching and shaking our heads with their long black arms. A python suddenly stuck its head out from a tree and extended its long tongue. Sometimes lions and tigers would growl from somewhere behind us. Maybe they were protesting; maybe they were terrorizing us!

For fifteen days and nights the diplomatic staff of the Chinese Embassy to Cambodia became “friends” with these frequently appearing forest animals. But greeting these “friends” meant tense muscles, sweat, and hair standing on end.

The fallen leaves that had accumulated for months and years were like sponges. It was very hard going. Even stranger was the smell that came from these fallen leaves. It was noxious to the point of irritating the nose. Sometimes a swarm of green-headed flies would pass with a “weng” sound. Sometimes a mass of big ants would crawl up a pants leg, get under clothes, and bite. In this situation it took revolutionary perseverance and the spirit of communist internationalism to endure.

The ants in the forest were peculiar. Often a mass of centimeter-long ants would descend from a tree at night and find their way into a hammock. The sleeping victim would be awakened by the ants' bites, at which time he had to either sweep them away or simply move to a different location.

Up and down the mountains they went. A slight lapse in attentiveness meant falling down and possibly sliding into a valley.

Thorns in thickets of wild grass; branches; thorns on vines; swarm after swarm of mosquitoes and flies — all poked, stung, and bit.

There was one kind of mosquito whose bite would swell into a large blister that itched to its core. It was unbearable. After several days the comrades' legs

were covered with wounds. Even after Ambassador Sun Hao and Comrade Fu Xuezhang had made it to Thailand the sores on their legs continued to fester.

By 31 March the food situation had become difficult. When moving they only carried three or four days of rations. Now they had three or four days of travel remaining.

The embassy comrades ate one tea tin of gruel twice a day. The Cambodian fighters had only leaves, wild herbs, and fruit.

No one dared hunt with the Vietnamese in pursuit and on their flanks. The comrades' strength was depleted, they were undernourished, and their health was deteriorating noticeably.

During the afternoon's march Dr. Pan Jiaqin was suddenly discovered missing. Fu Xuezhang quickly went after him and found him leaning against a big tree, vomiting. Supported by Comrade Fu Xuezhang, Dr. Pan rejoined the file. Wang Yongyuan's weight dropped from one hundred and twenty catties to eighty. His bones showed like kindling and his face was green-gray. At this time Wang's sciatica flared up. Others had to help him put on and take off his shoes and socks. Every step up a mountain was arduous even for those who were healthy. One can imagine the suffering that Wang Yongyuan endured marching his sick body onward. Wang stubbornly persevered, gritted his teeth, and gave his all to stay with the group. Later the Cambodians sent men to carry him on a stretcher. The Cambodian fighters' grain rations were extremely tight. They suffered edema increasingly. The Chinese comrades could not bear to see them.

When Wang Yongyuan was at his worst, all the embassy comrades extended caring hands. When coping with fallen trees, streams, swamps, and muddy tracks, everyone supported him, pulled him, or carried him on their backs. At night while others slept in hammocks Wang could only lie in the open air working hut. Often the pain kept him awake all night. Comrades took turn massaging him with "Tiger Balm" to ease his suffering. When Wang Yongyuan had gone seven days without a bowel movement and was distended, Comrades Fu Xuezhang and Zheng Jianfeng helped him dig the feces out with their fingers. Wang Yongyuan said emotionally: "Without the help of my comrades, without the united struggling collective, there would have been no way that I would have made it out of that endless primeval forest."

Wang Yongyuan is one hard Han. Even when his health was so far gone he never moaned and never yelled out in pain.

At dawn on 1 April Ieng Sary came to check on Wang Yongyuan. He brought with him several injectable vials of B12. This was a precious gift given how low Cambodian medical stocks were. Ambassador Sun Hao thanked him repeatedly.

Ieng Sary decided to stop and rest an entire day. He suggested to Ambassador Sun sending Wang Yongyuan to Thailand and then on to China for treatment. Comrade Wang Yongyuan displayed the not-afraid-to-die spirit of a Communist Party member and resolved to continue to work.

Ambassador Sun Hao continued to suffer from high blood pressure. Others had arthritis, hemorrhoids, or dysentery. Everyone provided mutual encouragement and mutual care. Everyone resolutely swore to complete the

displacement mission and to overcome the difficulties using the Red Army's climb over Snow Mountain and crossing of the grass plains that year as an example.

After a day of marching everyone's legs were aching and limp. They saw gold stars. But as soon as they reached that day's campsite everyone again reached into their souls to clear grass, erect an antenna, boil rice, and work with energy. Not one person said he was hurt or tired.

April 2. Life was more difficult and the environment more perilous. Motivation was clearly increasingly important.

On these days every evening everyone would sit in a circle fanning away mosquitoes and chatting after listening to the Chinese domestic news broadcast. Ambassador Sun Hao would lead by talking about the arduous struggle in the Yimeng Mountains, the long and abnormal times that China had just experienced, and the important speeches that Premier Zhou and Chen Yi had given at the Foreign Ministry. Other officials would describe from different perspectives the inspirational stories they had heard since young about the 25,000-*li* Long March. The speakers were lively and animated. The listeners listened with their souls. The stories dissipated fatigue and aroused honor and pride.

In the dark of night and the mist of dawn, one comes to respect the high mountains that the forest has adapted to. The eight diplomats' rumbling stomachs received great encouragement and invaluable spiritual sustenance from these historic stories of the revolution.

Not long after the Cambodian scout squad set off on the morning of 3 April two fighters returned at a run to report that one hundred Vietnamese soldiers were two kilometers ahead.

Ieng Sary immediately decided to change the route of march in a southerly direction.

On 4 April everyone's health was worse. They relied on their perseverance to continue to trek. To lighten their loads everyone kept just a few essentials and left behind dirty clothes, tobacco, even toothpaste and toothbrushes.

On 7 April they again began moving without a guide.

The dense forest was like a boundless sea. The map and compass in the hands of Ieng Sary determined the route of march.

Earlier in the month when they started the movement Ieng Sary said that the route was only three or four days. They had now walked eleven days and Ieng was still saying three or five more days were needed.

That morning while setting out Ieng Sary said that there was open terrain ahead. Something could happen, so everyone should keep silent and not fire carelessly. It turned out that not only was there no open terrain, but the mountain became higher as they climbed and the track harder going.

After eleven days of back and forth in a tropical forest everyone was walked silly. It seemed as if they had entered a maze. Now even Ieng Sary was not clear where they were or where they had been. He stared blankly at the compass in his hand, wondering whether it was functioning.

Food was in short supply. The accompanying Cambodian guards ate herbs every day. When time came to make camp and erect a sky antenna, the fighters

were too hungry to climb a tree. The Chinese radio operator secretly gave them biscuits, but the Cambodian army was highly disciplined. If discovered they would be criticized and punished.

The embassy comrades were still eating one tin of gruel per meal, two meals per day. Ambassador Sun and the comrades had requested several times to share what they had with the Cambodians, but throughout the Cambodian side did not agree.

Two scoops of rice per day was hardly half a meal, but compared to the herbs that the Cambodian cadre and fighters were eating it was luxury.

Readers may want to know what the stomach-rumbling comrades thought about. During interviews with the writer they stated the following:

Every night while lying in rocking hammocks our starving minds would get flustered. We would often think of Beijing's deep-fried dough cake with sugar, big fried dough twists, and sesame seed cakes.

We also frequently recalled scene after scene of life and work back home: waking up early to send children to preschool, then eating a fried dough twist; drinking a bowl of porridge; pedaling a bicycle to the ministry. Those times were rich without us realizing it at the time. No matter what was happening, whether marching or sleeping in a hammock, we felt that to be back home living in peace was the ultimate treasure.

On the march one of the young cadre had the following conversation with Ambassador Sun Hao:

"Ambassador, do you think about home?"

"Who doesn't? I think about my wife, my daughter..."

"When there's gunfire and artillery, are you scared?"

"Once you've been there, there's really nothing to be afraid of."

People think of diplomats as wearing tailored suits and clinking glasses at banquet toasts. In reality many things are not as people imagine them. Diplomatic personnel in Cambodia are in the same difficult environment as the local people. They suffer and brave death together. A country at war, whether it be on the high plains or the temperate zone, is a diseased country where the life of a diplomat is not inky arduous but life threatening. Moreover, diplomats cherish the motherland. A large number of new-era "most attractive people" come to the fore to work hard for the friendship between two countries' peoples, develop two economies, and develop cultural interaction.

On 8 April while bathing in a small river we happened upon the committee staff of the Cambodian Center.

It had been fifty-eight days in the Cardamoms. Where had the Cambodian Communist Party Center been? Where were the leaders of the Cambodian government? No one knew.⁴ Four times the Chinese Embassy had moved without knowing what was ahead or who was defending behind.

Who would have thought that today on the side of a small river we would run into the staff of Cambodia's central authorities.

During the midday rest period Fe Xuezhong and some other comrades were active around the embassy perimeter. They followed a mountain path for one hundred meters, rounded a large rock, and came upon a small river. The water

was clear to the bottom and when combined with the sun shining on its surface it was a sight for sore eyes. Even more surprising was that there were a number of men in the river bathing and grabbing fish. On the hillside was a sky antenna, a radio, and the intermittent “didi dada” sound of a radio [Morse] transmission.

Fu Xuezhong and Comrade Sun Hao observed for a moment from behind a tree.⁵ Their verdict: this was the Cambodian Center.

The comrades really were pleasantly surprised at the clear water in front of them.

Readers may not know that the water in forest depressions, ponds, and swamps is green. Wild animals urinate and defecate in it and not only can it not be drunk, but there is no way it can be used.

On the march each person had only one thermos of water per day. After getting up they would rinse their mouth with a gulp of water and then spit that water into their hands to wipe their face. When marching sweat soaked clothes that then dried while worn. The same clothes were slept in day after day. The sweat stunk.

Upon seeing flowing water this clear, everyone danced with joy. Without waiting for the ambassador’s nod they jumped into the water, gleefully washed a clean-water wash, and changed clothes.

Fu Xuezhong and Ambassador Sun suddenly discovered that Pol Pot, Nuon Chea, Khieu Samphan, and other Cambodian Communist Party and government leaders were bathing right in front of them. The embassy comrades asked the ambassador if they should go and greet them. Ambassador Sun said not to go and not to gesture either. Just act like you haven’t seen them so as not to put them in an awkward position over how to reply.

On 12 April after the embassy comrades had arrived in Bangkok they were told by comrades of the Chinese Embassy to Thailand that on 10 April a U.S. military attaché had told our military attaché: “On 8 April there were eight Chinese bathing in a small river in the mountains. I heard them talking.” This shocked the comrades assigned to Cambodia.⁶

The morning of 9 April the embassy comrades had just reached halfway up a mountain when they discovered footprints. Ieng Sary passed word from the front to the rear that fighting positions had been found. Everyone should immediately prepare for combat. Personnel dispersed; bullets were chambered.

Further reconnaissance revealed that it was the Cambodians’ own men who had caused the false alarm. A center unit of over one thousand men had withdrawn from Stung Kranhoung. The first thing they said when they saw Ieng Sary was that they wanted food. The unit commander reported to Ieng Sary that his unit had gone several days without food. Every day they lost personnel.

At the time the army of Democratic Kampuchea had approximately twenty thousand men on the Cambodia-Thailand border, but the food supply and sickness problems were serious. In one regiment of twelve hundred men only fifteen were combat capable. A division commander named Pol said tearfully that in the preceding months he had lost just fifty men to combat but nearly four hundred to illness. The fighters were indomitable. Some units preferred starving to death to walking away to become a prisoner of war.

The embassy personnel continued to advance at 1:30 P.M. This time they had a guide. He was a forward outpost called in by the army to guide.

Having a guide meant having a path and not having to walk the long way. Everyone's spirits increased suddenly like a car entering an expressway. The speed of march also increased considerably. Although it was a narrow meandering forest trail, they walked almost five kilometers an hour. At 4 P.M. a monsoon hit. The comrades braved the rain to press on.

At 5:30 P.M. word filtered back to camp in the bamboo on the side of the trail.

At 7:30 P.M. everyone groped in the dark to prepare his food — still one tea mug of rice gruel per man.

On 10 April Pol Pot met Ambassador Sun Hao alongside the river.

Two hours after setting off in the morning word came from ahead that Premier Pol Pot wanted to meet Ambassador Sun Hao.

Premier's Residence — Cardamom Mountains forest.

Meeting Table — Riverbed in the upstream portion of the Meinan River.

Host and guest to sit on a rock bench.

Premier Pol Pot watched the gray-templed Ambassador Sun Hao and the starved-looking Fu Xuezhong. He also saw the six unkempt officials sitting beside the river with jaundiced faces and taut muscles. He sighed a good long time and his two eyes filled with tears. He said to Ambassador Sun: "I've been thinking while I was walking. In the realm of diplomacy, what country's ambassador walks with the people of the country to which he is assigned, crosses mountain after mountain, comes deep into a mountainous old forest to help our righteous struggle?"

April 11. Pol Pot came to the border to send them off.

This day was also unforgettable. The Chinese Embassy to Cambodia would soon temporarily leave Cambodia.

At 11 A.M. the embassy's eight comrades arrived at a Cambodian border outpost.

At 1:20 P.M. Secretary and Premier Pol Pot, Deputy Secretary Nuon Chea, Chairman Khieu Samphan, Vice Premier Ieng Sary, and other Cambodian party and government leaders came to the outpost together to send off the Chinese Embassy's comrades.

There was no honor guard and no red carpet, but the ceremony was nevertheless warm and solemn. Pol Pot and the other Cambodian leaders stood in a line on the Cambodian side of the border and took a commemorative photograph with the embassy comrades and the lush forest of their homeland as background. Afterwards the line one by one gave tight hugs to the Chinese comrades. The Democratic Kampuchea fighters who had lived with the Chinese Embassy personnel for two months ran up together and shook the hands of the Chinese comrades. They were too choked up to speak.

The eight Chinese diplomatic personnel crossed to the Thai side of the border with tears in their eyes.

In fifteen full days and nights they had crossed more than forty mountains of various sizes and walked two hundred kilometers. At the end of the decade of the 1970s in the late twentieth century, in the tropical primeval forest of

Cambodia's Cardamom Mountains, Chinese diplomats had again completed a "Long March."

After our eight comrades bid farewell to the Cambodian leadership they followed a Cambodian army guide down a small winding road to the Thai border. Suddenly the sky changed and a massive rain fell. Everyone was drenched and their clothes stuck to their protruding bones. The Thai border guards and villagers thought that this diseased, emaciated gaggle of "Luoyang Ducks" were Cambodian puppet troops who had crossed the border, and they immediately surrounded and disarmed them. Making representations was useless because of the language barrier, and the Thai border guards proceeded to conduct body searches.

Later they came to Bangkok.

The eight comrades had justified the great trust placed in them by the party and the government. They did not fail their mission. They accomplished the task given them by the motherland and for this they should feel incomparably proud.

Notes

1. Little Hong is Suo Hong, Pol Pot's nephew and then secretary general of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (footnote in original).
2. Prei Phneou is an educated guess at the toponym represented by the Chinese "Beilufuluo."
3. Translator's note: the text frequently shifts between we, they, "the comrades," and "our comrades."
4. Translator's note: this paragraph is inconsistent with the earlier descriptions of meetings with Pol Pot and in particular the meeting on 26 February attended by Pol Pot, Nuon Chea, Khieu Samphan, and Ieng Sary.
5. Translator's note: this is the only time that the ambassador is referred to as Comrade Sun. This paragraph is inconsistent with the one before it because it seems to imply that in the preceding paragraph the ambassador is one of the "other comrades." Subsequent paragraphs are also inconsistent in that suddenly all the comrades are together.
6. This story is not so shocking when one thinks through the implications of the DK radio operator being at the bathing site. It would not be surprising for a surprised radio operator to inform the receiving operator that eight Chinese had just joined Pol Pot's bath. Such unencrypted "chatter" between Morse operators is often a boon to foreign signals intelligence organizations.

□