

Cambodia—an Outlaw Nation

Jack Anderson

The following are excerpts from Jack Anderson's extraordinary report on the ABC Television Network's morning news show, "Good Morning America" in early March. David Hartman is host of the show.

For two and a half years I have been haunted by a story that I pieced together from scattered reports. The story was disputed and denied when I first published it in 1975. But I now have overwhelming evidence from the secret files of the State Department, Justice Department, and Central Intelligence Agency. This is the most important human rights story of the decade. It is a stark, cruel story of mass slaughter in Cambodia under the Communist dictator Pol Pot.

I want you to remember that name, Pol Pot. It belongs in the hall of infamy alongside the names of Adolf Hitler and Josef Stalin. The Communists took over Cambodia in April of 1975. Pol Pot wanted to build a new Communist society. He did it by literally stamping out the old. The CIA has evidence that the Khmer Rouge, as the Communists are called in Cambodia, emptied the capital city of Phnom Penh. No one was spared. The sick, elderly, women and children were driven out with the men. They were sent on a tortuous death march without food or water, except what they could scrounge.

Thousands died of disease and malnutrition. Others were executed for malingering. Meanwhile Pol Pot began the systematic slaughtering of his fellow Cambodians. The files contain the testimony of thousands of refugees, but I am going to read to you from the testimony of a Communist executioner

who participated in the killings. Now this man's story is summarized in a six-page intelligence document—six pages of names, places, dates, and details.

His brigade was told it was Pol Pot's policy—I'm quoting—"to eliminate everyone in Cambodia who was not from the poor farmer working class." Bullets were too precious to waste on the victims. Hundreds of thousands were simply bludgeoned to death and buried in mass graves. The source used a garden hoe to batter people to death. Let me quote some more from this grim document. "Entire families were ordered executed because the surviving spouses and children would harbor resentment toward the government. The executioners had no remorse, since they had killed their enemies and they felt it was a great honor to be able to do so without facing danger." In 1976 the mass executions stopped, but I have an intelligence document dated February 13 of this year. It states, and I quote, "that a renewed emphasis has been placed on completing the execution of all people who are not from the poor farmer working class." Well, a few fortunate survivors have managed to escape into Thailand, but the border is laced with mines, barbed wire, machine gun nests, and gun emplacements. Anyone caught in this no man's land is killed on the spot. One intelligence source described it as more formidable than the Berlin Wall.

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DAVID HARTMAN: Ever since the end of the Indochina war there have been inklings that in Cambodia the new Communist rulers, the Khmer Rouge, have been staging what may be the most thorough and brutal social revolution in history. We say inklings because Cambodia has been sealed off to almost all outsiders. The only word comes from the relative handful of Cambodians who have managed to get out. Jack Anderson met one of the escapees recently in Washington and will tell us about him. Who is he?

JACK ANDERSON: His name is Pin Yat Thay. He now lives in Paris. He is an engineer. My staff has spoken with people in the State Department who knew him in Cambodia, and they vouch for him. Pin Yat Thay spoke to me in French through an interpreter, Monique Harwe.

Now we started with the Communist takeover in April, 1975. They immediately evacuated the entire capital, Phnom Penh, the city of several million people.

PIN YAT THAY (interpreted): I remember it very well. Everybody was extremely happy that day. We were celebrating the victory, but this happiness did not last. It lasted for only a few hours. At three o'clock in the afternoon we were ordered to evacuate certain areas of the city. The Khmer Rouge said the following: You shall evacuate the city for the next three days only in order to permit us to clean up the city. And also to avoid the bombardment by the Americans.

ANDERSON: As I understand the story, the sick and the elderly were forced out too.

PIN YAT THAY (interpreted): Yes, everybody. Everybody without exception. Civil servants, the civilian population, the religious people, military, sick people, and thousands of wounded in the hospitals and also doctors.

Even women who were pregnant. Nobody had foreseen this. And no shelter had been provided, no food. Those who could transport something with them could eat. Those who did not bring very much with them were forced to ask the others. There were a lot of sick people who died on the road; a lot of them had to be abandoned. A lot of people also were paralyzed. A lot of sick people who died that way.

ANDERSON: Pin Yat Thay then told me about months of tortuous forced marches. Wherever the marchers stopped there was forced labor, political indoctrination, and a complete indifference to human suffering.

PIN YAT THAY (interpreted): Thousands of people were there with me with my family and thousands of others who were ahead of us in this area of Karamum. We were in the middle of the forest, and I can remember very well it was raining. We had to sleep in the rain. We were shown a place and we were told here you shall build your own shelter, and of course we had no construction materials. We had only axes and knives with us.

And this means that for days we had to sleep in the rain. For days and days, and our food ration was only one can of rice for eight persons per day, and going down to one can per day for ten persons.

Of course people like me, I had jewels, and I can exchange clandestinely with the women, the wives of the Khmer Rouge, to obtain supplementary food. Those who were poor had nothing to exchange to pay for enough food. But I will remember every day the nervous wrecks we were and the executions that started during these days also.

ANDERSON: The Khmer Rouge systematically executed entire classes of Cambodians whom they distrusted, but even without the threat of execution it was difficult to survive. Take the example of Pin Yat Thay's own family.

PIN YAT THAY (interpreted): We were eighteen persons at the beginning, when we evacuated the city. I am the only one left. I have lost all my family. And I saw them die under my own eyes. My first born, three years old, she is the first one who was killed. My cousin and my brother-in-law have been taken away and executed. My father, fifty years old, too old to work, his food ration was cut in two and he died in his sleep. My mother was hospitalized, and in order to treat her my young sister feigned to be sick in order to be hospitalized and take care of my mother, and my sister died first, having contracted a contagious disease.

My other sister also feigned sickness to be hospitalized and stay with my mother, and she also died. And after her, her child, and then my mother. I can recall also my brother. He was a very strong person, and he wanted to be a good revolutionary. He worked very hard,

twelve hours a day, but unfortunately two days of hard fever were enough to make him die.

Then his wife died, and also her three children, and they all died. And then my older son, My Wan, he had an infected foot. One day the village chief came to me and said, comrade, you have very individualistic tendencies. You are keeping your child with you and this is contrary to our revolutionary principles. And this in a very menacing tone of voice. And after having heard this, my older son, I recall this very well, his name is Sy Dah, he volunteered and left in order for me to be left alone, and he was enrolled with a youth organization, but all this is very difficult. A few days later I was told that he had died.

I am terribly sorry, but when I think about my sons I become very emotional.

ANDERSON: Someone could write a very exciting and tragic novel about Pin Yat Thay's eventual escape. Here's how he described it.

PIN YAT THAY (interpreted): We were only two, my wife and myself, from my family, and ten other persons whom I contacted in the last village. We organized ourselves in order to reach Thailand. We knew that we were going to fail, 90 per cent chance we were going to fail, because we were separated by 150 kilometers from Thailand and by a whole range of mountains, which had to be crossed. Moreover, we knew there were a lot of Khmer Rouge around the village, as well as at the border. But in spite of everything, if we had stayed we would have died. If we left, we would die sooner, but anyway we might have a chance to cross the border.

So we left on the 24th of May, 1977, in the evening. We walked night and day. Unfortunately after two days' walk we were intercepted by the Khmer Rouge and we had to stay again and we were separated. Some of us were executed. Some others were lost in the forest. Myself, my wife, and another woman, we stayed together.

And a week later another encounter. At that time I was once again separated from my wife, and from the other woman who was traveling with us, so I believed they were taken prisoner by the Khmer Rouge and executed. I went on all by myself with one pair of pants, a jacket, no shoes, and not one grain of rice. For three weeks without a grain of rice. I ate leaves from the trees, and berries—I met also the Khmer Rouge three more times. The first two times I was alone. I noticed them.

I could hide and they left. The last time, about five kilometers from the border, they saw me first. And I was taken prisoner. The next day I was supposed to be executed, but during that night...It's incredible, I was shackled. I had two armed guards with me. But, thank God, I was able to escape, and in June, 1977, I arrived at the border.

ANDERSON: When he finally got to Thailand, the Thais put him in jail for a week while they checked out his story.

While I talked to Pin Yat Thay, there was something that troubled me. I asked him since the Khmer Rouge

were far outnumbered by their victims, why didn't the victims resist?

PIN YAT THAY (interpreted): I believe that the Khmer Rouge have thought about that too. This is why they have divided Cambodia into thousands of villages, isolated one from the other, always under guard, always monitored. And most of all, you have to work twelve hours a day, Saturday, Sunday. The food ration is such that at the end of the day you do not have enough to eat. You work at night too, and when you come home you are so tired you don't even have time to talk about politics or anything else.

And of course you are not free to move around.

ANDERSON: Are you telling me there was no resistance, no resistance at all?

PIN YAT THAY (interpreted): Yes, at the beginning, that is right, but now I believe there have been a lot of dead, and those who stay are afraid of dying. That is why they are fleeing to the forests and they have no transmission facilities, no weapons, but their morale is very high, and I believe that the days are counted for the Khmer Rouge.

If only we could communicate with the exterior, everything would blow up, the Khmer Rouge too, and they know it, and that's why discipline is terrifying. Thousands of families were taken away from their homes, and a lot of others had the same fate as my family. Thousands, millions of deaths, which is not imaginable for people like you, but this is reality.

Two and a half million I think is not an exaggerated figure, and how long is this going to go on? How many lives will be put to an end? And all this depends on you who are hearing me. They have to be saved. This massacre has to be stopped.

HARTMAN: Jack, it's incredible, you know. There are not words to...try to comment.

ANDERSON: An epic story.

HARTMAN: He said he didn't think two and a half million deaths was exaggerated. What do you say?

ANDERSON: Nobody has made a body count, but there are about 25,000 refugees and they're all coming out with the same story. We have even now gotten two or three actual Communist killers who have come out, been captured, or in some other way come out, and they confirm the stories. Two and a half million, I think that is right.

HARTMAN: What is the population of Cambodia?

ANDERSON: Six million. Nothing like this. Nazi Germany was not this bad.

HARTMAN: Who is doing anything about it, if anybody? We have the U.N., which is an organization that's supposed to....

ANDERSON: Cambodia has been completely sealed off, and in fairness to the United Nations it is kind of hard to focus on it. There are no television cameras reporting it. There are no foreign reporters, not even foreign diplomats there who are able to see what is happening and report reliably what is going on. Cambodia should be declared an outlaw nation, Pol Pot declared a war criminal.

HARTMAN: Jack, thank you.