

# THE DARK NIGHT

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The assault began at 10.00 p.m. on Friday night, 28th January 1977. About 300 Khmer Rouge soldiers had crossed over into Thailand, and attacked three Thai villages simultaneously in co-ordinated attacks. Defenceless men and women were cut down in automatic rifle fire and grenade blasts. Babies and children had their throats slashed with blunt knives. Altogether thirty one men, women and children died that night.

The motive for this brutal attack is obscure, although, possibly, the Khmer Rouge hoped to terrify the populations of all the Thai border villages, so that they would flee, leaving their rice crops to be harvested by the Khmer Rouge. If this is the case, then they have partially succeeded. A few villages have been evacuated completely. In others, the women and children leave their homes at nightfall, and return the next day. The men stay to try and defend their property against future attacks, even though they are poorly armed.

This massacre has shocked all of Thailand. I wonder what effect it has had on the rest of the world. The inhuman killing practised by the Khmer Rouge is nothing new. Working in the refugee camps, I often hear stories of the savage revolution that has taken place in Cambodia since 17th April 1975. Some of the reports may be exaggerated, but if only 10% were true, it is still a horrifying picture. It seems that the communists are trying to wipe out all traces of the old society, and create an entirely new one. This has involved slaughter on a massive scale. Not only have army officers and politicians belonging to the old Lon Nol regime been executed, but their wives and children have been murdered also. Even ordinary soldiers who owed allegiance to Prince Sihanouk, a nationalistic ally of the communists, have been hunted down and killed. Police officers, lowly government officials, teachers, students, anyone with education or holding a position of authority - all these are considered as war criminals and under sentence of death. The methods of killing are varied and read like horror stories . . . the lucky ones are shot, the unlucky are clubbed or bayoneted.

Starvation and disease have taken their toll as well. In the forced mass evacuation of cities after the communist take-over, people were left to die by the roadside. The sick and injured were forgotten ... the very young and very old were quick to succumb to the ravages of disease and hunger. Little food or medical aid was available, and the strong grew weaker, and the weak died.

Family units were split up ruthlessly, and the people segregated according to age and sex. Parents and children were sent to different places, never to see each other again. They were forced to work in the rice fields for long hours every day with only a small condensed milk-can of rice to sustain their weary bodies.

The new system knows no compassion, and those unable to work were of no importance. They were merely a drain on the country's resources, and so were eliminated. As people become more and more desperate, with no hope of seeing loved ones again, they attempt to escape. Many don't make it. They are intercepted by communist patrols and shot, or they step on the deadly landmines that have been planted along the border to prevent escapes.

In this month's Readers Digest (Asian edition), (English version - March 1977) - the atrocities carried out by the Khmer Rouge are set down in more detail. Read it, if you dare, but steel yourself first - it is not a nice story. Even in the heat of Bangkok, I shivered and my blood ran cold, as I read this account. I have before me the terrible newspaper photographs of the Thai children, whose throats were so recently slashed. It is not a pretty sight . . . . It has brought home to me the horror of what is going on inside Cambodia, this dark country, where night has fallen so completely.

It pricks my conscience, and I have to ask myself, "Have I done enough to protest on behalf of my fellow-human beings, whose only crime was to be born inside Cambodia?"

... continued overleaf ...

These people have lost all that, we, in the west, hold so dear . . . Freedom, Democracy, Justice, and in hundreds of thousands of cases, Life, itself.

Is there nothing we can do ?

We have a world body, the United Nations, of which Cambodia is a Member. If there is any conscience amongst the countries of the rest of the world, they should surely condemn this new society in Cambodia, yet they have not found the time to discuss this matter, nor to investigate these atrocities. Somewhere there is an answer . . . let us pray that God will alleviate this terrible suffering, and show us the solution, but let us also be practical and do something now.

If you feel as strongly as I do, I urge you to write to the United Nations to demand that these charges be investigated. If there is enough of it, public opinion can move governments.

I cannot stand idly by and let these people die without making some protest. . . . Can you ?

Robert Ashe

P.S.:

**EDITORS NOTE:** We urge you to write to the U.N. the address is . . . The Secretary General  
United Nations Organisation  
New York 10017  
U.S.A.

and also to your Member of Parliament.

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Further copies of this article may be obtained from Patrick Ashe, 62 Busbridge Lane, Godalming, Surrey.