



WITNESS TO HISTORY

THE JOURNAL OF CAMBODIA'S
QUEEN MOTHER



TRANSLATED FROM FRENCH
AND INTRODUCED BY
AMBASSADOR JULIO A. JELDRES

PREFACE AND EPILOGUE BY
YOUK CHHANG

THE JOURNEY OF H.M. THE QUEEN MOTHER
NORODOM MONINEATH SIHANOUK TO THE FUNK
LIBERATED ZONE OF CAMBODIA. 1973

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WITNESS TO HISTORY — THE JOURNAL OF CAMBODIA'S QUEEN MOTHER

The Journey of The Queen Mother to The Liberated Zone of Cambodia, 1973

Her Majesty Queen Norodom Monineath Sihanouk

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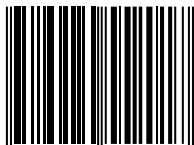
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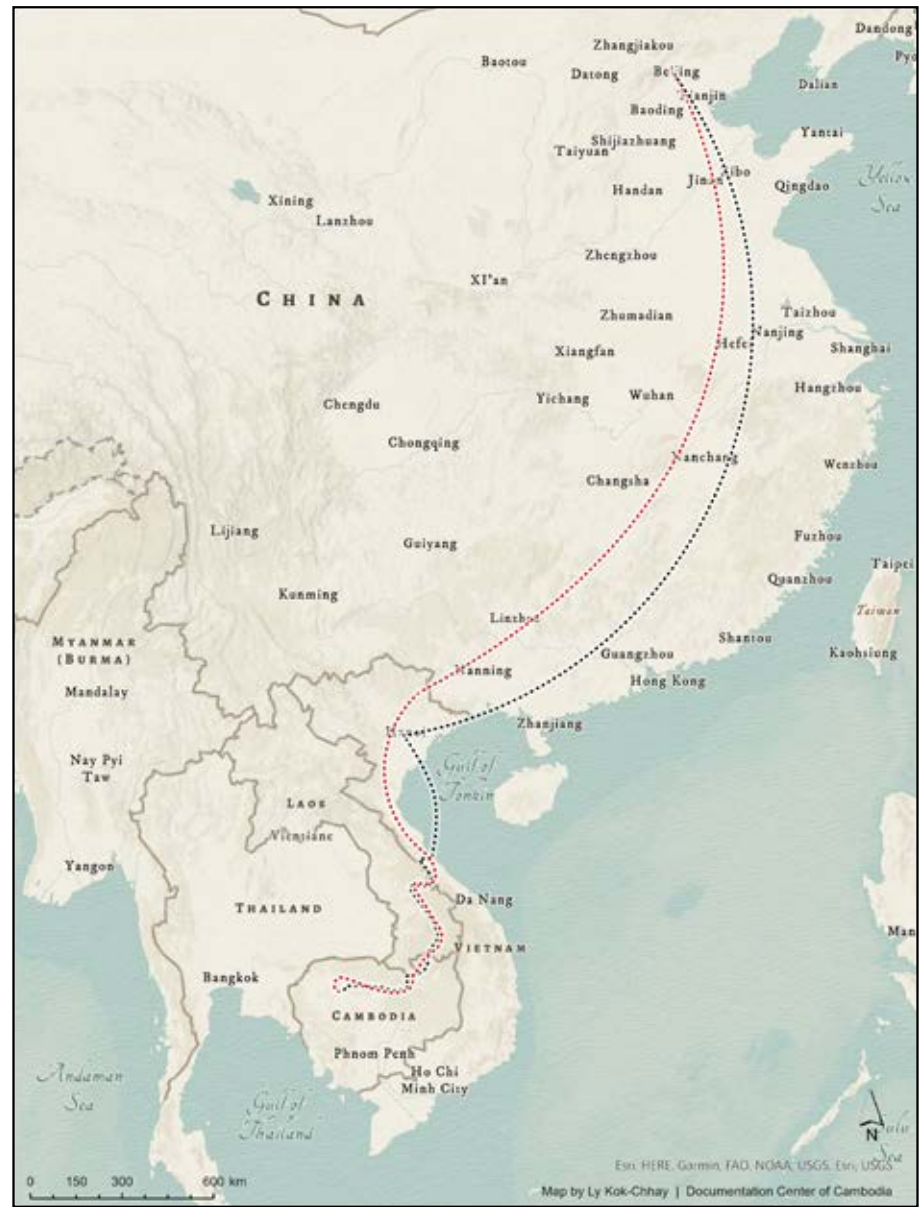


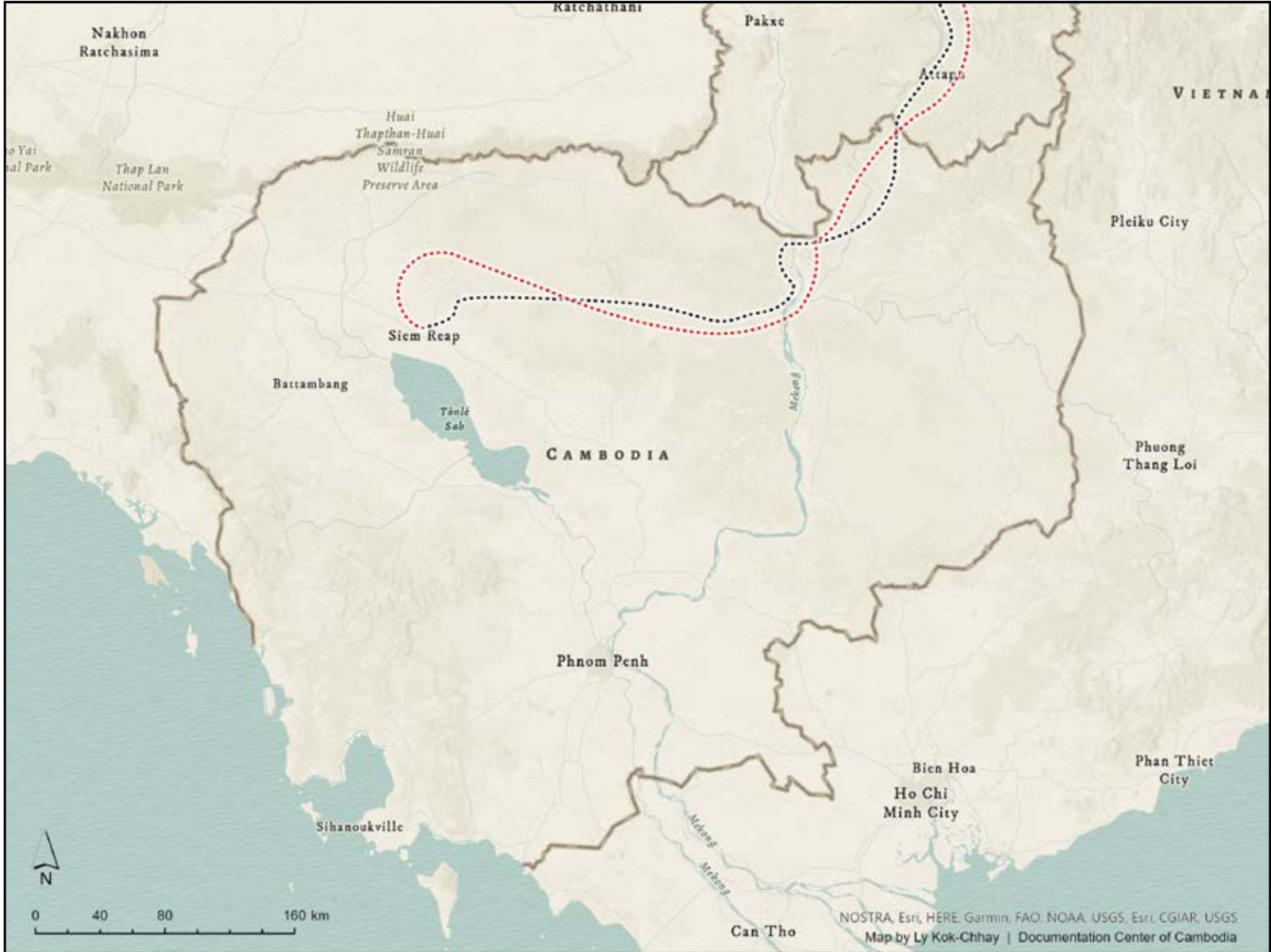
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TO THE FUNK LIBERATED ZONE OF CAMBODIA. 1973

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La piste Ho chi Minh longeant la "Grande Chaine" et descendant vers la frontière cambodgienne.

Photo du Prince SIHANOUK

PREFACE



This diary reflects the original, unedited writing of Her Majesty's thoughts, opinions, and observations during a trip that she took with the King Father from Peking to Hanoi by plane and from there mostly by motorized vehicle down the Ho Chi Minh Trail to Siem Reap/Angkor Wat province in Cambodia in 1973. The journey took one month, but the writing reveals a great deal about Her Majesty's grace and elegance amid the chaos that occupied Cambodia and the Southeast Asian region at that time.

Her Majesty has witnessed over seven decades of Cambodia's history, and she has been a prominent historical figure for much of this period. The writings in this diary provide brief glimpses into an important chapter of this history. Her writing is brief but insightful, showing how beauty and elegance can still persist in war. She writes with detailed praise of people who helped her and her entourage, and she deftly balances observations of the devastation perpetrated on Cambodia with poignant examples of beauty that magnify the surreal nature of her journey.

While Her Majesty offers a glimpse at the darkness and devastation of war, this is not her diary's most important element. Her description of events is inspirational and informative for today's political leaders and ordinary citizens alike, showing that the spirit of humanity can outshine the most perilous or dismal of circumstances.

She remarks on some of the hardships and dangers of her journey, but nearly all of her daily writings are balanced with a testimony on the wonders, triumphs, or curiosities of the landscape. Her insights were written almost a half century ago, but they are timeless because they speak to how Cambodians can find beauty and hope in any circumstance.

Her Majesty's role in Cambodia cannot be understated. She is an example of how to face tragedy and confront adversity—through elegance and grace to all Cambodians, rich and poor, and through integrity, honesty, and an undying commitment to the country. Cambodia's past will always be stained by turmoil, tragedy, and horror, but Her Majesty embodies the grace and resilience of the Cambodian spirit, through which Cambodian leaders can set a positive example and by which Cambodia can triumph as a nation.

YOUK CHHANG



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



This is the translation of a unique, historical document authored by Her Majesty, the Queen Mother Norodom Monineath Sihanouk of Cambodia in March-April 1973. As a Vietnamese leader stated recently, “Her Majesty is the only person from that historical period still alive”. Therefore, it is with great honor and pleasure that I present this English translation of her Queen Mother’s journal, which details the Queen Mother’s experiences and observations during her travels along the historic Ho Chi Minh Trail.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Her Majesty, the Queen Mother Norodom Monineath Sihanouk, for granting me permission to translate her journal from French into English and for allowing its publication by the Sleuk Rith Institute of the Documentation Center of Cambodia.

I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to Associate Professor John D. Ciorciari of the University of Michigan for reading the draft translation and improving the English.

Lastly, I express my sincere thanks to Mr. Youk Chhang and the staff of the Sleuk Rith Institute of the Documentation Center of Cambodia for funding the translation and publication of the Queen Mother’s journal.

AMBASSADOR JULIO A. JELDRES



THE PRINCIPALS

PERSONALITIES

HU Nim (1930-1977)

Born to a family of landless peasants. Educated in Kampong Cham and Phnom Penh; elected to Parliament in 1961; re-elected in 1966; fled to the jungle in 1967; appointed Minister of Information of Democratic Kampuchea in 1975; executed in April 1977.

HOU Yuon (1930-1975)

Born in Kampong Cham. Studied in France where he became involved with Marxist students; Served as Minister of Commerce and Industry 1958; and as senior official in the Ministry of Planning 1959; Ministry of Public Health 1959-60; Ministry of Finance 1962; Ministry of Planning 1962-63; elected to Parliament 1966; fled to jungle in 1967; Minister of Interior 1971; was killed in August 1975.

IENG Sary (1930-2013)

Sino-Khmer born in Travinh, South Vietnam. Member of Marxist group in France in 1950; teacher of history and geography in Phnom Penh; elected to Politburo of Communist Party of Kampuchea in 1963; fled to the jungle same year; established himself first in Hanoi then in Peking as Pol Pot's Special Envoy; appointed Deputy Prime Minister in charge of Foreign Affairs of Democratic Kampuchea.

KHIEU Samphan (1931-)

Studied in France in the 1950s. Elected to Parliament in 1962; re-elected in 1966; fled to the jungle in 1967; appointed Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Commander in Chief of Liberation Armed Forces in 1973; Appointed Head of State of Democratic Kampuchea in 1976.

KHIEU Ponnary (Mrs. Saloth Sar) (1920-2003)

She was born in Battambang province. Her father was a judge. Educated at Sisowath High School in Phnom Penh and in France. She became the first Khmer woman to have received a high school certificate in France. In 1951 returned to Cambodia and began publishing a women's magazine called "Neary". She married Saloth Sar (alias Pol Pot) in 1956. She founded the Democratic Women's Union of Kampuchea (a Communist mass front) in 1961 but did not declare its foundation. She fled to the jungle in 1965 and was not seen again until 1973.



KOY Thuon (1933-1977)

Little is known about Mr. Koy Thuon. In 1959, he was a reporter for the newspaper L'Observateur in Phnom Penh. He fled to the jungle in 1964 and became Party Secretary for the Northern Zone based in Region 32 (Province of Kampong Thom). In 1973, he was placed in charge of zone 304 based in Siem Reap. He became Minister of Commerce in 1976 and was executed in January 1977.

LON Nol (1913-1985)

Minister of National Defense and Chief of General Staff (1955-66); Commander in Chief Royal Khmer Armed Forces (1960); Prime Minister (1963, 1966-67 and 1969-73); President of Khmer Republic (1972-75) and leader of the coup which deposed King Sihanouk on 18 March 1970.

NORODOM Sihanouk, His Majesty (1922-2012)

Crowned King of Cambodia in 1942. Abdicated in 1955; elected Head of State in 1960; deposed in 1970; established the United National Front of Kampuchea (FUNK) in 1970 in Peking; Head of State of Cambodia in the Royal Government of National Union, established in Peking in May 1970; resigned as Head of State in March 1976; President of the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea from June 1982 to July 1990; President of the Supreme National Council of Cambodia from June 1991 to September 1993; reinstated as King of Cambodia in September 1993.

NORODOM Phurissara, His Royal Highness Prince (1919-1976)

Born in Phnom Penh. Studied in Phnom Penh and graduated from Faculty of Law of the Royal University of Phnom Penh 1958; served in successive Cambodian governments

as Secretary of State and Minister, including Minister of Foreign Affairs. Joined FUNK in 1972 and was appointed President of FUNK's Phnom Penh Committee and then Minister of Justice of the Royal Government of National Union of Cambodia. He was last seen alive in 1976.

PENN Nouth (1906-1985)

Close adviser to King Sihanouk. Several times Prime Minister of Cambodia between 1948 and 1969; Prime Minister of the Royal Government of National Union of Cambodia.

SALOTH Sar (alias POL Pot) (1928-1998)

Born in Kampong Thom province. Educated in Phnom Penh and France; joined Marxist group in Paris 1950; returned to Cambodia in 1953; fled to the jungle in 1963; appointed Communist Party Secretary North East Zone in 1968; secretly traveled to Peking in 1970; Prime Minister



of Democratic Kampuchea in 1976; briefly replaced as PM in September 1979; resumed PM function from October 1979 until June 1982; remained Secretary General of Communist Party of Kampuchea, died in 1998 (probably poisoned).

SON Sen (1930-1997)

Born in Travinh, South Vietnam. Educated at Phnom Penh's Teachers' Training College in 1946; studied in France in 1950; returned to Teachers' Training College as Director of Studies in 1956; visited Czechoslovakia in 1959; joined Communist Party in 1960; fled to the jungle in 1964; appointed Chief of Staff of the National Liberation Armed Forces; appointed Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense of Democratic Kampuchea in 1976; murdered on Pol Pot's orders in June 1997.

SOUPHANOUVONG, Prince (1909-1995)

Half brother of former Lao Prime Minister, Prince Souvanna Phouma, although a member of Laos' Royal Family, he was an active nationalist and fought the French as a member of the pro-Communist Pathet Lao. He joined Lao coalition government after independence but was arrested after right wing elements took over power in 1959. He fled to the jungle in 1960 and led the Pathet Lao forces in opposition. He was a Pathet Lao delegate to the Geneva Conference on Laos (1961-62) and became Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economic Planning in the resulting coalition. He rejoined the jungle struggle in 1963 after the failure of the coalition government. He became Chief Advisor to the Lao Government after a new coalition government was formed in 1974. In 1975, he was appointed President of the newly created Lao Democratic People's Republic. He resigned and retired from this post in 1986 and died in 1995.

VO Nguyen Giap (1911-2013)

Vietnamese general born on 25 August 1911. He had no formal education but received military training and went on to become the leading General of the North Vietnamese army. He planned and directed the military operations against the French that culminated in their defeat at the battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954. During the 1960's Giap controlled guerrilla operations against South Vietnam and the USA forces in that country. He planned the Tet offensive of 1968 and the final offensive against Saigon in late April 1975.

ZHOU Enlai (1898-1976)

Chinese statesman, educated in France, joined Chinese Communist Party in 1921 and rose to be China's first Prime Minister from 1949 to 1976. A pragmatic man understood the actions of Norodom Sihanouk and that Cambodia could not become communist overnight.



INTRODUCTION



On 18 March 1970, General Lon Nol overthrew the Cambodian Head of State, Samdech Norodom Sihanouk. This action changed Cambodia forever and for the worse. What had been until then a peaceful, moderately prosperous, and happy country became engulfed in the war that affected Vietnam and, to a certain extent, the Kingdom of Laos.

Samdech Sihanouk, who was then beginning a visit to the People's Republic of China, decided to fight back against Lon Nol's action and established the National United Front of Kampuchea (FUNK), in Peking (Beijing) on 23 March 1970, in order to better organize the struggle against Lon Nol and his American supporters.

FUNK welcomed all Cambodians of different political persuasions who opposed the Lon Nol coup. One of the first groups to recognize FUNK and to rally the Front was the then small Communist (Khmer Rouge) movement, whom Prince Sihanouk had kept tightly controlled through his policies in the 50s and 60s.¹

He had achieved this by recognizing the People's Republic of China and keeping in close contact with Chinese leaders—especially with his personal friend, Prime Minister

Zhou Enlai—despite some problems the two countries had encountered during China's Cultural Revolution in the mid-1960s. The Prince felt friendship with China was a guarantee for his small nation's security, sandwiched as it is between more powerful neighbors, Vietnam and Thailand.

China's support for Prince Sihanouk, which had begun in the 1950s, amounted to a considerable investment of prestige. It was also a sustained expression of divergent Chinese and Vietnamese interests, in view of Cambodia's longstanding and largely reciprocated distrust of all Vietnamese, Northern and Southern.

After the coup of 18 March 1970, the Prince took up residence in Peking, and his Chinese hosts treated him as a very honored guest of the highest rank. They extended support and diplomatic recognition to the Royal Government of National Union of Cambodia (GRUNC) as the only legitimate government of Cambodia.²

The Chinese were fully aware of the difficulties—as well as the ironies—of harboring a Prince in a socialist capital but paid the courtesy of broadcasting the Prince's statements

¹ Norodom Sihanouk, *The Cup to the Dregs*, privately published, 1985-1987, first part, chapter 6, pages 16-21.

² The establishment of GRUNC was announced on 5 May 1970. China, Vietnam, North Korea, and several other countries immediately recognized it as the legal government of Cambodia.



and messages to the Cambodian people while refraining from adding independent commentary or detailed endorsement.

Prime Minister Zhou Enlai had explained this Chinese attitude to the visiting US National Security Adviser, Dr. Henry Kissinger, in the following terms: *“As you know, and Samdech Norodom Sihanouk also knows, we would never want to turn Samdech Norodom Sihanouk into someone who would heed to our beck and call. If we did that, that would be like hegemony. Many of the views he expresses in our People’s Daily are not necessarily our views, but we give him complete freedom.”*³

This Chinese behavior may have been interpreted as a lukewarm reception to Sihanouk’s ideas, but it was more an expression of Zhou Enlai’s pragmatism and clearly indicated that Peking did not strive for pressuring its royal guest to follow specific Chinese policy lines.

But the Chinese leader, who was a true friend of Samdech Sihanouk, had also sensed the Cambodian leader’s frustration and shared his worry about Khmer Rouge extremism. Zhou had told Kissinger that it was *“impossible for Cambodia to become complete red now. If that were attempted, it would result in even greater problems.”*⁴

As he received no positive answer from Dr. Kissinger, the Chinese Premier repeated his appeal for a neutral Cambodia to other foreign envoys in Peking. Stephen

Fitzgerald, the then Australian Ambassador to China, reported to Canberra that he had been called to a late night meeting on 9 May 1973 by Zhou Enlai, during which the Chinese Premier repeated his appeal for Cambodia to remain a neutral country and to be respected as such by foreign powers. *“Cambodia could be neutral and if Sihanouk returned it would by no means be completely red.”*⁵

The 23 March 1970 appeal by Norodom Sihanouk was not an appeal directed to the Cambodian Communists but to the Cambodian people who supported him against Lon Nol. The Prince made no appeal to the Cambodian Communists, before or after the formation of FUNK, nor did he have any contact with the Cambodian Communists in Peking or Hanoi.

In 1977 and 1978, in his speeches broadcast by Radio Phnom Penh, Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot stated that he was himself in Peking on the 18 March 1970, the day of Lon Nol coup against Sihanouk. Pol Pot said that he had “counseled the Chinese leaders to advise Sihanouk to adopt a firm attitude against the Lon Nol group by fighting until the end against the puppets of American imperialism”.⁶

In his memoirs entitled *The Cup to the Dregs*, Sihanouk has written that he never saw the shadow of Pol Pot in Peking, whose presence in Peking at the time he doubts, and that the Chinese leadership did not take the liberty of counseling him to adopt a particular strategy.

³ Memorandum of conversation between Prime Minister Zhou Enlai and Dr. Henry Kissinger, Great Hall of the People, Peking, 18 February 1973, 2:43p.m. – 7:15p.m. Policy Planning Staff Director’s Files, 1969-77, box 371, Secretary’s Conversations in Peking, February 1973, Department of State Records, NARA.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Australian Embassy-Peking to External Affairs-Canberra, Telegram No. 336, 12 May 1973, Series A1838 Control Symbol 696/1/5/4, National Australian Archives, Canberra.

⁶ Pol Pot made this remark in a speech broadcast by Radio Phnom Penh in September 1977.



Sihanouk added that on the eve of the formation of GRUNC, Prime Minister Zhou Enlai advised the Prince's entourage in Peking not to name the new government as a "Revolutionary Government" nor the Cambodian State as a "People's State", as some of the Cambodians in Peking advocated.⁷

The Chinese leader felt that the best path for the Cambodian resistance was to struggle under a framework of legitimacy and continuity: Sihanouk's legitimacy as Head of State and the continuity of the monarchy illegally deposed by traitors in Phnom Penh. Zhou Enlai's thesis was that if the new resistance government did not define its orientation as royalist it would ipso facto grant legitimacy to the Lon Nol coup and would have lost any constitutional basis.

Zhou Enlai requested that the resistance government keep the Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia because it gave legitimacy and constitutionality to the new regime. Constitutional moorings and Sihanouk's huge popularity among the people were strong forces to use in the struggle against Lon Nol.

The Khmer Rouge leaders had their own private relations with China and had already spent years fighting in the jungles of Cambodia. They saw the tremendous opportunities that Lon Nol coup and US policies in Cambodia opened to them in their quest for power and immediately rallied the Front Sihanouk had established in Peking.

7 Sihanouk, *The Cup to the Dregs*, first part, chapter 6, pages 16-17.

Furthermore, Khmer Rouge leaders used the revered image of Prince Sihanouk among peasants, farmers, and government officials to recruit new converts to their cause. Many students, military and government officials left their jobs and their families and joined the "liberated zone" of Cambodia, which had been established by the Khmer Rouge, thinking that they were fighting to restore Norodom Sihanouk to his position at the helm of the Cambodian state.

Some foreign academic specialists on Cambodia, who have long held anti-Sihanouk views, have argued that Sihanouk rallied the Khmer Rouge movement immediately after Lon Nol coup. In fact, the opposite is the truth. That argument ignores the fact that the Khmer Rouge movement had never had any sympathy for Sihanouk's rule in Cambodia and had actively organized peasants' revolts against his rule.

From the moment he decided to resist Lon Nol coup, Sihanouk felt that for his resistance front to be credible and receive domestic and international support, he and GRUNC ministers had to establish themselves on Cambodian territory instead of having the resistance's headquarters in the capital of a friendly power.

A year after the establishment of FUNK and GRUNC, the Khmer Rouge leadership had taken over the leadership inside Cambodia of the anti-Lon Nol struggle. Khmer Rouge leaders continued to oppose, strongly but courteously, Sihanouk's idea of a transfer of GRUNC headquarters from Peking to Cambodia.⁸

8. Sihanouk, *The Cup to the Dregs*, first part, chapter 21, pages 2-10.



In his above-mentioned memoirs, Samdech Sihanouk explained that in his view, the Khmer Rouge leadership was opposed to his return to Cambodian soil for several reasons. First, the Khmer Rouge needed Samdech Sihanouk's name—and his frequent messages broadcast to the Cambodian people from Peking—to attract monks, students, peasants, and others towards their movement (still not revealed as the Communist Party of Kampuchea).

Second, the Khmer Rouge leadership used the legitimacy of Samdech Sihanouk and that of the monarchy to impose themselves as the “legal government” of Cambodia at the international level, thus reassuring the non-communist and non-left leaning friendly countries. In 1975, the Khmer Rouge would make use of that legitimacy to take over power in Phnom Penh.

Third, the presence of Samdech Sihanouk on Cambodian territory could have changed the perception of an important section of Cambodian public opinion, who followed Lon Nol and his allies only because of their fear of the Khmer Communists.

Fourth, the presence of the Prince as Head of State in Cambodia would have put an end quickly to the “Republican” adventure. This would have upset completely the Khmer Rouge's planning, which required a long-lasting war. Only through extended conflict could the Khmer Rouge extinguish the pro-monarchy and pro-Sihanouk feelings of Cambodians in the countryside and liquidate those loyal to Sihanouk and other non-communists who would oppose a total Khmer Rouge hold on power.

In Peking, Samdech Sihanouk was constantly asked by foreign diplomats and journalists why did he not move his headquarters to Cambodia and lead the resistance from Cambodian territory.

The Prince found himself in a very difficult position. Many countries that had initially supported the struggle of the Cambodian people did not extend diplomatic recognition to GRUNC or distanced themselves from the Cambodian resistance, regarding it as a simple puppet of China without any attachment to the Cambodian people.

On 23 March 1971, Samdech Sihanouk sent a telegram addressed to Khieu Samphan, then Deputy Prime Minister of GRUNC, who supposedly presided over the government on the liberated zone of Cambodia. In that telegram, the Prince pleaded the case for his return, or at least a visit to the liberated zone.

He explained in the telegram that it was of the utmost importance for FUNK and GRUNC to be able to show some photos taken in the liberated zone. This could prove the existence of the Cambodian People's Army, a truly Cambodian entity, showing that there was a true people's power in the recently liberated villages and farms of Cambodia.

Secondly, Samdech Sihanouk signaled that the propaganda machine of the enemies of the resistance had managed to tarnish the reputation of FUNK and GRUNC by showing that they were incapable of transporting their Head of State—Norodom Sihanouk— from Peking to the liberated zone of Cambodia!



Thirdly, the Prince pointed out that the political and diplomatic work outside Cambodia could not progress and benefit the cause of FUNK and GRUNC unless they could show to the outside world that they were not Chinese puppets and indeed had a strong attachment to the Cambodian people.

On 30 April 1971, Khieu Samphan responded to Samdech Sihanouk's request, stating as follows (excerpts):

"The telegram of Samdech Head of State, dated 23 March 1971, arrived on 19 April 1971. We convoked from the front and far away bases around the country all the other members of GRUNC currently in Cambodia and together we examined the questions you raised by trying to make an objective analysis of the situation.

We feel that the moral and material working conditions of the external part of FUNK/GRUNC are better there than anywhere else; possibility of participating in the struggle inside the country through the broadcasts of Radio Peking, facilities of contact with press and other progressive political forces abroad.

Regarding the current conditions of our struggle and in the interest of our people, it would therefore be indispensable that Samdech Head of State and the other principal members of GRUNC residing in Peking remain there.

The presence of Samdech Head of State in our liberated zone and that of the other principal members of GRUNC in our liberated zone would reinforce no doubt our struggle. We wish very much to welcome Samdech Head of State here, but we are concerned for his safety, particularly by the bombings

of the American air force, which seeks to destroy our leading cadres. The B-52s do not hesitate to completely obliterate our centers or regions suspected of lodging us".⁹

The Special Khmer Rouge Envoy, Ieng Sary, made the same basic arguments after arriving in Peking in September 1971. He warned of "the mortal danger" that a trip down the Ho Chi Minh Trail, the only way to reach Cambodia, would entail and argued that Sihanouk's life "should be preserved at any price".¹⁰

Samdech Sihanouk relates in his memoirs that he replied that in accordance with recent US-North Vietnamese agreements, the US Air Force had ceased bombing the Ho Chi Minh Trail and that the Hanoi government accepted responsibility for transporting the Prince to the liberated zone.

Ieng Sary, who had by then established his authority in the Cambodian resistance's circles in Peking, responded that the Ho Chi Minh Trail was full of unexploded bombs and other devices and that the Vietnamese could not assume responsibility for an accident that could happen during the trip.

He added that instead of Sihanouk going to Cambodia, the leaders of the Cambodian resistance could travel to Hanoi and meet Sihanouk there. If some of them were the victims of American bombs, Ieng Sary argued, that

9. Telegram from Khieu Samphan to HRH Samdech Norodom Sihanouk, Head of State and President of FUNK, 30 April 1971. Copy given to the author by Prince Sihanouk.

10 Ibid.



would not be devastating to the Cambodian resistance, as Sihanouk would still be alive.

Sihanouk responded that the point was not simply for him to meet certain political and military leaders from the liberated zone. Rather, the problem was that the resistance was losing all credibility, both at the domestic and international levels, by the fact that Sihanouk, as Head of State and President of FUNK, was not even authorized by the leadership inside the country to put his feet on Cambodian soil.

Finally, in desperation Samdech Sihanouk warned the Khmer Rouge leadership and the leaders in Peking and Hanoi that he would resign his functions as Head of State and President of FUNK if he was not allowed to do the trip, even a brief one. He even threatened not to participate at the forthcoming Summit meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement in Algiers.

This extremely serious threat finally put an end to the intransigence of Ieng Sary, Khieu Samphan and others. They agreed to allow the Prince to make the trip to his homeland in March 1973, but only for a month.

The trip took the Prince and Princess from Peking to Hanoi by plane and then down the Ho Chi Minh Trail, crossing Lao territory and into Stung Treng province in northern Cambodia.

During the trip, they met the principal leaders of the resistance within the country. He met Saloth Sar (Pol Pot), who had not yet disclosed his real role in the Cambodian

communist hierarchy and remained “hidden” behind the then better known Khieu Samphan (Deputy Prime Minister of GRUNC). He also met Hu Nim (Minister of Interior of GRUNC); and Hou Yuon (Minister of Information of GRUNC), who along with Khieu Samphan were the hosts of the Prince and Princess during their trip to Cambodia.

The three latter were known in western academic circles as “the three Ghosts,” as an Australian writer had claimed that they were not in the jungles of Cambodia but had been executed on Samdech Sihanouk’s orders in the 1960s. As will be seen, they were alive. Khieu Samphan today is in prison in Cambodia, having been condemned to life in prison by the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia, a tribunal backed by the United Nations to try certain Khmer Rouge crimes, while Hu Nim and Hou Yuon were executed by Pol Pot, the man that used to hide behind them, in the late 1970s.¹¹

The trip took place at a time when enemy planes intensified the bombing of Cambodia, and that is why absolute secrecy was essential and why not many people in the entourage of Samdech Sihanouk in Peking were aware of it.

¹¹ The Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) are also known as the Khmer Rouge Tribunal.







FIRST PART



THE DEPARTURE

THIS IS MY TRAVEL JOURNAL

I have never kept a travel journal before. But, today, I will start writing up my impressions because the trip, which we are about to begin in a few days' time, is a historic trip.

From Hanoi we will travel to the liberated zones of Cambodia, our beloved motherland, which we have not seen for the last three years. And to reach it, we will travel across the Ho Chi Minh Trail, which is well known around the world! We will then continue along the "Sihanouk Trail"! I am very happy to be able to do this trip because it will show that we are really members of the Resistance, and that we are not afraid to confront all the dangers to return to our homeland and visit our compatriots, which courageously struggle inside. I will try then to write the essentials, as I am not a writer, far from it!



22 FEBRUARY 1973



We left Peking (Beijing) at 14:30 hours. H.E. Prime Minister and Madame Zhou Enlai, as well as Samdech and Lok Chumteav (Madame) Penn Nouth accompanied us to the plane wishing us a complete success. Our departure took place in the most absolute secrecy so that even our two sons, Sihamoni and Narindrapong, who are studying in Prague and Moscow respectively, did not know anything.

We arrived in Hanoi at 18:30 hours, local time.





Arrival in Dong Hoi.

27 FEBRUARY 1973



After spending five days in Hanoi, making all the arrangements for the trip, it is today that our “Historic Visit” really began. Thus, at 11:00 this morning we took the flight, a Russian Iluysin 14, to Gia Lam.

Before leaving, we said good-bye to H.E. Prime Minister Pham Van Dong ¹² and to General and Mme. Vo Nguyen Giap. Everybody was very touched... The flight was smooth. We were able to see the seaside and, in particular, the province of Nge An, birthplace of the dearly missed President Ho Chi Minh. This province is very dear to the hearts of all Vietnamese. We landed at Dong Hoi at 12:30 hours ¹³. Then, we traveled by jeep to Truong Son, to the Base 559, where we arrived at 14:00 hours. There, we were welcomed by the commander of the Ho Chi Minh Trail. In the afternoon, we went for a boat trip in the Kien Giang River. It was very pleasant, and the scenery with the mountains of the Great Mountain Range at sunset was truly splendid! We were truly overjoyed by nature!

That evening, after an intimate dinner with the commanders of the Base, we attended a cultural performance. It was a surprise to see the high artistic level of the troupe. The performance included songs and dances. We ended the evening of the first day in a very pleasant way at the Base 559.

¹² Translator’s Note: Pham Van Dong was one of the founders of the Communist Party of Vietnam and Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and then, after 1976, of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam until his retirement in the 1980s.

¹³ Translator’s Note: Dong Hoi is the capital of the province of Quang Binh in Vietnam.



2ND DAY - 28 FEBRUARY 1973



Departure at 07:00 hours. After five hours of travel, with a brief stopover of 20 minutes when we reached an altitude of 1,008 meters, we arrived at Chaly at midday. It was the first time that we had seen the famous “Trail”, and we were incredibly shaken about. We were told that tomorrow would be worse!

But such beautiful scenery! During the brief stopover, we listened to the gibbons and admired the Great Mountain Range. We felt a little bit overtaken by this greatness, this beauty... The stay at Chaly was very pleasant. The place is very picturesque; there is a small waterfall in front of our chalet. The commanders of the place did wonders for us in a few days.

That evening we spent some pleasant moments, in the open air, exchanging ideas and listening to the reports coming from the frontline on Highway 9, where our Vietnamese friends achieved magnificent victories. There were several craters of fallen bombs near our chalet... To ensure our security, we are to continue traveling during the night. Thus, we left this magnificent place, Chaly, which is, as it was pointed out to us, the beginning of the Ho Chi Minh Trail.



At midnight, the evening of 28 February, we left for Xelanon. The night trip, which lasted nine hours, from midnight to 09:00 hours the morning of 1 March, was memorable.

The trail was even bumpier than that of yesterday. But we took the famous route 9, made famous in 1971! We saw Ban Dong, Ban Keo, not very clearly because there was not moonlight. The reminders of tanks, trucks... were still there.

This of Lower Laos in 1971 was the beginning of the end. We traveled by night because we would pass through some places that were quite open, not safe during the day. Our Vietnamese friends had the great idea of weaving underneath the trail bamboo branches that went on for kilometers, to make the trail less open. It was a gigantic undertaking! During the night trip, Samdech was sick while traveling through route 9. As far as Mr. Ieng Sary was concerned, he was not feeling well from the beginning of our trip. Heavens helped me, and I managed to tolerate the voyage courageously.

On the eve of our departure from Hanoi, on 26 February 1973, General Giap presented two revolvers to Samdech and me. We shall keep them in the Museum of the Resistance, after the liberation!



3RD DAY – 1 MARCH 1973



At 09:00 in the morning, after 85 kilometers en route, we arrived at Xelanon, in the Pathet Lao's liberated zone ¹⁴. There is a beautiful waterfall, with rocks and the water drew us to take a bath. But the doctors did not allow us to bathe in cold water after the tiring voyage. We were glad to admire the scenery and to take a warm shower.

During our stop in this place, bombers flew over us. It was the first time in three years that we heard them. This place reminds me of a spot in Cambodia in the province of Kampot, at Tuk Chhou, Kamchai, with its big, polished stones, and the clear water that streams in small waterfalls...

Tonight, we heard a huge explosion: we were told that it was a cluster bomb, dropped apparently by Enemy planes that did not explode. I forgot to mention that, as soon as we left the Base 559 to travel to Chaly, I noticed thousands of wild banana trees, which do not bear fruits but make the scenery of the mountains more beautiful. There were also huge ferns and other magnificent trees.

¹⁴ Translator's Note: The "Pathet Lao" was the short name in Lao language given to the Communist Party of Laos during the Vietnam War period.





A forest in Cambodia.



4TH DAY – 2 MARCH 1973



We left Xelanon at 07:00 this morning for KG4: Canoi. The voyage lasted six hours during which we traveled 75 kilometers. A very bumpy and dusty route but always with magnificent trees; each must be at least a couple of hundred years old. It was the Asian jungle with its lianas and trees with great roots. It was followed immediately by a jungle of splendid bamboo, which gave a natural archway to the route. We stopped for a few minutes to rest and take some photos. We arrived at KG4 at 13:00 hours. This time, our Vietnamese friends built for us a small bamboo house in the jungle. It was truly unthinkable that, all through our voyage, we found small but very cozy chalets to welcome us with a bathroom, toilet, etc... All the comforts like the towns! As far as the food was concerned, we enjoyed French food every day, with fresh bread and fresh vegetables! And all kinds of meats! Just like we were eating our meals in a big town!

In the afternoon, we made a brief visit to the camp named KG4, and we were able to see the measures taken by our Vietnamese friends to protect themselves from the bombardments as well as visiting the cinema, the kitchen, the club and the place where they collect the water coming from the mountain, which never seems to stop coming...

After dinner, we attended the showing of a film entitled "The young soldier". It was the story of a non-commissioned officer newly graduated from the military school, who rejoins the frontline during the struggle against the French colonialists in 1950. The film was well done, and we followed the story with interest. I must not forget to mention the anti-aircraft shelters that we always found next to our chalets, at each break of the journey, since departing Xelanon. Every day, from 12:00 to 16:00 hours the enemy planes flew over us!



5TH DAY – 3 MARCH 1973



We left at 07:00 hours, as usual. The route was particularly bumpy and dusty today and if I did not wear my helmet, which I always carry with me, my head would have been covered in bumps! Because we often hit the roof! The voyage lasted six hours and we advanced eighty kilometers. We arrived near the shores of the Sekong, at Senamnoy, north of Ban Phon, with tons of dust on us!

But the spot that welcomed us was beautiful, and our small chalet was placed under great trees with a small stream in front of it. It was good to take a shower! But during the shower, the enemy planes flew over us several times! My heart ran faster because I wondered whether I would make it on time to the shelter, built near our room - which we entered through a hole made on the wall - I did not know whether I would make it to the shelter before the first bombs fell! But nothing happened, and after flying over several times, they left! Umm! Another journey that ended well!

Here, like in the other spots where we have stayed, there are turkeys, chickens, pigs, and vegetable gardens. This made our meals always different and in great quantities. As we advance towards the south, I notice that the scenery becomes drier; there are no streams as before. Because it is already the dry season. All along the routes we have taken, we can see the craters left by enemy bombs; one gets the impression that they have really bombed these routes unrelentingly but vainly. Their bombs rarely touch their targets!





Resting in the Cambodian forest.

6TH DAY – 4 MARCH 1973



The night was calm, even though we heard enemy planes over us at 21:00 hours, something that is rather unusual since 22 February. Today we remain for another day here, in Senamnoy, and we will depart at about 16:00 hours because the route will be quite open and is better to travel at night, it is safer. Thus, this morning, while I wrote these lines, the film team who accompanies us was busy making the movie about our return to the liberated zones of Cambodia.

Samdech Head of State, the Special Envoy Ieng Sary, and myself, we are the “actors” of this film, while waiting for our arrival in Cambodia, where we will be filmed with the leadership, the people, the fighters, and the monks.

Young Vietnamese girls came to see me, and I tasted delicious coconut milk! At 13:00 hours while we ate, the enemy planes flew over us. I forgot to mention that we enjoyed a “succulent” grilled sucking pig during the stop at Canoi (KG4). It has been nothing but gastronomy since our departure!





After leaving Senamnoy ¹⁵ at 15:30 hours, we traveled fifty-five kilometers and reached Se Noy at 19:00 hours. We traveled through route 16, built by the French before the war. There we were able to advance forty kilometers per hour! It was the first time since the beginning of our voyage, as normally we can only achieve ten or twenty kilometers per hour.

The scenery changed a little bit, we could rarely see streams of water or green trees. As it is already the dry season and the route is very dusty, the trees bordering the route were reddish-brown. Sometimes, we encountered some spots that had been completely ravaged by the enemy's bombardments. The trees had been torn or burned to ashes, raising their bare branches to the sky... It was really a landscape of devastation, when this spot should have been very beautiful and greenish in the past. We could still see some big palm trees and other ancient trees, some several centuries old, with their lianas...

¹⁵ Translator's Note: Senamnoy, locality situated in the province of Champassak of Laos.



7TH DAY – 5 MARCH 1973



After a calm night, we marveled to wake up to a very attractive landscape. Because yesterday evening it was too dark to distinguish anything. In front of our small bamboo chalet, comprising a dining room and a small bedroom, with the necessary shelter next to it, we discovered a big river, with big rocks and waterfalls... It was very refreshing... underneath the chalet, the trees have dense foliage... there is a little breeze... we would love to stay here longer in this resting spot, but we must continue the voyage, which is far from being completed.

This morning, Samdech took a bath in the river. I was able to do a little bit of washing also. If everything goes fine, in three days, we shall reach O' Ta Ngau¹⁶, a village in the border of the Kingdom of Cambodia! The heart palpitates faster when we think that soon we will be able to tread upon our native soil, after three years of separation... This afternoon, after a brief nap, Samdech and I bathed again in the river. It was very refreshing, as it is very hot. We were filmed while crossing the river. As I write, I can hear several explosions. They are cluster bombs. It appears that many of them remain in the vicinity, thus it is dangerous to go too far from our houses. Enemy planes flew over us again this afternoon.

¹⁶ Translator's Note: O' Ta Ngau, village located in the province of Stung Treng in Cambodia.



This evening, we saw two films. The first was about the adventures and the heroism of a truck driver on the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and the second was a documentary showing the remarkable work done by our Vietnamese friends in charge of keeping the trail always in passable form, despite all the enemy bombardments. It was very moving and fascinating.

Afterwards, the Political Commissar of the region invited us to a meal with a group of his cadres. I was pleasantly surprised to find a beautiful table well decorated, with flowers, a tablecloth, cutlery, and very tasty dishes! We felt like we were in the dining room of a big Paris restaurant! The dinner took place in a very friendly and trusty fashion, and we listened to our Vietnamese friends relating the stories that took place on the trail. At 03:30 hours, we must leave Se Noy for the last journey on Lao territory, before arriving at the Khmer border.



8TH DAY – 6 MARCH 1973



After seven hours of travel through the most bumpy and dusty route of our expedition, we arrived at Seso at 11:00 am in the morning of 6 March 1973. After three hours of travel, we stopped for ten minutes for a brief rest. I thus looked for the two thermoses, which I had prepared before departing, one with tea, and the other one with ovaltine. But when I unscrewed the caps, there was not a drop left of these delicious drinks, the movements of the jeep had turned everything upside down! We all laughed!

A Vietnamese friend from this place brought us some fresh meat from a wild pig that he had just killed. This promised a good dish for later. Just before arriving at Seso, we traveled through some spots that were quite open, with trees that had been torn to pieces by the enemy bombardments, the earth had been ripped apart, blackened by huge bomb craters... What a devastation! We also traversed some marvelous undergrowth, whose leaves let through some ray of sunlight... We took a ferry to cross the Sekong River.




At Seso, we were able to leave the jeep and walked for about thirty minutes to reach our chalet, on the mountain. It is a Lao style house, always with a shelter. This chalet was well hidden under huge trees, and everything was calm. We were glad to have reached Seso as the route was truly bad, happy also to be able to rid ourselves of the tons of dust, which penetrated our clothes. I feel I should also say a few words about our driver, who is remarkable! He is excellent and knows obviously every inch of the Trail. Even when he drives at night, he could not use the ordinary lights of the jeep and so we used lamps whose light went downwards in order not to draw the attention of the enemy planes. We had the good fortune of having this driver. Furthermore, he is very kind and often inquires about our well being during the voyage.

As I woke up at 02:00 hours this morning to arrange things for our departure, I had a great surprise when I saw near my things an animal that looked like a rabbit, but which in fact was a huge rat, a very fat rat, which looked at me fixed, without fear. It appears that the mountain rats are very big; I had just seen an example!

We thus left Seso at about 03:00 hours in the morning, very happy thinking that in a few hours we shall be arriving at our homeland. I cannot describe the emotion I feel! I truly regret not being a poet, to transcribe in this journal, what I would feel, the moment when I shall see my homeland again!





❖ SECOND PART ❖
THE ARRIVAL IN
CAMBODIA



9TH DAY – 7 MARCH 1973



A return to our beloved motherland, after three years of absence! It is a date that I shall always keep in mind! After a seven-hour voyage, with a brief stopover to change and take a drink, we crossed the O' Ta Ngau River, which marks the border between our country and Laos, at 10:00 in the morning. As we returned to Khmer soil, we had the great joy of being welcomed by H.E. Hu Nim, Minister of Information of GRUNC and by H.E. Son Sen, Chief of the General Staff of the FAPLK, as well as two other authorities from the province of Stung Treng.¹⁷

Samdech and our compatriots embraced each other with much emotion and joy. Everybody laughed and spoke at the same time! Samdech said: "You do not know how happy I am to be again in Cambodia and see you all!" Their Excellencies Hu Nim and Son Sen responded: "We have waited for your visit for a long time and we are very happy to welcome you today!" "It is an historic day in the annals of Kampuchea!"

After all these emotional demonstrations, Samdech took a handful of earth and placed it on his handkerchief, and he embraced this sacred earth from his beloved homeland. H.E. Hu Nim also took some earth and placed it on Samdech's handkerchief in a very symbolic gesture! We then went for a rest in a small floating house on the O' Ta Ngau River.

¹⁷ Translator's Note: FAPLK: French sigla for Forces Armees Populaires de Liberation du Kampuchea (People's Liberation Army of Kampuchea).







The King Father in Angkor.



We spoke about the events that had taken place since the coup d'état of 18 March 1970. We drank Khmer coconut milk, brought by H.E. Hu Nim. Then, it was time to continue to our destination, which is located about forty minutes from O' Ta Ngau. Samdech and I were so touched and re-assured by this very warm and fraternal welcome of our compatriots, that we managed to forget all our tiredness of the last nine days! H.E. Hu Nim informed us that H.E. Khieu Samphan would welcome us at the end of the second journey and that H.E. Hou Yuon would be waiting at the end of the third journey!

In the evening, we attended an artistic performance by our Vietnamese friends accompanying us. We also often received messages from our friends in Hanoi and Peking. The messages were very affectionate and re-assuring for us....



10TH DAY – 8 MARCH 1973



Woke up at 07:30 hours after a good night—the first one on Khmer soil after three years—despite the reconnaissance flights of our enemies last night around 10:00 and again at 07:00 this morning. What a joy to be able to return home! The morning went fast while talking with Their Excellencies Hu Nim and Son Sen. Young Vietnamese girls came and brought me flowers on the occasion of Women’s Day.

Then, we were invited to a banquet given by the Vietnamese friends, which took place in a very friendly and casual atmosphere. In the evening, GRUNC offered a banquet to thank our Vietnamese friends and our escort, which we must leave here, as from now onwards it will be our compatriots who will take care of us.





King Father and Queen Mother enjoying Cambodian fruits.

11TH DAY – 9 MARCH 1973



We continued our voyage at 06:00 hours this morning, and after a journey of three hours, we arrived at stopover point T-50. There, we took our midday meal and a brief rest. The route was beautiful; there were some wild roosters that quietly walked around the trail.

At 15:30 hours, we left again to reach the spot where H.E. Khieu Samphan would be waiting for us. The Khmer forest was still beautiful, despite the dry season. It was almost intact and had not suffered too many bombings. After thirty-two kilometers en route, we met H.E. Khieu Samphan. Samdech and he embraced while talking and laughing at the same time!

H.E. Khieu Samphan told Samdech, “The Khmer people are very grateful to you! We think of you all the time and we are very happy to welcome you today. Come back often, and come back to stay permanently with us when it becomes possible!”





King Father and Queen Mother with their adopted pet gibbon.

With H.E. Khieu Samphan, H.E. Saloth Sar, Chief of the Army¹⁸, and some senior cadres came to welcome us. I asked H.E. Saloth Sar whether I should be seeing his wife, Mme. Khieu Ponnary, during our visit to Cambodia. He replied affirmatively. We spoke happily before taking boats, as night fell, to cross the Sekong River. We arrived at Siempang. There, H.E. Khieu Samphan hosted a dinner, during which twice the light had to be turned off while he was giving a speech because of the enemy planes that flew over us to go and drop its bombs a little bit further away.

This did not prevent H.E. Khieu Samphan continuing his speech in darkness! There was a warm atmosphere! The night went well, despite the enemy planes that bombed the neighborhood. Since our arrival in Cambodian territory, we heard more and more the bombardment by the enemy planes. It increases every day.

¹⁸ Translator's Note: Saloth Sar. Later to be known as Pol Pot, Secretary General of the Communist Party of Cambodia. Through the trip of Samdech and Princess Sihanouk, he kept a very low profile thus conveying the impression that he was not the most senior Khmer Rouge cadre.



12TH DAY – 10 MARCH 1973



We left at 03:30 hours this morning for Thnal Totung. At about 08:00 hours, we had a burst tire. While they changed it, we could hear the enemy planes. Then, while traveling through National Highway 13, we stopped several times to take photos next to the kilometer-markers, where it was marked: Kratie-Phnom Penh. From 03:30 hours this morning until 08:00 hours, we traveled through routes in the forest. From 08:00 to 09:30 hours in the morning, we traveled through National Highway 13. We traveled in a Land-Rover. H.E. Khieu Samphan, H.E. Hu Nim and a fighter were seated in the back, while Samdech and I we were seated next to the driver. How beautiful is our forest, with its green, auburn leaves?

Upon our arrival at Thnal Totung, in a corner of the forest, we had the joy of seeing again Mme. Hou Yuon ¹⁹, who announced that her husband would meet us at the next stopover point. She is in excellent health and very optimistic. She prepared for us an excellent Cambodian meal!

In the afternoon, H.E. Khieu Samphan gave us a briefing. Then, Samdech presented some of the gifts we had brought from Peking and Hanoi, to the leaders and fighters. Then, we continued to shoot the movie of our trip.

Since 11:00 this morning, and during the whole afternoon, the enemy planes flew over our spot without respite, but luckily, without knowing that we were there, and they dropped their bombs further down. We could hear the explosions though. It was near Sekong and the Sihanouk Trail.

¹⁹ Translator's Note: Mme. Hou Yuon, wife of Mr. Hou Yuon, Minister of Interior of GRUNC, was one of the so-called "Ghosts", who had been reported to have been executed by Samdech Sihanouk in the 1960s by an Australian academic. He had in fact gone to the forest and was one of the first ones to take up arms against Lon Nol. The Khmer Rouge executed him in August 1975.







13TH DAY – 11 MARCH 1973



Woke up at 07:00 hours with the birds singing! Having spent an excellent night despite the enemy planes because we were truly exhausted. We are becoming used to life in the forests, since our departure from Hanoi.

Being Khmers, our forests seem to us the most beautiful in the world. Mrs. Hou Yuon told me that life in the forest was quite convenient for her, and for all the other fighters. In fact, I had met Mrs. Hou Yuon in Phnom Penh before the war she had been skinny and pale, and now I found her well plump and darkened by the sun. All of the Khmer ladies I met were in good health and full of optimism.

Since this morning and until the afternoon, the enemy planes have had many activities, and passed over our heads quite often, to go and bomb about 10 kilometers further away. They are really starting to annoy us!

According to a cadre coming from Kratie, it is the first time in three years that they have seen so many planes in this region, which before was calm.

Our enemies must have had doubts about our return to Cambodia. That is why they are looking for us! In the afternoon, the bombs fell only a few kilometers from us. Our compatriots thus decided to move us immediately from the spot, as it had become “dangerous”. Profiting from a brief calm in the bombing, we





The Queen Mother, seating in a hammock, talking to Mme. Hou Yuon.



The Queen Mother with Mme. Hou Yuon.



departed from the spot at 18:30 hours, in the same white Mercedes completely covered by tree branches and leaves that we used yesterday because the Land-Rover did not work anymore! We took National Highway 13, but there were several stops because of the enemy planes. Our fighters were posted all along the route, and every time they heard the planes, they shot twice to warn us.

I must say that thanks to the moonlight, the driver of our Mercedes was able to travel with all the lights off. We finally arrived at the banks of the Mekong. There we took a motorboat to cross the river, which was calm. When we arrived on the other side, the enemy planes returned. We stayed in our jeeps, under the trees, quietly eating watermelons that had been brought by our comrades. Had the airmen over our heads known that they would have had a “heart attack”!

During our crossing of the Mekong, we passed in front of the town of Stung Treng. But we could not see anything; it was rather dark, only a few lights coming from some houses. After the planes went away, we continued our voyage, in the jeeps lend to us by our Vietnamese friends, traveling always with the lights off, we arrived at Anlong Kramuon, in the forest.

As our personal effects were left behind, we slept in hammocks until the early morning. This is again a new experience for us! I did not know that it could be so cold in the forest during March! I shivered during this night and the endless noise of the enemy planes prevented me from enjoying the rest. One would think that we attract the planes like honey attracts the flies!



14TH DAY – 12 MARCH 1973



Departure at 06:00 hours this morning, we are leaving the province of Stung Treng and entering that of Preah Vihear. The forest is splendid! There are these plants that resemble a kind of palm tree and that are very useful in the making of roofs, partitions, water containers, fans, sacs, mats... The route that our fighters just constructed is good, and we arrived before the scheduled time at our destination of Kampong Krum. During the voyage we had to stop several times because of the enemy planes. One time, we were even forced to abandon our jeeps to take refuge under the trees, in a small, dried stream.

Kampong Krum is a pretty spot, well shaded! The small hut built for us was made with precisely this kind of palm tree. Our cameramen shot many sequences in this hut, and Samdech took a bath Cambodian style, by pouring water over his body from a big jar made of baked clay. At 19:00 hours, we left this stopover point, and during the voyage we had to stop several times, even though we were traveling with the lights off. The moonlight guided us. Our enemies bombed only a few kilometers from our route, to our right. They were unrelenting in their bombing for hours, by launching flares and targeting, it appears, a dispensary. And this has been going for three nights already. Maybe they thought we were there! They really want us!



Upon our arrival at the scheduled stop, at 22:30 hours, Samdech was very warmly welcomed by H.E. Hou Yuon, the so-called “third ghost”! They embraced and spoke happily to each other... Everybody was very happy. We found H.E. Hou Yuon in excellent health, he had put on weight and spoke more gaily than before the war. With him there was also Mr. Nuon Chea, a senior fighter ²⁰ .

During the whole night, the enemies in their C-130 came to drop their bombs near our camp. Everybody was awakened and stayed near the shelters.

But after half an hour, we could hear that they continued bombing in another spot we went back to bed. Maybe they confused some trees with our fighters? The following day, 13 March, our compatriots told us that our enemies had been unrelenting all night targeting some sugar palm trees which were located near an abandoned camp of our resistance. The result was that this morning they could not offer us sugar palm juice!

²⁰ Translator’s Note: Nuon Chea was a Thai educated and Hanoi trained communist ideologue. He occupied several Ministerial and Party posts in 1998 rallied to the current Cambodian government. He died in prison in 2019, having been brought to justice and condemned to life in prison.



15TH DAY – 13 MARCH 1973

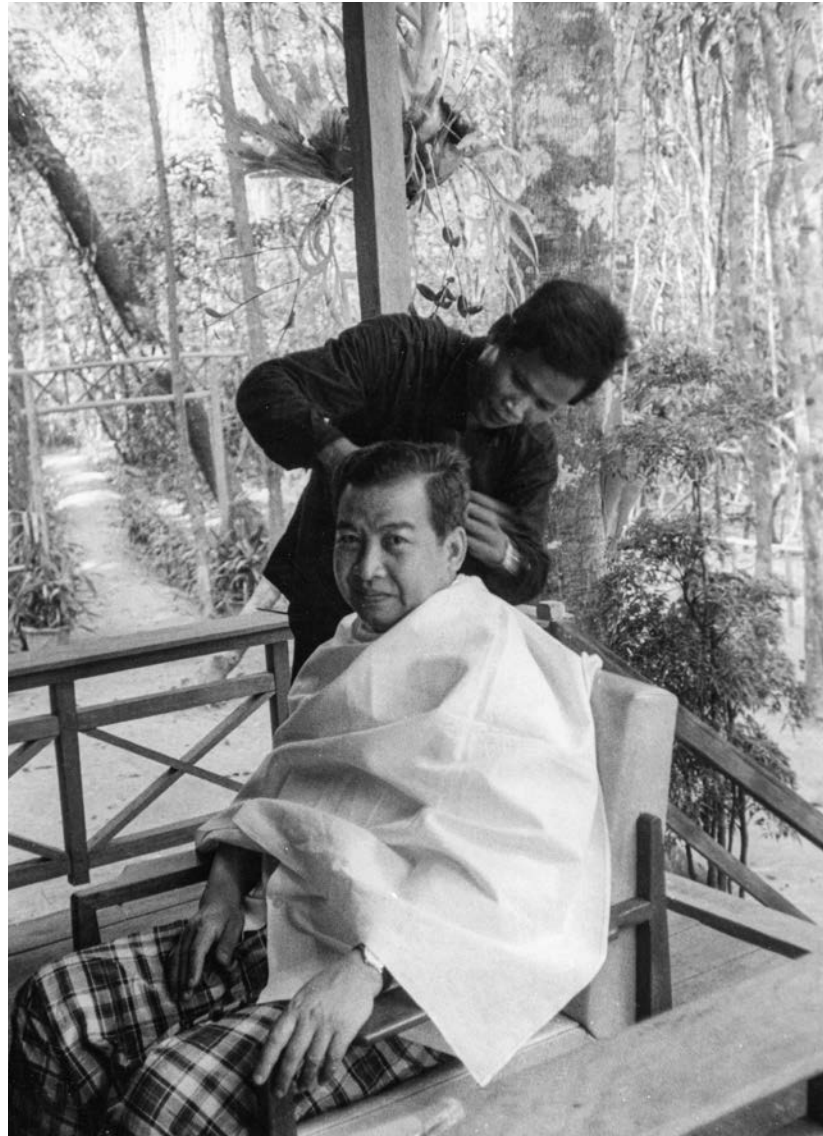


It is exactly two weeks since we left Hanoi. I am now used to this wandering life, from one forest to the other, to the night departures, to the bumpy and dusty routes and trails... It is the life that our fighters have led for the last three years already. To be able to share this kind of life with them for some weeks has strengthened our unity, made our feelings stronger, and increased our mutual esteem.

Later, we shall be able to say with pride that we have experienced—even for a short time—the life of the “maquis”. We felt a profound happiness to be able to live with our fighters; to share the same dangers. Even the savage acts of the enemy planes cannot alter this feeling.

Samdech and I were checked every day by two male doctors and one female doctor, placed at our disposal by H.E. Khieu Samphan. Everything is fine regarding our physical and moral health. Failed departure this evening. At about 19:00 hours, the leadership of the Interior, led by H.E. Khieu Samphan, came to ask us to delay by a day our departure because, according to information received, the enemy is undertaking many activities in the air over the route which we must take for our voyage. Tonight, the flights seem to have diminished a little bit, but it seems they have unrelentingly bombed the spots where our fighters are struggling, in Takeo, around Phnom Penh and on national highway 1.





The King Father has a haircut at the Phnom Koulen chalet.

16TH DAY – 14 MARCH 1973



This morning, we had some discussions with Their Excellencies Khieu Samphan, Hou Yuon, Hu Nim and Son Sen. We continued shooting the film and took some photos. From time to time, enemy planes flew overhead.

We left the spot at 18:30 hours and made a few stops during the journey because of the enemy planes, particularly the C-130s. We have already covered two of our stopover points and we arrived at the third, O' Kbal Chhlous, which makes more than three hundred kilometers. This stopover point, where we arrived at 01:00 hours of the morning, is in the province of Siem Reap. We have traveled through three provinces since our arrival in Cambodia: Stung Treng, Preah Vihear and Siem Reap.



17TH DAY- 15 MARCH 1973



An amusing event took place at about 05:00 hours this morning. We were brusquely woken up by our two Khmer bodyguards, Hong and Pang, in charge of our security. They made us enter the anti-aerial shelter because one C-130 was flying over us. They told us that the plane had launched flares very near our spot. In fact, we could see a glow in the sky. Seated inside the shelter, we wondered how our enemies managed to find us. Because we were very well hidden by this beautiful forest of Siem Reap²¹ !

A few seconds later, the Chief of the General Staff, Son Sen, came in and told us that the plane had gone and that the glow we had seen in the sky did not come from the flares: it was simply about to rain! We all laughed! One hour later, we heard the rumbles of thunder; flashes of lightning and the rain came! It was the first rain of the year, what Cambodians call “the rain of the mangos”. It was also the first time that we had rain “in Cambodia” since our absence.

²¹ Translator’s Note: Siem Reap is the Cambodian northern province where the world-famous Angkor temple is located.







The Queen Mother, seating in a hammock, writes her journal.



It is still raining as I write... In the afternoon, we presented gifts to the fighters who will wait here until our return. At 18:30 hours, profiting of a calm sky, covered by clouds, we continued our voyage. Traveling always with lights off, we arrived without mishap, after five and a half hours of journey, to Phnom Koulen, which means: “The mountain of the lychees”.

What emotion one feels seeing again this place! We were warmly welcome by H.E. Koy Thuon and his wife, and by Madame Khieu Ponnary, President of the Democratic Women’s Union of Cambodia, as well as by several hundred fighters of both sexes.

Amid the resounding clapping and after having shaken many hands, we walked between two lines of fighters and arrived at a small wooden house, on piles, covered with thatch. It had been built specially for us. It is our “White House” in liberated zone! I adore this Khmer style construction.

The inside was also pretty. It had been decorated well. There is a study, a small living room and a curtain separates the study and the living room from the bedroom, in which there are one bed, one drawer, one dressing table and one “Kdar Ngoeur”²² .

There were even carpets on the floor, curtains in the small windows, green plants, and a big silver bowl with water... Really, we are very spoiled by our brothers of the Interior. Since we began this voyage, it is the first time that we had such a beautiful house at our disposal. It is buried in a case of greenery, of ancient trees; it is even surrounded by a fence and suspended orchids at the entrance! I would love to be able to stay here with Samdech, until the liberation! Alas, we should soon leave because our mission is to work outside our homeland for the Front and the People. But let us not talk about the departure—that is too sad!

²² Translator’s Note: Kdar Ngoeur is a typical Cambodian furniture for the bedroom like a wooden bed.



18TH DAY – 16 MARCH 1973



Our first night at Phnom Koulen went smoothly. I did not hear the planes. At about 07:00 hours this morning, we were awoken by strange cries. Leaving the house, we saw two gibbons and a black bear! It was Mr. Koy Thuon who had them brought to us to keep us company!

At about 10:00 hours, we all went to the waterfalls. All the leaders of the Interior and other cadres accompanied us. It gave me great pleasure to see all these places again because I had often come here in the past. We took many photos and continued shooting the film. In the afternoon, we visited the river, with its sculpted stones. Samdech took a bath with pleasure, but the water was icy! I did not risk it!





The King Father and Queen Mother in Phnom Koulén.





❖ THIRD PART ❖
MEETING THE PEOPLE





19TH DAY – 17 MARCH 1973



This morning, at 08:00 hours, Samdech had a meeting with the leaders of the Resistance. The meeting ended at 11:30 hours. I had two hours of very friendly conversation myself with Mme. Khieu Ponnary, President of the Democratic Women's Union of Cambodia, and Mesdames Hou Yuon and Koy Thuon.

We then joined them, and we did a few shots for the film about our stay in Phnom Koulen. There are fewer planes flying over us here. Yesterday evening, the BBC radio announced that the enemy had threatened North Vietnam with reference to the so-called violations of the cease-fire! When it is the imperialists and their lackeys who have violated the agreements from the beginning! Would they dare to bomb North Vietnam again? One cannot rule out anything from them.

At 15:00 hours, Samdech continued his meeting with our brothers of the Resistance, and myself, at 16:00 hours, I again met my Khmer sisters of the Resistance. These meetings are very useful; we exchanged news and views and adopted a common line of action. This morning we also visited the kitchens, which are very neat and clean. Our fighters, who oversee them, rigorously apply the rules of hygiene. And their dishes are very successful!



In the evening, at about 19:00 hours, an artistic performance took place. The open-air theatre was hidden in a magnificent spot, under huge trees with lianas that created a natural décor of an incomparable beauty! Our arrival was greeted by a guard of honor composed of two rows of fighters and Khmer welcoming music played by very young but very good musicians. The spectacle began with a speech by H.E. Hu Nim and a song of welcome composed to honor Samdech. It was a varied spectacle. The songs and the dances portrayed the courageous struggle of the Khmer people against the imperialists and their lackeys, the daily life in liberated zone, the production, the resounding victories of Pochentong, the songs and dances of the minorities. It was very successful. Everybody laughed and enjoyed it very much. At the end, we went up to the stage to congratulate the artists and presented them with souvenirs. Samdech made an improvised speech congratulating and thanking them for their patriotism and the high level of the performance, which pleasantly surprised us.





20TH DAY – 18 MARCH 1973



Exactly three years ago today, the traitor Lon Nol staged his coup d'état, undermining peaceful, neutral, and independent Cambodia and bringing all kinds of suffering to our Country and People. Three years ago, we were very shaken and full of sadness. But today, after three years of heroic struggle undertaken by our people, we can say that the final victory is at hand. That is why we are happy to be back in our beloved motherland with our compatriots, and to be able to celebrate, together with the Resistance within the country, the third anniversary of the foundation of FUNK. We are also sad to recall the tremendous suffering befallen on our compatriots still living in the zones controlled by the traitors.

This morning, a big meeting took place at the same spot where the spectacle had taken place the previous evening. About 10,000 persons participated: the monks, fighters, and the people. At about 07:00 hours, Samdech arrived and reviewed, in the company of H.E. Khieu Samphan, the elite troops and the arms taken from the enemy. All the other leaders of the Resistance --Their Excellencies Hou Yuon, Hu Nim, Son Sen, and others--followed them. The fighters sang our national anthem --The Nokoreach. The meeting began at 07:30 hours with the traditional Buddhist prayer known as "Chayanto" by ten monks welcoming Samdech. It was followed by speeches by H.E. Khieu Samphan, a monk, a representative of the people and H.E. Son Sen.





Finally, Samdech gave a speech, which was often interrupted by exclamations of happiness and slogans of the fighters celebrating the return of Samdech and the third anniversary of FUNK.

After the meeting, Samdech had very friendly discussions in the stand of honor with the monks and the representatives of the people. Amid the acclamations of the crowd, Samdech and I then left the spot. It was a truly exhilarating morning, for which we had all waited for a long time!

At 16:00 hours, Samdech and I and all the leaders of the Resistance, men and women, went to the temple to pay our respects and pray to the Grand Statue of the Reclining Buddha, sculpted on the rock. The site is magnificent and reminds us of so many memories of happy days... Because we often came here, before the 18 March 1970! The Grand Reclining Buddha, sculpted on the rock, measures about 30 meters in length and about 6 or 7 meters in height. I prayed with fervor for the country, for peace and for my family. We took souvenir photos at the bottom of the rocks.

In the evening, there was a dinner offered by GRUNC in honor of Samdech. All the leaders, men, and women were present. The atmosphere was very cordial and warm! It was very joyous! Our visit to the liberated zone has reinforced our unity with our brothers inside the homeland, unity without ruptures, and which shall last forever. We swore that to each other.





The Queen Mother at Phnom Koulen with Mme. Khieu Ponnary (left) and Mme. Hou Yuon (right).









❖ FOURTH PART ❖
RETURN TO CHINA



21ST DAY – 19 MARCH 1973



Today is also a great day for us. We left Phnom Koulen at 03:00 hours this morning, and, after two and half hours of journey, we arrived at ... Angkor! Cradle of our civilization, symbol of our Nation! Angkor, which we were able to liberate from the first months of our struggle in June 1970! I cannot find the words to describe, as I would like, the emotion Samdech and I felt when we left the car.

Dear Angkor, marvelous temple, you raise toward heavens your majestic towers at the first light of dawn! To see you again, we have made this long and dangerous voyage! We did not even fear the Lon Nol troops who were only 1,500 meters from us. But we had to come here because the whole world would then know that we really visited the liberated zone, as we were able to shoot a film and take photos--and almost under the nose of our enemies. The film and photos will be irrefutable proof. While we visited with emotion the temple, we heard our enemies shooting into the sky, very nearby. It would appear that they always do that to give themselves courage! Thus, they amuse themselves and waste the bullets given to them by their masters, without any other outcome than making us laugh! It is pitiful!





The Queen Mother in Angkor (photo by The King Father).



*Top left: Photo of King Father
taken by The Queen Mother.*

*Photo right bottom
taken by
The King Father.*



We saw with anger the criminal damage the traitors had caused to the temples. Several places were damaged by their cannons and the napalm... It was with regret that we left Angkor at about 06:30 hours. We then went to the Bayon, another temple famous around the world, after Angkor Wat, with its fifty towers, each tower representing four faces. During our visit we heard the enemy's cannons and mortars, followed by F-105 planes, which flew over us several times, but luckily without seeing us!

After the Bayon, we went to Banteay Srey, this gem of a temple, in pink stones, whose sculptures are of magnificent beauty. There, also, we shot some scenes for the film and took many photos.

We took our lunch under the big trees in the forest and had a nap in the hammocks. During our rest, the enemy planes flew over us constantly, without doubting that we were under the trees! Luckily for us! But as we struggle for a just cause, the independence of our country, the Almighty protects us!

At about 18:30 hours, we left Banteay Srey to return to China, traveling through North Vietnam. The visit to Banteay Srey was the final stop of our program for the visit in the liberated zone. The question now is how to leave Cambodia safe and sound to continue our mission abroad. I took leave of Mme. Khieu Ponnary and of H.E. and Mme. Koy Thuon, who must rejoin our brothers fighting on other fronts.

We have gone back to using the Russian jeeps because we had used a 404 from Phnom Koulen to Banteay Srey to avoid the spies that were in the vicinity. H.E. Koy Thuon wanted to give us the two gibbons and the black bear to take to China. But we only accepted the two gibbons.

After three and half hours on route, in the night, we returned to O' Kbal Chhlous, the place where we had taken refuge in the shelter thinking that the enemy had found us out.²³

We have gathered so many souvenirs during this journey! Angkor Wat, Bayon, Banteay Srey! Have we really been to these sacred places? Sure, but it seems a dream! Our brothers within the country have a truly good organization and we are very proud!

²³ Translator's Note: O' Kbal Chhlous means in the Khmer language "River head of a wild boar".



22ND DAY – 20 MARCH 1973



A very good night of rest, despite the enemy planes, as I began to get used to them. The radio tells us that Lon Nol has ordered the arrest of numerous members of the Royal Family, after the bombing of his palace by a pilot. I should tell this story.

On 17 March, Cambodian Air Force Captain So Photra²⁴, husband of Botum Bopha, daughter of Samdech, dropped several bombs from his plane on Lon Nol's palace, but he only managed to hit the fence and part of the military barracks behind the palace. There were some victims. So Photra managed to escape with his plane. According to the news, he was able to land his plane in the liberated zone. But we have not received any confirmation of the news from our side. The Lon Nol regime is more and more shaky. For some weeks already, the strikes follow one another in all the factories, schools, and universities. The end is near.

At 18:30 hours, we left this spot for Kampong Krum, the spot where we had stayed two nights in a row. From this evening on, the criminal activities of the enemy will increase because we are entering the province of Preah Vihear again. We had to stop several times during the journey because the AC-130 planes were doing their rounds above our heads. When we arrived at Kampong Krum, we heard them bombing only a few kilometers from us, until dawn. Our convoy had to split. The second half, with some leaders, did not rejoin us until the early morning, after the bombardments and during a lull.

²⁴ Translator's Note: the Khmer Rouge, subsequently killed Captain So Photra, with his wife, HRH Princess Norodom Botum Bopha, daughter of HM King Norodom Sihanouk and their children. In 1994, HM King Norodom Sihanouk elevated Captain So Photra to the rank of HRH Prince Sihanouk So Photra.



23RD DAY – 21 MARCH 1973



The enemy planes have been active all day, without respite. As far as Samdech and I were concerned, we were able to drink palm tree juice for the first time in more than three years. It was very sweet and aromatic, delicious! One should not really despair in life. Everything happens to the one that knows how to be patient. That is why I am certain that the complete liberation of our country is near. Yesterday evening, for twenty kilometers, the route was guarded by militia women. They are very courageous, and they fight heroically in front or behind. They teach uniform making to others, they take care of the production and participate in the work in the fields as well as actively participating in the political life of all FUNK committees. I am truly proud of my compatriots!

Departure at 19:00 hours in the evening, as we are in the period of the waning moon. After a few kilometers, as it was too dark on the route, our jeep violently collided with a tree. As I was bending forward, vainly trying to see the route, I was thrown onto the front seat and my lips took a severe blow! I had a broken lower lip and bled a lot! My lips became swollen rapidly. It was the first “accident” I have had since the departure from Peking. We had to stop there for one hour and when the moon was high, we restarted our voyage to arrive at Phnom Tel at midnight. The forest is very lush in this place.



24TH DAY – 22 MARCH 1973



This morning, after waking up, I examined my lips with a small pocket mirror. They were swollen and painful, even though the wound had healed a little bit. It was while trying to avoid the B-52, AC-130, and F-105 planes that we collided with a tree! It is really comical! I can later boast that I shed a few drops of blood during our struggle for the liberation against the imperialist aggressors!

During the whole journey, the “music” from the enemy planes could be heard endlessly. Our leaders had the kindness to ask about our health and gave us some medicaments. Our departure is fixed for 23:00 hours, because after the experience of the previous evening, we prefer to wait for the moonlight to restart the journey.

We arrived at Anlong Kramuon, after some stops, at 02:30 hours in the morning and we felt cold.



25TH DAY – 23 MARCH 1973



Anlong Kramuon. It is in this spot that we had slept in the hammocks the last time. This night we were better equipped. Before going to bed, Samdech and I took some aspirin because we felt a bit feverish. We were suddenly woken up at 06:00 hours of the morning by the cries of our gibbons. Samdech quickly left the hut to check them. Here, it is necessary that I write what happened yesterday at Phnom Tel before our departure.

I have already written that H.E. Koy Thuon had given us the two gibbons that accompanied us at Phnom Koulen. The big one was almost two years and the small one only a few months. We are taking them to Peking. They are starting to get used to us. Samdech prefers the big one who has given him his affection and is always holding to Samdech's neck. Myself, I like the small one even though he is a little bit aggressive.

Yesterday evening, at about 20:00 hours, our comrades came to take them for the departure. At that moment, the big gibbon, frightened, tried to bite lightly the hand of our guard. The latter, surprised, had jumped and let the leash fall. Our gibbon took advantage of the situation to jump onto the trees and disappeared in the night.

Samdech was very sad because he had attached himself to this animal. Despite all our appeals, he had not re-appeared. It was with a heavy heart that we left the place. But we left behind some of our comrades as well as the small gibbon to try to draw the big one back. And this is what happened. We had thus seen both this morning.



They were balancing happily in the tree branches. The big one, noticing Samdech, went to him and never left him again! It is a good sign! We are certain about our victory over our enemies.

Today is also the third anniversary of the foundation of FUNK, of the historic Declaration of 23 March 1970 of Samdech. All the leaders of the interior; Their Excellencies Khieu Samphan, Hou Yuon, Hu Nim, Son Sen as well as H.E. Ieng Sary, came to present their good wishes to their Head of State. H.E. Khieu Samphan also presented Samdech with two rifles taken from the enemy.

They are a “79” and one “AR-19”. We had a very happy gathering, during which we drank tea and ate chocolates. I think that in Peking, Samdech Penn Nouth would be hosting a reception today to celebrate the occasion. We are very happy, Samdech and I, to be able to celebrate this third anniversary of FUNK and the FAPNLK with our brothers from the interior on Khmer soil! While waiting to do it one day in liberated Phnom Penh!

The spot where we are today is different from the others. It is a former village, thus there are many fruit trees, such as big mangos, tamarind trees, grapefruits, and many others. It is cool. I had another adventure this afternoon. Feeling that something tickled my feet, I shook them off and looked. What did I see? A big scorpion, it measured about 30 centimeters of length! I was frozen in fear because I cannot stand anything that resembles a reptile. Luckily, it did not sting me, something a scorpion normally does. Their sting causes a sharp pain and sometimes induces a high fever. I really had a narrow escape!

What will happen still? We must live for two weeks in the jungle before reaching Hanoi! But these small unpleasant things are nothing compared with the joy to be back in our homeland! This evening we shall not be able to leave again because the enemy planes bomb continuously twenty-four hours the spot where we are supposed to go. From Stung Treng to Kratie, the B-52, F-105, OV-10 and AC-130, drop tons and tons of bombs every minute. That causes a mortal hatred among our fighters and our people and reinforces their determination to struggle for liberation.



26TH DAY – 24 MARCH 1973



During the whole night the enemy planes, in particular the AC-130, bombed spots near our camp. I ask myself: how shall we be able to continue the journey? Because there are cluster bombs and delayed action bombs, which have not yet exploded, on the routes that we shall take. Particularly as we must travel at night! Yesterday evening, we all listened to Radio Peking, broadcasting the message, which Samdech had recorded just before our departure from Hanoi, and on the occasion of the third anniversary of the creation of FUNK. It was very good. Today, the aggressors continued to spread death and destruction in our homeland.

Our peasants do not any longer dare to leave their houses because our enemies see only one man walking or on bicycle or motorbike and they machine-gunned him without pity, reporting, later on, that they had eliminated some “Viet Cong” or “North Vietnamese”. Last night, one of our fighters, a few kilometers from us, lit a cigarette and the reaction did not take long. An AC-130 plane machine-gunned him. Luckily, he was able to escape! Thus, this evening we are waiting a little bit.



27TH DAY – 25 MARCH 1973



It is the third day that we have spent at Anlong Kramuon. Last night it was rather calm, with some bombardments not too far away. As it is Sunday today, I thought that the enemy pilots would profit to rest at least one day and leave us in peace. But no! At about 09:00 hours, while I took a bath, several planes circled over our camp, which, according to our fighters meant that they were about to bomb. They warned me to get to the shelter. I had soap on my eyes and all over my body, and I did everything to dry quickly and rejoin the others.

Luckily, the bombs did not touch our “village”. I was able to clearly see the B-52s, huge as boats, as they flew rather low surrounded by many F-105s on each side. It is rather strange that they fly over us without respite! Would they doubt something? Manila Radio said this morning, during the English broadcast, that the enemies at the request of the traitor Lon Nol, continue their bombings over the whole territory of Cambodia for the eighteen consecutive days! Truly, these imperialists behave in a revolting fashion, making a mockery of international opinion that condemns them! Again, this evening, we are unable to leave. If all these bombardments did not take place, we would be near the border by now. But this does not displease Samdech, who is very happy to be able to extend his stay in Cambodia! In the afternoon we took a nap fully dressed, to be ready to leave at a moment’s notice.



28TH DAY – 26 MARCH 1973



This past night I did not sleep at all. Only Samdech did. We were dressed, our luggage packed, ready for any eventuality. There were many bombardments around our camp.

It appears that we will have to leave this evening, even if the bombardments continue because to remain in this spot one more day would be very dangerous. The route will be very difficult because the bombardments get closer to our camp. As we are in the period of the waning moon, it will be very dark. The route will be extremely dangerous, particularly because of the hundreds of the delayed action bombs that have not yet exploded. Anyway, let us place our trust in Heavens and our fighter brothers.

I have learned how to tie up the hammock like the resistance fighters do, and I am very proud of myself! Yesterday evening, according to information coming from China, it appears that Air Captain So Photra, son in law of Samdech, who had bombed the palace of Lon Nol, managed to reach and land in Hainan Island in China. We were so happy to receive this news! It is really an exploit for a pilot of a small T-28 from Phnom Penh to Hainan! Moreover, flying over South Vietnam! I also received a message from Lok Chumteav (Mme.) Penn Nouth²⁵, which

²⁵ Translator's Note: Madame Penn Nouth was the wife of the Prime Minister of GRUNC, Samdech Penn Nouth.



really reassured me. Despite the long distance that separates us from China, we have the chance to be able to remain in touch permanently. As I write, two auburn squirrels, rather splendid, played with each other by jumping from one tree to the other.

It would be good to stay here for some time, in this village, if these planes of unhappiness were not around. Because they really begin to get on my nerves. Comrade Pang brought us the delicious “Mak Praing” fruit.²⁶ These fruits from our forests are yellow and very juicy. It is the first time in three years that we have seen them.

²⁶ “Mak Praing” is a fruit from the Cambodian forest.



29TH DAY – 27 MARCH 1973



We are still alive today! I need to recount yesterday evening's events. Because the spot where we are presently is rather calm, in comparison to Anlong Kramuon. We are in a forest that is not too lush and slept on hammocks, without cover, as the spot that had been chosen to welcome us yesterday evening was too dangerous. That is why we continued our journey until we arrived here at 06:00 hours this morning.

We took a rest, and this gives me the opportunity to relate a few of the latest events. At about 18:00 hours yesterday evening, we said good bye to Their Excellencies Hou Yuon and Hu Nim and to Mme. Hou Yuon, as it became necessary to reduce the size of our convoy for security reasons. The goodbyes were very emotional. Samdech and the two leaders warmly embraced each other and promised to see each other in a year's time. Mme. Hou Yuon and I embraced very warmly, offering each other good wishes, mutually thanking each other, and talking a lot at the same time so as not show our emotion. But just to think that we will see each other again next year makes our separation less hard.

Having shared their lives for three weeks, we admire even more our brothers of the interior for their courage, their tenacity, their optimism. Ourselves, we have somehow become used to this kind of life, hard but so exciting! It could be said that we have also struggled against the foreign aggressors and their lackeys. Because it was not easy to avoid their spies and their relentless bombings!



We therefore traveled the nineteen kilometers that separate Anlong Kramuon from the Mekong on a dark night, very slowly. A soldier walked in front of our jeep to guide it, as we could not see anything. When we arrived at the bank of the river, we waited and listened for a moment. As there was a lull, we immediately got into the boat and crossed the river in ten minutes, the heart beating wildly because if the AC-130 planes had come back, I would not have been able to continue writing my journal today!

As we arrived on the opposite bank, we rapidly moved to the shore. And it was then that the enemy planes returned over the other bank of the river! They began bombing everywhere, on the route that we had just left! We could see their red glimmers go high up to heavens, every time that the B-52 dropped their bombs! One could say that they resembled erupting volcanoes!

This fit of destruction lasted one hour, while we hid under a very big mango tree. When I think that we only were two minutes ahead of them, I feel the shock! They also came to bomb our side of the river, but a little bit further from our mango tree. When everything became calmer, we continued our journey, in an old Chinese truck this time. Because there was only one old Land-Rover, and it did not fit all of us. It also did not work very well. Samdech and I sat in the front, near the driver and Their Excellencies Khieu Samphan, Ieng Sary, Son Sen and Saloth Sar and a few other cadres sat in the back. The truck did not have a cover in the back.

I have changed vehicles many times since the beginning of our trip. Initially, we had a Russian jeep, then an English Land-Rover, followed by a German Mercedes, a French 404 and a Chinese truck! We traveled very slowly, in darkness, stopping every fifteen minutes. But every time that we were to continue our journey, the driver was forced to crank the engine several times. Without that, the truck would not have started. It is really old! We traveled all night like that, and it was only at about 06:00 hours this morning that we arrived, safe and sound, in this forest, located at about twenty-five kilometers from Siem Pang. It is a less dangerous zone here because the bombardments are less intense.

We opened this morning the tin of “foie gras” which we brought from Peking and which we have kept for the day when we lacked provisions!



30TH DAY – 28 MARCH 1973



O' Ta Ngau! Yes! We are today at O' Ta Ngau! After a voyage through rough terrain, we arrived here, this morning, at around 10:00 hours. After taking a good rest, I will try to update this journal on yesterday's events.

We left the forest at 22:00 hours and went back on the route, in the same Chinese truck. Just before leaving we said good-bye to H.E. Saloth Sar. Thus, our group was restricted to Their Excellencies Khieu Samphan, Son Sen and Ieng Sary. The latter will return in China with us.

Samdech gave his camera to H.E. Hu Nim. As for me, I left some medicines to Mme. Khieu Ponnary and Mme. Hou Yuon. I also gave my cassette player to H.E. Hou Yuon and my Polaroid camera to H.E. Son Sen. The two fighters that were our bodyguards and took care of us day and night, Hong and Pang, each received a watch from Samdech.

We also asked H.E. Hu Nim to pass on some souvenirs to Prince Phurissara²⁷ and his wife, as well as to the children of Samdech, Racvivongs and Khemanourak²⁸, who were unable to come and see us as they were in region far from us. We continued our journey without lights, and it was really somber, as there was no longer any moonlight. One of the fighters, comrade Hong, stood up on the running board near the driver to show the road to the latter.

²⁷ Translator's Note: HRH Prince Norodom Phurissara was a former Cambodian Foreign Minister, executed by the Khmer Rouge in 1976.

²⁸ Translator's Note: HRH Prince Norodom Racvivongs and HRH Prince Norodom Khemanourak were both children of HM King Norodom Sihanouk and HRH Princess Sisowath Pongsanmoni, daughter of HM King Sisowath Monivong. Both Princes joined the Resistance after the coup d'etat of March 1970. Prince Racvivongs died in the forest of malaria in August 1973 and the Khmer Rouge killed Prince Khemanourak in 1976.



When we were near of Siem Pang, comrade Hong, got off from the truck and walked in front of the truck to guide the driver. Because the route had been bombed several days ago by the B-52s. There were more than one hundred craters, and even in the same afternoon some cluster bombs exploded. It is quite probable that there are still some around. And if we touch one...it will be the end!

Arriving in Siem Pang at 03:00 hours in the morning, we immediately crossed the Sekong River. On the opposite bank our Vietnamese friends were waiting for us. They had been very worried about us, as they had no news about us, and they knew we were under the daily threat of the enemy planes. They asked us to continue our journey quickly to reach O' Ta Ngau because there it would be less dangerous. We, therefore, say good-bye to our brothers from the Interior, as they had to leave us there and return to the front.

H.E. Khieu Samphan said that as they prepared to leave Samdech, their thoughts were more and more with him. Samdech responded that he did not wish to leave them and to leave Cambodia! "But we will see each other again next year", Samdech added. "Please come back often, your coming to visit us is a joy for us and a big encouragement for our people," H.E. Khieu Samphan said. These goodbyes were very emotional, as afterwards, we will continue our journey accompanied only by our Vietnamese friends. We warmly thanked all our brothers who had taken care of us during our trip to Cambodia and got into the jeep, very touched...

From 05:00 to 10:00 hours in the morning, we traveled at a crazy speed! A kind of car rally! Since our departure from Dong Hoi, it was the first time that our Vietnamese driver (whom we had just seen again) drove so fast. I asked him the reason why. "It is to cross as fast as possible the danger zone", he replied. In effect, on both sides of the route and even on the route, we could see some huge craters, made by the B-52s, only one of two days ago, as the trees were still burning... Three weeks ago, on the way into Cambodia, all that did not exist. The route was still intact, and the sky was calm.

Our driver is truly remarkable! Another one would by now have thrown us in the gully. From time to time, I could see a tree straight in front of us, but the car always managed to avoid it! And in this way, tossed, shaken about in all senses, thrown into the air, we arrived this morning at O' Ta Ngau. It is our last stop on Khmer soil. Today is a day of rest for us. We will continue our journey at 03:00 hours in the morning on 30 March 1973.



31ST DAY – 29 MARCH 1973



This morning, we had a long rest. Our Vietnamese friends presented us with peacocks' feathers; they were magnificent. They then hosted a small dinner to congratulate us for our success and to wish us a good and safe return trip.

We must rest now, as at 03:00 hours we will leave O' Ta Ngau, and Cambodia. Good bye, dear homeland, I shall return! I have spent three unforgettable weeks with our brothers and fighters. I was able to see the places I love, Angkor Wat, the Bayon, Banteay Srey and Phnom Koulen. Until next year!



32ND DAY – 30 MARCH 1973



At about 04:00 hours this morning, we crossed O' Ta Ngau and into Lao territory. We thus left our beloved homeland! We had a heavy heart, the memory still full of souvenirs of the last three weeks spent in our country, but we are optimists because our brothers have invited us to come back often, as soon as the circumstances do allow it. And one day, we will return and stay forever. It will be then in a Cambodia completely and definitively liberated!

After having traveled one hundred and twenty kilometers, we arrived at Seso, where we currently are, at 10:30 hours this morning. The route was really bad. During the journey, I recalled a phrase of General Giap before our departure from Hanoi. "You will feel like you are riding a horse in the jeep!" And it is, in fact, the impression that I have! Every day, I was holding to the back of the chair in front of the jeep, to soften the bumps. But that did not help me much, and the palms of my hands are calloused. We will spend the whole day here and part of the night also. We will continue our journey at about 03:00 hours in the morning towards Senamnoy. We will travel one hundred kilometers by road and then take a ferryboat to cross the Sekong River, before arriving at our destination.

Apart from the road, which is very bad, there is one thing that changes our journey a bit. From this point forward, we will hear the planes less and less. It is very calm in comparison to Cambodia. According to the latest news from a reliable source, the foreign aggressors have sent seventy-eight B-52s to bomb our country every day! And Lon Nol had ordered commandos to be dropped near Siem Pang, on 26 March, to capture and assassinate us. They have really tried everything. Heavens allowed us to escape all these dangers because we have never betrayed our country or our people, whom we have always faithfully served. And we defend a just cause: the independence of our country.



34TH DAY – 1 APRIL 1973



We arrived this morning at 09:00 hours at Senamnoy. It is the place I like most. The site is remarkable with its lush vegetation, mountains and the river that runs in front of our hut. Samdech took a bath twice, in the morning and afternoon. It is really a good break for us. I also swam a little bit this afternoon.





The King Father showing the photos taken during the journey to H. E. Prime Minister Zhou Enlai and other Chinese leaders.



35TH DAY – 2 APRIL 1973



We had a calm night. This morning we bathed in the river. It will be our last day of rest. We shall continue our trip back at 16:00 hours, for the next stopping point. Over the past few days, we have received several very friendly and warm messages from Samdech Penn Nouth, the Vietnamese leaders and H.E. Prime Minister Zhou Enlai. These messages reassured us and encouraged us to continue the journey, which will be still long, rough, bumpy, and dusty, and not without danger! While lying on the nylon hammock given to me by our Cambodian brothers, I thought again with an intense nostalgia of our recent visit in our motherland. I recalled in my mind all my activities.

We shall never forget the affection, the warm welcoming, all the kindness of every instant, shown by our brothers from the Interior, from the senior leaders to the fighters. These priceless souvenirs shall remain forever enshrined in Samdech's and my own heart and spirit. Now, we have gained a new strength to continue to accomplish the mission entrusted to us by our people, that is, to work outside the country to achieve the understanding and support of the whole world for our struggle for independence and the liberation of our country.

After leaving Senamnoy at 16:00 hours, we arrived at Senoy at about 19:00 hours after a voyage without any problems. There were no enemy planes to be seen. The Political Commissar of the military base invited us to dinner. Tomorrow we will leave for Xelanon at 06:00 hours.



36TH DAY – 3 APRIL 1973



We arrived at Xelanon at 11:00 hours. As it was very hot, we took a long bath under the waterfall, until two F-105 showed up and over flew us hedgehopping, we had to leave the waterfall with regret. Is so pleasant to be in the cold water when is so hot. It could be said that we attract the enemy planes. Wherever we go they show up! Luckily, there are not too many here. This afternoon, Samdech had a quick dip in the waterfall. Our Vietnamese friends at this stop offered us a cage with eight magnificent parrots! We shall take them to China, with our two Cambodian gibbons, which have supported well the trip from Phnom Koulen. We shall continue our voyage this evening at about 22:00 hours because we must use the famous highway 9 and Ban Song. As it is rather open space over there, we must travel by night, to ensure our safety. I will therefore take a break before our departure. It is so hot that I have drunk at least a dozen cups of tea!



37TH DAY – 4 APRIL 1973



After a long journey of eight hours, we arrived this morning, at 06:00 hours, at Chaly. Here, the weather is different from Selanon, where it was very hot. As we are now in the famous “Great Truong Son Mountain Range”²⁹, it is cold. Everybody took a rest during the morning. After breakfast, we took photos with all the staff that accompanied us during the trip. At about 16:30 hours, there was a film showing about the visit of the artistic team of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in France, Italy, Algeria, and Cuba. It was a pleasant film, and we had a good time, despite the Siberian cold! Because the cinema was in the open air. After that, our friends from the military base hosted a banquet in our honor.

Tomorrow we shall undertake the last leg of our historic, marvelous, exciting, and unforgettable trip and that not everybody is allowed to make!

²⁹ Translator’s Note: The Great Truong Son Mountain Range, also known as the Annamite Chain, straddles the border between Laos and Vietnam reaching heights of over 2,500 meters above sea level in some places.



38TH DAY – 5 APRIL 1973



This morning, before our departure scheduled for 06:00 hours, we were able to speak to General Giap by special phone. We were very happy, as we felt like we were already in Hanoi!

The sky was cloudy, and we made half of our journey through light fog, encircling the mountains. It was very cold. The scenery seemed different because of this weather.

We arrived at Base 559, our departure point, at 10:30 hours. We received a warm welcoming from the officers, cadres, and fighters of the DRV ³⁰. Everybody was happy to see us in good health! After such a journey! We shall remain here today, and tomorrow we shall take the plane for Hanoi. As I entered the small room placed at our disposal, I looked myself in the big mirror of the wardrobe. I noticed that the wound in my lips had disappeared. Thus, our odyssey comes to an end. We shall speak for a long time and with much emotion of this magnificent trip! By the time we reached this stop, the last one, we had forgotten all the tiredness of the previous weeks. We are ready again to undertake the same trip!

³⁰ Translator's Note: DRV (Democratic Republic of Vietnam) was the name given until 1976 to North Vietnam. After the re-unification of the country it became the SRV (Socialist Republic of Vietnam).



General Giap spoke to us again by special phone today. We are very touched by his kindness and that of Mme. Giap, with whom I was able to speak on the phone. It is very nice here. We have the chance because our Vietnamese friends told us that it was very hot three days ago. For some days, we have received good news about the military victories achieved by our people. But we also have had some sad news, concerning Her Majesty the Queen and the children of Samdech. The traitors have taken revenge upon them, over the failure of their operations against us, during our visit to Cambodia. It is cowardly from their part, but from these traitors, anything can be expected!

I shall soon close this Journal...

We have another mission once we are back in China. In Cambodia we traveled 1,200 kilometers by car, from the border to Angkor and then back. On the Ho Chi Minh Trail, we traveled 1,600 kilometers return trip, which adds up to 2,800 kilometers traveling on the most difficult and dangerous routes of Indochina! Thank you to our Vietnamese friends, to their leaders, who strongly assisted us to make this historic trip. Thank you, Ho Chi Minh Trail! All our gratitude goes towards you! Thank you to all our Khmer brothers and Vietnamese friends who took care of us with so much kindness, during this trip. We encountered many dangers, confronted fatigue and we are back, safe and sound, in good health, and proud to be able to say that we were in the liberated zone of Cambodia, at a time when the Enemy planes relentlessly attacked our country. We are proud to have been able to travel through the famous Ho Chi Minh Trail! In truth, there is not just one trail but a multitude!

This afternoon, Samdech visited a transmission unit. At 19:00 hours, we were shown a film about the Ho Chi Minh Trail. It is a new and magnificent film. For us that have just traveled through the trail, this film brought back many memories. The film was followed by a banquet. The atmosphere was very friendly. Everybody was very happy but a little bit sad, as we were about to separate after having spent one month traveling together. But everything comes to an end. We gave ourselves an appointment for the next trip. We were assured that the trail would be in better condition!





The Queen Mother in Banteay Srey.

39TH DAY – 6 APRIL 1973



This morning was the last day we spent at Base 559. There was a reception, and Samdech presented gifts to all the members of the escort (115 persons) who accompanied us through the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The leadership of the Base 559 offered us a big, magnificent painting of the Ho Chi Minh Trail painted by an artist currently fighting. It is a very precious gift that we shall place at the Liberation Museum in Phnom Penh.

I must not forget to mention that Samdech composed a song, during the return trip, entitled “Thank you Ho Chi Minh Trail”.

The two gibbons valiantly survived the trip. They are the link that bonds us to Cambodia! Unfortunately, of the eight parrots that were offered to us at Xelanon, seven died during the voyage. We decided to leave the eighth, which seemed to be in bad shape, at Base 559. Maybe he can get better here.

We will take the plane soon at Dong Hoi for Hanoi. I had the pleasure to see again my small dog Miko, whom my secretary Mme. Sar Saoroth brought with her this morning. She came to accompany us with other members of FUNK and GRUNC. Samdech and Mme. Penn Nouth are waiting for us at Dong Hoi. Miko is a magnificent small dog, nine months old Maltese Bichon, given to me in October 1972 by Prince and Princess Souphanouvong of Laos.





EPILOGUE



Queen Mother Norodom Monineath Sihanouk of Cambodia is the embodiment of resilience, a beautiful woman who has endured countless hardships with dignity and courage. Through her, we can learn about colonialism, independence, civil war, genocide, democratization and the complex history of Cambodia, a country often overlooked.

ABOUT THE DOCUMENTATION CENTER OF CAMBODIA

The Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) was founded and constituted in 1995 after the U.S. Congress passed the Cambodian Genocide Justice Act in April 1994, which was signed into law by President Clinton. The Royal Government of Cambodia also formally supported DC-Cam. DC-Cam has received numerous accolades and awards for its work in support of memory and justice for victims of the Cambodian genocide. In 2017 alone, DC-Cam was the honored recipients of the Judith Lee Stronach Human Rights Award from the Center for Justice and Accountability, and his Majesty King Norodom Sihamoni made Youk Chhang a Commander of the Royal Order of Cambodia in recognition of Chhang's distinguished services to the Kingdom of Cambodia. In 2018, DC-Cam also was a winner of the Ramon Magsaysay Awards, which is regarded as 'Asia's Nobel' prize, for preserving historical memory for healing and justice.

