Pacific Stars & Stripes
Tuesday, May 18, 1971

Kate Webb's Glimpse Behind the Lines

THE CAPTURE

PART ONE

EDITOR'S NOTE: Catherine "Kate" Webb, UPI's Phnom Penh bureau manager, was captured last month by the Viet Cong in Cambodia. For many days she was believed dead. Suddenly, she was released by the Reds. In this series she tells what happened before her capture and during her confinement.

By KATE WEBB

FIRST OF A SERIES

(Had it not been for Toshiichi Suzuki of Japan's Nihon Denpa News, one of my co-captives, this story would be like a silent movie. "Suza-kee," as the Vietnamese pronounced his name, had spent two and one-half years in Hanoi as a correspondent and speaks Vietnamese well. For his courage, diplomacy and untiring translation efforts, I am forever in debt. There will remain a bond between us, more real than the ropes that at times bound us together.)

We stood in the dusk, an odd little group of six, turning to wave goodbye to the soldiers who had come to watch us leave on our walk back to freedom. "Tell the truth about us," they said.

"If we make it back," I thought, "if we make it back."

We were lucky. We made it back, 23 days after those first shots rang out on Highway 4.

* * *

April 7 was a quiet, hot day. The only photographs I had gotten were of Cambodian paratroopers swarming over a water truck. The road was so hot, the drops of water sizzled as they splashed on the asphalt.

"To heck with this," I thought as Chhim Sarath, the UPI driver, and myself plodded down Highway 4. "The story's in Pakistan today anyway."

I knotted my handkerchief around my neck as a sweat-catcher. Sweat was running into my eyes, down my arms and onto my camera. It was about 1 p.m.

Then without warning the world exploded into the crack and whistle of small arms fire, the crash of mortars, hammer of automatic weapons — and the sudden screams of wounded. We were in a ditch, scrambling. A paratrooper in front of me trailed his leg, the green and brown of his camouflage uniform drenched red. He moved forward down the ditch and stained the grass. Crack! Blood blossomed from the paratrooper's shoulder.

"The other way! The other way! Back to the C.P.! (Command Post)," I gasped at Sarath. My foot was cut. I stumbled, slipped on the blood and my sandal came off. Sarath threw it forward to me.

"Miss Kate! Miss Kate! No, No!" The face of a Cambodian freelance photographer appeared in front of me. "VC, VC, chirran-na (many)."

"Radio, no radio here, we must move to radio," Sarath said.

Then we realized what had happened. They were hitting the rear C.P. and the forward C.P. We were in the middle and the road was a shooting gallery.

The twice wounded paratrooper stood up and moved like a ghastly red sleepwalker, dazed. Crack! His other leg. He fell beside us, his face still blank. Tea Kim Heang, the freelance photographer, put a cigarette in the soldier's hand. He smoked, slowly, automatically. Another young paratrooper came running, doubled up, from the direction of the rear C.P., the zing of bullets cutting the air around him. I saw Toshiichi Suzuki, the correspondent from Nihon Denpa News, the Japanese newsfilm agency, and his interpreter huddled between some bushes behind us.

I lit a cigarette. "This is it," I thought.

The young paratrooper doubled and ran again. We heard a volley of shots. Another paratrooper followed him, more shots. We looked at one another, our eyes hollow with realization, and started scrambling back into the jungle, into Viet Cong lines 56 miles from the safety of Phnom Penh.

* * *

Six of us huddled in the forest whispering our plans. Eang Charoon, a 27-year-old Cambodian newspaper cartoonist, his elf-like face oddly calm. Suzuki, 41, silent, peering through thick spectacles, white shirt drenched with sweat, heavy movie camera still in his hand. Heang, 31, the jovial photographer everyone calls "Moonface." Blood from two AK47 gunshot wounds he had received only the week before on Highway 4 began to filter through the bandages and color his pale pink shirt. Sarath, 31, the UPI driver-interpreter known to all as "Jimmy," and Kong Vorn, 36, Suzuki's driver.

Move northeast, we decided. Try to keep between the road and the airstrikes and artillery. Charoon stripped off his clothes — military fatigues of sorts — and was left with only his undershorts. Sarath quickly buried his identification cards. We'll make the road before dark, we reassured one another. Northeast, parallel to the road, watch the sun and then cut back to the road. There will be reinforcements coming.

* * *

We scrambled, and ran as best we could through the thick jungle, thorns ripping our clothes and bodies. Then the thirst. We licked the sweat from our arms and faces. Artillery barrages began to fall around us and we tried to move closer to the road, stumbling into a network of Viet Cong bunkers joined by telephone wire. They apparently did not see or hear us although we did not look back as we edged around them. Suzuki ripped off his white shirt and fashioned a sling to hold his camera. Heang's wounds were smarting and I took his cameras. Vorn removed his shirt and I ripped the white binding from the neck of my blouse.

There is not much one can do in a bombing or artillery strike. We lay against the trunks of trees, pressed against one another and tried to burrow into the ground. The artillery got heavier and some wanted to move back. Those who wanted to continue moving forward won out; we were heading into the artillery but also toward Cambodian lines.

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Dusk fell and we estimated we had covered about five kilometers (three miles), but still the sounds of battle echoed through the jungle. We desperately needed water but found only a dry creek bed which the Viet Cong used as a medical evacuation route. Even they had been digging for water there without luck. Their footprints were clear and fresh field dressings were strewn on the sand. I tried to erase our prints with a tree branch. Night began to fall and the Viet Cong started to appear in large numbers around us.

We lay frozen, watching, uniformed men — and women — moving in columns only yards away. We knew from the uniforms and helmets they were North Vietnamese. The scream of a jet was followed by the deafening explosion of bombs. We rose to move, but the NVA did the same and we would have to lie low.

There was no hope of reaching the road before dark.

* * *

Nightfall brought the "spooky" gunships, the reconverted C47 transports whose miniguns spit out streams of fire. Their searchlights seek you out, terrified in a patch of thin jungle.

Flares lit the sky over the road, which we realized was so close we were forced to move back to avoid the light. Das Kanchor, our destination, was under attack. We waited and watched, lying there and averting each other's eyes. I began thinking. My office in Phnom Penh by now would know we were missing. I thought of the other journalists who had been at the forward C.P. and I began to shake and could not stop. I wasn't shivering; it was as if my bones were trying to rattle apart. I lit a cigarette and dropped it twice, then found I had bitten off the filter. I swore at myself and began talking.

"We have to keep going," I said. "We have to get beyond Das Kanchor and we have to be there before dawn. Then at dawn we can go onto the road."

We started walking again but an hour later found ourselves back in the same place. Going in circles. We conferred with dried mouths and deadened minds. We had to rest again. Heang, weak from his wounds, stretched out and went to sleep. Incredibly, he started to snore — loudly. I kicked him. We argued over the directions. The flares were lighting two sections of the area now and the sounds of fighting continued. The nightmare was stretching to the breaking point. Without further discussion we all tried to sleep. My shaking started again and I contented myself with kicking Moonface whenever he snored.

It was about 3 a.m. when we moved again, rested but proceeding more slowly. We reached a trail the Cambodians identified as the old Kirirom road — we were yards from the turnoff to Das Kanchor.

The jungle had fallen silent, so silent we were afraid of the sound of our stumbling. We made a turn to the east.

"Tank!" Charoon, who was in the lead, scrambled backward and with the strength of fear we fled back with him, falling over one another. The tank, Charoon reported, had its guns trained on Das Kanchor and was guarded by NVA. I was incredulous. "Stop," I said. "That must be friendly." Sarath, who had been second in line and collided with Charoon, pushed me forward. "Run," he whispered frantically, "they are awake."

* * *

We walked more slowly and the stops were longer. Every time we turned toward the road, we came across the knotted grass and telltale telephone wires.

The first grey light of dawn found us huddled between three dead trees and a tangled mass of vine. Our faces and bodies were streaked with dirt and scratches. Heang's trousers were ripped to shreds and he had strung his shirt around his waist. I changed the film in my Leica and photographed the group. I had lost Heang's camera during an artillery strike. We gauged direct east by looking at the way the light fell on our cameras and started moving again.

With the sunrise thirst returned, almost intolerable now. We no longer were sweating and Heang refused to get up. We waited and were about to move when the artillery started again. Too close. We huddled against a huge tree and I took more photographs. I tried to tell Jimmy that when you can hear the shells it means they are going overhead and everything is okay. My mouth was too dry and I said nothing.

* * *

We moved what seemed like a quarter mile and came almost face to face with three of them, uniformed NVA. They did not see us and we ran, back the way we had come. But now we were face to face with a young Vietnamese soldier who ran straight into us.

"Ranasei, Ranasei," (Cambodian Liberation Front) said Heang. The soldier hesitated, then said "didi," the Vietnamese expression for go.

We went.

We ran until we dropped. The young soldier must have been doing the double take of his life. He had looked at us all.

It was almost 11:30 a.m. Heang, who only one week ago was in a hospital being treated for an AK wound in the shoulder, refused to move. It had been almost 24 hours since the first shots rang out and we were exhausted. With dry mouths, we argued.

Heang lay on his back and said he couldn't move. The rest of us argued that we must. Heang said he wanted to head back and we told him he must be mad. We again avoided one another's eyes with the knowledge that none of us could move much farther without water.

We hauled Heang on his feet and moved toward the road. We were on a Viet Cong trail and we knew it.

Two AK47 rifle muzzles were in our faces and we stared vacantly. Our hands went up automatically. I looked at my left wrist beside my face. It was 11:30. "Bao Chi, Bao Chi," (press) we croaked. "Nuoc (water), Nuoc."

The two young Vietnamese troops looked at us, then one another. They conversed in Vietnamese, their rifles trained at our heads. Our hands went higher. Heang lay on the ground and pointed at one of their canteens. "Nuoc," he rasped, "Nuoc."

* * *

The soldiers began talking again, then pointed at me. "My?" (American) they asked "Anglaise, Anglaise," the Cambodians replied. They motioned at Suzuki. "Japonaise, Nippon," he said.

One of the soldiers reached a decision. Herding us together, motioning with his AK47, he left the other to guard us and disappeared up a trail. He returned, not with water, but with ropes in his hands.

We were captured.

(Tomorrow: The March Begins)

Pacific Stars & Stripes
Wednesday, May 19, 1971

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Kate Webb's Glimpse Behind the Lines

PART TWO

THE MARCH BEGINS

By KATE WEBB

SECOND OF A SERIES

(Our acquaintance with the Communists began at rifle point and ended 23 days later with handshakes and whispers at a pre-dawn release point. Throughout, I found in them an odd mixture of toughness and thoughtfulness. They called themselves the "Liberation Front of Cambodia," with the same tongue in cheek humor that the Americans in South Vietnam call themselves a "Military Assistance Command." They were Vietnamese, from the North and South of Vietnam, and like American GIs they were homesick. They listened to Radio Hanoi like GIs listen to the Armed Forces Vietnam Network (AFVN). They complained that Cambodian tea was not as good as the tea from the plantations in the north. They sang Vietnamese songs . . . and as we walked through villages at night, we sometimes heard Cambodian kids calling out "Viet Cong Vietnam," much the same as I have heard South Vietnamese youngsters calling "O.K. GI.")

My notebook entries for the day of our capture were lost when the book was "confiscated," but those first moments will take a long time to forget.

The two soldiers who had captured us tied our arms behind our backs with tape, vines and ropes. They ordered us into a nearby bunker and a few moments later approached with a green sack.

"It's plastique (an explosive widely used in Indochina)," I thought, and tried to scramble out, passing the word back to the others. We all thought we would be blown to pieces.

But the sack was for our cameras and personal effects. One of the soldiers sat methodically taking inventory of our gear and money. They counted the money each of us had and noted the makes of our watches and the details on our I.D. cards.

They brought water, in round North Vietnamese military canteens, but it was not enough. We grabbed at the canteens, drained them and pleaded for more. They brought more from a nearby command post that we had passed without seeing.

Running silently on his thick rubber Ho Chi Minh sandals, one of the soldiers returned with the first officer we were to meet. He wore no rank insignia. Only a pistol on an American belt identified him as a superior. His uniform, drab brown shirt and green trousers, was the same as those of the common soldiers.

"You are invited to go to my place where there will be food and water," he said, checking the binds on our arms. "It is a short walk from here."

* * *

It was the first of many walks which were never short, always long. But it was the worst. Still parched with thirst, tied individually and roped together in a chain with armed guards in front and behind us, we were pushed swiftly along a winding jungle trail.

The trail was one we had crossed several times while trying to elude the Communists, and led back to the Kirirom road branching off from Das Kanchor, the Cambodian outpost that had been our hoped for rendezvous point with government troops.

The guards stopped and hacked branches from the trees around us. With difficulty, we each held one with our bound hands. Like walking trees, we set off down the roadside.

American observation planes, the OV10 "Broncos" which also are used as gunships, droned low over our heads.

"If you run from the planes, we will shoot," the guards warned. "Just stop when we tell you." Toshiichi Suzuki of Nihon Denpa News translated.

They have to see us, I thought. The planes were droning overhead almost at treetop level. We would stand motionless for an instant on their approach, not even moving into the forest, then move on as the aircraft was directly overhead. Even with my white jeans and two of the others with white shirts, the pilots apparently did not see a thing. I found myself laughing.

A pool of oily black water lay in a hollow by the roadside. To a man, we ignored the threatening click of the guards' rifles and cries of "Di!" "Di!" (Go on, go on). We drank, lying on our stomachs with our heads in the slimy water.

* * *

It seemed about two hours before the first rest stop. We lay against a roadside bank. There were yells from nearby trees and soldiers appeared. They stood over us, cocked their rifles and prodded us. Our shoes and Suzuki's glasses were ripped off and the soldiers re-tied the men with wire, tighter this time. Mine were left alone.

One of the guards walked away and the other sat smoking. I motioned my head at a soldier's canteen and asked for water. The soldier laughed and clicked his AK breach again. Too tired to care, I closed my eyes. "American," I heard the soldier say. "No, no, Anglaise, English," Sarath insisted. Jimmy nudged my shoulder with his. "Water, miss," he said.

* * *

We saw for the first time how the "liberation forces" carry their water in the jungle. They tie a poncho by each end to a wooden pole. They carry their dead and wounded the same way, as we were to see later that night.

There must have been two gallons of water and we drained it as the guards stood by laughing. To our relief, most of the soldiers disappeared back into the woods.

We shuffled on until dusk, the asphalt burning our feet and splinters of bamboo cutting into our toes. Still thirsty, but we were sweating again. We discarded our tree branches, no longer caring about the planes. Finally, we stopped. Soldiers appeared from the forest and grouped around. I had four cigarettes left and smoked two, which the soldiers lighted for me. The other prisoners were taken behind a nearby tree.

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They were led off one by one, the Cambodians first. "Food and water, my foot, shot one by one," I thought.

I knew that Charoon, still clad only in his shorts, was thinking the same thing and I tried to move nearer to him. But a guard moved him behind the tree with the others and motioned me to stay where I was. I lay in a hollow by the roadside, dozing.

Many times, a soldier would ask "American?" Many times I repeated, "Anglaise." Night fell. The soldiers appeared like shadows, all clad in the dull blues, browns and green of the Communist "line" soldier — equivalent to the American "grunt" in Vietnam. Some wore pith helmets, others floppy leaf-like sunhats. All wore Ho Chi Minh sandals. They squatted around, talking in low voices and occasionally pointing torches in my direction or wandering over to look at me. Some spoke to me, but I could understand little of what they said.

Trucks moved on the road and into the forest with shaded headlights. I again found myself grimly amused at what observation planes could not observe.

A Cambodian wearing a bright blue shirt and civilian trousers appeared from somewhere and soon the other five captives were brought back. They whispered that they had simply undergone questioning by the Vietnamese. The Cambodian, prompted by Vietnamese, announced in Cambodian that we were prisoners of the Cambodian Liberation Forces. He said we were not to fear for our lives and would be taken a short way to another place. He said the Liberation Armed Forces were "humane."

Our ropes were replaced with green plastic covered wire. Mine, I noticed, were looser than the others. Tied in a chain and warned again not to run from the planes, we marched off into the night.

I remember little of that walk, except that we had no shoes. We were passed by shadowy groups of troops, some girls with pony tail hair styles. Four litters moved past like shadows, their bearers running at a shuffling trot. Two litters were closed, carrying dead. Groans and screams came from another and a guard told us it was a malaria case.

We were moving deep into the mountains and an artillery barrage started. We were herded into a three-man bunker. The guards stayed outside. The bunker was typical, deep and thick with about three feet of overhead cover. The six of us crammed inside, hardly able to breathe for what seemed about 30 minutes. It also smelled — of us.

Our party moved across creek beds, always uphill. We were passed by two soldiers carrying the tube of a 75 millimeter recoilless rifle on a tree branch and struggling and slithering under its weight. The Vietnamese moved easily in a rhythmic jogging walk, almost like a woman's walk with one foot always in front of the other. I discovered later, when I tried on a pair of Ho Chi Minh sandals, that the curved rubber, jutting out in front to protect the toes from thorns, scorpions and bamboo spikes, almost forces you to walk like that.

Sometime in the middle of the night, we stopped at a military camp which had flimsy shelters over deep bunkers. A Vietnamese, speaking English with extreme difficulty, questioned me . . . name, age, rank . . . We were to hear the same questions often during the coming days. This night, the others were questioned separately, in the dark and closely watched by their guards.

Then they brought us a basket of rice and thin pork fat soup, our first meal in about 40 hours. I ate about a half bowl of the mixture, gagged and threw up on my sleeve. The others didn't seem to notice and continued eating. I drank some tea instead.

Later, I was put in one bunker and the others in another and we slept the few remaining hours until dawn.

I emerged from the bunker streaked with the red dust of its walls. A group of soldiers was eating. I asked if I could wash, pointing to a piece of soap each soldier carried in a strip of plastic. One soldier, amused, took me to a stream and watched as I splashed water over myself and my clothes.

We were given the breakfast that was to become our staple diet — rice with fatty pork in a salt sauce. The soldiers ate the same. We were questioned again and they fingered through our belongings. We offered them odd trinkets, but they refused them.

Heang's feet looked like pulp. A soldier threaded them with needle and cotton to allow the pus to run out. The Vietnamese knew about sore feet, all had gapping ulcers and scars from their toes to their knees.

Early the same evening we moved again, and again were warned: Don't be afraid of the bombing. Don't run or you'll be shot. There is no reason to be afraid of the planes. We had six guards, three of whom were to stay with us until the moment of our release.

They gave us (with the exception of Charoon) shower shoes which they said were taken from the bodies of paratroopers on Highway 4, which we crossed that night. We walked about one mile down the center of the road in the moonlight. It was littered with burned-out trucks and there was the smell of burned bodies. The planes flew over. Moonface was hobbling slowly in great pain. Terrified of the planes overhead, we urged him on.

The guards untied Moonface and fashioned a walking stick out of some wood for him. The bombing was heavy that night. The moon was full and shadowy groups of soldiers passed us. There were lines of loaded bicycles pushed by men in black pajamas with scarves around their heads.

We stopped at another camp, a large one right on the highway. The bombs crashed only 50 to 100 yards away but the soldiers, some of them women, stood around casually smoking cigarettes and talking. They laughed at our fear of the planes.

It was a long march that night and I found myself dozing off in mid-step. Water was rationed and we gave most of it to Moonface. Rest stops were frequent but brief. The guards gave us cigarettes and chatted with us. We broke our pace only when someone stumbled and lost a shower shoe, our most valuable possession. I had lost the skin from the tops of two toes and sand was ground into them.

I had visions of oranges during that walk . . . cold, sweet Hong Kong oranges I had once eaten on the deck of the Macao ferry. I could see oranges in ice, stacks of oranges in shop windows. There were red oranges you find in the south of Italy and I remembered some thin-skinned oranges I once found in a London fruit market.

The land became flatter, sandier and the trees thinner — similar to the area where eastern Cambodia meets the southern section of South Vietnam. We crossed dried mud-pan paddy fields and passed villages, many of them bombed out. Before dawn we stopped at a vacant house. There were mats on the floor and we slept. We set off at dawn and traveled about an hour to another cluster of bunkers with crude shelters over them. We decided to call the place "Phum Takei" (Lice Village) because of the huge lice

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Kate Webb's Glimpse Behind the Lines

PART THREE

Pacific Stars & Stripes
Thursday, May 20, 1971

OUR CAPTORS TALK

By KATE WEBB

THIRD OF A SERIES

(The frankness of our captors amazed and puzzled me. Toshiichi Suzuki of Nihon Denpa News and I both requested interviews, and it was we who subsequently ran out of questions. The Vietnamese never tired of talking. It indicated, I personally concluded, the confidence which they kept expressing that public opinion was on THEIR side throughout the world. Most importantly, I believe, through the interviews and chats with guards, as well as what we saw, we obtained a glimpse of what has puzzled the world—how and why they fight.)

We spent two weeks in a place we called Phum Kasat (Press Village). It seemed to be some kind of transient camp, a collection of thatched roof "hootches" (huts) scattered under thickets of trees between two villages. We were confined to two small huts, one built on the second day when it became obvious the six of us were too cramped in the first.

They put Suzuki and I in one hootch, the Cambodians in the other. There was a manger-type wooden water trough, small bamboo table, hammocks and mosquito nets. We were permitted to walk only to a "squat-hole" type toilet about 50 yards away through some trees at the rear. A lean-to bath house, with a crock of water filled only three times before we were released, backed onto the small hut Suzuki and I shared on those interminably long days and nights.

We had no idea why we were there or for how long. We sometimes lost track of the days and never saw our faces in a mirror. I made a crude sun dial out of a stick in the ground. We gauged when our twice daily meals would come by when the cows from the east village walked past.

The monotony was broken only during our conversations with the officers and casual chats with our guards. Otherwise, it was nightly Radio Hanoi broadcasts, rising before dawn for exercises and speculating on the movements of the villagers and 20 to so military personnel in the camp.

One night the guards gave Suzuki and me half a coconut shell filled with rank fiery rice wine. It was the only night we slept well. One day we saw them pull a motorcycle out of a hay-stack; there were days we huddled in a bunker while U.S. AH1 "Cobra" helicopter gunships and "Slicks" (UH1 Hueys) circled overhead. Sweating, we were aware that the black pajamas they had provided for me and the green uniforms given the men would identify us as part of the Communist outfit if ever there was an attack.

There were daily visits from the camp doctor, a cheerful young kid with a shock of black hair who lanced my feet and cleaned Moonface's (Tea Kim Heang, a freelance photographer) open wounds. He handed out pills for fever and stomach upsets and warned us against becoming seriously ill because, he said, nothing could be done about it.

We came to know and study the camp dogs, cats and chickens, the habits of ants, and made half-hearted attempts to learn one another's languages. But most of the time we sat, or lay, wrapped in our own thoughts and deliberately avoiding talk of home or families, Phnom Penh or freedom.

* * *

I made some diary entries on the back of a cigarette package:

"Friday 16th. S. (Chhim Sarath, UPI driver interpeter) in depths of all-time low. After yesterday's interrogation he sure he going to be zapped. He told me he told not to talk to me. But said I was English and always very good. He huddles in corner silent all day. If had more paper would write essay on prisoners as domestic pets. New house means we must be in for long stay."

"Saturday 17th. Ten days now and days do not vary. My feet worse. Suz and I questioned by "Dad," thin man with bad eyes and girl in black pajamas, speaking bad French. We told to answer in writing 29 questions, and asked if anything want. Tailor measures us for clothes. What the hell is this? Hot, hot."

"Sunday 18th. Interrogate all day by young man with screwed-up index finger with wound. I call him The Finger. Notice girl has wedding ring, tough face, soft voice. Dad there and two old men, one in civilian clothes and specs speaking very good French. The other squat in mil. unif. They all laugh when I ask of their difficulties with Sihanoukists. Splitting headache after interrogation. All in French."

* * *

We were given paper for the 29 question questionnaire and I asked them for more to keep a journal. Suzuki also was keeping notes, in Japanese. They made no attempt to take them or read them, and gave us each two sheets of paper for our personal use. They are beside me as I write now, torn into a tiny book crammed with writing. Suzuki folded and tore his paper the same way; both of us ready to hide and save our notes at all costs if need be.

The questionnaire asked for all details of our families, salaries, addresses and occupations of friends, biographies and details of our capture. Suzuki struggled to answer them in English, writing hunched over the table because of his poor eyesight. We did not confer, except on the spelling of a word. The second section asked our opinions on the war. I rewrote from memory the last stories I had written for UPI on the military situation in Cambodia.

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I found the daylong interrogation tough and worrying (Suzuki's questioning had been shorter). It was hot. It was interesting, and confusing:

Why were you following the Lon Nol troops?

Why do you work for the American imperialists?

You cannot be a neutral observer in this war. Everyone is on one side or the other.

We do not believe you put yourself in dangerous military situations if you are not CIA. Then would you risk your life if you were not?

I tried to put as much humor as I could in my answers:

Would you rather I rewrote government handouts? You, I think, could answer that better than I could . . . This is the first opportunity I have had to meet you . . . Sometimes I think my profession is crazy myself. . .

They quipped in return, but I was never certain what was serious and what was not.

* * *

During the questioning I reiterated: "I am not a clairvoyant, I don't know who will win the war. If I did I would probably leave and stop reporting. I am an observer and don't have political sides, I try to report both." They brought Suzuki in.

He answered the question differently. "How come," asked The Finger, "that you both say you are asking objectivity and you both have different ideas?"

"We are different people," we replied simultaneously (I translated into French for Suzuki this time).

The interrogation group laughed and Suzuki was sent out again.

"Do you realize," said the old man in civilian clothes, "you are a prisoner of war," that one shot through the head could finish you, just like that?"

"I'm in your hands," I said, grinning. "That's up to you now, there's nothing I can do about it. Besides I don't consider myself a prisoner of war, I'm not a soldier."

"Then consider yourself an invited guest," he said.

They all laughed, harder, at this, and the old man commented that I seemed very confident about release. There had been no threat in the tone of his voice. The interrogation often fell into a humorous vein. They seemed to be enjoying themselves, the Vietnamese, but then it would suddenly twist.

It ended on an odd note. The Finger looked up seriously, and said, "If you really are objective, as you say, you must want to stay with us, having spent so much time with the other side. Do you want to go back to your family or stay with us?"

I felt the question was serious. I sat and thought. I was in a quandary. Afraid and fascinated, physically weak and aware of the worry there would be on "the other side." They were taking me up on my own statements. I thought of my own dictum, "Dead men don't write stories." Then I answered seriously, "I'd like to stay with you a few weeks, and then return home."

The man assigned to relay our questions was the 46-year-old southerner I had nicknamed Dad, thin to the point of emaciation, wiry and wearing the scars of old wounds on both legs. He said he came from the South Vietnamese town of Ben Tre in the Mekong Delta. Unlike the northerners we met, he carried a tiny Buddha on his cigarette lighter chain. He had, he told us, been in the resistance for 26 years.

Which was tougher, we asked him, the war against the French or the war against the Americans? "The war against the French colonialists," he answered unequivocally. We were to hear the same from other soldiers we met.

"In the first resistance," the man called Dad said, "we did not have the equipment and training we do now."

He fingered the hammocks we sat on and commented that they were very important in the "struggle against the American imperialists." Every man has one, he said, "then we slept on the ground."

"The French were better soldiers than the Americans," he said. "Their planes would swoop low and the pilots would drop grenades if they had used their bombs. They knew more about the country, the French; they were more entrenched, they knew Indochina."

(Suzuki told me he had heard the same answer many times in Hanoi.)

The bombing is very heavy, I said during one session, and there is the artillery, and the napalm. I was recalling the uncountable times in South Vietnam I had seen bodies of soldiers in the same uniform as his scattered over battlefields after air and artillery strikes. Twenty-six years. He must have been there too, many more times.

"All the bombs, and the weapons cannot conquer the spirit of a people who want to be free," he said. "We do not fear the bombs, unless there is a direct hit, you are not harmed. The Thieu-Ky and Lon Nol troops run from us, they have no fighting spirit. And the bombs we often know about in advance. They can pour millions of dollars of bombs on our country to try to advance their imperialist aims. But bombs cannot kill a spirit."

The man from Ben Tre talked mostly about the war in South Vietnam. He called it the "second resistance," and talked of how the northerners came to help the southerners when, after the (1954) Geneva conference, "the puppet Ngo Dinh Diem refused to give the people general elections in South Vietnam."

He (and the others) talked always positively, only of victory, never of their failures or defeats. They told the story of the war as a string of "American failures."

"The American aggressors and their puppets failed in the special war before 1966," he said, "then they poured in more than 500,000 troops. That tactic failed. World opinion condemned them, the people would never submit to the foreign aggressors. There were troubles between the puppets and the aggressors.

"They tried bombing the north, changing their tactics. But the fighting spirit of the Vietnamese people was high and world opinion again condemned their imperialist tactics.

"Now the withdrawal has begun, and the American people are fighting beside us. Vietnamization is a new tactic of the imperialists. We did not know how it would succeed, but the Laotian operation has proved it a failure. They have many modern machines of war but no spirit, they still remember Ho Chi Minh, they fear us. We honestly did not know what the South Vietnamese troops would be like after always fighting with the Americans in the front line. But now we are not worried."

He looked at me. I had written in the questionnaire that the outcome of the Laos operation remained to be seen, and that claims of victory on both sides could not be believed.

He grinned, slowly rolling a cigarette and offering me one at the same time.

"You both know a lot about the war. We have translated your answers," he said.

"You see the war is an Indochina war now, like the one against the French. Before it was just Vietnam, but now the American aggressors have invaded Laos and Cambodia.

"We have been in Cambodia for years," he admitted without hesitation but we confined ourselves to staying in a small place. Sihanouk supported our cause against aggression. But now, the war has spread, and we are all over the country."

"Can a leopard change his stripes? Can Sihanouk the prince stop being a prince?" Suzuki asked.

The man from Ben Tre laughed again. "I am not a clairvoyant," he said mimicking my answer, "and one cannot tell about Sihanouk."

(We had been amazed at the open scorn the Vietnamese seemed to have for Sihanouk. "If it wasn't for Sihanouk, I would be home," one of the guards said miserably one night.)

"Why is he in Peking and not Hanoi," I asked. "And are you afraid of a Chinese-Cambodian alliance because of Sihanouk's fears of "Vietnamese domination?"

The man from Ben Tre laughed once again. "We don't know why he is in Peking . . . And if Sihanouk came to Phnom Penh . . . ?" He shrugged. "Now he has seen the light. Now he is with us. Who knows about the future?

"There are many Sihanoukists in Phnom Penh. They would be with Sihanouk if he came back. But Sihanouk has not come back."

* * *

We asked the man whether students, monks and political cells had been organized yet in Phnom Penh.

"No," he said. "In Saigon, yes, but in Phnom Penh and the major Cambodian province capitals held by the government and along some of the roads, no. We have our people there, but no cells set up.

Our Captors Talk—

Pacific Stars & Stripes
Thursday, May 20, 1971

"In Phnom Penh, they are Sihanoukists. They are waiting. In the liberated areas from hamlet, village, town, district and Ku (Vietnamese for military region), liberation governments have been set up and established. But it takes time, it takes time."

Intrigued by this revelation of distrust of the Sihanoukists, I asked who was training the Cambodian members of the "Cambodian Liberation Front," and what kind of political future he saw for Cambodia.

"Those training the Cambodians are the children of old resistance fighters who have been trained as cadres in Hanoi and Peking," he said. "The Cambodian fighters are improving. They are beginning to be able to attack by themselves."

Warming to the subject, he began to draw maps.

"The Cambodian war will not be settled until after the Vietnam War is won," he said slowly. "The Cambodian Liberation Front is not yet ready to take over. They have a lot to learn. They could not take over now."

* * *

Suzuki told the man that many correspondents had written that Cambodia was the weak point for the Allies in Indochina and that Phnom Penh could fall easily to the more experienced North Vietnamese troops.

"The war in South Vietnam is harder for us," the men from Ben Tre said. "The Thieu-Ky troops are better trained than the Lon Nol troops. There is more bombing in South Vietnam, more intensive operations. The American troops. When it will end, we don't know. Nixon is hard headed, very hard headed.

"But the Cambodians are not ready to take over here. They are not ready. It will take a lot of time."

I asked if cadres were still being trained in Hanoi and Peking. He said yes.

What is the Cambodian liberation flag? I asked suddenly, having heard that several battles had broken out over Sihanoukists tearing down the Viet Cong flag and putting up the old Royalist flag.

"I don't know," he said.

* * *

These conversations continued in the shade of our hootch over the following days. He told us that all prisoners' food and money captured by the Vietnamese Communists were handed over to the Cambodians in the Liberation Front. He pulled out a prisoner record book, and showed us the names of several officers in the government army who were war prisoners. I knew three or four of them, and said so.

"They will be kept until the end of the war, learning political lessons, and in hard labor camps. The private soldiers (the Cambodians) are kept for ten days, then released without being harmed."

I debated the advisability of asking the question, but said, "If you turn over all the prisoners to the Cambodians, why don't you turn us over?"

He looked a bit puzzled. He knew that we knew many prisoners died in the hands of the Khmer Rouge. "As reporters, I suppose you want to meet them," he said. "We can turn you over if you really want to be. I don't advise it. They are not as well supplied as us. They could not treat you as well, and you (he touched my arm) are not very strong."

* * *

That night I talked to a guard I called "Gap Tooth."

"You were very lucky," he said. "If the Cambodians had got you, (he ran his finger across his neck) phhht. Finish. Especially if they saw that long nose. If you'd walked as slowly as you did on the march, phhht."

We spent many nights squatting outside our hootches in the dark, listening to the guards, joking with them, sharing our precious cigarettes. Gap Tooth was one of the more talkative.

"We have many monks as prisoners like you," Gap Tooth told us. "They carry pistols for Lon Nol, while the soldiers carry Buddhas." His peals of laughter rang out into the night and he mimed a government soldier being attacked. "They grab their Buddhas with one hand and shoot into the air with the other."

But he sobered when we asked about the "Mike Forces," the U.S. Green Beret-trained Cambodian mercenary troops who are hardened veterans of Vietnam and now fight in Cambodia.

"They are good," he said. "They use grenades and come right up to the bunkers and throw them in."

"They are well trained," he said respectfully. "They're good."

* * *

Mr. Liberation also talked about home. I called him Mr. Liberation because he must have said American imperialist aggressors and their lackeys 100 times an hour. A nervous young northerner who spoke English, he was brought in to interpret for me when the girl who had interpreted during the first session came down with a fever.

He was one of the few met who was married. Thirty-one years old, he had two children, a boy and a girl. His home was in the Red River Delta, he said, and his younger sister was still at school.

"Can you visit your family ever?" I asked him one night as we squatted in the dark after the Radio Hanoi news and commentary program had ended. "Make that walk? ..." He looked at me incredulously. "We are allowed, of course. I would like to see them, of course ... But that walk, I would never walk all that way and back again." He had uttered three sentences without saying American imperialists and their lackeys.

I am no longer in doubt that the North Vietnamese moving south walk at least most of the Ho Chi Minh trail. Mention of the walk makes them cringe.

"Mail we get," said Mr. Liberation. "I got a letter from my wife three months ago." He removed the letter from a plastic wallet in his pocket. It had been folded and refolded repeatedly and beside it was a photograph of Ho Chi Minh.

"I was in South Vietnam when he died," he said. "It was a terrible day."

"How did you feel?" Suzuki asked.

"Terrible, terrible," he said. I told him that in Saigon, most Vietnamese felt sad as well.

I hastily changed the subject to Defense Minister Vo Nguyen Giap and to military training. Mr. Lib became cagey. He was trained for two years he said, and came south four years ago.

"What will you do when the war is over?" I asked. He was sitting, as they all did, on one of his rubber Ho Chi Minh sandals, both feet on the other. The question seemed to strike him as odd.

"I have not thought, he said.

"What would you like to be?" I insisted, wondering if his answer had meant he thought he never would return north to his home.

"I have never thought," he repeated. "There is much fighting to do before driving the American imperialists and their lackeys from our homeland. And then we must always be on our guard because withdrawal is only a ruse, a trick by the imperialist Nixon to deceive the American people. The aggressors will try many other tricks."

Positive thinking be damned, I thought miserably as I lay awake in my hammock that night wondering about the soldier's wife in the orchard lands he had described in his Red River Delta province of North Vietnam.

I also thought of the guard I had called The Celibate who had said, "I will get married when the American imperialists are driven from the country."

One of the soldiers was playing a North Vietnamese love song on a flute. The sweet, lonely sound hung on the night air.

Then the droning of a plane in the distance and the bombing began in the hills around us.

Tomorrow: "Tell the Truth"

5/21/71

W

Pacific Stars & Stripes
Friday, May 21, 1971

LAST OF SERIES

Kate Webb's Glimpse Behind the Lines

TELL THE TRUTH

By KATE WEBB

(Living guerrilla style was weakening us, especially me, daily. Our captors seemed unaffected by the tough regimen. Our release was hinted at but never promised. I began to be racked by fevers. Then suddenly, we crossed from one world to another, a world of shadow in the night to the unaccustomed glare of light, speed and noise.

Symbolically, it was at dawn when we made the crossing to freedom, a lonely, hesitant and frightened group waving a white flag on Highway 4. I remembered what I had written at the time of a prisoner of war release in South Vietnam in 1968: "Their eyes look like those of sleepwalkers, but their feet tell you it was real.")

An entry in my scrap paper journal: "Monday. April 26. Ache all over, cold with fever. Still no cigarettes. Fever cold as cold. Wrapped in mine and Suz mosquito nets. Helos over again. Spend 30 mins trencher. Gap tooth says release in three days, but secret. I figure that a deliberate leak to get something out of us. Eyes burning with fever."

That evening we sat in a circle in the dark listening to Radio Hanoi news. Several of the officers came down to ask how I felt. The doctor had given me a tiffomycin tablet after Toshiichi Suzuki had called him.

The interpreter I called Mr. Liberation squatted beside me in the dark. "You must do your best to keep your health," he said. I nodded, thinking of the malaria case I had seen passing on one of the marches. Delirious screams coming from a poncho litter. It was becoming more difficult to force my mind into reality.

A column of six men moved into the camp, full packs on their backs, silently casting curious stares at us over their shoulders. They went in the direction of the kitchen, hidden in a nearby cluster of trees and a place we had never seen. I watched them, wondering why the guerrilla troops always moved silently, seemingly without orders. Drab anti-like columns.

Tea Kim Heang, the freelance photographer, whom we called Moonface, moved beside me, guessing my state of depression. "Bai Tangai," he whispered (Cambodian for "three days"). He put his finger to his lips and jerked his head at the guard we called Gap Tooth. He fingered a bracelet I had woven out of vines and threads from a peasant scarf they had given me and pulled more vines from the trees around us to make me a necklace.

* * *

The following day, April 27, Dad, the man assigned to answer mine and Suzuki's questions, said we would be released. We had been talking of Sihanouk all morning, hunched over the bamboo table in our shelter. "Bunker" and "Ky," two of the camp dogs, dozed under our hammocks. My fever was down. But I was still wrapped in mosquito nets and Suzuki's shirt which he had discarded because of the heat.

"You will be released at Trapeang Krailang on Highway 4," Dad told us. "The Liberation Front will assure your safety. You will have two sets of clothing, and 300 reils (5 to 6 U.S. dollars) each for transport. If that is not enough, you must not be afraid to tell us. Your personal possessions will be returned, but according to the rules, your cameras will be taken."

Suzuki and I were silent. Dad did not seem puzzled or surprised. Our release had been hinted at earlier, but not mentioned again. "Are you satisfied? Have you anything to say?" He asked.

We simply nodded. "Cam on," we said (Vietnamese for "Thank You").

"You are sad about your cameras," said Mr. Lib who had joined us and was squatting at the doorway of the crowded shelter.

"Yes," we said.

"We are sorry, but it is the rules," Mr. Lib said. "We are not taking them for ourselves."

I wondered if the cameras were being given to the Khmer Rouge as a ransom for our safety. I thought it probable, but said nothing.

* * *

Another journey entry: "Wed. 28th. Wrapped up with burning head and shivers all day. Cambodians say bath means release. Doctor gives me four pills and head rub. Scolds me for taking bath. Try to force food. Must eat. Getting too weak. Long slow day. Dad goes thru list of possessions, but says no more. Suzuki is betting on May 1. We discuss northerners and southerners."

The bath made us excited because we were not scheduled for another by our reckoning, until the following Monday. But two guards I called The Twins began carrying kerosene cans of water, coolie style, to the crock in the bath house early in the morning.

Moonface sat beside my hammock, drinking our tea because theirs was finished. "Today," he said while I inspected the stitches on his old shoulder wounds for what seemed the hundredth time and told him they were okay. "Lay off our tea," I added.

Bathing had become a major event. Individually, we should take our scarves and half coconut shell the Cambodians used for drinking (Suzuki and I had glasses) into the bathhouse and slop the water from an earthenware crock over our sweat-soaked bodies.

SS - 5/21/72

"A day seemed like weeks before, now it seems like years," Sarath said. He was right.

But although we were to walk two more days, our official release came the next (Thursday) morning. The guards woke us before five o'clock, earlier than usual.

Mr. Lib arrived and said, "Put on your new clothes. The officer of the high command is up here." I emerged from the bath house in a new green uniform they had given me and Sarath said, "Pack Miss, everything."

Each of us was given a small green cloth bag and I packed "everything" — the torn shirt and jeans I had been captured in, the necklace Moonface had made for me, my black pajamas, tooth brush and tooth paste. "Hammock and mosquito net, too," Mr. Lib ordered.

We stared at each other. Was it release or just another long march?

* * *

At nine o'clock we were photographed, individually and in a group, by a man Mr. Lib confided was a "very high ranking officer." Mr. Lib was flustered and nervous, although it is not Communist habit to salute or show deference to officers. We discussed the value of a camera lens with the officer as he squatted beside us. Mr. Lib was mistranslating in his nervousness.

We then were taken to the tree-hidden shelter where we had been interrogated. Wooden benches were arranged in a semi-circle before a table covered with the traditional green and white checkered cloth.

The squat old military man who had been in the background during our interrogation presided. Before him lay a sheaf of documents — "the official orders from the southwest command for the release of four journalists and two driver-interpreters, according to the humane principles of the Liberation Armed Forces."

We felt awkward in our new clothes. The high command representative cleared his throat, put on his spectacles and looked up. He seemed weary and read the order slowly.

Translations were read to us and when the sections about the "humane" policies were read we were signalled to applaud. We did.

More group photographs followed before we returned for our personal possessions. I was handed back my purse, watch, a Chinese charm I wear around my neck, my ring, aspirin, wallet and I.D. cards. Nothing was missing. I signed for them, and for the 300 reils they gave each of us for transportation.

"You now have the opportunity to say thank you," Mr. Lib informed us, producing his tape recorder. Suzuki took the microphone and thanked them in English. Moonface followed, in Cambodian, then myself and Charoon. We shook hands all around, the officers included, and plates of bananas and candy and tea were placed on the table. We also were given a full package of cigarettes each.

The officer motioned me off the bench onto a chair. "You are very weak," he said. "When you return to your home, you must check your health very carefully." He pushed a glass of tea toward me and lit my cigarette, as he had done during the interrogation.

"Your cameras are tools of the imperialists and their lackeys," he told us. "They will be used for the good purposes of the Liberation Front.

"When you leave you will not tell people where this place is. It could mean difficulty." He looked at me and Suzuki.

"When you go back to your homes," he said, "tell the truth about us. Tell the truth. You may have to be very brave, but tell the truth."

I remembered that during the interrogation he had said he did not believe UPI would publish anything I wrote about them.

* * *

We asked about other journalists (there are 17) missing in Cambodia. The command representative looked almost embarrassed, I thought.

The Liberation Forces could not be held responsible for journalists who followed the Lon Nol troops, he said. It sounded like a warning. Suzuki and I pressed the question. He repeated that it was the policy of the Liberation Front never to kill prisoners, but said that in the southwest region he had no knowledge of other captive journalists.

I felt an odd sense of failure.

* * *

It was at 5:40 p.m. that evening under a sickle moon that we moved out on the first leg of the last lap to freedom. The entire camp turned out to shake hands and say goodbye. We were photographed together with the officers, then moved off into the dusk, turning to wave. From 20 yards away, the camp looked like just another clump of trees.

We were not tied. The men carried rice in scarves slung around their necks, and also their "release bags." There were, as usual, six guards — Dad, Dave, Gold Tooth, Mr. Lib, the teacher and one of the members of the new party that had arrived in camp. The Cambodians were told that if we walked fast it would take one night instead of two to reach Highway 4.

Twice we seemed to lose our way and three times we back-tracked, the guards flashing their torches on trail forks looking for a familiar sign. Once a village woman carrying a torch called to the guards, shouting something in Cambodian, and we retraced our steps.

I was told I was walking "very well" and that I must keep doing my best. My head was swimming, my hair and new suit drenched with sweat. At the next rest stop we simply leaned against one another's backs, too tired to sit.

A blister broke on my foot. It will be numb in an hour, I thought. It was.

Then a jab like a hot needle in my toe. "Snake," I yelled.

Dad was there with his torch before the echo of my voice had died. I grabbed Vorn, Suzuki's driver, who was in front of me in the column. "Tell them they have to cut my foot, it's a snake," I jabbered.

Gold tooth came grinning with a seven-inch scorpion. "Don't worry, no danger," Mr. Lib said. "If snake, very dangerous." We crouched in a circle of torchlight as Dad bound my swelling toe and the raw blister. Mr. lib asked me what a scorpion was called in English.

* * *

We saw what looked like a town, with scores of bright lights, but it was villagers fishing for crabs and frogs in the flooded but shallow paddy fields by the light of oil flares. Gold Tooth and Dad joked with them and bought four live frogs, which croaked behind me the rest of the march. (They ate them for breakfast the next morning, roasted over a fire on a bamboo skewer.)

I fell at least three times despite Dad's torch. Finally, he stopped and gave me his Ho Chi Minh sandals, put them on my feet, and took my shower shoes. The Ho sandals had curved rubber sticking out in front to protect the toes and were much more comfortable, aside from protection from thorns, scorpions and bamboo spikes.

Dad seemed to have difficulty, too, walking in the shower shoes. They slither, mud sucks them off, and brambles tear them askew. He decided to carry them and walked barefoot. It was past midnight and we were exhausted when he handed Suzuki and me lumps of fudge-like sugar. A thick patch of jungle was our camp. The Teacher had strung my hammock and I fell into it.

* * *

It rained that day and we amateurishly strung ponchos over our hammocks. Moonface caught an inch-long thorn in his heel and went straight to Dad with a confidence that amused me. Dad dug it out for him.

We lazed in hammocks listening to the transistor radio. I picked up a children's program on the BBC: They didn't ask me to turn it off. Gold Tooth and the new guard had gone off all day and I wondered if they ever slept.

Dad repeatedly went over a hand sketch map of the release point with us. He had a fever and asked for some of the aspirin they had returned to me. I gave him the aspirin — and the pocket book. He had admired the soft black leather.

* * *

We were scared. Even the guards seemed nervous. There was fighting about 300 yards away near the end of the march, with flares and the crash of mortars. We skirted villages and the guards held long consultations at each stop. Dad kept dropping out of line. He had the stomach upset known to American GIs in Vietnam as "Ho Chi Minh's Revenge."

Tell The Truth—

We stopped at a moon and flare-lit place where straw had been stacked under a spreading tree. We were told to sleep but I didn't. The guards went off in groups and seemed to be arguing over their plans.

Gold Tooth appeared out of nowhere, bringing news, and by the light of the flares over the battle on the road I could see him drawing maps in the dust for the others.

"It is time to move," Mr. Lib said. We scrambled up and in minutes were moving off again. I lit my second last cigarette. It was sometime after 3 a.m. We did not use torches.

We stopped suddenly on what I thought was a new trail. The Teacher was whispering in Cambodian, we were shaking hands, wishing good luck to each other.

Then the six of us were alone in the dark.

"Where are we?" I asked Sarath.

"Highway 4, but not at Trapeang Krailang. Quick, we must move from this place. The soldiers say we must move."

Still we stood. The Teacher appeared from somewhere behind us. "Move," he whispered, then disappeared.

We moved about 500 yards, our shower shoes making a loud flapping sound on the road. I walked in front "because you have a white face," as agreed beforehand.

We argued about moving to a nearby abandoned house with old foxholes around it. The guards had said to wait until after the government armored road-clearing patrol had passed. We had said we would take civilian transportation back to Phnom Penh. But we knew we were not in a town, but territory controlled by the Khmer Rouge.

Moonface won out. He took a piece of white parachute silk I had and tied it to a stick. We stripped off our gift clothing and dressed in the dark in what we had left of our civilian clothes. The pink grey dawn came slowly, illuminating an empty stretch of highway littered with spent shell casings.

Shakily, I picked up my little bag. Moonface, clad only in his torn trousers — now too large for him — raised the white parachute silk flag. The two of us stepped out onto the highway, the others shuffling behind. There was the familiar flap of shower shoes in the unfamiliar naked light of day.

Troops appeared on the crest of a hill ahead of us. We stopped and Moonface's face fell, as did the flag he was carrying. We quickly shoved it up again, snapping at him nervously.

Government or Khmer Rouge? The drab column moved slowly down the hill toward us. "Lon Nol," Sarath and Moonface said simultaneously. The approaching troops stopped, staring. We continued walking, slowly.

I could see their uniforms now and for the first time in 24 days my nerves relaxed. I had to blink to hold back the tears. A first lieutenant was standing in the middle of the road.

"Journalists," we said lamely, still waving our flag high. The officer pointed at me.

"Miss Webb," he said. "You're supposed to be dead."

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Friday, May 21, 1971

New Zealand born Kate Webb, Cambodia bureau manager for United Press International, whose series of articles about her capture by the Viet Cong, begins today.
(AP Photo)

Stars & Stripes
18, 19, 20, 21 May 1971