

# First They Killed My Father

A Daughter of Cambodia Remembers

By Loung Ung

## Cambodian History

Cambodia and Vietnam have shared geographic space and people for at least 4000 years. Even though little is known about the prehistory in the area of Cambodia, there is solid evidence of Mekong River habitation and a pottery tradition that goes back at least 6200 years. Early historic occupation of the area beginning in about the 1st century was about trade and commerce between Indians from the Bay of Bengal region and Chinese from the southern provinces of China. This marked the area now known as Cambodia with Hindu deities and Javanese Buddhist roots that later facilitated the rise of the Kingdom of Angkor. In 802 AD the ruler Jayavarman II declared himself a universal monarch and consolidated power in the area now known as Cambodia. His rule and that of those who followed over the next 300 years, created a nation/state that left a legacy of Southeast Asia's finest architecture. From 1219 to 1864 Cambodia's fortunes rose and fell with a variety of kings and conflicts with the Thais to the West and the Cham Kingdom to the East (Vietnam).

The country stabilized somewhat in 1864 with the signing of a treaty protectorate with the French and so became a third of French Indochina, along with Laos and Vietnam. French rule lasted until the Japanese defeat in 1945. Cambodia was then declared an autonomous French State, which lasted until the French defeat in Vietnam in 1954. In 1955 King Norodom Sihanouk consolidated power through parliamentary elections and maintained power until his exile to China in 1970 which also marks the beginning of the Cambodian civil war and the rise of the Khmer Rouge. On April 17, 1975 the Khmer Rouge won the civil war and evacuated the cities of Cambodia to institute a return to Year Zero and establish an agrarian classless society. This also marks the beginning of the "killing fields" era when more than 2 million Cambodians died either through execution, disease, or starvation. The government of Cambodia instigated many border clashes with Vietnam to its south and east, and in 1978 Vietnam invaded Cambodia and installed a new government leading to even greater chaos and more starvation. The Khmer Rouge retreated to the mountains of Western Cambodia and Thailand. Vietnam maintained control of Cambodia until 1989 when their own domestic problems forced their withdrawal. The Paris Peace Accords were signed in 1991, and supervised elections returned to Cambodia.

## Important Dates in Cambodian History

<b>AD 100</b>	Indianization begins. The language religion and culture of India starts to take root in Cambodia.	<b>1947</b>	Provinces seized by the Thais during the war are returned.
<b>802</b>	Jayavaman II proclaims independence from Java, starting the Kingdom of Angkor.	<b>1953</b>	Cambodia becomes independent from the French.
<b>889</b>	Yasovarman I moves the capitol to Angkor.	<b>1955</b>	Free Elections.
<b>1112</b>	Suryavarman II commences the construction of Angkor Wat.	<b>1969</b>	President Nixon authorizes the secret bombing of Cambodia.
<b>1177</b>	The Chams sail up the Tonle Sap, defeat the Khmers, and occupy Angkor for 4 years.	<b>1970</b>	The Civil War begins.
<b>1181</b>	Jayavaman VII defeats the Chams and takes the throne.	<b>1975</b>	The Khmer Rouge win the civil war and begin the "Killing Fields".
<b>1431</b>	The Thais sack Angkor and kidnap most of the royal court.	<b>1979</b>	Vietnamese forces liberate Cambodia followed by famine.
<b>1772</b>	The Thais burn Phnom Penh to the ground.	<b>1985</b>	The Khmer Rouge retreat to Thailand.
<b>1864</b>	The French force King Norodom I to sign a treaty of protectorate.	<b>1989</b>	Vietnam withdraws.
<b>1942</b>	Japanese forces occupy Cambodia.	<b>1991</b>	Paris Peace Accords, elections return.
		<b>2002</b>	First ever local elections.

## Cambodia Today

**Population:** 13.6 million Growth rate: 1.8% (2005 est.)  
**Capital:** Phnom Penh  
**Location:** Borders Thailand, Vietnam, and Laos  
**Area:** 181,040 sq. km. (about the size of the state of Missouri or Washington)  
**Ethnic groups:** Khmer 90%; Vietnamese 5%; Chinese 1%; Other 4% (Chams, Burmese, hill tribes)  
**Language:** Khmer (official) 95%; French; English  
**Religion:** Theravada Buddhist 95%; Other 5%  
**Life Expectancy at Birth:** female 62 years; male 56 years (2005 est.)  
**Literacy:** total 70%; female 60%; male 80% (2003)  
**GDP per capita:** \$2,000 (purchasing power parity, 2004)  
**GDP growth:** 5.4% (2004)  
**Government:** Constitutional Monarchy  
**Economic system:** market economy since 1989

### Sources:

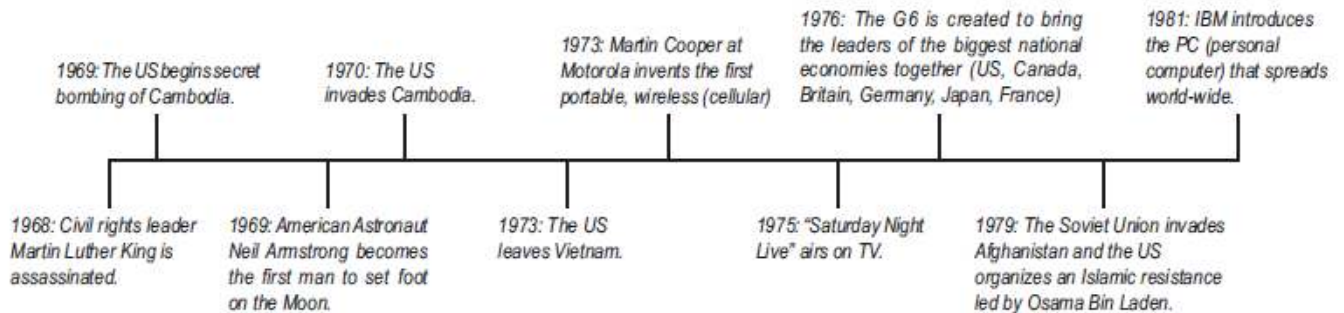
2005 Ray, Nick. "Lonely Planet, Cambodia" Lonely Planet Publications CIA World Factbook, U.S. Department of Commerce

# First They Killed My Father

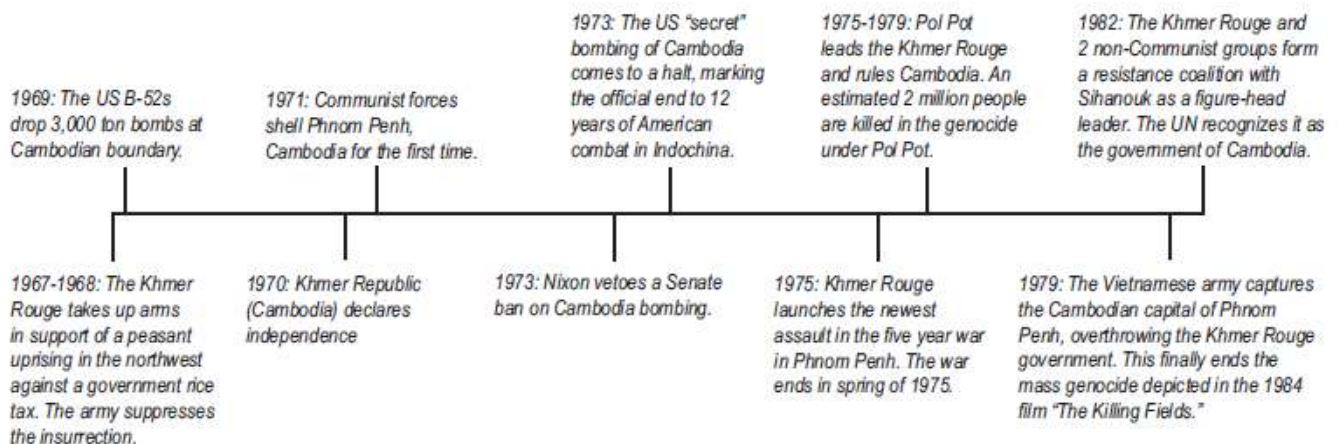
## A Daughter of Cambodia Remembers

### By Loung Ung

#### US Timeline (1968-1981)



#### Cambodian Timeline (1967-1982)



#### Loung's Life (1970-1997)

