

Navy to Assault Cambodia City

Examiner News Services

SAIGON — U.S. Navy boats are planning an assault up the Mekong River to help open a 60-mile stretch of the waterway to the Cambodian capital of Phnom Penh, official sources said today.

The naval operation to start tomorrow was announced at an unprecedented news conference by South Vietnam's Foreign Minister Tran van Lan.

The U.S. Command in Saigon and the Pentagon in Washington refused to comment, and in Washington a top Pentagon spokesman said, "We would deeply deplore any release of any information on upcoming operations that would endanger lives of U.S. troops."

News men arriving from Cambodia today reported heavy fighting on the western bank of the Mekong River halfway between the border and Phnom Penh.

The Navy boats will be in for some sharp fighting. North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces are dotted along most of the waterway and control the ferry crossing at Neak Luong, 37 miles Southeast of Phnom Penh.

President Nixon has said he would not send American forces beyond 21.7 miles into Cambodia without seeking congressional approval.

The operation will take half of the 500 Americans involved all the way to Phnom Penh. The sources said there

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will be 40 U.S. boats and 60 South Vietnamese craft.

American helicopters flew thousands more U.S. and Allied troops into northeastern Cambodia today and into the heart of a vast North Vietnamese bunker complex.

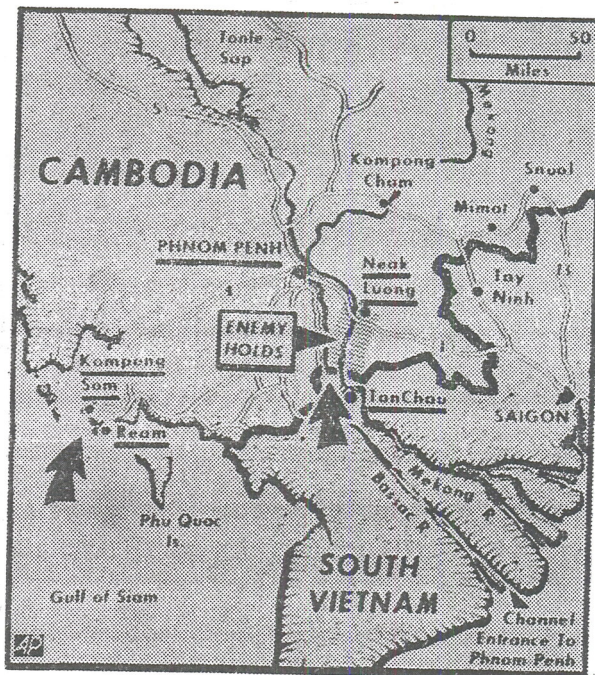
Copter Crashes

One helicopter crashed, killing nine Americans in the accident-plagued operation.

The crash brought to 26 the number of Americans killed in five helicopter crashes in Cambodia and four in Vietnam since Tuesday. U.S. military sources said the Cambodian offensives and Communist reprisal attacks have raised American casualties to their highest point in a year.

Red Retaliation

Viet Cong and North Vietnamese troops launched more retaliatory attacks in Vietnam overnight, killing 12 Vietnamese and wounding 21 in shelling at Hue, wounding 17 Americans in bombing a theater and killing six U.S.



Map shows where Navy is planning assault up Mekong River to Phnom Penh and South Vietnamese are considering amphibious landing at Cambodian port of Kompong Som, navy base of Ream. Shaded areas controlled by VC and North Vietnamese.

—AP Photomap

soldiers in attacking a paratroop base.

Although South Vietnam announced it was pulling

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back 6000 men from on e completed mission in Cambodia, UPI Correspondent Robert E. Sullivan reported today from northeastern Cambodia that at least six battalions (4800 men) of the U.S Fourth Infantry Division had been flown into Cambodia by late today.

Also flown in were units of the American 101st Airborne Division and 22nd Infantry Division. About 2000 Americans had been flown in yesterday, despite intense ground fire which delayed some helicopter landings.

Assault on Port

There also were reports that U.S. Seventh Fleet aircraft carriers were maneuvering in the Gulf of Tonkin off North Vietnam but the intention was not clear.

In announcing the operation, the Foreign Ministry said air cover would be provided for the flotilla.

In a related development, it was learned that the government is considering an amphibious assault at the big port of Kimpong Som, formerly Sihanoukville, and the Cambodian base of Ream, reported to be threatened by North Vietnamese troops only 20 miles away. Ream is 15 miles southeast of Kompong Som.

All the Way

Sources said the American part of the task force in the Phnom Penh operation on the Mekong will include 38 gunboats armed with .50-caliber machine guns and two 350-foot long landing ships to be used as command posts.

The landing ships also will help carry back any of the 200,000 Vietnamese living in Phnom Penh who want to re-

The 60 South Vietnamese navy gunboats will have mixed American and Vietnamese crews.

The Foreign Ministry said the flotilla also will be protected by South Vietnamese turn to their homeland.

troops, presumably riding in attack boats along with their U.S. infantry advisers.

The South Vietnamese military command said one task force had returned to the western Mekong Delta from Cambodia after "successful-

ly completing their mission to destroy base camps and supply depots" around Ba Thu, in the southern end of the so-called Parrot's Beak 45 miles west of Saigon.

The command said that during the operation the

force killed 1197 enemy troops, captured 168 prisoners, and seized 1266 weapons, 160 tons of ammunition and 30 tons of rice. Sixty-six South Vietnamese troops were reported killed and 320 wounded.