

NYTimes MAR 8 1975
**CAMBODIANS LOSE
 LAST BEACHHEAD
 ON LOWER MEKONG**

**Garrison Falls Back to Only
 Position Still Held on Vital
 Water Route to Capital**

SEVERE SETBACK IS SEEN

**Airlift by U.S. Is Continuing
 Despite Rockets—Forces
 of Government Are Thin**

By **DAVID A. ANDELMAN**
 Special to The New York Times

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia,
 March 7—Government troops
 have lost their last beachhead
 on the lower Mekong River,
 Cambodian and Western military
 sources reported today.

The sources said that the
 entire garrison of 800 to 1,000
 men at the beachhead, known
 by the military as Sierra II,
 was evacuated by navy craft
 last night 10 miles up the river
 to Neak Luong, the last major
 Government position on the
 vital waterway between the
 South Vietnamese border and
 Phnom Penh.

The loss of the beachhead
 stopped the Government effort
 to reopen the Mekong to supply
 ships—perhaps for months, in
 the view of some Western mili-
 tary analysts. Since the Com-
 munist-led insurgents closed
 the river in mid-January the
 capital's supplies have been
 coming in by American airlift.

Rockets Hit Regularly

The military situation was
 similarly bleak around the capi-
 tal, with rockets still hitting
 Pochentong Airport with regu-
 larity, although the airlift con-
 tinued unabated. Efforts to push
 the insurgents out of range
 of the airport were still unsuc-
 cessful, with brigades rushing
 from point to point to bolster
 severely weakened units on
 two fronts in the northwestern
 area of the capital.

At a news conference yester-
 day President Ford, appealing
 once again for additional assis-
 tance to Cambodia, said it
 would enable the Government
 of President Lon Nol to survive
 through the dry season, after
 which the prospects for a nego-
 tiated settlement would be bet-
 ter.

Shells of Recent Vintage

It seemed clear, however,
 even to hopeful Western mili-
 tary analysts, that Government
 forces can make no major head-
 way toward reopening the Me-
 kong until it has risen substan-
 tially. The rains may begin late
 in June, and it will be at least
 two months after that before
 the rise will be sufficient to
 force the insurgents back, en-
 abling minesweepers to clear
 the river without harassing fire.

In the flight from the Mekong
 beachhead the garrison was
 forced to leave behind its am-
 munition supply and three of
 four American-made 105-mm.
 guns. Military officials said that
 the ammunition was destroyed
 by air strikes and that the
 guns were disabled.

A Western military observer
 said that 105-mm. shells falling
 on Pochentong in recent days
 were found to have serial num-
 bers indicating that they had

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**Cambodians Lose a Beachhead,
 Retreat to Last Mekong Position**

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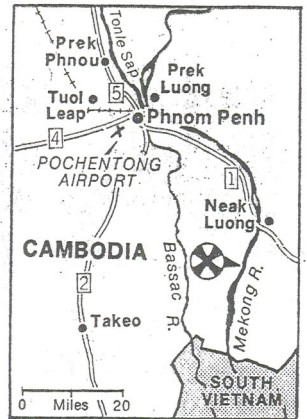
been captured since Feb. 1.
 Such losses are believed to
 be widespread.

Their source is in an arc
 northwest of Phnom Penh—the
 southern fringe of what is be-
 lieved to be the heaviest concen-
 tration of the 30,000 insurgent
 troops that Western military
 officials estimate to be around
 the capital.

As for the Government's mu-
 nitions supplies, the United
 States Embassy said on Feb.
 8 that without additional aid
 they would run out by the
 latter part of March, and on
 Feb. 25 the President said in
 a letter to the Speaker of the
 House of Representatives, Carl
 Albert, that unless assistance
 was provided they would run
 out "in less than a month."

Today the embassy said it
 had not changed its assess-
 ment. Other Western military
 observers felt that stockpiles
 could last up to three months
 longer.

Efforts are being made to
 stretch the reserves. A com-
 mander on Route 5, a key



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**Mekong base below Neak
 Luong (cross) was lost.**

highway, said that his ration
 had been cut from 100 shells
 a day a month ago to 30 a
 day.

Sihanouk Cautions U.S.

PEKING, March 7 (Ajence
 France-Presse) — Cambodia's
 former ruler, Prince Norodom
 Sihanouk, warned the United
 States today against "direct in-
 tervention" in Cambodia, which
 he said was being prepared by
 Washington to prevent the fall
 of the Phnom Penh Government
 headed by President Lon Nol.

Asserting that the insurgents'
 victory was imminent, he said:
 "In the face of a situation
 which has been described as
 desperate by the most im-
 portant leaders in Washington,
 the U.S. and its valets in Saigon
 are preparing to intervene
 directly in the Cambodian
 war."