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Cambodians Mauled

CIA 'Trades' Troops in Laos

PHNOM PENH — (AP) — More than 40 Cambodian soldiers have died fighting in Laos as the result of a bizarre three - cornered deal involving the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, Cambodia's premier Lon Nol and Prince Boun Oum, onetime right - wing premier of Laos.

The Cambodian soldiers were part of a contingent sent to a secret camp to be trained by the CIA, reliable sources say. Instead of returning to Cambodia they were thrown into the recent battle for the Bolovens Plateau and engaged in some of the heaviest fighting.

Besides the 40 or more killed, an unspecified number were wounded, the sources say. The losses together with disagreements and wrangling on both sides, have ended the CIA training program for Cambodians.

Geneva Agreement

Official circles here are reluctant to discuss Cambodia's involvement in Laos. Such use of Cambodian troops challenges the much-violated 1962 Geneva agreements on neutrality for Laos and hard - pressed Cambodia is not anxious to give an impression of having spare soldiers.

Despite official silence, the following story has been pieced together:

The Cambodians taken in hand by the CIA were originally trained to serve as members of spy teams to infiltrate into Cambodian provinces held by the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces.

Use of Laos for training presumably enabled CIA operatives to circumvent the Cooper-Church amendment banning U.S. military advisers, training teams or combat soldiers from Cambodian soil.

Training Center

In addition, the CIA had a ready-made training center at Nakorn Sin camp, about 25 miles north of Pakse. It was used as a jumping-off point for raids into Cambodia by Khmer Serei rebels during the reign of the former head of state, Prince Norodom Sihanouk.

Nakorn Sin is also close to the zone where the 12-man spy teams were supposed to work.

The camp is almost entirely isolated; access is by air. North Vietnamese units have tried to hit the camp with mortars but missed.

Any deal involving southern Laos is impossible without the approval of Prince Boun Oum, whose word is law in government held portions of the panhandle. The former Laotian premier is known to have flown to Phnom Penh last year when the training program was being established.

Most of the dickering with Boun Oum was conducted by Cambodia's Premier Lon Nol.

Lao Also Train

Lao soldiers are also trained at Nakorn Sin, but 350 trained alongside the last batch of 450 Cambodians included some teenagers

whose reliability was questionable. A number of 12 year olds are serving in the Lao ranks.

After the Bolovens battle, the Cambodians complained that they had been given the hardest fighting because they were thought to be better soldiers than the Lao. This action soured the Cambodians on the CIA program, informants say.

Disillusionment was not one-sided, however. The U.S. training team was reported to have been angered by lack of cooperation from the Cambodian coordinating officer, Lt. Col. You Kim Heng.

The Americans also were annoyed that Cambodian trainees did not receive the monthly \$13 allowance earmarked for them. Soon after incurring American displeasure, Heng was arrested on a charge of smuggling opium. He is reliably reported to be awaiting trial.