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Advisers in Vietnam Can Make 'Protocol' Visits Into Cambodia

By RICHARD HALLORAN APR 10 1970

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WASHINGTON, April 9—A spokesman for the Defense Department, in response to inquiries about an American officer seen in Cambodia, said today that military advisers in South Vietnam have been authorized to cross the border into Cambodia for "protocol" meetings.

Press reports from the border area said that the officer had been seen 200 yards west of the frontier. When correspondents and photographers saw him returning to South Vietnam in a jeep, the officer turned around and went back into Cambodia.

The department spokesman said that the military advisers had not been authorized to enter into planning discussions with the Cambodians or with the South Vietnamese operating in Cambodia.

The spokesman also said American officers were not authorized to accompany South Vietnamese units to which they were attached into Cambodia for combat operations.

The spokesman noted that the American headquarters in Saigon had given advisers permission to cross the border. An official in Saigon, the spokesman said, had stated that the permission was granted to "exchange pleasantries and protocol greetings and not to carry on any substantive discussions or to make any plans or commitments."

'No Military Connotation'

"Such meetings are not planned nor are they solicited," the Saigon statement said. "There is to be no military connotation to the meetings."

Officials here said they were unable to explain, however, why "protocol" visits had been allowed or how such meetings could be separated from military discussions. The officials said they saw no political or diplomatic implications in the border crossings.

The policy of the United States of respecting Cambodian neutrality, sovereignty and territorial integrity has not been changed, the officials said.

This statement has been repeated here almost daily since the overthrow of Prince Norodom Sihanouk by the anti-Communist Premier, Lon Nol, on March 18.

A similar situation existed in 1965, before American advisers went into combat with the South Vietnamese who were fighting the Vietcong. Officials said repeatedly then that there had been no change in the policy of not authorizing American advisers to take part in combat.

When the war intensified and American advisers were involved in the fighting, officials here said the advisers had always had the right to protect themselves. Along the Cambodian border today, American forces have the right of "protective reaction" to defend themselves against fire from across the Cambodian border.

The White House press secretary, Ronald L. Ziegler, said on March 28 that American troops could also cross into Cambodia in response to enemy attacks if American field commanders deemed it necessary. Mr. Ziegler was questioned by reporters the day after a South Vietnamese battalion supported by American helicopter gunships undertook a raid into Cambodia.