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Nixon Deadline Worries Field Officers

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PHUOCVINH, South Vietnam, May 9—President Nixon's announcement that he intends to begin moving American troops out of Cambodia by midweek and have most of them out by mid-June has startled and bewildered field commanders of the 10-day-old sweep across the border.

Rather than being ahead of schedule in the gigantic seven-front operation as the President said, commanders have hastily moved into so much new territory, they say, that they are only now beginning a through search of enemy base areas.

At his news conference Friday, President Nixon said: "The middle of next week, the first units, American units, will come out. The end of next

week, the second group of American units will come out. The great majority of all American units will be out by the second week of June, and all Americans of all kinds, including advisers, will be out . . . by the end of June."

Ground soldiers insist that at this point they do not even know the bounds of the huge supply depots they have already discovered. Only a tiny fraction of the enemy bunkers they have spotted have been searched. Hundreds of trails within these huge complexes have yet to be explored, and hundreds of square miles of dense jungle hideouts have yet to be searched.

Yet already, battalion and company commanders say, their men are so spread out in guarding the enemy supplies already discovered and in providing security for the

operations, that they have been unable to search very much new ground.

The commanders are faced with removing or destroying what is already the largest haul by far of enemy munitions, supplies and food uncovered in the war.

By late today, the tentative count reaching Saigon command headquarters stood at 6,757 rifles; 1,232 heavy machine guns, mortar tubes, rocket launchers, recoilless rifles and anti-aircraft guns; 865 tons of ammunition; 1,653 tons of rice; 12 tons of medical supplies; 130 trucks, and thousands of other items ranging from radios to mortar cleaning and repair kits.

"I think this could be just the tip of the iceberg," said one high-ranking officer.

Just moving that much material out of the cache sites or destroying it is a job requiring either thousands of additional troops or several more weeks than President Nixon has given the troops already there.

Resupply helicopters are already working overtime simply supplying the troops in Cambodia with food, ammunition and other needs.

Engineer units are feverishly trying to open roads from South Vietnam to the cache sites, but in some remote areas

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this is considered impossible in the time remaining. And with monsoon rains already beginning to fall, truck traffic may be halted.

When the invasion of the Fishhook area of Cambodia began, commanders of the operation envisioned a very limited foray, perhaps of only three to four days into a relatively small area about 10 miles into Cambodia in a triangle from the base of the Fishhook.

Operation Was Expanded

After President Nixon's statement that the operation would last six to eight weeks, however, commanders here decided to expand their operations in an effort to keep enemy troops off balance and also explore new sanctuaries. As a result, two of the largest cache sites were found — one known as the City about six miles south of Snoul and the other just over the border from Budop, South Vietnam, in Phuoclong Province.

Several areas into which

ground troops had already moved were hastily swept through with an eye toward returning later for a thorough search. Commanders assumed that they would be given enough time and men to fully explore the cache areas already uncovered.

Lieut. Col. James Anderson and his First Battalion, Fifth Infantry, First Cavalry division (Airmobile), went into the complex known as the City on May 5. But he said yesterday that his men still did not know the extent of it.

Sites 'Go on and on'

"We haven't even been able to find the boundaries of it," he said yesterday. "It just goes on and on."

"We've got the platoons going out but the big problem is that you can't afford to just forget about security in the area," he said. "They've found so much stuff there that pretty soon, as you drop off people to secure each new find, you just run out of people. So basically, I'm going to have to

get some more troops in there.

"There is so much in there that I couldn't begin to estimate it," he went on. "It's so big it's swallowed up my men as far as trying to keep tabs on it. It's like taking a grunt them into Longbinh [army headquarters in South Vietnam] and saying write down everything you see there."