

17 MAY 70

## News Analysis

# The Search for A VC 'Pentagon'

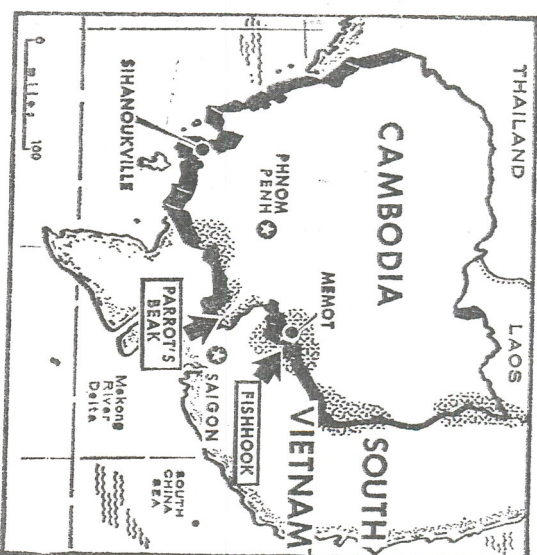
*"Tonight, American and South Vietnamese units will attack the headquarters for the entire Communist military operation in South Vietnam... This is not an invasion of Cambodia."*

—RICHARD M. NIXON

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UNITED STATES intelligence has been convinced for some time that the Communists were developing a more elaborate logistical system, mostly inside Laos and Cambodia. Prisoners, defectors and captured documents have provided extensive evidence of this buildup, intelligence sources say. It has not been sudden or recent, but a constant and perhaps growing phenomenon, according to these officials.

Beyond the general statement, there is doubt, confusion and argument about what the sanctuaries in Cambodia really contain and about what can be gained by invading them.



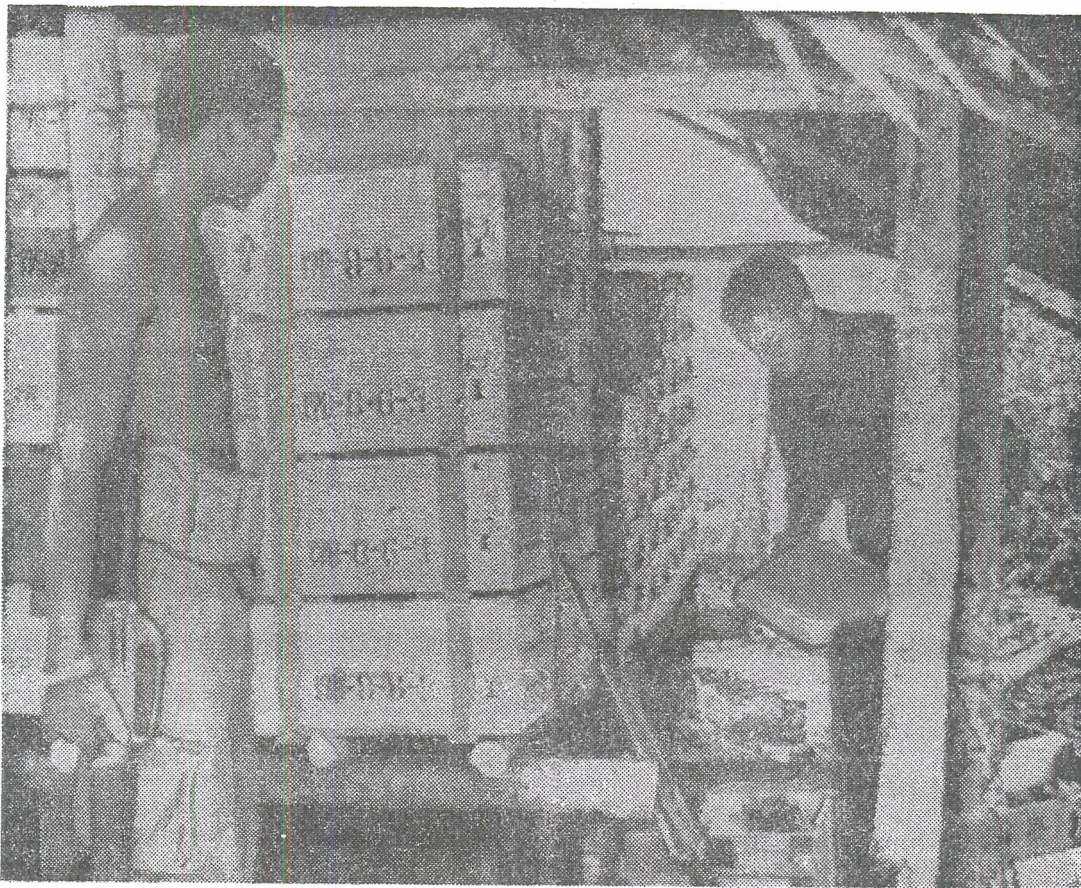
Location of American moves in Cambodia

On the second day of the current operation, the U.S. command in Saigon released a "memorandum to correspondents" describing Viet Cong base areas in the Fishhook Region. In about 500 words, this memo said the areas have provided "indispensable bases" for the Communists. They are, the memo said, home for Viet Cong headquarters, Liberation Army headquarters, several Communist divisions, communications facilities, infiltrations routes, and "extensive supply complexes."

The memo implied that all these—about 7000 people—could be found in the area, but the invading armies in the Fishhook last week haven't found them. They have uncovered extensive supply dumps and hints of a few other installations. The 7000 people seem to have evaporated.

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AMERICAN TROOPS WITH MUNITIONS CAPTURED IN CAMBODIA  
Several munitions dumps were found, but no red "Pentagon"

ARMY OFFICIALS have spoken of the Fishhook time and again as the Viet Cong's Pentagon or its Long Binh, a reference to the huge U.S. supply depot north of Saigon. But several civilian experts on the Communist structure reject this view.

"The trouble with the American military is that they see the other side in terms of their own thinking," one experienced authority said last week. "They conceive of the Communist headquarters as a kind of Pentagon, when in fact the physical side of the Viet Cong operation is secondary." According to this source, the people — the Viet Cong's vaunted organization — are far more important than any "headquarters," and they are almost certain to avoid death or capture in an operation like this one.

If the leaders — and most of the other personnel — do escape, how important are the supplies and facilities left behind? The military view is that they will be extremely important — the Communists will have lost their rear area, their "nerve center" as one general put it.

But supposedly, they lost that in 1967. Administration spokesmen in Washington and military officials here have acknowledged that in a matter of months — four to six are oft-heard figures — the enemy could rebuild its rear area, perhaps in new locations. So the question really seems to be whether the time this operation can buy will be in any way decisive, or even very important.

The U.S. military insists that it might



be decisive and will certainly be important. American soldiers here think they have made the enemy's position extremely difficult already. They refuse to accept the idea that the North Vietnamese can continue the fight regardless of what happens to them — they're human too, American officers say repeatedly, in one way or another.

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AT THE beginning of the Cambodian campaign some of highest military officials here depicted COSVN, Hanoi's central office for southern South Vietnam, as a sort of guerrilla Pentagon with tiers of underground offices and thousands of security forces.

But this view is no longer heard in Saigon.

The consensus among experienced military officials now is that COSVN has eluded the allied thrust into Cambodia's sanctuaries.

A First Cavalry intelligence officer, for example, maintained that COSVN "is not a single entity but a dispersed collection of offices." The key personnel, he said, left the Fishhook several days before the invasion.

There is also, among specialists on Vietnamese Communist affairs, some sharp difference over the nature of COSVN and its role in military direction of the war in South Vietnam.

One widely respected expert, for example, takes the view that COSVN is a code-name for the headquarters of the People's Revolutionary Party, the Communist element of the National Liberation Front.

"I have always doubted that COSVN was a military headquarters as the American military contend," this specialist told Washington Post staff writer Stanley Karnow in Hong Kong. "The U.S. military tend to de-

scribe COSVN as if it were a Pentagon. Actually the Communist leadership in the South is civilian, with a military section of course."

"The Communist headquarters has been a kind of permanent floating crap game, part of it inside South Vietnam in the Tay Ninh area, another part near Attapeu in south Laos, and so forth," this expert continued. "The headquarters was really the Peoples Revolutionary Party Central Committee . . . if you can capture the Central Committee of the Peoples Revolutionary Party or the North Vietnamese commanders, then you have something. But when you capture a headquarters that has been evacuated, what have you got? It is like capturing an empty Pentagon, to put it in American military terms."

Another observer of South Vietnamese Communist affairs here conjectured that the home base of the Communist central office would be an area "where the functions of running the political-military effort could be carried out with the least amount of fuss or minimum number of personnel and buildings."

An unlikely location for the central command headquarters, in his view, would be a large and well-equipped bunker complex such as "the city" southwest of Snoul in Cambodia. The White House speculated last week that "The City" might prove to be the home of COSVN.

And so, despite the implied promise in President Nixon's April 30 speech the opinion of experienced observers here is that it would be "by luck or rare coincidence" that the American forces in Cambodia could find COSVN.

*Times-Post Service*