

The U.S. Drive Is Slowing in Cambodia

By Peter Arnett
Associated Press

Base Area 351, Cambodia

After spectacular initial results, the allied thrust into Cambodia is rapidly slowing down.

Field commanders cite three factors for loss of momentum in the three-week-old campaign against a dozen Communist supply base:

- Strengthening resistance. North Vietnamese regiments that fled before the massive armored pushes across the border have returned and are making counterattacks against the American and South Vietnamese troops.

- The rapidly approaching

See Back Page

Prom Page 1

monsoon that is bringing early morning fog and late afternoon rains. A brigade commander at this base area 100 miles north of Saigon, Colonel Carter W. Clarke, said Sunday his operations are sometimes reduced to six hours a day because of the weather.

- The orders to clean out the enemy supply caches and stockpile the supplies inside South Vietnam.

"We would much rather blow these caches up and move," a senior officer of the First Cavalry Division said. "The need to secure these places, then ship the stuff out

The political requirements in this operation are overshadowing the military requirements."

Because of these three factors, field commanders say they have little hope of satisfactorily clearing out the enemy's border sanctuaries by June 30, the time limit imposed by President Nixon.

RECOVERY

There is hourly evidence that the North Vietnamese forces have recovered from the initial allied attack. Constant sniper fire and harassing attacks on the South Vietnamese Airborne Division in the Fishhook, one of the first areas hit by the allies, indi-

cates that the Seventh North Vietnamese Division "has sorted itself out and is counter-sweeping," said one United States intelligence officer.

American troops in Base Area 351 are meeting "maximum delaying tactics" from the North Vietnamese Fifth Division, according to Colonel Clarke.

Snipers are hanging from trees. Rocketeers are hiding in bunkers. Five attacks were made last week on one U.S. infantry company cleaning out a supply cache.

Whereas early resistance was from rear-guard security forces, the enemy troops fighting now appear to be from regular infantry units, indicating the Communist command is seriously contesting the allied thrusts.

The monsoon weather "is just starting to hurt us," Colonel Clarke said. Particularly vulnerable to the fog and the heavy rain clouds are the Cavalry Division's "pink" teams of spotter and gunship helicopters spearheading the drive to locate supply caches.

The tiny spotter helicopters fly at tree-top level, seeking movement and other evidence of caches, while the high-powered Cobra gunships hang in the sky 2000 feet up, waiting to attack. Often in recent days these search missions have to be canceled because of the weather.

RAIN

Rainstorms are also hampering supply missions. But armored operations in this area do not appear much affected so far. The U.S. 11th Armored Regiment has moved to high ground and escaped the clinging mud now building up in the Fishhook, where the tanks first swept through.

Only about 30 per cent of the sanctuary area has been covered so far, and that has been the easy 30 per cent. Many of the remaining areas have a triple canopy of jungle, hills and heavy bunkers.

Bigger supply caches could well be either in the thick jungle or deeper inside Cambodia. At the current pace of operations, they might not be found by June 30.