

Saigon Force in Cambodia Doubles in Week to 40,000

South Vietnamese Aide Says Troops Will Remain for 'as Long as They Feel It Is Necessary' — Bunker Sees Thieu

By JAMES P. STERBA

Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, South Vietnam, May 22—South Vietnam has doubled the size of its forces operating within Cambodia during the last week.

A military spokesman of the Saigon Government disclosed today that the week's two new assaults into areas considered enemy sanctuaries had raised the number of troops involved to 40,000, about double the total given a week ago.

South Vietnamese spokesmen were again asked whether their forces would withdraw from Cambodia along with American troops by the end of June. The spokesman reiterated previous statements by Government officials, saying: "South Vietnamese troops will stay in Cambodia as long as they feel it is necessary."

The United States Ambassador, Ellsworth Bunker, met with President Nguyen Van Thieu for an hour and 20 minutes this morning, but as usual the topic of the conversation was not disclosed. Mr. Bunker was reported in Washington to have been urged to discuss the status of South Vietnamese troops in Cambodia with Mr. Thieu.

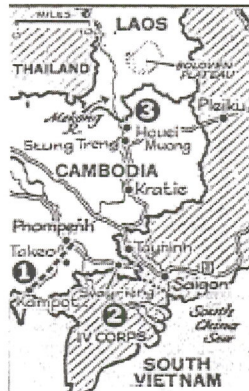
Informed sources here said higher officials believe that the South Vietnamese will pull back to a large extent from Cambodia, but will continue occasional forays there.

Fighting in Cambodia in the last 24 hours was reported as light and scattered as troops continued to report finding caches of enemy supplies.

Heavy raids by B-52 bombers

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More Saigon soldiers were reported in Cambodia east of line drawn from Kampot (1) than in IV Corps (2). Communist drive near Houei Muong (3) was believed to be aimed at entering Laos.

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were reported in the Fishhook region, where headquarters elements of the enemy's military command are believed to be. Spokesman would not disclose the number of the bombers involved, but each plane can carry a bomb load of 30 tons.

American troop losses in Cambodia were reported today as 172 killed and 687 wounded since allied forces crossed the border on April 30.

American troop strength in Cambodia was put by official sources at about 12,000. The sources said that from a high point of from 15,000 to 20,000 the first days of the operation, American strength dropped to about 10,000 last weekend. Since then, some 2,000 more Americans have crossed back over the border to help ground troops there secure and evacuate captured enemy supplies.

The sharp increase in South Vietnamese troop strength was mainly the result of an assault

five days ago by about two divisions from the southernmost border region into the Cambodian provinces of Takeo and Kampot.

This troop increase means that there are now more than twice as many South Vietnamese troops in Cambodia as there are in the IV Corps tactical zone of South Vietnam, which takes in the 16 provinces of the Mekong Delta.

The burden of defense in the area has been left to one South Vietnamese division, a few battalions of marines, and provincial and village defense units called Regional and Popular Forces.

Official sources said, however, that only one enemy regiment, which they said had been badly depleted, was in the IV Corps area.

Spokesmen also reported that South Vietnamese troops were in position along the Cambodian coast as far west as Kampot and east of a line from there to positions occupied by

marines and infantrymen two miles east of Phnompenh, the Cambodian capital.

South Vietnamese airborne troops continued to operate with American troops in the Fishhook region, north of Tay Ninh Province.

Several thousand other soldiers were reported to be continuing operations in two areas of Cambodia further north, one west of Quangduc Province in the Southern Highlands and the other area of Pleiku Province.

U. S. Copters Kill Allies

SAIGON, May 22 (AP)—American helicopter gunships supporting South Vietnamese troops two miles inside Cambodia accidentally fired into the positions of South Vietnamese marines yesterday, killing 9 and wounding 15, the United States Command reported today.

A communique placed the site on the Mekong Delta about 37 miles northeast of the South Vietnamese district town of Triton.