

BIG RUBBER TRACT IN CAMBODIA FALLS TO SAIGON TROOPS

French Managers Are Told
to Quit Chup Plantation in
3 Days, Witnesses Say

MEKONG PORT IS SEIZED

Task Force Takes Tonle Bet
—Rogers Noncommittal on
Pullout by South Vietnam
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By HENRY KAMM

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PNOMPENH, Cambodia, May 24—A South Vietnamese task force seized the large rubber plantation of Chup late yesterday and witnesses reported today that the force had confiscated all movable assets and had given the French managers three days to leave.

North Vietnamese and Vietcong troops were reported to have fallen back within the 70-square mile plantation last night and were said to be surrounded there by the South Vietnamese.

The plantation, about 50 miles northeast of Pnompenh, produced half of Cambodia's output of rubber.

River Town Captured

As in previous South Vietnamese operations deep into Cambodia, the attack was led by units of ethnic Cambodians, former mercenaries of the United States Special Forces who have been assigned to the Cambodian Army.

The forces, known as Khmers Krom, captured the important port town of Tonle Bet, across the Mekong River from Kampong Cham, Cambodia's second largest city, today and cleared enemy forces from surrounding villages in the way of the South Vietnamese advance north along the Mekong. Thus the

brunt of the action was borne by troops other than the regular Cambodian Army.

[In Washington, Secretary of State William P. Rogers indicated that the Nixon Administration would not oppose continued South Vietnamese operations in Cambodia after American forces are pulled out at the end of June, and he left open the possibility that the United States would continue to provide air support.]

The South Vietnamese now occupy a major part of Cambodia east of the Mekong, as well as large areas in the south that are west of the river. This situation has provoked a deep uneasiness among the sectors of the population that most enthusiastically supported the Government of Premier Lon Nol and First Deputy Premier Sisowath Sirik Matak after their overthrow of Prince Norodom Sihanouk as Chief of State in March.

The uneasiness is heightened by the presence in Pnompenh

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of several South Vietnamese naval craft whose officers and sailors, some armed, stroll about the streets and shops much as American troops do in Saigon.

In the university and high schools, reports of killings, rapes and plundering by South Vietnamese troops circulate and find an eager hearing. Faculty members reported today that a delegation of student leaders has called on General Sirik Matak to express concern over the takeover of much of Cambodia by South Vietnamese and over the conduct of these troops.

Intellectuals are beginning to express open doubts over some policies, fearing that the Cambodians may be losing control over their own country as a result of military unpreparedness. They realize the difficult situation of the government, caught between two opposing Vietnamese forces stronger than their own, but they wish their country's leaders would assert

more strongly a demand for a different solution.

The best solution envisioned in these circles, covering a significant section of the educated class, would be the commitment of a far larger number of Khmers Krom, but no more are known to have arrived here since the initial contingent of about 2,000 in the first week of May.

Stronger U.S. Role Favored

Failing that, these circles are urging that the United States take over the job.

Foreign Minister Yem Sambaur is due to leave for Saigon tomorrow, and South Vietnamese sources said that the continuing roles of South Vietnamese troops in Cambodia would be a principal topic of his talks there. The resumption of full-scale diplomatic relations is expected to be agreed upon, although it may not be announced until the South Vietnamese Vice President, Nguyen Cao Ky, pays a visit here.

The complex relations between the two countries continue to be complicated further by the problem of the Vietnamese minority in Cambodia. Vietnamese continue to arrive at the severely overcrowded assembly camps here in the expectation of evacuation by boat to South Vietnam. But Saigon has decided to halt the naval evacuation program.

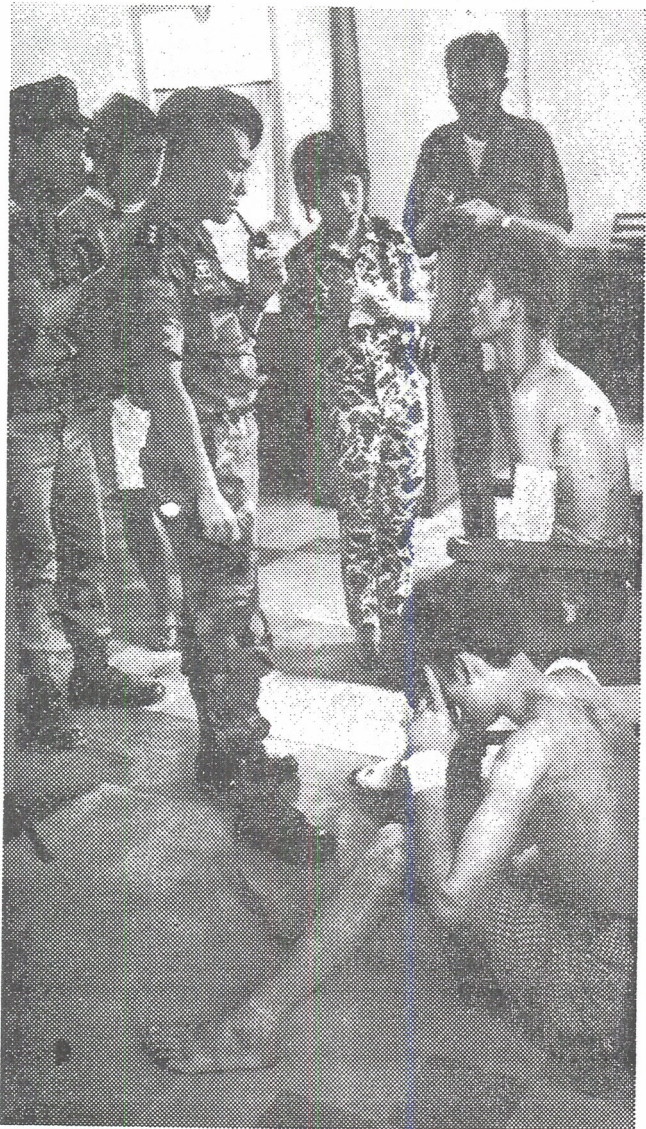
The 70,000 Vietnamese in the temporary camps, large sections of which are awash from the early rains of the oncoming monsoon season, are showing signs of restlessness, and at least one minor riot has been reported.

One Saigon official said he did not have the courage to tell the would-be emigrants that the evacuation program had been halted. He said that there was only one question that faced him every time he visited a camp. The question is, "When?"

Although the Cambodian authorities responsible for dealing with the problems of the Vietnamese appear unaware of it, the South Vietnamese have decided to solve the problem of the refugees, whom they feel their country cannot absorb, by persuading them to return to the homes in Cambodia that they have given up or lost.

Amity Urged by Premier

Under urging from the Saigon authorities, General Lon Nol has issued an order of the day calling on Cambodians to treat the Vietnamese minority of about 400,000 as neighbors. But it is unclear whether the order was issued in the knowledge that the South Vietnam-



Associated Press

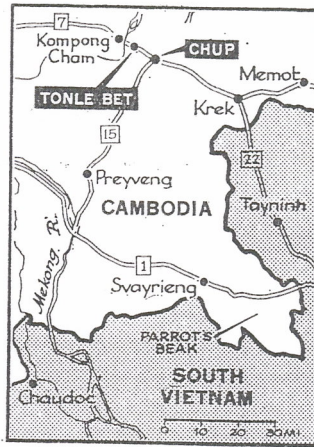
Lieut. Gen. Do Cao Tri, commander of South Vietnamese forces near Chup, Cambodia, puffs pipe as he interrogates North Vietnamese prisoners seized near Kampong Cham.

ese aim was to persuade the Vietnamese residents to remain here.

The Cambodian Government and people—as well as the Vietnamese residents — clearly would prefer that the Vietnamese leave.

Informed observers here see catastrophic possibilities if the evacuation program is definitely halted. In the face of clear evidence that neither the Cambodians nor the Vietnamese here want to live with each other, the question of rehousing and re-employing the Vietnamese appears to these observers, as well as to a number of South Vietnamese officials here, to be insoluble.

They feel that the profound mutual distrust between Cambodians and Vietnamese caused



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Rubber plantation at Chup was seized by South Vietnamese, and Tonle Bet by special Cambodian troops.

by the complexities of politics and war is by now unbridgeable. According to South Vietnamese sources, the decision to halt the evacuation can be reversed only by President Nguyen Van Thieu.

The rubber plantation at Chup was captured after three bombing raids by the South Vietnamese Air Force yesterday that left the rubber-processing plant, the largest in Cambodia, a flaming ruin.

Gen. Do Cao Tri, commander of the III Corps military area of South Vietnam, who is in charge of the operation, was reported to have told the French managers of the plantation that his troops could not remain to occupy the region and must therefore remove all material that might be useful to the enemy forces when they returned.

Vietcong and North Vietnamese forces, occupying sanctuary areas across the border from South Vietnam, have long exercised effective control of the plantation area, holding the French management in an uneasy state of compliance with their exactions.

Witnesses in Chup said that

troops of the South Vietnamese task force had driven off all usable vehicles, loading some with air conditioners, refrigerators and other appliances taken from the houses of the French managers.

Officials of the Compagnie du Cambodge, owner of the plantation, hope that the Cambodian Government will take a position opposing their expulsion from their plantation. However, Cambodia's present dependence on South Vietnamese military assistance, as well as strained relations between

Pnompenh and Paris over France's hostile attitude to the Lon Nol Government, gives them little ground for optimism. Two Frenchmen who had been slightly wounded during the bombing were evacuated to Saigon, while other French employees were evacuated here in a plane owned by the Memot Plantation, which has also been destroyed in the course of the

important Mekong River ferry crossing of Tonle Bet, which had been held by a North Vietnamese battalion since May 11.

There was little resistance when the troops, two battalions of a contingent that formerly served with the United States Special Forces in South Vietnam, entered the town. The North Vietnamese appeared to have left a few hours earlier. Tonle Bet, on the east bank of the Mekong opposite Kampong Cham and 78 miles northeast of Pnompenh, had been pounded by Cambodian artillery and mortars for a week.

The main street is piled five feet high with rubble. Walls and roofs have collapsed. Not a pane of glass was left unbroken.

No building in the center of town escaped the shelling. There are gaping holes everywhere, and thousands of spent cartridge cases and jagged pieces of shrapnel lie in the still-smoking rubble.

Sweep Operations Continue

SAIGON, South Vietnam, May 24 (AP) — United States and South Vietnamese forces sweeping through Cambodia have found more large North Vietnamese and Vietcong war stockpiles while encountering only light resistance, the allied military commands reported today.

The allied troops uncovered more than 200 tons of war materials and foodstuffs in 24 hours, including 600 bicycles used by the enemy for transport, the headquarters said.

One of the half-dozen war stockpiles uncovered over the weekend yielded 15 tons of munitions. It was found in a bunker complex 100 miles northeast of Saigon and five miles inside Cambodia by American troops of the First Cavalry Division (Airmobile).

The United States Command announced the loss of three helicopters, two of them inside Cambodia, the other in South Vietnam. Ten American soldiers and two South Vietnamese were killed and five Americans were injured.