

Mercenaries May Work in Cambodia

Manchester Guardian

London

White mercenaries who fought in Biafra and the Belgian Congo are being recruited for work in Cambodia. During the past two months between 35 and 50 mercenaries have flown into Phnom Penh from Europe by way of Hong Kong. The soldiers-of-fortune have been hired in Paris and Brussels and promised salaries ranging from about \$1000 to \$1800 a week.

It is not known whether any have seen action, but it is believed their prime task is to transform small groups of Cambodian soldiers into elite long-range striking

forces and to provide bodyguards for senior officials.

A Hong Kong newspaper, "The Star," reported Wednesday that groups of mercenaries were passing through Hong Kong on their way to Cambodia. "They fly in as tourists on economy fares, then fly out again to Phnom Penh to pick up their guns and start fighting for cash," the newspaper said.

One of the mercenaries' leaders quoted by the Star said: "We are all ex-Belgian Congo fighters whose names have been kept by the mercenary organizations . . . when the Cambodian crisis blew

See Back Page

From Page 1

up, we were contacted by representatives of these organizations in London and New York and offered big money to fight for the Cambodian government."

The Hong Kong newspaper said the man was 37 years old and had fought with the United States Marines and in the jungles of Borneo with British forces during the Indonesian-Malaysian confrontation. He was a heavy-weapons specialist who dealt mainly with heavy machine guns, mortars and anti-tank weapons.

Mercenaries living in South Africa and Rhodesia have also been contacted by organizations seeking men for work in Cambodia, it was learned.

The recruiting drive began two months ago with simultaneous approaches to mercenaries in Brussels and Paris. The men were told they

would not be working against the government of Cambodia, but the persons seeking recruits were not Cambodians. The mercenaries were told their salaries would be paid monthly into bank accounts in either Manila or Zurich, in any currency they specified.

Once contracts had been agreed upon, the mercenaries were given instructions to travel in groups of three or four, on different flights, from Paris and Geneva to Hong Kong, where they would receive further instructions and tickets for flights to the Cambodian capital.

U.S. troops are scheduled to leave Cambodia tomorrow having spent only two months there—hardly enough time to weld the dispirited Cambodian army into anything resembling an efficient or confident fighting force.

The mercenaries will

almost certainly be faced with that task after the Americans leave. Many of those hired are former French Foreign Legionnaires who fought in Indochina with the French army between 1945 and 1954. Most also speak fluent French, a language understood throughout Indochina.

Meanwhile, in Phnom Penh, the Times-Post Service reported that representatives of a group of mercenaries—apparently a different group, composed mostly of former members of the Australian army—have approached the government of Lon Nol seeking employment as officers in the largely untrained Cambodian national army.

The inexperienced Cambodian army, swelled from 35,000 to more than 100,000 men in recent months, lacks arms, supplies, trained soldiers and officers. U.S. officials here have ruled out the possibility of American ad-

visers being sent to train the army.

The mercenaries' representative, a former Australian non-commissioned officer with mercenary experience in New Guinea, Thailand and South Vietnam, said successful negotiations depended on Cambodian ability to pay hard-currency wages.

He added that Cambodian officials had told him they were inquiring as to whether or not mercenary salaries, which run to several thousand dollars a month for each man, could be paid through American military assistance funds.

Both government sources and the mercenaries' representative denied that white mercenaries were currently involved in the Cambodian war.

Both the American and Australian embassies here have denied any knowledge or reported Cambodian mercenary contacts.