

# Report More U.S. Action In the Cambodia Fighting

## Attacks By Air Witnessed

Associated Press

Saigon

The United States has increased its direct involvement in the fighting in Cambodia with Navy support ships, Army helicopters and liaison personnel, according to authoritative sources and field dispatches.

The moves, which included the stationing of a U.S. 7th Fleet helicopter carrier off Cambodia in the Gulf of Siam, were made without official announcement.

The reason for the expanded involvement apparently is essential U.S. support for the joint South Vietnamese-Cambodian offensive now under way to break the Communist command's blockade of Highway 4, Phnom Penh's lifeline to the sea.

### SCENE

The operations become known yesterday from military sources, eye-witness accounts and photographs taken on the scene.

A photograph taken Saturday near Ta New, south of

the Stung Chhay pass along Highway 4, showed an American in a camouflaged jungle suit on the ground running to board a U.S. helicopter that had landed. The American was accompanied by two other persons, apparently Vietnamese. The helicopter crew was American.

Colonel Robert W. Leonard, chief of the U.S. Command's information office, was furnished a photograph of the American on the ground and asked for comment.

He replied: "I have no comment on the picture. As has been stated, there are no U.S. advisers on the ground in Cambodia."

Other sources, however, described the American as a liaison officer, presumably

*See Rack Page*

### From Page 1

coordinating the U.S. logistics support to the South Vietnamese and Cambodians.

Associated Press Photographer Henri Huet reported from Stung Chhay that he observed two U.S. Cobra helicopter gunships flying in the region.

Officers on the scene told Huet the gunships have been supporting the 13,300-man South Vietnamese-Cambodian operation for several days. Photographs of two Cobra gunships in the same region showed Cambodian troops and civilians in the foreground.

South Vietnamese military sources admitted U.S. Army Cobra helicopter gunships have been flying into Cambodia in support of South Vietnamese troops.

But the U.S. Command said American aircraft fly into Cambodia only for "interdiction" missions, raids against ground objectives such as roads.

Pulitzer Prize winning UPI photographer Toshio Sakai, who accompanied South Vietnamese rangers in Cambodia Saturday, said he saw Cobras in support of the allied column.

He said the Cobras were flying very high but making rocket attacks on ground targets.

### MARINE

The only Cobras in southeast Asia are operated by the U.S. Army and Marine Corps.

Informants said several Seventh Fleet ships had moved into position off Cambodia, including the helicopter carrier from which American aircraft are operating.

The sources said other ships are providing ship-to-plane communications for American aircraft supporting the operation, and also bringing in war materials to the Cambodian seaport of Kompong Som.

### DIRECT

Concerning the use of helicopter gunships in direct support of the South Vietnamese and Cambodians, the U.S. command in Saigon said:

"We are flying interdiction





*AP Wirephoto*  
An American in jungle uniform ran to board a U.S. helicopter near Ta New, Cambodia. Unofficial sources said he was a liaison officer coordinating U.S. support for Cambodian and Saigon troops.



missions in Cambodia. There are no restrictions on the type of aircraft that fly these missions. We do not address specific missions on out-of-country air operations. We do not identify specific areas of interdiction missions.

"As we have stated, interdiction missions are carried out against enemy personnel and equipment to protect the lives of U.S. and allied military personnel in Vietnam, to protect the Vietnamization program, to enhance the continuing withdrawal of U.S. forces and to reduce American casualties.

"Such interdiction missions may have an ancillary benefit of relieving pressure on nearby friendly forces. However, the primary purpose of this interdiction effort is to destroy enemy troops and material that could be used against allied forces in the Republic of South Vietnam."

#### MEDICAL

On logistics support, a spokesman said: "We have provided some aerial logistics support of ARVN efforts. No medical evacuation helicopters have been employed in support of the current operations on Route 4. There are no restrictions as to

types of aircraft which conduct logistics support." ARVN stands for Army of the Republic of Vietnam.

Asked for comment on the movement of Seventh Fleet ships off Cambodia, the spokesman replied: "Without regard to specific ships, U.S. naval vessels operating in off-shore waters have the capability to be used in connections with communications and other logistical support for U.S. air interdiction in Cambodia."

Spokesman also said, "As a matter of policy, generally speaking, we do not release the home base of aircraft conducting interdiction missions in Cambodia or Laos."

#### SORTIES

The new moves came on top of disclosures by Pentagon sources in Washington that U.S. air attack sorties against Communist command troops and supplies in Cambodia have increased to their highest level in about six months.

The sharp increase in American air activity is aimed at slowing the dryseason resupply of North Vietnamese forces in Cambodia, and at helping Cambodian and South Vietnamese troops counter intensified ground attacks.

Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird said over the weekend in Washington on return from a visit to Southeast Asia that the next few months will be critical for Cambodia.

#### SEAPORT

Troops of the North Vietnamese 1st Division have controlled Highway 4 since Nov. 21, cutting Phnom Penh off from its only deepwater seaport, Kompong Som, 115 miles to the southwest.

The closing of the highway has led to a critical shortage of fuel and other commodities in Phnom Penh, resulting in inflation and rationing of gasoline and electricity.

It was reported officially for the first time yesterday that a Cambodian regiment was ambushed on Highway 4 on January 1 and suffered heavy losses.

There was no new significant contact reported in the drive to reopen Highway 4.

Associated Press correspondent Robin Mannock reported from Highway 4 that at the present rate of progress two Cambodian regiments pushing southward are not likely to reach Pich Nil until tonight or tomorrow for a final assault on the extremely heavy fortifications reported there.

The Cambodian command announced that South Vietnamese troops were pushing northeast on the Highway, after capturing the key pass of Stung Chhay, the other strong enemy position 32 miles south of Pich Nil, and had reached the crossroad at Sre Ambel last night.

If the report of the South Vietnamese gains is correct, the points of the allied pincer movement now are about 18 miles apart.

In other action, the U.S. Command announced in a delayed report that one American adviser was killed, one was wounded and a third is missing after being ambushed Friday by enemy troops while training South Vietnamese border defense rangers in the western Mekong Delta bordering Cambodia.