

# CAMBODIANS SEIZE ENTRANCE OF PASS, Pincer IS CLOSING

Saigon's Troops Said to Be  
Three Miles From Allies  
Along Key Route 4

## PNOMPENH AIRPORT HIT

NY TIMES  
Aviation Fuel Explodes—  
Battle Reported Across  
Mekong From Capital  
JAN 22 1971

By The Associated Press

PNOMPENH, Cambodia, Friday, Jan. 22—Cambodian soldiers reportedly captured the craggy northern entrance to Pich Nil Pass yesterday, ousting enemy troops who for two months have blocked fuel and other supplies from reaching Pnompenh.

A South Vietnamese force, advancing from the south, was said to be three miles away from closing the allied pincer on Route 4, which runs through the pass and connects Pnompenh with the port city of Kompong Som on the Gulf of Siam. Advance elements of this force were reported to have reached the Cambodians Wednesday.

Early today, hours after the Cambodian troops had planted their nation's flag on the Pich Nil heights, parts of the Pnompenh airport, eight miles outside the capital, exploded in flames.

A senior Cambodian official there said the airport, a joint civilian-military facility had come under mortar attack.

## Blasts Last Two Hours

For more than two hours explosions sounded from areas where aviation fuel was stored and from one of the four ammunition dumps at the airport. [United Press International reported that fighting erupted at the same time between enemy and allied soldiers on the bank of the Mekong River directly opposite the downtown section of the capital.]

Dispatches yesterday from the Pich Nil Pass area said 1,300 Cambodian infantrymen seized the heights after enemy forces had retreated, leaving behind the bodies of those killed in their bunkers. On the heights, the Cambodians raised their blue, red and white flag over the napalm-scarred chalet of Prince Norodom Sihanouk, the former Chief of State now living in exile in Peking.

The Cambodian infantrymen had been stalled for four days at the entrance to the pass by an estimated 2,000 enemy soldiers entrenched in the Elephant Mountains flanking Route

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4. The pass is about 60 miles southwest of Pnompenh and about 55 miles from Kompong Som.

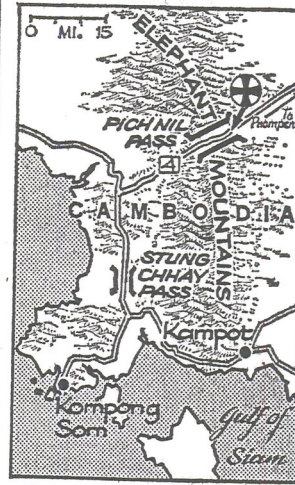
During those four days the enemy troops in their bunkers reportedly withstood heavy American air strikes. On retreating before the Cambodian advance, they were said to have left behind suicide squads to fight to the death from the entrenchments.

Once on the move, dispatches from the front said, the Cambodians fired wildly at every bunker, and American helicopter gunships and South Vietnamese fighter-bombers strafed and bombed the mountain jungles.

The enemy troops reportedly retreated toward the advancing South Vietnamese force, which was said to be in the southern part of the seven-mile-long pass.

The allied roadclearing operation, which began more than a week ago, has involved more than 5,000 South Vietnamese troops and more than 8,000 Cambodians.

The South Vietnamese regained control of the southern half of the 115-mile highway, capturing last Saturday one of the major enemy strongpoints



The New York Times Jan. 22, 1971  
Foe reportedly retreated  
from mountain bunkers at  
entrance to pass (cross).

at Stung Chhay Pass, 95 miles southwest of Pnompenh.

## Combat Marines on Carriers

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Jan. 21—An American military spokesman today corrected an earlier statement by the United States command that no combat marines were aboard two American helicopter carriers off the Cambodian coast that were launching missions in support of the allies on Route 4. The spokesman said that all such "amphibious readiness

groups" routinely carry American combat marines—he would not say how many—but he repeated official assertions that American troops would not be committed to ground combat in Cambodia.

Asked why they were aboard, he replied they were part of the routine "contingency" force.

The spokesman continued to describe the purpose of United States air strikes in Cambodia as "interdiction" of enemy lines, despite official acknowledgment in Washington that Americans were also flying direct combat support for South Vietnamese troops in Cambodia.

The spokesman denied that there were American advisers flying in South Vietnamese helicopters to coordinate support for troops in the Route 4 operation. An Associated Press dispatch from Saigon published today in the New York Times, said that United States advisors had been flying with South Vietnamese officers on command and control helicopters and periodically landing with them in Cambodia.

The command spokesman said Americans seen on the ground in Cambodia—such as one photographed last week in a uniform running for a helicopter—were logistics personnel who alight for a short time when a helicopter lands.